



# Dinosaurs, Disasters & Albert Einswine

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**Category:** Romance, Fantasy, Young Adult

**Description:** I have huge man problems.  
Literally, since one of my mates is a T-Rex.

Things are about to get interesting, because my day job happens to be in a museum.

A museum full of dinosaur bones, if you know what I mean.

It turns out my bloodline is older than dirt, and an ancestral matchmaker decided to send me some gifts...aka, men. And not just any men, but dinosaur shifters from the past.

I've read enough paranormal romance to know all about fated mates, but I've never heard of fated dinosaur mates. These men are supposed to be my perfect match, here to help me learn about my magic. Rawr. Yes, they are as sexy as you are imagining.

My life had been a routine of working and spending time watching TV with my pet pig, Albert Einswine. Now I needed to learn to control the magic I never knew I had, learn more about my family line, and help these sexy dino shifters adjust to modern society.

All while hiding a T-Rex sized secret from the world.

To make matters worse, detectives are looking into the explosion I may or may not have caused when my blood mixed with some magic-infused ancient dust, which is a serious problem since the sexy green-eyed detective has my heart flip-flopping in my chest.

**Total Pages (Source):** 58

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

## ARIZONA

Where do pigs keep their money?

In the piggy bank, of course.

\* \* \*

“Ahhh-choooooo!” My sneeze sent a cloud of dust billowing into the air around me. I wiggled my nose, desperately trying to stop the annoying and persistent tickle that would no doubt cause me to sneeze for the umpteenth time that evening.

Blinking my watery eyes, I picked up a clean rag and swiped at another thick layer of dust that lay heavy on the museum archive shelves. Floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with bones, relics, and fossils surrounded me. If the depth of the dust that coated everything was anything to go by, this monstrosity of a room had been neglected for decades.

“We came from dust, and we’ll return to dust. Which is why I don’t dust...because it could be someone I know.”

I mumbled my mother’s favorite quote and wiped at my still teary eyes with my cleanest shirt sleeve. I’d always thought the saying was funny, but surrounded by the very real remains of lives long past, I felt slightly creeped out.

“Think of warm beaches and drinks by the pool, Arizona.” I forced false positivity into the words, hoping to distract myself from hypothesizing about the number of

dead bodies that were probably in the room with me.

The only reason I'd taken this job was to save for a much-needed vacation to sunny Mexico. I enjoyed my day job at the museum, leading tours and selling tickets, but it barely paid me enough to cover my bills. Which made splurging on my dream vacation completely out of the question.

When the museum higher-ups decided to hire someone to clean the storerooms packed full of pieces they'd deemed unworthy to be displayed publicly, I'd jumped at a chance to earn some extra cash. It'd meant giving up my days off and working late several days a week, but I didn't mind. I enjoyed putting in my headphones and being able to work without constant interruptions from the entitled museum guests who thought a certain search engine knew more than I did, or coworkers looking to offload extra work onto me.

The room I was currently cleaning was the size of the large warehouse-style grocery stores where you buy stuff in bulk, knowing that you'll be unable to use it in your lifetime. All the items with insanely high value were on display or being held in another of the museum's back rooms. The items stored in this section of the museum weren't nearly as valuable, which made it slightly less stressful when handling the items, and also meant the museum didn't feel the need to hire security to watch me. They were satisfied with the security cameras that recorded every angle of the room. I still had nightmares where I accidentally knocked over one of the pieces. While they didn't compare in value to the items on display, I'd still be unable to repay the value if I broke something.

Few items ever left this room, and when they did, it was to create elaborate displays for the rarer items that generated crowds and newspaper articles. They were odds and ends, things not valuable enough to draw a crowd, but still too important to toss into the trash. Some were donations that were gifted to the museum from well-meaning benefactors, and they held a higher sentimental value than a monetary or historical

value. The museum curators wouldn't risk offending those wealthy benefactors, so these donations were sent to the abyss that was the storerooms.

Glancing down the impossibly long row, I realized I needed to pick up my pace if I wanted to finish even half of it before I clocked out for the day. A quick glance at my watch showed it was already late afternoon on this Sunday, and I preferred to get home before darkness fell on the city. I wasn't afraid of walking the streets alone... but I wasn't exactly not afraid either.

The clearing of a throat had me spinning around. I snatched up a broomstick, fully prepared to channel my non-existent inner ninja if needed. I spotted Pete, the sweet old man who greeted guests and ambled around the museum all day. My shoulders sagged with relief.

Pete quirked an eyebrow at my makeshift weapon. "Jumpy today, aren't ya, Miss Charcoal?"

I wheezed out a relieved laugh. "Oh! Pete! Being alone in here makes my skin prickle. It's almost as though some of these things are still alive, like ghosts of the past are floating around." A cold gust ran along my arm. My voice lowered to a whisper. "Can you feel it too?" How could he not? I wasn't into all the new-age mumbo jumbo flavor-of-the-week beliefs, but the energy in the room was palpable, and you would have to be dead not to feel something. But not like the sort-of-dead that I was feeling in this room, but like dead-dead... worm food dead.

Pete stared at the broomstick I held as though preparing to joust, and his eyes softened. "No, I don't feel anything but a chill from the old air conditioner. Everything in this room is ancient, and the people are dead and have moved on." His expression changed to one of a worried grandfather. "I think you are spending too much time alone and scaring yourself by imagining things lurking in the shadows. I'm leaving for the day. Why don't you head home too? Get some sleep. You've

barely had any time off for the past month.”

With a reassuring smile, I waved away his concern. “Stop worrying about me, Pete. You know I have an overactive imagination. Once I finish this row, I’ll head home too.”

Pete hesitated but finally gave me a resigned nod and headed out the door, leaving me alone with my music and the shelves filled with fossils. Dead fossils. I eyed them warily, my stomach fluttering. Dead-dead.

Chewing on my bottom lip and procrastinating a bit, I fiddled with the tags on the various bones. Why did I struggle to match up a pair of socks, yet paleontologists could tell which bone belonged to which dinosaur with pretty much zero context?

Magic. It was probably magic. I snorted at the idiotic thought. For that to be true, magic would have to actually exist.

Shaking my head, I turned my attention back to the task at hand. I spent the next hour alternating between sneezing and dusting and dusting and sneezing. Reaching the end of the long metal shelf and out of clean spots to wipe my eyes on my shirt, I decided to stop for the night and pack away my cleaning supplies.

I bent over to tuck my dirty dust rags into the bright yellow cart. My eye caught something glinting on the lower shelf of the row across from me. One I hadn’t cleaned yet. With everything still covered in a half-inch of dust, the sparkle was out of place and shouldn’t have been possible. Moving across the narrow aisle, I reached behind the cracked bowls and various broken pottery items to pick up the small clay vase.

Pulling it out into the harsh overhead lighting, I squinted at the orangish piece of pottery. At only fifteen centimeters tall, it was far too small to have made a decent

water jug. I traced my finger along the intricate design that someone had painstakingly brushed on the tiny vessel long ago.

Slowly turning the vase, I tried to find what could have caught the light and caused the glint. Carefully gliding my fingers across the pottery, another layer of dirt and dust fell away, exposing a green emerald nestled deep into the clay. My breath caught as the emerald sparkled, as though fireflies were trapped in its depths.

I blinked, fully expecting the glittering lights to disappear. It had to be a trick of the light, didn't it? The museum would never have anything valuable hidden back here.

Unable to resist, I reached out the tip of my finger, pressing it against the gem. To my surprise, the emerald was hot beneath my skin. Forget a trick of the light; it had to be my mind messing with me now!

My heart lurched in my chest as a faint click echoed in the quiet room. The emerald lit up like a party glow stick, and a tiny hidden compartment in the vase sprung open.

Crap!

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

I'd seen my fair share of treasure hunter movies and knew a booby-trap when I saw it... and this was a textbook example of one. With a shrill scream, I tossed the vase-of-doom onto the mound of fluffy dusting rags in my cart. I didn't want to break it, which would cost me my job, but I was definitely finished holding it.

My movements were quick, but not nearly quick enough. As the tiny hidden compartment sprung open, it released a puffy cloud of black ash, directly in my face. Since my mouth was open in horror, I sucked in a lungful of the ominous ancient dirt. To make matters worse, more of the soot blew into my eyes, temporarily blinding me.

Coughing and retching, I staggered backward, straight toward the shelf filled with delicate antiques—extremely breakable and utterly irreplaceable on my meager budget type of antiques. I blinked like my life depended on it, trying to clear the grime from my eyes. At the last second, I managed to push away from the shelf.

I wheezed out a sigh of relief over avoiding a catastrophe I could never financially recover from. That relief, much like my ex-boyfriend's ejaculations, was extremely premature and destined to leave me disappointed.

As I shoved my body away from the shelf, my foot caught on the handle of the broom I'd left propped against the tiny cleaning cart. Arms spinning like a windmill, my body careened toward a large crate with all the light-footed grace of the dinosaurs whose bones now filled said crate.

In desperation, I tried to grab something to stop my fall, but my efforts were futile, and I landed in the center of the crate with a bone crunching—whether it was mine or the dinos' bones, I couldn't tell—thud.

The force of the fall sent my body sinking beneath the layers of fossils. That was followed by a sickening sound of vanilla wafers breaking, except it wasn't cookies breaking; it was the more delicate fossil pieces. A thick cloud of sand billowed around me, merging with the heavy dust cloud the creepy little vase had blown in my face.

I sat in stunned silence, half-buried in assorted fossils, all of which used to have tags displaying names I wouldn't dare attempt to pronounce. What a mess that was going to be to sort out. Rubbing the last of the gritty dirt from my eyes and reaching out, I grabbed the sides of the crate to haul myself up, only to wince when a searing pain shot through my wrist.

Gingerly turning my arm, I bit my lip to hold back a cry. A three-inch-long cut traveled the length of my flesh from wrist to elbow. Thankfully, nothing vital had been slashed, so I wouldn't bleed out. Probably. The wound was still leaking enough blood to make me queasy, and I didn't need to be a psychic to know that stitches were in my near future. I whimpered, more at the thought of spending the evening at an emergency clinic than from the pain.

A soft glow flickered to life, bathing the crate in a beautiful orange glow.

"Aw, heckity-heck-heck!" I yelped, not caring if I spoke out loud. With Pete gone home, there was no one in the museum to hear me. "You do not see a light, Arizona. You abso-freakin-lutely do not see a light."

My mind-over-matter skills were clearly lacking because instead of the light fading, it blazed brighter until it lit the entire storeroom. It was beautiful, comforting, and weirdly enough, it seemed friendly.

Nice try, mother trucker. I knew the drill, and I wasn't about to go toward the beautiful light, no matter how welcoming it tried to make itself seem. I resisted the



urge to stick out my tongue. Barely. One day I would die, and I didn't want to tick off the pretty light... just in case it held a grudge.

Slowly reaching out to grab the edge of the crate, I prepared to pull myself free, bracing for the sharp sting in my arm. My chest tightened in anxiety as my body moved far slower than my brain was commanding it to. In fact, everything seemed to have crept nearly to a stop for me.

The second hand on the wall clock moved slower than molasses, and my uneven breathing grew slow enough to make even the most skilled yoga teacher jelly. I wondered vaguely if I'd entered the twilight zone. Was that even a thing? Or was it just an old TV show? Maybe I was unconscious, and this was a dream. The last option was the best out of my available options, which honestly sucked. I didn't have to ponder the weirdness of time, or the reality of, well, reality, for long. The deafening roar of an explosion brought everything back into sharp focus with a burst of speed that was second only to the speed of Black Friday shoppers spotting an open door.

The impact blew my body from the crate with enough force to launch me through several time zones. I began wishing it would launch me into next week because I was beyond ready for this night to be over.

My ears weren't just ringing. Oh, no. Alarm bells banged into the sides of my muddled brain as my body smacked against the cold concrete floor.

With immense effort, I struggled to open my eyes. Horror dawned on me. My eyes were open.

I just couldn't see.

Icy terror washed through me, taking with it what little that was left of my courage

with it. Violent coughs threatened to pull every muscle in my chest while my mouth filled with the acrid scent of something burning.

Was something on fire? Had it been a bomb? That would explain the eardrum-bursting roar and the explosion. I wondered how much damage the bomb had done. Would the roof collapse on me? Without being able to see, how would I escape?

Adrenaline coursed through my body, giving my confused mind the hard shove it needed to fight for survival. As I tried to heave myself off the floor, the cold of what could only be steel pressed me down, pinning my body to the concrete. Over and over, I pushed against the metal. It didn't budge. Switching tactics, I tried to wiggle out from under the mess. My eyes burned with tears as the gravity of my predicament settled on me, heavier than the twisted metal cutting into my flesh.

It was useless. I wasn't strong enough to free myself.

I should've taken the heavenly light up on its offer because that would have been a far more pleasant way to bite the dust. Far better than suffocating or being burned alive. Still not able to see the situation around me; I didn't know which was likely to come first.

The crash as something massive collapsed onto the floor near my head had me screaming in fear. I screamed until my throat was raw, all the while knowing there was no one to hear my pleas for help.

Another roar shook the building, and I nearly peed myself from the shock of it. Was this a terrorist attack? How many bombs had been set in the museum? Drywall fell from above, knocking the wind from my lungs and forcing the metal to cut deeper into my body. I tried to cry, to move... to breathe. But it was all in vain.

So, death by crushing it was.

The floor beneath me shook as chunks of the ceiling continued to fall, slamming into the shelves and sending them crashing to the floor. I was being buried alive. Instead of my past flashing before my eyes, all the exciting things I'd wanted to experience before I died popped into my mind. I'd lived an okay life, but it had been far from an adventure. I fought back a sob as I thought about my apartment and my mini pig, Albert, who was waiting patiently for me to come home. And then there were my parents. They were going to be devastated by my death. A pang of guilt twisted my insides. I was supposed to have lunch with them tomorrow, but I wasn't going to make it.

Closing my eyes, I gave up trying to regain my vision. I relaxed beneath the layers of debris, no longer fighting. My lungs strained with each shallow breath, and my head swam from lack of oxygen. Burning tears leaked from the corner of my eyes as I did the one thing I'd never done in my life.

I gave up.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

ARIZONA

What do pigs use as soap?

Hogwash.

\* \* \*

Idrifted between consciousness and unconsciousness. I thought maybe I was dead, right up until the crushing weight of debris was lifted from my oxygen-deprived body. My lungs spasmed, knife-like pain stabbing my chest as I sucked in the foul-tasting air. I was stubbornly clinging to life in much the same way cheap toilet paper clings to an unsuspecting butt.

Rough arms wrapped around my body, jerking me off the floor and dragging me away from the smoke and collapsing ceiling. I was thankful for the rescue, but dang, the guy could use some pointers on how to handle the injured. My hearing was nearly useless, but the terrifying sound of another bomb going off somewhere near us had my body trembling in fear.

Cracking open my eyes, I was met with the glorious sight of flickering light and fuzzy outlines. Overwhelming relief swelled inside me. While I still couldn't see well enough to make out much more, it gave me hope that if I managed to survive this ordeal, my vision might return.

As the person moved me farther away, every inch of my battered body radiated pain, especially my ribs. They felt like they'd been bruised—or worse. Even with the

weight of the debris off my body, I was struggling to take in air. More concerning was the weird sucking sound that emanated from my chest with each breath I took.

With a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, I knew there wasn't any way I'd be avoiding a trip to the hospital. And that meant my vacation was likely out of the question since I'd need to use my savings to cover my medical bills instead. I knew what happened tonight was far bigger than a vacation, and I should be thankful to be alive, but my mind latched onto the intense disappointment, and fresh tears leaked from my eyes.

Hasta la vista, Mexico.

My ears rang from the explosions, but through the racket, I heard a loud hiss. Great. A gas leak was just what I needed to really take this night to the next level. We should be nearing the end of the dark hallway. But I knew what stood in our way of escape: a reinforced steel door. My heart sank. Whenever I exited through the door, I had to put my full body weight into it, and that was after my keycard had unlocked the bolts, locking it into place. With the alarm bells ringing, the bolts were likely secured and not able to be unlatched without the master key now. We were trapped.

"Too. Strong—" I struggled to speak, but stopped when the dark shape of my rescuer slammed into the door. With a screech, it bent like a tin can and flew outside into the empty parking lot.

"Dang. Youuu're strong." The words came out slurred, and dizziness made my head swim. The museum's structure must have been damaged pretty badly if this man had been able to knock the thick steel door down like a stereotypical superhero. A weird half hiss, half growl was the only response I received. Who could blame him? I was betting his shoulder hurt like a witch. He'd slammed into that door like a freaking wrecking ball.

I giggled, my mind swirling like I was on a merry-go-round from a roadside carnival that was wobbly, covered in duct tape, and possibly drunk. I started groggily humming. Logically, I knew that was a bad sign. No sane person would find anything about this situation the slightest bit humorous. Was I going into shock? Instead of reacting to the severity of the situation, my body responded by trying to hum the catchy song about wrecking balls. That was a definite mistake, and one that sent searing pain shooting through my chest.

My giggle turned to a groan, and the steel band of arms around my waist tightened. This dude must be ripped.

Yummy. Eye candy!

Unfortunately, it was hard to appreciate some eye candy when you couldn't see. My eyesight was improving, but at a rate slower than I was happy with. A street lamp in the parking lot cast a soft light, and I was able to make out the fuzzy shape of the royal blue dumpster and the museum's van. The van was locked up tight, and they kept the only set of keys locked in the curator's office. I'd walked to the museum that morning. This was going to be a problem since I was in no shape to walk three steps, let alone to walk across town to the nearest clinic.

I needed an ambulance, and I hoped the stranger had a cellphone because mine was no doubt buried under a pile of rubble. I was pretty dang proud I'd managed to stay conscious. Well, mostly.

"Do you think—" The sucking in my chest made every word a challenge. "You. Could call—"

That's all I could gasp out before dozens of stars twinkled in my vision, and not the kind nestled high in the night sky. No, these were the beautiful, sparkly type of stars that signaled my tenuous hold on consciousness was fading fast. And I really wanted

to see my rescuer before that happened.

I muddled through the quicksand in my mind that was sucking me into the darkness. My brain seemed to be fragmenting, confusing what was real and what wasn't. What if my rescuer pulled that disappearing crap act? I was one of those people who couldn't figure out whodunit until the very end of a book, so I'd never figure out who he was. Panic bubbled in my chest, my mood becoming more unstable than my pulse. He hadn't even sung for me! I wouldn't be able to recognize him later by the sound of his voice! I could end up married to a sea witch instead of my hero, all because of a case of mistaken identity. I wouldn't get my happily ever after. Tears streamed down my cheeks at the tragedy of it all.

In the middle of my pity party, a new thought wormed its way to the forefront of my crumbling mind. What had this man been doing in the museum in the first place? A keycard was needed to enter or exit, and no one but Pete and I were supposed to be in the back of the museum today. My head throbbed, the strain of working through the puzzle causing a migraine. Or maybe the whole ancient dust in my face or being crushed by debris had caused the skull-pounding headache.

The mystery man dropped me onto the sidewalk. Well, not quite dropping me. It was more like he laid me down—roughly.

“What. The. Heck.” Each word was a harsh hiss, but the lack of oxygen took most of the heat from my tone.

I lay panting on the sidewalk. The night air was cool, but it did nothing to stop the sweat that beaded my skin and dripped into my eyes. Who knew breathing was such hard work? If I made it through the night, I would never take it for granted again.

A shadow blocked up the hazy light from the streetlamp, and the man leaned over me, his body taking shape. Except it wasn't the shape of a human. He was a giant

lizard man thing?

Good goddess! I was in worse shape than I'd realized if I was already hallucinating.

The head of the lizard moved closer to my face. Wait. He wasn't a lizard; he was a dinosaur. Which made no more sense than him being a lizardman.

I had to give props to my brain, though. This illusion was crazy realistic. A new thought wormed through my mind. What if the old dirt I'd inhaled was some ancient drug to help people see visions? That might explain what I was seeing. Forest green scales ran the length of his head and across the parts of his body that I could see in the dim light. Yellow eyes glowed as they looked at me, and long catlike slits in the pupil sent a shiver down my spine. His eyes held humanlike intelligence, which was more than a little terrifying in a powerful monster. Every fiber of my being wanted to run for my life, but my trembling muscles were too weak to sit up, let alone run for my ever-loving life.

The creature's head tilted to the side, and brilliantly white teeth grinned at me like I was the yummiest looking dinner he'd ever seen.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

“Grandma, what big teeth you have,” I wheezed out, ridiculously relieved to know I would at least die with my lame sense of humor intact. I doubted the lizardman could speak English because of all the night’s impossibilities. An English-speaking lizardman seemed like a preposterous stretch. Even if he could, my words were faint and barely intelligible. I needed a doctor, and fast.

I choked on a scream when a crash came from the building, causing the concrete under my body to tremble.

“Bomb. Need to get further away,” I whisper-wheezed to the reptile who paced beside my body. If he’d been human, I would have thought it was from anxiety. But that was impossible. A dinosaur wouldn’t be worried about me. More likely, he was simply eager to get started devouring me.

Yep, I was losing my tentative grasp on sanity if I thought this predator was showing emotion. Also, why did the idea of him devouring me have me blushing instead of screaming in fear? It confirmed what I had always suspected—I was one sick puppy. My mom had been right. All the alien romances I devoured at night when I couldn’t sleep were to blame.

A deafening roar stole away the bit of my hearing that had returned. This time, the terrifying sound was different. It wasn’t a bomb; this was an actual roar. If every lion on earth released their loudest roar at the same time, it would still have sounded weak compared to this bone-vibrating sound. What beast could make a sound like that?

I didn’t have to wait long for the answer.

The glow of the street lamp and the moon were blocked as the massive shadow moved over me. I stopped breathing, partly out of shock and partly because it was becoming too hard to pull air into my lungs anymore.

When I recognized the beast for what it was, my heart tripped, and my soul desperately tried to flee from my body, not wanting to stick around for what was likely the grand finale of this night from Hades.

It was a freaking T-Rex.

My gaze darted back to the shorter beast, and things clicked into place at a snail's pace. He wasn't a lizard, but rather a dinosaur as well. I racked my brain, trying to remember the names of the various dinosaurs.

I recalled seeing a dinosaur like the dark green one in several movies, the ones that were smaller but faster and usually portrayed tearing people apart. Some type of raptor? That's what he was! I was assuming it was a 'he.' How did you figure out a dino's gender? Raptors were supposed to be the inhumanly and exceedingly intelligent ones, right? Or was that just a movie thing?

His eyes were locked onto my wounds. Was he concerned or just looking for my weaknesses so he could attack? Eyeing him warily, I tried to push myself back toward the building. What if it hadn't been a bomb at all, and these two had created all the damage? How were they in existence right now? This had to be a sick prank. There was no other explanation that made any sense. Who was I kidding? Nothing had made sense from the moment I picked up the clay vase, and it farted prehistoric dust in my face.

I'd managed to push my dying body two bloody inches before the raptor's sharp gaze locked onto me. I froze, caught like a deer in the headlights.

The supposed-to-be-extinct reptile stomped toward me, chittering angrily. The sound was more bird-like than I'd have thought it capable of producing. The T-Rex answered with a powerful huff that blew my sweat-soaked hair away from my face while drying it in place.

Idiot. I wanted to slap my head. How do you know it was talking angrily? You speak dino now?

I knew my mean inner voice was right. There were exactly zero reasons for me to know the raptor's emotions. But I did. He was angry with me for moving.

Darting a look around, I prayed the welcoming light from earlier would return. I would be nicer to it this time, and I'd happily skip into its glowy depths without a peep. But alas, the night continued to darken. Apparently, the light was throwing me the finger, having decided I wasn't worth coming back for.

I whimpered, feeling more alone than ever before. How would anyone find me in time? I needed help, but when I tried to speak the words, my lips refused to move, and nothing came out. My heartbeat was growing faint, my body beyond exhausted. I fought to keep my eyes open, but they were growing too heavy.

Light erupted around the T-Rex. It wasn't the buttery yellow-orange glow from before, but a beautiful bright blue. His entire form shimmered like a mirage in the desert before the T-Rex disappeared, leaving me weirdly disappointed that he'd been nothing more than a figment of my imagination. I was terrified of him, but at the same time, I wanted him to be real.

A man stepped from the shadows behind the antsy raptor. I half expected the raptor to jump on him and rip an arm off or something. But the creature stepped aside, making room for the man as he hurried toward me. For his part, the man seemed oblivious to the raptor, striding by him without so much as side-eyeing the dino. That was logical

since the raptor was a figment of my imagination.

I fought to keep my eyes open, wanting to make sure the man knew I was still alive... or at least mostly alive. Maybe it wasn't too late for me to survive this. Whatever this was.

The man kneeled by my side. It turned out I wasn't dead enough to ignore the fact he was naked and giving me a great show more than proving to me that I'd guess right. He was most definitely a man. Honestly, I could think of much worse ways to go than admiring this man's delicious physique.

He was built like a wrestler, not the chubby ones, but rather the ones built like military tanks. The kind of man who looked like he could catch a missile out of the air and break it in half. He probably ate nails for breakfast and bench-pressed baby elephants for funsies. No wonder my delusional brain had imagined him as a T-Rex!

My gaze drifted lower. Who could blame me? I bet anyone who knew they were dying, and knew they wouldn't have to face potential embarrassment later, would do precisely the same thing. And if anyone claimed differently, they were lying through their teeth.

Man, oh man! Forget horses, this man was hung like a—dinosaur?

I would have been worried about drooling, but thankfully my mouth was drier than the desert the museum's fossils had come from.

The stranger's warm palm slid along my jawline, the gesture almost tender. I would have expected him to have checked my heartbeat first. But his gesture had been loving rather than clinical or detached.

Broken as I was, I was surprised when something inside me flickered to life, my body

responding to him in a way I'd not experienced before. It made the fact that I was dying extremely depressing, because I'd miss the chance to see where this attraction might have led.

You can't leave me, my queen.

