



Cullen

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Category: Romance, M-m Romance, Paranormal

Description: Fae dragon shifter Cullen is still adjusting to becoming a guardian of the space between the human world and all the other dimensions he's tied to. He and his two brothers are dealing with dragons and babies and more, and he doesn't think he can handle much beyond that.

Which is when the unicorn shows up.

When a friend tells him that a house up in the mountains in Colorado is having some weird goings on, unicorn shifter Orion heads up to make sure no one is in any kind of distress. But once he's in the dragon guardian's house, he finds out he can't leave unless one of the fae dragon brothers goes with him. Which would be fine if he and Cullen weren't fated mates and there wasn't a pesky vampire problem out in the human world.

Cullen and Orion have all the problems of any couple: families, mate bonds, and tons of insecurities. Will fighting off vampires be too much to handle on top of all of that?

This is an mpreg romance with gargoyle babies, hilarious beaver shifters, and a lot of magical family wildness.

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ChapterOne

“So, tell me what’s going on, man.” Orion sat across from his buddy Yarrow at a cafe down in Pagosa Springs, his plate full of croissant French toast, Yarrow’s bearing fancy-ass avocado toast. Yarrow had called for a meet yesterday, and he’d hustled to get into town as fast as he could, because Y rarely had an urgent worry.

“Well, you know I come up here every year to build a dam.”

Orion nodded. Yarrow was a beaver shifter, and he was from this area originally. So he was like, constitutionally bound to come around once a year and stake his claim by damming up some stream or other.

“So I was up by that 1950s A-frame. You know the one I mean. Sits back in the mountain a ways, hidden at the back?”

“Yeah. You drove me by there once.” Yarrow loved an A-frame. Said the silly things were the perfect house.

“Well, and there was a family, you know? Several male couples. Lots of kids.”

“Yeah. Gay commune type thing.” To guys like him and Yarrow, sexuality was so...fluid. But humans tended to narrow it down.

“Yeah. Well now I don’t see anyone coming and going, and the house has...morphed.”

“What the hell does that mean?” He poured more syrup on his French toast, then dipped a veggie sausage in it.

“Do you mean literally or figuratively?”

“What?” He didn’t follow.

“Like, you know what morphed means, right?”

“All right.” Orion arched an eyebrow. “Do you want me to bite you now or later?”

“Yeah, you’re not very scary, buddy. My teeth are way bigger.” Yarrow snorted, and then kind of made this weird chuffing noise.

Honestly, he was going to get him one of those trucker hats with a Buc-ee’s beaver on it.

“I’m serious, though. It’s not the same. There’s an A-frame involved in it, sure. In fact, it does seem as though it’s the most solid bit, but then things get a little misty, and if you look really hard, there’s this Victorian place and then this other place that really reads like thatched roof ren faire shit. I have to say, it’s very odd. Like a greenhouse, but not. And you know it’s cold here for a thatched roof. Anyway, I’m disturbed.”

“No shit on that.” It didn’t seem reasonable, but Orion was basically an expert in the unreasonable, and this was quite intriguing.

“What about the guys—the ones with the kids. Maybe they’re just doing renovations?”

“I don’t think so.” Now Yarrow’s voice dropped, and his eyes, which were usually

sort of distant and glazed and not particularly there, were suddenly sharp as whittled sticks. “Bloodsuckers came through, and there was a lot of blood, man. A lot.”

Fuck. Vampires. “And then?”

“Let’s be honest, no one can fight a swarm. Then they were gone.”

“The gay guys and the kids?”

Yarrow nodded. “And the large mosquitoes.”

All right, that was a little bit alarming. Every one of them—any decent being—was fighting to keep those plague bringers away.

“So how long has all this been going on?” he asked, and Yarrow shrugged.

“Well, I haven’t seen the guys and the kids in a good long while. Since the spring after the incident, there hasn’t been any sort of activity at all. It’s been just sitting there, kind of slowly getting dusty. I hadn’t wanted to bother it because it’s in pretty good shape, and you know it is always a situation if I happen to need wood and there isn’t any, so I like a reliable source.” Yarrow shrugged. “But it’s in good shape, one way or the other. And then suddenly the lights are on again, but you never see anybody go in or go out. That’s kind of weird. Then the next spring, I notice this other house, and it’s a bit more solid. Not tons, always in the clouds, and that’s weird too. Really weird in my mountains.”

Orion did manage not to mention that Yarrow was a beaver shifter in the mountains, and that was pretty special when it came down to brass tacks. Orion knew from special.

“I need to make sure that that’s not some sort of a portal. The last thing we need is for

vamps to start pouring in like fire ant swarms. They're already problematic enough."

"I believe you. That's why I called you. I have a weird feeling. Not bad. I don't feel like this black cloud coming over me when I look at it and I've never heard any voices saying, Get Out. But, well, let's be honest, I've never gotten in. There's a gate, and I really don't want to get arrested for trespassing. I don't like the idea of being caged up."

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“Who does?” Still, Yarrow had a point. He might have to go and look this whole thing over. Just to be on the safe side. He had a few more tricks up his sleeve than a beaver shifter, even one as resourceful as Yarrow.

If there were vampires in the area, they needed to be removed. Period.

“So, will you look into it?” Yarrow asked. “It would ease my mind. It’s still my family territory. I have to be able to get up there and build dams.”

“We can’t have anything interfering with that.” He winked, then polished off his toast. Did he need a cinnamon roll?

Yarrow snarfed down his last bite of avo toast. “Want to split a big side of hash browns and some churro waffles?”

“Goddess yes.” Being a vegetarian and a magical creature simultaneously was tough. It took a lot of energy to maintain the glamour he had to put on to look human, even in a human form. If he didn’t put on gray hair and gray eyes, then he had silvery hair and eyes and iridescent skin.

That could be a little off-putting to humans. And get a guy caged to be studied...

They polished off two more plates of food, and he raised an eyebrow at Yarrow. “I’ll meet you here in say, three days? Same time? I’ll make my report.”

“Sounds good.” They both left money on the table. Magical guys like them tended to go off the grid, especially when traveling all the time like him and Yarrow did. “I’ll

look forward to it.”

“In the meantime, be careful,” Orion admonished.

“I will.” Yarrow clicked his teeth and headed off. He could almost see that big paddle of a tail in the shadow Yarrow cast. Someone really needed to get his beave on.

Orion hit the little local department store to outfit himself for camping for three or four days, then grabbed some groceries before heading up the mountain toward Wolf Creek Pass.

He didn’t want to have to deal with any magical fucking weirdness.

Hopefully, this was all just because Yarrow had gotten into some wormy wood and was having hallucinations.

A guy never knew with a beaver, did they?

ChapterTwo

“Do it again. Do it again.” Little Elliot clapped his hands, chanting, “Do it again, do it again.”

“Your wish is, as always, my command.” Cullen gathered up his magic, opened his arms, and butterflies flew everywhere, dropping flower petals with every flap of their wings, and every time the baby reached for a flower petal, it exploded in a flurry of sparks.

Elliot ran around the room, clapping and exploding butterfly wing petals, laughing like the world was the best place ever.

Heavens above, wasn't that an endorphin rush?

Cullen loved this little boy more than life itself, not just because he was amazing or because he was his nephew and his godson, but because nobody thought he was cooler. The other dragon kids, sure, they all thought he was neat, but they were so involved with being all weird and magical in a new universe kind of way, and he needed someone who thought he was the best.

“Luff Conkle.”

“Oh, I love you too, little boy. My Elliot Bo-belliot. My sparkly little beast of joy. My?—”

“Cullen, you are making a racket.” Cosmo looked like hammered poo.

“You asked me to babysit. You're the one having morning sickness. You need to leave me alone. I'm playing with my godson.”

“I'm pretty sure he's my godson.”

He whipped around and stared at Corbin with a grin. “Is not.”

“Is too.”

“Not not. Not notty, not not not.” He snapped his fingers, and the rainbow-colored wind swirled around little Elliot and plopped him back down in front of him from where he'd tried to sneak off. “I was asked to babysit. I'm not playing. If you all don't like it, then shoo. Shoo, shoo, shoo.”

Elliot climbed up into his arms and perched on his shoulder like the cute, creepy little dragon he was. “Mine Cuncle.”

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“Absolutely. And this is my little gargoyle.”

Cosmo growled. “He’s not a gargoyle.”

“He perches better than anyone I know. He can be incredibly still, and he is absolutely granite colored. Aren’t you my little gargoyle?”

“Gar grill.” Elliot beamed and then looked at his father and roared. “GAR GRILL, DA!”

“I have a headache. I’m going to go upstairs and die,” Cosmo said.

They all stared a moment, then Elliot kind of whimpered and snuggled in.

“Don’t worry, little gargoyle. Your da’s head just hurts. He’s very busy making another baby.”

“Rocks?”

“Possibly. It could possibly be making the baby out of rocks. You never know with your fathers.”

Cullen, you know that that’s not true.

Oh, don’t start with me. Cullen shook his head. Until the point wherein someone can come up with a better answer, we’re sticking with rocks. Right, Uncle Corbin, or do you want to try to explain?

“I like rocks. We could totally go play with rocks, all three of us somewhere not in here.” Good brother.

“You so have a point, brother. I’m starving, and everything makes Cosmo puke. Let’s go outside and cook something stinky.”

Burgers and bacon with blue cheese.

I do love it when you’re alliterative.

Cullen and Corbin looked at each other and then started to giggle. “Do you wanna go make burgies, little dragon? I mean little gargoyle?”

“Burgies! Burgies wif cheese!”

“All right, burgies with cheese. Eddie, are you coming?” The huge magpie that was little Elliot’s constant companion and best friend came swooping down, brushing the little boy’s toes with his wing and cawing loudly.

“There’s nothing that bird likes more than to sit on the grill and pick hamburger. Which door do you want to go out of?”

“Oh, let’s go out into the front. It’s summer out there. It’s bitter cold in Lunastra. I mean, unless you wanna go see Mother in the Summerl?—”

“No, no.” Corbin glanced at Elliot. She’s on a tear. She’s all frustrated about something with Dad, and I don’t want to get in the middle of it, so let’s just not.

Fair enough, I don’t want any trouble. Especially not with their mom. She was a fae high born and could be very...imperious.

They headed out to the human realm, which was one of the directions their house faced. The day was sunny but not too hot, and it would be perfect for grilling.

Corbin set up the grill. Corbin loved to grill stuff, and they were all dragon enough to love meat, which made their mother roll her eyes.

Even though they were out in the human realm, Cullen didn't bother to glamour any of them. With their fae blood, they never looked really human unless he magicked it, but they were somewhere that they couldn't be seen from the road or hiking trails, so they went with natural. Which meant Cullen was in his violet splendor, and Corbin was an electric green. Little Elliot was silvery gray all over, and he was so adorable.

Hawk, who was Cosmo's mate, would join them soon, he would bet. The big guy had been over in Lunastra, or the dragonlands so to speak, for a meeting.

"Grill ahoy!" Corbin called.

He chuckled, watching Eddie the magpie swooping and dive-bombing Corbin, waiting for food.

Elliot waved at him. "More twicks."

"More? Greedy little dragon."

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“Rar! What greedy?”

“Here it means you like it when Cunkle does tricks.”

“Twicks. Me like. S’good. More.”

“Okay, my little gargoyle. What would you like me to do?”

Elliot’s lips tightened as he thought. “Colors. I want colors.”

Cullen swiped his hand through the air, a scarlet flame appearing. “Do you like red?”

“Pwease. Yes.”

“Or do you prefer blue?” In his other hand, a tiny blue flame appeared.

“Poople.”

“Oh. I see. You want purple.” He breathed the red flame and the blue flame together and slowly pushed them until the thick colors intertwined and created purple.

“Oh.” Little Elliot stared with wide eyes.

“Nicely done, brother. Learning opportunity. Color theory is our friend,” Corbin told him.

He set the purple flame on the ground for his nephew. “I hate how sick Cosmo is this

time. I don't remember him being quite this sick before."

"Everybody on the other side says every pregnancy is different. I don't know, but I don't blame you. It's just, it's sad."

"I think we're going to have to talk to Mom."

Corbin arched an eyebrow. "We? Do you have a mouse in your pocket?"

"Oh, all right, I'll talk to her." Everybody knew that Cullen was totally cool with wandering across whatever doorway he wanted to, and he loved to hang out with Mom. She was a hoot. If by hoot he meant kind of a giant pain in the butt. With a temper.

"You rock," Corbin said.

"No! Him Cullen!"

"Would you like me to be a rock?" Cullen asked, and he gathered a little magic, making himself into a big boulder.

Elliot squealed, clapping his hands. "Silly Unc! You's a rock."

"I am." He let go of the illusion. "Boo!"

"Eeek!" Elliot laughed wildly as Cullen picked him up.

He blew a raspberry on that tiny belly.

Elliot laughed, and Corbin got burgers on the grill, the sizzle and sudden scent of searing meat yummy.

“Unc. Unicorn.”

“You want me to be a unicorn?” Or make one? He’d done that, but it took a lot of energy.

“No! Unicorn. S’over dere.”

Cullen looked to Corbin. “Do you think?”

Corbin’s nostrils flared. “Get the baby inside.”

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He immediately threw up an illusion that turned Elliot into a stump. “We’ll go together. It seems to be quiet.”

“No. See, Cunkle? Unicorn,” the stump said.

“You want to be a unicorn, sweet baby?”

I don’t know what it is, Corbin growled. I can’t see anything, but I don’t like that he thinks he can see something.

Now, and I’m itching. Let’s get inside.

Can you hide us long enough to save the burgers?

No problem. He threw up a quick glamour—sort of his emergency, no one can see us illusion, a heavy fog separating the house from everything. “I think we should go eat with Grandma, huh?”

“Gammy!”

“That’s right, my little gargoyle. Let’s go eat with Gammy. That sounds like way more fun than eating out here. It’s a little hot, huh?” And he was moving from nervous to wigged.

“Unicorn come?”

“Not today. He’s not hungry. He doesn’t eat hamburgers. Unicorns are notoriously

vegetarian.”

“What mememarian?”

“That means that they have dull teeth, not sharp ones like us, and they don’t eat meat.”

Elliot’s knot holes went wide. “No burgies.”

“Nope. No burgies at all.” They gathered up the food and headed inside, locking the door firmly once they were all inside.

He peeked out the window, making sure there wasn’t anything out there that he could see. All he could see was sparkly fog.

By the time the illusion faded, the intruder wouldn’t be out there watching anymore. Whatever it was, well, if he hadn’t given up, they’d eat him.

Chomp.

ChapterThree

He’d been seen.

Honestly, Orion was kind of shocked. He’d thought he’d cloaked himself well, and he’d picked a good hiding spot.

But that little one had seen him sure as shit.

He pondered his next move. Because while the family who was out there grilling burgers were obviously sweet and loving, they were also purple and green and silver.

Not merely human...

So Orion felt honor bound to see what the hell they were... And what they wanted. And why a simple A-frame house from the fifties was now mostly a giant Victorian monstrosity with painted lady flare.

And then there was the purple guy. Skin and hair was a vibrant violet, and he was obviously an illusionist. And he'd made Orion as hard as a rock with one good look at him.

He thought that was an unreasonable reaction, and he did not improve. Well, he approved, but now he just had to get into that house and figure out what the hell was going on.

The illusion that Mr. Purple and Wonderful threw up was solid, and if he hadn't seen him do it, he might have even missed it.

Even better was the illusion that had turned the little silver baby into a stump. Honestly though, if they were going to continue with that then they were going to have to teach the little one to stop talking.

And wiggling its limbs.

Right. Orion rolled his eyes at himself. He just needed to go find out what the hell was going on. He figured the easiest way to do that was to knock. So, he tromped up to the door and rapped on it smartly.

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The house seemed to shudder a little bit, shimmer, and he thought he heard, “Take Elliot and go. Go to Cosmo. I’ll deal with this.”

Then the door opened, and he came face-to-face with what he was sure was supposed to be a wise and old man. Really what he saw was the pretty little purple guy dressed in an old man suit. “This is private property. Go away.”

“Oh, now don’t be like that.” God that was cute. Orion was simply enthralled.

That earned him a blink, and then Mr. Violet and Vivacious picked up a cane. “I wasn’t joking.”

That seemed to be considerably more serious.

“I’m not here to hurt anyone, sweet man.”

“The land has been posted with keep-out signs, private property. You’re not going to hurt anyone at all.” Now the voice was deep, damn near a growl.

He was going to explode in a giant ball of happiness. Just a joygasm. “That was really hot.”

“I’m going to count to three.”

“And then what? Are we going to wrestle?” Sparkle. Hands on that violet skin? Oh, yeah.

“No, I’m going to kick your fucking ass.”

“You’re gonna try, and I’m going to enjoy it.”

The sweet one bared his teeth. “Oh, I don’t think so.”

“Look, sweet pea, no amount of aggression from you is going to do anything but turn me on.” He winked. “So what are you? Dragon hybrid, clearly, but then what else?”

That mouth firmed into a hard line. “I am none of your damn business!” He raised the cane. “Get off our land!”

“Look, I represent a local beaver shifter. He just wants to know if his ancestral dam-building land is safe.” He held up his hands, trying not to spoil that ridiculous-sounding statement with too much humor.

Now sweet and lavender blinked hard. “A beaver shifter...”

“Yep.” Orion moved a step closer to the door. “His name is Yarrow. I intend to buy him a trucker hat up at the pass. I think it will perfect for him.”

If they weren’t impressed with charm, dazzle them with bullshit. That was his philosophy.

Of course, this one he wanted to be madly in love with him.

“I—A trucker hat.” Those lips twitched.

“On a beaver. Just imagine it. He’s a good egg, though, and he’s worried about the family who lived here.”

Sorrow passed over that mobile face. “I’m sorry. Did you know them?”

“No. No, I pass through every so often, but Yarrow was fond of them, I gather. He’s a sucker for kids.”

The purple beam of light shook off whatever he was thinking. “The kids are safe. They’re with relatives.”

The iridescent hairs all over his body stood up at attention. “But the adults... Was it vamps? Dammit, I was hoping Yarrow was full of shit.”

“He wasn’t wrong. It was?—”

“Get out of my house!” Now that roar was dead serious, and it literally shook the walls. A huge red-and-black dragon came soaring down the stairs, and Orion tilted his head.

“How did you manage to do that without knocking any pictures off the wall?”

“What?”

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“This is Hawk; don’t irritate him. This. Just. I.” Pretty in Purple closed his eyes for a second. “As charming as you are, you can just tell the beaver that everything’s fine.”

Oh, the dragon chimera thought he was charming.

“We’re going to control them, the vampires, should they show back up,” purple added.

The dragon, and this one was solely a dragon, stared him down.

Orion just stood there. He wasn’t worried. He meant them no harm, so they wouldn’t harm him.

“Apparently, there’s a beaver shifter. I think this is his lawyer.”

That huge head turned so the dragon could stare at the purple one. “Cullen, what is going on?”

“I just told you, Hawk, there’s apparently a beaver shifter who has ancestral lands close by. This is his lawyer. He was making sure that we weren’t vampires.”

That head swung back to him, teeth gleaming. “Do I look like a vampire to you?”

“Well, you’re kind of pointy in the teeth area, and you’re red, which is usually, you know, associated with vampires. At this point, though I’ve never seen a vampire dragon hybrid, and... You know that that’s just kind of nauseating to think about. So let’s not do that. Think about it, I mean.” He tried a winning smile.

“See, it’s totally a lawyer.”

Orion shook his head. “I’m not a lawyer.”

“You talk like a lawyer.”

“Well, I do know quite a bit of Latin, but I’m pretty sure that I lack some of the sharkish aspects of a lawyer.” That seemed reasonable.

“Lawyers are sharks?” Hawk asked, and Cullen—it was so nice to have a name to go with the face—snorted.

“All monkeys wear pants.”

Orion blinked. “I’ve seen plenty of monkeys without pants.”

Cullen rolled his eyes. “Old TV reference.”

The big guy growled. “They have many of those.”

Orion let an eyebrow rise. “Monkeys?”

“In jokes.”

“Ah.”

“Ugh. You two are bonding?” Cullen sighed. “It figures.”

“Might as well bond with the big guardian.” Orion let his grin widen. “All the better to get to you, pretty.”

“I’d argue and say I wasn’t pretty, but it would be a lie. I’m fucking gorgeous.”
Cullen snarled.

Orion nodded, happy to agree. “Fascinating. Fabulous. Fantastic.”

“I bet you’re good at Scrabble.” It was Hawk who snarled now. “Go away. We won’t bother the beaver.”

Orion wasn’t sure why that was so funny, but it was, and he snorted.

And he also wasn’t sure what that sound did for Cullen, but those eyes got huge.

“You’re a unicorn.”

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Oops. “Pardon?”

“Don’t you pardon me. You’re a unicorn.” Cullen stared at him. “Hawk. This is a unicorn.”

Hawk stared at him too. “How do you know?”

Cullen tossed that lavender hair. “Hello? Half fae, I know things, and seeing past bullshit illusions is one of them. You’re a unicorn. What are you doing here? You don’t belong here. You belong where Mother is, wandering around the Land of Summer, tromping around happily and making whinnying noises. You don’t belong out here.” Cullen’s eyes went wide. “What if somebody catches you? That’s awful. We can’t make him go back out.”

“What?” Orion and Hawk managed to say that at exactly the same time.

Cullen stamped his foot. “We can’t let him go back out. If they catch him, they will hurt him, and it’s just bad. Seriously, do you know what a unicorn horn goes for in the illegal market?”

“No,” Hawk said. “Do you?”

“Well no, but?—”

“Do you even have a black market for unicorn horns?” Orion asked. He’d never seen one.

“You know there has to be one. It’s probably on the dark web. Regardless. I’m bringing him in. I. You guys!” Cullen began to just sputter, and Hawk shook his head.

“Look, if you want to take him to your side of the house, you can take him over there, but do not let him around anyone else until we getthingssettled.”

“It’s going to be a long time before we getthingssettled. He’s only just beginning to settle. We’re still in the puking part of?—”

“Shut up.”

Orion blinked some more. Then he tilted his head to look at Hawk. “Your mate is pregnant. Is that your little boy, too?”

Hawk just gave him a stony stare.

“Shit. No wonder you’re freaked. Look, I’m not here to hurt anyone. I came for the beaver, but I’ll stay because the purple deity here wants me to.”

Cullen paused. “Deity?”

“Mmmhmm.” Sex god.

Cullen’s amethyst eyes went wide, gold flashing around the edges. “I?—”

Hawk sighed. “If you hurt my family, I will personally find out how much your horn goes for on the illegal market. Cullen, he’s all yours.” Hawk slammed the door shut, then stomped off, his whole form vibrating disapproval.

“Whatever shall we do with our time?” Orion purred, scooting closer to Cullen.

“Stop it.” Cullen poked him in the chest. “I didn’t get my burger because of you. I don’t suppose you know how to cook.”

“Sure. You got the stuff for spaghetti and sauce?”

“I do. As long as it’s scratch sauce. I’m out of Prego.”

“I am the king. And I’ll even split some out to make with meat for you, if you want.” Orion bowed, waiting for Cullen to lead the way.

After another moment of hesitation, Cullen turned in the opposite direction that Hawk had gone and took Orion into the house, tromping along hard. Orion grinned. Cullen wanted him to know he was mad. Clomp, clomp, bang, bang.

Adorbs.

He followed, drawn by that straight back, tight ass, and flowing purple hair. God, that was the prettiest thing ever. The green one was hot. The big dragon was intimidating. But Cullen he could just wallow in all day.

“Stop it.” Cullen walked into a kitchen that gleamed with gadgets and clean counters. Oh, good. He was pretty much a neat freak himself.

“Stop what?” Orion asked, opening cabinets.

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“Staring at my butt. Thinking sex thoughts about me.”

“Mmm. No promises.” He pulled out a large sauce pot, a pasta pot, and then grabbed cans of Italian tomatoes and mushrooms and such.

“Hmph. So, what will you tell the beaver?”

“Yarrow? I’ll tell him the truth. That the other family who lived here is gone, but that you guys aren’t bad folks.”

Cullen tugged out the stuff to make a salad, it looked like. “Will vamps hurt a beaver shifter?”

“Yeah. Yeah, they will.” Those bloodsuckers would be almost anywhere and, wherever they showed up, it was a nightmare. They were a blight, and he just didn’t understand. Surely there was a place where they belonged, where they weren’t hurting anybody. “I guess they all think we’re their prey.” He glanced at Cullen. “What do you think?”

“I think the last time that I ended up coming face-to-face with any of them—and I have a number of times—it didn’t go well.” There was an ice-cold fury in those eyes now. “I don’t do prey particularly well.”

Okay, so hot.

“Would you stop it?”

“What? I can’t help the fact that you’re superhot.” Orion winked over, waggling his eyebrows. “Do you have any onions? And what about fresh garlic?”

“You act like I cook.”

“With this kitchen, you cook.”

No one had this kind of amazing kitchen without cooking. This house, even more than the big one that they came through, screamed with magic. Somebody’d created this home to be exactly what he wanted it to be.

“Yeah. Here are the onions.” A beautiful sweet onion was plopped in front of him. “And the garlic’s in the red container, the one marked garlic.”

It was easy to find the cutting board and the knife, and he got to work, whistling softly as he chopped.

“What are you doing here?”

Orion shrugged. “Honestly, I came because Yarrow asked me to. Now I’m here for you.” Because he’d never seen anything this wonderful, and he wanted to learn everything there was to learn about this pretty little dragon fae. Drafae? Fragon? Fragon was cool.

“Would you stop? I kind of like drafae. It’s a little bit aggressive, but so absolutely accurate.” Cullen winked at him, playing.

Orion was in love.

And they were hearing each other seamlessly. Which was super interesting and had all sorts of implications...

“Hmm. Do you still see your parents? Maybe you should ask them if there’s a name for it.”

“Oh, very nice segue into digging into my family.”

Orion raised an eyebrow now instead of waggling. “Was I unsubtle?” He slid the aromatics into the warmed oil in the pot so he could get it all fragrant.

“You’re as subtle as a jackhammer,” Cullen said, slumping down on a stool on the other side of the island, chin on his hand.

“Eh, I’m a unicorn. We’re not exactly shy and retiring.”

“Really. That seems odd. I mean, aren’t you supposed to be all sparkly and innocent and searching for virgins? If that’s what you’re into, dude, I got to tell you, I’m not it.” Cullen stared him down as he stirred onions.

“No? Are you suggesting that you might have been soiled by another?” he teased.

“No, I’m suggesting that I really like to fuck, and I’m pretty good at it.” Cullen twisted his lips. “Not that I’m suggesting that you and I ought to...”

“Oh damn, and things were going so well. I’m disappointed.” Orion made a wide-eyed face.

“I was kind of suggesting that we might...at some point. It’s not like I find you distasteful.”

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Orion would take that. “You know, I find you delicious.”

“You haven’t tasted me yet, so you don’t know,” Cullen shot back. “I might just be super pretty.”

Orion shook his head. “There’s no might about that; that’s just a fact.”

“Nice.” Cullen snorted. “You are something else. A unicorn, unique in all the world.”

“And you’re not?”

“No. I’m one of three.”

As if that mattered. “Yes, but, I bet you’re still pretty unique. And you don’t look alike. At least from the one I’ve seen. I’m assuming the other one, the big dragon. He’s not your brother.”

It wasn’t really a question.

“No, that’s Hawk. He’s Cosmo’s mate. You won’t be allowed to meet Cosmo, at least for a little while. I’m sure you understand.”

“He’s about to pop?”

“Not that close, but yeah. He’s pregnant.”

“Nice.” He opened the cans of tomatoes with the opener he’d found in the island

drawers. “Congrats. I get the impression from your wee stump that you like being an uncle.” Family. Such a weird concept to him, but he thought he got it. He had a good many friends, who he loved.

Cullen shrugged, and the grin that split his face made him even more stunning. “He’s amazing. Believe me when I say that I would do anything to protect him from anyone.”

“I’m not here to hurt anyone. That’s not my job.” No, in fact, he was a protector of innocence.

Now that hooked Cullen’s attention. “What is your job? What do you do? Who is it you do it for? What’s your calling?”

His calling. Well, right now, his calling was jumping this beautiful lavender bit of lusciousness.

“Be good.”

“Sorry.” How should he put this? “I’m very good at looking for things, exceptional, even, especially lost things. So that’s what I do. Consider me a bit of a hunter, but I don’t have to carry a gun, and it’s very rare that I feel the need to be aggressive.”

“All right. I can sort of buy that almost. So you’re like a private investigator? A spy? One of those psychic finders who hunts for amulets and lost children and the periodic letter of intent that’s stuck in someone’s library?”

“Why do you ask? Do you have a library? I could look for something for you.” Orion felt as if following Cullen’s train of thought might lead to a total derailment at some point. But it was so worth it.

“I don’t. I don’t feel the need for one. It’s not personal. My brothers have both have libraries that are extensive.”

“Is that what they hoard?” Orion was desperately curious.

“You tell me that you’re a spy slash PI slash psychic, and you expect me to tell you anything about my brothers? Do I look stupid?”

“No.”

One purple eyebrow winged up. “And just imagine, I’m probably smarter than I even look.”

He could play with this dragon forever. Cullen would never fail to keep him on his toes, he was certain. “But I still want to know all about you. What do you hoard?”

Cullen grabbed the opener and went to the sink to open the cans and drain them. “What do you? Or do you?”

“Oh, I do. I mean, tucked away in a vault, I have all sorts of unicorn stuff. Tapestries. Scottish coins.”

“Wait, coins?”

“Yep. The unicorn is the symbol of Scotland, after all. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they had coins called unicorns and half unicorns.” He dumped the whole tomatoes in the pot, then set about breaking them up with a long wooden spoon.

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This kitchen really did have it all.

“That’s wild. So you have some of those coins.”

Orion had to grin. “Enough to devalue them some if I ever released them for sale...”

“Wow.” Cullen actually turned to stare at him, leaning on the sink. “Quite the collector, huh?”

“I am. I don’t do ceramic unicorns from the dollar store, you know?” He grinned. “Though those have their appeal.”

“I bet. But if you bought every one you see, you wouldn’t have a hoard. You’d have an endless stream of unicorns.” Cullen pushed the drained mushrooms to him.

He dumped them into the pan with the bubbling tomatoes. He stirred, then added a bunch of herbs and spices from the spice rack. “Sometimes, I do buy a chipped or broken one just to smash it with a hammer. You got any stock? Or red wine?”

“I have both. Which would you rather?”

“Mmmm. Meatballs... Wine.”

“Cool.” Cullen went to a closet, which turned out to be a fully stocked wine storage. “Uh, chianti?”

“Perfect.” He beamed and then took the bottle to pour half the contents into the sauce.

The other half stayed in the bottle, which he waved at Cullen. “Glasses?”

“Some for the pot, some for the chef?”

“Absolutely. The best way.”

“You’re kind of nuts.” Cullen got out two big-bowled red wineglasses.

“But you’re not kicking me out.”

“We’ll see how the sauce comes out,” Cullen shot back.

“Oh! Direct hit.” He put the lid on the pot just a little cock-eyed to let steam out before moving across the kitchen to crowd Cullen a little. “Now I see how you taste.”

“Oh no. Nope.” Cullen backed off, moving to the other side of the island. “If we do that, and I sayif, it will be for dessert.”

“Oh, love. Dessert is a full-body contact sport. Kissing is an appetizer.”

Cullen’s pupils dilated, his breath coming faster as Orion chased him. Stunning.

He wanted that. Now.

“I’m not big on appetizers.”

“Really? Because you have all the stuff for about a million charcuterie boards.”

“Pregnant brother.” Cullen shrugged. “He likes his cheese and meat.”

“Mmmm. So do you.” He grinned. Hugely.

“Okay, but you don’t. You’re a vegetarian, and I am absolutely not made of plant matter.”

Oh, nice, that was a direct hit. “For you, I’d make an exception.”

“I have no doubt.” Cullen arched an eyebrow at him, having regained his equilibrium, which was a pure shame.

Off-balance dragon was delicious.

“What about the fae part of your parentage? Surely they’re vegetarians too.”

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Cullen glared at him. “One, never talk about my mother and use sexual innuendo at the same time because that’s foul. Two, have you ever met a fae? Did they seem like vegetarians to you? Because if they do, you haven’t been paying attention.”

Fascinating. Seriously. He had met a fae once or twice, but he hadn’t spent too much time with them. “I tend to hang around shifters. Bears. Lions. Wolves. Beavers. Foxes. I even know a porcupine shifter...”

“Yes, but you’re not a porcupine shifter. I mean, you may have a little prick or two...”

“Be nice, Cullen. I am a shifter, obviously.”

Cullen snorted. “Bah. No more than I am. There’s a difference. They can pass no matter which form they’re in. We only pass if we’re in human form, and even then with some of us—” Cullen tilted his head toward Orion, eyes knowing. “—some of us have to use a little help even to do that.”

“Yes, I would have to say that you would be absolutely noticeable out and about.”

“Yeah. It’s true. Even in the circus.”

“Were you in the circus?” How fascinating was that?

Cullen nodded. “We traveled with the circus a few decades ago. That was back before cell phones and cameras on everything and people constantly trying to figure out how we did what we did. It really was entertaining—a lot of fun. But then the boss found

us, and we had something else to do.”

A fission of jealousy shot through him. “The boss?”

“Yes, we have one, the three of us. He lives...elsewhere.”

“Like in another dimension?” Because he’d had a picture from Cullen of a land where it was winter right now, and where dragons flew free in the sky without worrying about being shot down. Fascinating.

Cullen shrugged, not answering, but that elaborately casual movement was an announcement in its own right, wasn’t it?