My body jerked, startled by the deep soothing voice drifting through my mind. A sense of comfort wrapped around me like the softest of blankets. It was incredible and worrisome. I was imagining voices in my head and physically responding to them. Tears blurred my vision. I didn't want the voice to be another hallucination.

## Page 5

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The entire night had been one weird impossibility after another. At any moment, I expected a TV crew to pop out and tell me this was all part of a messed-up prank. But even in my confused state of mind, I knew that wasn't the case.

My injuries were too severe for this to be a joke, and the pain from those injuries was far too real to be a nightmare. Either the rules of reality weren't quite what I'd been raised to believe, or I had lost my grip on sanity.

Lying on the rough pavement, sweating profusely from the effort just to breathe, I realized I wanted the dinos to be real. I wanted this sexy naked man who was brushing the damp strands of hair away from my face to exist. I wanted the raptor who stood guard over me to be real. My eyelids drooped, and with a sheer force of will, I kept them from closing completely, knowing that I would likely never see these two again once I drifted into unconsciousness.

I am real, and I won't let you die.

Those were words that every little girl who dreamed of being a princess and finding her white knight in shining armor grew up hoping to hear. I desperately wanted to feel the lips of the man who touched my mind with his words against my own lips.

My pleasure. His husky baritone voice purred, the words a sensual caress in my mind.

The muscular, naked man at my side leaned toward me. His hand gently slid beneath my head, cradling it in his massive palm as he angled his head so that our lips met. The explosion that followed wasn't caused by a man-made bomb... but it wrecked my world just as effectively.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

ARIZONA

Why should you never rob a bank with a pig?

They always squeal.

\* \* \*

His lips melded against mine, tasting of sand and exotic spices. He slid one hand beneath my head, using it to tilt my head and give him better access to explore my mouth.

Completely lost in our kiss, I wasn't prepared for the heavy weight of his left hand as it pressed down on my chest. Hard.

I cried out, but he didn't seem to notice and simply swallowed my cry. Sharp bits of debris dug into the skin of my back as the hand on my chest pushed me harder into the concrete. I tried to breathe, but I couldn't get my lungs to expand with the weight of his palm bearing down on me.

Wrenching my mouth from his, I gave a weak scream. Grabbing onto his wrist with both my trembling hands, I tried to push him away, but he was about as movable as a brick wall.

Don't fight me. I don't want to injure you by mistake.

"You are"—I panted—"hurting me."

It cannot be helped. To heal, you will have to endure pain.

I want to tell him I didn't need inspirational sayings. I preferred to get my self-awareness advice from the same place as everyone else—social media memes. What I really needed was a hospital, surgery, and pain medication.

I do not understand your thoughts. Be still, and let me care for you.

My heart must have a pain kink, because it pounded harder at his words. Meanwhile, my mind was struggling to decide what our next step should be. The clear winner would be to run away and find help... the medical kind that could actually save my life. Obviously, I wasn't in any shape to crawl, scoot, roll, walk or run. Which meant option number one was out.

My brain's backup plan was to forget the part about me needing a hospital and beg him to kiss me like I was dying... which I probably was.

He made the decision for me, capturing my lips with a need that made me dizzy. Or was I dizzy from low oxygen and blood loss?

Focus on my kiss. I regret what comes next.

Dang. Normally you waited until after sex to say you regretted what happened. This guy must have serious performance issues if he was apologizing before we even jumped into bed together.

His hand grew warm, hotter than the eye of a stove. Agonizing pain sizzled through my body, scorching every last nerve ending. The scent of something burning filled the air. It was disgusting, and my throat tightened as my stomach rebelled.

At the same time, the stranger's kiss shifted from passionate to something closer to



CPR. He'd stopped stealing the breath from my lungs, and instead, he blew his own breath into them. His breath traveled down my throat, more comforting than a gulp of warm soup on a snowy day. It was nice, and more intimate than I could have dreamed.

Even through my pain and confusion, my body stirred with a craving like nothing I'd ever experienced. Pain and passion twisted together into a single unfathomable sensation that threatened to destroy the last of my sanity.

If I had the full use of my body, there was zero doubt in my mind that I would have jumped him on the spot and dealt with the consequences of my irrational actions later.

One-night stands had never been my thing. I had to catch feelings for a guy before I was willing to do the deed of darkness with him. I was blaming the ancient dirt. It being a powerful drug was the only explanation for this level of need.

There is much more to this than you know, but now is not the time for explanations. Be still, My Queen.

Naked Man had a lot to learn if he thought I would take orders from—

My body jerked, arching up off the concrete like a scene from an exorcism. Opening my eyes, the brilliant blue light encircled us, while the buttery yellow glow was back. But with a shock, I realized it was radiating from my chest.

A scream built in my throat, but my body was stuck in suspended animation. I could see, hear and smell, but my body refused to obey even the simplest of commands.

Almost finished—

My body relaxed back onto the concrete, and the man sat back on his heels. His eyes searched my face, looking for something. But what?

I closed my eyes, trying to ignore the sexy-as-french-fries naked man, and the dinosaur pacing a few feet away.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

Breathing in a deep breath, I tried to take stock of my body, stopping in shock when I realized I'd taken a deep breath. I hadn't been able to breathe until the man had nearly fried my insides like a scrambled egg. But suddenly I could?

Breathing out, I gulped in another deep breath just to double-check I hadn't hallucinated my miraculous healing. My lungs expanded and deflated perfectly. There was no pain, and the horrifying sucking sound was gone.

Since being dragged from the building, I'd been trying my best to ignore the pain of being crushed and sliced by the falling debris. But now I opened my mind, bracing myself for the onslaught of pain.

It didn't come.

I was pain free. No headache, no crushing weight in my chest, no bone-deep cuts along my exposed skin. Nothing. In fact, I hadn't felt this good since, well, I couldn't even remember how long ago. Maybe never?

Flattening my palms on the cold sidewalk, I carefully pushed myself into an upright position. I waited for dizziness or nausea to overwhelm me, but my head remained astonishingly clear.

"This is amazing!" I tilted my head to look for cuts along my legs or arms, but the skin was smooth and unmarred.

A warm hand rubbed the small of my back, the gentle touch reassuring. Turning, I locked eyes with the man who'd somehow saved me. His eyes were dark, a rich

umber brown. I caught a glimpse of his perfect white teeth behind his plump, kissable lips. His skin appeared as though he'd been kissed by the sun, slightly darker than mine, and it almost glowed. There was a faint smattering of freckles across his Romanesque nose. His face was framed by long, silky black hair. He had a wild, untamed edge to him that made him sexier than any of the perfect male models who were plastered around the city on billboards.

Electricity shot from where his hand rested on my back, straight to my girly bits with the same subtly you would get by sticking a fork in a light socket. I'd been touched before, but never had my body reacted to anyone like this.

Maybe I was still feeling the effects of the dirt-drug? Or perhaps this was the normal reaction to a sexy naked man saving your life? I wasn't sure, but now that my body wasn't in a desperate battle to survive, it'd decided we should focus our attention on other matters... ones best enjoyed when you were alive.

As his hand moved down my back, I gasped out a moan, quickly slapping a palm over my mouth to cover the sound. When did I moan from nothing more than a pat on the freaking back? I tried to remember how long it had been since I'd taken a tumble in the sheets. Then I remembered that the man could read minds, and he was watching me with intense interest.

Besides, it didn't matter how long it had been. Clearly, it had been too long if his hand on my back could elicit that type of response. I wasn't a vocal lover, so this was both weird and embarrassing.

That is because you've never had the right partner. I will keep you screaming all night.

My mouth fell open in shock at his absolute confidence. Taking advantage of my surprise, he leaned forward and kissed me soundly on the lips. I moved to push him

away, but my traitorous arms wrapped around his neck and pulled him closer.

That kiss was the stuff of legends. Songs could have been made about it, and books written about it. It was the most mind-blowing kiss of my life, made even better by the lack of pain. His hands slid down along my rib cage to grip my waist. Pulling me onto his lap—a still very naked lap—he settled me so that I straddled him.

Blushing, I tried to ignore the fact that his erection was pressing against my ripped pants like a hot iron. We were strangers to each other, and anyone running around naked in the city was likely suffering from some issues.

This was the last person on earth I should be making out with... so why did it feel like he was put on earth for me? Our bodies fit together like a hand in a glove. It felt like he was made for me.

Because I was.

His comment was enough to pull me from my too-good-to-be-true waking dream. My body ached with lust, but I managed, barely, to yank my head out of the fog.

That's when it hit me how terrible our situation truly was. Either I was still hallucinating, or I was looking at a freaking dinosaur and a naked man who needed to find a loincloth before he got arrested. While I was a fan of nudity, it was sadly still illegal in this part of the world. I'd watched enough TV to know that I needed to get these men somewhere safe.

If there was even a chance that they were truly dinosaurs, I didn't want them to end up in a secret government lab as test subjects. Just the thought of being separated from them had fear shredding my heart into confetti. It was ridiculous how I could feel so attached to them this quickly, but that seemed like a problem to deal with later.

There was also the matter of the museum's storeroom. I needed to call in someone about the damage. But what if they asked me to wait for the cops? That would raise a heck of a lot of questions about my two unusual companions.

Think. Think. Think. I leaned away from Naked Man and rubbed at my temples, trying to figure out the best course of action.

I would head home, and when the museum called to ask about the storeroom, I would claim I'd hit my head and didn't remember anything about what had happened. When in doubt, amnesia was definitely the way to go. No one could argue with brain damage. And since I still wasn't 100 percent sure I wasn't suffering from it, it should be an easy act to sell.

The plan wasn't without flaws, but I certainly couldn't tell them what had really happened. At least not yet. Not until I knew what was going on.

My eyes darted between the raptor and the naked man, still doubting my sanity and whether they were real.

I am real. We are both real. His words whispered through my mind.

"Why don't you answer me out loud?" I asked, my voice a hoarse whisper.

I can understand your thoughts, but I am unfamiliar with the language you speak. It sounds nothing like the tongue I spoke during the time we walked the earth. Communicating mentally is the best for now. At least until I have time to study modern tongues.

He reached out, stroking my jaw with his calloused palm. Without thinking, I leaned into his touch. It was as though he couldn't keep his hands off me... and I didn't want him to.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

My Queen, Zonkut grows anxious. Do you have a dwelling nearby?

“Zonkut? His name is Zonkut?” I asked, pointing at the raptor.

Yes. And I am Rezkac. His deep, silky voice had all sorts of naughty images sliding through my mind.

“Rezkac.” His name felt strange on my tongue, but it fit the man.

Do you have a dwelling? Rezkac prompted.

“Yes.” I dragged out the word as I eyed his naked frame and the dinosaur pacing nearby. There wasn’t a chance I could sneak them unseen through the city. Not a freaking chance.

I chewed my lip, watching the giant reptile stamp its large clawed foot. Rezkac said he was anxious, but he seemed angry to me. But I wasn’t exactly a dino expert, so what did I know?

“Can he, like, turn into a man? Like you did?” I asked.

Were they werewolves? I’d read a few of those books too. No, if they were werewolves, they would turn into wolves. These men turned it into dinosaurs. So would that make them weredinos?

Your thoughts are confusing. We are dinosaur shifters. We can shift our forms between that of our animal and that of a man. This is achieved by the bending of

energy and magic. It allows us to create our different forms and fit our essence into them.

“Can you become other things?” I needed to stifle my curiosity if we were going to escape this mess.

No. Our DNA specifies what creature we have the ability to shift into. Our skill with bending is what makes it possible for us to take that form or take the human form. There were many of my kind who became stuck in one form or the other and never had the ability to swap forms.

“That makes sense,” I answered, although honestly, it made about as much sense as advanced calculus, and I failed out of Intro to Algebra. “Can you get him to shift into a human? It will be a heck of a lot easier to explain a naked man than a dinosaur. Even though it’s getting late, there will be a lot of people on the streets, and it’s not like we can take a rideshare with two dinosaurs.”

Rideshare? Rezkac’s brow wrinkled in puzzlement. If you wish to share a ride, I can shift back to my beast form. It is large enough to give you a comfortable ride.

“No, that’s not what I meant at all. A rideshare is where you call people on your phone, and they’ll come and pick you up. They charge you a fee, but you don’t have to worry about driving your own car.” I stood from his lap, pacing the sidewalk.

I’m sorry, My Queen. This concept makes no sense to me. To answer your question from earlier, Zonkut can shift, but it’s challenging to shift when we are experiencing extreme emotions. It is far easier to survive in our beast body. He rose to his feet with the gracefulness of a dancer. Why was he so perfect?

We lived many, many years in this form. It is less vulnerable than this fleshy human body. Rezkac motioned at his muscled body in disgust while I discreetly wiped my lip



to check for drool.

“Can you try to get him to shift?” I asked hopefully.

As you wish. Rezkac bowed his head toward me and then turned his attention to the huffing raptor.

He released a string of strange clicks, chirps, and rumbles that reminded me of several movies I’d watched with alien creatures. Until that moment, I hadn’t thought humans were capable of producing those types of noises without the aid of burritos or food poisoning.

The raptor seemed to understand and disagree. He stomped its massive foot, cracking the concrete beneath it. I took a discrete step backward. I didn’t want to abandon them to the white lab coats, but I also didn’t want to be a dino snack.

Rezkac released an angry barrage of sounds. I didn’t have to speak the language to recognize the fact that Zonkut was getting cussed out. The raptor dropped his head in defeat. Light began to swirl around him, transforming the raptor into my prince charming.

Zonkut wasn’t as tall as Rezkac, and appeared a few years younger. His hair was blonde and fell just below his shoulders in a tangled mess. His skin was marked with tribal tattoos and scars. Tremors shook his body, and his eyes snapped up, locking with mine.

He is having trouble holding this form. Your touch would help to calm the stress he is experiencing. Rezkac reached out a hand toward me, coaxing me to come to him.

My survival kicked in, albeit belatedly. Darting a look around, I checked for an escape. I didn’t find one, and I doubted I would have taken it if I had found one. As

terrifying as the raptor appeared, I wanted to touch him. There was this strange draw, like an invisible rope pulling me forward.

My main concern was how did one go about calming an upset human-dino man, anyway?

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

ARIZONA

What do you call a karate trained pig?

A pork chop.

\* \* \*

Arm shaking, I reached out to offer him a handshake. Zonkut laced his fingers through mine and drew me forward. Caught off balance, I tumbled against him.

“Ompf!” My words were muffled against his washboard abs. I resisted the urge to lick them. Barely.

Shaking my head to clear it of the powerful ancient dirt juju, I tried to step away, but Zonkut’s arms wrapped around me. Our bodies melded together as perfectly, just as Rezkac’s body and mine had fit together.

Zonkut breathed deep, his nose buried in my hair. He followed by releasing a series of soft whistling chirps.

He is pleased you are his mate and relieved you are unharmed. Zonkut was terrified you were going to die when we had only just found you. Rezkac paused, head tilting to the side as Zonkut whistled again. Something glinted in Rezkac’s eyes as he spoke again. Zonkut smells your desire and looks forward to mounting your body many times in the near future.

I staggered away from him, horror and horniness battling for dominance. He could smell me? THAT? We'd just met, and he was already thinking of taking me to bed. I should have been offended. Instead, I was flattered. He was the most gorgeous man I'd ever laid eyes on, and he wanted me.

I wasn't ugly, but I was ordinary. Not tall enough to be sexy, but not short enough to be cute. My hair refused to lie flat, but also refused to curl. I had okay curves, but I'd missed the boat on big boobs or a juicy butt. I was the girl next door, the kind guys liked for a best friend, but not a hot girlfriend who they could show off.

How many thousands of years had it been since he'd last seen a female? I knew that when Rezkac saw the beautiful girls of the city, his interest in me would vanish. But until then, I would relish his attention.

Both men snorted. Apparently, that was a sound that had kept the same meaning since the beginning of time.

You are the most beautiful of all women on earth. No other can capture our attention. We belong to you. Rezkac's tone was patient, as though he were explaining things to a child.

I tried to ignore the way every part of my body responded to his words. We didn't have time for me to get distracted again. I was surprised that the fire department hadn't already been alerted. There must have been a bigger disaster somewhere else in the city that had delayed them.

"Wait here. I need to check on something," I ordered them before turning and making my way through the mangled doorway leading inside the museum. Parts of the hallway appeared smashed in, as though a body had slammed into the walls, and the sound of debris hitting the floor nearby had me jumping. I needed to hurry.

I knew very little about the security system in the museum's storage areas, but I did know where the cameras were placed. Glancing up at the security camera in the hallway, I was relieved to find it had been cracked and was dangling from the partially destroyed wall. The tiny red light that signaled when the camera was recording was dark.

"One down, two more to go," I murmured under my breath.

The museum had countless cameras scattered all over the areas that were opened to the guests each day, but the rooms for employees were far less monitored. Making my way inside the storage area, I froze in shock. The room looked like it had come from an apocalyptic war zone.

Sections of the ceiling were gone, and I could see straight up to the blackened rafters. Debris was blown everywhere, and most of the pieces stored in the room were broken and scattered on the floor. The metal shelves had knocked into each other like dominos, toppling to the floor. Several of the shelves were flattened, while others had been twisted into a modern art piece, while others were partially covered under plaster and wood from the crumbling walls.

Nothing in the room had been left untouched. A cold chill trickled up my spine. How had I survived?

Magic.

You knew your day had taken a sharp right onto Freakishly Weird Avenue when magic was the most logical answer you could come up with to explain things.

Shaking my head to clear it, I focused back on the task at hand. It took a moment of searching to find the first camera, which was crushed on the floor beneath a shattered piece of pottery. The second camera hadn't fared much better. It clung to the wall, but

all the cords leading to it had been severed.

If I'd had more time and a heck of a lot more skill, I would have found a way to break into the security office and delete all the footage. Unfortunately, I wasn't a secret agent with mad skills. I was a minimum-wage-earning museum employee who possessed the computer skills necessary to open cat memes and not much else. I would have to hope the cameras had gone off-line before recording anything I didn't want to explain.

The sound of a siren in the distance had my pulse leaping. It was time to go. Rushing toward the exit, I noticed a coat rack where employees often left various stray garments. Spotting two oversized dark coats, I yanked them from the hooks and hurried to the men.

"Put these on. They aren't fashionable enough for the runway, but they will at least make you less obvious." I tossed the coats toward the men. "Unfortunately, we are going to have to walk to my home. And we need to go. NOW!"

Walking is not an issue, My Queen. Lead the way.

Both men managed to get the coats on and buttoned them up. They needed pants and shoes, but this would have to do. Thankfully, my apartment wasn't far away.

My hands were sweaty as I grabbed their hands. I dragged them into the shadows with me. If we wanted to avoid prying eyes, we needed to avoid the main streets. Trying to look as inconspicuous as possible, I led the way to my apartment.

\* \* \*

My relief was overwhelming when I opened the door to my tiny apartment. We'd made it home without too much drama, and without creating a scene. There had been a sketchy moment or two when I thought Zonkut was going to panic bend into his dinosaur, but as long as I kept my hands touching his skin, he'd held it together.

His control was short-lived, however.

Albert Einswine came rushing out of the bedroom, high-tailing it toward us as fast as his tiny little legs would allow.

"Albert!" I dropped to my knees, scooping the mini-pig up in my arms. He squealed happily in response.

The little pig was my best friend on earth, and no matter how crappy my day had been, he could always put a smile on my face. My apartment hadn't been keen on welcoming a pig, no matter how much I tried to educate them on the cleanliness of pigs. Thankfully, one of the managers had fallen in love with Albert, and with a wink and a joke about silly typos, she'd changed where I'd written 'pig' to the word 'pug' on my applications. I made sure to bring her cookies and coffee a couple of times a month.

Albert spotted the men and stiffened in my arms, an adorable warning grumble coming from his throat. I loved my cute little guard piggy.

Zonkut shouted, causing me to jump and almost toss Albert across the room. Rezkac

held his human form but darted behind the couch, where he peered at the piggy in my arms. Zonkut's body shimmered with light before shifting into that of his dinosaur form.

Squeezing Albert tighter in my arms, I stared in horror at the panicking raptor. Thank goodness I lived on the bottom floor, otherwise his weight would have sent us crashing through to the apartments below. Although the cramped room couldn't handle his size. I only barely managed to duck beneath his tail as it whooshed through my tiny living room.

Zonkut's tail crashed into a shelf, sending two of my vases tumbling onto the floor, where they shattered into a thousand shards. The noise of the vases hitting the floor caused Zonkut to jump. He whirled around to face the racket with his huge teeth bared, as though he was expecting an attack. "Calm down! Albert's harmless!" I shouted, hoping to get through to the terrified dino.

That beast in your arms is not harmless. I know of his kind. They are creatures of mischief that moved through the cover of darkness during my time.

"You had pigs back then?" I asked. While I was no expert, I'd given enough museum tours to know that pigs like Albert hadn't lived during the time of dinosaurs.

Pigs? That is not their true name. No, they were creatures of dark magic that fed on the chaos they caused.

I snorted. He wanted me to believe they had magical goblin-like pigs who wandered the earth as instruments of evil?

They weren't all evil. Most were just instigators of trouble. It was never a good sign when you spotted one of their kind, as bad luck was likely to visit you soon after. Rezkac watched me scratch under Albert's chin, shock replacing the fear on his



features. You keep one as a pet? You are even more powerful than I had first believed.

I wanted to ask him what he meant about ‘powers,’ but Zonkut’s tail was swinging toward my modest-sized flat-screen TV. Let’s be real, it was only slightly bigger than a sheet of computer paper, but I was still making payments on it. With a shriek, I dropped Albert on the floor and dove toward the TV, yanking it away in the nick of time.

Albert stormed toward the raptor, backing Zonkut into a corner. The raptor actually trembled and cowered away. The sight of my tiny teacup piggy facing down an apex predator would have been amusing if I hadn’t been terrified that Zonkut would realize any minute that bacon came from pigs and decide to have a quick snack.

No one could resist bacon.

“Please don’t eat him, Zonkut!” I begged. Setting the TV down on the sofa, I edged toward Albert, trying to avoid startling Zonkut.

Eat him? I assure you that will never happen. To eat a creature of the darkness would be to take that darkness on ourselves. It would likely bring more of the creatures to our dwelling to torment us.

These men were crazy, but I decided to stop arguing over whether my pet was an ordinary pig or a malicious pocket-sized monster. He was safer if they thought he could defend himself with the powers of hellfire and dark magic.

Easing forward, I snatched the angry, snorting pig from the floor. “Let’s get you some food, Albert. And maybe it’s best if you hang out in the spare bedroom tonight.”

Ignoring Rezkac's slack-jawed expression, I made my way down the hall to the tiny guest room. I could admit I had a slight addiction to buying things for my spoiled pet, and his room already overflowed with toys, costumes, and oversized beds. I poured some piggy kibble into his favorite food bowl, the one that had been custom painted with his name. With a happy squeal, he began stuffing his face.

"Today has been a confusing mess. I cannot wait to tell you about it. But first, I need to calm down a dinosaur," I whispered while giving him a quick kiss on the head.

Albert gave a grunt of acknowledgment but didn't bother to look up.

Closing the bedroom door, I moved into the living room again. Zonkut hadn't moved from the corner Albert had backed him into. Rezkac had moved to sit on the couch, although he still looked uncomfortable sitting straight up, and his eyes kept glancing down the hall.

I rubbed a hand down my face. Exhaustion and adrenaline were catching up with me, not to mention the mental gymnastics I was doing to try to wrap my mind around the fact that two dinos had come to life. I was getting tired.

"He won't be coming out of the room right now. Not until we sort out some of this mess."

I'm not sure we have enough time to 'sort out this mess' tonight. There is much you don't know, and it will take many days to explain it all to you.

I sighed. "Well, I have tomorrow off, so that is how long we have to figure this out and decide where you two go from here."

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 15, 2025, 8:33 am*

A strange look passed across Rezkac's face, and his brow wrinkled. Where we go? That is easy, My Queen. We go where you go. We are yours.

My nervous laughter sounded strained even to my own ears. "That's not how things work now. People can figuratively belong to someone, but not literally. You are both alive again. You get to go out and experience everything the world can offer you."

I tried to ignore the way my heart twisted at the thought of him leaving me, even for a second. Even though I'd just given them the 'you can't belong to someone' speech, every fiber of my being screamed that they were mine.

Rezkac rose from the couch, his movements silent as he strode to me. He pressed the long length of his muscular body against mine, and all the tension in my body drained away.

I have many things I wanted to experience, but they all involve you. Leaning down, Rezkac brushed his lips against mine, the touch featherlight and excruciating.

"That is because you don't know better. You don't know what is really out there."

It would be impossible for me to fall in love with another. The priestess has already bound my heart to you for all eternity. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

His hands slid under the hem of my torn shirt, and his thumbs brushed along my sensitive skin. I opened my mouth to ask him about the priestess, but he took the opportunity to delve his tongue into my mouth. Without waiting for my mind to catch up, my body responded. My arms slid around his neck, and I leaned against him.

Why did his arms feel like home? Like we had done this a million times before?

You are as stubborn as you are stunning. With time, you will understand that I speak the truth. Rezkac's words were an intimate caress in my mind.

### ARIZONA

What do you get if you cross a dinosaur with a pig?

Jurassic Pork.

\* \* \*

Ididn't get a chance to respond before a second pair of arms slid around my waist from behind, and a broad chest pressed against my back. My yelp of surprise changed to a low moan as Zonkut's mouth pressed to my neck. I expected Rezkac to be angry at Zonkut, but Rez only acknowledged Zon with a rasping chirp before focusing his attention back on my mouth.

I'd lived a pretty boring life up until that point. While my sporadic sex life had been okay, it had been pretty vanilla... and I'd been perfectly okay with that. The thought of a threesome hadn't been something I was interested in. Not until that moment when four hands were exploring my body, stealing my breath away as they moved ever closer to the parts of me that were begging for attention.

I should slam on the brakes until my brain had a chance to sort through the chaos of the night. That's what I wanted, wasn't it?

There was no point in trying to lie to myself. The truth was, I didn't want them to stop. I wanted—no, I needed—more.

My legs wobbled, struggling to hold me upright. Zon's arm slid around my waist,

steading me between them. The men exchanged several more of the inhuman clicks and seemed to come to an agreement.

Still sandwiching my body between their hard-muscled chests, they moved toward the couch. Rezkac shed the borrowed coat, giving me an unobstructed view of his chiseled body and hard erection. He wanted me. A blush spread across my skin, while lust spread through my veins beneath it.

Before I could give in to the primal urge that wanted me to jump Rez's body, Zonkut spun me in his arms so that I faced him. He'd shed his ill-fitting coat as well and stood naked in front of me. My mouth simultaneously watered and went dry.

How was a girl supposed to choose between two men who were equally impressive physically? Especially when her selfish heart wanted to lay claim to both?

Zonkut gave me a small smile, his brow raising as if asking a question.

He wants to know if his body meets your approval, Rezkac supplied. Zon is still struggling to adjust to human language and thought.

Were they crazy? Maybe they didn't realize how many women on earth would give up sex for the rest of their lives just to have a single night with one of them.

It doesn't matter what other women think. Only what you think. Are we satisfactory to... you? Rez said the words every girl wanted to hear, and I could feel myself melting.

"Yes. You are fine. I mean, you're both good." I wanted to slap my hand over my mouth to stop my nervous rambling. Truthfully, if I'd seen them in a magazine, I would have thought someone photoshopped them because no man was that perfect in real life.

Rezkac gave a rumbling laugh. Sitting down on the couch, he relayed my answer to Zon. Relief crossed Zon's face. It was followed by a wicked smile as he closed the small gap between us. Using his body, he slowly walked me backward until the back of my knees bumped Rezkac's legs.

Faster than I could blink, Zon pulled my tattered shirt over my head. Then he flicked out a claw and sliced the band of what remained of my bra. I blinked, unable to believe I'd just seen his finger waiver between human and raptor. It served as an incredible distraction, because I forgot to be embarrassed by my breasts, which were on full display. I forgot how to breathe when his mouth latched onto my nipple.

Zon wasn't done yet though, and his hands slid to the waistband of my athletic pants, pausing while he watched my face, waiting for permission. I nodded, swallowing the lump in my throat. He didn't wait to be told twice.

Dropping to his knees in front of me, Zon hooked his fingers around the stretchy band and slowly dragged the pants down my body. Why hadn't anyone told me how erotic it was to have someone undress you? By the time I stepped free of the garment, I was panting.

My tiny neon yellow thong was all that hid me from his eyes, and my relief at having chosen a decent pair of underwear that morning instead of my granny panties was immense. I made a mental note to never wear crappy underwear again. It just wasn't worth the risk, no matter how comfy they were. Plus, who knew when some seriously sexy dinos from the Stone Age were going to come back to life and want to rock your world?

Zon stroked his calloused fingers up the inside of my leg, stopping just shy of the juncture of my legs. Trembling, I reached out a hand to his shoulder, attempting to balance myself. It was a futile effort. Zon leaned forward, pressing his hot mouth against the fabric of my thong.

“Oh!” It was the only word I could remember how to say. “Oooh!”

Zon sucked the thin fabric that separated his lips from mine. I’m not sure how much longer I would have been able to remain standing had Rez not grabbed my hips and pulled me down on his lap. Rez’s erection pressed against my butt while Zon scooted forward, keeping his mouth moving against the tiny triangle of fabric.

Shifting me on his lap slightly, Rez angled my hips apart, giving Zon full access to me. Zon moved in tighter between my legs, eager to take advantage of my new position. I squirmed, more in anticipation than discomfort.

Be still, Rez growled against my ear.

If any man had dared boss me around in the past, I would have kicked him out of my house instantly. But this must be a night of firsts for me, because my body responded by growing wetter. Zon inhaled a shuddering breath, his teeth nipping at the soaked fabric.

The teasing brush of Zon’s finger as it slid along my inner thigh caused my skin to prickle. His mouth disappeared, only to be replaced by his finger stroking the fabric.

“Stop teasing me,” I groaned.



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We aren't teasing you. We're savoring you, little queen. Rez laughed.

"I—" My words vanished as Zon's finger made its way beneath my thong.

Zon's finger delved inside my slick heat, causing my hips to buck. Rez pinned my hips to him, groaning as the move caused his erection to rub along the curve of my butt. I wiggled again, enjoying Rez's groan of pleasure.

Before I could torture Rez further, Zon pulled his finger from me. I watched, utterly mesmerized, as he looked me in the eye while he licked my cream from his finger. My body clenched with need.

Zon leaned down a second time, this time pulling the scrap of fabric to the side. I nearly screamed when his tongue made contact with my delicate skin. He lapped up the drops of my slick that he discovered, and when those were gone, his tongue went searching.

I cried out, my fingers digging into his hair as his tongue sank deep inside me. Zon flicked and sucked, alternating slow strokes with fast ones. He would drive me to the edge of my climax and pull back at the last moment, leaving me a sobbing mess.

While Zon tormented me with his mouth, Rez's breathing had grown rough, and he'd begun to shift his hips, craving the friction against his burning erection. If someone had told me that morning that I would spend the evening being eaten out by one man and dry-humped by another, I would have called them crazy. The world was a strange place, and life could change in the blink of an eye.

Rez chirped, and Zon responded, but the sound was muffled since his mouth was still busy tasting me. That's when something odd happened. I was being stroked deeper. And when I say deeper, I mean that my last boyfriend hadn't been packing the equipment necessary to explore that deep into my cave of secrets. How on earth was Zon doing it with his tongue?

Magic. Rez whispered the word.

I'd never been a believer in magic, but suddenly I found myself wondering what I might have missed out on if it could perform sorcery like this. What if a pigeon had tried to bring me an invitation to some magical school, and I'd shooed it away for fear it was just waiting to poop on me?

Your mind is complicated. Stop thinking so hard and enjoy yourself, Rez coaxed.

Zon's tongue twisted along my tight walls, and I didn't need to be reminded twice to stop thinking and just enjoy the sensations pouring through me. When his tongue pressed against my g-spot, I nearly came undone.

HOLY CRAP. I'd begun to doubt I even owned one of those since no boyfriend had ever found mine, and even my own attempts had been fairly unsatisfying. Zon's tongue feverishly worked that spot like it was a magic lamp, and he intended to meet the genie inside.

It was too much, and my mind shattered as the best orgasm of my life exploded inside me. My body convulsed, while Zon's tongue greedily licked up the evidence of my pleasure.

Rez's warm breath blew across my sweat-beaded skin. I wasn't sure why he was breathing so hard when I'd been the one that nearly died from Zon's tongue. I tried to move my hand, but my muscles were like putty and refused to obey.

Because smelling the sweet aroma of your desire and witnessing how beautiful you are when you come... It is too much. I want to sink inside your body and worship you until the sun rises.

Rez's words caused my body to clench, and my hand twitched, suddenly deciding that it had a reason to go on living... at least for a few more hours.

"Let's go to the bedroom," I whispered, mouth dry.

Zon sat back on his heels, allowing Rezkac the space he needed to stand with me cradled in his arms. I relaxed against Rez's chest, still feeling the afterglow effects of my release. Motioning him down the hall, Rez followed my directions, hesitating slightly as we passed the door to Albert's room.

I giggled. "He isn't going to hurt you. It's past his bedtime, anyway."

Mischief never sleeps. Rez's voice was hushed, as though he thought the piggy could hear his inner thoughts. Men were weird, but dino-men were on another level.

Stepping into my room, Rez paused. It is very small. You should have much larger quarters.

"Yeah, well." I shrugged. "Just because you believe I am your queen doesn't mean the rest of the world sees me that way. I am just an average girl struggling to make ends meet. This place barely fits in my budget."

We will remedy this in the future. Rez spoke with conviction, which was adorable since the man didn't even own pants. He didn't understand how the modern world worked. Dinosaurs had been extinct for a long time, and he wasn't just going to be able to make money appear out of thin air without having an education and a career.

Rez laid me gently on my bed. It was full-sized, and was massive for Albert and myself. But Rez was a lot bigger than even the average man, which was going to make this a tight fit.

Zon walked into the room behind us and crawled onto the bed beside me. This was going to be an even tighter squeeze than I'd anticipated.

Rez crawled up the bed, his body covering mine. His gaze was filled with lust, need, and something else that terrified me. Tenderness.

It is hard to believe that I waited so long to have this time with you, and now it is here. This isn't a dream that I will wake up from. His words were rough, raw with emotion.

My heart wanted this to be more than a mind-blowing one-night stand, but my mind was struggling to get a grip on the rollercoaster my life had become in the past several hours. I was allowing this to happen because I'd nearly died, and I wanted to celebrate life. Maybe I was even concussed and not thinking clearly.

So why did my heart vehemently disagree with my logic? Why did my very soul feel like this was fate, and they were mine?

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Stop fighting. You are feeling the effects of the bond. It is how things should be, Rez soothed, stroking his hand along my cheekbone.

I didn't fully understand what he meant by a bond, but I could get those answers tomorrow. Tonight, I was going to let my heart lead me.

Reaching up, I traced his stubbled jawline, enjoying the feel of his dark stubble against my hand. Turning his head, Rez caught my finger between his teeth. Butterflies exploded in my stomach when he swirled his tongue around my finger.

Zon's hand traveled across my breast, languidly massaging the tender skin. Between the two of them, I was pretty sure my body was about to burst into flames.

Releasing my finger, Rez shifted his weight, freeing his hand to travel down my ribs and hip until he reached the junction of my thighs. My breath caught in my lungs, waiting to feel his touch. After waiting for this moment since the Stone Age, his patience had apparently run dry as well, because he didn't make me wait. His finger delved inside me, running along my slick walls as he teased me.

This is not teasing you. I'm making sure you are ready for me, so I don't hurt you. A sexy smile flashed across Rez's handsome face, bumping my need up another notch. Fingers and tongues were great—in their case, fantastic—but I needed more.

One more thing, it will be difficult for me to control my beast nature. I will not harm you, but there are some things about the beast that I'm not sure your human body can handle safely. When we are having sex, you need to face me. If I take you from behind, I'm afraid my control will slip, and instinct will take over. Rez's brow

wrinkled in concern while he waited for me to say I understood.

I understood. He was saying some really kinky and possibly dangerous stuff might happen if I wiggled my butt in his face and his beast nature came out to play. What I didn't understand was why that was a bad thing? This was like telling someone that they shouldn't press the red button. That is just going to make them want to press it more.

But I was growing tired of waiting, so I nodded in agreement. I would behave. Probably. Maybe.

Satisfied, although clearly suspicious, Rez pressed himself against my wet entrance. With the speed of a sloth, he pushed the head of his erection inside and stilled, giving me time to adjust.

"Rez," I growled. At this rate, I would be old and gray before this was over.

I don't want to hurt you, Rez responded, voice strained.

"You aren't going to hurt me!" I protested. Wrapping my legs around his hips, I pulled us together, forcing him deeper inside me.

Our moans blended together. Rez lowered himself until we were pressed together. He was careful not to crush me with his full weight as I trembled against him.

I'd forced him deep, but Rez wasn't done there. Shifting his hips, he pushed still deeper inside me. Deeper than any penis had gone before. Dino-dudes were obviously built differently.

When he finally began to slide out, every nerve in my body was vibrating with need. I could do little more than cling to him as he thrust in and out, his movements slow at

first, but building faster as the urgency for release pushed him.

Rez's thumbs brushed against my skin, a surprisingly tender gesture. His eyes grew dark as he looked down at me.

All those years spent dreaming of this day, and yet none of those imaginings compare to the real thing. You are incredible, Arizona.

Rez's words, combined with his powerful thrusts, sent me flying off the precipice and into the bliss of my ecstasy. I screamed his name both out loud and in my mind as I collapsed beneath him. He sheathed himself inside me once more, and I felt him jerk as he found his own release.

Rez nuzzled my neck, whispering words in a language I didn't understand. While I didn't comprehend the exact meaning of the words and clicks, I admired its alluring rhythm and flow. My eyelids grew heavy, and my body melted against the two men on either side of me. It was going to be a long night, and a quick nap wouldn't hurt.

### ARIZONA

What do you get when you cross a pig and a cactus?

A porky-pine.

\* \* \*

Loud pounding on my front door awakened us the next morning. My annoyance flared. I'd been having the best dream ever! Granted, it was a little weird, but it was still freaking incredible! I'd been having the most incredible sex of my life with two dinosaur shifters—

My thoughts came to a screeching standstill, and when my eyes landed on the two men pressed along either side of me, my body temperature spiked to a dangerous level.

It hadn't been a dream.

It had really happened.

The pounding on the door grew louder, and someone shouted my name.

“Coming! Coming!” I shouted back while muttering under my breath about how I might have been coming if they hadn't interrupted my morning.

During the night, the sheet had come untucked from under the mattress. Pulling it



against my body, I tried to wrap it around my body while shimmying my way off the bed. The movement pulled the sheet from the bodies of the two sleeping men, exposing their muscle torsos, long legs, and other parts.

My cheeks warmed, and I looked away... taking one more peek, of course. After what we did last night, I couldn't believe I still had it in me to feel embarrassed.

Working my way off the bed, I picked up the comforter where it had fallen on the floor and laid it gently over the two men. Tiptoeing my way out of the room, I closed the bedroom door behind me.

The front door was trembling under the fist of whoever was on the other side of it. I wasn't exactly Miss Popularity, so early morning visitors were unusual. They were also typically annoying. Nothing good ever happened this early in the morning. Civilized people needed time for coffee before approaching other humans.

Standing on tiptoe, I looked through the tiny peephole. My heart lodged itself in my throat, and panic started rising faster than bread dough in hell.

It was two police officers. They were probably here about last night. I wanted to smack myself. Duh! Of course that's why they were here.

The last thing I wanted to do was practice my woefully inadequate acting skills while still half asleep. What I really wanted was to be back in bed with the two sexy dino-dudes who were determined to convince me that they belonged to me. But it was not to be. Straightening my shoulders, I cracked open my door.

"Can I help you, officers?" I asked, rubbing my eyes.

Both detectives' jaws dropped, their eyes taking in my clothing, a.k.a. sheet, and my wild bed hair. Hey! If they wanted me to be presentable, they should have made an

appointment.

“You were asleep?” the older of the pair asked. He was balding, with a rounded middle that stretched the buttons of his dress shirt. There were stern lines carved into his face, and I wondered if he’d ever smiled in his life.

“Your skills of deduction are impressive.” The moment those words left my mouth, I wished I could shove them back in. My lack of caffeine meant I was also lacking my filter. People and I didn’t mix until I had downed at least two cups of coffee. Which could be a problem since I was supposed to be playing sweet damsel-in-distress, not snarky antagonist.

To my relief, the second detective burst out laughing. I was shocked at how handsome he looked when he laughed. At a quelling look from his grumpy partner, he straightened his features back into a neutral expression. Reaching out his hand, he introduced himself. “I am Detective Jack Oliver, and this is my partner, Detective Billings. You are Ms. Charcoal, I presume?”

“Yes, I am. But you can just call me Arizona.” Reaching out, I shook his hand, only to yank it back when static electricity snapped between our palms.

“Ouch!” I squinted at him, rubbing my burning palm with my left hand.

“How odd. I haven’t been shocked like that since I was a kid.” Detective Oliver gave an awkward chuckle, pressing his hand to his thigh. A thigh that bulged under his perfectly pressed pants as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

My gaze traveled up, noting the lack of a wedding ring or a tan line to indicate he was supposed to be wearing one but had taken it off. Butterflies brushed against my stomach at the knowledge he wasn’t married, but I quickly tried to squash the pesky bugs dancing in my tummy. I had to be the greediest chick on the planet to have two

men currently sleeping in my bed while I ogled another man. How long was the ancient dirt drug going to keep affecting me?

If it pleases you to bring another mate to your bed, we will have no issue with it. Watching you with another man could be very erotic.

Rezkac's words had my blood heating and my heart doing frantic cartwheels inside my chest.

How had I gone from a sex life that was mediocre at best to this?

I wasn't sure I was comfortable with the three of us being a 'thing.' It was amazing last night, but that was just one night. Plus, adding a fourth would be hot... I mean, awkward.

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Rez laughed at my mental slip-up. You will need a larger bed and a larger home. But that is to be expected, My Queen.

I made a mental note to get an explanation of why it was ‘expected,’ but then turned my focus to the matter at hand and the two officers eyeing me. Rez, you two need to stay in there until they leave.

As you wish. But if they threaten you, I cannot agree to remain here.

“We’d like to come in and talk to you for a few minutes, if you don’t mind. Would you prefer to change into something first?” Detective Oliver questioned.

I pressed my fingers to my temple and swayed a little, careful not to go overboard with my acting. The last thing I wanted was for an ambulance to be called.

Detective Oliver stepped forward, his hand cupping my elbow. “Ms. Char—Arizona, are you okay?”

I nodded, trying to ignore the heat seeping from his rough palm and into my bare skin. “I think I should sit down,” I suggested weakly, hoping they would offer to come back later.

“Jack, help her to a chair.” Detective Billings motioned for Jack to lead me to my tiny dining room set. Addressing me, he added, “We only have a few questions, and then we will be out of your hair.”

I swallowed a groan, and relaxed into the worn wooden chair, careful not to lean back

too far as the chair had a tendency to rock unsteadily.

Detective Billings wasted no time, quickly jumping into his questions. “You were working at the museum yesterday, correct?”

“I—yes. Did I?” I purposely stumbled over my words.

“That’s what I am asking you, Miss. Did you work at the museum yesterday afternoon and evening?”

I rubbed my forehead, taking my time to answer. “Y-yes. I remember going to work, but—” I trailed off.

“But what?” Detective Billings prodded.

“But I don’t remember clocking out or coming home.” I turned wide, panicked eyes on the detectives. “Was I drugged? What happened?”

“So you don’t remember what happened?” Detective Billings narrowed his eyes on my face, searching for any sign of a lie.

“No!” I cried, clutching the sheet tighter around my body and pitching my voice higher. “Why can’t I remember?”

“Hey, calm down. It will be okay.” Detective Oliver patted my hand where it rested on the table, his voice low and soothing. I tried to ignore the tingle that shot through my hand at his touch.

It was clear who was the good cop and who was playing the bad cop. Much as I would have liked to believe Detective Oliver cared about my emotional wellbeing, he was here to do his job, which was to investigate the happenings at the museum and

find out how I was involved.

“Did something happen at the museum?” I rubbed at my forehead again as though struggling to remember.

Detective Billings sat back in his chair while clearly taking note of my every movement. “Yeah, the entire storeroom was destroyed, along with parts of the ceiling, hallway, and rear door. Right now, we believe there was a bombing.”

“A bombing? Why would someone want to do that?” I asked, letting a slight wobble into my voice.

“That’s what we are trying to figure out. And right now, you are the only witness to what happened. Pete said you were still there cleaning when he left for the evening. According to the security feeds, it was shortly after that when the first explosion took place.” Detective Billings’s eyes locked onto my face, watching my reaction.

“I don’t remember seeing a bomb.” Deciding it was best to stick with the truth as much as possible, I continued, “I remember cleaning. I’d finished with one of the long shelves and decided to be finished for the day. As I was putting away my cleaning supplies, I leaned over because something caught my eye. And then, nothing.” I dropped my head into my hands. “Why can’t I remember?”

“That is what the security footage showed as well. What did you reach down to get?” Detective Billings shifted toward me.

I hesitated. “I’m not sure? Everything was covered in dust, but I think something glinted and caught my eye. Could that have been the bomb?” My hands trembled, not from fear of a bomb as they likely thought, but from fear of how close to the truth I was dancing.

The men looked at each other, silently communicating how much they should disclose to me. Oliver must have won the silent debate, because Billings sat back heavily in his chair, causing it to creak in protest. Turning to me, Oliver's green eyes softened.

"Possibly, but there is no way you could have survived a direct hit so close to a bomb. We also found blood, quite a lot of it. Inside the wrecked storeroom, trailing down the hallway, and on the sidewalk outside the museum. We had assumed that you had died, and the bombers took your body, so it was a surprise to find you here. Are you injured? Or was there someone else in the museum with you after Pete left?" My skin heated as Oliver's eyes traveled down my body, as if he were trying to see through the sheet to check for injuries.

There was no use lying. A blood test would match the blood to me. "I have a few cuts along my body that I don't remember getting, although nothing too serious. I also get pretty bad nosebleeds, so maybe that was the cause?" Even I knew how lame my suggestion sounded. I'd nearly bled out on that sidewalk. There was literally zero logical explanation for that.

"I don't think you understand the amount of blood we are talking about, Miss. Whoever it belongs to is either dead or in a hospital. You are neither, so it must belong to someone else. Who was with you last night?" Billings's tone had shifted slightly, a hard edge sneaking in. I was quickly moving from victim to possible criminal in his mind.

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Time to up the acting. I could do this. If I could pretend that I was on my period seven times in a month to get out of gym in sixth grade, I could pretend to have no idea why an entire building looked like a scene from a zombie movie.

“It was just me. No one else came in after Pete left. Not unless they had been hiding or something.” I shivered. “Was I alone in the museum with a terrorist?”

“We don’t know. At the moment, we have more questions than answers,” Oliver said.

“Am I in danger? Are they going to come after me?” I pulled the sheet tighter against me and looked at my tiny windows.

“We don’t have any evidence to suggest they were targeting you specifically. It is more likely that whoever did this was targeting the museum. I wouldn’t worry too much, although I wouldn’t recommend you take any extra risks either. Stay around people, try not to be alone until we learn more,” Oliver tried to reassure me.

Billings scribbled something in a tiny notebook. “Perhaps we should take you to the hospital and have you checked out? Not being able to remember what happened could be a sign of a serious head injury.”

He framed the question to sound kind, but the glint in his eye told me it was a calculated move. If the doctors checked me out and said I was fine, then he would have more proof I was hiding something.

I shook my head. “I’m terrified of hospitals. Maybe I just need to rest more and my memories will come back.”



There was an awkward moment of silence until both detectives stood. Oliver reached into his pocket and pulled out a card, laying it on the table in front of me. “If you think of anything, give me a call.” He paused, then added, “My personal number is on the back. It doesn’t matter how early or late it is, call me.”

I touched the card with my fingers, nodding my head. There was a tiny part of me that felt crushed by the circumstances of our meeting. I would have loved to call his number... if not for the fact that I currently had two dino shifters in my bed. Oh! And let’s not forget the added complication that he was currently investigating me for a crime I didn’t commit.

Well, that I probably didn’t commit. To be fair, I wasn’t exactly sure what part I’d played in the fiasco at the museum.

“I will.” The lie tasted sour on my tongue.

He gave me a small smile and followed Billings to the door, where they saw themselves out.

The moment the door clicked closed, I darted for the toilet, where I dry heaved up the non-existent contents of my stomach. The stress of the last twenty-four hours was catching up with me.

### ARIZONA

What happens when you play tug-of-war with a pig?

Pulled pork!

\* \* \*

Tears streamed down my cheeks as I clung to the porcelain throne, struggling to calm the nausea churning in my stomach.

My long hair was pulled away from my sweaty face, and a wet cloth was pressed against my forehead. I hadn't heard anyone come in, and I glanced up expecting to see Rezkac, but instead, I met Zon's worried eyes. He'd dragged me from the museum, and we'd had incredible sex, but his gentle thoughtfulness was a surprise.

"Zon?" I rasped.

Zon didn't answer, but he gave me a soft smile. He brushed his free hand down my cheek, carefully studying my face. Opening his mouth, I thought he was going to talk to me, but with a frustrated growl, he snapped his mouth shut and ground his teeth together.

"It's okay. Don't push too hard. I can't imagine trying to get used to human communication while at the same time trying to learn a new language. It will come with time." I didn't know how much of what I'd said he'd understood, so I rested my hand against his thigh, hoping to calm him.

Even that slightest touch sent warmth through me, and not just sexual desire, but also a reassurance that I wasn't alone. It was exactly the type of reassurance I needed, because my life had gone from monotonous drudgery to apocalyptic chaos in about two seconds flat.

I wasn't sure if I still had a job.

I'd nearly died.

I'd been drugged ancient with fairy dust.

I'd slept with not one stranger, but two.

Two men were claiming that they belonged to me due to a priestess' voodoo, and rather than seeing that as an alarming red flag, my heart and body seemed to agree.

I was also the prime suspect in the bombing of my museum. Which might be why my confused and stressed-out mind had formed a crush on Detective Jack Oliver, only to remind me it could never work out between us. How had I gone from a one-man type of woman to trying to collect them all?

Scariest of all, I was beginning to believe that magic was real. Because either I learned to believe in magic, or I had to accept that I'd officially lost my marbles.

Staggering to my feet, still clasping the sheet against my body, I closed the toilet lid and moved to the sink. I brushed my teeth and rinsed several times before gargling with mouthwash. When I finished, Zon caught me in his arms and sat down on the side of the tub, cradling me in his arms. The anxiety and tension eased from my body.

Everything would work out. I wasn't weak, and I wasn't alone.

Just as I felt relaxed enough to go back to bed, Zon's hand moved to the top of the sheet, gripping it hard. With a sharp yank, he pulled it away. I fought the urge to cover myself as he drank in the sight of my naked body. There was something thrilling about the way he'd gone from comforting me to craving me.

Zon's hand brushed along my ribcage, cupping my breast and kneading it gently. He teased my nipple, causing it to harden. I moaned, and his eyes locked on mine. The air left my lungs in a whoosh as his pupils flickered and shifted into reptilian slits. It was terrifying and weirdly enough, sexy-as-heck.

Maybe I did need my head checked.

He leaned down, nuzzling my neck and breathing in my scent in slow, deep breaths. There was something predatory about the way his mouth pressed against my jugular. It was yet one more thing that should have been disconcerting, probably even terrifying, but my body found it perversely sensual.

Moving down my neck and chest, he stilled at my chest. My breasts ached for his attention, and my stomach knotted in anticipation of his touch. I was being hunted by a predator, and dang! It was exciting!