“Huh.” He pulled the pasta pot to the sink to fill it with the pull-down spout. He wouldn’t boil it yet, but he would get it on the stove. Then he would start on the accompaniments.

He’d totally make meatballs for the dragon if Cullen had the stuff.

ChapterFour

“Like I’d make you do that.” Cullen wasn’t an asshole. At least he wasn’t that big of an asshole. “You don’t ask vegetarians to make meat. That’s nasty. Even I know that.”

Why was he letting this man be in his kitchen to make meatballs?

He knew the answer to that.

Because he had this horrifying idea that if anyone had seen this gorgeous magical creature out there in the world, they would just kill it, or worse, take him somewhere

and experiment with him.

Cullen saw movies; he had lots of movies. He knew what people did to things that were different because he was a thing that was different.

Poe had found them. Tanya had found them. A couple of others had found them. A frigging unicorn had found them.

They were going to have to stop going out front.

Maybe they could go only to get Amazon access. Maybe they should build a thing where the Amazon delivery guy could put the packages. The driver could just open it up from the outside, then they wouldn't have to worry about it, and they could just get the things that they needed.

Like Doritos.

They ordered Doritos by the caseload.

There just wasn't a good Lunastra answer to Doritos.

Goddess knew those little nacho cheese triangles were fucking addictive.

"All right, we don't have to have meatballs. I was trying to be nice. Don't you want me to be nice to you?" Orion asked.

"Absolutely."

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He needed to change the sheets in the guest room.

Did he have a bed in the guest room?

Did he have a guest room?

Maybe he should see if he had a guest room. If he didn't have a guest room, this was all going to be very awkward.

Because while there was space in the room that he used for his hoard, he didn't feel as if just having his magical items available for exploration was wise.

Do I have a guest room, guys?

You don't know if you have a guest room?Corbin asked.

How can you not know if you have guest room?Cosmo sounded way more rested now.Is he really a unicorn?

Yes, and I don't know, I just never looked.

You never looked in your house?

No, Corbin. I mean, I looked at some stuff, but no, it kind of came as it was, and so I assumed everything was okay, but now I've got this unicorn, and he needs a place to sleep.

Sleep?

Yes, Cosmo, I want to give him somewhere to sleep.

Why? Surely he did just fine without you for years.

He's making me supper! He offered to make me meatballs, and he's a vegetarian.

And a beaver lawyer...

A what?Cosmo asked.

Can I come for dinner?Corbin put in.

Orion was grinning madly at him, most likely aware that he was having a silent conversation with someone, and it stood to reason that it was his brothers.

Who were going to die.

Guest. Room.

We don't need a guest room.

That came from Orion and made him jump half a foot.

No? Why not?

Because I can sleep with you.

There was a deep twinkle in Orion's gray eyes, a silvery swirl that he thought was the real color. The longer Orion was in his house, the more the I'm-just-a-human glamor

was fading.

Cullen?Corbin's mental voice broke in.Where did you go?

Nowhere. Sure. Come for supper. He's making a lot of sauce. And Hawk is here to protect the pink one and the sprog and a half.

Cool. I'll be over.

Orion stared at him. "Naughty fae dragon. Afraid to be alone with me?"

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“No! But Corbin loves spaghetti.”

“Hmmm. I bet the nephew does too, but he’s not coming, is he?” One silvery eyebrow winged up. It had been a dull, I’m-prematurely-gray gray only moments ago.

“No. Because Cosmo could handle you, but my nephew is too young. I can’t trust you with him yet.”

“I do understand that, my dear.” Orion stirred the sauce, amazing scents coming from the pot. God, his belly was rumbling. “If your brother is coming, would you like to put together one of your charcuterie boards? I don’t mind meat being on the same tray at all. As long as there’s cheese and olives.”

“Yum.” He could so do that. It would give him something to do with his hands. He could build a nice appetizer and feel like he was contributing.

Orion bumped hips with him when he moved around to the fridge, which made his heartbeat speed up. Dammit. He didn’t need the worry of attraction. Not even to this amazing unicorn.

“Oh, now, don’t rule it out.” Orion slid an arm around him, nuzzling his ear.

That felt so good. Hot. Wonderful. Gave him a hard-on. And Orion smelled amazing, like red sauce and also musk and maybe...sandalwood?

“My soap. I got fond of it back in the Regency era.”

“That long ago, huh?”

“Yep.” Orion bit him gently just as Corbin burst in carrying a big loaf of French bread.

“You’re not going to sleep with him, right?” Corbin asked, his voice a little breathless.

“That’s why I asked about a guest room.”

“You still don’t know if you have a guest room?” Orion stared at him.

“When have I had time to look?” Cullen growled, plopping goat cheese on a board that had a twenty-sided dice burned into it that said Board of Cutting.

“You play D&D?” Orion beamed at him. “Excellent.”

“You do too?” Corbin bounced and grabbed an olive when Cullen dumped a bunch of them on the board.

“Can you two stop it?” Cullen slammed down a summer sausage. “This is my house! Not either of yours!”

Corbin stared at him, eyes wide. “Sorry, bro.”

You don’t have to be jealous, my purple rhapsody. Green is not my color.

I will choke you with this meat stick.

Promises, promises.

“Argh!” He grabbed a knife, waving it at Orion. “Stop it or I will chop off your horn.”

Corbin finally blinked. “Stop what?”

“Just hush.” He sliced into the sausage, and his brother and Orion both winced. Good. He wanted them to be worried, damn their hides.

“Yes, sir.” Orion saluted, then checked his sauce, re-seasoning a little. He was so...damn hot.

Nope. No, he was annoying.

Don't be mad.Orion admonished.I'm a good guy.

I am mad. You're driving me crazy.And he wanted to...he wasn't even sure. Touch?

Lick?

Snuggle?

Orion nodded to him, and Cullen could fall headlong into those eyes and never come back, and what was wrong with him? “You can have all of it, but first we need to have noodles.”

“Yeah, that’s fair.”

“Brother, you need to be careful.” Corbin was frowning at him.

He blew out a breath filled with rainbow-colored bubbles. “I am being careful.”

Cullen was trying to be careful. He didn’t really want to be careful. He wanted to be naughty. He wanted to?—

“Noodles.” Corbin grinned. “We’re having noodles. Noodle, noodle, noodle, noodle. Nothing but noodle.”

Orion snorted. “Sort of like nothing but net.”

“Yeah, but with more noodles.”

Corbin liked Orion. Cullen could tell.

Dude, where do unicorns even come from?

He looked at his brother. Well, a unicorn mommy and a unicorn daddy fall in love

and?—

“I’m going to beat you,” Corbin growled.

He swore he could see Orion’s ears perk up. “That’s my job.”

“Don’t interrupt.”

“You were the one who was talking to the room at large.”

“Aren’t you making noodles?”

Corbin raised one hand. “I brought bread.”

I want to know why I can’t come and have spaghetti. I love spaghetti, Cosmo whined.

Because you’re pregnant, you have to deal with the sprog, and Hawk would have a stroke. Tell Hawk to have someone make you spaghetti.

I would totally feed everybody spaghetti. Especially if it meant I got to go to bed with you afterward. Orion wasn’t helping.

I’m not some kind of spaghetti whore.

Are you sure?

He glared at Orion. Okay, well, maybe a little bit.

Exactly.

Cosmo was pouting hard. Everybody’s having fun but me.

Go play with your mate. You can't get any more pregnant.

I will send some home with Corbin for your brother and his mate and their child. I made a lot of sauce.

Thanks. I'll send some for you, Cosmo.

It was getting dizzying, all the mental gymnastics. He put some grapes on the tray.
“Corb, you want some wine? I can open another bottle, but there's about a glass left.”

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“Please. And what can I do?”

“Can you make garlic butter? We’ll put it on the bread and bake it in.” Orion’s grin was friendly, but not interested like it was for him.

Cullen was glad.

It was ridiculous and he knew it, but he didn’t want Orion to be interested in Corbin. He wanted all that interest for himself.

He had never experienced anyone who made his eyes cross, softly jumping when warm hands landed on his shoulders and started rubbing.

Orion purred. Unicorns purred? Seriously? “Yeah, that’s better. Poor baby. So tense. Are you always so stressed?”

“No, I’m never tense. I’m known for being low stress.” His eyes went wide with a mix of aggravation and desire. “It’s you. You make me tense.”

“Sexual tension is okay, but you can relax. I mean you no harm. You have my word. I will defend you to the end of time.” Orion kissed his temple from behind, lips just barely brushing his skin, lighting him up nonetheless. “You’re all right.”

“I’m supposed to be protecting you, remember?” He was supposed to be the one with the sharp teeth and claws that defended his mate—whoa.

WHOA.

He stepped away, his eyes going wide. He slammed into Corbin with a thud, and the wine bottle went flying.

Orion's hand shot out and caught it, the act so fast it had to be pure magic. "Cullen?"

Cullen spun around to look at Orion, and he could see it now, the magic swirling around the man like a drug that he was desperate to taste, to explore and learn. "I can't mate with a unicorn, can I?"

Corbin stared. "What?"

"Why not?" Orion didn't sound too worried.

What? You can't mate with someone I haven't met! Hawk! We're going to Cullen's. Now!

A knock came to his back door, and if his mother showed up right now, he was going to scream.

Literally.

Just start screaming and never stop.

"Cullen, dear, you're dropping...emojis."

He blinked, and Orion was right. Dozens and dozens of yellow faces were pouring from his fingers and bouncing all over the floor.

"The best news is that they disappear. Less sweeping involved." Corbin had apparently decided Orion was okay, because they were conversing without him. "Our brother and his family are, apparently, on the way. We need two more place settings

and the highchair. Elliot likes noodles.”

“I’ll drop more.”

“Corbin, will you please see who was at the back door?”

“Of course. It would be my pleasure.” Corbin rolled his eyes and looked out. “Care package. Honey, daisies, cakes, a bottle of elderberry wine, and it looks like a set of blocks for Elliot.”

“Oh, good.” That meant the pixies had delivered it, and Mother was busy.

Perfect.

He didn’t think he was quite ready to explain Orion to her. She was...

Well, she was his mother.

But she was imperious. So damn fae high court. And she could pick a fight with a tree.

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Orion poured wine, and the door to the main house opened, Cosmo's belly breezing in, followed by Cosmo, Elliot, and a very grumpy-looking Hawk.

He grinned and held up the basket. "Mom sent a gift."

"I get the honey," Cosmo said. "Since you get the wine." He pouted. "Hi, I'm Cosmo."

"Hello. I'm Orion. And this is the stump."

"Me's Elliot!" Elliot stomped over to look up at Orion. "You're sparkles."

"I am. I hear you like noodles. Do you like sauce like this?" Orion lifted Elliot, then gave him a tiny spoonful of sauce.

"Yums."

"But leave some plain bread for him, please, Corbin."

"Of course." Corbin softened up some butter in the microwave and then spread some on bread he'd cut off for Elliot.

"So, you're a unicorn?" Cosmo asked, beaming at Orion.

"I am, yes."

"I see?" Elliot asked.

“Not right now, kiddo. I’m still making noodles. In fact, I need to take these out and put new ones in.” Orion handed Elliot to Hawk so he could pull the strainer out of the pasta pot, dump the pasta into a bowl, and then put more noodles down.

“I hep?” Elliot’s eyes were huge, and the little one was so eager, so ready to help.

“Come help me with the tomatoes for the salad, my little gargoyle. I have the little ones and they need washing.”

Cosmo gave him a grateful smile. Thank you.

You know I would die before I allowed a single hair on his head to be harmed. Cullen winked back at his brother.

So would I, Orion sent to him.

Tears stung his eyes, which made him blink and grit his teeth. So emotional, and it wasn’t like him at all. Thank you.

“Okay, bread and salad-doers. Twelve minutes to dinner.” Orion leaned on the counter. “This is a hel-ck of a setup you guys have here. Super magical.”

“Magiiiiiiiiic,” Elliot cried. “Shows me, Cullen.”

So Cullen made a tomato look like an orange.

Elliot squealed, and Orion grinned. “Elliot. Look.” Orion turned in a circle, and when he looked at them again, his eyes were brown, and he had an enormous black moustache. “Boo.”

“Hairy!” Elliot clapped. “Like you, Unc!”

“Your unc and I have a lot in common,” Orion murmured, dropping the illusion. The look he gave Cullen almost set him, and the kitchen, on fire. Goddess.

Cosmo glanced back and forth between them, his smile just beaming. His brother loved love.

Hawk snorted. “You are very suspicious.”

“Nope. I am just me. And I really am here because of a beaver.” Orion met his gaze with an apologetic glance. “Who I have to go meet in Pagosa in three days. Want to come with?”

“Oh, I don’t think—” Hawk started.

“That might be—” Corbin said.

“A bad idea,” Cosmo finished.

“Sure.” Orion shrugged casually, but Cullen could feel the hurt feelings emanating from him.

“We don’t get out much anymore,” Cosmo said. “It’s just too dangerous. We’re guardians here.”

“Can’t you just call him?” Cullen asked.

“Yarrow is low-tech. Still uses pay phones or phones at like, hospitals to call me.”

“No shit?”

“Yeah. I mean, he does retreat to a beaver lodge all winter, eating and sleeping and just—” Orion looked at Elliot. “Er, enjoying himself.”

“Oh. I guess that would cramp his style to have a cell phone or a sat phone.”

“Something like that. But if it’s cool with you guys, I’ll just go down and come back on the same day.” Orion wasn’t fooling him. The elaborately uncaring pose meant he was desperate for them to accept him.

“Of course it is,” he said, glaring at Hawk. “Maybe I should just go with him.”

“I don’t think this is a good idea.” Hawk was scowling again. “I don’t like the idea of you out with a stranger.”

“I could go too,” Corbin said. “If we went together, we could get some shopping done and put in a really good load for...uh...the winter.”

“That’s an awesome idea.”

Cosmo blinked at him. “Might not be terrible. You know, eventually it will be winter.”

“You know what I mean.” Cullen’s cheeks heated. Okay, that had been stupid. “You know that...somewhere they’ll be wanting something.”

Lunastra was in the middle of winter right now, after all, and while the calls for things from this realm were lessening at kind of a steady rate, they were still coming—Doritos, olives, marshmallow fluff, and Campbell’s chicken noodle soup.

“I go.” Elliot ran to him, hands held up to be lifted. “I go bye bye wif Cuncle.”

“Oh, little gargoyle. I don’t know that that would be such a good idea to go this time, but we can go together and see your seanmháthair soon.” Elliot loved to visit Mom.

“Seanmháthair. Go see daideo too?”

“That’s right. Why don’t we do that?”

Elliot beamed, and Cosmo relaxed with a sigh.

“Let’s just do it. We’ll go out, do some shopping, talk to the beaver. Then come home.” Cullen thought that was a fine plan.

“Sounds good.” Orion beamed at him. “I would like that.”

“Do you have anything you need to pick up? Surely you live somewhere around here. If you’re going to come stay for a bit, you’ll need things.”

Everyone was staring at him now, and only Orion didn’t seem like he was in shock.

“No worries. I’ll arrange to have them deliver my things here.”

“If you have house spirits, you need to make sure that they coordinate with ours, because you know, we don’t want them having a little war or anything.” Cullen wasn’t sure that was a thing, and he also wasn’t sure how or why he was inviting this man who he’d known for like two hours to come stay with them.

In their house.

Something was very weird.

Very.

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Butmatehad popped out of his mouth. And there was the most amazing-smelling red sauce.

So he guessed it was going to be a thing.

“Okay, time to dish up,” Orion said, and he filled bowls with noodles and sauce.

They had a feast.

And Cullen knew the way to his brothers’ hearts, if not Hawk’s, was through their stomachs.

So surely, they would all love Orion after this.

Right?

Elliot ate two-fisted. He devoured the sauce with a spoon, the noodles with his hands, and then bread and more bread and more bread.

Orion nodded, obviously pleased. “Impressive. You can eat.”

“I eat good!” Elliot croaked, so proud of himself.

“Yes, and after you eat so good, you’re going to go have a bath.” Cosmo rolled his eyes, one hand on his belly, the expression warm and fond. “You are a mess, young man.”

“Like bafs!” Elliot seemed perfectly pleased with himself, and to be honest, so was he.

Cullen found himself looking over at Orion, as if the man was a flame and he was a moth. Yeah, that worked.

Except he didn’t feel very moth-y. He felt a little like he was the flame, like he was on fire.

I want you too, beautiful one. You make me ache.Orion’s voice rang inside him like a bell, and flower petals fell on the table.

I think that you should let him sleep over at my house.Corbin was worried, not jealous, so Cullen wasn’t mad, but it still didn’t work for him.

I like him, I want him. He’s my mate.

Cosmo blinked.But he’s not a dragon or a fae, does that even work?

Right? I mean... What if it doesn’t function like that.Corbin’s stress was a palpable thing.

Not everything is about babies. If there’s no babies, we still have Elliot.He stared at Cosmo’s belly. “And whatever that is.”

She’s not a whatever. Don’t be a bitch. She’s your niece.

You know what I mean. He’s my mate; he’s not sleeping at your house. He’s sleeping at my house with me. I’m sorry.

Cosmo frowned.Don’t apologize if he’s your mate. Apologize if you’re just being a

horndog and you're lying to him, but if he's your mate, you have to stand up for him.

Cosmo stiffened all of a sudden, and his eyes turned a blazing white.

"Papa!" Elliot screamed. "Hesees, Papa."

"I'm right here. He's okay, don't worry. Cosmo, love?—"

Cullen shook his head. "I think maybe it's too late for that."

Cunkle! Help me! Elliot scrambled to get to him, running and jumping into his arms, heedless of sauce or noodles or buttered bread, and Cullen held on.

"It's all right, it's all right, my gargoyle boy. It's just a vision. It's just a vision. It doesn't hurt him. Look at me."

Cosmo started talking, his voice a monotone. "He must be protected. At all costs. He must be."

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Well, that was rather less poetic than what normally came out.

What's happening? Orion asked. He has visions?

Yes. And sometimes it can get a little scary.

What can I do?

Just hang on and let him ride it out.

Hawk had a hold of Cosmo, supporting his body, and Cosmo's eyes rolled back in his head, his mouth still moving, but nothing was coming out.

"Cosmo?" Corbin looked so worried.

Hell, he knew exactly how the big green one felt.

"Unc?"

"It's okay, baby boy. He's going to be fine."

It took what seemed like forever for Cosmo to snap out of it, and he sank against Hawk when he did, dazed. "Wow."

"Cosmo?" It was his turn to ask.

"I—" Cosmo turned worried eyes to Orion. "Go to town. Get your stuff. You two will

go with him. But then we need to meet with Mom and Dad and the dragons. We have a real problem on our hands.”

ChapterFive

Orion studied Corbin and Cullen, who had dithered for the whole three days about whether to come down to town with him or stay at home.

Three whole days without having sex with his mate. And he was peeved.

Not at Cullen, really. He was worried about Cosmo’s vision or whatever. But dammit, no one would leave them alone.

And they wouldn’t let Orion go to town alone.

They were coming, but he needed to make sure Cullen’s illusions were good, and that he could reinforce them. They needed to blend.

“You’re still a little...” He waved a hand around his head as he checked Corbin over. “Leafy.”

“Leafy?” Corbin scowled.

“Your hair kind of looks like kale.” It was a great short-hair illusion, but instead of a nice, uniform golden brown, it was brown with green tips.

“Let me shore that up,” Cullen said. His illusion was perfect, but that was understandable. It was always easier to work one personally than it was on someone else.

Orion added a little of his own magic to the mix, and Cullen’s eyes went wide.

Did you feel that, love? I'm starting to get a little impatient. I want you.

Cullen licked his lips, the move sending him into a paroxysm of need. When we get home.

I'm not sure I understand why.

Because if we need days to cement the mate bond, we can't be out and about in public.

Huh. That was actually really reasonable. I should have asked before now. I assumed Cosmo had prophesized I would get hit by a bus.

"Will you two stop it. Am I looking like a human now?" Corbin asked.

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“You look great,” Orion said, earning himself a scowl. He supposed he hadn’t really answered the question, but since he knew what they actually looked like, he happened to see the glamour laid over them, not truly disguising them. “We’ll have to ask Yarrow.”

“The beaver,” Cullen said. “How would he know?”

“Because he’s a shifter who is born from and tied to the human world. He’s far more human than we could ever be.”

Corbin tilted his head. “Fair enough. I’ll ask him then. Come on, you two. We’re burning daylight.”

“Ooooh, how western movie of you,” Cullen teased, and Orion chuckled. He’d watched his share of old westerns. At the theater. With his popcorn. All for a quarter.

“Come on.” He led them out, and he opened the door of his truck for Cullen. He’d retrieved the vehicle from its hiding spot yesterday, and had parked it where no incidental passerby would see it.

“Nice truck,” Corbin said, admiring the seats.

“Thanks. I got it for a steal.”

Oh, that was bad, Cullen told him. You literally stole it?

No, I stole the cash I bought it with from a hive of vampires.

Ah. Nice move.

I like to think so.

They got moving, and Orion was actually excited to introduce them to Yarrow. His buddy would be fascinated.

Somehow, the trip into town seemed to take way less time than it did getting up to the house. The ride was smooth and easy, the music on the radio easy to sing along with, the company stellar—both Cullen and Corbin excited about getting out and meeting Yarrow.

In what seemed like a few heartbeats, they were parking near the cafe where he was meeting his friend.

“Okay, everyone check themselves. Everyone looks like a person, no one’s a weird color?” Orion looked them over.

“We’re all good.” Cullen checked him and Corbin out carefully. As they had driven, Cullen had switched from being a Tom Hiddleston lookalike to a pregnant woman to a clown. Then to what looked to be a very large humanoid duck, and finally what he was now—a wizened, ancient old man—that seemed to be one of Cullen’s favorite ones.

“Why an old dude?” Orion asked.

“The only thing more invisible than an old man is a middle-aged woman.”

That was fair enough.

They headed into the diner together, the bell above the door jingling merrily, the

smell of coffee and maple syrup strong and delicious.

Yarrow was already waiting, dark eyes focused on them, and Orion could see his whiskers twitching as they walked up. “You brought friends.”

“I brought some of the people who live in the house for you to meet. It seemed like the most logical thing to do.”

“Since when have you ever done anything logical?” Yarrow frowned and scooted over so that Orion could slide in next to him, the brothers taking the other side.

“Don’t be mean. This is Corbin and Cullen.”

“You’re not dragons.”

“Nope.” Not completely, not exactly. Cullen winked at him. “We’re harmless, though. Just like hippies.”

“Hmmm.” Yarrow chattered his large front teeth. “What happened to the others?”

Sorrow filled Cullen’s expression. “Some of them are okay. The kids are all okay. But some of them didn’t make it through their fangy visitors.”

“Oh, damn.” Yarrow sighed. “I was afraid of that.”

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Corbin nodded. “It sucks, but it happened so fast. We weren’t here then, or we would have helped.”

“But the house has...grown,” Yarrow pointed out.

“It has.” Cullen made a wry face. “We each got the house we wanted. And Cosmo’s mate’s house came too.”

“Is that the big Victorian?” Yarrow asked, eyes wide.

“It is.” Corbin shrugged, the motion deceptively casual. “Something terrible happened to the people who lived there, and so we came to defend it, to protect the space. It’s safe now. And if you need help, we’re here.”

Yarrow frowned at them, lines forming on his face. “They were safe there too, or so they thought. There were just as many of them as there are of you.”

“You’re talking about vampires.” I know what happened to Myk’s family. They decapitated Myk’s brothers and their mates. Took the babies. Infants. Literal infants. Newborns. And also little Nevvy down to the basement to feed on. They captured Myk when he came roaring in to try to save them. Myk and Tyson got them out. Cullen looked green, angry, and Orion wanted to reach out and touch him.

He didn’t know who all those people were, but all the dragon-fae brothers had mentioned dozens of dragons.

Soon he would learn Cullen’s secrets, and Cullen would learn his.

Right now, though, Orion needed to focus because Cullen's glimmers were shimmering a little bit. Hold it together. Breathe. It's all right. I have you. I'm right here.

I can't imagine—what if they got to Elliot? I would die for him.

They won't. I swear to you. I will keep us safe.

"I'm going to be staying up there with them." The words fell out of Orion's mouth.

Yarrow stared at him, blinked. "You're going to what?"

"I'm going to be staying up there with them. That way, I can lend my magic to the cause, so to speak."

Cullen nodded. "And we can protect him too."

Yarrow arched an eyebrow. "You have met him, right?"

Scowling, Cullen pointed a mommy finger gesture at Yarrow. "He's mine to protect."

"Looks intense over here, folks," the fifty-something server said when she walked over. "Coffee?"

"Just flirting!" Corbin beamed at her, and she melted.

Not literally, he told Cullen.

No, that would be gross. Remember I'm old. Order for me.

Kinky. "I'd love some coffee, and Grampy here wants hot cocoa with whipped

cream.”

“Oh, of course. I’ll put it in a nice, big-handled glass.”

“Perfect. Thank you.” Orion beamed. “Cor? You know what you want?”

“Coffee and water please. With cream.”

“Absolutely...” She licked her lips and wandered off, and Cullen smiled.

“You’re going to get her phone number,” Orion whispered, and Yarrow rolled his squinty, dark eyes.

“You’re lucky if you don’t end up with her hand wrapped around your?—”

“Ahem.” Cullen wagged his beard, warning Yarrow off.

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“Sorry. Sorry. She’s...on the hunt for a man. You know how that is.”

Cullen looked Orion up and down. “I do.”

Oh, that felt so good. His cock hardened, and he leaned forward, his need flaring. Be careful, mate.

I know. I’m trying. Tonight. I promise.

“The pheromones are going to make me want to gnaw on the table.” Yarrow bared his rather impressive front teeth. “Someone might complain, you know.”

He nudged Yarrow gently. “Drink your coffee.”

“What’s good here?” Cullen was pretending to look at the menu.

“I like the pancakes,” Orion offered, “And the egg, potato, and cheese breakfast tacos. They are made of win.”

“I like waffles,” Corbin murmured. “They have pecan ones.”

“Yum.” Yarrow did grin then. “You want to split some tacos and each get a waffle?”

Corbin beamed. “Sure. Though I want two waffles. And bacon.”

“You do you, boo,” Yarrow said. “I’ll skip that part.”

“We could split the tacos and pancakes,” Cullen told him. “No bacon.”

“Sounds great to me, l-old man.” He winked, barely cutting off the “love”.

“Man, no bacon, it must be love.” Or at least really intense heat bond. Either way, he’d take it.

“So what do you have to do after this,” Yarrow asked.

Corbin shrugged. “I think we’re going shopping.”

“We’re absolutely going shopping.” Cullen grinned. “I promised that—I would bring Elliot home something that he could play with. Some art supplies, maybe a new stuffy. “I would get myself some warm winter clothes.”

Good save.

I know we keep almost making mistakes. It’s hard. I got used to not having to pretend.

He nodded, just barely, because it was true, at least for Cullen. Orion guessed it hadn’t been that long for him, and to be honest, pretending was the easiest part. He’d been a part of the human world for a very long time, and he wanted to fit in and surround himself with all that delicious energy and life.

It was easier for him, too, because it seemed to be easier to believe in unicorns than in dragons.

Personally, he was more worried about things like losing his temper. That tended to make him a little pointy. Injustice didn’t suit him very well.

No, I can imagine you have a finely tuned sense of justice. Cullen winked at him, the wrinkled mask his mate wore just charming as hell.

I like the old man illusion. You're very good at it.

Don't talk about it. It has to feel real, hmm? And I'm covering both of us. All three, actually—I can't seem to not reach out for you.

You're good to me.

I want to be...

He realized that Corbin was doing a really good job of talking to Yarrow, keeping him distracted while they talked in their heads. He couldn't help it; he only had eyes for Cullen.

That's a song.

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I know. Do you like music?

Cullen smiled, eyes lighting up. Oh, I'm half fae. We love everything that's beautiful. I can't help it.

I want to take you home. I'm going to take you home and do unspeakable things with you in your bed. For hours.

Oh, I imagine you should shoot for more than hours. Decades. I promise to change the sheets at least once a year.

I do love how you think.

Cullen kicked him from under the table. "Yarrow was telling me about this amazing store that's close by. It's a toy store, like an independent toy store. Maybe we should go there. Get some games and just look around."

Yarrow nodded, obviously pleased. "I make wooden puzzles for them, for everyone from little ones to adult. They're a good, good place, they do fair business, and they pay their artisans very well."

Cullen perked up. "Oh, do they? Those are some of my favorite words ever. I love those words. Fair. Good. Pay. We should totally do that. Also, I think we should stop at the bookstore. Get books for the winter. I know it's summer, but we need to start thinking about things we're going to get—the kids—people for the holidays."

He knew that there were worlds that could be reached via this amazing nexus that the

triplets had, and he was desperately curious to see which ones he could slip into and which ones he couldn't.

But honestly, his big focus was his dragon fae.

So when you shift, are you different from a regular dragon? Orion asked.

Cullen nodded. We are. We're smaller, by like quite a bit. And I think we're significantly more scaly and sparkly. We don't fly as well, either. You ought to think of the difference between a bird and a butterfly. Or maybe even a bird and a dragonfly. We can fly, but we really need it to be pretty good weather and not terrible winds. And we have lots of scales, but they're tiny, so they sparkle. Of course you know, we have our own particular skills. Cullen relaxed as he warmed to his subject, staring into him. Dragons, I think are, totally magic. Completely. Fae, on the other hand, are physical, and the magic flows through them. They're not made of magic; they control it and use it. It works for us, I think, because we get to be both. We're in our bodies, way more than most dragons, but we have a huge well of magic to draw from, because we're not just accessing it, we are it. Magic, I mean. Of course there's three of us. I can't imagine just being one.

No, I understand. I can't imagine you only being one either. You three are a set, and I can see the connection between you.

I love them. They're my family.

I want to be a part of that. Maybe he needed to. Orion wasn't sure.

All of the sudden, he realized that the table had become very quiet, and Corbin and Yarrow were both just staring at them.

Oops.

They must have been having their little talk longer than he'd thought.

Corbin offered him a mild smile. "Did you both fall asleep? The food is here."

He heard that rebuke, loud and clear. "Sorry. I think I must have. It's so warm in here."

Cullen nodded. "You know I nod off, sonny."

Orion turned a hoot into a snort, and Corbin rolled his eyes. Yarrow narrowed his, head tilting.

Shaking his head just the tiniest bit, he dug into his food, glad for the distraction.

"Can I get a grilled cheese and a vegetable soup to go?" Yarrow asked when they were all finished. He grinned, those front teeth so cute. "I want lunch for later too."

"Oh, that sounds like an idea."

"We'll grab something on the way back home," Orion said. He had a feeling Cullen and Corbin might prefer that hamburger they hadn't gotten the other day. He'd call ahead to the Colorado Roadhouse and get them a burger and himself a collection of yummy fried things like mushrooms and onion rings as well as some mac and cheese...

How could he still be hungry?

"Would anyone like a cinnamon roll while you wait?" the server asked.

"Goddess yes," they all moaned at the same time.

“Should we get a half dozen to go too?”

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Cullen and Corbin nodded as one. “That way we can take them home.”

Right, there were two adults and a ravenous little one, just waiting. Hell, Cosmo was the size of a house. “Why don’t you make that an even dozen?”

“I can do that.” She smiled and headed off, a bit of a dazed expression on her face.

Yeah. He was going to have to get hamburgers for Hawk and Cosmo and the little one too. They wouldn’t thank him for forgetting them.

Mate, you’re sparkling a little bit.

Oh. Oops. Sorry! He dialed it back, focusing on his appearance. Does the little one like hamburgers?

He does. A lot. But you can always count on chicken nuggets. Some things are eternal. The child loves chicken nuggets, especially when shaped like dinosaurs. But he will take a plain burger as dinosaur chicken nuggets are rare in the wild. We tend to have to buy them domestically.

The cinnamon rolls came, huge and dripping with icing, warm with a dollop of butter on the top. They polished them off about the time that the to-go boxes came.

“I do really appreciate you guys coming down to meet me,” Yarrow said. “I feel better. That land is important to me. It’s good to have good neighbors.”

“We’re exceptional neighbors,” Cullen told Yarrow. “Just ask us, we’ll tell you.”

“Especially since if you need me, I’ll be there too.”

Yarrow’s eyes went wide. “Will you now?”

“Yes. I’m going to be doing some...work.”

“You?” Yarrow’s lips twisted. “You’re going to be doing work? You?”

“Hey!”

He worked.

Sort of.

That did remind Orion that he needed to make a few phone calls.

Now that he knew he was going to stay, he needed to make sure nice man knew how to find him. The hob had been with him since time immemorial, and he’d be damned if he was going to leave his oldest friend behind now.

Cullen offered him the quick lowering of his brow, but didn’t say anything.

He thought Basil would love it—wandering along the houses, learning a new place.

If you have another lover, I’m going to be cross.

Who? Me? No! That was ridiculous. Basil is a hob. He’s one of my dearest friends.

Do you have a cofgod as well? Cullen immediately relaxed. I’m glad. Cosmo and Hawk love their gnomes.

Yes. No reason to be jealous. He's going to love you. He's going to think you're amazing.

And if Basil didn't? Well, Orion wasn't going to worry about that. As long as the fellow didn't pee on Cullen's sheets, all would be well...

They wandered, and their disguises slipped a little as they laughed at all the things in the toy store, but no one there said a word. He had a feeling the people who ran it were shifters... The bookstore yielded treasures, and they grabbed a huge load of groceries before picking up burgers and such to take back up to the house for lunch.

Orion was so lost. He was deep in love already. Cullen knew how to laugh and play and when to be serious, and he smelled like...

Home.

Orion's hands itched to touch him, and he was ready to see his purple love in all his splendor.