Zon took mercy on me and his tongue curled around my nipple. It was the faintest of touches, but it sent molten lava scorching through my veins. I arched my back, begging for more, and with a laugh, Zon eagerly complied. His mouth latched onto the hardened peak of my right breast, sucking and teasing, while his hand cradled my neglected left breast, gently massaging it.

I moaned, my body quickly becoming wet with need. There were a thousand things I needed to be doing, but I couldn't remember a single one with his mouth ravishing me.

I reached out, running my hands down the lines of his abs... and lower. My hand bumped against his erection, and it did not surprise me to find he was hard as a steel rod.

Wrapping my hand around his erection, I smirked when he jerked in my hand. In retaliation, Zon's teeth nipped my breast. Our desire escalated into a frenzy of tangled limbs, erotic kisses, and groping hands.

"Zonnnn." I moaned his name as his finger delved inside me, testing my wetness before inserting a second finger and then a third.

Zon teased and stretched, drawing me to the brink of release, only to slow at the last second and deny me. It was maddening and addictive.

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Unable to take it anymore, I squeezed his erection. Hard. “Either put this to use, or I am going to find Rez.”

Apparently, while the men seemed fine with sharing, there was an underlying sense of competitiveness because Zon snarled, flashing his teeth.

I squinted. Were they a little sharper than normal? I didn’t have time to ask before Zon stood, and I started to drop from his lap. With a yelp, I wrapped my legs around his waist, clinging to him.

The change in our position caused my needy core to press tight against his erection. As he walked from the bathroom, each step caused delicious friction that had me seeing double. Unable to help myself, I used my thighs to move myself along his length. His erection was searing hot, and the combined sensation of heat and friction had my body trembling.

“I need you in me.” My voice cracked.

Zon strode to the table. Sliding his arm across the surface, he knocked the random items on it to the floor with a crash. Bending, he laid me on the table, and before I could say a word, he shifted his hips and buried himself deep inside me with one hard thrust.

“JEGKAHDREHKOHEGH!” I blabbered utter nonsense, my brain short-circuiting from the pleasure that was rocking every cell in my body.

Pulling back, he slammed deep again. Deep enough that I thought I felt him in my

throat. My eyes rolled back. His strokes were far from gentle, and my back and hips banged against the table with each stroke. I would likely have bruises later, but I didn't care. I wanted more.

In the back of my mind, I knew he was still holding back, and I wondered what it would be like if he let go. What would happen if I disregarded Rez's warning and showed him my back during sex? Maybe one day, I would summon the courage to find out...

I clung to him, my nails biting into his skin. Blood pounded in my ears, and my need for release clawed at my insides like an angry cat. With each hard thrust, our bodies ground together.

Zon reached beneath my butt and lifted it slightly so he could drive himself deeper. The new angle caused friction in all the right places for me, and my climax loomed over me like a tsunami wave. One more hard thrust, and I would come apart at the seams...

My front door flew open, slamming against the wall with a bang. Zon froze, and I tilted my head back, viewing our unexpected visitors upside down.

My parents.

I screamed. My mom screamed. We all screamed for eye cream that could erase the images that had been burned into our vision for the rest of eternity and our afterlives.

My dad covered his eyes and spun away, smacking his head on the door frame, while my mother clung to the door, looking as though she were going to pass out from the sight of her daughter being pounded into a dining table.

At least things couldn't get much worse.

Rez rushed into the room, eyes wild, chest heaving... and completely butt-freaking-naked and his member saluting like a brave soldier. I heard your screams. Who dares to attack you?

My mom slid down the door frame, and my dad cursed in the hallway. Huh. So apparently things could get worse. Like my parents finding not one, but two naked men in my apartment. I'd reached the most humiliating point in my life. There was nowhere left to fall. This was rock bottom... or that is what I believed right up until the moment my dad spoke.

"Who are you two, and what are you doing to my daughter?" My dad's bellow echoed down the hall, and I had no doubt my nosey neighbors heard every word.

Rez stood tall, eyeing my father with disdain. "We were gifted to your daughter, and we are ensuring her needs are met and well satisfied," Rez answered. His rough, deep voice had a cultured edge to it. That surprised me almost more than the fact he'd spoken out loud.

I couldn't believe the first time I heard him speak was also the day I would prove it was scientifically possible to die from embarrassment.

"You have ten minutes to make yourselves presentable, and then we will be back to discuss things." My father helped my mother from where she sat dazed on the floor, and closed my front door with a resounding thud that had the picture frames banging against the walls.

I pushed away from Zon and scrambled off the table. Tears burned in my eyes as I ran to the bedroom and began tearing through the pile of clean but unfolded clothes that lived at the foot of my bed.

Rez's arms wrapped around me from behind, and he pulled me tight against him.



Don't cry, My Queen. I do not understand the cause, and your mind is too jumbled for me to make sense of your thoughts. How can I help?

"My parents just saw me banging a guy on my dining room table!" I wailed.

And this is unacceptable? Rez's tone was cautious, as though he were stepping his way through landmines.

I spun in his arms, thinking he wasn't taking me seriously. "Of course it is unacceptable! Are you going to tell me that dinosaurs were cool with watching their grandbabies be created?"

Of course not. We do not purposely watch others while they are mating. But if we happened upon another couple or group being intimate, there was no shame for either party. We simply walk away and give them privacy. There is no shame in showing love and meeting a biological need. Rez bent down, kissing away a tear that ran down my cheek.

"It's not like that in the modern world. Some people are more relaxed about it, and others are more uptight. And even though I didn't invite them over, it's still seen as disrespectful. They wouldn't want to see their little girl doing stuff like that..."

They are your parents, and they love you. This will not hurt your relationship for the rest of your lives, Rez reassured me.

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“Yeah, but it is likely to be horribly awkward for a while.” I chewed my thumbnail.  
“Plus, how am I going to explain the two of you?”

Rez shrugged. I already explained that to your father.

“No, your explanation likely has them thinking a friend gifted me with two male strippers and that I need therapy because I am secretly a sex fiend.” Groaning, I dropped my head against his chest.

Stripper? I don’t understand—

I cut him off. “Don’t worry about that. We need to find you some clothes. You can’t go out looking like that.”

I dug in the back of my drawer and came out with a small pile of clothing that an ex had left behind and I’d never gotten around to donating. “These won’t be your size, but they will do until I can go shopping.”

Zon walked into the room, and I tossed a pair of pants at both men. Zon sniffed and rumbled a growl. Rez did the same.

“What now?” I slipped on a clean thong and dug for a pair of my pants.

These belong to another male. Is there another male we need to know about?

I halted, my skinny jeans halfway up my thighs. “No, I haven’t been with him for almost two years. Why do you suddenly care? You were fine with me bringing the

detective to bed, but now you are jealous of my ex?”

Us agreeing to bring in an additional male is different from us needing to seek approval from an already established mate. There is a sense of pride in being the first mate, Rez answered, as though his logic made perfect sense.

“Whatever. There is nothing for you to worry about. There aren’t any other guys in my life right now, and I have zero plans to add any more. Good grief, I don’t even know how to explain this”—I waved my hand between the three of us—“to my parents. They aren’t exactly the most accepting of non-traditional relationships.”

Wiggling, I managed to get my jeans over my hips and pulled on a soft cami. Rushing to my bathroom, I swiped a brush through my hair. I glanced at my reflection, noting the redness on my cheeks from the men’s stubble and my puffy lips from their kisses. Unfortunately, I lacked the makeup skills needed to hide those signs of my love life.

Zon captured me in his arms as I left the bathroom. He nuzzled my neck, swaying slightly. At his touch, some of the anxiety vibrating through me relaxed. Rez stepped up behind us, wrapping his arms around my waist from behind. They cocooned me in their embrace, and it felt like heaven.

I understand enough of your thoughts to realize a relationship with more than one man is not common in your culture, nor is it something you had considered. I just ask that you please give us a chance to show you that this can work. We can work. Rez’s plea was an arrow to my heart.

Selfishly, I wanted this. I was living a dream straight out of a smutty novel. But the reality was a lot harder... starting with explaining things to my parents. If I gave them even a fraction of the truth, they might very well disown me. If I gave them the full truth, they’d probably have me committed.

A tentative knock on my front door interrupted us. Scrubbing my hands against my puffy red face. I headed toward my front door, feeling for all the world like I was heading to my execution.

REZ

I read a story about pig anatomy.

It was all straightforward until I found a twist in the tale.

\* \* \*

I watched my beautiful female walk to the door, her body stiff. Anxiety flowed from her. She was nearly terrified. How had she faced the destruction of the museum, coming face to face with two long extinct dinosaurs, without any sign of fear? And yet the two older humans had her shaking like a naughty child?

She opened the door, revealing her parents. Hard lines were carved into their faces, and the weight of their disapproval hung in the air. I had to fight every instinct to resist the urge to slam the door in their sour faces and kiss the hurt away from my Arizona's heart.

Arizona stepped to the side, allowing them to enter. They moved to the couch, her mother purposely avoiding eye contact while her father tried to shoot knives from his eyes at Zon and me. I was getting the distinct feeling he didn't like us. Not at all.

With a long sigh, Arizona closed the door before moving to the chair across from her parents. Her shoulders sagged as she settled in the chair, trying to make herself as small as possible. Annoyance flared through me. She was a queen. They should be the ones cowering in front of her.

Zonkut caught my eye, and I jerked my head. With a nod of understanding, he followed me to Arizona's side. I took up a position behind her chair, ready to spring to her defense if necessary.

Zonkut settled himself on the floor at her right side. I tried to hide my shock. No one in this room other than myself would understand the symbolism of his action. By lowering himself to the floor, he had taken the position of servant or pet.

Predators were proud creatures, and this was almost unheard of as a predator would only take such a stance for one they deemed powerful and worthy. Arizona was worthy, but her power seemed lacking... hence why I'd chosen a position from where I could defend her more easily.

I watched as Zon leaned his head against the arm of her chair and Arizona absently played with his long hair. Her breathing slowed, and she relaxed visibly. He had let her pet him. I barely contained my laughter at the thought of his brothers seeing him now. Once a prized member of the most prestigious court on earth, he now sat on the floor as a pet.

Instead of disdain, I was shocked to realize I was jealous. I wanted to be in his position, with her slender fingers brushing through my hair. How had she wrapped me around her finger so quickly? Giving myself a mental shake, I focused my attention on her parents.

"What do you have to say for yourself, young lady?"

Arizona flinched at the disgust in her father's every word.

Before Arizona could answer, her mother burst into tears. "We heard about the museum on the news this morning and how they thought it was probably some type of bombing. When you didn't answer your phone, we got so worried and rushed here

to check on you! And then we found you, you—with them!” she wailed.

“Mom, please don’t cry,” Arizona begged, her own lip quivering.

“Of course she is going to be upset! You didn’t think about how this would affect her. Were you so caught up with your boy toys that you couldn’t even stop to call and let us know you were okay?” Her dad’s voice had risen until he was almost yelling.

My body tensed, and I took a step forward, ready to launch between the two. How dare he yell at her like this?! Perhaps I should shift and eat him. I smiled at the thought, and it wasn’t a nice smile.

Calm down, Rez. He isn’t normally like this. They are scared.

Arizona’s voice was sweet in my mind. I didn’t care what reason he had to behave this way. It was unacceptable.

“Mom, Dad, my phone must have been destroyed in whatever happened. I couldn’t find it anywhere in my apartment this morning. I didn’t even know what had happened until two detectives showed up at my first thing.” Arizona leaned toward them as she spoke.

I could feel her distress. She didn’t enjoy lying to them, and the memories of what we’d spent the night doing were causing guilt to blossom inside her.

“How is that possible, Ari? We saw the footage of the museum storage area. It is a miracle you survived!” Arizona’s mother spoke through her sobs.

“I don’t remember what happened last night,” Arizona repeated what she had told the detectives.

Her mother rushed forward, grabbing Arizona in her arms. “Oh, baby! I’m so sorry I was angry with you. I’m just thankful you made it out alive.”

While her mother seemed to have bought the story, her father still looked suspicious. “And these two men? How do you know them? Did they take advantage of you during our lapse of judgment?”

“I had a lapse of memory, Dad. Not a lapse of judgment.” Arizona patted her mom’s back as she spoke to her father. “I just hadn’t had the chance to introduce them to you both yet.”

So she wanted to pretend we’d known each other longer than a day?

“Are you dating him, sweetheart?” Arizona’s mother looked between Zon and her daughter. Dropping her voice to a whisper, she added, “And isn’t it a little strange having them both here when you are having private time?”



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“Why would it be strange?” This modern language wasn’t difficult to learn, but it felt odd on my tongue.

Arizona sucked in a sharp breath of air while her parents’ eyes grew wide. “Rez, now really isn’t the time.” Arizona hissed under her breath.

“Because one of you would have to feel jealous, or at the very least some awkwardness, knowing what was going on in the other room. We all walked in on them together this morning!” Her father waved at Zon.

It took me a minute to put the words in the correct order before speaking. “There is no jealousy between us. It is beautiful to watch her with Zon, and he feels the same when she is with me.”

The color drained from her parents’ faces, leaving them the color of sun-bleached bones.

Rez! Having more than one partner is not common and is considered unacceptable in most societies! Arizona’s pulse raced, panic coursing through her.

I don’t understand. They are your parents, they would have found out, I tried to reason with her.

Maybe not! she protested.

Unless you planned to cut them from your life or cut us from your life, then it is impossible that they would be kept in the dark forever.

There was a long pause. Too long. My stomach lurched as the realization of what her silence meant slammed into me.

My Queen? You did not plan for us to stay together? My words shook as the mental link between us wobbled.

Her words were so soft that I nearly missed them. I-I don't know. This is all so much to take in.

I tried to see things from her side. Her fear, her confusion, her uncertainty.

But my pain was too strong.

We'd dedicated our lives to her when she was nothing more than a vision in the high priestess' head. I'd allowed myself to be magically bound as a gift to her, even though it had meant I would live without a mate in my previous life.

I'd survived those long years filled with loneliness, clinging to the glimpses of visions the priestess showed me. My love for her had grown every day. It had never occurred to me that by the time I met her, times would have changed so much that she was unwilling to accept the mates the priestess had prepared for her.

Now, I was faced with the possibility that I would be forced to live a second lifetime without my mate's love. Without Arizona.

The pain of that knowledge was too strong. I could no longer bear to be in the room with her, knowing that she was contemplating a life without us. I didn't want her to feel pressured to accept us, but neither could I handle the hurt that her hesitation was inflicting on my soul. To be near her, but not to be claimed by her... it was a special type of torture.

I tried to speak to her, but the mental link between us trembled and crumbled. Without my confidence in our bond, my mind couldn't maintain the link.

Clearing my throat, I managed to speak with a calm voice, a voice that hid the tumultuous storm raging inside me. "I think maybe it is best if I give you privacy with your parents." I fought the urge to lean down and place a kiss on her head and strolled from the room.

I walked out the door of her dwelling—home—and made my way down the hall, and emerged outside, following the way we had come the night before. Standing at the edge of the road, I wasn't surprised when Zonkut stepped up by my side.

We were not brothers born of blood, but we had been best friends since hatching. I almost smiled at the memory of Zonkut fiercely defending me when we were children. While I carried the strength of a beast that struck fear in the hearts of those around me, I'd never been eager to brawl.

Children could be cruel, and they seized on my reluctance, viewing it as a weakness. Zonkut had no such reluctance, and he relished any opportunity to hone his skills as a fighter. He'd pulled me from tight situations several times. Now he was in this mess because of something I had drawn him into.

I'm sorry, brother. Of all the visions the priestess shared with me, I never saw one where our bonded would not wish to claim us. I ground my teeth together. We both gave up our chance for a family when we last walked the earth, all to be part of her life. And that may not be possible now.

Zonkut's answer, when it came, sounded far away as though underwater. His skills with mental communication were not nearly as strong as his skills with his claws and teeth. I hold no grudge. You did not force me into this destiny. It is like a battle. We may win, or we may lose. There were no guarantees.

A battle? What a strange way to look at love. But the longer I thought about it, the more I thought he might be onto something. What if I treated this as a battle for Arizona's heart?

My heart still ached at the thought of her hesitancy and the rejection that could bring. That was because I felt as though I'd known her. I was already in love with her before I'd met her in person, and the thought of her refusing to claim us was devastating.

The problem was that Arizona hadn't known anything about the priestess, dinosaur shifters, bonding, or even magic until a few hours ago. She needed time to understand and then hopefully accept us.

We needed a battle plan.

It was time to capture our beautiful Arizona's heart.

ARIZONA

Why did the pig have ink all over his face?

Because it came out of the pen.

\* \* \*

My parents continued barraging me with questions, but their voices faded into the background until the only sound I heard was the hard pounding of my heartbeat in my ears.

Time slowed as I stared at the door, unable to believe Rez and Zon had left. A sharp pain in my chest had me rubbing at the area over my heart. How could I be experiencing more heartache over two men I'd known less than twenty-four hours than I'd experienced when I found out my ex was cheating on me?

Because they were mine.

The thought shook me.

They belonged to me.

It was such a weird, and more than a little creepy, way of thinking about another human... but it was right. Like the last puzzle piece clicking into place. It made sense on a level that logic couldn't touch.

“Sweetheart, I know you are young and prone to make some bad decisions as young people do, but this is not acceptable. What if the family finds out?”

Blinking away the haze, I looked at my mother, trying to comprehend her words. Even from across the room, I could see the rapid rise and fall of her chest. She was upset. With dawning understanding, I realized her stress wasn't so much caused by the scene she'd walked into that morning but by the thought of someone finding out that her daughter had more than one partner.

“If those men are willing to be in this type of relationship, then there is something not right about them. They are going to use you for a good time and then toss you aside for the next thrill,” my father added. “We tried so hard to raise you to have healthy relationships.”

How quickly their fear over my possible death had shifted into outrage over me living my life. There was a lot more that needed to be said between us, but it would have to wait.

“I've got to go.” Standing, I waited for them to do the same, but neither moved.

“Sit down. We aren't leaving until we know you've got your head screwed on straight again.” My dad motioned for me to take my seat again.

“Now isn't a good time for me. I really have to go.” My gaze shot to the door.

“You don't intend to go after those gigolos, do you?” Dad curled his lip in disgust and mom's eyes watered.

“Don't call them that!” I snapped, my patience running thin. I loved my parents, but the men were wandering around a city without an understanding of how the modern world worked. They needed me.

And I needed them.

My dad stood, helping my mother to her feet beside him. “We are going to leave. But you need to reign in this wild streak, Arizona. I won’t allow you to bring shame on our family name. If you choose to continue down this path, don’t bother showing up for family visits or holidays. Your boyfriends aren’t welcome in our home.”

My eyes burned with tears, but I wouldn’t let him see how badly he’d hurt me. They had never been like this as parents, and while I’d known they preferred traditional relationships and thus wouldn’t be comfortable with the idea of me being with more than one guy, I hadn’t thought they would basically disown me over it.

Something brushed my ankle, and I jerked in surprise. Albert sat on his haunches, his little upturned snout twitching. Reaching down, I pulled him into my arms, snuggling him against my chest. A calmness fell over me as I scratched his ears. I didn’t know how he managed to get out of the spare room, but I was thankful for the reassuring cuddles.

I was an adult, not a teenage girl, and I wouldn’t let him force me into his way of thinking. Standing tall, I met his eyes. “So you only want me as a daughter if I follow what you deem is acceptable?”

“I’ve supported your dreams, showed up for every school play, traveled to sports events, kissed hurt knees, and helped with homework. You were raised better than this, Ari. I won’t stand by as you ruin your life all for a fling or two that can’t ever last.” Dad’s voice cracked, his eyes red.

“You don’t know that it won’t last,” I whispered back.

“And you don’t know that it will. Are you willing to throw away your family for the unlikely possibility that it might work out? Are you willing to turn your back on your

family just so you can have your sex buddies?” he snapped back. Disgust, rage, and hurt shone behind his eyes. Mom hung onto dad’s arm, sobbing and looking anywhere other than at me.

“Get out.” There was no heat in my words. In fact, they were completely emotionless. “I won’t be disrespected in my home. I hope at some point we can work things out, but that can’t happen until you are ready to listen without judgment.” I was proud that my voice didn’t shake, and that I didn’t burst into tears.

My parents turned away from me without another word. There were no goodbyes. No ‘I’m so glad you are alive’ hugs. It was completely silent as they left the apartment and closed the door behind them with a soft click.

My lips quivered, but I refused to give in to the need to cry. For now, I would do the adult thing and shove the weight of my parents’ disapproval and my crushing heartbreak over how easily they could write me off just to save face in front of their peers into a box in the back of my mind. I would deal with all that baggage later. Probably. Maybe.



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“We’ve got to find the guys, Albert! I think I’ve really messed things up with them.” Albert only huffed in response. Kissing the top of his head, I set him down on the floor and rushed to find my shoes.

Snapping a leash on Albert’s harness, I rushed from the apartment and onto the streets.

“Now, where do I start looking?” I mumbled, glancing down the street. It was still early enough in the morning that not many cars were out.

Albert yanked hard on his leash, and before I could grab it, he bolted down the sidewalk.

“Albert! Stop!” I screamed, terrified that at any moment he was going to dart into the road and become flattened ham, or that he would fall down in a storm grate and meet a friendly clown.

The stubborn little ham ignored me and picked up the pace, his adorable butt jiggling as he rounded a corner too fast. I caught up, but he managed to stay just out of my reach. He ran like a pack of bacon addicts were chasing him, and he was the last pig on earth.

I’d begun losing ground, barely keeping him in my sight. My lungs were burning, and my side felt as though a knife was sawing away at my rib. Just as quickly as Albert had taken off, he screeched to a halt. Sitting down, he watched my limping approach with a look that said, ‘what took you so long?’

“Don’t. Ever. Do that. Again.” I wheezed each word, leaning against a stop sign to catch my breath.

I could have sworn Albert rolled his eyes, but decided it was my lack of oxygen that had me hallucinating.

As my pounding heart and gasping lungs quieted, the sounds of excited laughter and honking horns became clearer. Was there a parade? Using the hem of my shirt to wipe my brow, I finally took in our surroundings. My mouth fell open, and my soul left my body.

I lived on a relatively quiet side street in the city, but it was still only two blocks from the main street that traveled through the busiest sections of our fine city. While my city wasn’t the size of, let’s say, New York City, it wasn’t exactly a small country town either. Which meant that two dinosaurs stomping angrily in the middle of the street were going to get some attention.

A lot of attention.

For the love of peanut butter, how was I going to explain them away to the crowd of delighted onlookers? I didn’t have a magic wand to make them all forget, and since I could see several cell phones aimed at the duo, the people had proof.

Zon roared, spinning anxiously as the crowd pressed forward. There was no time left to think; it was time to act. ACT! That was it! Sometimes I was almost a genius.

Grabbing Albert, I barreled through the crowd like a running back with a pigskin and a mission. I tumbled out of the crowd and ran headlong into Rez’s thigh. Rez jerked away with a roar, no doubt believing the crowd was invading his personal space.

Rez, it’s me! Arizona! I wanted to scream the words out loud, but I didn’t want to give

the crowd any more information.

My mind remained horribly silent, and my gut twisted painfully. But then Rez caught sight of me. He released a rumbling chirp and dropped his massive head down. Reaching out a trembling hand, I rested my palm against his scales. Stepping forward, I pressed a kiss against his head and whispered, "I'm sorry."

Rez gave a soft trill that vibrated the ground under me. His massive size meant that even when being gentle, he was powerful.

Hearing Rez, Zon's head snapped in my direction. Tilting his head to the side, Zon studied us, probably trying to decipher where we stood. Rez gave a chirp, and Zon's tail wagged happily. The entire crowd melted at the doglike mannerism, which reminded me we had a crowd surrounding us.

Turning toward the audience, I gave a little bow. I raised my voice so that I could be heard over the chattering throng. "We hope you enjoyed our performance! Filming is still happening, but you will get to see more of these fabulous animatronics in the movie, which is coming to a theater near you! Thank you so much everyone for being a part of our demo today! I better get these guys back to the prop department before someone thinks I've stolen them away!" I winked, and the crowd laughed at my lame attempt at humor.

"If everyone could move to the sidewalk so I can get these guys moving, I would greatly appreciate it!" I motioned for people to split and move to either side of the street, breathing a sigh of relief as they slowly followed my request.

There were more than a few complaints, requests to touch the dinosaurs, and more than a few questions regarding how the animatronics worked. I mumbled answers to some and pretended not to hear others. As soon as there was a path large enough to accommodate Rez's tyrannosaurus body, I waved for them to move ahead of me and

down the street.

It went well for about twenty feet, and then Albert decided to make an appearance. With a happy oink, he raced as fast as his chubby little legs could move to catch up with Rez.

Rez glanced back, caught sight of Albert, and bellowed in terror. The hair on my arms stood on end, and everyone on the sidewalk covered their ears. The sound coming from the tyrannosaurus was one that no creature left on earth made. It was bone-chilling. Zonkut responded with a loud roar of his own before both dinosaurs ran for their freaking lives.

Each time Rez's massive foot pounded into the ground, the window panes rattled in every building that lined the street. People nearest Rez lost their balance, toppling to the ground. Parked cars bounced, and cracks spread like lightning strikes across the pavement.

Albert was completely unfazed by the pandemonium he had caused. With each step Rez made, Albert bounced several inches into the air, but as soon as his toes hit the ground, the chase was back on. If I didn't know better, I would think he was having the time of his life.

"No need to worry! This was just part of the show! The pig is a paid actor!" I tried to reassure the crowd as I backed away. Turning on my heel, I took off, chasing after the traumatized T-Rex, the rampaging raptor, and the sadistic sausage.

When had this become my life? Of all the things I'd hoped to experience in my life, this one hadn't made the bucket list.

Albert Einswine herded the panicking dinosaurs back toward my apartment with a skill I hadn't known he possessed. By the time I'd caught up, he'd chased them into

the windowless alley beside my apartment building. Scooping the ham up before he could follow them and possibly get trampled, I patted his head. “That’ll do, pig.”

Making my way into the dim alley, I eyed both dinos carefully. Their sides heaved, and they stomped nervously. I didn’t think they would purposely injure me, but that was just an assumption on my part because I had no freaking idea if they were more man or beast at the moment.

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“Guys?” I kept my voice low, trying to soothe them. “Everything is okay. I’ve got Albert, and he isn’t going to hurt you.” I was proud I managed not to laugh at the absurdity of the sentence.

Edging further into the alley, I slid my hand along Rez’s tail. I’d ridden horses for a while as a kid, and I remember my teacher instructing me to always make sure the horse knew where I was so I didn’t accidentally spook it. Rez wasn’t a horse, but the advice seemed good.

“Rez, Zon? I need you guys to hocus pocus yourselves back into men. Please?” When neither dinosaur so much as moved a muscle, I tried again. “Listen, I want this... this thing to work out between us. But we need to talk. I need help to understand what is going on and how all this is happening.”

The alley grew silent, and then the air grew warm, shimmering around us. Rez shifted from beast to man first. Once Rez’s shift was complete, Zonkut followed suit and shifted quickly.

I was disappointed—I mean, relieved to see their borrowed clothes were still intact. “How did your clothes not rip?”

“Magic,” Rez answered, giving me a small, hesitant smile.

Setting Albert down with a command to stay, I rushed forward, tossing my arms around Rez’s neck.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you.” My words came out muffled against his skin.

“I know. It is best we talk.” Rez hugged me tight before releasing me into Zonkut’s waiting arms.

I whispered my apology to him as well. Zon kissed the tip of my nose and motioned for me to lead the way out of the alley. I suspected he wanted me to go first as protection from Albert, but I didn’t say as much out loud. Grabbing Albert’s leash, we headed into the apartment building.

It was time to get my answers.

### ARIZONA

What did the pig say on the warm summer's day?

I'm bacon.

\* \* \*

It took almost thirty minutes to get Albert settled in with his breakfast. My growling stomach had reminded me Albert wasn't the only one who hadn't eaten breakfast, so I'd scrambled some eggs and fried some turkey bacon for the guys and myself. After clearing away the dishes, we moved into my living room. I sat in the recliner while the guys sat down on the couch across from me.

There was a long pause before Rez cleared his throat. "There is so much I need to explain, but I'm still finding it difficult to use your 'English' tongue."

"Can't you just do the telepathy thing?" I hadn't heard his voice in my mind since he'd walked out the door that morning. The emptiness left me feeling strangely lonely, and I missed the intimacy it had given us. It was a sign of how weird my life had become that I was missing the voices, er, his voice in my head.

Rez shifted in his seat, not meeting my eye. "That isn't an option at the moment. The link is unstable."

"Why is it unsta..." I trailed off as my mind attempted to put things together.



“I heard your hesitation and uncertainty regarding our future.” Rez focused on the window. “It made me question our future. It was selfish of me to assume that you would be as happy to see me as I was to finally be with you. My confidence was shaken, and without it, it is difficult to maintain a stable link between our minds.”

My stomach pitched, and my chest tightened. Voice cracking, I asked, “Can it be fixed? With time?”

Rezkac’s features softened. “Please don’t be upset, My Queen. It is not beyond repair. The link will reestablish as our relationship solidifies, but only if that is what you want. I do not want you to feel pressured to be with me, with us,” he emphasized.

I nodded, swallowing past the lump in my throat. It could be fixed. I wanted that. It was time to clear the air between us, and I needed to know my hero's backstory. I’d been woefully left out of the loop. “Who was the priestess? It seems like she is at the heart of all this.”

“Indeed, she was.” A tender smile lifted the corner of Rez’s mouth, sending a sharp stab of jealousy straight into my heart.

I stomped down the ridiculous feeling. I’d never been a jealous partner, and to be jealous over a lady who died during the age of dinosaurs seemed to be brushing along the edge of insanity.

“Priestess Tsufnu was a powerful woman, the most powerful to have existed since the dawn of time. She was an artist with magic. If her mind could think it, she could use magic to make it happen. There were very few things she could not do.”

There was no denying the respect that Rez had for this woman. It was in every word he spoke. The tiny green monster that had taken up residence inside me reared its ugly head again, and I heard myself asking, “Was she your wife?”

Both men's eyes grew wide, and then they burst into loud laughter. Crossing my arms, I waited until they pulled themselves together. Rez was still wiping away tears as he spoke. "Priestess Tsufnu was my best friend. We would have killed each other as bonded mates."

"Good," I blurted out.

"During my time, magic was everywhere. It flowed freely from the earth. My kind, the dinosaur shifters, used the magic to bend their form. But, the people of the priestess—the Vazi—used magic in their everyday lives. While my people were born with an inner beast, the Vazi were born with inner magic. Shifters use the magic around them to bend, but the Vazi create their own magic." Rez paused, giving my mind a moment to process the information dump. "Depending on their skill and strength, some benders learned to use the magic in other ways as well, but not like the Vazi could."

"So the Vazi are like witches?" I asked.

Rez's brow wrinkled. "From what I learned, while our minds were linked, the modern witches are descendants of the Vazi with extremely diluted bloodlines. They hold only a tiny flicker of magic inside them, whereas the Vazi possessed a powerful blaze of magic."

"Holy heck! Are you telling me that witches are really real? They're not just something out of the movies? Or a religion?" I blurted.

"I cannot speak to what the witches of your time are or are not. I do not know their practices or the details of their abilities. But yes, the reason they can cast spells is due to their bloodline."

"That's incredible!" I exclaimed, still trying to process that magic existed. "First, I

found out that shifters existed, although, to be honest, I would have thought werewolves were more likely than dinosaurs. I mean, you never read about dinosaur shifters in romance books, and if you do, the romance tends to fall more in the kinky read genre.”

Noticing the confused expressions on the men’s faces, I stopped rambling. My cheeks warmed. “Sorry. So, do werewolves actually exist?”

“I do not know. Werewolves did not exist during my time. With magic fading from earth, and the original benders’ bloodlines so diluted, I believe it would be nearly impossible for shifters to exist today. Perhaps a few, but even that is doubtful. It takes a considerable amount of power to bend into one’s beast.”

I nodded. What he said made sense. “Thank you for explaining how things were on earth during your time. I still don’t understand, though. What does it have to do with me? You keep saying that you were bound to me. It sounds as though you had no choice, almost like you were a birthday present that someone wrapped up and mailed me from the past. A long, long time in the past. How is that even possible? How is it even possible that you are alive? Dinos are extinct!”

Rez chuckled.

“What?” I demanded. “What’s so funny?”

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“I find it humorous, because you aren’t far from the truth. We are gifts to you. Gifts from the priestess.”

“Hold up, hold up, hold up!” I put my hands out in front of me, trying to stop his words from wrecking reality as I knew it. “That makes no sense whatsoever. Why would she do something like that? She didn’t even know me! Not to mention, that was a long time ago! What if she got the wrong girl? And why were you guys okay with it?”

“Calm down, My Queen. We were not forced; this was an honor for us. Priestess Tsufnu had many abilities which no other Vazi possessed. She had visions and could travel through dreams. The glimpses she had into the future went far beyond her life span, and she discovered her people would nearly die out. A few would survive, but most did not make it through the changing times. That knowledge broke her heart. Tsufnu wanted her daughter, her grandchildren, and her great grandchildren to experience the same joy of magic that she did.” Rez took a breath, giving me a moment to absorb the mini history lesson.

“Priestess Tsufnu began praying for a vision, hoping to see someone of her bloodline who could help revive magic. For many years, she walked through times and dreamscapes, finding no one. Until the day she found you. It was finding you that changed everything for her. Tsufnu had grown bitter and depressed, knowing her people would be forgotten and that the magic of the earth would slowly begin to die out. After, when she discovered you, her smile returned, and she seemed decades younger.”

Rez smiled, his gaze far away. “The priestess had lived a long life, and you became

her reason to continue living. You were her long-lost grandchild, who carried her blood and her magic within you. She wanted you to grow into that power, but she realized it would be difficult, if not impossible, since there would be no one to guide you or to teach you the ways of the Vazi.”

Maybe it was my confrontation with my parents that had me overly sensitive when it came to family, but my heart ached over his story of a woman I’d never met, who’d obviously loved me. I used the hem of my shirt to dab at my eyes.

Zon moved to sit at the foot of my chair, pulling my feet into his lap. “What are you doing?” I asked, voice wobbling.

“Comforting you,” was Zon’s clipped response as he began to massage my feet.

Zon was a man of contradictions. His exterior appeared rough, the type of man who’d die for his woman, but was sensitive enough to pick up on her need for touch and comfort.

Rez remained silent for several minutes, watching Zon with a strange expression. Finally, with a soft smile on his lips, Rez continued, “Mostly, she wanted you to know how much she loved you.”

“Then why send me gifts? Why couldn’t Tsufnu have used her magic to pop in for a visit?” I wished I could meet her myself, and have her here to explain all this to me.

“Sadly, it does not work that way. The priestess couldn’t work a spell of that magnitude on herself, but she could perform the spells on others. So that is what she did.”

“But how did you two get involved in Tsufnu’s plan? Did you know what she intended to do?” I found myself unable to sit still, the emotions driving me to fidget. I

needed to do something. Without realizing it, my fingers made their way into Zon's long hair. His dark hair was still slightly tangled, and I gently worked the knots from the long strands.

Rez answered, his eyes twinkling, "Yes, we both knew what we were agreeing to. Tsufnu and I had been friends for many years, and she knew I'd been unable to find my mate. One night, she included me in one of her dream travels. It was something that took a massive amount of energy and magic, but she wanted me to see you. She was so proud to show me her beautiful grandchild who would walk the earth someday."

My mouth dropped open. "You'd seen me before yesterday?"

"Yes. The moment I saw you, I knew you were my mate. It was only vague glimpses into your life, but I memorized every detail. The whole situation made no sense, and it should have been an impossibility. Fate matched mates so that they could live full lives together. Yet, we never would have met had it not been for the priestess' meddling. Tsufnu was delighted at the discovery and went into full matchmaker mode."

Rez chuckled at the memory. "She babbled on and on about the perfection of her plan. She used her magic to bind my soul to my bones. The spell worked so that when your magic was activated, I would be awakened and my body restored."

"And you!" I squinted at Zon, who watched the interaction between Rez and me with quiet amusement. "You just went along with this crazy plan? Was I your mate too?" My hand trembled as I continued stroking his hair.

Zon caught my hand, bringing it to his lips. "No, you were not my fated mate. But listening to Rez speak of you, and I wanted to see this girl who captured his heart. I asked the priestess to take me on a dream walk. The moment I saw you, I knew I

wanted you.”

“What about your fated mate? What if you missed out on a life with her?” I asked.

“I enjoy risk.” Zon shrugged, running his knuckles down the arch of my foot. “I stopped looking once I made my decision. I knew what I wanted.”

“Zon was not your fated mate in the same way as I was. He chose to be bonded to you through magic, not the call of his beast. It is still a powerful bond, but slightly different,” Rez added.

We sat in silence, my brain struggling to come to terms with the concept that these two men had committed themselves to me so long ago, and gave up so much just for a chance that we would find happiness together.

“What if you had been separated? I mean, there was a good possibility they could have only found one of you during the archaeological digs? Did they need to find your full skeletons for the magic to be able to activate?” I had zero idea how many of their bones had been in the museum’s storeroom.

Just thinking about it had my anxiety spiking. “That was a huge freaking risk to take! All on the off chance I would somehow run across you both and accidentally activate you!”

“We didn’t need our entire skeleton to be intact. That wasn’t how Tsufnu’s spell worked. If they only found a sliver of my bone, it would have been enough.” Rez tried to act as though it hadn’t been a huge risk, but I could read between the lines.

They’d taken a huge gamble for a chance at a life with me. And while it seemed crazy, I found myself longing to build a life with them. Which brought me to another question that had been weighing on my mind.

“Why do I feel like I’ve known you both all my life? Why does my body crave your touch? I know it might be hard to believe, but I’ve never invited a man who I’d just met over for sex, let alone two of them! I don’t understand my body’s reaction to you.” I’d started out strong, but my words were almost a whisper when I finished.

“The priestess embedded an ability into the magic inside her, and her children. This ability was passed from generation to generation. It allowed them to find their perfect mates. But as Tsufnu’s bloodline became diluted, the ability was lost. Your power is still latent, but even so, when the spell was activated, it triggered the magic, and it recognized us as your mates.”

“So she basically wrote a code in her DNA and then wrote a virus inside the code that would activate when certain keys were clicked.” It reminded me of my high school computer classes... on steroids.

“I don’t understand what any of that means. But, yes, that ability was written into the magic of your bloodline many thousands of years ago. Now, it has been activated, and that’s why you are able to recognize us as mates. Your magic also recognizes the magic of Tsufnu, your grandmother. In truth, she would be your many, many ‘greats’ grandmother, but that many ‘greats’ becomes confusing. While you still struggle with the idea of us being gifts, your magic does not. This is why your reactions to us differ from your reactions with other men.”

Collapsing back in the recliner, my mind bounced wildly between the past and the future. I whistled. “So basically, I have two mail-order husbands, er, mates?”

Both men chuckled. Rez’s smile lit up his face. “Yes. The delivery just took a while.”



### ARIZONA

Why did the pig break up with her boyfriend?

Because he was a boar.

\* \* \*

Rez sighed. “I see you have many more questions. Go ahead and ask them, Ari.”

I jumped right in. “But what does this mean for me? You’re not going to tell me I have to save the world? Or hide from bad guys? Or any other of the insane cliché romance tropes which I totally love to read, but don’t want to live, right?”

Rez’s brow raised, his expression amused and more than slightly confused. “The priestess did not tell me of a mission to save the world. Tsufnu was devastated that magic would dwindle to near extinction, and she wanted you to experience the joy she felt when using magic. She also hoped that through you and your children, magic might be reestablished on earth again—”

“Through my children?” My words came out in a squeak. “Slow your roll! I need some time to get used to the whole Fairy Grandmother dropping hot dudes off at my house for me to ‘experience magic,’ before I even consider the possibility of having kids!”

I didn’t have a problem with children, per se. But I also spent way too many hours at the museum surrounded by ill-behaved kids, and I didn’t have a particular interest in

coming home to kids too, even if they were mine... and had Rez's gentle eyes, or Zon's inky dark hair. I shook my head, trying to clear the adorable image from my mind.

"Not to mention we need a house with a yard if we are going to have kids. There wouldn't be hardly enough room for us in this cramped apartment, let alone if we added kids!" I put a hand over my chest, trying to calm the frantic pounding of my heart.

Rez's gaze traveled the room, and he nodded in agreement. "With the others, we'll definitely need more room."

"Others? What do you mean 'others?'" I asked, trepidation worming its way through me.

"Your other gifts from the priestess," Rez stated matter-of-factly.

"Yeah. That's you two, right?" I motioned between Zon and Rez.

Rez laughed. "No, of course not. We are not your only gifts. Your grandmother wanted to spoil you. There will be others. We just have to find them."

"Find them?" I yelped.

Where was I supposed to find more ancient dudes? In another museum? What if I accidentally blew that one up too?

Did I look like an adventurous treasure hunter? Nope. I was a city girl, not the find-hidden-temples-in-the-jungle type of girl.

And I certainly didn't go around looking for dead people I could raise to add to

my—what would that be called? A harem? No, a harem was for a man with a bunch of women. What would the opposite of that be? Maybe a reverse harem? I almost snickered.

“Plus, who in their right mind goes around trying to wake up dead people?” I shivered at the mental image that gave me.

“You will be drawn to them, Ari. There is no need to worry. Now that your magic has been activated, in time, you will find them.”

I’d had enough talk about waking up dead dudes, even if they might be as sexy as Zon and Rez. Time to move on to another question that had been running through my mind.

“How exactly did my magic get activated in the first place? Did I say a combination of words? Or was it the part where I nearly died? I bet it had something to do with the drug in that vase, though. Didn’t it?” I swallowed hard. “I still feel like I have dirt coating the back of my throat.”

Rez leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “Tell me what happened yesterday.”

“It was simple. I had just finished cleaning, and I saw something sparkly. I picked it up, and when I wiped my hand on the vase, it blew a cloud of dirt in my face. It went in my mouth, nose, and eyes. I couldn’t breathe and could barely see. While I was coughing and spluttering, I tripped. That’s when I fell into the crate filled with various random fossils.”

“That was all?” Rez prompted.

“Well, not exactly. When I fell into the bones, one must have cut my arm because I

was bleeding. There was a beautiful light. I thought I was dying!” I laughed, trying to play off how scary the whole situation had been.

“Your blood mixed with the dust?” Rez confirmed.

“Yeah, I guess it would have. The dust was everywhere.”

Rez thought for a moment. “Hmm. That might be the answer. I know that your blood was the ingredient needed to activate the spell’s magic. The vase was prepared by your grandmother, and the dust held the ashes from that spell. Tsufnu made sure the vase would find you at the right time in your life and help your magic to activate... and Zonkut and me to awaken.”

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It made sense, as much as anything about magic was making sense for me. “It was right after the light disappeared that the first bomb went off.”

“There was no bomb. That light was your magic waking, and when it did, it set off the chain of events which roused us from our slumber.”

My stomach dropped to my toes. “That would mean I was kinda sorta at fault for pretty much everything at the museum.” Except there was no way for me to explain it to the police without sounding like I needed a self-hugging jacket. I had to stick to my amnesia story, because it was far more believable than the truth.

“You are not at fault. There is no way you could have known your magic was going to activate there. It was simply an unfortunate location for that chain of events to play out.” Rez tried to assuage my guilt, but it didn’t help much.

Rubbing my temples, I moved to the last question I had at the moment. There would be many more questions to come, but my brain was on the verge of a nuclear meltdown. “Is there a chance I could avoid activating any more gifts from my grandmother? Maybe we can let the other men keep sleeping?”

Rez rested his chin on his hand, deep in thought. “No. I do not see any way it can be avoided. Now that your power is activated, your proximity is all it will take to activate other gifts the priestess left you. But why would you want to wait?”

“Just freaking fantastic,” I mumbled.

“Why are you so stressed? You did not have complaints last night. Are we

unacceptable as mates?" Zon asked.

"No! It was fantastic." I laughed. "It was better than fantastic; it was the best sex of my life. But there's a lot of judgment that we're going to face if we choose this." I motioned to the three of us.

"We have already chosen, but we will honor any decision you make." Rez's eyes had shuttered over, hiding his emotion from me.

My heart ached. I hadn't meant to hurt him. "I want you guys! I don't think you understand how badly," I cried, clenching my hands until I felt my nails bite into my skin.

"What is the issue? If you want us, and we want you, why do the opinions of the world matter? Aren't we enough? You can send us away, and we will accept your decision. But it will not stop the rest of your gifts from activating, and we won't be here to answer your questions or guide you in the things of the past. You will still have to deal with the other mates who will eventually awaken," Rez explained.

"Yes. I mean, no. Oh! I don't know." I ran a shaking hand through my hair, making it stick up at odd angles. "It's not strangers' opinions that worry me." I hesitated. "Fine, maybe I'm a little worried about them. But my parents made it clear that they don't want to see me again if I am going to continue this relationship with you both."

Zon and Rez's faces twisted into twin masks of horror. "Your parents would do this to you?" Rez choked out.

"They seemed pretty determined about it." I picked at one of the recliner's seams.

Zon's mouth fell open. "You live in a terrifying world! Do adults here also eat their young?"

It was my turn to be horrified. “Of course not! We’re not cannibals!”

Rez didn’t look convinced. “So your adults do not eat them, but they toss their offspring away if they no longer amuse them?”

“It’s not like that, okay?” I wanted to defend my parents. “They love me, and they are great parents. But they are embarrassed at the thought of their friends finding out about our relationship.”

“Why should strangers care what you do in your home? It does not affect them,” Zon interjected.

“It’s just the way things are. People love to share juicy gossip about others and judge them if they make choices different from what the majority does.”

Rez stood striding to me. Kneeling in front of me, he caught my hands in his and placed featherlight kisses across my knuckles. “I do not want to cause you pain. It distresses me to think of you losing your family. I will leave if you wish.”

My heart throbbed in panic. “No. I want you to stay. I want you both to stay. I’m an adult, and I can make my own decisions.” Good grief, I’d been living on my own since my eighteenth birthday, which was more than a few years ago.

“I am not questioning your ability to make decisions on your own, but I know it is hard to face disappointment from one’s family and to be shamed by them. I wish there was a way we could avoid this.”

Pulling one of my hands free, I brushed the back of my fingertips along his jaw. “So do I, and who knows? Maybe they’ll come around, eventually. Maybe the idea just shocked them, and when they see this isn’t a fling, they will grow to accept us.”

“Yes, we will hope for that.” Rez nuzzled his cheek into the palm of my hand before leaning forward to place a featherlight kiss on my lips.

“So, how will this work? Are we married now?” My cheeks grew hot.

Rez rested his chin on the recliner’s arm. “No, more like engaged or promised to one another. We have not performed a claiming ceremony to complete the bonding. Until then, we are engaged.”

“There’s so much that we’re going to have to figure out. There’s barely enough room here for Albert and myself, let alone for the two of you. I was due for a raise at the museum soon, but I doubt that’s going to happen now that I’m a suspect.” I chewed on my bottom lip.

There were so many decisions to make. They didn’t have ID, they couldn’t drive, and I couldn’t even trust them to not panic and shift in the street. Which meant they couldn’t work a job. How was I going to support the three of us on my measly museum salary?



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“Ari, stop stressing. We knew we were coming to a world that would be far different from ours, and we prepared for it with the priestess’ help. Give us a little time to adjust, so that our beasts are not so jumpy, and I assure you, things will work out.” The deep timbre of Rez’s voice soothed my frayed nerves.

The day had been a chaotic mess from the moment I’d opened my eyes, and I really didn’t know how much more I could take.

“Come on. You were awakened far too early this morning.” Rez kicked a protesting Zon out of the way so he could pull me to my feet.

Ignoring my protests, Rez lifted me in his arms and maneuvered down the narrow hallway, careful not to bang my head against the wall or doorframe.

I relaxed in his arms, relishing the security of having his sexy arms around me as he carried me into the bedroom. The same bedroom where we had enjoyed each other’s bodies only hours before. The memories had my body flushing.

“Arizona.” Rez’s tone was scolding, but his eyes twinkled. “Stop thinking of such tempting things.”

“I wasn’t!” I protested weakly. “And you’re not in my head now, so you don’t know what I was thinking!” Widening my eyes, I tried to appear innocent.

“I may not be in your head, but I can smell your desire,” he whispered, voice husky.

“You can what?” My voice was shrill, and all desire dried up faster than rain in the

desert. Having someone smell me did not sound at all sexy.

“You’re lying.” There was no hiding my hopeful tone.

“I’m not. You smell incredible, and I want nothing more than to strip you naked and lick up every drop of your fragrant nectar. But all our bodies need rest. Bending between our forms is a challenge that requires immense energy, and we’ve done it more than once since awakening. We need sleep.”

Rez laid me gently on the bed. He quickly pulled off his shirt, but left his pants on as he crawled into bed beside me. “I can’t risk tempting such a sexual deviant,” he teased.

I laughed, and he brushed a stray hair away from my face.

Zon sauntered into the room, tossing his shirt on the top of my dresser and crawling in bed behind me. He pulled me against him, so that I was the little spoon.

“You’re warm,” Zon murmured in my hair.

“Thanks? I guess?” I mumbled, not sure if being warm was a compliment.

“Dinosaurs like the sun and heat, and you are like sleeping with a tiny fire.” Rez answered my unspoken question. “Now, hush. It’s time to sleep.”

The sound of tiny toes tapping on the hardwood floor in the bedroom caused both men to stiffen. Albert walked up the little ramp at the end of the bed, settling against my feet with a contented sigh.

“He’s not going to hurt you guys. ‘Cause he’s a good boy,” I cooed at my piggy companion. He’d brought his favorite stuffed toy with him and cuddled it under his

chin. Albert's eyes began to droop closed.

"Me and the pig are a package deal. You're going to have to accept us both at some point." I met Rez's wary gaze.

Rez's jaw clenched. "We will try to remain calm in our human forms, but it would be best for us to avoid Albert while in our dinosaur forms. At least until we gain better control of our beasts. It has been a long time since they've walked the earth, and there are too many stimuli in the modern world. The pig, as you call it, is one of the few things we do recognize while we are shifted. And it is not a reassuring thing for our beast to see."

"Fine, you do your best to accept Albert when you are men, and I'll do my best to keep Albert from scaring you guys when you're big bad dinosaurs."

Rez's eyes narrowed. "I feel like you are mocking us."

Zon's arms tightened around my waist. "She is. Our little queen has no idea what she has living under her roof."

"Yes, I do! He's just an adorable pig!" I laughed and scooted back tighter in Zon's arms, loving the solid reassurance of his body curved around mine. I'd never fallen asleep faster.

### ARIZONA

A local farmer has trained his pigs to perform ballet.

I'm going to see their production of swine lake.

\* \* \*

Isat at my desk at the museum, staring into my half-empty cup of coffee. And yes, I was having a pessimistic kinda day. I hadn't realized how hard it would be to go to work and be forced to leave the men in my apartment.

I'd been praying all day that Albert wouldn't figure out how to get out of the spare room while I was gone. I could just imagine the news frenzy that would happen if Rez went full T-Rex and destroyed half the apartment building.

That wasn't even my only worry at the moment. My leg bounced, the anxiety needing an outlet, and I swiped my sweaty palms down my dark jeans. I'd had a meeting with the board of directors that morning, and I wasn't exactly sure where I stood with them.

I'd gotten the distinct feeling they'd have loved to fire me on the spot, but they couldn't risk it. They were in a sticky situation until the investigators figured out what had happened in the storeroom. I could guarantee they wouldn't figure out the truth. That meant whatever they wrote as the cause would be false. And that made me nervous.

But until the board members had the detectives' final report, they couldn't fire me. If I caused the damage, and they could prove it, I knew that not only would they fire me, but I would face legal and criminal action as well. The city frowns upon detonating bombs and the demolition of buildings without proper permits.