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“This was a great day, Orion,” Corbin murmured as he pulled in around the back of the house. “Thanks.”

“Hey, I live to please.” He winked over.

“I just bet.”

“Nope.” Cullen was his violet self in a second. “No flirting with my unicorn.”

“I only do it to piss you off, bro. Come on. Let’s eat. We can unload the coolers after.”

“Someone call your family?” They would eat in the weird junction of the houses, Orion thought.

“You got it,” Corbin said, grinning as he grabbed the bag with the burgers.

Orion’s food came in his own bag.

Cullen took his free hand, smiling at him. “It was a good morning. Corbin is right. I like Yarrow, too.”

“I bet he shows up this winter.”

“That would be cool.”

They walked inside hand in hand, and Orion had to admit, while he wanted food and

all, he wanted Cullen more.

And tonight, he wasn't sleeping on the couch.

ChapterSix

Cullen wiped his hands on his pajama pants.

They were sweaty, and he wasn't sure what to do with them. He'd had a shower, and he thought maybe Orion had done some yoga or something while he did. Not that he blamed the guy. Spending all day with his family when someone was used to being a loner had to be nuts...

He'd seen the way Orion had been looking at him since breakfast, though, and he didn't think Orion planned to spend another night on the couch...

So he wandered while Orion was in the shower, trying to decide if he should go get the pillows off the couch and bring them back up to the bedroom.

Which was when he looked at the bed and saw that Orion already had. Oh, goddess.

His breath caught when Orion walked out of the bathroom, steam following him. He wore a towel draped around his waist, but he was otherwise bare. His silver hair was combed back off his face, and his skin had that otherworldly iridescent sheen to it that screamed magic.

Cullen thought he was the most amazing thing he'd ever seen.

"I clean up okay, huh?" Orion spread his arms, letting Cullen look his fill. Or mostly his fill, anyway. He wanted to see what was under the towel.

“Uh-huh.” He was probably flushed, which made him look like an eggplant. So attractive.

Orion tilted his head, eyes flashing quicksilver for a moment. Then he held out a hand. “Come here, baby.”

Cullen let himself move forward to take that hand, his nervousness popping like a bubble as soon as they touched.

“This is going to be the most fun ever.” He stepped in close so that their bodies touched. “I feel like I’ve been waiting for this my whole life. And here you are.”

Orion nodded. “And we are long-lived folks, aren’t we?”

Yes, and they were going to drive each other nuts for an eon. “Yeah. Kiss me like you mean it.”

“I’m always going to mean it.” Orion pushed his hands under Cullen’s hair, cradling his head and drawing him near.

Cullen wanted to close his eyes, but he also didn’t want to because he wanted to see every second of this—of Orion loving on him.

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His hands landed on Orion's hips, managing to dislodge the towel without even really trying.

Orion chuckled, their lips brushing together. "That's cheating."

"Accident." He winked, blowing his chuckle over Orion's lips.

Their lips crashed together, and suddenly, he swore that there were shooting stars.

Just from this one kiss.

Absolutely shooting stars.

Cullen couldn't wait to see what happened when they orgasmed.

Orion's tongue slipped across his lips, asking for entrance, and he gave it easily.

They kissed until they were breathless, until the feel of Orion's cock prodding his belly made him moan and ripple his abs to try to get more of the sensation.

"Mmm." Orion said it against his mouth. "Belly dancing."

He chuckled. "I just want to be so close to you."

"I know. I feel the same way." Orion grabbed his ass, squeezing, and then he pulled Cullen up against him so no air could get between them.

“Uhn.” His head fell back, his hair streaming down behind him. Orion had him. He wasn’t going to fall. And this way, their cocks rubbed together all along their lengths.

“Can’t we go to bed? Will you let me hold you?” Orion didn’t move though. In fact, he just rocked, prick slipping and sliding against him and making his toes curl.

“Uh-huh.” He loved how broad Orion’s shoulders were, how he tapered into lean hips. The shape of Orion fascinated his hands, and he couldn’t seem to stop touching.

When Orion dragged him up along the strong body, he gasped, and suddenly, he was flying with Orion, moving across the room and landing in a bed that was filled with down and felt like sinking into a cloud.

He kept them close together, their kisses never-ending, their bodies writhing together as Orion covered him.

Cullen could barely breathe, and he felt as if he was drunk, as high as he’d ever been. “You’re perfect.”

“I’m made for you. That’s close enough.” Orion bit his bottom lip hard enough to sting, and their gazes locked, the magic between them inexorable, and Cullen felt like he was being sucked down in a whirlpool of pure need. “I can smell you, my dragon fae. I can smell your need.”

He was never going to stop blushing, his balls were never not going to be full, and he was never going to not need to feel this passion.

It made his eyes cross, that touch, and he dragged his fingers up Orion’s back and then pushed hard on the way down with the heels of his hands.

All the while, he stared into Orion, offering this pleasure, praying that he understood

what Cullen felt.

“I do. I feel you. I feel you everywhere.” One finger slid into his wet hole, and he groaned, his lips parting, his tongue flicking out.

“Don’t stop.”

“I don’t intend to stop.” Orion kissed him again, and one finger became two, the pressure light, steady, rocking into him and then out and in and out. Orion’s thumb nudged him all the while, pushing at his balls and sliding over the sensitive spot behind them.

When two fingers became three, Cullen cried out, the sound pure hunger as Orion twisted those fingers inside him.

“So hungry. You’re so hot and wet inside. I want to take you, and I feel you all around me.”

He nodded, staring hard, caught in his lover. “Do you have a knot?”

Orion brought his hand over to touch his cock, which was long, heavy, especially for someone Orion’s size. The tip was thick and broad, and then the shaft was lengthy and barely rippled, the skin tight.

Cullen stroked up and then pushed down. When his fingers teased the base, he could feel it, just a hint at that massive knot that promised to make him fly.

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“This is all for me.”

“Every inch. Do you think you can take it?”

“God. God, yes. How do you want me?”

Orion stopped for a second, smiled. “I’ll let you ride me. That way you can curl down when we’re knotted, I’ll cover us up, and we can rest together. Sometimes, the after is more magical than the doing, right?”

“Yes.” He pushed Orion, encouraging him down. “I have amazing pillows.”

“They smell like you.” Orion turned and settled into the sheets, stroking his own cock, showing off a little bit for Cullen, and he appreciated every second of it.

He licked his lips, the bead of moisture at the tip of Orion’s cock calling him to taste it. “Can I?”

“Anything, my fae. Anything you want.” Orion arched up off the bed, offering himself right up.

“Mmmm.” Putting his hands down on either side of those muscular hips, he licked, the flavor exploding inside him. It was like...it was like super creamy sea-salt caramel ice cream on a hot day. Smooth on his tongue, spiced with a little saline flavor, but also with that little tang cream gave a caramel ribbon.

“You’re comparing me to ice cream?” Orion stared down over that flat belly.

“It’s my favorite.” He licked again, and then Orion yanked him up, touching him again, fingers sliding into him. “Wet. Are you ready for me, baby?”

Oh, no fair pulling out the baby card. It made his cock jerk. He’d always loved that in books. He was totally a romance guy.

“Yeah.” He panted, riding those fingers, but needing something way bigger.

“Come on up here and take me in when you’re ready.”

He crawled up Orion’s body, eager to feel what his mate’s cock could do for him. He straddled Orion, his thighs shaking as he rose up, and Orion helped guide him into place, that cock slipping into him an inch at a time.

Finally, gravity pulled him down, and he was fully seated.

He grunted, willing, but Orion grabbed his hips. “No, love. Not yet. Don’t move yet.”

A low sound escaped him, and Cullen would hit anyone who called it a whine. “But I need to move.”

“Soon, love. Soon.” Orion drew in a deep breath, and when he let it out, butterflies appeared, sparkling in the light, then bursting into glitter that disappeared.

“Oh. Nice.” Cullen loved that. And he had a feeling it was totally spontaneous, not planned out for effect.

He waited, his body on fire, and finally, his mate let him move. Moaning, Cullen started rising and falling, riding just like Orion had said. He controlled the pace this way, controlled the depth, and Cullen felt powerful.

He also felt damn beautiful when Orion looked at him, touched him, hands sliding up over his ribs to his chest, fingers plucking at his nipples.

“Oh. Oh, goddess.”

“Uh-huh. That’s it, baby. Take all of me. Can you feel my knot? It’s almost ready for you. You’re so tight and hot. You feel like paradise. I’ve never wanted anything more.”

“I needed you so much, and I waited...”

“I did too. I’ve had lovers, but you’re my mate. Mine. And you’re all I’ll ever need now.”

That warmed him, and he moved faster, feeling that knot swell for him, filling him, threatening to lock him into place. He took Orion’s hand and put it on his cock, and Orion stroked him, tugging good and hard, letting him really feel it.

“Please. Orion. Love. Please.” He shook his head, trying to understand what he was experiencing, but it was too much. It was overloading his nerves, and sparkles started to shoot from him, his very skin seeming to glow.

Orion was the same way. He shimmered like the most beautiful after-a-storm rainbow.

He felt that knot fill him, and he grunted, because now all he could do was rock back and forth, his hips jerking madly.

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“Come on, baby. You can come for me. You can show me everything. I’m going to fill you so good. Make you feel so amazing.”

“Already do,” he said, his breath coming so short and fast he could hardly manage to get any air.

Orion laughed, pressing on his chest with the hand not on his cock. “No passing out.”

“Right.” He blew out air, then sucked more in. “Need to—Ughnnn!” His orgasm took him completely by surprise, and then that knot swelled so tight in him that he shouted before Orion came inside him, filling him deep and hot and perfect.

“Fireworks,” Cullen murmured, because little non-scary sparklers were exploding all around them.

Orion nodded, and Cullen slumped down, landing on Orion, his eyes falling closed. The blankets covered them, Orion’s arms wrapped around him and holding him close, that heavy knot barely shifting inside him.

Cullen chuckled, and a particularly bright set of fireworks exploded under the blankets. “I like that.”

“Mmhmm. I like that a lot.”

Oh, he was so screwed, because now that he knew Orion on a cellular level? Damn.

“That was the best first time ever,” he whispered.

“It was.” Orion squeezed him tight. “I’m desperately curious to see if it’s going to be the best second time ever too.”

ChapterSeven

Orion bounced out of bed to head to the kitchen.

He wanted to make something yumtastic for his new lover. His mate. All he had to do was explore the dry goods and such to see what there was. Waffles? Scones? Pecan rolls?

So many options, if the stuff was there to be used.

He opened cabinets, peering in, cataloging. Okay, the flour and sugar had to be—ah. Cannisters on the counter. There was yeast, but no pecans...

“Unicorn!”

Orion whirled around at the bellow, his heart jumping into his throat, his hands up like some kind of demented ninja’s.

“Elliot. What are you doing over here, wee one?”

The magpie who watched over Elliot settled on the back of a chair as the little dragon held his arms up.

“Hungy.”

“Are you hungry, little one?”

Elliot stared at him as if to say, ‘I just said that, dipshit’. So he thought he’d try again.

“Do you like waffles?”

Elliot tilted his head, then nodded. “Wif bacons.”

“They’ve already got you started on bacon? You don’t even really have teeth yet.”

Elliot bared his teeth, showing off that he did, in fact, have a mouthful. They actually looked a little sharp, to be honest.

“Fair enough. Um, I will make bacon. I wonder if they have veggie bacon, here. We should get them to get some of those mushroom-based bacons. I bet you’d like those. They’re better for you than real bacon.”

Elliot just lifted an eyebrow. Orion could tell he didn’t care about Orion’s issues with health.

Also, apparently vegetarianism and mostly dragonism weren’t bedfellows.

“Bacon and waffles it is.”

He started puttering around the kitchen. He thought bacon would probably be safer in the oven just because that meant less spattering on little children.

But Elliot could sit and watch him make waffles.

“Does your father know that you’ve escaped? Does Uncle Cullen?”

“Cuncle!” Elliot roared, the foundations of the house shivering.

Oh, Orion did love how this little boy adored Cullen.

“That’s right, your Cunkle is sleeping.”

“Magic?”

“When he wakes up.” He assumed that Cullen would, at some point, wake up. He was pretty sure that he hadn’t broken Cullen in any actual practical way. Maybe round three had been a little crackly on the edges. It had been totally worth it. He was fairly certain his balls were going to fall off, of course.

He still wasn’t sure what baby and magpie were doing down here by themselves though.

Orion was honestly surprised that he was awake and up and about by himself. To be real Corbin seemed the type that would be up with the sun and asleep as soon as the

sun set.

He really wasn't sure about Cosmo, but that was pretty much the whole pregnancy thing, and Orion couldn't blame them for that. You had to protect your own.

And Hawk, Elliot's other dad, was still a mystery to him.

He got bacon on a sheet pan in the oven, then started a waffle batter. The waffle iron sat on a shelf in the pantry. And, oddly enough, there were oyster mushrooms in the fridge next to the eggs, so he could make himself fake-con.

The magpie watched him with those beady little black eyes never leaving him. It was clearly hungry too.

He hummed, whipping up waffle batter, not even blinking when the door flew open and Corbin rushed in, his green eyes searching the room.

"Elliot! How did you get down here?"

"I hungry. Unicorn. Bacon."

"Ta-da." Orion bowed deeply. "He just showed up, and he wanted bacon. I'm making waffles."

"Oh, good. Thank you." Corbin visibly relaxed. "Is there coffee?"

"Not yet. Were you watching him?" Are you the one in trouble?

"No." Corbin started making coffee. "I went up to give Cosmo his tea to help with his morning sickness. It's lasting forever. And I noticed that Cosmo was still asleep, Hawk was gone, and the baby wasn't in his bed. And then I knew that you and Cullen

were...being you and Cullen...together, and so I came to find him.”

“Good job.”

Elliot beamed, repeating, “Good job.”

“Thanks.” Corbin rolled his eyes. “You can’t just wander off, little one. You’re just little.”

“No. I beg. I hungry. Unicorn.”

Corbin nodded. “Yes, Orion is a unicorn.”

“Mine unicorn.”

Well, that was definite, and it kind of made Orion smile, although he thought that probably he was Cullen’s unicorn when it came right down to brass tacks.

“Where’s Cullen? Is he okay?”

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“He’s sleeping the sleep of the…well adored.”

Corbin’s lips twisted. “Good save. Can I help with anything else?”

“Does Elliot need to clean up or anything?”

Was he still in diapers? He didn’t know. The little dragon was dressed. In the most adorable pair of zebra jammies ever.

“Are you ready to get some clothes on, Elliot?”

“No.”

“He’s all right.” Corbin shook his head. “Alphas.”

“I bet you’re all excited about the new little dragon.” Orion knew Cullen was over the moon.

Corbin nodded. “We are. Everyone’s very pleased. We’re also very confused by your appearance, but pleased.” Oh, for Corbin that was high praise, so he would take it.

“We can blame it all on Yarrow. He’s the one who decided that he was worried about you guys.”

“I liked him. He seemed a good solid sort.”

Orion nodded. “In my experience, beaver shifters often are.”

“Do you know many? Beaver shifters, I mean?”

Of course he did. “Yeah, they kind of come in families.”

“Huh. Have you ever met a porcupine shifter? I think porcupines are incredibly cool.”

Why did this not surprise him?

“I met one from South America once. Loved crunchy things.”

“Yeah?” Corbin grinned hugely. “I love those YouTube videos of the non-shifter porcupines eating like, corn and popcorn and all.”

“They have the best cronches. You know what videos I like?” Orion asked.

“What?”

“Binturongs. You know, the bearcats?”

“Oh they have great whiskers.”

“Whiskies! Make wafs,” Elliot demanded.

“I am, my love,” Orion told Elliot. “But the waffle iron can take a bit. Let me heat up some syrup.”

“Warm syrups?” The little one’s eyes widened.

“Yes. It’s so much better that way.”

“Cullen has a little electric warmer. Here.” Corbin got it out for him. “He actually

uses it for honey a lot.”

“Excellent.” He took the fun little thing and plugged it in, setting the clean pot on top and pouring in enough syrup for all of them. Well, he thought so. Corbin could eat.

Orion?

Hello, my love. Would you like to join us for waffles?

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I smell bacon.

Yes. The little gargoyle insisted.

Ah.

I was going to surprise you with pastry in bed.

I love that. But I'll come down.

"Were you talking to Cullen?"

"Hmmm?" He pulled out some waffles, then put in more batter.

"Just then," Corbin said. "Your eyes went a little unfocused and you kind of went away."

"Way!" Elliot clapped his hands, and the magpie chattered and screeched.

"Good lord. Do they always do that?" He stared at the magpie.

"Gods, yes. I have a feeling it will only get worse over the years."

"Wow."

"Morning, you lot," Cullen said as he wandered into the room, yawning.

“Morning, bro. You need to keep this one. He cooks.”

“He does.” Cullen yawned again. “Among other things. Hello, my little gargoyle.”

“Magic!” Elliot watched Cullen raptly. “Puweeeeeeese?”

The magpie chittered, and Cullen laughed. He cupped his hand and blew into it, and a flurry of tiny birds flew out, all of them cackling like ravens and crows.

The magpie chased, and he tilted his head, laughing. “Does he have a name?”

“Who?” Cullen asked.

“The magpie.”

“Eddie,” Corbin told him.

“As in Eddie Munster?”

“No, as in Ed Sheeran, but Eddie seems to fit him better.”

Orion laughed, humming a few bars of “Shape of You”, which was his favorite Ed Sheeran song.

“Very nice,” Cullen approved.

“Thank you, my love. Corbin, can you pull the bacon out of the?—”

“Do you all have my child?” Cosmo staggered into the kitchen, looking all askew, his robe not quite tied right, his hair everywhere.

“We do. We’re about to feed him.”

“Oh.” Cosmo glared at Elliot. “Did you come with Corbin?”

“Wif Ed!”

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“Elliot! You are not to explore alone.”

“Wif unicorn!”

Orion whistled, pulling out more waffles. Nope. Not touching this convo.

“Now I know that Orion did not come up and take you out of your bedroom.”

Elliot just blinked innocently. “I hungry.”

Oh, I hate when they challenge each other. Cullen rolled his eyes. Hawk needs to come home. Cosmo’s tired.

Orion nodded, and Corbin poured more coffee.

Cosmo just stared at his son, and Elliot stared back, the air just sort of crackling between them.

Are they always like this?

Oh yeah. Elliot’s stubborn. It doesn’t help that he’s super dragony. He responds way better to Hawk. I think he’s going to be one of those huge ponderous dragons, you know? I can feel it in my bones. The good news is, that Elliot’s basically lovable, and he loves his dads. He’s sort of like a pit bull. He wants to please, but he really also has a little bit of obsessive tendencies and he’s a little stubborn.

Are you a pit bull too? Orion teased, though he knew better.

Cullen was more like a border collie. Quick, clever, easily bored, equipped with a desperate need for something to do, and awfully pretty.

Oh no, I'm totally more like a Pomeranian. A vampire Pomeranian.

Suddenly there was a low laugh, and Hawk came swooping in, his arms full of baskets of god knew what kind of fruit and a bunch of bread and rolls and bright blue flowers that he offered to Cosmo with a kiss.

How fascinating.

"Sorry, am I in time for breakfast?" Hawk's eyes belied his breezy attitude. "Are the waffles ready?"

"They are getting there. I am a waffle-making machine."

"Elliot, tell your father you're sorry."

Elliot gave Hawk a cheery smile. "Sorry!"

Cosmo stared, then dropped the flowers on the table with a thud. "I'm going back upstairs. You can be with your son and enjoy your breakfast." Cosmo didn't even storm off. He just walked away.

"Do you not want waffles?" Corbin asked.

"No."

Hawk sighed and shook his head. "Son, I swear by all I hold holy. I'm not sure I'm going to survive you being a teenager. I'll take Cosmo a plate in a bit."

“Is he all right?” Orion hated having so much drama, and Cosmo seemed so grumpy.

“This pregnancy has been tough. He’s been sick the whole time. The healers in Lunastra say that he’s fine—his magics are a little unbalanced.” Hawk glanced at Elliot, who was now happily playing with a couple of bright stones the magpie had brought over. “This one’s not helping. He’s just such a dragon. What are we going to do when hormones hit?”

Cullen shook his head and smiled. “Just send him down to Cade. I bet Cade and Poe could deal with him just fine.”

“Now who were they?” There were so many names, and Orion hadn’t gotten to meet any of them yet.

Give him time. It hadn’t even been a week, he thought.

Cullen offered him a warm smile. “You know how we’re a portal now? Go to the Land of Summer on one door, the human world out another, and then if you go out through Cosmo’s house, then you end up in Lunastra. That’s the dragon world. I’m pretty sure you don’t get to go there.”

“And why not?”

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Cullen shrugged. “Because you don’t get to go there. I guess you can try; it won’t hurt you. I mean, the dragons might hurt you—I don’t know how they feel about unicorns. How do dragons feel about unicorns?”

Hawk snorted. “I think you’re okay, and I’m a dragon. After all you’re making waffles. I know an entire slew of dragons that would be all over that.”

“That would be something that we’d have to look up in the library, maybe?” Corbin said. “Or talk to Dev and Ollie? Maybe Brandon?”

“If you can find him.” Cullen rolled his eyes and took a rock out of Elliot’s mouth. “At any rate, Cade is one of the guardians of the village that’s down at the bottom of the mountain and Poe’s his mate. He’s like a horse guy, Poe, I mean. He was a cowboy when he was here.”

This was complicated. He might need to make notes. Maybe a chart. “Wow.”

“Right? It’s a whole new universe.”

Orion nodded. He’d really stepped right into something this time. Yarrow would just lose his mind.

“So you guys let human-world peeps into the other realms?”

Hawk shrugged. “Occasionally. But we’re also here to keep them out. Guardians.”

He put a stack of waffles on the table, then poured more. “Okay. Okay, cool. That’s

fair. So the veil is like, narrowed down to here?”

Cullen nodded, expression speculative. “Both lands are pretty big. I bet there’s more portals somewhere, but so far, we only know this one.”

“That makes sense to me too. I mean, can you imagine if this was it?” Cullen rolled his eyes. “We’d have to be insane to think we could defend it, just the four of us.”

“Five.”

“What?”

Corbin stared at Orion. “You’re here now. You know about us. Congratulations, you’re fucked.”

“Huh.” Panic hit him right in the chest, and Orion fought the urge to go all hoof and horn and make a run for it.

Shhh. It’s okay. It’s better than okay. Really. He’s just being an ass. Cullen stopped on the way to the table to kiss his cheek.

Right. Sorry. Sorry. Centuries of magical pens and fences and dungeons...

I would never lock you up. But I thought—Cullen lowered his gaze. I thought we were mates.

Oh, we are. I am here to stay. I just had a moment. It’s a lot of change.

It is. Cullen buttered and syruped a waffle for Elliot. Hawk would have, he thought, but he was catching a glass of orange juice before it went over the side of the table. Elliot had fast hands. I’ll help you through it. We’ve had a little more time to adjust.

Hawk set the orange juice down, very little having sloshed out. Corbin handed him two full plates. “Take these up to Cosmo. We’ll watch little bit.”

“Thank you so much.” Hawk bowed his head at all of them, then grinned at Orion. “And thank you for making bacon. I know it is not something you eat.”

“Your son insisted.”

“Ah. Yes. He is very bacon-focused.” Hawk chuckled. “Be good, my son.”

“Yes, Papa!” Elliot bared his sharp little teeth.

He poured more waffles, then sat down with his, buttering and syruing liberally. Yum. He loved that sweet and creamy flavor on top of crispy goodness.

He licked his fork, then glanced up to find Cullen watching him. Thankfully, Corbin was busy with Elliot and didn’t see the violet fire that Cullen sent his way.

He hummed, reaching out with one hand, and Cullen took it, the vibrations between them strengthening as they touched.

Yeah, okay, maybe he was here to stay, but the panic was gone. This was his mate, and Orion was here for Cullen. He would support this sweet fae, and his home and family, with everything in him.

ChapterEight

Cullen headed to the basement, leaving Orion and Hawk playing video games. Cosmo was making a baby blanket, and Corbin was napping with Elliot.

He felt like he needed to look at his hoard. He had all sorts of...stuff that had to do with magic and illusion. Cards. Magic wands. Silly magician hats. Tarot cards and talking boards. Illusion boxes.

He loved every piece.

Cullen hummed, stroking an old scarf that had been a magician's prop in the early twentieth century. Silk held up so well as long as it didn't shatter thanks to chemicals or moth eating.

He wandered through the stacks of things and the little glass cases, but then he stopped, blinking.

A glorious unicorn automaton from maybe the Georgian era sat in a glass case directly in front of him. Oh. Oh, that was so beautiful it brought tears to his eyes.

Orion! Is this yours?He let Orion see it through his eyes.

Ah, Geordie. How nice to see him. Where are you?

In the basement with my hoard. It's very climate-controlled. Will he be safe down here?

For the time being, yes. Let me follow you down there?

Here I am. Cullen dropped a mental pin, wondering if Orion would be able to follow it.

Sure enough, maybe five minutes later, Orion wandered down to him, studying Cullen's hoard as he went. "This is amazing, Cullen."

"Thank you. The automaton is... It's art, love."

"I told you, I wasn't much for ceramic unicorns from the Goodwill."

"True." He chuckled, leaning on Orion when his mate put an arm around him. "I love it. Shall we see what else is here with us from your stuff?"

"Oh, absolutely." Orion kissed his neck, which made his nipples tighten and his cock rise a little. Nothing urgent, just a deep, pleasurable ripple.

"What else should I look for?"

"Oh, I have tapestries galore—for some reason, unicorns seem to inspire needlework and fiber artists of all kinds. It's actually quite flattering."

Cullen chuckled, but he could see it. There was something about unicorns that screamed immortalize me in silk.

"I also have some amazing jewels, some coins from Scotland. Some bestiaries with fascinating illustrations. I have quite a few odds and ends. I've been collecting for quite a while." Orion nuzzled him again, breath huffing on his neck. "I mean, I'm not a dragon... I don't do a hoard, but I can see that Basil's been working hard at moving me in here."

“Where were you before?”

“I have a place in New Mexico—it’s not much, just a place on the border. I had been on the West Coast for quite a while, but it was getting very busy. I dislike crowds.”

Cullen could see that. He did too, as a rule. “Did you ever go to one of the big cities, like LA?”

“I did.”

“Did you happen to go see any magic shows?”

He did love a magic show. He respected the hell out of those performers, to be honest.

They didn’t have real magic to help.

“I did. Vegas is especially good for them. I love how humans search for magic in the humblest of ways.” Orion gave him a gentle grin.

“Me too! That’s why I have this hoard. I love illusions...”

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“Well, you’re particularly good at them. I love the old man. The butterflies were nice, too.”

Cullen chuckled. “You did all the wee birds.”

“I did.” Orion nuzzled his temple. “Shall we look for a tapestry? We could hang it in the upstairs hall.”

“Oh, I’d love that.” He had a ton of rooms—a dozen little rooms over three floors, all with a different theme. Suns, moons, bears, games—whatever amused him at the time. His room was in the tower, and it faced the Land of Summer, the sunlight keeping it warm and cozy, no matter the season in Lunastra or on earth. “I can clean out a room for Basil, you know. I want him to be comfortable.”

“Oh, Basil is going to want to be down in the basement. He loves to snuggle and create his own space.”

“So long as he knows he’s got a home here.”

Orion squeezed him. “You’re amazing, lover. So kind to me.”

Why wouldn’t he be?

Hell, he was the one who had insisted that Orion come to stay. He had known from the second he’d met Orion, he needed to protect his unicorn from the human world.

They didn’t understand real magic. They’d want to hurt Orion, study him.

He found himself just standing there, resting against Orion, letting time pass in his arms. It was odd for him, to not feel the urge to run about and be wild, to be relaxed and quiet in his soul.

Finally, he took a deep breath. “Let’s find our tapestry. I think the hallway on the second floor is screaming for a unicorn.”

“Screaming?”

“Whining?” He chuckled softly.

“How about begging?” Orion nibbled his ear. “I like begging.”

“You’re awful. Terrible. I may have to beat you.” He laughed, though, and turned, pushing into Orion’s arms and lifting his face for a kiss. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“Yes. Yes, sweet dragon. I’m glad I’m here as well.” Orion nibbled at his bottom lip, teasing him. “There’s nowhere else I’d rather be. Nowhere.”

“Promise?” Was he being needy? Maybe he was, but this whole mating thing was new. He thought about how hard it had been for Cosmo and Hawk to get in sync, but then Hawk’s house had come with him, and that had all been an explosion of change...

“Ah-ha!” Orion tugged him over to a side wall, where a tapestry was draped over what looked like a hunt board. Like something old and gorgeous. The hunt board. The tapestry was encased in layers of unbleached muslin.

“Can we bring this upstairs too?” He went to explore the hunt board—the wood was warm and well-oiled, with a row of drawers and heavy iron drawer pulls. He opened the drawers, finding twine, a little knife, buttons, linens. “Is it yours? Why is it down

here?”

“I think that Basil is worried to come abovestairs, love.”

“Well, that’s awful.” He looked around. “Basil? Basil, if you can hear me, this is Cullen, and you are more than welcome here, and you can put furniture upstairs. If we need it moved, we’ll move it!”

Orion chuckled softly. “You are a good dragon, you know that?”

“Only half of me,” he teased. “The other half is wicked fae.”

Not that fae were particularly wicked. They simply had different priorities.

Beauty. Art. Sunshine. Music. Dance. Making love.

Things like work were overrated, no question.

“So...that’s what is outside the kitchen door, is it?”

Cullen nodded. “That’s where my mother and father live. You can even see their chimney from the window. We can see Mother’s gardens from the bedroom.”

Orion tilted his head, blinked. “Oh? What does she grow?”

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“Flowers. Thousands and thousands of flowers.” He winked at Orion. “That’s why she fights with Corbin so. You know how he only grows vegetables and fruits. Grains.”

“I saw the roses, though. They’re breathtaking.”

Cullen nodded. “Stunning. I like the purple ones the best.”

In a totally non-weird, completely unexceptional sort of way, of course.

“I’m shocked.”

“I thought you would be.”

Orion chuckled, then went to lift the muslin-wrapped tapestry. “Come on, love. Let’s take this upstairs and hang it up, hmm?”

“That sounds wonderful, actually. What do we need to hang it?”

“I have no idea. It’s been years, maybe decades, since it was strung up.”

“Strung up has such old-west connotations,” Cullen teased. “You sound like Poe, or Zeke.”

Orion frowned. “And who are they?”

“Friends. You’ll like them, although you’ll not get too much of a chance to meet

them, I guess.” Cullen chewed his lip. “They can’t come in the house, and I don’t know if you can go to Lunastra... Maybe we need a bubble.”

“A what?” Orion stared at him, tapestry in his arms.

“You know, a bubble attached to the house. A catio. If it’s attached, surely you could go sit and the dragons can come talk to you through the glass.”

“You are a nutball, baby,” Orion told him.

“I think about these things.” His cheeks heated. He knew that turned him from lavender or violet to royal purple, but there it was.

“I’m glad. It made me laugh.” They trooped up the stairs, all the way to the second-floor landing, where there was a nice clear floor to unroll the tapestry.

Cullen gasped when he saw it, because it was so amazingly beautiful. It was along the lines of the unicorn in captivity, and he was grateful it wasn’t the hunting kind, with men on horses spearing a unicorn. He’d seen that in a book his mother had when he was a child, and he’d cried for two days.

“This looks almost new.”

“I know. I’m told it was woven by a pair of sisters who used spiderwebs as threads.” Orion shrugged. “They wove magic into it to keep it from weakening, and they infused it with a couple of phoenix feathers...”

His mouth dropped open. “What the?—”

“I’m not teasing. But who knows what the actual method was. What I can tell you is that I’ve owned it since the French Revolution.”

“Wow. I mean. Wow.” He blinked hard. “That’s so cool.”

“Right? I think a tapestry clamp. Does anyone woodwork?”

“Hawk can, but there’s also a master woodworker in the village. The dragon one.”

“Can you order a tapestry clamp?”

“Sure, just show me what it looks like.”

“Here.” He pulled out his phone, bringing up a picture.

“Okay, cool. Yeah. Next time one of us goes down this week, I’ll commission it.”

“Thank you, love.” Orion rolled it back up in the muslin and put it in, yes, the guest room. Cool.

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“You’re welcome. I want this to be your house too.”

“Mmm. I like the sound of that.” Pulling him close, Orion kissed him nice and long and deep.

His body reacted immediately, and he moaned, his whole self lighting up. He wrapped his arms around Orion’s neck, grinning up at his mate as they rubbed together. “The bedroom is right there.”

“So it is. You’re hot as a two-dollar pistol today, my love.”

“I am.” He climbed Orion’s body. “I want you.”

“I want you too.” Orion carried him to the bedroom and proceeded to show him how much.

So much better than an automaton.

ChapterNine

Orion hummed, hands behind his head, staring at the ceiling. Anyone looking at him would probably say he had a goofy-as-hell grin on his face.

But why not? He and Cullen had been like bunnies. Just whoa. For like, three days.

He loved the purple lug even more every time.

He was sure he needed to get up and find food.

Be social.

Get dressed.

Oh, what fun was that?

He was being lazy. He turned his head to look out the window, and Cullen was right, he could just see this beautiful land, all of these flowers.

And Orion could see now where the idea for Cullen's house had come from. He could see the triplet's parents' house—it seemed like a quaint fairy-tale castle, covered with vines and roses and flowers of every different kind.

Orion was so curious, he wanted to go and see. He wanted to see if the flowers smelled as good as they appeared to, and if the bread and honey that they brought over from the Land of Summer tasted just the same over there.

When he went out Corbin's front door, it was becoming autumn, with falling leaves and the burgeoning harvest. When he looked out of Cosmo's, it was thinking about becoming spring—albeit a high mountain spring, complete with snow and just barely budding trees. Here it was summer, and it was dizzying.

And fascinating.

Maybe if he just tried to go. Maybe that was the answer.

Cullen walked in from taking a shower obviously, and Orion tilted his head.

“Uh. Love?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re covered in spots.”

“What?” Cullen looked down at himself, and sure enough, his mate was covered in bright blue polka dots. “Umm...where did those come from?” Cullen dried his hair and sparkles just sort of fell right out of the long, silky stuff.

That was weird. Pretty, but weird. “Are you hungry?”

“Yeah, I could eat.”

He sighed dramatically. “I guess that means I have to stand up.”

“Hey, if I managed to walk after the last three days, you can get your ass up.” Cullen reached down and pinched his big toe, and the tiniest little jolt of electricity zapped him.

“Ow!”

“What happened?”

“You shocked me.”

Cullen’s lips twisted. “I didn’t mean to.”

“Be careful. What if you do that to the little one? He’s going to bite you.”

“I said I didn’t mean to! It was just static electricity.”

It had felt much more directed than static anything. Static really meant that it was still. Static. This wasn’t still. This had traveled up his leg, almost to his groin. Not quite, thank goodness.

Orion slipped out of bed, scooting out of the way when Cullen reached for his balls. “Nope, nope, nope. No touchy.”

Cullen looked hurt. “Why?”

“Well, what if you’re not done being static? I don’t want you shooting up static lightning through my balls.”

“I didn’t do anything. It just happened. It was just—” Cullen stopped and turned and walked to his dresser, throwing on a heavy sweater and a pair of gauzy pants.

“Are you cold?” he asked.

“I’ve got a little bit of a chill, and I’m grumpy. I tend to get cold when I’m grumpy.”

“Oh, good to know. Probably?—”

Suddenly, it was as if the world was rattled, was shaken with a scream, and he heard, CUNKLE! CUNKLE! ripping through his brain.

Cullen was off in a second, and Orion ran right behind him, naked as the day he was born, and he didn’t even care. He didn’t have time to.

Cullen ran straight for Cosmo and Hawk’s house, flying up the stairs.

They made it to the third floor, where Cosmo lay, water and blood pouring from his belly. Hawk’s house spirit, Bakli, was there with towels, trying to stop the flow, and the little one was screaming.

“Elliot! Elliot, it’s okay.” Cullen grabbed Elliot from the floor, almost tossing him at Orion. “What happened?”

Bakli shook his head. “His water broke, and he slipped. He hit his head on the floor.”

Cullen lifted his face to the sky, and this sound like none he’d ever heard, sharp as a scalpel, sliced through him. Hawk, Corbin, I need you now.

Then, as if the fabric of relativity had opened, Corbin and Hawk were there.

“What happened?” Hawk roared, flying to his mate.

“I don’t know. I wasn’t in here. I was in my house.”

“Da falled and hitted hims head,” Elliot cried, clinging to him like a limpet.

“Bakli said maybe his water broke, and then he slipped.”

Corbin shook his head. “We’ve got to get this baby born.”

“You’ve got to wake up my mate!” Hawk’s roar split the air, and Elliot screamed in pure terror.

“We need to get him to Lunastra or Mother.” Corbin stared at Cullen, who was beginning to glow.

“Hawk can bring him to Lunastra.” If something happens, Hawk should be there.

Fuck.

“Come on, then.” Hawk grabbed Cosmo up and began to run with Corbin and Cullen right behind.

Cullen pinned him with a look. “Come on, bring the baby.”

And out they ran, down the stairs and out the door, so he ran with them.

Suddenly he was not in the house.

He was not in the house, and he was naked and there was snow on the ground, and he had Elliot.

Oh, dear.

Orion pondered what to do, and finally, he swung Elliot around to his shoulders. “Hold on, Elliot. Can you do that for me?”

“Da!”

That had to be good enough. Orion shifted into his unicorn form, choosing the smaller of the options, the one that the tapestry weavers all made look like a cross between a goat and Shetland pony. He was far more attractive than that, naturally, but human art perspective hadn’t evolved at that point...

Elliot clung to his mane like a burr, and he clattered down the rise from the house,

following the brothers and Hawk to what looked like another cluster of bizarre, amalgamated houses. Hawk was still roaring, calling to...well, he guessed other dragons, judging from who was spilling out of the houses and arriving by air.

“We need the midwife!” Cullen shouted. “And Abe! Please.”

“What happened?” A brawny gray-haired dragon ran out of the upper house.

“He fell and hit his head.”

“I’ll go get the midwife.” The guy ran a few feet, then sprang into the air, his dragon form huge and intimidating and wild.

Another half-dozen male dragons came running, a bunch of children of all ages trailing behind.

“Abe. Help!” Cullen begged.

“Sebby! Get blankets. Get some water on, Samuel. Bring him to the house, Hawk.” Abe took off back toward the cabin-like home at the top of the little villagey-type collection of homes.

“Is that a unicorn?”

Cullen rounded on him, eyes wide. “Uh. Yes. Yes, it is. He’ll need something to wear when we get to the house.”

“I’ll get some of Justin’s clothes.”

They all ran inside, and he shifted down, catching Elliot before he could fall to the floor.

“Da!” Elliot wailed.

“Hello, Elliot.” A smaller silver-haired dragon came to hold out his arms. “Will you come with Uncle Seth? We’ll make hot cocoa for your da to have when he wakes up, hmm?”

“Da.” Elliot nodded, then lunged at Seth, who caught him when Orion lost his grip from surprise.

“Here. You might need these. Bit cold.” That was another huge, silvery hot dragon. Damn. This was a good-looking bunch.

“Thanks.”

“So a unicorn, huh?”

Orion stuck out his hand. “Orion.”

“Samuel. Bad circumstances, but good to meet you.”

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“What can I do?” Orion asked, dressing quickly. The warmth felt heavenly.

“Can you cook?” Samuel shot back.

“I can.”

“The main kitchen is in there. We’ll need lots of food.”

“On it.” He’d make some broth, too. For Cosmo, who he thought would need the nourishment.

“Who you?”

He blinked down at a small child who looked like she was made of spun platinum.

“Orion. Who are you?”

“Melia.”

He blinked at what lumbered over to them from behind her. A pale gold bear. “Is that a bear?”

“Spirit.”

“Uh, nice to meet you, Spirit.”

“Ups.” She held out her arms, so he picked her up.

“Is that your bear?”

“Me and Lissa and Laurel,” she said, her voice clear as a bell.

“That’s pretty exciting.”

“You’s a uni?”

“I am.”

“Pretty.” She patted his cheeks, then grabbed his ears to steer him. “Find Elliot.”

“Uh, very well. I am your faithful steed.”

“Steeeee.” She nudged him in the chest with her knees, and he headed to the communal kitchen, or at least he thought that was what it was.

Cosmo?he asked his mate.

Still knocked out, but Abe thinks he’ll be fine.Cullen sounded worried, though.

I am just in the kitchen if you need me.The best thing he could do was to stay out of the way of the healers.

Thank you, love.

Do you have clothes on?

I do,Cullen told him.Make something yummy.

Your wish is my command.“Hi,” Orion said to the one named Seth. “Do you have

yeast?”

“Yes.”

“I thought I would make cinnamon rolls. Also, what about any veg that’s on the edge of a breakdown. I can make broth.”

“We always have something on the verge of a nervous breakdown around here.” Seth grunted him, those silver eyes faceted and sparkling. They were fascinating.

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“I’ve never seen anybody with silver eyes like that before. They’re amazeballs.”

Seth’s eyes crinkled. “Thanks. We all have them. The five of us and the babies, I mean. Oh, congratulations for getting through the doorway, by the way.”

He hadn’t been worried. “Going through doorways is sort of a specialty of mine.”

“Yeah? I’ve never met a unicorn before. I mean, at this point, I thought I’d met a lot of things. People. Um, creatures?” Seth’s cheeks were bright pink.

“Oh, I like creatures.” He grinned at Seth. “Let’s go with beings.”

“Beings. All right, I can do that.” Seth rolled those glorious eyes. “Goddess, I’m such a dork. I’m just a little off-kilter. And, and I don’t know where Gareth is. He’s probably got the other children. He tends to watch them, the older ones especially. Before they head off to school.” Seth took a deep breath, before letting it out, obviously soothing himself. “Sorry, this is very unnerving. I don’t love when things are unnerving.”

Orion could imagine that they had had quite a bit of unrest. Honestly, he had heard from Cosmo about how they’d all been trapped in a house that kept changing and then kept getting smaller and smaller around them. And then Cullen had explained to him about the veil and how different the dragonland, Lunastra, had been. How many of their friends had made their way over.

And Corbin had been very clear about their boss who lived on the other side of the veil and couldn’t get out now, and how they’ve all been worried about Hawk,

especially Cosmo, who was pregnant with Hawk's baby.

Well, had been pregnant with Elliot and was currently pregnant. Christ, he was getting a headache "Veg?"

Seth started pulling out tubers and greens and what appeared to be some kind of onion. "Here, this is what we've got. I can find more if you want."

"Oh, this is great. Perfectly fine. I just thought I'd make a broth."

"That's very thoughtful. I'll—I'll make brownies."

An owl, or what appeared to be an owl, and a flying...something feathered, but kind of large...went through the kitchen.

He ducked, and Seth sighed. "Stella, you and Luna, be good, please. Uncle Cosmo is sick and...is somebody keeping an eye on Penny?"

That was a switch in direction.

Seth was answered with a screech.

"Oh, good. Well, she can stay in there with Gareth. Why don't you guys go find some... Let's see... Can you go see if we have any dried garlic? If not, you'll have to go to Uncle Myk and ask him if he has any we can use."

She fluttered out with another screech that tried to split him in half.

Orion blinked. "Seth, what was that?"

"Hmm? That's Stella. She's Abe's daughter. Him and Brandon." Seth smiled, the

expression fond and warm. “She was an unexpected gift.”

There was no way that was a dragon. But Orion smiled and nodded. He knew a lot about orphans and gifts from unusual places. That was, in a weird sort of way, one of his stocks in trade.

Changelings, the humans called them. He would bet she was a special gift, kind of like he had been.

He studied the tubers. “Do I need to peel these?” Orion asked.

Cosmo is awake!

Oh, good. I’m making broth with, um, Seth.

He’s a sweetie. I’ll be in here a while.

No problem.

And it wasn’t. He was pretty self-amusing, and there seemed to be an endless stream of kids and animals and?—

“Who are you?” A strapping young dragon came to stare at him, standing in the entry to the kitchen.

“Orion.” He smiled, going for charming but not smarmy. “I came with Cullen.”

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“I’m Sebastian. I’m the oldest second gen.”

“Pleased to meet you.” He shook hands with Sebastian when the kid came over. “So. Peel or not?”

“Definitely peel.”

“Thanks.”

“I can do that, no problem.”

“So...you’re not a dragon. How did you get across the veil?” Sebastian didn’t pull any punches, and he opened his mouth to answer when a blaze of fire came rushing in, all wild red hair and huge eyes.

“Seb! What’s wrong with Cosmo?”

Sebastian turned to...her? “He’s fine. Uncle Cosmo is fine. He’s awake.”

“Promise?” Sparks were flying, but Seth didn’t seem to be worried, so he started peeling.

“I swear.”

Seth nodded. “Abe says he’s awake. He slipped when his water broke, and he hit his head. Knocked himself right out. Scary, but he’s all right. He’s having a baby.”

She blew out a long fiery breath and relaxed for about ten seconds, then she turned on him. “Who are you?”

“I’m Orion. I’m Cullen’s mate.”

“The unicorn. How did you get across the veil? I’m fairly sure you’re supposed to be impossible.”

“Arielle, be polite, please,” Seth murmured.

He arched an eyebrow. “No one had informed me of that, so I didn’t know. Elliot was scared and needed to be close to his father, so I brought him.”

She tilted her head, lips twisting. “Well, thank you. I don’t want him scared, but this is deeply concerning. You shouldn’t just be able to cross. Where did you come from?”

“The Glade.”

Arielle glanced to Sebastian, who shrugged. Then she looked at Seth, who also shrugged.

“You could just ask me,” he said wryly.

“I could.” She blew out sparks.

He blew out a rainbow that sparkled like one of those fireworks that exploded into more little explosions. He was sure they had a name.

She blinked for a moment, then laughed, sounding much more like the youngster she had to be. He lived for that. For healing a worry, for making it better when someone

was worried or sad.

“Is this the same grove Penny got lost in?”

“Huh?” He shook his head. “Who is Penny?”

Seth smiled, this radiant little grin. “She’s mine. She’s going to be some sort of sage or something according to the lady of the grove.”

He finished peeling and started chopping, tossing things into the old, battered stockpot Seth had pulled out for him to use. He loved it. “Tell me about the grove.”

Both kids looked suspicious again. “What if you’re not nice?”

He set the knife down to turn to face them fully. “Cullen and his brothers and Hawk are guardians, yes?”

Seth just folded his arms over his chest, smiling slightly at the kids.

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Sebastian and Arielle exchanged another glance. “Yes,” they said at the same time.

“Let’s construct a syllogism then. Cullen is a guardian, and you clearly trust him. Cullen and I have formed a mate bond, and he trusts me. Therefore, you can also trust me. I mean you no harm.” A flash of golden light enveloped him for a moment, and he nodded, because it was a sacred vow, and the magic in this world was acknowledging him.

They both sighed, and Arielle’s shoulders relaxed. “I had to know.”

“I understand. Everyone you care about is here. Now, about this grove.”

“Tell me about the glade first,” Sebastian said.

“How about we trade facts? I’ll tell you one thing, you tell me one.”

He got a searching look from each that was so identical it almost made him laugh.

“Okay.”

“So, I wasn’t born in the Glade, but that was where I was taken to be raised.” He stared. Waiting.

Sebastian sighed and waved a hand. “Well, Cade is the one who went to get Penny there, and we’ve never seen it, but?—”

“But it’s like a place that’s out of time and space with here,” Arielle finished.

He frowned, going back to chopping. “So it’s like a magical space?”

“This whole world is a magical space.”

“Sebby! Him next,” Arielle snapped.

“Okay.” He chuckled. “Ask me something.”

“Who are your parents?” Arielle asked.

“My birth parents are unicorns. They live in another dimension. I don’t see them much.”

“Oh.” Now the kids both looked guilty. “I’m sorry.”

He shrugged. “I can get there when I need to.” He handed the pot to a surprised Sebby. “Can you cover all the veg with water, please, and put it on the stove?”

“Sure.” Sebby dutifully filled the water.

“Now.” He tossed a wink at Seth. “Yeast?”

“I’ll show you the baking cabinet.”

“You make up your brownies if you want the oven first. I’ll make bread and cinnamon rolls, but they’ll both have to rise.”

“Sounds good.” Seth got to work after showing him the big Hoosier cabinet that held all the baking supplies. They even had an amazing sourdough starter.

How’s it going back there, baby?he asked Cullen.

Good now. You baking?

I am. And being interrogated.

Ah welcome to my world. Cullen's mental laughter made him smile.

"Are you talking to Cullen?" Sebby asked, his curious tone respectful, at least.

"I am."

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“Everybody around here can do that, did you know?” Arielle rolled her eyes. “Where we were, where we grew up—me and Seb and some of the others—you couldn’t. Only mates and brothers, sometimes, I mean. It got bigger, huh, Seb?”

Sebastian nodded. “Yes. The closer we got to being able to come here, I think, the more we learned to talk to each other with our minds, but it’s neat to know that you can do it.” Sebastian pursed his lips. “Can you do it with us?”

“I have no idea.”

CAN YOU HEAR ME?Arielle’s mental voice was like a sledgehammer. Just bashing him right between the eyeballs.

He swayed for a second, lights flashing. “Yes.”

Seth shook his head. “Arielle, easy.”

“Sorry, I was just?—”

Two gigantic dragons pushed into the door at about the same time, the house shaking with it.

Arielle looked at Sebastian, who looked back at her and then looked at the big dragons. Then, for the first time, Arielle really, genuinely smiled. “These are our uncles.”

Sebastian nodded. “Tyson and Zeke.”

This seemed sort of important. “Nice to meet you both.”

“Good to meet you.” Big and red-headed smiled at the kids. “Guys, can you please go get Elliot? He went off exploring, and things are getting loud, and he’s getting worried.”

“No problem.” The two teenagers disappeared like smoke, and Seth just cracked up.

“The kids called, huh?”

“They did. They were worried.” The silver fox with rainbow facets for eyes—rainbows! If he wasn’t mated he’d be all over that—laughed. “And you know their Uncle Seth is gentle.”

Tyson nodded. “Sweet and kind.”

“He would never hurt a fly.” Zeke rolled his eyes.

“Ari has a very well-developed sense of defense when it comes to her family.” Tyson had red hair, which was a surprise, given everyone else was silvery. He could see where Arielle got it from.

“Are you Arielle’s father?” he asked, and Tyson shook his head with a snort.

“Oh no. No, I was not responsible for that. I am, however, her uncle, and she is the child of my soul.”

“As Sebby is mine.” He got a smile. “Zeke. Pleased.”

“Same. Orion. It’s been a day. I’m making cinnamon rolls and bread, and soup for Cosmo. Seth here is making brownies. Do you have any requests?”

Tyson's lips curved in a smile, and holy goddess, these dragons were devastating. He might be mated; he wasn't dead.

"I don't suppose you know how to make empanadas."

"Bien sur, mon amie. Or rather, por supuesto, mi amigo. I knew a manchachicoj from Argentina who made empanadas that would make the angels cry. Sweet or savory or both?"

Zeke raised an eyebrow. "Both? Please. So, about this Glade the kids mentioned."

"Mmmhmm." He measured out flour and sugar.

There was only so much information he was going to give up about his homeland. Not that he didn't trust them. Of course he did. Except he didn't.

He hadn't even told most of this to Cullen.

Why would he share with strangers?

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“I’m assuming it’s a dimension like this?” Tyson asked. “Is it dangerous? Is it going to be attached to us? And do I have to worry about it, because I have a lot to worry about. Arielle wants to go away to college in a few years, and I think Myk’s pregnant again...”

“You two do know what causes that, right?” Zeke growled, and okay, watching the two of them turn on each other was delicious.

He’d pay for that.

All of the monies.

“Oh, do tell me about it. How many babies do you and Gareth have?”

Zeke arched one silver eyebrow, and Orion kneaded. “You’re way ahead of me.”

“I started with three!” Tyson rumbled. “So you have to remove three from anything you’re talking about.”

“Well, if you remove three, then you’re on what? Number twenty?”

“Six,” Tyson admitted.

Are they always this grumpy?he asked his mate.How’s Cosmo?

Yes, if you’re talking about Zeke and Ty. It’s their job. And we have a head. In five minutes, he’ll have a baby.

Oh, yay!

“That makes nine. I do not have nine children.” Zeke rolled his eyes. “This one is trying to repopulate the entirety of Lunastra.”

“I am not. And anyway, I’m pretty sure this is the last one.” Tyson shook his head. “Myk has his hands full with everybody, and I don’t know that he’s pregnant, I only suspect. He may just be grumpy.”

“I’d be grumpy if I had to deal with you all the time.” Zeke winked at Tyson.

“I’m going to show you grumpy.” Tyson grabbed Zeke, gave him a huge hug, and they both cracked up.

It felt so good to see that.

Then they both turned back to look at him. “So. Is it dangerous, and do we have to worry about it?”

“Not dangerous. You don’t have to worry; it’s a haven. Pure and simple. Zero drama.” At least that was the party line.

We have a little girl! Cullen’s voice was overjoyed. She’s perfect and bright pink, a little like bubble gum.

Oh, mate. Congratulations.

“The new baby is here,” he told the others.

“We should go see!” Arielle raced off, Sebby at her heels. He hadn’t even realized they were back. Ty and Zeke chuckled, and Ty clapped him on the back. “Thank you

for helping out. Food will be a huge part of the day. Expect Abe soon.”

“Yep.” His head was spinning with all the folks he was meeting.

“You’ll come see the baby soon, right?” Zeke asked.

“As soon as it clears out a little and all my dough is rising.” He winked, but he didn’t want to go step on toes. He wanted to let the family and friends who formed this tight conclave all do their thing first.

Maybe someday he would feel as though he belonged, but then again, maybe not. He literally was the proverbial unicorn. He didn’t fit in anywhere so he went everywhere.

“Hey.”

He had no idea how long he’d been alone in the kitchen when warm arms slid around him from behind, and he jumped half a foot, not expecting Cullen to come see him.

“Hey. You can be very stealthy.”

“You were kinda lost in thought.”

“I was.” He turned to take Cullen in his arms and make sure he wasn’t still...spotty. He had no idea whose clothes his lover was wearing, but they were too big. “Are you feeling okay?”

Cullen looked so tired.

“I am.” Kissing his chin, Cullen leaned against him. “It’s just been a roller coaster of a day.”

“I bet.” Orion felt the same way, and he hadn’t been in there for the birthing. “So is your new niece amazing?”

“She so is. She’s very pink. And so pretty. Kind of more like My Little Pony than dragon...”

“Oh, I have to see her soon, huh?”

“Yes. She’s your niece too.”

Orion felt that like a punch to his chest, and he stood with the feeling for a moment, trying to get a grip on it. Okay. Okay, he could do that.

“So what all are you making?”

“Bread is in that bowl, cinnamon rolls in that.” He pointed to bowls that sat on the

back of the counter by the huge old stove, staying warm. “And I am about to make empanada dough. That I have to keep cool.”

“That is so cool, babe. And I smell broth?”

“Vegetable broth. I thought I would separate some out and make bone broth or chicken soup or whatever they have for everyone, and some veggie for me.”

“You are amazing.” Little exploding hearts started going off behind Cullen’s head.

“Is that on purpose?” It was adorbs. Yarrow had told him no one said adorbs anymore, but he’d reminded Yarrow how many centuries of slang he had on the guy.

“What?”

“The hearts.” He pointed, and Cullen craned his neck to look.

“Crap. No.” But they didn’t stop.

“I like them.” He loved Cullen. So much suddenly that it hurt. Magical chemistry was a weird thing. He couldn’t imagine a life without Cullen now, and it had only been a few weeks.

“I can’t wait to eat your food.”

“You hungry?” He nuzzled Cullen’s cheek.

“Starving. Thank you.”

Orion smiled. “For what?”

“Being here for us. For me.” Cullen rose on tiptoe to kiss him.

“I’m glad I am.” And he was. Because he wasn’t alone in the kitchen anymore. Cullen was with him.

ChapterTen

Cullen looked at his hands, which were...fuzzy. Like sasquatch hands. Like, oh man, you were jacking off and got hair-palm hands.

Which was stupid. He never lost control of his body part illusions like this.

Maybe it was the new baby. Not that she was a bad baby, or that she was sick. No, she was happy and healthy and a little bubble of bubblegum joy. Elliot had been alittlegrumpy, but not too bad at all, and Orion was always willing to entertain the little guy.

There definitely was something wrong. Maybe it was mating.

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Although it hadn't messed up Cosmo.

Maybe he wasn't getting enough meat in his diet. Having Orion, it really did cut down on the whole meat-eating part of his world. He just didn't really want it anymore, which was weird, but okay, he could live with that.

Veggie bacon was a thing.

He glanced back down at his fuzzy hands and shook his head. Whatever it was that was going on here, he didn't approve.

Orion walked in, Elliot on his hip, and frowned. "Why are you being a werewolf?"

"I don't know. Hey, Elliot."

"Cunkle." Elliot waved to him, little hand opening and closing.

"What are you guys doing?" He was being fuzzy.

"Me no like baby."

"You don't like the baby? Emily is a pretty little girl, you know."

"No."

"No, you don't know? Or no, she's not pretty?"

“No, her not pretty. I’m pretty. I’m the baby.” Elliot pouted.

“Oh, I see.” Cullen really didn’t know what he was supposed to say to that. He knew it was normal, but on the other hand, he’d never known not having siblings, so he didn’t have any idea what the appropriate thing to say was. ‘Sorry kid, life sucks’?

Orion kind of stared at him a little bit. “Love? Mate?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re forming thunderclouds. If it rains, is it going to be real water or illusory water?”

“It’s—What does it matter? If it looks wet, and you think it’s wet, then that means it’s probably wet, right?”

Orion stared at him. “I was more thinking of like damage.”

“I imagine that it’s—” Cullen blew out a frustrated breath. “You know what? I’m going to go see my mom. Do you want to go see Mhormia, Elliot?”

“Mormy.” Elliot lunged at him, and he caught the little one, laughing at Orion’s surprised expression. He was still getting used to living with kids.

“Yep. Maybe she can make me feel less hairy, huh?”

“Haiwy.” Elliot was tugging at his hands, the little nutburger.

Mmm. Nutburger. He could go for a veggie burger.

“Are you coming?”

“What? Excuse me, what?” Orion actually looked a little bit like he’d been shot with Cupid’s arrow or something.

As soon as he thought that about ten thousand little heart-shaped arrows went flying. Fortunately, the ends of them were all suction cups and they were illusion, so they didn’t actually pierce anything.

“Well, that’s cute.”

Oh, that pissed him off. He wasn’t trying to be difficult, dammit. “I’m freaking adorable. Are you coming?”

“Can I?”

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“I don’t know, can you?” Orion had managed to walk right into Lunastra without the slightest bit of anything terrible happening. “If you want, I can pretend to have an emergency, throw you Elliot, and you can run through.”

“Okay...” One of Orion’s eyebrows winged up. “Do you want me to be naked while I’m doing it?”

“Well, you could, or you could just be a big horsey and run clip-clopping through the house.” He frowned at himself. “Whoa, that was really grumpy of me, I’m sorry. I’m not angry with you at all.”

Orion, who had started to look really hurt, relaxed and came right up to him. “Well, I’m glad you’re not angry with me. It’s the magic, is it?”

“Yes, I don’t like not being able to control it. This is like being a teenager. So frustrating.”

Orion frowned at him. “Hormones, you think?”

“Maybe. I want to go see my mom, and I think you should come with me. I’d like it if you could.”

“All right, well, let’s do it. I mean, you said if I can’t come in, I just can’t come in.”

Cullen nodded. “Absolutely. No one’s ever gotten hurt. If you can’t come in, you just can’t come in. You end up right back where you started.”

“All right, then you take Elliot with you. If I can’t come, then I’ll see you when you get home.”

“Yeah, exactly. If you can’t, then I’ll see you when I get home, and I won’t be long. And I’ll bring honey.”

“I love honey.”

They walked through the house to the back door, opened it, and it smelled so good.

Elliot laughed. “Go, go, go!”

As soon as he started calling and waving, Cullen could see hundreds of tiny pixies hurrying over to see who it was. Their bodies were invisible, just the tiniest little sparkles letting them know that they were there.

“We’re coming to see Mother. If you’d like to tell her we’re on our way, I’d appreciate it.”

There was a distant laughter, like a giggle that was more like bells tinkling than anything else, and then the mass of pixies winged off to tell Mother that they were on their way.

He walked through the door. “All right, Orion, let’s?—”

There was Orion standing next to him. “Huh. Well, okay, we know that this works. You’re the only one who can go everywhere. Well, I mean, there’s us and Elliot.”

“But Hawk can only go back and forth to the dragonlands?”

“And the human world.”

“Interesting.” Orion grinned at him. “Are you okay with me meeting your mom? This wasn’t just to see if I could come out here?”

“No. Not just to see. I want you to meet my folks. Though where my dad will be, I have no idea.”

“Can he go back and forth?” Orion asked.

“Dad? No. No, he got a one-time pass into the Land of Summer, and he can’t leave or he won’t be able to come back in.”

“Ouch. Is he mad?”

“No. I mean, I think he misses dragons, but he loves my mom, and he has us.” Cullen’s hands had gone back to normal, and he was so glad. The hairy thing was weird. And not like him at all. Not since puberty.

Orion’s hand landed on the small of his back, and he breathed in deeply, smelling the flowers and grasses and trees. The very earth here was rich and deep, and it felt like his body was falling into harmony with it as his feet touched it.

“This is amazing,” Orion said. “It’s a lot like the Glade.”

“You’ll have to tell me about that place.”

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“I will. I promise.” Orion’s eyes glowed a moment, and he had a feeling the magic here was more like Orion’s native magic. Something he could manipulate more.

That was really cool.

“Ah, son.” His mother appeared, walking out of the trunk of a tree. “You brought me Elliot!”

“Have you come to see Cosmo?”

“I have. Late last night. But my beautiful Elliot. Come to me, my sweet love.” She held out her arms and Elliot seemed to float to her.

“Oh, that’s a neat trick.”

His mother looked at Orion and smiled a gentle, mostly enigmatic smile, which meant she was withholding judgment. “Hello.”

“Hello, my lady.” Orion bowed low, his fingers sweeping the ground. He came up with a flower Cullen had never seen before and, while it was an illusion, it was solid enough for his mother to grasp and smell.

“Is this from your home?”

“Where I was raised, yes.”

Cullen thought the flower was so pretty it almost hurt his eyes. It was like the deep

purple irises his mother loved, but it had the tones of a violet and a blue rose, as well. It was shaped like a bell, and he thought it rang a little when his mom turned it upside down.

She blinked, then laughed. “Oh, that’s clever.”

“Thank you.” Orion chuckled. “But this one,” and he nodded at Cullen, “wanted to see his mom.”

She frowned at him, a tiny, gentle line appearing between her eyes. “What is wrong?”

He looked at Orion and thought...hearts.

And his mom took a step back with Elliot. “Sharks? Where did you encounter sharks?”

“I didn’t! I’ve been polka-dotted. I’ve had hairy palms. I set off fireworks in the house. I was talking to the new”—he looked at Elliot—“to Cosmo’s latest, and a big pink pointing finger appeared over her head.”

“Hmm.” His mom bounced Elliot, who was playing with her necklace. “Follow me, both of you. I’ll make tea.” She turned to walk through where she’d come from, which was a kind of a portal she’d opened. Cullen was used to that, but he wondered if Orion would be wigged.

But he followed easily, even if the shadow he cast was of a large stallion unicorn rather than a man. He wondered which of the unicorn forms he’d seen was closest to the real thing. Or if any of them were.

They all are the real me, love, Orion told him.

Are they?

Yes. I really am very fluid. The horn is mandatory.

But where is it now?

Oh, it's there.

He chuckled, but he didn't think that was a sexual innuendo. So he would have to explore. Maybe there was just a nubbin on Orion's head that he hadn't felt yet.

"Welcome to my home. I'll put the kettle on. Would you like some milk with honey, sweet boy. I've missed you. You should stay here tonight, and we'll play with your Daidhe. Do you think that would be all right, Cullen?"

"I think that Cosmo and Elliot would love it. I'll ask him."

Cosmo? Brother? Mother would like Elliot to spend the night.

He felt Cosmo's sigh of relief. Thank you. I just...

Shh. He knew; he got it. Sort of.

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“He says that’s fine, Mom. Just don’t let my little gargoyle destroy your house.”

Mother’s house was dainty, filled with hundreds of vials and jars, curios and books. At the same time, Dad was a dragon. Like a full-out, great big dragon.

So of all the houses here, this one had huge furniture, tons of room for a dragon to turn around without finding himself crashing into shelves and causing explosions.

At least he was fairly sure that hadn’t happened since he left home.

“He would never. Your father created a playroom, just for our garmin.” She smiled at Orion, her eyes sparkling. They were the same as his, even as her skin was like Cosmo’s. She and Cullen had the gift of growth in common, so she was in all of them.

Orion bowed his head. “Grandchildren are a blessing.”

“They are.”

She put Elliot down and he ran to the back door. “Daidhe! Daidhe, I here!”

“Are you here, my sweet garthach?” Dad came in, all green and scaly and wild. He scooped Elliot up with a happy roar, swinging him around. “I’ve missed you.”

“Me.” Elliot turned to glare at Cullen. “Me me me.”

“Hey! Who’s been your best bud?”

“Unicorn.”

Cullen’s mouth dropped open, and he clutched his heart. “You wound me.”

Dad blinked at him. “Unicorn?”

Orion smiled. “Me, I’m afraid.”

Dad sniffed the air, nose tipping up. “By damn.”

“Bron. No cursing in front of Elliot,” Mom said.

“Damn, damn, damn, damn!” Elliot beat on Dad’s chest as he chanted.

“Somebody’s going to be in trouble!” he singsonged to Orion. “Orion, this is my father, Bron of the Third, and my mom, Calla of the Flower Mound. Guys, this is my mate, Orion.”

Mother’s eyes crinkled at the edges, but Dad’s went wide. “Your mate? Seriously? You didn’t mate with a dragon?”

“Not everyone has to mate with a dragon, you know.” He rolled his eyes, and it started to snow on his father.

“Your brother did.”

Elliot started catching snowflakes.

“Bron, dear, don’t be rude. Cullen brought his mate home to meet us.” She handed him a cup of violently blue tea. “Please stop snowing in the house.”

“Was he supposed to mate with a dragon?” Orion asked, and Dad shrugged.

“There are more of us wandering around the universe than there are fae. I just assumed he’d find a nice young dragon to mate with.”

“Dad, you’re being specist. It’s tacky.”

“Am I? Sorry. I’ll do better. I was just being?—”

“Rude, dear.” Mom was so clear on those things.

“Right. Of course. Sorry. Can you make the snow stop, son? I apologized.”

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“I’m trying!” The snow turned to bubbles. Those would be less wet.

“Drink your tea, dear. It will help.”

At least it didn’t taste like ass. In fact, it was quite pleasant—smoky, sweet, not blue-tasting at all.

He took a deep breath, and he felt Orion rubbing his back again, which made the tea a normal color when he looked at it again, and it made the bubbles stop.

Thanks.