However, if I was innocent, then I could sue them because they hadn't provided proper security, and I could have been killed. Not to mention they'd be forced to cover any long-term medical issues I might have.

I had exactly zero plans to pursue anything legal against the museum. There was no way I'd be able to live with myself since I knew what really happened.

It wasn't my fault. Not exactly. But it also wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been there that night... if my magic hadn't been activated, and my dino mates hadn't awakened and released havoc on the building.

Basically, both the museum and I were innocent bystanders in this whole situation. I wasn't an idiot, though, and I didn't think that it was in my best interest to tell them that. So, for now, I had an uneasy truce with the directors.

Unfortunately, the questions hadn't stopped after my meeting with the board. My coworkers had been eager to hear all the gossip about what had happened and were greatly disappointed to learn I didn't remember anything. Now, they were back to ignoring me. I suspected they'd picked up on the directors' annoyance with me and didn't want to risk my bad luck rubbing off on them. Who could blame them?

But it was making for an even lonelier morning. The only bright spot had been the constant stream of people coming to the museum, which had kept me busy. The news about the suspected bombing had spread, and rather than people steering clear, they'd decided that today was the day they should visit the museum.

There were a lot of disappointed people when they realized that the areas that sustained damage were off-limits and weren't open to the public. Not even for a quick peek.

Seeing my next tour group making their way toward me, brochures and tickets in hand, I pushed to my feet. Their eyes were eagerly peering around the museum, trying to spot signs of anything out of the ordinary.

Pasting a smile on my face, I greeted them cheerfully and led them through the museum, falling into the memorized spiel I used with every tour.

Eventually we reached the part of the museum that displayed our complete dinosaur skeletons, dino teeth, pieces of dinosaur eggs, and of course, Coprolites, a.k.a. dino poop. As we entered the room, a tall man caught my eye.

Shut the front door!

It was Detective Jack Oliver.

What was he doing here? There was no way this was a coincidence.

The man was stalking me. All right, to be fair, he could have been at the museum checking for damage, and I was the prime suspect slash victim in his case. But why was he in part of the museum which had sustained zero damage?

Oliver turned, and our eyes met. Smiling, he lifted his hand in a small salute.

I tried to remind myself I should be angry that he was spying on me, but his smile was turning my insides into goo, and my heart thudded out a happy beat as though excited to see a lover. Which was a serious problem since he wasn't, and I needed to avoid him.

Ignoring his friendly gesture, I focused back on my tour group. An older gentleman raised his hand, asking several questions. Thankfully, the museum prepared us for the most common questions visitors might ask, and I answered his questions easily.

While I was speaking with the inquisitive older gentleman, a movement along the wall behind him caught my attention. Standing against the wall were two broad-shouldered men.

Two men, who I distinctly remember telling to stay in the apartment.

Why were they here? This was not good, not good at all! After dinner the night before, I'd gone on a quick shopping spree and bought them the essentials. Looking at them now, I couldn't deny that they looked sexy in their dark wash jeans, their muscles bulging under their vintage-style T-shirts. I wasn't the only one who thought so, either. A group of women were making a show of looking at the exhibit right next to Rez and Zon, trying to 'accidentally' brush against my men.

I was about two seconds away from stomping over to them and making a scene that would have gotten me fired when Zon and Rez moved down the wall and into the shadows, carefully avoiding the women. The rapid pounding of my heart began to slow the moment my men were an arm's length from the women. I hated this irrational jealousy, but it seemed like I was unable to control it when it came to Zon and Rez.

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I made a show of pointing at one of the exhibits, ushering the crowd away from the dino-dudes, while also taking discreet glances at the detective. He had his back to my little group, ostensibly studying a life-size replica of a caveman painting that had been painted on the museum wall. I didn't miss how he managed to meander in the same direction that my little group was going, though.

You told us to stay home, but how are we to learn about your world if we do not observe it?Rez asked in my mind.

Oh, so now you can use the mind link?I snapped back. Truthfully, I was excited to see them. It had been miserable being away from them. But the thought of them alone in the city and unprotected, sent a shiver of fear down my spine.

I heard Zon snort, which was followed by a grunt as Rez elbowed him.

I assure you. We are far from helpless and defenseless. Zon barely contained his laughter.

From what I know of your world, we are likely the most dangerous creatures to exist in this century,Rez added, cockiness leaking from his words.

Yeah, and one wrong move on your part, and you'll end up in an electrified cage in an underground lab on land that the government claims doesn't exist. And that's the optimistic outcome! They could decide to dissect you both! I was nearly yelling at this point, and it was giving me a migraine.

Are you okay, Arizona? You are tense, and anxiety is pouring off you. Why do you



keep glancing at the man looking at the wall? Rez paused before he spoke up again. And why is he studying those drawings so intently? Ari, I thought museums were for priceless artifacts?

Yes, they are. Museums preserve things from the past, to teach future generations about the things that came before them, I answered automatically, having sat through more than one dull training meeting on the importance of museums.

I'm confused. If that is the case, why are those paintings on the wall in such a prominent location? Rez asked.

Shouldn't they know the answer to this? Because those were some of man's earliest expressions of language! They used pictures to communicate and record stories. It's incredible what they could convey through the simple images. And yes, Mr. Mind Reader, I'm worried about the guy who's looking at them. He's one of the detectives who is investigating me.

Rez was quiet, and when he spoke, there was keen interest in his voice. I see. Is it the detective you wish to have sex with?

I tripped, nearly tumbling over one of the red velvet ropes and into an exhibit. I laughed awkwardly, trying to cover up how flustered I was by Rez's bluntness. He is the nicer of the two detectives who visited us.

Zon's sexy laughter filled my mind. So he is the one you wish to bed.

My cheeks burned hot, and I fanned myself with my clipboard.

"Miss? Are you feeling okay? You look like you might get sick," the too observant for his own good gentleman asked, studying my face with concern.

His wife whispered a bit too loudly in his ear, “I heard she was the survivor of the explosions.”

Another older lady made a tsking sound, and whispered loud enough that I could still hear, “Oh my! Poor dear. She should be at home. Why do they have her working?”

“I am fine, everyone! I feel like it is a little hot in here today. Now, if you’ll follow me, I want to show you our Brontosaurus skeleton. It’s one of the most complete skeletons in any US museum, and we are quite proud of it!” I winked at the crowd and walked with an extra bounce in my step, wanting to convince them I was fine.

Rez spoke, Just so you know, the cave paintings are not what you think they are.

Zon snickered.

Then what are they? I hissed back mentally.

Rez hesitated. They are from something you call a drinking game.

Please tell me you are not about to inform me that scientists have been studying the drunk scribbles of grown men?

My mind was eerily quiet. Rez?

You said not to tell you, so I thought it best to keep silent.

Zon’s soft chuckle came from the shadows, and I pretended not to hear it. I eyed the cave art with a critical eye. Rez was wrong about them, wasn’t he?

As we walked, the guests talked about the beautiful paintings of the various dinosaur species. The chatty gentleman pointed to an image of an oviraptor. “I read that those

were known as excellent mothers!”

I nodded. “You are correct! One was even found guarding its nest, proving that they have a strong maternal instinct.”

Wheezing laughter echoed from the darkened corner of the museum.

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Exasperated, I demanded. What now?

They were terrible mothers. Absolutely terrible! Res exclaimed, his voice tight as he tried to hold back his laughter.

Yeah, then explain why they were found near their eggs and skeletons of their young if they weren't protecting them!

They fed on their young, that's why! Zon cackled.

Rez pulled himself together, trying to sound serious. These were not shifters, our kind would never do something so atrocious. When the babies began to hatch, the adults of the species would descend on their nest, devouring the young.

No! I gasped. Science couldn't have gotten it that wrong.

Zon, unable to help himself, elaborated, Yeah, and they didn't care if it was their neighbor's kids or their own. They were literally the worst parents of the dinosaur world. The only reason they survived for so long as a species was due to the large number of offspring they produced.

Unable to speak and really not sure what to do with the information that the dinos had just given me, I motioned for the tour group to continue walking.

I spent the rest of the tour carefully avoiding the dino-dudes and the detective. When finally, my guests were exploring the museum on their own, I moved toward the desk, hoping to drink the rest of my now cold coffee.

“Miss Arizona? Do you have a minute?” I didn’t need to turn around to recognize Detective Oliver’s voice.

Sighing, I slowly turned around to face him, plastering a tired smile on my face. “Hi, Detective.”

“Call me Jack.” He held out his hand, and wary, I took it.

Just like before, electricity traveled between our clasped hands. Was the man wearing a prank clown zapper? With an awkward laugh, I pulled my hand free, massaging the tingling skin with my opposite hand. “Quite the handshake you got there.”

Jack turned his hand, his brow crinkling. “Odd. That only happens with you.”

My mouth moved faster than my brain, and I retorted playfully, “I bet that’s what you tell all the girls.” I wanted to kick myself. Why was I flirting with him? I never flirted!

Jack’s lips curved into a smile. “You’re something else, Arizona. And no, I don’t tell other girls that. It seems you have a shocking effect on me.”

I couldn’t help it. I laughed at his lame pun. I was a sucker for corny jokes. Which is exactly why I needed to get as far away from him as possible. “Is there something you needed help with?”

“No, not today anyway. I just wanted to say hello and see if you had remembered anything else about Sunday night?” His features had shifted back into that of a focused professional, and my heart gave a sad ache.

Could my newly awakened magic really be playing that much havoc inside me? I made a mental note to discuss my magical mood swings with Rez.

“No, I still haven’t been able to remember anything. I’m sorry. I really wish I could be of more help.” I gave him a sad smile. “I promise to call if I do, though!”

“That’s all I can ask. See you around, Arizona.” Without waiting for my response, Jack spun on his heel and headed out of the lobby into the late afternoon sunshine.

\* \* \*

Returning home that evening, I was relieved to find that both men were safely in the apartment. Both men were dressed in the same dark jeans they’d been wearing at the museum, but their shirts were nowhere to be seen. Zon lay stretched out on the couch, while Rez leaned back against the couch, his legs crossed in front of him.

They must have figured out how to use the television because both men were completely enthralled, not even glancing at me as I came through the door.

Well, I guess the honeymoon stage is over! I laughed to myself. I set my stuff down and stepped down the hall to crack open the door to the spare room, wanting to make sure Albert Einswine was unharmed.

The little ham gave a happy oink and stretched his front legs before wiggling his way over to me.

“Well, hello, Albert.” I scratched under his chin. “I’m glad to see you didn’t become an appetizer for the men.”

Albert released a noise that was curiously similar to a snort of derision, as though he found the concept of him being in danger from the two men ridiculous. I had to admire his confidence. Quickly washing out his food and water dish, I poured clean water and his favorite food.

Once he was happily chowing down, curly pink tail twitching, I decided it was time I got comfy too.

I kicked off my shoes in the hallway and slipped out of the tight jeans and navy dress shirt I was required to wear while working the front of the museum.

Rummaging through a drawer, I found one of my buttery-soft oversized T-shirts and slipped it over my head. I briefly considered slipping on a pair of shorts underneath it for modesty, but decided against it and closed the dresser drawer.

Feeling a bit naughty, I made my way down the hall and into the living room. Rez's attention continued to be focused on the television, but Zon noticed me standing beside the couch, and his eyes darkened as they traveled the length of my body.

Zon's nostrils flared, sending warmth flooding my belly. It was intoxicating having a man look at me like that. He opened his arms for me, scooting until he was lying on his side, with his back pressed against the back of the couch.

Rez didn't even notice as I stepped over his legs and laid down in front of Zon. There was barely enough room for the two of us, even with both of us lying on our sides.

Zon held me tight against him as we watched the movie. A movie I couldn't even tell you about, because I was far too busy savoring how good it felt to not be alone after a long day at work.

Sure, I'd had Albert to greet me, and the little pig had cheered me up through some pretty down times. But I hadn't realized how lonely I was until that very moment being cuddled by Zon.

### ARIZONA

I saw a pig with laryngitis.

He was disgruntled.

\* \* \*

Stifling a giggle, I watched Albert sneak into the room and head for Rez, who had fallen asleep. The tiny pig scooted on the floor until he pressed against the unsuspecting man's leg.

I'd expected Albert to do something, maybe spring onto Rez's lap, or give one of his eardrum-bursting squeals. But he just lay motionless. Waiting. But for what?

My attention was drawn elsewhere when Zon's hand slid beneath my shirt. The heat of his flattened palm against my lower stomach was incredible and had butterflies flitting about in my belly. His fingertips played with the band of my thong, and I bit my lip to keep from growling at his teasing.

"Patience. There is no rush," Zon rumbled, his lips brushing my ear.

I forced myself to relax and enjoy Zon's attention. I was used to wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am type of sex. Foreplay wasn't something I'd much experience with.

When his fingers finally moved lower, pressing against my sex, my eyes crossed. I shifted my hips slightly, hoping to encourage him to get on with it.



“Be still. If you move, I will stop,” Zon growled, lips trailing along my exposed neck.

I’d never been given an order during intimate moments, so I was surprised when my body quivered in desire from his command. Forcing myself to relax, I tried to keep my body from twitching.

“Good girl.” Zon rewarded me by slipping a single finger between my lips and stroking it across my entrance.

Unable to help myself, I moaned. Zon’s right arm was tucked beneath me, and he quickly brought his free hand up to my mouth, stifling the sounds of my pleasure.

“Shh. Rez is sleeping. It would be rude to disturb him.” Zon’s mouth continued to lick a line of fire down my neck. “Can you be quiet?”

I nodded, willing to agree to anything if he would get back to stroking me.

“That’s my girl,” he trilled. The birdlike sounds were deeper than any bird could make, and they were odd coming from a man. But there was also something sexy about them as well, and my body was quick to respond, sending lust flooding my core.

His finger slipped easily inside me. My desire was providing far more lubrication than was necessary. I closed my eyes as his calloused skin gently stroked my tight walls. It took everything in me to not react, and somehow that made me even more excited.

“So wet for me.” Zon’s tongue traced the edge of my ear, causing my body to quake. He plunged the finger deep inside me, and I had to bite my tongue to keep from crying out at the incredible sensations.

His finger plunged in and out, and my body tightened with the demand for release. Then he stilled, and in desperation, I nearly moved my hips. Zon was a man on a mission now, his finger locked on its target. There was no stopping my trembling when he flicked across my sensitive bundle of nerves.

“I’m going to make you come, and you will be silent. Understand?” Zon’s hot breath teased across my skin.

Unable to do anything else, I nodded again.

Zon picked up the speed, his finger moving expertly as he turned my body into his toy. It didn’t take long before my need morphed from hunger to borderline pain. I needed release.

My teeth ground together as pain and pleasure mixed in a raw combination that built faster and faster inside me. But I just couldn’t find my release.

“Come for me, baby. Now,” Zon whispered.

I obeyed him. Letting go and trusting him to catch me from the heights he had driven me to. When my release came, I bit down on Zon’s hand, which still rested lightly against my mouth. He growled, and his hips jerked hard against my butt. My body shuddered, and tears burned the backs of my eyes.

“I’ve got you.” Zon’s words were almost loving. His finger rubbed lazy circles around my swollen clit, sending aftershocks of pleasure through me.

We rested there through two more commercial breaks. Zon’s left hand pressed against my lower stomach, and his right hand rested gently against my throat. I couldn’t believe Rez had yet to stir.

Zon repositioned himself behind me, his hand disappearing from my stomach for a moment before he settled behind me, and his hand returned to my stomach.

There was a pause, and then Zon jerked his hips against me. This time, when his hips shifted, things had changed, though. He'd undone his jeans, freeing his erection so it could slide between my legs and stroke the thin, soaked fabric of my thong. Both our bodies shuddered at the delicious friction.

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Zon's fingers tightened almost imperceptibly around my throat. "Same rules as before. If you move or make a sound, I'll stop."

Heat warmed my belly. I glanced at Rez, but he hadn't stirred.

Bucking his hips again, Zon's erection pressed against the fabric for a moment before it again slid between my legs. Each time the tip pushed at the fabric, teasing at my entrance, I wanted to reach down and move my soaked panties to the side. But I worried if I so much as twitched that Zon would follow through with his threat and stop altogether.

Zon's unhurried pace grew faster, and his breathing became ragged. His smooth undulations shifted into something rougher. The tiny triangle of fabric was being pushed to the side with each pump of Zon's erection between my legs. One more thrust and he would be—

With a single thrust, his erection pushed my thong out of the way, and he sank deep inside me with that single long pump. My eyes rolled back in my head, and Zon growled. Not a playful growl, but something else. Something that had my insides quivering with fear and excitement.

His teeth sank into the skin between my neck and shoulder, the skin he had been kissing and licking moments before. It wasn't hard enough to break the skin, but it was close.

I'm not sure what had alerted Rez to the situation, but he'd woken from the depths of slumber in about two seconds flat.

Rez's eyes glowed, and his chest rumbled a warning as he snarled at Zon. "What were you thinking? You know better!" Rez went to move and then noticed the pig sleeping against his leg. He froze, eyes widening.

Zon released a chuckle that was dark and sexy as sin, his chest vibrating against my back. He pulled his hips back and thrust inside me with a force that shook our bodies.

"Zonkut. Stop this now. We had an agreement." Rez's voice held a barely restrained fury, and his body trembled.

"You forced that decision on me," Zon snarled, the words barely intelligible.

"She is human, her body is not made for our beasts. You could hurt her." Rez's eyes darted between the sleeping pig and Zon, his indecision clear on his face.

"Ari is our mate, and she is Vazi. Her body is made for us. Our beasts will not hurt her." Zon shifted his hips again, burying himself completely.

The air suddenly felt alive around us, like electricity crackling. The clean scent of ozone filled my lungs as I panted. My body tightened around Zon's erection, begging him to give me more.

One minute I was lying on the couch, Zon behind me. His erection deep inside me, his teeth pressing into my neck, and his hand clamped to my hip, holding me in place. The next, I was flat on my back on the carpet, Rez crouched over me like a lion protecting its kill.

Zon pushed himself up on the couch, his pupils little more than thin slits as he hissed a warning. "Mine. Move, Rezkac."

I tried to remember the scout classes my mom had forced me to attend. A wildlife

expert had visited to teach us what we should do if we ever encountered a large predator like a bear.

Where she thought a group of city girls were going to encounter a bear, I didn't know, but now I tried desperately to remember her advice. Was I supposed to play dead? Oh yeah, it was:

“If it's black, fight back.

If it's brown, lay down.

If it's white, say goodnight.”

So, what was the best course of action when it was a dinosaur?

“If it's a raptor, don't let it tap her?

If it's a T-Rex, it's time to have sex?”

Rez made a strange choking sound, and Zon burst into loud, shocked laughter. The tension in the room ebbed away.

Rez looked down at where I lay beneath him. “Poetry is not one of your strengths, my love.”

“I disagree. That was elegant.” Zon chuckled. He was smiling, but his pupils were still thin slits. His beast was barely under the surface.

Rez leaned back, helping me sit up. “I warned you not to give us your back during intercourse. You are going to be trouble.” I didn't appreciate his scolding tone, nor did I appreciate that I was hot and bothered... and noticeably empty without one of

them in me.

“I don’t understand why, though. We were just fooling around. All couples do that!” I retorted, pulling my shirt down to cover my girly bits.

“Maybe it is fine for human couples, but it is too dangerous when one mate is part dinosaur.” Rez’s eyes followed my movement to cover myself.

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I barked a laugh. “That doesn’t make sense, Rez! You are fine to visit pound town as long as we face each other, but if we do it doggy style, it’s suddenly taboo?”

“Doggy style.” Zon’s eyes glinted as they traveled down my body. “Dino style is far superior.”

My body heated, and my imagination kicked into overdrive. Zon took a single step toward me before Rez’s palm slammed into his chest, stopping him.

“I said no! That is final.” Rezkac gave a frustrated growl.

“You are not the boss of me!” I hated that I sounded like a bratty teenager, but it was frustrating that everyone in my life had taken to making decisions for me without asking for my input. Also, I swear my lady bits were about to come to life and bite someone’s head off if I didn’t come soon.

Rez’s shoulders stiffened, but to my surprise, it was Zon who responded; all teasing gone from his voice. “Because dinosaurs only have sex in one position. The male penetrates from behind. When we are in our human form and experience intense emotions, it can trigger our beast, and that is dangerous since our self-control is strained.”

“Trigger you to what? Shift into your dinosaur body?” The thought of him shifting into his raptor with his erection inside me was terrifying. How long would his dino-dong be? It would split me in two.

Rez answered, “No, of course not. Our beast would never do something so dangerous



and risk the life of his mate. The beast is eager to please his mate too, and will use magic to alter certain parts of our bodies to increase the satisfaction of our mate and the likelihood of her conceiving.”

“I don’t get it. If your beast would be doing that to please me, then why do you think it would hurt me?” I wasn’t about to admit how curious his admission had made me. What could the beast do during sex to make it even better? I squeezed my legs together, hoping that the guys wouldn’t smell my lust.

“Because those, um, adjustments were intended for female dinosaur shifters. Their bodies were made for ours—no matter what our form. Your body was not, and I fear the beast doesn’t understand that. I won’t risk you being injured.” Rez was resolute in his conviction.

However, when I looked at Zon, the raptor winked. My body clenched in response. If I wanted to test the theory, I would bet Zon would be down for some experimenting.

With a smirk, I reached for the hem of my shirt, preparing to pull it over my head. Unfortunately, a sharp knock at the door kept me from trying to test my theory.

I was getting pretty tired of being interrupted by uninvited guests. Maybe I should start looking at moving sooner rather than later?

ARIZONA

What do you call a trendy pig?

Calvin Swine.

\* \* \*

I hurried to grab a pair of shorts, putting them on as I moved toward the door. Albert followed me, and I nearly tripped over him as I wiggled my way into the old denim shorts.

My mind was still working overtime, trying to figure out what exactly the guys were keeping from me, and how they thought it could hurt me. Which is why I flung the door open without remembering to check who was there first.

“Jack!” I squeaked his name like I’d been sucking helium, and all the air left my lungs in a whoosh.

Jack laughed. “I didn’t expect you to be so happy to see me?” I knew the moment his eyes landed over the two shirtless men in my living room, because his smile dropped away, and his expression shuttered closed. “I apologize. I should have realized you might have company.” I would never admit it, but it hurt when his eyes looked back at me, this time cool instead of friendly.

“It’s no problem. Don’t worry about it.” But I was worried about it. What if he started trying to do background checks on Rez and Zon? That wasn’t going to end well for

the three of us.

“I came to ask if you would like to go out for a quick bite to eat. Maybe we could go over a few things I’ve found out about the disaster at the museum. Your friends are welcome to come.”

I didn’t miss how he stumbled over the word ‘friends,’ nor did I miss that instead of calling it a bombing, he called it a disaster. Red flags started waving in my mind. This was not good.

“We’d love to. Thanks!” Rez accepted before I could decline.

Rez! What are you doing? Are you crazy? This will just give him a chance to probe for more information, I growled, my frustration at an all-time high.

It is also a chance for us to learn about what he knows. Better to be prepared if there is going to be a problem. His eyes softened. I see the reaction your body has to him. He could be one of your mates, and you are fighting it.

Jack Oliver is human, not Vazi, and definitely not a dino-shifter. He cannot be one of my ‘gifts.’ I shut that idea down real quick. I had enough on my plate without bringing my enemy into my bed.

Stop being dramatic. Oliver is not your enemy. He is a man who is doing his job, and he may be able to help you stay out of trouble. Just because he isn’t a gift doesn’t mean he isn’t a mate. Have you forgotten that Tsufnu’s bloodline carried a magic that alerts you to your perfect matches? Rez tried to reason with me.

But I wasn’t in the mood to be reasonable. I was tired, horny, and hungry... and not necessarily in that order. You don’t understand how risky this is.

Maybe not. But I do understand how important mates are. His response was so quiet I almost missed it.

Sighing, I opened the door a little wider. “If we are going out, I need a minute to freshen up. Why don’t you come in?” I hoped I sounded sincere because my smile felt brittle.

“Thank you, Arizona.” Jack stepped inside. As he passed me, his shoulder brushed against my arm, and a bolt of electricity felt as though it sizzled through me.

Jack’s eyes shot to mine, but he didn’t say a word as he rubbed his arm and moved on into the living room. Rez and Zon took the couch, leaving the recliner for Jack. He sat down and started chatting about the show that was on TV.

I closed the door and then stood still, studying the three men. Jack wasn’t nearly as big as the other two. He would have been the scholar in high school, while Zon and Rez would have been the football players. Even so, they filled my living room with their bodies and presence.

With their bodies taking up the seats and their legs stretched out on the floor, there would have been nowhere for me to sit. Unless I sat in one of their laps. That thought had me snapping out of the fog and hurrying to my bedroom to make myself presentable for dinner.

\* \* \*

Thirty minutes later, we were sliding into a cute little booth at my favorite Italian restaurant. Jack slid in first, followed by Rez, then me, and finally, Zon scooted in on my right. I was sandwiched between the dinos, and almost directly opposite Jack, who flashed a sexy smile before picking up his menu.

My stomach growled as the aromas of garlic and herbs drifted through the restaurant. I hadn't been able to hide my excitement when Jack suggested it, and he'd admitted it was his favorite Italian restaurant, too. I'd ignored the knowing look that Rez shot my way. Just because we both liked Italian food didn't mean we were soulmates.

Things were awkward in the booth for the first few minutes, and I breathed a sigh of relief when the server came to get our orders, grateful for someone to break the silence.

"Since it is your favorite Italian restaurant and you know which dishes are the best, how about you order for us?" Rez suggested smoothly. By having me order for us, Zon and Rez wouldn't need to try to read the menu themselves.

Earlier, Rez had explained how Tsufnu had tried to create a spell that would allow both men to read and write my native tongue, but it hadn't worked perfectly. It did help them to pick up my language supernaturally fast. Within a few more days, they would likely sound like native English speakers. Reading in English was slightly slower for them, but Rez believed they would have that skill tackled by the month's end.