No problem. You don’t mate every day, right?

Never before this.

See?

Orion took a cup of tea as well. “Thank you, Lady Calla.”

“You’re welcome. Some days require a nice cup of tea, you know?” She smiled at them, and motioned to the low, overstuffed monstrosity that was their couch. It was multicolored and soft, big enough that Dad could lay on it, and Mom could sit on one cushion like she was perching atop a mushroom cap.

Orion took his cup to let him sit, then handed it to him and curled up next to him, letting him lean. Goddess, it was nice to have the support. He did love his mate so

much already.

“So, Orion,” his mother started. “Tell us about yourself.”

“Oh, I’m just your average unicorn,” Orion said, his voice heavy with humor.

“Yes, and Cullen is just your average half fae.”

“Half dragon,” Dad teased.

“Mmm... Cullen may be fifty-five percent fae.”

Orion chuckled, the sound warm and happy. “He’s perfect.”

Little sparks started flying from his fingertips.

“Drink your tea, son. It will help.”

He arched an eyebrow. “You know what’s wrong?”

“You’re having a bit of a hormone imbalance, that’s all.” She beamed at him, and he swore he could feel a wave of heat in the pit of his belly.

His breath hitched, and he looked at Orion, who stared back at him, eyes wide.

What?

Hmmm?Orion smiled.Nothing.

It doesn’t feel like nothing, mate. It feels like we got ourselves in trouble. We just had a baby in the house. Elliot is...already frustrated, but?—

A baby. Could they already be pregnant? Was that possible? He didn't think so.

—but he was having...troubles.

I'm not sure Elliot is going to have a say. I think we were very busy having heat sex, my love, Orion told him.

Whoops. But he couldn't stop grinning. Not even a little. He and—what the heck was a dragon-fae-unicorn baby going to look like anyway?

Suddenly a tiny, sparkly dragon with a spiral horn appeared in the middle of the room, and Elliot squealed.

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“PRETTY!”

Oops.

It poofed away after it flew around for a bit, and his heart pounded. That was what she would look like. Their girl. Oh, goddess.

“Well, congratulations are in order, Bron,” Mother said.

“What?” Dad blinked at Elliot, then at them.

“Oh, my dear, you are so oblivious. Cullen is with child.”

“Yes, Elliot is right there.”

Mom stared at Dad, not blinking.

“What?”

Did she learn the lizard stare from a dragon, because that is impressive.

He nodded to Orion. I’m pretty sure it was Corbin. They don’t get along.

Really? That’s hard to see. I like him a lot.

Cullen nodded. He got along with his brothers, his parents, he was basically easy. He loved them all, and while they could be difficult, he was used to being the

peacemaker.

Dad finally looked at him. Really looked. “Oh. Oh! Well, congratulations, son.”

“Thanks, Dad.” Cullen chuckled, shaking his head.

“Rion! Make rainbow!” Elliot demanded.

“Of course, my liege,” Orion said, and a bright rainbow filled the ceiling of his parents’ home, clouds floating about it.

“You are well-matched, son,” his dad said.

His mother’s delighted laugh sounded very much like Elliot’s. “How lovely.”

“Yeah, yeah, he’s not the pregnant one,” Cullen said with mock fierceness.

Orion took his hand. “Hormones. Have you seen his old man human disguise? It’s amazing.”

His cheeks heated with pleasure, and his mom and dad laughed along with them, and Cullen decided he could handle being pregnant.

As long as he didn’t slip in his own goo and hit his head like Cosmo had.

ChapterEleven

Orion found a flute in a drawer in the buffet that Basil had brought him and Cullen as a gift from...somewhere. It wasn’t his. He wondered if it had belonged to someone who used to live in this house, but Cullen assured him that was all over on Corbin’s side, so goddess knew where it came from.

But the flute was lovely.

And he was bored, because Cullen had taken Cosmo to visit their parents with Elliot and the new baby. Even Corbin had gone. Hawk had gone to the dragonlands.

It was just him and the magpie.

So Orion took it apart and cleaned it, then reassembled it and started to play.

Oh, that was rather good.

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So, he played, and he danced about as he played the flute, and the magpie bounced about with him, flying from perch to perch, calling out as if singing.

“Sing it, Ed!” he cried, taking a bit of a breath, which was when he heard the knocking at the main door of the house. The door to the human world.

“Oh, shit, Ed. What the hell? No one knocks at this house.” Not even Amazon. They just left shit in the weatherproof box at the end of the driveway...

Ed screeched, then flew out through the hall of Cullen’s house, heading to the front door.

“Okay, fine.” He held his flute more like a weapon than an instrument, stomping out to the front door. There was no camera or even a weird offset mirror thing to see who was out there. Just a peephole, and Orion had watched enough horror movies to know better than that.

“Who is it, Ed?”

The knock sounded again, and then the thump of a beaver tail sounded on the boards.

“Yarrow? Is that you?”

“Let me in! I brought doughnuts!”

“Just a moment!” He did look then, simply to make sure Yarrow was alone. When he saw no one else, Orion opened the door, smiling at his friend.

“How are you doing, old friend?” Orion wasn’t sure if he should let Yarrow in. It wasn’t his house.

Well, this part wasn’t his house, but he didn’t know any way to get to his house except for through this door, this way.

“Okay, I’m good. Real good. I just thought I’d stop by. I’m fixing to go to ground for the winter. It’s going to be a harsh one. I can feel it in my bones.” Yarrow held up the box of doughnuts. “Anyway, I thought that I would share my bounty, say hello.”

“Do you have a good place to stay for the winter?” Orion hated the thought of his friend being miserable for the cold season—which was weird because he had been friends with the beaver for years, and he’d never worried before.

“Define good.”

“I mean is it safe?” Orion asked.

“Well, it’s warm, it’s deep, and I can sleep there. So I like that. It’s a little dank, but you know. It’s a den.”

He nodded as if he understood, even though that was a lie. He really didn’t understand dens. Or dank. Oh really, no. That wasn’t his thing. Still, it was his job to acknowledge and agree, right? “Okay. Well, that’s good.”

He couldn’t just not let Yarrow in. It just felt wrong.

Cullen? He wasn’t sure Cullen could hear him from across dimensions, but it was worth a try.

Yes, mate?

Okay, that was easy. Can I let Yarrow come in?

It's your house too; just don't let any vampires in, because that's creepy.

He looked at Yarrow. "Are you a vampire?"

"A who what?" Yarrow's breath made a whistling sound through his teeth.

"Are you a vampire?"

Yarrow bared said teeth, which were absolutely huge, but blunt. Not for sucking, just for gnawing.

Totally not a vampire.

Then let him come in.

"Come on in, have a seat. This is our shared living area."

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Yarrow toodled right in, and he shut the door. “Oh, it’s nice in here. Warm.”

“Yeah. You know, you probably need a better coat.”

“Eh, in my beaver form it’s a non-issue.”

“Are you sure? I mean, we have an old spring house out back...”

Those super-dark eyes gleamed. “Really?”

“Yeah. We never use it anymore, apparently. And it’s always warm in there.” Cullen, can Yarrow stay in the spring house?

Hmm? Why would he stay there?

For the winter. It would be a good warren for him.

Oh, sure.

“Cullen says it would be fine, hon.”

“Oh, cool. Can I go see it?”

“Sure, but let’s have a cup of coffee first.” Orion grinned at his buddy. Yarrow would be a great watch beaver.

“Totally. It’ll go with the doughnuts. So where are the others?”

“Visiting their parents.” That was innocuous, and he figured he didn’t want to mention new baby and or babies or just recently not pregnant Cosmo or currently pregnant Cullen. Man, it was dizzying.

“And they don’t mind about the spring house? The boys, I mean.”

“No. We’re not using it. It would be nice for you to be close and warm and solid. You could make it a home of your own.” Orion loved the idea of close and personal.

“I’d like that.” Yarrow started, pulling out doughnuts from the box. “I got you blueberry and lemon. I was craving maple logs.”

It didn’t surprise him at all that the beaver who gnawed on logs would like maple. It made sense. In fact, it was kind of deeply satisfying in a way.

“What on earth have you been doing up here?” Yarrow didn’t look upset, just curious, and Orion had to think about what he had been doing.

Moving furniture.

Playing with Elliot.

Exploring the dragonlands with Cullen.

Exploring the Land of Summer with Cullen.

Knocking Cullen up.

“Watching Cullen make some of the strangest magical illusions I’ve ever seen in my entire life.” It was kind of unnatural to wake up with a giant lizard in the bed. Not quite as unnerving as when Cullen started glowing with a bright yellow light. Not a

light in that gentle, soft, warm glow of a lightbulb light. But more in that as bright as the sun itself, I think I'm going to go blind, kind of light that even putting numbers of blankets over Cullen didn't seem to help.

They'd actually had to call Cullen's mom in for that one.

"Did you know that orgasms change magic?"

Yarrow blinked over, doughnut in his hand. "Pardon me?"

He started the coffee pot. "I'm serious. Like, let's say you're doing illusions, and you, oh I don't know, start growing really, really long toenails, and it's worrisome. If you give someone an orgasm, it changes it."

"Oh." Yarrow tilted his head. "Into something better?"

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“Not necessarily.”

“Huh. That’s kind of...unhelpful.”

Orion shrugged to his friend. “Yeah, but at least it’s fun. And you know, if you can get a twofer, even a threefer, your chances get better.”

“I worry about you, friend. Seriously. You need help in the worst kind of way.” Yarrow winked at him, playing with him. “You know, they say it’s dangerous to get involved with dragons. They’re...not of this earth.”

“Oh, I don’t think that’s an issue.”

“No?” Yarrow studied him. “Yeah, so unicorn and all. I get it. But, I never see you guys outside.”

“Are you stalking us, Yarrow?”

Yarrow flushed a dark pink, which made his sideburns look very dark. “I’ve just been looking for a place to winter.”

“Sure, man. I get that. I was just teasing. But if we go outside, then someone has to maintain an illusion, at least here. So, we don’t go where anyone could see us from the road.” He wasn’t going to explain to the whole Lunastra and Land of Summer thing.

And he hadn’t taken Cullen to the Glade yet.

“Ahem.” Yarrow squinted at him. “What aren’t you telling me?”

“Reams of shit, my friend, but it’s not my story to tell.”

“Right.” Yarrow chattered his teeth. “Spring house?”

“You know it.” He finished up his doughnut, licking his fingers. God, that was good. Lemon. Yum. He climbed to his feet, heading out the hallway to the back door that led out into the actual backyard and not some other realm.

They walked out the back door, but then he had to stop, staring at the door that was in front of him again. It was open, and Yarrow was outside, but?—

“Quit joking around, Orion.” Yarrow squinted again, head tilting.

“Sorry.” He stepped out the door, then stared at the doorway and Yarrow again. From inside.

“What the fuck, man?” Yarrow blinked hard, his nonexistent-in human-form whiskers twitching. “I saw you walk outside. Why are you popping up back inside?”

Cullen? Why can’t I leave the house?

What?

I want to take Yarrow to the spring house, and I can’t get out the door. It just dumps me back into the house.

Oh, crap. Let me come back.

Oh, but?—

Cullen walked out of their part of the house only a few minutes later. He and Yarrow were still staring at each other through the doorway.

“Hey, guys.”

Yarrow started. “You’re purple.”

“Oh, yeah. I was an old dude the last time we met.”

“That was you?” Yarrow beamed. “That was righteous.”

“Thanks,” Cullen said. “Okay, let me see it.” Cullen stayed back a good five feet from the door, watching him.

He walked outside, then ended up back inside.

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“Huh.” Cullen came forward and took his hand. “Okay, try it with me.”

They walked through the door hand in hand, and he stood outside in the cooler air, right next to Yarrow.

“Whoa.” He stared at Cullen.

“Hmmm. You haven’t left the house without one of us since you moved in, have you?”

“No.” His heart started to pound as panic tried to set in.

Cullen squeezed his hand. “Well, let’s go see the spring house.”

“Did you know that you’re trailing flowers along behind you?” Yarrow asked.

“That means I’m stressed a little.” Cullen laughed.

“He’s preggers.”

“Congratulations!” Yarrow didn’t even pause.

“Thanks.”

They walked Yarrow to the spring house, and he pried open the door. Yarrow gasped as he walked in. “Wait, this is a hot spring house! Not cold storage.”

“Yep. They used it like a sauna, I think.” Cullen waved at an old brazier in the corner.

“Ooooooh.” Yarrow shifted, his clothes falling around his wee beastie body, and he waddled all over, sniffing and batting his tail on the floor with joy.

“I think he likes it.”

“Me too,” Cullen said.

“So why do you think I can’t leave without one of you?”

“I have no idea.” Cullen sent another raft of flowers out of his hair.

“Hey.” He squeezed Cullen’s hand. “It’s okay.”

“I dunno. Do I want you trapped in the house?”

He winked. “I’m never trapped. I always have my own door with me to somewhere.”

Cullen tilted his head. “Yeah? To where?”

Orion grinned. “The Glade.”

ChapterTwelve

Orion was in so much trouble.

Once they got back to the house, he let Orion know it, too.

“So what’s the Glade? Why haven’t you told me about it? How do you get to it? What’s going on? I can’t believe you kept this from me. You got me pregnant, and

you had a doorway, and you didn't tell me?"

"It didn't come up."

Orion was not going to get away with that.

"Oh. Oh, I'm going to get Corbin, possibly Cosmo... Cosmo's meaner. And Cosmo can see things. He's a seer, did you know?" He was fairly sure toads were falling from his fingers, but he didn't care because he wasn't paying attention because he didn't particularly care for toads.

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Which is probably why they were falling from his fingers.

“What the hell do you mean it didn’t come up? Why didn’t you tell me?”

Orion shrugged, looking more than a little uncomfortable. “That’s a secret.”

“I’m your mate.” Okay, well that hurt like a blow to the chest. He thought they were supposed to share their secrets. He thought that was part of the deal. And not in a boo, here’s this thing that I can do that you can’t because my feelings are hurt because I can’t go outside anymore. “I didn’t do that to you, you do realize?”

“Do what?” Orion didn’t get to be hurt here, even if he looked butthurt and surprised.

“Pay attention.”

“I thought I was paying attention.” Orion looked confused, and that just made Cullen even more angry.

“I didn’t make it to where you couldn’t go out without us. I didn’t do that. I had no idea.”

One of Orion’s brows went up. “You knew how to fix it.”

For a second, he couldn’t breathe, and he shook his head. “No, I didn’t. I just knew that you were with us when we went to Lunastra, and you were with us when we went to the Land of Summer. That’s it.” Did Orion really think that he would do that? Surely not. He wasn’t a dick.

“I have to go. I’ve got to go back and get Elliot from Cosmo. He needs help.” Cosmo was fine, of course, but Cullen wasn’t.

He thought maybe he would just stay with his mom for a day or two. Hell, he still had a room at her house.

Well, they still had a room.

They’d all only ever shared until this house, actually. They’d always just shared a big room.

He would blame Hawk, except that they’d moved into their respective houses before Hawk ever showed up. He supposed in that they should blame the boss.

Well, maybe he could go talk to Gavin. Except Cosmo wasn’t with the boss, and he didn’t want to lie to Orion.

What did it matter? He was just going to go somewhere. Somewhere not here, because...

Well, just because.

Orion caught him when he would have walked away. “Hey. Can we talk about this? Please? And sit down while we do it? Sans toads.” Orion led him into their part of the house, holding his hand so he didn’t get away, and sat him on the couch. He took a deep breath before continuing. “Look, this is all new to me too. I’ve had a lot of changes in the last month or so. A lot. And it wasn’t something I wanted kept from you. I just didn’t get my shit together and tell you.”

“Okay, but you know that I didn’t do this to you, right? I didn’t know. I would never... I don’t want to trap you.”

Orion grinned at him. "If I wanted to go, I would just ask you. As in let's go outside, and off I'd go. Or let's go to the dragonland. Or let's go to the Land of Summer. Let's go. Did I panic at first? Yeah. Because it's weird. Now the real question is, can I go out with Elliot, with the new baby? How about Hawk? What about your brothers? There's so many different questions. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I'd say that I would never do that, but..." Orion blew out a hard breath. "But it happens. I get frustrated, and maybe I make jokes or roll my eyes, and I'll try to be better."

"Me too." Cullen stared at Orion. "And did we just have a grown-up conversation?"

"Yes, let's not do that anymore, all right? It's creepy."

"I concur. No more adulting." He cuddled into Orion's side. "So, tell me about the Glade. Is it full of unicorns?"

"There are unicorns, not a lot. There are winged horses. There are satyrs and dryads and nymphs. All sorts of magical creatures." Orion kissed his nose.

He loved that. It sounded like Fantasia come to life. "Wow, that's cool. You'd probably get in trouble if you took me." Which was a sad thought. "Do you have parents over there? Still? I mean, obviously you have parents. Do you think they'd want to meet me?"

Orion shrugged. "I don't know. My fathers are fiercely independent. I'm not sure that they remember that they have a child. I think that if I showed up and said, 'hey, your grandchild is on the way', they would respond with 'who are you?'"

"That's ridiculous. Who could forget you?" Cullen couldn't even imagine. "You're the most magical, amazing being I've ever seen."

"Ha!" Orion shook his head and rolled his eyes. "In the glade, I'm just another

magical creature.”

“Dude. Then I must be like hideously ugly, like an ogre.” All of a sudden, he could feel himself turning green, warts popping out all over.

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“Stop it, you are not an ogre. Besides that, if you were an ogre, you’d still be cute.”

“Thanks. I think.” Cullen chuckled and leaned on Orion.

“Definitely thanks, because I mean it in the best way.” I think you’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.” Orion rubbed slow circles on his back.

“Do you? Will you think so even when I get all big and swollen?” He’d never thought Cosmo was ugly, but Cosmo sure had, so Cullen knew his time was coming.

“Baby, you’re carrying our kid. I can’t imagine anything being more stunning to me than you being big with her.” Orion stared into his eyes, that silver gaze so serious. “I love you. All of you. No matter what. And I know you would never screw me over, babe. Okay?”

“Okay.” He had to return the favor. “I know you didn’t hide the whole Glade from me on purpose, but please don’t not tell me things.”

“Fair enough.” They grinned at each other. “Are you hungry? Yarrow brought doughnuts.”

“What kind?”

“Uh, lemon, blueberry, and maple logs.”

“Should we eat his doughnuts?”

“Love, he’ll be hauling sticks into the springhouse for a week. I’ll toss food at him periodically.” Orion rose to go grab the doughnuts and some milk.

That was kind of wonderful, so Cullen let the rest go, and he laid in his lover’s arms and ate doughnuts.

* * *

Orion sighed, because Cullen had deserved better than to be forgotten. He’d just never taken anyone to the glade before who wasn’t—who wasn’t a rescue. And the last one he’d taken there had been a couple of centuries ago.

Orion waited until everyone was busy, though, Cullen watching Elliot, Hawk and Corbin in Lunastra for a guardian meeting or some shit.

Then he pulled off the pendant he wore on a cord around his neck and laid it on the table that Basil had brought into the bedroom. It was a lovely Regency piece he’d always adored. The table. Not the pendant.

That was old silver, a stylized wooden door like something out of *The Hobbit*, surrounded by trees, vines climbing around the edge.

He stared at it for a long moment. Then he knocked on it three times with the tip of his forefinger.

The whole world slowed down, even the dust motes no longer dancing. A bright light appeared, the shape of it like the doorway on the pendant. And then the door opened, letting him step through.

Into the Glade.

He took a deep breath and ducked in, knowing the pendant would hide itself until he came back. It had a built-in glamour that way so no one could steal it.

Orion stood just inside the glade for long moments, the scents of rich earth and sweet running water filling him as he breathed in and out. It had been a long time. A really long one. God, goddess, and their children...

“Orion.” The soft, melodious voice of a naiad reached him, and she rose out of the water on a little splash. “How good it is to see you.”

“Hello, Lania. How are you?”

“Well. Are you here to see your fathers?”

“If I am allowed.”

She tilted her head, her blue and white and gray hair sliding over one shoulder. “Why should you not?”

“You know how they are.”

His fathers weren’t mean, not under any circumstance, they just simply...had these incredibly complicated lives, which had absolutely nothing to do with him.

And he wasn’t one hundred percent sure that they remembered they had a child.

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“I do. They’re home. You’re well come there.” She tilted her head, water dripping from her fingers as she waved her hand. “So tell me. What’s different about you? You look different.”

“Do I?” He gave himself a once-over, being as dramatic as he could. He wasn’t ready to share about Cullen and their little girl. Not until he spoke to his fathers. “I think I just look like me.”

“Oh, no. No, you look different. Definitely not just you. Something’smore.” Oh, Lania was too clever for her own good.

“I need to go see my fathers. I’ll stop back by on my way out, though, and we’ll have a nice visit.” Hopefully, that would assuage any damage.

“Don’t tell me. Just hurt my feelings, that’s all right. I didn’t want to talk to you anyway.” She splashed him, the spray of water making him glitter.

He laughed and waved, then began to wander deeper into the glade, following the paths that had been worn down by millennia of hooves and feet and stones.

The breeze was warm and pleasant, and he could hear the hint of a pipe playing a seductive tune. The satyrs must be rutting. That meant the dryads would be flirting and hiding, the trees circling them in their boughs.

It was lovely to be home, really. It had been too long.

After an apple and a bunch of grapes, along with a long sip of clear water from a

stream, Orion found himself at a familiar hill. It was gentle and rolling, olives and apples and apricot trees offering sustenance and shade to the home built right into the side of it. The front door was a deep purple, a single horn carved into the surface.

He knew that there was a foyer on the other side of that door, with a bench to sit and wait and hooks on the wall for cloaks to hang. There was a table too, with fresh fruit and nuts in their shells, candies created from honey—an offering to both visitors and the gods. If he looked beneath that table there was a tiny door carved into the wall, a spot for their petty drake—her name was Elspet and she had amused him for hours as a child, with her gossamer wings and her rainbow scales.

Ivy and moss covered the home so it looked like it was a piece of the earth itself. It was an illusion, of course. Most everything here was open to interpretation. It was rare that he found anyone who remembered that fact. That very little here was real. Unchangeable.

Orion didn't bother to knock. He just went and found a comfortable place near the door and waited.

They would come to him.

A tiny fairy came fluttering up to him, her entire body no longer than his finger. "Orion! Welcome home."

He narrowed his eyes and sniffed, discovering the scent of cinnamon and peaches, pink and silver sparks surrounding her. "Finola, is that you?"

"It is! Are you here to see the children?" She bounced down on a leaf, chin in her hand as she watched him.

"I hadn't thought to, no. I don't want to disturb them. Are they doing well?"

“Of course. Don’t worry. None of them will remember you, because they’re not the same children as when you left. Now you’re like a story to them, like a legend. They keep coming, though. There’s a bunch. A little world of little ones. All needing parents. All needing friends. There’s a little fox; you could take him. He has a lovely laugh and bright red ears!”

“Oh, lovely, I think that I have my hands full. But I would love to come and peek. Perhaps.” He didn’t want to disrupt anyone; it was hard enough to care for the children.

He remembered.

“Have you missed me? That’s the important part. Did you bring me a present?”

“Of course I brought you a present.” Orion was neither stupid nor did he have a death wish. He pulled a tiny diamond out of his pocket, handed it over. She took it, fluttered over to give him a burning kiss to his cheek.

“Thank you. You’ve done well.”

“You are most welcome. Have you seen my fathers?”

“They are in the garden in the back.”

“Thank you, sweetness.” He bowed, and she tittered, the sound like tiny bells. And he took a deep breath, then let it out.

She buzzed off like a hummingbird, and Orion waited. Maybe he should go around back...

“Orion.” The deep, mellifluous voice of his alpha father sounded, and he smiled,

turning to see him standing at the corner of the house.

“Father.” He bowed deeply. “I was worried you wouldn’t remember.”

One dark brow winged up, the only change of his father’s expression. “Orion, I could never forget you. Neither could Alnitak.”

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His omega dad was Alnitak, and this father was Rigel. They were dark and light, seriousness and laughter, sky and earth. He loved them so much.

“I am glad, and I meant no insult. You have so many children.”

“We do, my son, but you were special. You stayed with us so long, and you brought so much magick and joy with you.” His father turned on his heel, robes swishing, and led him back around the house to the gardens.

“Orion!” His omega father rose, holding out a pair of dirty hands. “Come give your da a hug!”

He was a beam of light where Father was a stroke of lightning and a burst of thunder. He moved to take the hug, soaking up the grounded, earthy love his da offered.

“Look how handsome you are, my lad,” Da said. “I’m so pleased to see you.”

He breathed in the scents of loam and greenery. “I missed you both.”

“Hmm.” Father stared at them. “You have not used your door in a very long time.”

“I know how much you have to do here. I didn’t want to intrude.”

Da’s bright green eyes widened. “Orion! How could you think we would be too busy for you?”

“He told me he worried we would forget him,” Father said.

His da jerked. “Son! You are beloved. I carried you—and you alone under my heart! How could I have forgotten you, even for a second?”

“Sorry. Sorry. I’m just being an ass.” Tears stung his eyes for a moment. “I had to come see you.”

“What is wrong?” Father asked, frowning deeply.

“Has someone hurt you?” Da glanced to his mate. “Rigel. One of those humans have hurt him!”

Orion? Mate? What’s wrong? Are you having a nightmare? Do you need me?

No, love. I’m fine. I promise, I’ll tell you what’s going on soon, but you just hang out with El, okay?

Okay. As long as you’re fine.

I am. “No one hurt me, Da. I promise. I mean, the closest anyone has come lately is Yarrow, who felled a small tree that almost landed on me.”

“Yarrow?”

“A beaver shifter. Look, we need to talk. It’s serious, yes, but it’s not bad. Can we please go inside?”

“Of course.” Father arched one eyebrow. “Seriously, do you need some assistance? We have no little ones right now. We can come and speak harshly on your behalf.”

Da rolled his eyes. “With our hooves.”

“Oh, I thought there was a fox...”

“Ah, yes, well, he is with others, at the foundling meadow.” Da blinked at him.

“We’re taking a bit to rest. Regroup.”

Orion nodded as if he knew what that even meant. “Um, I have news.”

“Come inside. I have honey cakes and tea.” Father opened the door, and they went to the rough-hewn table, the heavy wood gleaming from a million washings.

“What news?” Da took his hand, held it tight.

“My mate is pregnant.” The words just fell from his lips and both of his parents stared at him as if a serpent had leapt from his lips.

“You have a mate!” Da shrieked.

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“And they are pregnant?” Father thundered.

“Yep.” He was pretty sure his ears were bleeding. Maybe his nose.

“So, where are they? Who are they? When can we meet them?”

Orion? Love? Is someone yelling at you?

A little, yeah. I came to see my dads to ask permission to bring you to the glade.

Oh.Cullen sighed mentally, which also abraded him. You could have said.

It was supposed to be a good surprise.

“Son, pay attention,” Father snapped.

“Sorry. My mate was worried that someone was screaming at me.”

Da’s eyes widened, and he smiled.

“Don’t you yell at him! He’s the most amazing mate ever and I love him!” His eyes crossed as Cullen’s voice came out of his mouth.

Now his father gaped at him. “Is that your?—”

“Yeah. He’s fierce.”

“We need to meet him. Go and get him.”

Are you ready to meet my dads, love?

ChapterThirteen

“Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my god, Oh my god.” Cullen looked at his brothers.

“Do I look all right? I’m going to meet the parents I’ve never—I’ve never gone to meet the parents. I’ve never had parents to go and meet. Oh my god, how’s my hair?”

“You’ve watched way too muchReal Housewives. You’re fine.” Corbin rolled his eyes. “Did you know that we had a beaver living in the spring house? He’s such a neat guy...”

“Don’t try to change the subject. You and I know that we have a beaver. We all know that Yarrow is in the spring house. Even Elliot has gone out to the spring house to say hello.”

Cosmo frowned at him. “He has?”

Oops. “Look, pay attention to me. I’m going to meet parents. Hello. How is the hair? Should I, like, glamour up?”

Corbin shrugged. “Does that work on unicorns?”

“I don’t know.” How was he supposed to know?

“It didn’t work with Orion, remember,” Corbin pointed, while Cosmo asked, “Are Orion’s parents unicorns?”

“How else are unicorns born?” That was just a stupid question. “You think there’s a

horse and a-a-a uni?”

Cosmo tilted his head. “Maybe it’s a rhinoceros and a horse. That could make a unicorn.”

“Oh what about a narwhal and a horse? Much closer to unicorn.” Corbin was altogether too amused for his own good.

“You two are not helping!”

“No yell, Cunkle!” Elliot hollered.

“I’m not yelling!” Was he yelling?

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“You’re so yelling,” Cosmo said.

“What in our long association with one another leads you to believe that we are ever helping?” Corbin had a point.

“All right, I’m going to go meet the parents. I hope you both get boils on your butts.”

“I hope you can keep all of your magic together long enough to not make an ass of yourself when you go and meet his parents,” Cosmo shot back.

“Oh, that’s just mean.”

“Meaner than butt boils?”

“Yes. I need them to like me.”

Cosmo looked him up and down. “I’m not sure that outfit is going to work. Let’s not wear white.”

“What?”

“Well, you’ve got on a white muumuu thing. You’re not pregnant enough to wear one of those muumuu things.”

His cheeks started to burn. “Well, no...”

“I mean, look at what you’re wearing. It’s almost like a nightgown. You look like an

old romantic poet, as if you're going to be wandering along the Moors. Put on some pants." Cosmo nodded as if that was that. "And that green shirt, the really silky dark emerald one; it makes your skin look nice."

"All right. I just have to find it..."

Cosmo rolled his eyes. "Never mind, I have that dark blue one he can wear right here. Take that thing off of him, Corbin."

Cosmo went to the closet and Corbin grabbed his nightgown and started tearing it off.

Gods, this was embarrassing. "It's not my fault that I was asleep when you all bothered me and asked me to come and visit."

"You weren't asleep, you were being lazy. Besides, this is ridiculous—it's at least eighty-seven yards of lace."

Cullen grinned at Corbin. "I know. I was honestly testing out what it would feel like to be pregnant and heavy, and so I was wandering around with loose clothes on and just seeing how it felt."

It had been a silly bit of playacting, but he'd had fun with it, and it had made him feel closer to his little butterfly baby.

Corbin stared at him for a second, then he got a hug. "I would tell you that it was really weird and disturbing that you did that, but really? It actually sounds like a perfectly reasonable thing to do, or at least something that I would do."

He leaned closer to his brother. "What if they don't like me?"

"Fuck them."

Elliot crowed for them.

He blinked at Corbin. “Brother!”

“I’m serious. If they don’t like you, we don’t have to see them. We will take Orion, we will make a family with him, and they can just fuck right off. You’re amazing. Not only that, but your brothers are amazing, so this family is amazing. And there’s going to be a baby, and if they’re not going to be nice, then they don’t get to be grandparents.”

“I can’t wait until you find a mate, and you say that to mom.”

Corbin grinned, and Cosmo chuckled. “He’s been practicing.”

“I bet.” Okay. He could do pants and a nice shirt. And once he was dressed and his hair brushed, he took a deep breath. I’m ready, love.

Okay. Meet me at that little Regency table Basil put up in our room.

I can do that. That seemed odd, but who was he to say? He headed to their room, and Corbin’s clothes felt kind of big, but he’d cope.

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He saw Orion appear, seemingly out of thin air, and he blinked. “Hey.”

“Hello, love.” Orion chuckled. “The dads are impatient.” He held out a hand. “They reacted so much better than I feared. But then again, they told me I was just being a butthead and that I should have come home sooner.”

Cullen laughed. “Not butthurt, though?”

“No, baby. I’m so happy for you to meet them.” Orion kissed him. “Okay, are you ready?”

“I am.” Orion reached out and touched a piece of jewelry sitting on the table. One he hadn’t seen. Then a door appeared.

“Oh, wow. Look at that. Is this what you meant by you always have a door?”

“Yep. And it will cloak itself until we come back.”

“Neat! That’s handy. And it only works on the Glade?”

“As far as I know, yeah.”

“Huh.” He took Orion’s other hand, and they stepped through the door. “I’ll have to ask Mom if the Land of Summer has anything like that. Whoa.”

Cullen looked around as they walked into the Glade, and his first thought was that it smelled amazing. Not like flowers, like his mom’s place did. This was rich earth and

verdant green plants and clear water. Corbin would plotz.

“This is beautiful, Orion.” It was sort of like...descriptions of paradise. No wonder Orion was a little butthurt about having to not live here. It was amazing.

“Yeah. Come on. I’ll take you to the?—”

“Is this him?” someone thundered.

“Yes, Father.” Orion winked at him as a large, dark man strode toward them, long, embroidered robes flapping around him.

“Well come, Cullen. I am Rigel. Come, I will take you to my mate.” The big guy smelled like the weather right before a storm, and Rigel latched onto his arm and they were off and running. Well, he was running. Rigel was marching.

“Father! That’s my pregnant mate you’re towing like an otter with a turtle on its tail!”

“Don’t you mean a beaver?” Cullen teased, already out of breath.

“Or something in the water.”

They trooped up a hill, along a stream, and as they came to the crest of the hill, he saw the house. All the air whooshed out of his lungs. “That’s where you grew up! Wow. Wow!”

“You like it.” That got Rigel to go from scowling to a slight smile.

“It’s gorgeous.” The place was both deceptively simple and like a palace. It was stunning.

“My mate is in back in the garden.”

“He’s like Corbin,” Orion teased. “He loves to dig.”

“He does,” Rigel agreed. “Who is Corbin?”

“My brother.” Cullen grinned. “He’s the gardener. Cosmo is the seer. I’m the illusionist.”

“Ah, no wonder you and my son are well-suited.”

“Cullen is amazing, Father. Though he has gone a bit haywire since he got pregnant.”

“Yeah, not going anywhere that I have to maintain the illusion for a goodly bit,” Cullen teased.

“Probably a good idea.”

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They rounded the house, and he saw a much shorter, leaner man bent over, tilling a little with some kind of tool.

“Da! Come meet Cullen.”

“Ah!” The man straightened. “Hello, Cullen. I am Alnitak. Pleasure to meet you.” This one was all earth, from his deep green eyes to his loam-colored hair. He was lovely. And he was hugging Cullen hard. His hugs were like Mom’s. Magical.

Then he was spun into a hug like Dad’s. Bone crushing. “Welcome to our new son.”

Tears stung his eyes. “Thank you. I—” He looked at Orion, who winked and mouthed, Hormones.

He stuck out his tongue. “Come. I’ll make tea. I was going to for Orion, but then he told us about you, and we made him go get you.” Alnitak moved close and put a hand on his belly. “Hello, butterfly!”

“That’s what I think of her as.” He was doomed to be a watering pot this whole meeting, he could tell.

Before he could blink away the tears, a host of little lights that sounded like hummingbirds surrounded them. “Baby?” he heard tiny, high-pitched voices asking. “Orion’s baby?”

Cullen nodded, offering the little fluttering lights a smile. Of course, a rush of butterflies in every color of the rainbow began to flutter around them, the magic

refusing to be held back, even a bit.

Orion came to him, holding him easily. “Yes, lovelies. This is my mate. He’s having our child. A new baby.”

“Finally!” One of them came right up to Orion and popped him on the nose, even as the others explored him, tugging at his hand and clothes, the touches of light hot and a bit shocking.

“Be nice, dears. Cullen has come a long way.” Alnitak waved his hand gently, dislodging them, before wrapping one hand around Cullen. “Tea and cakes, I think. There hasn’t been a dragon here in a millennium.”

“So long?” Orion teased his father.

“Maybe longer.” Alnitak shot back, and Orion’s laughter filled the air.

Rigel watched him, eyes so stormy, so serious. “And your other people—the Ildathach?”

He nodded, smiled. He hadn’t used that term in a while. “My mother is Calla of the Flower Mound.”

“Then she would fall right in with my mate, eh?” When Rigel looked at Alnitak, the love there humbled him, made him happy. That was what he wanted for him and Orion in however many years. He already had all these feelings for his unicorn that he could never put into words.

Just think how he would feel after having children and spending decades together.

“I like how you look at him,” Alnitak murmured to him. “You are fully invested in

this, dragon-fae.”

“I—yeah, I guess I am. I want to keep him safe. I want to be with him.”

Rigel shook his head. “Protect him?”

“Of course!” Cullen blinked over them, shaking his head. “Orion’s magical. I can’t bear the thought of someone hurting him! I love him, and I won’t allow anyone to hurt him, ever.”

Alnitak came to him, hugged him again. “You are amazing, sweet dragon-fae.”

“He’s a guardian. He protects the Land of Summer and the dragon world.” Orion sounded so very pleased, so proud. “Him and his brothers.”

A cup of tea was offered to him, the cup paper thin and delicate, the most delicate robin’s egg blue with a bright yellow foot and handle. It was amazing.

The tea itself was deep, dark and rich, and it smelled like the earth and growing.

He drank deep, and he swore, for half of a heartbeat, he could hear their baby girl laughing. “Oh!”

Orion smiled at him. “Are you well, mate?”

“More than. I heard her. I honestly heard her laugh, and it was perfect. She is going to be amazing.”

The smile widened. “I can’t wait until I can hear her,” Orion said.

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“It won’t be long,” Alnitak said. “She is a bright butterfly soul.”

“She is.” Cullen put a hand on his belly, feeling at one with this stunning space.

“I like you.”

“Thank you, Alnitak.”

“Oh, you must call me Da. And you are welcome to all Rigel Father.”

“I call my father Dad, so that’s wonderful if no one objects.”

“Not at all,” Rigel told him. “I am honored.” And he stuffed a whole small cake into his mouth.

He’s adorable. Seriously. So sweet.

Not as much as your father, who has clueless down to a fine art... Orion pointed out.

Noted. Cullen nodded and sat when Da motioned to the chair. “Is this where you grew up, mate?”

“I did. I loved it here.”

“Why did you leave?” How could anyone leave this magical place?

“I didn’t have a place here.” Oh, there was something cold and miserable in those

words, and Cullen hated to hear it.

“Oh.” Oh, love. I’m sorry. Do you want to go? I will totally go with you, right now.

“That’s not true. You always have a place here, hios.” Alnitak’s eyes were wide.

“You sent me away.”

“We had to. There were children that needed rescue, and you were the one best suited for it. You were our guardian. We needed your help.”

“And I needed to come home, Father. I needed your help, your support, your love, and you just...” Left me in the wind out there, alone in the human world. It was wrong.

Rigel’s face seemed to crumple. And Cullen couldn’t blame him if he’d heard what Cullen had heard.

“Oh. My son. I am so sorry. I thought you liked the human world. You always seemed so fascinated by them.”

“I was! But I would happily have gone and done rescues and then come home to stay.” Orion looked at Cullen. “But I did finally find you, and I will never regret that.”

“And I can’t imagine my life without you, Orion, so we’re equal.” He reached out for his mate and squeezed his hand.

Rigel hummed deep in his chest, the sound almost pained. “You are welcome here. Here, or you and your mate can build a home of your own here. Whichever you’d like.”

“We can’t leave my brothers or my post. It’s my job, you know, to protect the different realms. We have to make sure that any dragons left behind get to go home.”

“Are you the only portal?” Da asked, and Cullen shrugged.

“We don’t know. If we’re not, then there’s a reason no one is sharing where the others are...”

“I suppose that is true.” Da smiled gently. “Know that we love you, Orion, and that you and your mate are always welcome here.” His eyes scrunched as if he might cry. “I did not know we were keeping you away so badly. At some time, I will ask your forgiveness, but now I will only apologize.”

Father Rigel just stuffed another cake in his mouth.

Parents. They were all the same.

Don’t you know it? “Would you like to see the room I grew up in?”

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“Of course I would!” He was so curious to know where Orion had formed himself, where Orion had been a little unicorn.

Orion cracked up, shaking his head and holding out his hand. It was a little weird, that Orion had faith his rooms were still there, still as he’d left them.

Of course they are. I locked the door. They can’t get in.

Orion! That’s devious. And sort of wonderful.

The doorway was at the very top of a tower, the door glowing around the edges with a white light that seemed to pulse. Orion held his hand and simply walked through.

“That’s a really neat trick.”

“Yeah. It’s my own invention.”

Cullen looked about, and he saw a gorgeous mural covering the walls, reminiscent of something in an old Tuscan villa, but it had unicorns and pixies and plants Cullen had never seen before.

There was a bed big enough for an actual horse, and a little table that held what looked like a sundial, and tons of other knickknacks and books. The books all looked to be hand-written, or illuminated, he thought it was called. And they were gorgeous.

“These are wild.”

“This one is fairy tales,” Orion said, handing him a heavy leather-bound volume. “We should take it for our butterfly.”

“Oh, but we’ll bring her here, right?” Cullen asked. He couldn’t imagine not coming back.

“We will. I’ll come far more often now. I’ve just been...bitter. I hate that. I’m a unicorn. I’m about love.”

“The magic is thin in the human world, love. They forget about it. It starts to hurt after a while.” Cullen went to sit on the bed, and he patted it to let Orion sit next to him. “Have I ever told you about Hawk?”

“I’ve met him, love.” Orion gave him a quizzical look but came to sit.

“I know, dork. Anyway, we think he was born in the dragonlands and then went to the human world somehow.”

“You think?”

“He’s a little vague on his origins, but that’s the thought.” Cullen sighed, his heart aching for people who couldn’t remember how to be magical. “He lived among humans for a long, long time, and it made him a little nuts.”

“Yeah?” Orion leaned against him.

“Yeah. He slept for hundreds of years at a time and would forget so many things. Like whole swaths of memories.”

“Damn.” Orion rubbed his leg, comforting him. Him! And he wasn’t the one having bad memories.

“Anyway, I just wanted you to know you aren’t the only one.”

“That’s both sad and reassuring. I’ll have to talk to him about it.”

“You will. He’s very open.”

“Thank you, love. I hate to feel...ungrateful. I know my fathers love me. But I just wish I had talked to them sooner, I suppose.”

Cullen snorted. “The brothers and I have a pact not to let anything simmer more than one day. With all of us so close together, it could get really hinky, real fast.”

“Oh, goddess. I join that pact. I don’t want anything to stretch out with you or the family.”

“Good.” Cullen kissed his shoulder. “I like your dads, but you have to remember they live here. They haven’t ever been over there, have they?”

Orion pondered that. “No. No, they haven’t.”

“This is a rarefied world. They all are, in their own ways, yeah? They all have their light and their dark, but the humans? They lose their magic. It grows and then it ebbs. I don’t think anybody knows why.” Cullen shrugged. “Maybe it’s greed? Maybe envy? Maybe it’s just simply that they end up hating each other, and the magic can’t hold. I don’t know; I’m just a dragon. There’s horrific stuff everywhere. It just doesn’t seem to get fed as easily in the other realms. The humans feed it. I don’t have a good reason why. I wish I did.”

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Orion nodded, chewed his bottom lip as he thought. “You and me both. The fact is, you’re welcome here and I’m...well, I guess I am too.”

Cullen liked that thought. He thought it was...hopeful. “I like your room. It’s pretty and it feels comfortable.”

“I grew up here. I’m sure if you looked hard enough, there’s a journal filled with terrible teenaged angsty poems about how my horn was never going to be as long, and my mane was never going to flow as easily.”

“Oh wow. Wow, man, that’s impressive.”

Orion blinked at him. “You don’t have one?”

He snorted, unable to stop his eyes from rolling. “Are you kidding? I have two brothers, one of whom is a seer. If there had been a journal of bad poetry? Trust me. They would right now be wallpapering the house with it, so that we could all see it, every day, forever.”

“Oh, you have a point.” Orion grinned at him. “At least you knew you were never alone, right?”

“Not even so much as a second. Privacy was not one of those things that we had, but you’re right, we had each other. That’s more than a lot of people have.” And he loved his brothers fiercely, just as they loved him.

“They’re good eggs.”

“Bawk bawk. I guess we should go back down?”

“Yeah. I bet my da has worked up a real batch of worry by now. Thinking I hate him. He’s the sensitive soul.”

“Sure. I got to say, Rigel is kind of intimidating in that god-of-thunder kind of way.”

“Oh, goddess, he was never one to let things go. Always thundering, for sure.”

Cullen stood and pulled him to his feet. “But he loves you. I can feel it in the stones here. In the air.”

Orion grinned at him. “Yeah, I can feel it. Come on, let’s go down. Let Da feed us. Then I’ll take you and introduce you to some of my friends.”

He let his eyes go wide. “You have friends? Are you sure?”

“Don’t make me hurt you.” Orion’s smile was wicked. “You’re pregnant and that would probably be looked down upon.”

“Yeah, I would probably let Corbin kill you.” Although, really? Cosmo was the hormonal one. Like seriously. “Come on, let’s go. I could totally spend the night here though. This room is stunning.”

“I used to lay in here and dream about meeting someone like you, you know? When I was here feeling so alone and so distant from the universe, I’d mope and dream about finding a mate and being madly in love.”

“How does it compare? I mean the reality to the imagination.” It took way more courage than he had anticipated to ask that question.

“The reality is nothing like I imagined.” Orion shrugged and leaned in, rubbing their noses together, a spark of magic passing between them. “This is so much more real than I had imagined. What I had fantasized was just a dream.”

Okay. Well, maybe he wouldn’t kill Orion because that was really sweet.

In fact, little pink hearts were floating up and exploding all around them in a wave of joy.

He stood up and rubbed his belly. “Come on, let’s feed this butterfly before she starts complaining.”

“Complaining? Our little girl? Surely you jest...” Orion took the book of fairy tales under his arm. “I’m going to take this home with us. This one can be hers.”

“She’ll love it, I’m sure.” He hooked their arms together, both of them heading out the door. He couldn’t wait to see what Orion’s fathers would invent for a meal. Corbin and Cosmo would be so jealous.

They loved food. All of them did. They had to keep the magic flowing, and that took a lot of energy. Hell, all the dragons in Lunastra had that in common. His mom ate like a bird and sipped a lot of flower tea, though...

“There you are!” Da greeted them when they came back down. “I have buns and cakes and little sandwiches.”

“Oh, that looks so charming.” Cullen beamed. “It’s so pretty. It’s like tea in Britain?”

“What are your favorite things? Have you started having cravings?” Da’s eyes were warm, curious, but not mean.

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“Not really. Everything—literally everything—has been about the magic. It’s just—I’m not very good at keeping it under control. My mom helped, but it’s still hard.”

“Well. I’ll help as well. Have a cookie.”

Da twisted his hand, and suddenly there was a cookie. Not an illusory cookie, but a real cookie.

“It’s okay?” he whispered to Orion.

“It’ll be fine. Da’s cookies are legendary.” Orion said. Kind of literally.

“This is very Alice of Wonderland.” But he took the cookie, and he ate it. It tingled all through him, and he swayed for a second. “Whoa.”

“When the magic starts becoming problematic again, just come have a cookie,” Father said in his deep rumble of a voice. “We’ll visit for a while, and we’ll help settle it. You’re not used to glade energy inside you, but you will become that way.”

Cullen concentrated, built a flower and handed it over, so tickled to have things work again.

When Da took the white rose, it became bright blue and then pink before settling into a deep purple. “Thank you, dear. Now let’s have lunch. No one can do anything on an empty stomach.”

ChapterFourteen

“So you fixed Cullen, man,” Corbin said. “That’s pretty cool.”

“What do you mean I fixed him?” Orion pruned back the grapevine as Corbin had shown him. They were cleaning up the yard outside Corbin’s house before late summer turned to fall, which would then turn off super cold. The roses needed pruning, the bulbs digging and saving, the vegetables that had gone to seed needed drying and the onions needed hanging.

Corbin was quite the gardener. He really ought to introduce the guy to his da.

“He’s not flinging out random illusions anymore unless you say something really sweet. Then it’s the hearts.”

“Ah.” Orion scoffed a bit. “That was Da. His cookies are magical.”

“And no one brought me any?”

“You’re not pregnant,” Orion pointed out.

A fat, happy beaver waddled by, heading for the stream. He’d never seen Yarrow look so ready for winter.

Corbin watched him too. “You think he’s an omega?”

“Why?” He gave Corbin a sly grin. “You always wanted to try a little beaver?”

“Oh, you suck.” Corbin threatened him with the clippers. “Be good.”

“Eh. Good is boring.” He winked broadly before going back to the grapes. Corbin

had explained that one trimmed leaves off in the spring so there was room for the grapes, but in the fall, you trimmed back the dead parts of the vines.

“Yeah, but aren’t you like, the epitome of purity.”

“What, I can’t be pure evil?”

“Corbin!” The voice thundered from an upstairs window. “We need you!”

“That was Hawk.” They sprinted inside, Orion on Corbin’s heels, though really, if Corbin went inside without him, Orion would just be transported inside the house. Boom.

They sprinted up the stairs, meeting Hawk on the way down. “What is it?” Corbin asked.

“Come down to the main parlor.” Hawk led the way down to the parlor, where Cullen was already sitting, his baby bump really growing some.

The sight never failed to make him smile, his heart beating faster.

“Hey, babe.” He plopped down next to Cullen.

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“Hey.” Cullen looked very serious.

“What’s happened?”

“Hawk just got back from a meeting with Gavin. Arian visited him.”

Orion raised a finger. “Sorry, who is Arian?”

“A friend of my mother’s. A fae woman. She has long been a go-between for one of the dragon clutches and the lands beyond the human ones.”

He tilted his head. “So she can move between all the worlds?”

“Yes.” Hawk waved a hand. “She came to ask for help. Her nephew stepped out into the human world to do a job for the fae court, and he was taken.”

“Taken how?” Corbin blurted out.

“Kidnapped.” Hawk’s expression had gone very grave. “They think it’s vamphyr.”

“Shit.” Cullen put a hand on his belly. “Where?”

“He was in the Pacific Northwest. Not too far from where Gavin’s house used to be.”

“So the boss wants us to go look?” Cullen asked.

“Oh, no. Not you or Cosmo either one,” Orion snapped.

“One, it’s my job. I have to go. Two, Corbin can’t go out there by himself.”

Corbin blinked at his brother. “Of course I can. I am entirely capable.”

“You’re green.Green.” Cullen shook his head, worry pouring off him in waves. “I can hold it together until?—”

Orion shook his head. “No, no. You are having a baby. You’re having our baby. You cannot go. I’m sorry, but no.”

Cosmo came down, holding the baby. “Well, I can go if you need me to. Someone has to watch the children though.”

“You aren’t going,” Hawk growled. “You have a new baby.”

“So do you!” Cosmo shot back.

“Guys, brothers. I’m the one who keeps everyone from looking at us like we’re insane and need to be dissected. You’re pink, you’re green, I’m purple.” And getting more so every second.

“You’re pregnant.” And Orion simply wasn’t going to listen to this anymore. He was not going to put up with this nonsense. His pregnant omega was not going to go out to wherever and save someone from vampires. No.

“I’m fully aware that I’m pregnant. I’m not broken.” Cullen stared at them.I’m not. I’m not broken. I can help. These are my brothers.

I know, love, but this is our baby. Our little girl, our butterfly.

Cosmo suddenly sat on the floor with a thump, and the baby began to cry. He stared

out into the room, his eyes beginning to glow.

Corbin rolled his eyes. “Really. Right now?”

“Apparently.” Cullen stood and grabbed the baby before even Hawk could get to her, holding tight.

Cosmo began to rock back and forth. “You can’t go. We can’t go. We can’t go. But we have to go. If they infect the fae. If they infect us, the disease will spread like wildfire. It will get all of us, all of us with even a drop. Kill him. Did they change him? They infect him. All of us. Every one of us. You have to go and save him.”

“See, I told you.” Cullen shrugged. “We have to go and?—”

About the time that Orion was about to scream, Cosmo stared right at him. “You have to save him. And bring him back here. As fast as you can. As fast as you can. Very little time.”

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This temptation to look at Cullen and say, “see” was huge, but he wouldn’t, because the last thing he needed was for Cullen to get stubborn.

“Wait,” Corbin snapped. “Shouldn’t it be me and Hawk? Orion can’t fly.”

“No, I can do one better. I’ll just, I’ll get us there and get us back.” It was exhausting, and the worst part was that he had to teleport in his actual form, which meant taking the chance of being sighted and also periodically walking into someone’s home as a unicorn was problematic.

But it was a thing.

Hawk nodded. “So you can teleport?”

“I need a place to go. We have to know where we’re going.”

“It won’t work.”

“What?” He stared at Corbin.

“You have to be with one of us. I don’t think it works with Hawk. If you can really teleport us, and we can do it late at night. I’ll just wear a hoodie. Gloves. We’ll just stay in the dark.” Like it was just that easy.

Hawk shook his head. “No, that’s when the vampires are going to be the most active.”

Orion nodded. The last thing they needed was to drop into a nest of vampires and get eaten alive. They used their sheer numbers against their prey. “Then we’ll have to do it during the day when they’re sleeping.”

“Makeup. All anyone would see is my face.” Corbin helped Cosmo up off the floor. “If they see me, I’ll wear makeup. The three of us will go. We’ll get the—Do we have a name?”

Hawk nodded. “Evander.”

“We’ll go get Evander, and then we’ll come back. Quick. Easy. The last thing we need is for Orion to be bringing Hawk somewhere and then discover that he can’t go through, and then Hawk is stuck out in the middle of Oregon being attacked by vampires and a possibly infected fae.”

I don’t like any of this. He hated the fear pouring from his mate, but not as much as he hated the idea of Cullen being in danger.

Neither do I, but I can’t take a chance of you or the baby becoming infected by vampires.

And it’s okay to take Corbin?

Love. Please.

He glanced at Hawk, who had lifted Cosmo into his arms. “Come on, love,” Hawk said. “Let’s find you some chocolate.” Hawk nodded at them. “I’ll be right back. I need to help him lie down.”

“Of course.” He stared at Cullen, who watched him with a worried gaze. Not petulant or angry. Just worried. It broke his heart.

“Cullen, you know Orion is right. He can cloak himself with an illusion, and I can wear a hoodie and some makeup. It’s not like we expect to hang out.”

“But you’ve never gone on a mission without me!” Cullen cut his hand through the air. “And I promised to protect him.” Now Cullen flung that hand at Orion.

“Yes, well now that you carry the universe’s first faedragicorn, you need to be more careful.” Orion tried to lighten the mood.

It didn’t work. Cullen heaved a sigh. “I love you. Both of you.”

“We love you too, bro, but your mate has a point. And he can’t leave without one of us, so I got elected.”

“What about Hawk?” Cullen asked.

“I doubt it.” Hawk returned, striding into the room. “It has always been one of you who is needed.”

“Dammit.” Cullen slapped a hand on the couch. “I don’t like it.”

“I know, baby, but we have to do this.” They couldn’t leave someone out there with a vampire nest. They had to go get him. It was part of their deal as guardians. “Okay, Hawk. Give us the rest of the deets.”

There was really no time to waste. They needed to get a move on.

ChapterFifteen

“Ireally don’t like this, Orion.”

Orion nodded, stuffing a few things into a bag. Apparently, Corbin would carry everything, and Orion would concentrate on the portal or teleport or whatever.

“I know, baby. But we have to go. We can’t just leave this guy hanging in the wind.”

He chewed his lip, because he knew Orion was right. But he was scared. It had always been an adrenaline rush, to go out and do missions with Corbin and Cosmo, but the world was a very different place now that he had baby nieces and nephews and his own child on the way.

And a mate.

“I love you, baby. I promise I’ll be home soon, with Corbin and this Evander in tow.” Orion came to kiss him on the nose. “Please don’t worry too much.”

“I worry about you. A lot.”

“And I want you to be happy and healthy and keep our butterfly fed.” Orion put a hand on his belly.

Tears stung his eyes, and little hearts that were breaking started popping up everywhere.

“Oh, goddess, you’re killing me, baby. Please don’t cry.”

“I never cry! I’m a stud! Stupid hormones.”

“I know.” Orion kissed his mouth this time. “If you need anything, knock on any door that’s made of wood and call Father. Rigel. Can you remember that?”

“I can.” Cullen nodded.

“Good.” Orion hugged him hard. “I’ll be back soon.” He picked up the bag, heading for the door and making his way downstairs.

Cullen followed, and they met Corbin and Hawk in the main hallway.

“You all set?” Corbin asked.

“I am. Here, you take the bags.”

“Okay. You know where to put us?” Corbin looked excited, not worried. He’d put on enough makeup to cover things, and he had on an oversized hoodie to cover the rest. A beanie could cover his hair too.

Hawk was wearing a costume that was basically the same, with a pair of dark sunglasses.

“I do. I won’t land us on a wall.” Orion winked broadly, and Cullen tried to smile.

“Please be so careful.” Cullen pulled Orion in for a hug, then Hawk and Corbin. “Call if you need any support from afar. Tech, reinforcements, whatever.”

“We will,” Corbin assured him. “No worries.”

He drew in a deep breath, then stepped back. He had no idea if Orion could do what he needed to here or not, but he would bet he could.

Orion closed his eyes, and a glow surrounded him, so bright it hurt Cullen's eyes. He heard Corbin say, "Whoa," and he grunted when suddenly Orion was there. In his true form. And he was so beautiful it made Cullen cry again. This time for joy.

Corbin. Hop on. The sound echoed around them. Hawk, grab my mane.

"Wait, you want me to ride you?"

Hawk's too heavy to. Come on!

Cullen snorted. Then he started laughing. "Go on. Don't hurt him."

"I won't. I promise." And then Corbin was on his mate, and they were all three off like a shot, Orion turning into the light and leaping.

And disappearing.

Cullen held it together for the most part, until he saw little Elliot. Standing there, little hand opening and closing over and over again as he waved goodbye.

That was it. It was all over but the crying.

Actually, there was a lot of crying. A lot of crying.

It was Cosmo who stamped his foot, finally, and caught his attention. “That’s enough. It’s not like they’re even going to be gone an entire day. We can totally cope for one whole day. Let’s go eat potato chips. Or popcorn.”

“Pa-corns!” Elliot cheered.

“That’s right. We could make popcorn and watch a movie.”

Cullen glared at his brother, not feeling like making nice. “They’re out there without us.”

Cosmo raised one eyebrow. “Guess what, butt munch. You and Corbin went out without me a lot. Do you remember Poe’s nest of v-a-m-p-i-r-e-s? Was I there? No. Why do you think that was?”

“Oh stop.” He didn’t need to be lectured.

“No, this is what happens. You get pregnant, you have to take responsibility for it.”

Cosmo handed him Emily. “Now, we are going to take the children, and we are going to make popcorn, and then we are going to watch movies. Together. Cuddled up in the blankets.”

“Fine, but if you have some kind of a vision, I’m going to kick you. You cannot do your stupid vision thing while I have the babies.” That thought was terrifying.

“All right,” Cosmo conceded. “If that happens, we’ll go to Mother’s.”

He tilted his head. “We could all just kind of go to Mom’s.”

“And leave the house unprotected? And what if they need us? No.” Cosmo’s lips tightened. “Come on, we can do this. We’re going to have to learn how to do this.”

Cullen guessed that Cosmo was right. He hated when Cosmo was right.

But he was. So he smiled for Elliot, then kissed Emily’s cheek, and they went to Corbin’s area of the house to make popcorn. Elliot loved to listen to it ping against the pan.

He also listened hard for Orion and Corbin and even Hawk, who he rarely heard, but he could if it was an emergency.

“You’re going to give yourself a headache,” Cosmo said, putting oil and kernels into the pan. Cosmo wasn’t much for unitaskers, so he didn’t have an air popper.

“I go bye-bye wif Papa soon.” Elliot reached up toward the stove.

“Nope. Hot.” Cullen swooped Elliot up and into his chair. “Oh, my little gargoyle, I think that we should stay here right now, but soon we’ll go bye-bye and see the other dragons, okay?”

“Okay.” Elliot just didn’t want to be left out.

He got it. He didn’t either, but he did have his little butterfly to worry about. I love you, bug. More than I can say.

He felt a little—well, it was honestly like a flutter, like an honest to goodness butterfly in his belly.

He frowned, stilling with his head cocked, as if there was some way for him to hear the feeling.

“What’s wrong? Everything is okay?” Cosmo glanced at him.

“I think the baby just moved. I don’t want her to move, not until...” He began to panic. “Not until Orion comes home. She needs to not move. I want him to feel the first time she moves.”

“It may be a couple of days before that happens. You can usually feel it before.”

Cullen glanced at his brother, tears making his vision swim. “You’re sure?”

“Yep, that’s one of the benefits. Goes along with hormones.”

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Elliot waved to him, banging on his highchair tray. “Buda-fly!”

“That’s right, that’s my little butterfly. She’s growing in here.”

“Like Izzy?”

“That’s right, just like Izzy.”

Elliot smiled, then came to hug him, ear to his belly. “Halloooooo.”

That had both him and Cosmo laughing. Well, until Elliot started having a conversation.

“Uh-huh. No, deys rode away wit Unc Orrie.”

His eyes went wide. Do you hear that, brother?

Cosmo nodded, shaking the pan. He used to talk to Izzy. He’s a baby whisperer.

“Unc Orrie is a uni-uni-unicorn! No. You’s budafly. Cuncle says. Bud. Da. Fly.”

Goodness, that was adorable. He chuckled softly. “Orion should be home very soon, guys. Very soon indeed.”

And if he wasn’t, Cullen was going to bite all three of them.

His teeth were way sharper than Orion’s.

Way.

ChapterSixteen

The humidity hit Orion first, then the way that the light seemed to be filtered through layers of trees and fog.

He shifted as quickly as he could, knowing that his human form was, while not normal, less remarkable than his horsey self.

They stood there, the three of them, getting their bearings.

“We’ll be looking for somewhere underground, but it can’t be natural. If it was natural, the fae could have found him and fetched him home.” Hawk pushed his sunglasses up on his forehead, those eyes just flashing. “Corbin? This is your specialty.”

“Right on. Vampires smell like moldy citrus—it’s unmistakable.”

He glanced at Corbin, a little shocked. “Seriously? Is that why Cullen only brings a couple of fruits in from your mom’s at a time?”

“Bingo.” Corbin winked at him. “We hate that smell.”

“I bet. And it was all in your house when you first moved in, huh?”

“Vampires are a scourge,” Hawk spat.

“Right. Okay. Corbin?” Orion didn’t want to get Hawk worked up any more than he was. That would be bad, because the big guy might just go off the rails.

“Right. Bloodhound mode. Got it. You know, I could get a dog. A hound. That could be part of the repertoire. I could teach it to track vampires.”

“But what would happen if it bayed?” Orion pointed out. “Then they would know you were coming.”

“True—”

“One finds it difficult to believe either of you ever rescued anyone,” Hawk said.

“Harsh.” Orion rubbed his chest as if that had hurt.

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“Accurate,” Hawk said. “Lead on, Corbin.”

“Gotcha.” Corbin strode off, and if anyone looked closely at his shadow, or Hawk’s, well... He’d seen dragons who could totally blend in as humans. These were not those dragons. “Nice work, by the way, Orion. This is a great location to get to the basic coordinates we were given on foot.”

“Yay.” He wasn’t sure about any of this, for all he’d lied to Cullen that he was. He was used to picking up orphans or changelings and taking them back to the glade. And while he’d done his share of horning people and kicking and fighting and illusioning, vampires made every other kind of creature nervous and palm-sweaty.

They really were a scourge, as Hawk said.

Corbin marched, and he was wondering, since Corbin was so connected to the earth, if he could feel the vamps in it like a rotten spot in said moldy fruit. Like if it would be like a beacon to him. Orion could do that with the babies who needed saving. The magical beings who were lost and forgotten. They stood out to him like those spotlights that split the sky back and forth to advertise a movie premiere or a big sale.

Stopping, Corbin held out a hand as if to keep them from being thrown forward in a moving car. He kept his voice low when he said, “There’s a cave about three hundred feet ahead of us. If you look to the right of the big batch of brush...”

He squinted, and now that he was looking for it, the entrance to the cave was obvious. Hawk would probably just fit as a human.

“Strategy?” he asked, keeping his voice low as well.

“We get in, we get the elf, we get out,” Hawk said. “They’ll be sleeping, but they will have human guards, and as we know from Poe, they might be able to wake up if there’s an emergency and they can stay out of the light.”

Orion had met Poe and Cade in the dragonlands. Poe had lived in the human realm a long while.

“Well, you could lava them,” Corbin said. “If we were all out of the way.”

“If there is a way, then you can rest assured I will.”

“Good deal. I’ll go in first. I can also flashy thing them with my natural light,” Orion murmured.

“Onward, then.” Corbin moved much stealthier then, and he was like a vine that was moving, or a leaf that was twitching, even in his human clothes. It was pretty cool.

So he moved on, and Hawk made no sound behind him. Honestly, dragons were amazing hunters. Unicorns were more the run in and glow types.

Maybe that was why all the old tapestries showed them in a pen, even if their horn was buried in something.

They made it to the mouth of the cave, and Hawk stopped them, easing up to the front to check, presumably, for guards.

Suddenly Orion heard something ringing in his head that was a touch dizzying. What was that?

What was what?

Did you not hear it? It's like a bell, I think? Something weird...

Hawk arched one eyebrow. Look, if you're going to panic, we've got a real problem. You've got to relax.

I'm not panicking. I hear something.

Corbin was moving into the mouth of the cave and just leaving them behind.

What's he doing?

He heard Corbin's mental snort, and he told himself he was just worried because he was confused when he could hear this noise that he couldn't ignore. I'm doing my motherfucking job. He'd never heard that tone from Corbin—this chilled, almost rumble, like two stones were creaking together inside Corbin's head. Contrary to popular belief. I've been doing this for a very long time.

Hawk met his eyes. He could see the hint of shame there. Oh, I'm in so much trouble when I get home.

They followed Corbin deeper into the cave, his personal light illuminating the walls.

He could hear it, that noise. It was a bell. A light little bell—not like a tinkling, but not deep. Not a huge bell, just the tiniest little ringing bell that was calling to him, and he noticed his light was getting bigger.

What is wrong with you? Hawk stared at him.

I don't know!

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Stop glowing! You're putting off 'oh suck me dry now' vibrations.

Can you not hear that? It's getting louder. It was threatening to make him crazy, actually. Do vampires make noises?

Mostly chewing. I think it's really chewing and sucking.

Huh. That was totally not this. This was more like...home. Maybe fae rang?

I don't think they'd let him keep any jewelry, Orion. Hawk was totally in humor the lunatic mode.

No. No, goddess, listen to me. There's a ringing!

You're glowing louder, Hawk pointed out.

Louder? Could he glow with decibels?

Brighter, whatever. You've got to stop.

I'm not doing this on purpose.

What exactly are you two trying to do? Get me killed?

Shut up. Orion noted that Corbin was the one who was just hurrying ahead like he knew what the hell he was doing and could see in the dark. Did you know he was this fast?

Hawk shook his head. It's never really come up. Usually, it's Cullen and Corbin that go. I don't show up as a rule.

He thought, maybe, someone should have told him Hawk was a virgin. Obviously, this ringing was intended to warn him that he was fucked and surrounded by assholes. They should have brought a groundhog shifter. They could dig and there was lots of good eating on a groundhog, should the shit hit the fan.

They came to an opening, and staked out there was a good-sized fae. He would have been beautiful, if he hadn't been beaten and tortured. And if he'd been bathed? Like ever. He was nothing but lean muscle and skin and sores.