"When did you guys first meet?" Jack asked, grabbing a breadstick that positively dripped with garlic and olive oil from the basket.

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“I saw her years ago.” A mischievous smile spread across Rez’s face. “Although it took her a while to notice me.”

I wished I could kick him under the table, but since he sat nearest Jack, I worried I would kick the detective by mistake. The man was playing with fire. Rez hadn’t exactly lied, though. He’d seen me first, but we were going to need a decent ‘how we met’ story if we were going to pull this off around other people.

“Is that so? Where did you guys meet?” Jack asked, pretending to inspect his breadstick. He wasn’t fooling me. The man was fishing for information. But why? For the case? Or could there be another other reason?

My mind was working overtime trying to create a story about us meeting in high school or while on vacation, but my mouth refused to spit out the words. I was finding it difficult to lie to Jack. Not only because he was a detective, and I was worried he would easily pick up on any mistruths, but because it just felt so wrong.

It’s one of the signs of a mate bond. Rez said, not bothering to hide the ‘I told you so’ tone in his voice.

Seriously? How is that a sign? I grumbled.

No one wants to lie to those who matter most to them. Regardless of what your head believes about logic, your heart believes Jack is meant to be yours, and it does not want to lie to him.

Well, that was freaking dandy. I had a feeling this was going to be a meal consisting

of mainly linguine and lies, because I would need to lie like Pinocchio if I intended to walk out of this restaurant a free woman instead of wearing a pair of sparkly silver cuffs.

I'd go back to partial truths. It was the only compromise I could find for my conflicting heart and mind.

"We met after hours at an employee thing. At the museum." I stumbled over my words and wanted to facepalm myself. Real smooth, Arizona.

At least it wasn't exactly a lie. We had met after hours at the museum. The employee 'thing' wasn't exactly a party, but more like my cleaning shift. That detail wasn't necessary for him to know, though.

"I see." Jack's eyes bore into mine just a moment too long, and I fought the urge to squirm. Huffing a laugh, he turned to Rez. "What do you two do for work?"

I opened my mouth, but Rez beat me to it. "I'm a healer, a doctor."

He was a what now? I sat back in my seat, feeling stunned and trying to hide it. I thought back to the terrifying night at the museum when I'd been dying on the sidewalk and he'd healed me. Rez had never mentioned having a career, but more importantly, why had I never thought to ask him? I'd been so caught up in how their arrival had changed my life that I'd not learned much about who they'd been before awakening.

"That's fascinating." Jack chuckled. "My mother wanted me to be a doctor, but that would have ended badly since I don't handle the sight of blood very well."

"But you're a detective. Don't you see a lot of blood?" I asked.

“I’m not a homicide detective, but I still see more than I would like.”

That made sense. Our conversation was paused as the waiter brought plates overflowing with pasta. For the next few minutes, all that could be heard was the clinking of forks on glass plates and my moans of appreciation for my food.

Looking up, I realized I must have moaned loud enough that all three men could hear because they were staring at me with looks of hunger that had nothing to do with food. I sucked in a sharp breath, and my skin burned as though I had a sunburn. Rez and Zon’s desire had my blood heating, but the raw need in Jack’s eyes surprised me.

Having the three sexiest men I’d ever laid eyes on look at me like I was the only meal they wanted to eat had me wishing I was an archaeologist, so I could crawl under the table and start digging for bones.

The moment was broken when the waiter brought refills for our drinks. Once he left, we all went back to our plates of food. Well, I tried to go back to eating, but I wasn’t really hungry for pasta anymore.

“So, Zon.” Jack took a sip of his water. “What line of work are you in?”

I stopped, twirling my fork around in circles, curious about Zon’s answer.

“I’m a nanny,” Zon answered.

Jack choked on his bread, and his eyebrows shot to his hairline.

Neither of us believed for one second that the hulking giant of a man covered in scars was a nanny. Unless he was a nanny for the Mafia and changed diapers with one hand while strangling an assassin with the other.



Zon leaned back, crossing his arms with a scowl. “What? Don’t I look like a nanny?” Before we could answer, his stern features disappeared, and he chuckled. “I’m a personal trainer.”

Jack laughed. “That is far more believable.”

I was dying to know more about their lives before. I hadn’t really thought about them having careers, but I couldn’t ask questions now without raising Jack’s suspicions. They were supposed to be my old friends, which meant I should probably know almost everything about them.

“We are both taking some personal time off,” Rez added. “We just arrived in town a few days ago.”

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Rez, stop offering so much information. The more he knows, the higher the risk, I hissed mentally.

It's okay, Ari. I will not risk your safety, and I am not an idiot. If he is your mate, then he will protect you. Rez tried to reassure me, and it helped a little.

But between my near-constant state of anxiety and my lust, my body seemed to be vibrating. I needed to burn off some of this energy. My mind immediately created impressively detailed images of how the men could help me accomplish that. My hand trembled, and my stomach twisted.

Rez's hand slid under the table, giving my thigh a gentle squeeze. His touch eased some of the discomfort, but not enough. I had to get out of here. But where would I go?

The men continued talking, but I was no longer listening because I was too busy trying to get the atoms in my body together. I tried to remember how much caffeine I consumed throughout the day, but I knew caffeine couldn't be causing this.

Rez's hand trailed up my left thigh, moving beneath the hem of my skirt. His knuckle brushed gently against my thong. Casually leaning back against the booth backrest, I shifted my legs apart the tiniest fraction, giving him better access. That was all the encouragement he needed to sink his finger inside me.

Picking up my fork, I took a tiny bite of pasta, trying to act like I wasn't being fingerbanged under the table. It turns out eating is beyond challenging when your body is only craving one thing.

When Rez slipped a second finger inside me, I fought back a moan. Trying to seem less suspicious, I held up my breadstick. “This bread is incredible!”

Zon’s hand slid along my right thigh. “The meal has been delicious. I can’t wait to see what’s for dessert.” He put another forkful of pasta in his mouth.

Surely they wouldn’t...

Zon’s finger teased along my ‘down there’ set of lips, forcing me to stiffen every muscle in my body to hide my shiver.

Pick up your fork, Ari. The detective is going to get suspicious. Rez’s voice was liquid honey in my mind, each word an intimate stroke. His fingers flicked across my g-spot, and I saw stars.

I picked up my fork, each movement mechanical as I fought to control my facial expressions and my body’s response to the touch of my mates. Giving Jack a smile, I put another bite of pasta in my mouth, this one much smaller. The last thing I wanted was someone yanking me out of my chair to give me the Heimlich maneuver because I’d choked.

Zon’s finger slid inside me, and my soul tried to leave the chat.

I wanted to cry. Maybe beg them to stop, or beg them for more. My body felt as though it were shattering into a million pieces, and at any minute, I would disintegrate into the ether.

Focus on my voice, Zon ordered.

My body obeyed instantly.

Good girl. I grew wetter at Zon's praise. His finger danced with Rez's as they pumped and stroked. Their fingers were turned opposite of each other, giving me a sensation it would be impossible to feel with one man's hand.

I bit down on my tongue and tasted the odd tang of blood.

You like that Jack is across the table and could catch on at any minute. Don't you, baby?

My walls tightened around their fingers.

I felt that. Such a naughty girl, Zon growled in my mind.

What was wrong with me? I'd never taken risks like this before. If Jack caught us, I would be humiliated.

Would you? Or would you like it if I offered him a taste of your cream? Zon asked, voice rough.

My body trembled.

That's what I thought. I glanced at Zon as he spoke in my mind, but he seemed to be ignoring me. He was relaxed, taking his time with the last of the food on his plate.

Taking a quick peek at Rez, I watched in disbelief as he talked to Jack about a burglary he'd seen on the news that morning. Neither man gave away even a hint that they had their fingers buried inside me. The risk and the naughtiness had lust tearing at my insides. I fought to keep my breathing even, but the effort was making me lightheaded. I needed release.

When I tell you to, you're going to come, Zon ordered.

I quivered around their fingers as they pumped faster.

Pick up your glass, and pretend to take a long slow sip. Zon's command gave no room for argument.

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I did as told, hand trembling and my stomach cramping with the overwhelming need that was burning me alive.

That's my good girl, Zon purred.

Not breaking their rhythm, both men slipped a third finger inside me, stretching my tight walls. My mouth quivered on the glass.

Let go, baby, Zon growled.

Yes, show us how much you want us, Rez murmured.

I came apart.

To an onlooker, the only thing off would have been the momentary tremble of my glass and my breathless laugh as I set it on the table.

But on the inside, every nerve ending in my body exploded. Wave after wave of my climax slammed into me, each as powerful as the one before it. It was the longest orgasm I'd ever experienced, and it went on long enough that I worried it wasn't going to end.

While I struggled through the sweet agony, Rez and Zon kept their fingers motionless inside me. All the while, they talked to the chatty waiter about their favorite part of the meal.

How could they act so unaffected? I wished I could know what they were thinking.

Will this man ever stop talking? Maybe I should tell him I know twelve ways to kill him without leaving my chair? As soon as we get home, I'm going to lick her clean. Zon was snarling in his mind.

My eyes widened. I heard Zon's voice, but not in my mind. I darted a look at Rez.

If I drop my fork, would anyone notice if I took a quick taste? Maybe it would help settle my beast... Rez was seriously thinking about it. I had to make an escape so we could all cool down.

"I need to take a quick trip to the ladies' room," I spoke up, a bit too loud.

Zon stood, allowing me to scoot out of the booth. Trying to appear unhurried, I headed for the bathroom.

Once inside, I rushed into a stall and locked the door. Sitting on the toilet, I allowed my muscles to relax. My body trembled violently, and I worked to calm my breathing and release what was left of my anxiety. It was a relief to realize that my orgasm had eased the worst of the anxiety I'd been struggling with.

I felt better. My body was calm, and it no longer vibrated as though it was coming apart. How had my men known what I needed?

### ARIZONA

Why did it take the pig hours to cross the road?

Because he was a slow-pork!

\* \* \*

Opening the bathroom door, I stepped into the dimly lit hall and came face to face with Jack. He leaned against the wall opposite the door, waiting for me. The moment I stepped out, he pushed off the wall and moved toward me. He may not have had a beast inside him, but there was a wild look in his eye.

I should have been scared. But my freaking body hummed with excitement. With each step Jack took toward me, I took one backward away from him until my back hit the wall at the end of the hall furthest from the dining area.

Using his body, he caged me in, but didn't touch me. Leaning down, his five o'clock shadow brushed along the sensitive skin of my cheek.

"Do you think I don't know what just happened?" Jack whispered.

It took me a minute to remember I had a voice. "I-I don't know what you are talking about. If you are talking about the meal, yes, it was fantastic."

Jack's body pressed lightly against mine, and his left hand moved to rest at my waist. Even with the alpha man vibes he was giving off, I didn't truly feel trapped. If I



wanted to walk away, I knew he would let me. But I didn't move.

"That's not what I'm talking about, and you know it, Arizona." His voice was hoarse.

"I don't know what you are talking about," I retorted, adding a touch of indigence into my tone.

Jack chuckled, the sound harsh. "I'm talking about how you just let those two guys finger you under the table until you came apart in their hands."

My eyes widened. How had he known? Did everyone in the entire restaurant know? I would never be able to eat here again, and that thought brought tears to my eyes.

Jack's hard expression softened, barely. "Don't cry. No one else knows, if that's what you're worried about. But I'm a detective. It's in my literal job description to notice every tiny detail around me."

"I'm sorry." I didn't know what else to say. What could I say? Wringing my hands in front of me, I waited for him to berate me.

"I'm not." Jack grabbed my wrists with one of his large hands and pinned them against the wall above my head. His taut body leaned harder against me, allowing me to feel the evidence of his arousal. "That was one of the sexiest things I've ever seen. I'm only sorry I didn't get to touch you."

"Oh," was my eloquent reply.

I thought he was going to kiss me, but he stopped when there was only enough space for a single sheet of paper between us. I could feel the air move against my lips as he spoke. "Did it turn you on knowing that I might figure it out?"

“Yes,” I breathed out, unable to lie while his touch was setting my body on fire.

Jack’s hand moved up my ribcage until he could cup my breast, slowly massaging it.

“Jack,” I moaned his name, enjoying the taste of it on my lips.

His body shuddered. “I’ve wanted to hear you say my name like that since the moment you opened your front door wearing nothing but a bedsheet.”

Jack’s lips caught mine in a tender kiss, so at odds with the bad cop vibe his body was giving off. It wasn’t a kiss fueled by lust. It was a kiss filled with longing.

Pulling his head away, he rested his forehead against the polished wood walls. “What am I going to do?” he whispered.

I had some suggestions of things he could do, but the question seemed rhetorical, so I stayed quiet.

“I found security footage today.”

My heart stopped beating.

“It’s from an old shop across from the museum’s back parking lot. It doesn’t show you exiting the building, but it shows you walking down the street away from the museum with two men right after the explosion. Two men who have a striking resemblance to the guys we just ate dinner with.”

I stayed quiet. My world was falling apart.

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“It’s only a matter of time until I figured out what happened that night, Arizona.” Instead of sounding like a threat, it sounded like a plea. “I shouldn’t even have told you this.”

“Why did you?” My words were so soft I doubted he heard me until he answered.

“The same reason I hid the tape in my locker instead of immediately putting it into evidence.” Jack’s mouth moved back over mine. “You.”

This time, his kiss was hard and hungry. I was growing warm, uncomfortably warm. My palms burned, and the scent of ozone, clean but pungent, tickled my nose. I blinked furiously as the surrounding air seemed to shimmer like a heatwave on the hot pavement during summer. The only sound I could hear was that of blood rushing in my ears.

Letting go of my hands, he grabbed my butt, lifting me off my feet. I wrapped my hands around him as he slammed me against the hallway wall, grinding his erection against my core through both our clothes. Clutching his shoulders, I clung to him, unsure if this might be the only time.

“Why can’t I get you off my mind? Why did I have to fight the urge to be near you? Why haven’t I been able to sleep since you opened your front door? Why can’t I walk away from you?”

He asked each question between each breath-stealing kiss, and I couldn’t have answered even if I’d wanted. How could I explain something I didn’t fully understand myself?

Somewhere in the fog of my mind, I knew we needed to stop, that someone could decide to use the bathroom and find us at any moment. But no sooner would I think it than the thought would slip through my grasp, and I would be lost to Jack's touch again.

Jack's fingers found their way under my shirt to explore the bare skin of my back, leaving a trail of fire everywhere he touched.

This has to stop. You know she's hiding something, Jack. Pull yourself together and do your job.

How weird. I never called myself 'Jack.' It took a moment for my lust-addled brain to realize I heard Jack's thoughts, not my own.

Hold the carrier pigeon, the phone, and the internet.

Hearing Rez and Zon was one thing. They were magical beasts. Jack wasn't. Although he was feeling pretty magical, pressed up against my body and turning me into a needy mess. But if I could hear his voice...

Zon grabbed the back of Jack's collar, hauling him away from me. Rez caught me from sliding down the wall and carefully tucked me behind him, out of Jack's line of sight.

"I'm glad you two are getting along so well, but this is probably not the best place to become better acquainted," Rez spoke, amusement thick in his voice.

"I'm sorry, man. I know she's your—" Jack's eyes flicked between Rez and Zon. "Your girl. I never lose control like that."

"We're her men." Rez emphasized the word 'her.' It was a distinction that I didn't

think Jack would understand, but I did. Jack hadn't meant anything by it, but Rez was making it clear that they didn't consider me their property, and therefore Jack's apology meant little to them.

I really needed to get it through their minds that we could belong to each other, without actually 'owning' each other like a piece of furniture.

But what if I want to? Rez's question was a featherlight whisper in my mind.

I shouldn't like it when he said things like that, but I did. Butterflies took flight inside me, and my chest warmed. You keep saying things like that, and I'm going to fall in love with you.

I meant my words to be a teasing retort, but Rez shuddered before every muscle in his body grew stiff.

"Rez?" I elbowed him gently. Peeking around Rez's body, I caught sight of Zon's wide eyes and slack jaw. His shock was replaced by wild-eyed panic.

"We have to go." Zon scooped me up, tossing me over his shoulder, while shoving Rez out the door in front of us.

"But—" I tried to protest.

"Now is not the time," Zon spoke, voice strained. "Keep your eyes on the ground, Arizona."

"We need to pay!" I wiggled on his shoulder as we passed our table, trying to get Zon to set me down so I could pay the bill.

Rez rested his hand on the tabletop for a brief second as he strode by it. When he

lifted his hand, money lay on the table.

“How did you do that?” I hissed quietly, darting a look around the restaurant to see if anyone had noticed.

“Eyes down, Arizona,” Zon growled through clenched teeth.

Hurt flashed through me. It was one thing being ordered to obey when we were being intimate. Having him treat me as less than an equal outside of that hurt more than I cared to admit.

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I'm sorry, baby. Words are Rez's thing, not mine. I'm barely keeping it together right now. Please trust me. Zon's words were a plea. You said the word love to Rez, and he is losing his internal struggle to remain in control of his emotions and his beast right now. We've got to get him away from here. Fast.

I stopped struggling, relaxing in his hold and trusting that Zon knew what he was doing. Keeping my eyes on the floor, I dug my fingers into his shirt and held on as he dragged the three of us out of the restaurant.

"What's going on?" Jack had followed us outside. "Is Rez okay?"

I didn't look up from the ground. "He's fine, just tired. Have a good night, Jack."

Jack's shadow stretched toward us on the pavement as he tried to catch up with Zon's long strides. "Arizona, I'm not an idiot. What is going on? Back there I saw your e—"

"Jack, not now. Please? Go home and have a wonderful night." I took a deep breath, filling my lungs with the fresh scent of the earth after a rainstorm that wafted through the still night air.

Jack's footsteps stopped abruptly, and then I heard them fade as he moved without another word in the opposite direction. I'd been prepared for him to argue, and when he didn't, I breathed a deep sigh of relief. I went limp on Zon's shoulder, suddenly feeling tired.

"Impressive." Zon squeezed my thigh where he held me secure.

Zon guided us into a dark alley, the type that anyone born and raised in a city knew not to step foot in. Before I could tell Zon why this was a bad idea, he spoke.

“I’m sorry about this, Arizona.” His hand burned against my thigh, like a branding iron was searing my skin. I opened my mouth to scream, but it was swallowed by the darkness that devoured the three of us.

\* \* \*

I blinked open my eyes, closing them again when the world twirled like I was on the teacup ride at the carnival.

Ari, are you okay? Please tell me you’re okay. Zon sounded worried.

If you injured her, I will squash you like a roach. Rez’s voice was colder than the Antarctic.

We wouldn’t have been in this mess if you’d been able to control your emotions, Rez. I’m supposed to be the unstable one, but you were seconds away from shifting in a building full of innocent bystanders. I did what I had to do to keep us alive, and the humans unharmed, Zon shot back.

My head pounded, and the shouting match in my brain wasn’t helping matters. How can I hear you both in my mind at the same time?

You’re okay! Zon’s relief was palpable.

I’m glad you are unharmed, Ari. You can hear Zon and me speaking to each other? Rez asked.

Yes, and you guys are giving me a migraine, so quit yelling. I need sleep. I rolled



over, cuddling against the warm body in bed next to me.

Except that wasn't warm skin pressed to my skin. It was scales.

And it wasn't a soft mattress beneath me. It was grass.

My eyes snapped open, and I shoved myself up into a sitting position. I was in some type of small cave. Crawling toward the dim light, I emerged into the cool night air. I glanced back to see where I had been. Turns out, it wasn't a cave. It was Rez. He was in full Tyrannosaurus rex mode. He must have tucked me under his body at some point after I passed out. It was a miracle he hadn't crushed me.

Rez snorted, a gust of air that blew my hair back from my face.

"Stop that!" I mumbled, running my fingers through my tangled hair.

Stop insulting me. My beast and I would never hurt you.

Grumbling under my breath, I rose unsteadily to my feet, giving my eyes time to adjust to the moonlight. Zon lay nearby. Close enough to watch me, but far enough away to make it clear he was ticked off with Rez.

"Someone needs to start explaining. What was that mess at the restaurant? Where are we? Why do I feel like I just ran a triathlon? Where we are, and how did we get here? Oh, and I'd like to know about my new ability to hear you both in my mind at the same time." I crossed my arms and gave them both the look that meant business. Because yeah, I'm totally sure it was intimidating to the two apex predators watching me. Maybe if they were in their human forms, it would have worked better.

I can't shift back yet, Arizona. The beast needs time in this form, and since we are safe, it is best to give him what he needs. Rez dropped his massive head to the ground

beside me, forcing me to reach out to steady myself as the ground shook beneath me. His dark blue scales were the color of the deep ocean and glinted in the pale moonlight. I wanted to stroke them and admire the rest of his dinosaur body, but I needed answers more and couldn't allow myself to become distracted.

I brought us here. It is one of my abilities. I can travel to other places if I have seen them before or have an image of them from a map, Zon answered first. Rez was seconds away from losing control and shifting, and you were unknowingly feeding the chaos.

Shame laced Zon's words, but I couldn't understand why. "You brought us somewhere Rez could shift safely. Your ability is incredible!" I remembered Rez saying some talented dinosaur shifters could harness magic for other abilities, but I hadn't realized that Zon was one of those powerful benders.

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I had to siphon magic from you to perform the spell. It is a crime to take magic from another without their permission, Arizona. Magic burns a lot of energy, and it is worse if you don't know what you are doing. You did your nifty magic trick in the street, and then I pulled magic from you right after. Your system was in shock, and you passed out, and it's why you are exhausted right now.

Zon spoke in my mind, the words heavy with pain and laced with shame. The raptor turned his head away from me as though he couldn't bear to see my rage. But he didn't get it; I trusted him with my life and with whatever magic I had in me. I still had my doubts about that.

I walked to his side. Even with him lying down, we were eye to eye. "Zon. Stop this. You did what you had to do to keep us safe. It would have taken too long to explain everything thing to me."

I petted between his eyes, admiring the color shift of his emerald green scales as he moved. "Are you sure you got the magic from me, though? I thought you guys said my magic was still weak since it had just been awakened."

We were wrong. Magic was pouring from you last night. By the time we realized it, things had gone too far, Rez broke in.

I thought back over the night before. "At the table, before we, uh... you know, did the stuff, I was feeling weird." I laughed uncomfortably. "This is going to sound crazy. Then again, I am talking to two dinosaurs, so maybe it won't. I thought I was going to disintegrate." My cheeks burned as I continued. "After my orgasm, a lot of that feeling eased, but I was still on edge."

That was your magic. It had been building inside you and reached a boiling point during dinner. I sensed your worry and hoped my touch would help calm and distract you. I didn't realize it was far more than anxiety about Jack's presence that had you so high-strung. Your climax helped to disperse some of the magic's chaotic energy, but not all of it. Rez's frustration at missing the cause of my distress was clear.

"What would have happened if you didn't disperse some of the magic?" I asked the question, but dreaded the answer.

Neither dinosaur would meet my eye. "Guys?"

Magic is chaotic. It has a life of its own sometimes, which means it is unpredictable. It is made more unstable by strong emotions and fatigue. There is no way to know what the exact outcome would have been if you'd erupted, but it could have been anything from burning yourself out permanently, to blowing up the restaurant, to sucking the life force from humans in close proximity, to casting a love spell on every patron in the restaurant.

Zon growled in anger. Which is why I should have been paying closer attention. I got so distracted by your body and your intoxicating magic. My beast was pushing to take you in the middle of the restaurant. By the time I regained a semblance of control and came to find you, things had escalated again. Rez blew out a long breath, flattening the grass around him.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

Zon gave a dark chuckle. He means you were well on your way to binding the detective to you as your mate. And before you feel guilty, that isn't possible unless he was one hundred percent on board with the idea. Heck, you'd even thrown up a false wall to give you two privacy in that hall. We only found you by following your mouth-watering scent. If you'd orgasmed again with that much magic surrounding

you, you might have blown up the city block.

I gasped like a fish out of water, my lungs refusing to inhale or exhale.

You didn't have to tell her like that, Zon! Rez's eyes, which were larger than my head, glowed a brilliant amber, and he snapped his teeth at the raptor. Ari? Arizona?

I couldn't speak. Not only did I possess magic, but I'd used it. Memories flashed through my mind.

Me yelling at the crowd to step onto the sidewalk, and them moving, almost unwillingly, to obey.

Me wondering what my guys were thinking and then me suddenly being in their heads... and in Jack's mind a few minutes later.

Me telling Jack to go home last night when he was following us, and him following my directions.

Me worried that someone would come down the hall to the bathroom and catch Jack and me making out.

How many other times had I used magic without realizing it? Had Jack even wanted me, or had I hocus-pocused him into horniness?

I covered my face with my hands. There was no way I could face him after tonight. We were just going to have to stay here in the wilderness for the rest of our lives.

ZON

What's a pig's favorite color?

Ma-hog-any.

\* \* \*

I couldn't help it. I burst out laughing, although it came out more of a hacking bark while in this form. This is the park on the outskirts of the city. It's hardly a wilderness. We will have to go home soon.

Arizona groaned into her hands.

If it is any conciliation, Jack wants you. Your magic fanned the flames, but it didn't set the fire. Think of it like your magic just sped up the falling in love part... a lot.

"How can I avoid doing it again if I don't even know what I did in the first place?" Arizona stared at me, fear shimmering in her luminous eyes. "I have to be at work in a few hours. How will I get it under control before then? What if I hurt someone or blow up the museum? Again?"

Calm down, My Queen. Strong emotion will make it worse. Take deep breaths and let go of your anxiety. Rez tried to soothe her.

I groaned, dropping my head into the dirt. Rez was supposed to be the one who was good with words, but even I knew not to tell a woman to calm down. That was one of

the few things I knew hadn't changed with time.

Three...

Two...

One...

"CALM DOWN? You want me to calm the freak down?" Arizona's voice had risen to a pitch so high that several dogs across town barked out a response. Clearly, her magic hadn't lowered enough.