That wasn't what hit him in the center of his forehead, though. What caught his attention was the animal that had been hog-tied next to the fae.

It was a foal, no more than a week old, black as night, with tiny wings on its back.

Those mother fuckers. He started to shift, rage flooding him, and Corbin glared at him, putting one finger up.

We are going to get them out and get them home. You are not fucking this up.

That's a pegasus. They were damn near as rare as he was.

I know full well what it is. We won't let it die in this place, but we have to get out of here. We get them out and we put Hawk to work destroying the entire nest, but we've got to go and we've got to go RIGHT NOW. Even as he spoke, Corbin was sliding on his belly over the dirt, trying to get to the fae, moss growing on the path where Corbin touched.

Orion could barely hear the soft whispers of Corbin comforting the man as he worked

to get him freed.

Orion went over to do the same with the little horse, encouraging him to breathe, to relax, and to let him help. But the baby was scared, hungry, weak, and utterly panicked.

He rested one hand on the dark forehead. Hear me. We're going to get you out of here. Do you understand, little one? We're going to take you out of the darkness. But you have to be quiet. Once we're out, the big dragon will burn up the bad ones.

Big, liquid eyes met his, and the baby leaned its head on him. He lifted it into his arms once he got it untied, then stood. Corbin had the fae guy slung over his shoulder, and he motioned for them to go back out the way they came.

Which was when Hawk started to glow. Like a volcano that was about to go off.

Oh, shit. Time to run.

Orion put on a burst of speed, as did Corbin, but even then, he could feel the heat on his back. Hawk was going to melt this place.

Will he be able to get out? he asked Corbin.

Oh, yeah. He's immune.

That's comforting.

Corbin's laugh rang out, and he thought the guy was getting off on this. He just wanted to get home, get them all safe. No mistakes. Corbin and Hawk both seemed a wee bit...reckless.

Come on, Hawk! Hurry!

Just because there had been no guards didn't mean humans couldn't be about somewhere.

They burst out of the cave, and that was when they heard the great roar. Holy shit, Hawk had a voice on him. And then all sorts of shit went up in flames.

They moved as far away as they dared without leaving Hawk behind or burning, and they waited.

Hawk strode to them not long after they stopped running, and he was stark naked now, his clothes either burned off or lost because he'd shifted.

Well, that was one way to clear out a nest of vampires.

"Take us home, Orion," Hawk said. "They're gone."

"Good." He handed the baby pegasus to Hawk. "Okay, guys. Be ready to hold on tight to my mane with your free hand."

He opened the portal, the blinding gold light shining from him, and he waited for the others to grab on before he leaped through, taking them right into the main hall of the house and closing the portal as quickly as he could so nothing could try to follow them in or get a fix on them.

Orion was always cautious.

“Oh my goddess, they’re home!” Cullen cried. “You’re here. Oh, love.” Cullen tossed himself into Orion’s arms.

“Here we are. Hawk was amazing. And your brother is like a ninja.”

“You were fine. Until you glowed.”

“You glow—Does anyone hear bells?” Cullen asked.

“See?” He looked at the baby in Hawk’s arms and held out his. “Can I take him back from you?”

“Of course. I should go dress. Did Cosmo go to the babies?”

“Yes. They were both crying. Elliot said it was hot.”

Hawk smiled faintly as he handed over the wee pegasus. “My fault. I’ll go make nice.”

“I’m taking this guy to my guest room,” Corbin said. “I’ll call Mom and see what she says, but until we know, we need to keep him contained away from the little ones.”

“Okay. Holler if you need us,” Cullen said. Then he looked at the foal. “Hello. Who is this?”

* * *

“Who is this?” Cullen asked.

“We found him with the fae man. He was hog-tied, Cullen! Hog-tied.” Orion was so mad, he could tell. And who wouldn’t be, if someone was harming this sweet little baby? Cullen touched the foal, and the bells...

Stopped.

Oh. “Orion. He’s?—”

“Ours.”

“Yes.” Cullen stared down as the wee one nuzzled his belly, making these little snuffling sounds. So adorable. So sweet.

“I knew it the minute I picked him up. But I’ll have to take him to the dads. If he’s not a shifter...”

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“Then he belongs there.”

Cullen could see that. He got it. But it killed him to think of giving this baby over to someone else. This was his baby as much as the one growing in his belly.

He sniffed, hormones, making him so weepy. “Did it all go okay?”

“Yeah. Hawk melted them.”

“He is a little volcano-like. Lava is his thing.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. It could come in even more handy at some point.”

“I know!” Cullen laughed, taking the wee one to their side of the house with Orion following. He put the baby on the couch and covered him with a blanket, then hugged Orion tight. “Does he need milk?”

“I imagine that wouldn’t hurt.” Orion was giving him the weirdest look.

“Okay.” He went to the kitchen, the listlessness of the little pegasus worrying him. Vamps could drain the magic from so many creatures.

He wasn’t sure what he was going to do. He needed to get this baby milk, but he didn’t have a bottle. Like, not that kind of a bottle.

Damn it.

Cullen warmed up some milk with some sugar in it, as he tried to figure out what the best way to do this was. Horses didn't belong in the house, he knew that. He also knew, in the pit of his stomach, that the baby in Orion's arms was not a horse. He just had to figure out?—

Orion gasped. "Oh dear."

Cullen came running, finding Orion holding a little beautiful perfect baby with skin dark as a raven's wing.

"Huh." That was new. "Oh! I do have bottles for this, thank goodness."

Orion blinked at him. "We have a baby. With wings."

"No parents, huh?"

Orion blinked at him. "Can you imagine? Full-sized winged horses not getting noticed? Here?"

The baby had wings.

Fascinating.

"Let me go get his bottle made up."

Orion nodded. "Let's get a diaper on him. Hopefully, he'll be able to communicate enough to let us know his name or something. He's very young though. I imagine that was why the fae was there—to make sure the baby got back somewhere safe."

"Poor guy. Had he been bitten?" Was he infected?

Orion shrugged. “To be honest, I didn’t even get a look at him. Not really. He’d been beat half to death, I know that for sure. But I can tell you from what I know...”

Cullen stopped listening because he’d dealt with a lot of vampires. He knew a lot about them, but he didn’t have a huge desire to be ugly about this.

Not with that baby being hungry.

Orion was still sitting there when he got back, and he picked the baby up, put a bottle in its mouth, and started heading for where he’d stored the diapers. There had to be something that would work.

“What are you doing?”

“Feeding and diapering the baby. What are you doing?”

Orion shook his head, still on the sofa. “Hawk burned them all alive.”

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“Good. It’s faster than what Corbin and I do.” He met Orion’s gaze. “We let them starve to death. It takes weeks.”

Orion stared at him. “You’re not serious.”

“As a heart attack.”

“But—”

“Honey, I get that you’re all golden light. Your nature is to help. But vampires get nothing from me. Zero. Zip. They’re a parasitic disease, and you see what they do to magical creatures. To be honest, what they do to humans is just as bad. It’s just faster. Usually.” Cullen waved a hand. “I’m not going to be sorry.”

Orion nodded. “Okay. Yes. Yeah. It’s just a little?—”

“Bloodthirsty?” he teased.

“Something like that.” Orion rose. “Just a little surprising. That’s all.”

Cullen shrugged and tried not to be hurt. “They like to drain magical babies best. That’s their jam. They keep them alive, too, so they’re terrified and they spend their short lives in agony. One of my jobs is to go out and save them, and make sure that we get rid of the nest.”

“You torture them!”

What did Orion want him to say? “I’m going to rock the baby and get him to sleep.”

“Okay.” Orion watched him, then kind of followed him around, looking a little sad. He wondered if it was because Orion was disappointed in him, or if it was because they’d had a little snarl.

Finally, Orion looked at the baby and bit his lip. “I need to go talk to Father.”

“Sure.” He would call his mom to see if she could come to look at the baby, and also to tell Arian that the rescue had been a success. “I’ll see you when you get back.”

Orion came to drop a soft kiss on his head. “Don’t be mad at me for too long, okay?”

“I’m not mad. Seriously. But I don’t feel like I have anything to apologize for, either.” He knew Orion was still pretty hyped up from the rescue, so he would leave it at that. He didn’t want to fight.

“I don’t either.” Orion stroked the wee one’s cheek, then headed over to lay his pendant on the table. The door opened, Orion strode through, and the door disappeared.

And he sighed.

He hated being at odds with his mate.

“Did I hear there was a pegasus—whoa.” Cosmo wandered in. “Baby with wings.”

“Yep. He shifted a few minutes ago.”

“Nice.” Cosmo glanced around. “Where’s Orion?”

“He went to talk to the dads.”

“Ah.” Cosmo wandered to the kitchen to peer in his fridge. “Why are you mad at him?”

“I’m not.” Cullen knew he was sharp about it, though. It stung to feel like Orion disapproved of him.

“Uh-huh. Tell.”

“He didn’t like what I told him about how we dealt with vampires. He said we tortured them.”

“Mmm.” Cosmo grinned and came to sit across from him, holding a carton of pudding and a spoon. “Yeah, he could be shocked by that, huh? I mean, he did rescues, but I bet he popped in and popped back out with the baby or the magical creature or whatever.”

“Yeah.” Cullen rocked the baby back and forth, even if he was already asleep, the bottle drained.

“But, he’s a creature of pure light, Cull. He might have lived among humans for a long time and he might be a snarky hottie on the surface, but he’s still from the Glade or whatever. He has a right to be a little shocked. Just like we’re half dragon and half fae, and the fae have been warriors for the ages. And we’re used to being a little ruthless. So you both need to get unmad.”

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“He wasn’t mad when he left. He was sad. I think that was worse.”

“He’ll come around.” Cosmo opened the pudding. “Mmm. Pistachio.”

That made him laugh.

Okay, so maybe he was a little ramped up from the day too.

He could ungrump.

As soon as Orion got home.

ChapterSeventeen

“Son. This is a surprise.” Father Rigel looked about. “Where is your mate?”

“He’s back at home with the baby.”

His father blinked. “What? I mean, obviously it’s kind of difficult at this point for him not to be with the baby, one would assume.”

He shook his head. “No, I found a baby. We had to go out into the human realm. There were vampires who had stolen a fae, and there was a baby as well. Hawk—he’s a dragon, one of Cullen’s brother’s mates—he killed them all.”

“Good.” That was his da, who wandered through like it was no surprise whatsoever that he was here. “I hope it hurt. What kind of baby?”

“Da!”

“What?” His sweet omega parent just arched an eyebrow at him. “What kind of baby?”

What was happening here? “A pegasus.”

Da’s eyes lit up. “Oh my. Are you going to bring him here?”

“I don’t know.” Orion didn’t know a whole lot of anything right now. He was so shocked that Cullen, who seemed like such a caring soul, would hurt someone and not feel angst about it. Now he didn’t know what to think.

“Well, it seems rather important,” Father grumbled. “I mean, to know.”

“Yes. Well, obviously I don’t. Cullen’s got him. Not sure Cullen’s going to let him go.”

Da blinked at him. “Does that bother you?”

Orion could only shake his head.

His fathers shared a look, then Da said, “I’ll make tea.”

Father nodded and motioned to a chair. “I think that’s a good idea, mate. Why don’t you have a seat, Orion? Obviously, you need to talk.”

“Oh, I don’t?—”

“Son, it’s been almost a century since I saw you last, and now you’ve been here twice in one week. It’s obvious that you want to talk. I’m here. Sit down.”

That was direct. So he sat.

“Here I am.” He stared at his dads. They stared back.

Finally, Da smiled gently. “Love. Vampires are a disease. They’re not people anymore. Or whatever creature they might have been. They’re not salvageable once the disease truly takes hold.”

He tilted his head, the distinction catching his attention. “But if they’re caught before then... How long do they have?”

“That depends on many factors. But maybe a day or two. Longer if the victim is not human. But don’t be angry at your mate. It seems ugly, but sometimes, the only thing you can do is seal them in their sleeping place and let them starve. Fighting them is too dangerous.”

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“That just seems cruel.”

Father Rigel snorted. “Life can be cruel, my son. Even here, there are predators. You think those pixies who bite your fingers wouldn’t kill you if they were big enough?”

“Good thing they’re not.” Orion sighed. “It just surprised me. I’m not angry at him.”

“No, but you saw a different side of him,” Da murmured. “It’s all about learning each other.”

Father nodded to him. “Your omega is fierce. He will protect your children to the end of the earth. He will protect you. This is the perfect match. He’s going to protect this little one from anyone that comes for him.”

Orion sighed softly, and he had to smile, even if it felt like a challenge. “You two like him.”

“We do,” Father rumbled. “And we’ve missed you.”

Da bobbed his head, the face that had been there for him for so many centuries, loving him, supporting him, unchanged. “We’re looking so forward to having grandchildren. I suppose we do now, hmm?”

At the raised eyebrow, Orion chuckled, shook his head. “I think so. I don’t know, but Cullen just wrapped around him and refused to let him go, really. And then I left him to come here because I was so confused. Maybe it’s me who’s wrong? Maybe I don’t need to be here?”

Father took one of his hands, surprising him on a deep level. “You are always welcome here, as is Cullen. There will always be space for you here at the top of the stairs. But, son, you’re not infallible. Sometimes you need support and your family. I’m sorry you didn’t believe that you could have come home before. That was our mistake, and we’re sorry.”

What was he supposed to say to that? To hear the words he’d needed to hear for so long so honestly offered over? He didn’t know. He simply didn’t know anything.

“They stole a baby.” The words tumbled out of his mouth, unwelcome and surprising. Orion looked up to his fathers, his heart suddenly shattering into a million pieces, the pain and fury there near unbearable. “They stole the baby, and they were feeding off of it. A baby and a fae! Da! How could anything do that?”

His da shook his head, eyes shimmering with tears. “They’re monsters. Monsters are real. All they know to do is harm and hurt. And feed.”

Orion had to sob, the horror finally flooding him, and he couldn’t stop it, even for a second. His fathers wrapped around him, helping him and supporting him as he let it all go, offering it to the pair who had raised him and loved him.

They let him cry until it was all over, the storm too huge to linger long. Then his Da, in his infinite wisdom, handed him a cup of tea and a little plate of cookies. In his Da’s universe, all things were healed with tea.

He smiled, with damp cheeks and a runny nose. “Some things are eternal, aren’t they?”

“Yes, you’ll learn this. Some things are. You’ll find yourself doing something when your son cries?—”

“Or their daughter,” Father pushed in, and Da nodded.

“You’ll find yourself doing the same thing.” He got a wink and a smile. “Are we going to get to meet him? Do you even have a name yet?”

“I don’t even know. He only shifted. He was in his equine form when I found him, but he shifted for me when Cullen was fixing a bottle to feed him. He’ll never be able to go out into the human world. He has wings.” He looked up at his fathers, his heart pounded. “He’s beautiful. Small and hungry, but so perfect.”

They nodded in unison. “Of course he’s perfect. He’s our first grandson. He’s mostly magic. He’ll be able to come here and visit with us. Always.”

“Do you think it’s okay to keep him? I mean, I could take him to the foundling home, but—” But Cullen might kill him. “Cullen seemed to touch fierce.”

Father tilted his head. “Do you think that you truly can?”

He didn’t even hesitate. His heart knew better. “No. I loved him the moment I saw him. I’ve rescued dozens and dozens of children. I never felt this way.”

He’d never felt this incredible need to protect, to hold the little one and promise him the earth and stars.

It was love.

He’d never fallen in love at first sight with anyone but Cullen, and now this baby.

“It’s a bond, son, and you’re starting your family.”

“Yes, and I’ve left Cullen alone, pregnant, with a new baby, and a fae that has been

drained to the bone.”

Father’s eyes went wide. “Has he been infected?”

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“I have no idea. Cosmo—he’s the seer—he said that if the fae was infected, it would pass through all the fae. Like a virus.”

“Son, you must go to your omega. You cannot let the fae infect the Land of Summer.”

“You’re right.” He stuffed a bunch of cookies in his pocket, one in his mouth, and then gulped down his tea. “Thank you both.” He had to go, so he leaped back through the doorway, knowing his fathers would never be offended. He needed to see this fae for himself.

“Oh!” Cullen jumped when he came through, clutching the baby until he squeaked. “You scared me.”

“I’m sorry, love. I didn’t mean to. And I’m sorry I snapped at you. I was—” Orion took in a deep breath. “I couldn’t believe they’d taken that baby. That they were going to eat him.”

“Babe.” Cullen rose and put the baby on a blanket, then put the whole kit and kaboodle on the floor before coming to him to wrap both arms around him. “I’m sorry. It’s a whole different thing with vampires.”

“I—it is. I’ve seen neglected and forgotten babies. I’ve seen changelings that just weren’t going to work, or babies who got magically transported by accident. But never vampires. I’m so sorry.”

“I love you.” Cullen slipped his arms around Orion, and he soaked up the love and

care.

“I love you too. I need to go see Corbin and the rescued fae. If he’s been bitten...”

Cullen pulled a face. “Let me take this one to Cosmo and Hawk, and I’ll go with you.”

“But you’re pregnant, love.” He didn’t want Cullen in danger.

“I’ll keep my distance, but there’s no way I’m letting you go over there alone. Even if Corbin is there.”

“I just want you to be safe.”

“Ditto.” Cullen stared him down, and he realized he wasn’t going to win this one.

“Okay.” He lifted the baby into his arms. “Let’s go.”

Cosmo met them out in the main hall, smiling. “I’ll take him. You two be careful. Tell Corbin that too.”

“We will.” Cullen beamed at his brother, but Orion could see his hands shaking a tiny bit.

“Come on, love,” Orion said. “The sooner we do this, the sooner we can settle and I can hold you.”

“Sounds good.” And hand in hand, they went off to Corbin’s house.

ChapterEighteen

Cullen looked at Corbin, who sat next to the bed holding the big fae man. He was so pale. Almost translucent, and his breathing was incredibly shallow. Dark, bruised-looking veins stood out under his skin, and he was tied to the bed with vines that had sprouted up magically out of the floor and surrounded the guy.

“What happened?”

“He tried to eat me,” Corbin said.

“What? Why didn’t you call for us?”

Corbin raised an eyebrow at him. “Hey, my preggers bro and my only recently no longer preggers bro! Come help me with this fae guy who’s turning into a vamp.”

“So he was bitten.” Orion moved forward to peer at the guy.

“Be careful, Orion,” Corbin said. “I wasn’t joking. He really did try to bite me. Thankfully right now, he’s super weak, but...”

“Look, the dads say he has maybe a day. Maybe two.”

Corbin scowled. “No. No, we’re going to figure out how to help him.”

Cullen moved up just enough to grab Orion’s shirt as he leaned over the guy and pull him back. “Sure. We’ll start research right away. And get Hawk to come help you watch him.”

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“No.” Corbin bared his teeth. “I can do it. You just figure out how to cure him.”

“Can I talk to you a minute?” Orion asked, pulling Cullen aside.

“What?” He glanced at Corbin, who was totally acting weird. “You don’t think Corbin got bit, do you?”

“Huh?” Orion tilted his head. “No. Why?”

“He’s just acting really odd.”

“Yeah. I know.” Orion sighed. “The dads don’t seem to think he can be cured.”

“What?” Now it was his turn to stare. “There has to be a way.”

“Well, I’m totally willing to look for it, but I thought I would tell you what they intimated.”

Corbin was looking down at the fae guy with this weird expression, and Cullen felt magic move in the room.

“Okay. But they deal in theoreticals, right?”

“Sure, but they’re pretty, uh, realistic about vampires.”

Cullen grinned. “You mean they told you I was right?”

“That too.” Orion chuckled, and Corbin rounded on them.

“If all you can do is laugh, you can leave.”

They exchanged a glance, and he poked at Corbin with his mind. Did he bite you?

“Don’t be ridiculous. Of course he didn’t bite me.” Corbin rolled his eyes. “He tried really hard. His teeth aren’t sharp, though, so that made it a little weird. It was sort of like watching a rampaging cow, but a pretty one.”

Cullen stared at his brother. “Are you sure you didn’t get bit? Maybe you have mad pretty cow disease.”

That earned him a glare. “Not funny, and we have to fix him.”

He winced, because the chance that they were going to have to kill the fae was huge. “Corbin, you know that?—”

“No, you have to fix him. We have to fix him.” There was a hint of panic in Corbin’s eyes, the green almost neon.

“We can’t let the family get infected?—”

“So let’s fix him!”

Cullen shrugged and glanced at Orion. “Corbin hasn’t been bitten.”

But that didn’t mean that this poor creature was not going to have to die if he threatened the children or his parents or the whole entire fae land. The good of the many—it was a thing.

Orion sighed softly. “Can you two think of anything? Do you have any kind of idea about what we could possibly do?”

He shrugged, racking his brain—not that he was a scholar or an herbalist or anything. “Do you mean like is there a vaccine?”

Orion shook his head. “Maybe an antidote?”

“Well, I don’t know. What’s the opposite of vampire.” Corbin never looked away from the fae tied there on the bed again. “I mean. Give me something that’s practical. We say, oh, they’re bad. Well, we’re relatively good, and you know, we can be vampires. They feed off children. That makes them evil. We rescue the children. That makes us good. I don’t know. How much do you get fed from even to be turned? Do you have to get emptied? And then the virus or bacteria or whatever vampirism is infects you as your blood starts to make itself again?”

Cullen glanced at Orion, whose eyes were wide.

“I don’t even know if that makes sense,” Corbin said.

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“Yeah, me either.” Orion sat on the end of the bed while Cullen took the one wing-backed chair. “Okay, so if it’s not an herb, if we can’t mush up mugwort or something and pour it up his nose and fix him, What if it’s magical?”

He tilted his head. “Some sort of weird-assed magic?” That he did know about. “Well, I could try to blast him with all of my drippy hearts.”

“Not helpful,” Corbin snapped, while Orion followed up with?—

“Don’t get close enough to him to blast him with anything. Last thing we need is a vampire-dragon-fae and a vampire-dragon-fae-unicorn baby?—”

“Aren’t babies kind of vampires by definition?” he asked.

“Shut up, Cull!”

Cullen was developing one hell of a Corbin-sized headache.

Really, all he wanted to do was go see the new baby and hold him, ask him his name. He wanted to enjoy being pregnant. Enjoy being freshly mated. He did not want to have to deal with this shit, and he wasn’t sure why this was happening right now.

Cullen was starting to feel a little cursed, and he was beginning to feel a wee bit grumpy about it.

“You’re pouting, your bottom lip is sticking out. It’s really cute.” Orion tried to smile for him.

He scowled. "I will kill you."

"Right, not cute. You are the least cute omega ever."

Corbin threw a glass of water against the wall, shattering it. "If you two do not stop being funny and adorable, I'm going to murder you both."

That would be adorbs as hell if it wasn't terrifying.

"You can just go away," Corbin snapped.

Orion shook his head. "We're not leaving you here with the bloodsucker."

"You don't have a choice. This is my house!"

Was Corbin yelling at them? For being decent?

He blinked at Corbin and then screamed, "Your house? This is our house, and it always will be! There is no you without me and vice versa!"

Don't forget to add Cosmo in. Orion stood, staring at Corbin. His feelings will get hurt.

"And the only reason Cosmo is not in here yelling is because he is with the children!"

"Oh, I'm here."

I thought you were watching the babies.

Hawk is watching the babies. You needed my support, Cull.

All right, that works. “So Cosmo is here too. You want to yell at him? You could yell at both of us, and let’s see what happens!”

“Stop screaming at me!” Corbin did round on them now, pointing at Cullen. “I’m doing the best I can.”

“I know. I do.” He held out a hand to his brother, but that was when his eyes widened in horror. The vines holding the fae man to the bed had shriveled to dried husks, and the fae rose up, grabbing Orion and yanking him up against him to bite deep into Orion’s neck.

“No!” He leaped forward to rip the guy away, Corbin and Cosmo both shouting and moving to help.

But it was too late. Even as they pulled the fae man free, he could see the great, bloody wound on Orion’s neck.

* * *

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Orion flailed, trying to push the fae off of him, but his strength was unreal for someone who was so skinny and pale.

The bite felt agonizing, and he shouted, the sound coming out of him something like, “Annnnnnngggghhhh.”

“Orion!” Cullen let Corbin and Cosmo wrestle the guy away from him, then grabbed him and yanked him off the bed to tug him toward the door. “No! No, no, no, no. No, you can’t be bitten.”

“Well, I think I am, baby. I mean, those were not cow teeth. They were pretty sharp.”

“Oh, goddess. Oh no.” That was Corbin, who had subdued the man again, this time with sheets ripped up and wrapped around him like a mummy. “Orion. Oh, fuck.”

Orion put a hand to his neck. The flow of blood was slowing, his natural healing taking over. This hadn’t been a catastrophic wound. Those took way longer. The only thing that could kill him, though, was taking his horn.

Now, there were ways to keep living that were no fun, but?—

“Orion, come back to our part of the house. I need to take care of you. Hawk still has the baby, so?—”

“It’s okay. Look, it’s closing up.” He wiped more blood away, knowing Cullen would see what he felt.

“Holy shit,” Cosmo said. “That’s some accelerated healing.”

“Yeah. Part and parcel of the whole unicorn gig.” He winked at Cosmo, then wrapped an arm around Cullen. “Just a sec, huh?”

“What—”

He let Cullen go for just a moment, then moved to Corbin to put a hand on his shoulder. “I’m okay. It’s okay, Corbin. But obviously he has some sort of plant affinity like you do, so keep him tied up with actual rope, huh?”

“We should just kill him,” Cullen spat.

“No!” Corbin almost sobbed. “Not yet. Please. We have to try.”

“If he infected my mate...”

Orion went back to Cullen, taking him in his arms. “Not infected. See how his wound never closed up? The one on his neck? Mine already is. Ta-da.” Orion showed off his throat. “Corbin. Be careful. We’ll come back once I get cleaned up.”

“I’ll stay with him,” Cosmo said, eyes wide, his lips quivering a little.

“Okay. Seriously. We’ll be back.”

“No, we will not.” Cullen dragged him out of the room, then out of Corbin’s part of the house. “Orion.”

“Stop.” He wrangled Cullen into their main room, then took his shoulders in hand to kiss him. “I’m fine. I mean, that hurt like the very devil, and I hate being all bloody, but?—”

“Did you know your blood is kind of...golden?”

“Huh?” He blinked, then grinned. “Oh. Yeah. I’m like a golden delicious.”

Cullen slapped his chest. “Not funny! What if you die!”

“From what? The wound is gone.” He wasn’t being deliberately dense. He just didn’t get it.

“But you got bit! What if he infected you?”

“Oh, love.” He hugged Cullen close. “He didn’t. I would know.”

“How? It can take a few days. Didn’t your dads say that?”

He frowned. “No, they said we only had a few days at most with this guy. Can we take a shower?”

Cullen burst into tears. “I’m so mad.”

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“I’m sorry, honey. I am. I’m not trying to be a?—”

“Not at you. At everything. I just want to be with you and the baby and be pregnant and not be scared that you’re turning into a zombie!”

“Technically, a vampire.”

“No, people who are like, only half turned become zombies or something. I read it in a book.”

“Hmm.” He thought he knew what book that was, and it wasn’t exactly a history of real vamps. “I’m fine, love. Really. Just bloody and full of adrenaline.”

Cullen stared at him. “This has been the longest day in the history of days, and there has been a long goddamn history of days, and I do not want to do this anymore!” He crossed his arms over his chest and glared. “You went out without me for the first time. My brother went out on the job without me for the very first time. Ever. You brought home a fae vampire Pomeranian and a baby with wings, who is hanging out with Hawk, but he should be hanging out with us. And now you’ve gotten bitten! I’ve fought with my brothers. I think that maybe Corbin has lost his goddamn mind. I found out that I am mated to a man with gold blood!”

Orion opened then closed his mouth and shook his head, and Cullen stuck his finger right in his chest.

Not literally.

“You know, we had our first real fight, and you walked out on me, and I don’t feel like that has been effectively resolved. First, you ran off to your parents to complain about me? That’s not fair! They haven’t even gotten to know me yet! Now they’ll think I’m a harridan. You got all pissed at me because I killed vampires. See why I kill vampires? Did you notice how you got bit in the neck? Did you see the teeth marks on that baby? Somewhere, that baby has parents, and I don’t know how to find them! We don’t even know his name. And they didn’t care. They just eat. And eat. And eat!”

Orion listened, allowing Cullen to vent his spleen. They would talk afterward; he had no doubt. They could talk about things like how that baby’s parents weren’t alive because there was no way anyone would steal a baby like that and leave the parents alive. Then they would talk about how somebody—most likely the baby himself—would tell them the baby’s name.

He would tell Cullen that he understood, and that he was sorry.

And that he was okay.

But first, he was going to have to let the screaming just happen.

Of course, the most important thing was not to smile, because Cullen’s screaming was accompanied by balloons.

Hundreds of them.

Some with skulls, some with unicorns. Some with baby pegasuses. Pegasi?

It was adorable, but he was not going to smile, because that would get his ass kicked, and he would by definition have to let the pregnant guy kick his ass. Because otherwise, Hawk and the other brothers would kick his ass. Possibly his dad would...

“—pregnant with your baby and it would kill me to lose you. I just found you.”

Oh, that was the end of the storm. So Orion felt like it would be reasonable to draw Cullen in and hug him tight.

“I hear you.”

“Do you?” Cullen sniffled, and he nuzzled one of Cullen’s temples. “For real?”

“I swear to you on my horn.” He needed his pregnant mate to be about to relax. Seriously. “Let’s shower, get cleaned up, and then we’ll go see the baby. He’ll be hungry again by then.”

“Okay. But if you turn into a vampire, I’m going to be really mad.”

He wanted to note that he wasn’t turning into a vampire. He didn’t feel any different than he had any other day. Maybe a little tired.

And hungry.

There hadn’t been enough food, like real food, and he wasn’t hungry.

Not in an oh my god, I just got turned into a vampire so I have to go eat the universe kind of hungry. This was more hmm, I could murder a fried tofu sandwich with lettuce and tomato kind of hunger. Actually, that sounded super, super good. “You know what I want?”

“The blood of the innocent and your enemy’s head on a pike?”

“No... I was thinking a fried tofu sandwich with lettuce and tomato, possibly with a little mayo on brioche.”

Cullen grinned at him. “I’m fairly sure no vampire in the history of vampires has ever said fried tofu sandwich.”

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“Good, because I’m not a vampire and I do really want one. That sounds—oh...or we could get falafel wraps?”

Cullen rubbed his belly. “That sounds really good. And actually doable without cooking. Falafel and feta with maybe some fries.”

Orion beamed. Bingo. “We’ll just get him to leave it at the door. Let me get a big thing of hummus for later.”

It wasn’t fried tofu, but it was crunchy and it had sambal.

Unless... “Someone does deliver, right?”

“Yeah. One of the Mexican places in town has a cook from Israel. He makes amazing falafel. He’ll do it for the delivery fee.”

“Ah, small towns.” He grinned, and kissed Cullen lightly. “We’ll talk out the rest. But first, you order food, and I’ll get the shower going.”

“Okay.” Cullen stared at him a moment. “You promise you’re not infected?”

“I promise, my love.”

“Okay.” Clearly trying to trust, Cullen went to grab his phone to order food.

Orion went to start the water, feeling sticky and a little worn out from all the adrenaline leaving him.

Food. Baby. Nap, all of them together.

And then they would figure out what to do with the vampy fae.

ChapterNineteen

They all sat at the big kitchen table, even Corbin, who had hauled the fae man in a cocoon of sheets and laid him on the couch, and Cullen kept looking at him, hating that he'd bitten Orion, hating that he'd been bitten by those freaks of nothing natural.

Elliot's magpie Eddie was watching the kids just over in Cullen's house.

But Corbin and Cosmo kept staring at Orion. Waiting for him to change into something bloodsucking.

Orion finally chuckled. "I told you guys, I'm fine. I swear, I'm not going to change."

"As long as you're sure."

They still stared. But Cullen kept looking at the fae guy.

"I am. Do you want me to show you later? I can go to the Glade. If I was infected, I wouldn't be able to."

Cullen glanced at Corbin and Cosmo and Hawk. "We went this morning. He didn't disintegrate."

"Did you take the baby?" Cosmo asked.

"Yes, and Da pronounced that Tisi was healthy, even if he needed to fatten up some, and that he was to come home with his dads." Cullen grinned a little, then looked

back at the fae guy, frowning. “Does he look different? Less pale?”

Pure, desperate hope shone on Corbin’s face for a moment. “Does he look better?”

“I think so,” Cosmo said.

“Hmmm.” Hawk withheld comment, but it was Orion who laughed.

“What’s so funny?” Corbin barked. Corbin didn’t have the most developed sense of humor at the best of times, but the plants were fading, and no one—no one—dared to open the door to the Summerland until they were one hundred percent sure that the fae was healed. Poor guy—they couldn’t even remember his name...

“Well, he’s lying in the sun, for one thing.” Orion waved, and sure enough, there was a stream of sunlight coming through the window, dancing with dust motes. It landed right on the fae man’s face, and he wasn’t smoking or withering away. In fact, it seemed to be helping.

“Holy shit.” Corbin blinked. “He’s okay in it.”

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Cullen stared now at his mate. “You healed him.”

Orion tilted his head. “Did I? I mean, I’m sure I started the process. I heal superfast, so it stands to reason that I could help heal him.”

Corbin whooped, then stood up to haul Orion out of his chair. “Goddess, you did it!”

“Has he shown any signs of waking?” Hawk asked.

That sobered them all up as they stared again.

“No.” Corbin sighed. “Not yet.” He put Orion down. “But maybe he will soon.”

“Well, it’s good to see him looking almost golden,” Orion put in. “You’ll see. He’ll recover.”

For Corbin’s sake, he sure hoped so. Cullen beamed at his brothers. “Maybe I can go back to being happily preggers now and not worry so much.”

Cosmo came to hug him. “Of course you can. I’m so sorry this has all been such a worry.”

“Well, no more of this shit. You need to be enjoying your babies, too.” He winked though, to take the sting out.

“I think I’ll take him back to my place and put him by the rose garden window,” Corbin said, going to lift the guy. “Holler if you need me.”

“Later.” They watched him go, and Hawk finally turned to them all.

“Do you think he laid him in the sun consciously?”

“No.” That was Orion. “But I think he knew on some level that if he was still infected it was time to let him go.”

“Well, I’m glad he seems better. Maybe not out of the woods...” Cosmo rose.

“Hawk, let’s get?—”

A knock at the front door had them all stiffening and exchanging glances. “Who the hell?” Cullen snapped.

Cosmo checked the door camera on his phone. “Yarrow.”

“Huh.” Orion went to open the door. “Have you been bitten by a vampire?”

Yarrow blinked hard, then whistled through his front teeth. “Nope. I miss all the good stuff. I came to ask if anyone is missing a marten.”

“Like a bird?”

“No, that’s martin with an I.” Yarrow held up a weasel-like creature with a super poofy reddish coat and a big puffy tail. “I mean an American marten. Keeps trying to get into the house. Won’t leave me alone.”

Cullen blinked, utterly fascinated. “He’s so pretty.” He held his hands open, and the marten leapt for him.

Orion made a little squeak, but it didn’t matter.

“Oh my god, he’s so cute!” Cullen held his arms open, and the marten just jumped right into them.

Orion made this great noise that sounded sort of like somebody stepping on a dog toy, but it didn’t matter because Cullen was immediately and totally in love. Not in love like he was in love with Tisi or in love like he was in love with Orion—because that would be creepy—but still. In love. “I’m Cullen, it’s nice to meet you. Did you come to be with the babies, little marten?”

The little one chattered, and he tilted his head, listening.

“I don’t suppose that your name is Martin, because that would be really cool.”

The marten stared at him and blew out a hard breath.

And suddenly he knew, much like Tisi had told them his name only hours after Cullen had lamented he didn’t know it, that this was Roderick.

“His name’s Roderick.”

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Cosmo looked over. “You mean it’s not Martin?”

Cullen’s eyes went wide. “I know! I asked him that too, but no. Roderick.”

“I like it.” Cosmo smiled. “Can I pet you?”

Roderick offered Cosmo his head. Hawk watched them, kind of rocking back on his heels a little bit.

“So wait. In Lunastra, we have bears, giant cats, even fierce otters. But they have bears. And yet somehow here, we have a bird and a weasel?”

“Don’t be insulting,” Cullen whispered. He wasn’t sure whether or not weasels and marten were copacetic or if there was some kind of weird specist West Side Story thing going on, but he didn’t want to risk it. “We should find you some food and a nice place to sleep.”

Yarrow was leaned against the doorframe. “Okay, well. You guys are weird, so I’ll talk to you later. I’m gonna go back to my house. Bye.”

Cullen blinked as the door shut. We’ll need to figure out what Roderick likes to eat best and make sure that he’s got a nice place to live.

Cullen rubbed his belly, and their little girl kicked.

Bang.

It was hard enough that it made Roderick jump.

“Oh! Easy!”

“Mate?” Orion came over, frowning. “Did he hurt you?”

“Of course he didn’t hurt me. He’s here to be with the babies. Stop it.” Roderick was going to be great. “No, she kicked. Serena kicked.”

Cullen put Orion’s hand on his belly, and Serena kicked again. Bang.

“Serena, huh?”

He nodded. “Serena. She told me her name is Serena. Our little girl. Like Tisi told us his name.”

Suddenly, like in a rush, Cullen needed Tisi. He needed to hold his son. His son. The thought gave him shivers. Both of Orion’s dads had assured him this little one’s parents must have been destroyed. There was no way they would have allowed anyone to take their baby while they still lived.

And so now Tisi was their son. And he was tired of dealing with shit that wasn’t loving on babies.

He could handle all the rest of the nonsense on earth later.

Right now, there was Elliot and Emily and Tisi, and he just wanted to go. Just be a dad and an uncle. A normal life—if there was such a thing with the dragon-fae, a unicorn, and a pegasus.

Oh goddess, his head hurt.

Love, it doesn't have to be this complicated. Orion walked with him. "Let's go play with the babies. Maybe we'll have some ice cream. But your little gargoyle misses you, and I know that Tisi needs a snuggle."

"Don't forget my Emily." Cosmo hooked his arm with Cullen's. "Come on, Corbin's very busy being Corbin. You and I can be very busy being dads."

He nodded, and they wandered back toward his house. It was nice to have the babies over here because there was always golden light coming through the windows and warming everything up. When they got to where Ed watched the babies, everyone but Elliot was sound asleep.

Elliot was doing one of his wooden puzzles that had dragons and fairies and one unicorn. Elliot was singing to himself. "Dwagon, dwagon, dwagon. Here is a dwagon and a fairy. Hooray, unicorns!"

They cracked up, all of them. It was Cosmo who caught his breath finally. "Absolutely, son. Yay unicorn!"

Elliot beamed. "Wuv all."

"You are pure love, my boy. Shall we sit and play with you?"

"Uh-huh."

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Cullen snorted. “Okay, but someone will have to help me up off the floor. I am well past the fulcrum point now.”

“I can lift you, baby,” Orion said. “Let’s play.”

Ed chittered, Roderick answered, and Elliot giggled.

And suddenly he felt like it might all just be okay.

ChapterTwenty

Orion boogied around the kitchen, scrubbing counters, getting ready to make his first batch of bread from sourdough starter. The Uinta branch of the Rocky Mountain clutch had given him some. Apparently, it was like, fifty years old.

He couldn’t wait.

Tisi lay in a little rocking chair thing on the floor, and Roderick was curled up at his feet. Cullen was napping on the couch just a stone’s throw away, his belly really starting to stick up.

So cute.

“Shake it, Tisi,” he said, grooving along with Daddy Yankee. “Shake it!”

Tisi raised a little fist into the air and squealed.

He was coming out of his tiny shell every day, but they kind of had to keep him partially swaddled or he started to have lift off. Those little wings were strong.

He grinned, rocking his hips as if he was surfing, arms out, singing and fake-rapping to his heart's content. He moved to the fridge to pull out some milk to warm up, and when he turned around, he let out a shriek, almost dropping the milk.

Cullen popped up on the couch, blinking, hand on his belly. "What is it, love?"

"There's a woman in the kitchen. She wasn't here moments ago."

Cullen stood, peering into the kitchen at him, then the woman. "Ah, Arian. How are you?"

"I am well." She gave a faint, enigmatic smile. "How is my nephew?"

He looked at Cullen, raising his eyebrows.

"We believe he is recovering, Lady. Would you like to go see him? He's at Corbin's."

"Yes. But first, may I meet this little one?"

Is she safe? Orion asked his mate.

As houses. She's one of Mother's best friends.

Okay.

"I'm Orion. Pleased to meet you." He held out his hand, and she took it gently.

“Unicorn.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Ah. And this little one is a pegasus.”

“Yes,” Cullen said. “His name is Tisi.”

“Well come, Tisi.” She moved her hand to his forehead, touching his tiny face, and it looked like a blessing of some kind as her hand glowed gold.

His dark limpid eyes watched her, and he giggled.

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“And well met, Orion. Now, Cullen, I should like to see Evander.”

“Of course.” Cullen winked at him. “Orion is making bread.”

“Mmm. I love bread.” She followed Cullen out, and he shook his head.

Damn. That lady reminded him of his Father, Rigel. Stately, deadly, no doubt, and ancient.

He turned the music on again, as somehow Arian had turned it off, and went back to dancing and cooking, but he also made tea and grabbed cookies out of the cookie jar, because he had no doubt the Lady would be back. Should he make little finger sandwiches?

She loves cheese. That was Cullen, and he could feel his mate’s laughter.

Little cheese sammies. Got it. In fact, he had pimienta cheese he’d made yesterday. Homemade was so much better.

So he got the bread mixed up and to its first rise, then made sandwiches and steeped tea, and by the time he was done, Cullen and Arian were back.

The Lady came right to Orion and hugged him. “You saved him.”

“Well, Corbin and I?—”

“No, I mean when he bit you. You healed him. Thank you.”

“I—Hey. I just have good blood.”

“But you gave it freely rather than killing him, which you easily could. So I am grateful.” She studied his little tray. “What is this?”

“White chocolate macadamia cookies and pimienta cheese sandwiches.”

“Ah, I adore strange cheese dishes.”

“Cullen said.” Sometimes his life seemed so surreal. This fae princess was about to have tea with him and his mate and eat orange cheese goo.

Roderick scampered over to the Lady and put his front paws on her leg, chittering.

“Hello, friend,” Arian said. “Is this a good house?”

Roderick answered, really chatting away in...marten.

“I thought so too.”

Can you understand him when he talks?

Cullen arched an eyebrow at him. I knew his name, didn't I?

Oh. Cullen had a real point there. Right. Sorry.

Tisi watched Arian, his ebony eyes sharp and focused.

“Can I hold him?” she asked, and Cullen nodded.

“He would love that. Seriously. Tisi loves a cuddle.”

As if Tisi understood, those chubby arms and legs moved as if he was swimming, the baby obviously trying to get to Arian.

“He’s absolutely beautiful, aren’t you?” She held her arms open and Tisi flew right to her. “Oh, such a brilliant boy!”

Her tinkling laughter filled the air, and it felt like home, oddly, and he relaxed.

Tisi snuggled in, the baby’s wings fluttering like a hummingbird’s.

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“I don’t know how we’re going to keep him on the ground.”

Cullen rolled his eyes. “We will just have to babyproof up high. I don’t see any sense in making something born to fly stay on the ground. That’s just mean.”

Orion looked at his mate and grinned. “Okay, ouch. You have a point. I hear you, and I guess you’re right. Dragons just don’t fly until they’re older, right?”

Cullen nodded. “I flew early, though. All three of us flew early, and who knows what our little one’s going to be?”

“Perfect.” Orion had no doubt. “We call her our butterfly.”

“She’s going to be amazing. The world has never had a baby quite like her born into the world.”

“She’s going to be all right.” Cullen put his hands over his belly, nodding to Arian. “She’s going to be okay.”

“Well, I don’t see how she couldn’t be? She has you and Orion and a new brother.”

Orion just kind of snorted. A half-unicorn, one-quarter dragon, a quarter fae. So, possibly a horn. Possibly wings? Possibly weirdly magical, but then all of them were in different ways.

Stop it, she’s going to be fine. These are butterflies. She’s moving. I’m not the size of a house, so she can’t be coming out in horse form. If you’d worked harder, you could

have found yourself a nice, sweet, unicorn omega to bring home, but you chose me. Oh, he needed to be careful, Orion could tell.

I absolutely did one hundred percent. I walked up to your door.

Following the smell of grilled meat, even though you don't eat it.

Orion didn't point out that Cullen hadn't had a single bite of meat at this point in weeks. He hadn't asked for it. He hadn't craved it. They hadn't commented on it.

"Have you spoken to Zeke in the dragonlands?" Arian asked.

"I have." Cullen grinned at her, his eyes twinkling. "They're having another baby. Oh, they want a boy, I think, this time, but I don't know. They seem to be kind of girl heavy, that pair."

"They're well?"

"They're very happy. I'm busy. There are very many of them, and they're starting to integrate with the other dragons in the village. Arielle and Sebby and Nevvy, they're all growing so quickly. Even Little Stella, who I don't think is ever going to get very big, she's very fierce and happy. She's incredibly happy."

"That's what I like to hear. And your mother, how is she?"

"Good. A little worried about Corbin and your nephew." They all were, Cullen most especially.

"I'll speak to her on that behalf. Not to worry. I know that she is overjoyed to see Elliot."

Orion nodded toward the little boy, sound asleep next to his cunkle. “They have great fun together. Elliot loves to go see her, and they play in the gardens.”

“I’m so glad. It worries me a bit. That they found this baby, you know.”

Cullen nodded. “I didn’t even know—Surely someone would have known if they’d—Where do pegasi even come from?”

“We have them in the Glade. There are a few families, more families than there are unicorns, of course, but I haven’t heard of any gone missing.” Orion held up his hands. “Not that I’ve been home a lot, but surely someone would have told me—I mean, my job is to find lost children—had there been a lost child, I would have found it.”

“You did find it,” Arian pointed out. “Perhaps they were isolated enough that no one noticed.”

“Someone would have noticed if vampires got through to the Glade. My fathers would have noticed.”

“Well then, we must figure this out, because they didn’t.”

“Exactly. So where did this one come from? My fathers saw him, too, and they didn’t recognize him.”

“I will work within my own people to see what we can find out. But I’m not going to open any of the other doorways we have and send anyone out, because the vampires were waiting for Evander somehow.”

“We’ll figure it out,” Orion said. He glanced at Cullen. “But we need to heal Evander up first, and Cullen and I want to focus on his pregnancy now.”

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He could feel his mate melt. Sweet Cullen wanted to come first, and dammit, he should. At least with Orion. That was his mate, after all, and he loved Cullen so much more every day.

Every day.

Of course they had to find out about the vamps, and kind of right now, and they would. But they had to keep their house happy and safe in order to guard the other worlds.

“Of course. Guardian guard thyself.” She smiled faintly once more. “I would take Evander with me, but Corbin seems to be happy to care for him.” Then her brow furrowed maybe a quarter of an inch. “He will wake soon, I hope.”

“So do we all, Lady,” Cullen said. “But he’s far better than he was at first.”

She ate one last pimento cheese sandwich and then, completely out of character, he thought, she licked her fingers. She really did like cheese. “Well, I shall leave you now. I will come back soon to see my nephew. Bright blessing, my loves.”

“Bright blessings,” he and Cullen said, and she walked off, disappearing through a corner in the wall.

“That was wild,” Orion said.

Cullen winked at him, grabbing a sandwich. “She’s a hoot. But thank you for standing up for me and the baby. We need alone time, the four of us.”

“We do. And I need you. With all my heart.”

He leaned down and kissed Cullen, then Tisi, who was back sleeping happily in his father’s arms. “That’s all I can ask for.”

ChapterTwenty-One

“Ithink I’m going to have to put a fence over the top of your crib.” Cullen stared at Tisi, who stared back with his gorgeous ebony eyes from on top of the bookcase.

“He doesn’t seem real worried,” Cosmo pointed out, little Emily in his arms.

“Hims can fly, no fair.” Elliot stared at Tisi, arms crossed, little flames threatening in those gray eyes. Man, if that baby could blow fire, he would. He was getting stony as they spoke.

“Oh, little gargoyle, don’t be mad,” he reached out and tried to stroke Elliot’s hair, but the little one moved away.

“Don’t be mean.” Cosmo clucked his teeth. “You’ll fly soon enough, but first, we have to figure out how to get your cousin down off the bookshelf.”

He nodded, staring up at Tisi and holding his arms out, hoping Tisi would fly down. He was too pregnant to climb up there.

“So what are you going to do if you have another one that has wings?”

He gave Cosmo a look. “Orion is a unicorn, not a pegasus.”

Cosmo shrugged. “So? We don’t know what happens when you mix fae and dragon with unicorn. She could come out with wings. Then you’d have two.”

“Well...” Dammit. “Then I’ll put netting on both cribs. I don’t know.” Cullen shook his head. “I mean, you had a gargoye.”

Cosmo nodded. “Have you met Stella? Brandon and Abe had an owl. There’s no telling how this works.”

“Right. Every baby is different. I just happened to have an airborne baby.” Cullen glanced at Elliot, who was still pouting mightily. “You want to call him down, little gargoye?”

“No,” Elliot snarled. “No. I no like him.”

Okay, that actually hurt his heart a little bit. “You don’t like Tisi?”

“No. I no like babies.”

“Well, you don’t have to like him if you don’t want to.” Little shit. “It’s a shame though, because you’re the oldest cousin, and that’s important.”

Elliot narrowed his eyes, and Cullen could see Cosmo fighting his smile. Someone is really jealous.

Do you think? I thought maybe he was just being an asshole.

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That earned him a glare. Stop it.

So what do we do? Cullen hated that Elliot was so unhappy. He also didn't love that his baby boy was on top of the bookshelf, now sound asleep.

Honestly, I don't know. We've asked Elliot to do a lot here. We've gone from Elliot is an only child to Elliot as big brother and cousin. Add to it his favorite uncle is having a baby, and Corbin is all tied up with, you know...him.

What? They weren't even saying his name now? You mean Evander?

Yes, that's who I mean. Cosmo shot him a glare.

Seems like you're a little jealous too.

Cosmo arched one eyebrow. I don't get jealous.

Are you sure? Because you sure sound jealous to me, Cullen singsonged.

You know I can call Orion and tell him you let the baby nap on the shelf.

You could, but that would be a bullshit move, and we all know that you're lonely because Hawk is over in the dragonlands, okay? So just suck it up and come help me get this baby off the damn bookshelf.

They really, really needed Corbin to fight with. It was way less fun to fight with each other and much more fun to fight with Corbin.

“Yeah, I know. Do you think he’s okay?”

Cullen shrugged and shook his head. “I don’t know. I haven’t been able to see him because, you know, nobody wants any of us to get close, just in case, but it’s just not like Corbin to not go outside.” Even in the wintertime, he was outside doing things, clipping things or rooting things or—He’s just in there with that Evander guy, and he never comes out, and the Evander guy’s not even awake. It’s kind of creepy.

Yeah. I mean, how do you have a conversation for weeks with somebody who doesn’t converse back?Cosmo chewed on his bottom lip, eyes worried.

Okay, you’re both dicks. I can hear you. I’m not...what the fuck? Also, why did you let the baby get on top of a bookcase?

Oh, Corbin! Yay!Hey, you’re busy being with Olivander.

His name is Evander. Stop it.

You mean Everett?Cosmo grinned at him.

I’m going to kick your asses.

That would mean you’d have to come out of your rooms,Cullen pointed out.

I’m fine. He’s in there, he’s talking to me.

Huh.Cullen wasn’t sure he bought it.

I’m serious, he’s talking to me. Just like you two are talking about me constantly when I can hear you. And I miss you both too. We should have dinner.

Together?Cosmo asked.

No, asshole, we should totally have dinner completely separately. I want to see the kids. All of them. I want to see you both. Both of you. Would you just stop? You honestly think that... I mean seriously... I can't even.

You're stuttering.

He misses us.Cosmo was all sparkly eyed.

Get the baby off the bookshelf.Corbin snarled.If you doubt that, I'm going to tell Orion that you let him do this on purpose. And all he'll do is fret.

Be nice or I'll go let Orion bite your whatever he is, your vampire Pomeranian.

No one even remembers that movie,Corbin snapped.

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Sure we do. Blade 3.

I hate you both. I'll get Yarrow to come watch Evander, and we'll have dinner. If we make him butter carrots, he'll do it.

He glanced at Cosmo, who shrugged before handing over Emily and climbing. Just as he got to Tisi, the little one flew back to his crib. Little turd.

Okay cool. Tomorrow we'll do dinner, Cullen said.

Rock on, Corbin told them. I miss you.

We miss you too. And I'm so huge now.

I can't wait to see.

It really seemed like it had been months and months rather than weeks since they'd all spent time together. Things had been nuts.

We'll see you tomorrow, bro, he told Corbin.

Love you.

You too.

Cosmo climbed down, then sat and took Elliot into his lap. "Wanna sit with me for a bit, kid?"

“Uh-huh.” Elliot looked less...stony.

That was good.

He winked at Cosmo, who grinned back. They would plan a menu.

And then, since Orion and Hawk had left them all day, they would make them cook tomorrow.

ChapterTwenty-Two

“How much garlic do I put in the butter?” Hawk asked.

“Uh, do we have powder or paste?”

“I made the paste like you told me last time.” Hawk showed him the goood-up garlic mixed with a tiny bit of salt.

“About half of that.” He was making vegetarian lasagna, and Hawk was going to brown meat for him and Cosmo. Corbin had said the veggie kind was fine.

They were in the big shared kitchen and lounge area, and Cullen was napping on the couch with Tisi, and he looked so pale and tired. It worried him some. All of this stress was making it hard on Cullen, who was getting close to the end of the pregnancy, and his body was really starting to do the wonky.

With Tisi being so energetic, he needed to stick closer to home. Because he didn’t want poor Cullen to get hurt or sick trying to catch up to the baby...

“Okay.” Hawk mixed butter and garlic and then spread it on the bread. “Like that, yeah?”

“Yep. And then in the top oven to brown.”

“Got it. I can cut salad. Go sit with your mate.”

“Thanks, Hawk.” He knew Cosmo would be down with the kids soon, so he did just that, lifting Cullen and Tisi and putting them on top of him on the couch.

He matched his breathing to Cullen’s, taking time to bond a little with his mate. They seemed to have had so little time to simply be together, and he’d heard from Hawk that he’d felt the same. It had been one thing after another since he’d come to the guardian house.

Maybe once the kids were old enough and Corbin worked out his shit with the fae man, Orion would take Cullen on a wee honeymoon to the Glade. The dads would watch the kids, and he and Cullen could snuggle and eat and play.

That sounds so nice, Cullen murmured in his head.

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Then we'll do it.

Okay.

Are you doing all right?

I am. I am not having this baby until after I have my shower.

He chuckled.Right. No popping out the baby until after gifts.

Hey, I need to be able to have nesting. Blankets. Tiny socks.

I hear you.He did. And he hoped everyone backed off the damn stress until Cullen got what he wanted. Orion sent a plea up to the universe, in fact. He wanted Cullen to have such a happy last few weeks or month. To be ready to have their little butterfly.

Tisi stretched, his wings unfurling, and Orion held him down. He'd heard all about the bookcase.Nope. No way, buddy. Resting while Uncle Hawk cooks.

Tisi settled back down with a massive sigh. Like total drama. In his baby form, he was so helpless, but in this form, he was so like a foal. Already up and moving and thinking hard.

Cullen's mental caress made him feel great. Orion wanted to be the one his mate knew he could count on. And it made him so happy to do it.

Lasagna smells so good.

Thanks, baby. Hawk is trying hard on the bread and salad.

He's a good guy, Cullen said, patting his back.

He is. He really is.

They dozed together until Corbin knocked on the door, and Cullen sat up, pushing off on him.

"You don't have to knock, Corbin," he called, levering up.

Corbin came in, his cheeks dark green. "I wasn't sure. I know it's been weird." Corbin came to Cullen and grabbed him, clinging hard, looking a little desperate if his body language had anything to do with it.

He had to be freaking out.

Orion just sat quietly with Tisi, letting the brothers bond, and soon he had Emily and Elliot while Cosmo joined the dragon-fae mind meld.

When they finally broke, Hawk handed out drinks as Orion grinned at Corbin. "Yarrow's carrots are roasting." Yarrow was kind of guarding the front door to the human world as well as keeping an eye on Evander.

"Oh, cool." Corbin came to love on wee Tisi. "Hey, man. How's it going?"

"Good. Good. How's the dude?"

"I think better. I just wish he would wake up."

"What does Arian say?" Cosmo asked.

“That he’ll wake up when his mind has healed from the trauma. Or healed enough.”

“Then that’s what will happen. I’m sorry it’s so hard, though.” Orion put a hand up, and Corbin grinned, pulling him to his feet.

“Making lasagna, huh?”

“Yep. Gonna go rescue Hawk.”

“Thank the goddess!” Hawk called.

He chuckled, moving into the kitchen, listening to the brothers with half an ear. Cullen sounded so happy now, and that was perfect. His love needed downtime. Family time. And he would give all that Cullen needed for as long as he could.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:15 am

Cullen came to him, burrowing into his arms after he checked the oven. “I love you.”

“I love you too, baby.” He hugged Cullen tight, so grateful to be here, to be with his family. His dads were so...remote sometimes as much as he loved them. This family was immediate. Messy.

And perfect.

He could just stay with them for?—

He grunted, looking down at his feet, his eyes widening. “Cullen, I think your water just broke.”

“No!” Cullen looked down at his belly. “I need mini socks! And lasagna!”

“Well, you can still have lasagna after we clean up the kitchen floor.” Cosmo was not helping.

“Absolutely,” Hawk said. “And I’ll go across to the dragons and get you socks. The baby shower was going to be this weekend anyway, right? You two were planning what, four showers? Twelve? Something like that?”

“Hawk, that’s not helping.” Cosmo grinned at his mate, Hawk grinned back, and Cullen started sobbing, which had Tisi flying over to see him and bashing Orion right in the head.

Boom.

“Ouch.” He grabbed his son and rubbed his noggin.

“Sorry, he just yanked out of my arms. He’s a strong little bugger.” Corbin’s eyes were wide from where he had landed on the floor.

“At least he didn’t slide through the baby goo on the floor and then have a dirty coat.”

Orion glared at his brother-in-law. “Cosmo!”

“Sorry, I’m just glad it’s someone else.” Cosmo looked at Cullen. “That would be you. You’re the someone else.”

Cullen was still just standing there. He’d stopped crying, which Orion thought really was Cosmo and Hawk’s purpose, but he looked a little gobsmacked.

“Let’s take you upstairs. We’ll get you cleaned up. And then we come back and have lasagna and then have a baby. Hell, you could have lasagna before and after delivery.”

Cullen glared at him. “I love you, but I really need you to shut up right now and help me get cleaned up. Also, someone needs to watch the baby while we go do that.”

Oh, it always sucked when Cullen was in logical mode. Cullen was the least logical of all of them.

No shit on that, Corbin muttered.

Suddenly, shocking him, his Cullen was a dragon—a relatively small, bright purple, really pissed off dragon, who snapped at him with huge teeth, and said, Now, now would be good.

“Dude, can you give birth as a dragon?” Cosmo’s eyes were huge, and Hawk shook his head.

“I don’t think so.”

Corbin shrugged as Cullen roared. “I don’t think Cullen cares what we think.”

“Fair enough. Cullen can do whatever the hell he wants to. I’m going to get the mop.” Hawk was a good brother.

Orion handed Tisi to Corbin, and then he went to the front door. He couldn’t go out there, but he went to the door and hollered. “Yo, buddy! Yarrow! Could you come help?”

Yarrow popped up like a daisy through the snow burying the front walk. “Totally. I live for this shi—oh my gosh. Hello, dragon, you’re very purple and?—”

Orion nodded. “Hi. Right, so. Cullen’s water just broke. Don’t go in the kitchen. I mean, you can after the mopping, but—” He sort of stood there, feeling like a giant lump. “I don’t suppose that you could be an extra set of hands.”

Yarrow nodded, so happy. “Like I said, I live for this. You take your dragon, who looks very hungry, and I’ll take the flying horse. Who is way smaller as a baby. Can you tell him to become a baby?”

“If you can figure out how to communicate with my son, you’ll be doing better than I have.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am

Yarrow's head tilted. "Aren't you part horse? Isn't there some sort of whinnying situation you could attempt?"

Orion was fairly sure that he had gritted his teeth more in the last six months than he had in his entire life. "He's little; he's a baby, that's all. He just needs to be fed and loved. And he'll learn."

Cullen roared again, and somewhere in that roar, he was fairly sure he heard some more complaining about socks.

"I don't suppose you know how to knit."

"Actually, yes, I'm pretty good at it."

"Great. Have Cosmo find you needles and yarns. I need socks, little socks. By the time the baby comes, I just need little socks in all sorts of colors for little feet."

"Are you sure that it's not going to have hooves?"

He stared at Yarrow as Cullen roared again. "Right. Socks. Knitting. On it, boss. I got this."

Much better. He handed over Tisi and followed Cullen to their house and up to the big bed.

Cullen flopped. Wings flapping, tail swishing, and it was really, really, really pretty. "How come you never went dragony for me before? You're really cute."

Cute?

“Gorgeous.”

Better.

“Seriously. You’re beautiful.” He walked right up to that snapping muzzle and stroked the ridge above one of Cullen’s eyes. “I’ve never seen anyone so beautiful. One day soon, maybe on our honeymoon, we should go for a long run. You can fly. We could just have a ball together.”

Do you think she’s too early?

“No. No, I really don’t. But if you’re worried, we can go to the Glade. We can let the dads help.” They would. They would do anything for their grandchild. He knew that for a fact.

No. If you think it will be okay, it will be okay. You healed someone who’d been bitten by a vampire.

I did, huh? Can we get you cleaned up?

Sure. Um. If I can shift back. I’m trying.

Well, then I’ll get a cloth. Or a couple of wet towels...

Cullen snorted, blowing out little rainbows, and Orion chuckled, heading to the bathroom. He gathered up the stuff to clean Cullen up, and his mate was a man again by the time he came back.

So he looked at the birthline. “I think you’re going to have to have lasagna after the

birth, baby. Good thing Yarrow is knitting.”

“What?” Cullen rose up to try to peer at the birthline.

“Well, she’s coming right along. Let me get Cosmo. He’s done this?—”

Cosmo! That mental bellow was enough to make his eyes bleed.

Cosmo came running up the stairs. “The kids are all having a slumber party with Yarrow and Corbin. Hawk is willing to run up and down the stairs. What can I do?”

“She’s coming.” Orion waved at the birthline.

Cosmo blinked at it. “Wow! Towels. Clean sheets. I’ll get Hawk to get the baby blankets we’d gotten for the shower. I’m still working on the quilt. Now!” Cosmo’s eyes unfocused, clearly so he could talk to Hawk. Then he was bustling over to Cullen and piling up pillows and moving stuff around. “Okay, Cullen, it’s time to push.”

“Already?” Cullen breathed in deep, then let it out as Orion got back with towels. “Hold my hand, mate?”

“Of course, love.” He sat on the bed to support his mate, letting Cullen grab and squeeze his hand. Hard. Wow.

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I have you, love. You can do this.

I can. I'm almost there.

"Push," Cosmo said. "That's it. You're amazing, Cullen."

"I am." Hearts and babies with wings appeared around Cullen, then burst like bubbles.

"Come on, love. She's ready to come out. Come on."

And less than half an hour later, they had a wee pure white baby with a tiny horn on her head, and a pair of wings. Dragon wings instead of bird wings.

"Oh. Oh, love. She has silvery eyes," Cullen told him, crying.

"She's stunning." He couldn't find the words. Orion had no idea what to say when faced with the most beautiful girl child ever. Tisi was clearly the most amazing boy...

"We have the most amazing babies. Oh, love."

Cullen sniffled, nodding hard. "We do!"

Cosmo snorted. "No, those are mine. Here, brother. Hold your little girl." Cosmo was crying some too, sniffing hard. "She's amazing."

"Thank you," Orion told him.

“You’re welcome. I’m going to clean up, and let you two hold her, then I will let you take her to meet her uncles, Orion, while I help Cullen and change the sheets so Cullen can rest. She’ll need to eat.”

“She will.” He sat with Cullen while Cosmo pottered around, and he helped support his butterfly’s head. Their Serena. “She’s so pretty, Cullen.”

“She is.”

Corbin burst through the door, holding up something tiny and knitted. “Hey, guys! Yarrow got a pair of socks done for you.”

Orion beamed at his brother-in-law. “Just in time, Cor. Just in time.”

ChapterTwenty-Three

Cullen hummed, nibbling a honey cake and watching Tisi and Serena toddle around on their little foal legs. He and Orion had the best of both worlds. They had human babies to swaddle and cuddle, and little dragicorn and pegasus babies who could walk and fly.

And in the Glade, the winged creatures all set out to help keep watch over the kids and let Cullen and Orion have a vacation together.

Orion was stretched out on a blanket, book in one hand, a cake in the other, feet crossed at the ankle. He was a study in silver and white, and so beautiful it hurt. And he looked happy. So happy.

“I am, love,” Orion said, clearly hearing his thoughts.

“You don’t regret coming to our front door, then?” He grinned at his mate, knowing

that his lover didn't.

"If he says yes, pop him in the nose," Father said, coming over with two bottles and a huge blanket. "Who's hungry?"

Tisi and Serena came barreling over, their adoration for their grandparents shining through. Da spoiled them mercilessly, and Father's pride in them was so clear.

He laid out the blanket next to theirs and put the bottles aside to gather the children to him, one in each arm. "Ah, hello my winged ones. How is your day so far?"

A chorus of snorts and happy sounds came from them both, their wings fluttering, and he had to laugh at them. Silly, wondrous babies.

Da wandered up with a large picnic hamper. "I have goodies!" he sang out.

The babies abandoned Father in favor of food, and Orion set his book aside, rolling up to sitting so he could lean over to kiss Cullen's neck. "And are you happy?"

"I am. Really really." He hesitated, and Orion frowned slightly.

"What is it?"

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am

“I just worry about Corbin.” His brother was the one worrisome thing in his otherwise pretty idyllic life right now. “I wish Evander would actually wake up.”

The fae man still slumbered on, for all that Corbin said he was talking to Cor in his head. It just—He wanted his brother to be happy and out in his gardens again, prepping them for the spring.

“He will.” Orion stroked his back. “I feel it. So does Arian. Da has some ideas for a tincture, too. I know Corbin is getting him to drink his nourishment.”

“I do have some ideas,” Da said. “I will send you home with some things. And if not, we will bring him and your brother here to heal him.”

Father Rigel raised a dark brow. “We will?”

“Yes.” They had a tiny stare down, and Cullen had to hide a smile, because that was adorbs.

It is, huh? They’re so happy with the grandkids. It’s wonderful to see. Orion kissed his mouth this time, and he leaned hard on his mate.

He could hear Cosmo and Corbin in his head even here, his new family and his old blending so well. He did smile as Tisi nibbled at Da’s hair.

He would have faith.

And he would look forward to whatever came next.

End