I rolled onto my back, wanting to get a better view of the scene playing out in front of me. Arizona stood to her adorable full five-foot six-inch height and stomped toward the confused T-Rex. Rez rested on the ground, his head towering over her. Even with the absurd height difference, my money was on the angry little spitfire winning this fight.

My man Rez decided to double down, obviously not realizing that he'd stepped in a huge pile of brontosaurus dung with his choice of words. Yes. It would be best for you to calm down. This isn't good for your body, Ari.

I shouldn't have laughed, but I did. Harder than I'd ever laughed in my life. Oh, how the mighty had fallen.

I was the one who couldn't control my emotions and shifted into my beast because it was easier than dealing with my feelings. Rez didn't shift because of emotional turmoil. Even the day we'd shifted in the city, Rez had only shifted when a truck had nearly slammed into me.

Not until last night when Ari's teasing words about falling in love had hit the one

nerve Rez kept protected. Outside of Tsufnu and my friendship, he'd never been loved or cared for by anyone. Not by a parent, sibling, partner, or lover. Rez wanted to experience that love so much that he'd gambled everything on the chance of being with Arizona. He'd tried to protect his heart, telling himself he would be fine to love her even if all she felt was affection for him. But deep down, I knew he wanted that which he'd never had.

Rez was a Tyrannosaurus rex. They were the monsters of our time, feared by all, but fearing nothing themselves. All except for Rez, the gentle giant with a gaping hole in his armor... A hole Arizona had hit by accident with the one thing he wanted more than anything else in his lifetimes.

As soon as the words left her lips, I saw Rez's body react. I'd seen the bone-crushing longing in his eyes. I'd tried to speak to him, but he was too busy fighting his beast for control.

When Arizona had peaked around his body, her eyes had glowed. Not in a happy way, but in the I-swallowed-a-magical-lightbulb kind of way. I'd only seen one other Vazi light up like that.

Priestess Tsufnu.

I was becoming increasingly suspicious that she hadn't shared all the details about Arizona's abilities.

My priority had been to get Rez and Arizona out of the restaurant before Rez shifted and before anyone got a good look at Arizona's face or the glow in her eyes. I could only pray that Jack hadn't seen her eyes. It had taken every ounce of control I possessed to fight my beast and take charge. I'd managed for Ari.

I watched her prepare to slay the dragon, so to speak, and grinned. She was a girl



worth changing for.

“I’ll tell you what’s not good for my body.” Arizona stood toe-to-claw with Rez.  
“Having you tell me what to do!”

My love, I’m only trying to explain—

“Yes, why don’t you explain things to me? Maybe in simple terms that my little human mind can understand.”

Dear priestess. Had Rez lost his mind? I covered my face with my tail, not sure I could handle the comet crash that was most definitely incoming.

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“Mate, you are frustrating for one so tiny.” The words were spoken out loud, but were mangled and guttural. The result of speaking without human vocal cords.

My blood chilled. Springing from the ground, I landed between the arguing pair. I could see my reflection in the eyes of the beast. It was not Rez who looked back at me.

Slowly stepping backward, I pushed Arizona away from the much larger dinosaur. I was a trained fighter, but there was no way I would win against a T-Rex.

“Zonkut, stop irritating me. I would never hurt her.”

Still seeing his beast in his eyes, I hissed. There wasn't a thing on earth I was willing to fight an adult male T-Rex over. Except for Arizona.

The same Arizona who ducked around my body and moved to run her hand along his nose. “Are you really the beast inside Rezkac?” Her voice was soft, all signs of her earlier anger gone.

“Yes. We are having a difference of opinion at the moment.” He gave a harsh laugh with no humor.

Arizona's hand paused. “But he's okay?”

“Of course. We cannot survive without both halves. The man wishes to coddle you. I want to keep you, and us, alive. Tonight cannot happen again. You stirred their emotions, and your magic intoxicated Zonkut and Rezkac, heightening those

emotions. Both men are fighting against their natural instincts to give you the space that human standards require, but it is at a cost to them. Being apart from their mate is physically painful, and by not completing the claiming, they have been left in a state of constant upheaval.”

Lowering his voice, Rezkac’s beast continued, “If you were a beast, you would already have claimed these men, and they would have spent weeks devouring your body from dusk to dawn, and all the hours in between. It strengthens the mate claim and eases the high emotions that are experienced before claiming. You must understand what Rezkac and Zonkut are by nature. We’re volatile, dangerous monsters who were not meant to live in your time on earth. There is no place for beasts of our size to hunt and run. Controlling our nature is a challenge without adding an unstable Vazi to the equation.”

I growled, warning the tyrannosaurus to back down, but he only laughed. “You and Rezkac are too soft to tell her what is going on. I am not. She’s our mate and is strong enough to handle it.”

Flicking his eyes back to Arizona, who sat on the grass, tears trailing down her cheeks, he continued, “You are a flame to dry grass. This is the reason no Vazi has ever been mated with a beast. Controlling our nature is hard enough without your magic running amuck and heightening our senses.

“Benders feel the call of the magic around us, tempting us to use it. The magic of the earth tastes and feels the same, but the magic from the heart of a Vazi is far different. Each Vazi has their own taste, unique like an individual fingerprint among humans.”

The beast leaned closer to Arizona, saliva glistening on his razor-sharp teeth. “Your magic is innocent. Sweet and eager to please. It will be hard for any to resist its allure... beast or man.”

He licked his teeth. “In the restaurant, magic oozed from you. Zonkut and Rezkac automatically absorbed as much as they could to ease your distress, but the more they take in, the more on edge they will become. Magic is like energy. It needs to be released. Benders’ bodies are not meant to store magic. Even a Vazi can only hold so much at once before they are forced to release it and hope they do not destroy lives in the process.”

Arizona’s thoughts had shifted from sorrow over the strain Rez and I were under to irritation that the beast seemed to find her lacking as a mate because she was Vazi. She shoved to her feet. “What am I supposed to do? You’re telling me to make sure I’m not leaking magic all over the place, but then you tell me I’m not supposed to keep it bottled up inside me. Which is it, Oh Great One?” Arizona crossed her arms over her chest, scowling at the tyrannosaurus.

Probably not the best idea to rile him up, I whispered urgently. Arizona ignored me. Of course she did.

“You need to find a way to control how much magic you create. You are Vazi, which means you are capable of holding some magic, but not as much as you are putting out now. Find a way to burn off the magic before it gets to dangerous levels and before your men absorb too much. That was what Rezkac was trying to explain—albeit poorly.”

He leaned toward Arizona again, and I fought the urge to wedge myself between them. “The more heightened your emotions become, the more magic you will create. Your body’s response to stress is to produce more magic in case you need to defend yourself. Unfortunately, your puny body cannot discern whether a life-threatening situation or a minor inconvenience caused your stress. It is up to you to control your emotions in the same way Rezkac and Zonkut control their beast.”

Arizona was quiet, deep in thought, as she nibbled on her kissable bottom lip. “Thank

you for telling me.”

“No thanks are needed, tiny mate,” the beast rumbled.

“Do you have any suggestions about how I can get rid of the extra magic? I don’t want to hurt anyone, or make things harder on Rez and Zon,” Arizona asked.

The tyrannosaurus’ mouth widened into a terrifying grin. “I think you’ve already discovered one way to burn off the excess. It would be wise to take advantage of that often until you learn better control. You will also need to deal with the human male.”

“Jack? What does he have to do with this?”

“Nothing until you lost control of your magic last night. You started the claiming process. It was stopped, but not before he tasted your magic, and your magic caressed his soul. You could have walked away from him before last night, and you both would have suffered but eventually recovered. That is not an option now. He will suffer if you deny the claim. There is no happy ending for him outside of you.”

“The longer you two delay this, the more stress you both will experience. Your magic will ease some of that for you, but he doesn’t have that option. Perhaps remember this in the future before you start claiming a man in the heat of the moment, yes? Especially if he is human and might not be able to keep up with your stamina like we can..” Rezkac’s beast shivered as though the word human grossed him out.

“Rezkac is fighting for control. It seems I’ve angered him with my opinions on humans.”

He’s not the only one, I muttered.

“There is one last thing, Arizona.”

Her brow wrinkled. “Yes?”

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“Rezkac is wrong. Fully bonding while in human form will not injure you. Unless the humans of this time often die from intense pleasure. And regardless of my concerns over being bonded to a Vazi, I am pleased to belong to you. You are untrained, but you are already powerful. Dangerous.”

Arizona’s cheeks turned a bright red, and I could hear the sound of her heart as it beat harder in her chest. The only question was if it was from embarrassment or from imagining what might happen in the bedroom later.

The giant beast dropped his head to the ground, humbling himself in front of Arizona. “Be gentle with Rezkac, mate. He is a strong man, but weak when it comes to you. You are the only thing in the world that can break him. We’ve lived a long life already and are weary of the world. Rezkac is only doing this again for a chance to be loved by you.”

She wasn’t the only one affected by that piece of information. My body grew hot at the thought of completing the bond with Arizona. Of taking her in the form that allowed beast and man to be of one mind and body for a few brief moments. Knowing that it wouldn’t hurt her had my body aching in anticipation.

But one look at the dark smudges under her eyes and her trembling hands, I knew that the only thing she needed now was sleep.

I looked at the sky, following the line of the stars. It was nearly three in the morning. If we got her home now, she would get a few hours’ sleep before she had to work.

Rez’s body swayed, and he blinked slowly before turning to look at us.

Are you two ready to go home?I asked.

Rez nodded, and we both shifted to our human forms. Scooping Arizona up in my arms, I cradled her head against my shoulder.

She yawned. “Do you have enough magic to get us home? If not, you can use some of mine.”

I pressed a light kiss to her forehead. “Yes, I have plenty.” She was already exhausted, and I wouldn’t have risked taking any more from her.

Plus, it didn’t matter. I had enough magic in my veins to hop us across the continent and back if we wished to travel that distance. Rez’s beast has not been lying when he said Arizona’s magic was special. It was intoxicating, and now that I’d tasted it, I wanted more.

But I wouldn’t allow myself until the time was right.



JACK OLIVER

What do you call a pig with skin problems?

A wart-hog.

\* \* \*

My eyes burned as I stared, unseeing, at my laptop. Staring at her on-screen was the only thing keeping me sane since leaving her presence. It was playing a loop of Arizona moving down the street with two men after the destruction at the museum. Why had they been there that night? And who were they?

The night before, I'd had the restaurant put both men's forks in evidence bags, intending to run their DNA through the police database. I was good at my job, and that's what had allowed me to rise quickly through the ranks. So why were the evidence bags still lying on my backseat, and why hadn't I forwarded the security film to my partner?

Because of Arizona.

I dated my fair share of girls through high school and college, but I'd never allowed one to impede my job. Especially one I'd only talked to a couple of times but who affected me to my core. Yet here I was, my finger hovering over the delete button on my laptop. If I believed for even a second that she was guilty, she would be in cuffs. But I knew in my gut she wasn't part of a terrorist ring or a group of thieves.

The museum had confirmed that morning they couldn't find any unaccounted-for items that could have been sold on the black market, nor had there been damage to any of the museum's more valuable pieces. They also made it clear they were eager for our investigation to wrap up so they could get a crew in to repair the storeroom and put the whole saga behind them.

So either a catastrophic accident of some type had occurred that night, or the world's dumbest criminals had attacked the museum. So, was Arizona in the wrong place at the wrong time? Or did she cause the accident? More importantly, did it matter?

The museum wanted this wrapped up ASAP. My partner had lost interest once we determined it wasn't a terrorist attack or a heist, and my boss had dropped a new case on my desk that morning with a comment about dropping everything else and making it a priority. I was the only person doggedly running down every lead to solve the case.

I wanted to believe it was because I was just that dedicated to my cases. But what other reason did I have to keep seeing Arizona if I closed the case out? It was pretty clear that her guys didn't want me to stick around after they hauled us apart and dragged her out of the restaurant yesterday. The last thing I wanted to do was cause problems for her and the people she cares about. Plus, deep down, I knew I wanted answers not for my report, but for myself.

The blood at the scene had been hers. According to the report, the amount of blood was high enough to indicate a fatality. She wasn't dead though, and she didn't seem to be recovering from major trauma, which was an impossibility. Or was it?

I slammed my laptop closed and tossed it in the backseat. Looking out the car's windshield, I watched the happy visitors entering the museum. My skin itched incessantly, and my body ached feverishly. When I'd got up this morning, I thought I might be coming down with the flu, but my symptoms had eased slightly since

parking outside her work. The desperate need to be near her, and with her, was almost unbearable. Unable to sit still any longer, I got out of my car and headed inside.

\* \* \*

It didn't take me long to find her. It was like she drew me to her, and I came like a moth to a flame. She was mopping up an unidentified liquid that had been spilled on the white and brown marble floors. It didn't look right. She looked like she should be holding a scepter for a coronation ceremony, not a mop.

She looked exhausted. It seemed neither of us had slept well the night before. For a moment, I felt pity for her and wanted to take the broom from her hand and mop up the mess for her. But then I remembered she was hiding things from me, and I was determined to get my answers.

"We need to talk." There was no point beating around the bush.

Her shoulders tensed at my voice, but she didn't look up from her task. "I'm working, Jack. How about when I get off?"

"I've already spoken to your manager. I told them I needed your help with a few things regarding the case, and they agreed to give you the rest of the day off. Grab your stuff, and let's go." I hated how rude I sounded, but I was trying to keep my emotions turned off.

I thought she would argue, but she only shrugged. "All right, give me a minute." Disappearing into the back with the mop and bucket, she returned a few minutes later with a small backpack and her jacket.

I jerked my head toward the front door of the museum, and she followed me outside without a single word. Reaching my car, I opened the passenger door for her—I

wasn't a monster—before making my way to the driver's side.

I carefully pulled out of the parking space and made my way to the shoreline about fifteen minutes outside the city limits. The beach was nearly empty this time of day at the secluded little cove I favored. It was quiet with minimal distractions, which was exactly what I wanted for the conversation weighing on my mind.

Arizona finally spoke, "Please tell me I don't have to dig my own grave. I'm too tired."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, not understanding her.

"You showed up at my work angry, ordered me to your car, and then drove me to a secluded place outside the city. I've seen this show and know how it ends." She said it all in a deadpan tone.

An unexpected chuckle rumbled in my chest. "I'm not planning to kill you. I just want to talk."

She raised a single brow. "Uh-huh. That's what they always say."

"Come on, let's walk out on the sand."

With a nod, she grabbed her backpack and pushed open her door before I could get out. I followed her out onto the warm sand. Finding a spot near the water, but where the sand was still dry, we sat down, both of us staring out at the crashing ocean waves.

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Sitting beside her, just enjoying her nearness, everything became crystal clear. My mind finally stepped out of the haze it had been in since meeting her. Life without her wasn't an option. Nothing I'd achieved in my career mattered if I wasn't coming home to her. The home I'd purchased this year, and had been so proud of, had felt cold since meeting her. I would rather sleep on the floor inside her apartment than spend another night alone in my house. Could I handle another night away from her?

As a cop, I knew the signs of addiction, and there was zero doubt that I craved her in a way that wasn't normal when a boy met a girl. After touching her skin and tasting her lips in the hall, things had gotten worse. I wasn't being dramatic when I questioned if I could survive losing her. It made no sense that I didn't know she existed a week ago, and last night I'm not sure I would have found the strength to stop if Zon and Rez hadn't separated us. I knew with certainty that I would risk my entire world for a chance with her.

"Arizona?" I turned, taking in her elegant profile and windswept hair. My heart clenched painfully. I wanted her, but I needed to know she trusted me.

"Hm?" Her gaze stayed on the sea.

I decided to spit out the thought that had been running through my mind since I'd awakened this morning. "At the restaurant last night, when we were making out, your eyes glowed."

Her breath hitched, and she closed her eyes.

Why was she acting so weird? Her bubbly personality was almost flat. I'd thought it

was fatigue, but maybe it was something else...

“My eyes are weird. In certain light, it makes them look like they are glowing,” she said it with confidence, but refused to meet my eye.

“I’m not an idiot, Arizona. Your eyes weren’t just reflecting the hallway light; they were radiating light. I know what I saw.” The ache in my chest deepened. I knew she had no reason to trust me, but her lame lie hurt.

“I stopped by the restaurant this morning and asked the owner, who’s a friend of mine, to let me check out the security cameras. I wanted to see your eyes and confirm what I saw.” I didn’t tell her that I wanted to make sure they didn’t accidentally see her eyes or see us going at each other like rabbits. “The footage showed us kissing, and then we disappeared. There was no glitch in the recording, no editing, nothing. We were there, and then we were gone. When your guys came to find us, they walked down the hall and disappeared as well.”

She fidgeted with a broken seashell, spinning it around and around between her fingers.

“I wish you trusted me enough to tell me what is going on.” I spoke the words that I shouldn’t, letting the wind carry them away.

This time Arizona met my eyes. “I wish I could too, but let’s be real. You’re a cop. No matter what feelings you have for me, you will feel obligated to do your job. For all I know, you are recording this conversation right now and this is all a trap to get me to let down my guard and spill my secrets. If I had secrets, I mean.”

Tears swam in her eyes, but she didn’t look away. Instead, she allowed me in, letting me see her raw emotions. Her eyes flickered, glowing for a second before the light faded away, leaving behind a hollow sadness.

Come what may, I made my decision. I scooped her off the sand and carried her out into the cold sea. She yelped at the shock of icy water, and I winced as wave after wave soaked us, but I didn't stop until we were neck deep, and she clung to me like a life vest.

"Hold your breath," I ordered before dunking us both beneath the waves.

When we both surfaced, Arizona sputtered. "Are you insane?"

At this point, I was pretty sure I was. "Maybe. But I wanted you to know that you can trust me. We are up to our necks in water. Even if I was wearing a listening device, no one could hear us now." My eyes dropped to her lips, remembering her sweet taste, but I stopped myself from giving in to temptation.

"Nothing you tell me is going to be in a report. Not that it matters, since my partner is planning to file a report on the case today and then file it away, never to be seen again," I added.

Her arms circled my neck, and she rested her head against my neck for several long minutes. The waves rocked us gently, and I tried to not think about how cold the water was against her skin.

"I wish I knew what you were thinking about so intently."

No, she didn't. She didn't want to know how much I craved to be with her and how much hearing the truth from her lips meant to me. I wanted her trust, just as much as I wanted her gorgeous body.

"It's only because of the magic." Her words were whispered, and I nearly missed them.

“The magic?” I asked.

“My magic.” She lifted her head, glowing eyes meeting mine. “Last night you tasted my magic, and that’s why you are ready to do whatever you can to be with me.”

I laughed. “Last night’s make out in the hallway was far better than any sex I’ve ever had, but I wanted you before that. This is going to sound ridiculous, but I felt like you were the one since you opened your front door wearing that sheet. So yeah, last night certainly escalated things, but it wasn’t when I fell in love with you.”

“I didn’t believe in love at first sight.” Arizona’s words were hollow. She wasn’t being completely honest.

“Neither did I.” I made a move to put her on her feet, but she clung tighter to me. “But crazier things have happened, right?”

She laughed. “That’s an understatement.”

I pressed my lips against the wet skin of her neck, needing to touch her, taste her. “Seriously though, Arizona, I didn’t believe in it either. Not until I met you.”



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She moaned, her back arching as I sucked the delicate skin of her neck. I loved how her body responded to my touch. I'd only touched her with garments in the way, and I couldn't imagine how incredible it would feel to have nothing between us.

My lips trailed up her neck to her throat and then found her lips. I nipped at her bottom lip, silently asking her to open her mouth for me, and she did. My tongue danced against hers, and the velvet heat of Arizona's mouth had my body aching with the need for another hot velvety place on her body. Unfortunately, the cold Atlantic water had certain parts of my anatomy imitating a turtle.

I thought I heard Arizona giggle, but I wasn't sure with the roar of waves crashing around us. Moving slowly so I didn't lose my balance, I walked us up onto the shore out of the reach of the greedy waves. I laid her down on the sand and flopped down beside her.

"Let's hear it, Firefly." I traced her lips with my finger.

"Hear what?" She was breathless. "And why are you calling me firefly?"

"Because your eyes light up like the lightning bugs I chased as a kid growing up. Maybe your butt lights up too, but I haven't had the pleasure of checking yet." I smiled. "Tell me what I need to know to be ready for whatever chaos you are about to bring into my life. I have a good sense of intuition, and it's telling me I'm in for a wild ride with you."

"Long version? Or a cliff notes version for now?"

I could barely take my eyes off her body. Wet clothes clung to every curve. “Cliff notes,” I whispered, voice hoarse.

“I’m kinda like a witch, except I’m really new to the idea and can’t control my magic. My magic woke up Rez and Zon, who also happen to be able to change their bodies into dinosaurs, sorta like werewolves in the movies. They are gifts from an ancestor who was born thousands and thousands of years ago, who hoped I would make lots of magical babies to save magic from fading from existence. There are other similar gifts out in the world that my magic will probably activate at some point.”

I stared with open mouth in shock as she continued without taking a breath. Her eyes were wild, like she hadn’t had a chance to unload on someone in a long time. “If I lose control of my magic like I did last night, it hypes my dino-dudes up, and that could cause them to freak out and shift. I could also accidentally explode and destroy everything around me. My maniacal magic may or may not lure people to me like a siren’s call, which was why you lost control last night, too. My parents aren’t speaking to me because they walked in on me having sex, and they didn’t approve of me having a relationship with two guys. Oh, and I have a pet pig named Albert Einswine who is definitely not an evil spirit like Rez and Zon claim.”

“Dinosaurs? As in extinct dinosaurs?” I clarified.

“Yes. That kind of dinosaur.”

I nodded. “I’m afraid your parents aren’t going to be happy when they find out about me.” Not waiting for her response, I brought my mouth to hers, kissing her until we gasped for air.

She pressed her hands against my chest, her own chest heaving as she fought to catch her breath. Holding me at arm’s length, she asked, “That’s it? After all the stalking me and trying to get the truth out of me, you just accept it, no questions asked?”

“It doesn’t matter. There is nothing you are going to say that is going to change my mind about you, about us. If you say you live with two dinosaurs, I’m cool with that.” I tried to move her hands, but she shook her head.

“There’s one more thing that you need to know now.” Her brow wrinkled with concern.

“Okay?”

“One of my magic abilities is that I can tell when I’ve met my perfect match, a soulmate. The pull to each other and the electricity when we touch are both signs of the bond.” She paused as though waiting for me to say something.

“That’s great. I don’t have magic, but I’d come to the same conclusion.” I smiled and tried to kiss her, but again, she pushed me back.

“Last night, when we were making out, my magic was out of control.” Her eyes skittered away from mine, a guilty tell. But why would she feel guilt? “I didn’t know it was magic or what I was doing, but the guys told me I tried to claim you or bind you to me. And even though the guys stopped before it was complete, the process started, and there’s no way to stop it. You may already be feeling the effects when we are apart.”

Did that mean what I thought it meant? I clarified, “What exactly is a binding or claiming? If you had kept going, what would we be now?”

“Um. Married?” She said it as a question, her cheeks turning red.

My throat tightened. “Heck, yes.”

ARIZONA

What do you call an imaginary pig?

A pig-ment of your imagination.

\* \* \*

“Yes, what?” The man was making no sense.

“Yes, I’ll marry you. That’s what you are asking, right?” Jack’s green eyes sparkled mischievously, a smile curving the corners of his kissable mouth.

Had I asked him to marry me? No... Yes? I’d told him I might accidentally claim him for all eternity in the heat of the moment. That was almost the same thing, right?

The man had to be insane if he was willing to marry a girl he’d met only days before. The same girl who was a suspect in his case. A girl who also just told him her boyfriends were dinosaurs.

Yep. There had to be something wrong with him.

But then again, aren’t we all a little broken in our own way? We just had to find someone who loved us because of our weirdness, not in spite of it.

Jack, the logical cop, was willing to take a gamble on a life with me. The magic inside told me he was my soulmate. Rez and Zon had encouraged this from the start.

So what was holding me back?

My fear of being hurt if he suddenly came to his senses. I craved the excitement of the life Tsufnu had wanted for me. I hated being alone and longed for a life where I was never lonely again.

It was time to grab life by the balls, or was it supposed to be horns? Whatever, it was time to go after what I wanted.

Sliding my hands up Jack's chest, I wrapped them around his neck and pulled him to me. My mouth melted against his, our kiss tasting of sea and need. Moving my hands to his chest, I fumbled with the buttons of his shirt, wanting to touch his skin. Without breaking our kiss, Jack gave a hard yank on the shirt, sending buttons flying in different directions.

We both groaned when my hands touched his skin. I traced every line of his muscles, traveling down his chest to his abs, and lower still. The faint line of hair that led from his belly button down into his pants intrigued me. I wanted to follow it... but was stopped by Jack's hands sliding down the front of my shirt. It was still fully buttoned up, but that didn't keep his hands from exploring my body beneath it. When his hands gently cupped my breasts, I moaned his name.

We were still fully clothed, but my body already vibrated with need and—magic? Oh well. We were alone in a deserted spot, and he'd given me the okay to claim him if it happened. This was safe, and we would burn off the excess during sex. It was totally fine.

I let go of my worry and focused on savoring my first time with Jack.

“Too many clothes,” I panted.

“Agreed,” was his single word reply.

Sitting up, we pulled our shirts off, tossing them on the sand as our hungry eyes devoured the skin we’d revealed. Reaching behind me, I unclasped my bra, dropping it to the sand beside me. Jack bent toward me, and his mouth was on my aching breast before the bra hit the ground. He was incredibly gentle, licking and sucking as his hand massaged the neglected breast.

I unbuckled his jeans, pushing them over his hips, and growled in frustration when his boxers were still in my way.

“Let me help.” Standing, he slid his jeans and boxers off, letting them hit the sand with a soft thud.

For a moment, he stood still, allowing me the time I wanted to memorize his body. I’d been picking up stray thoughts from his mind, one of which was the worry about cold water shrinkage. He must have recovered quick, because the man was beautiful and abnormally huge.

“Your turn.” Jack’s voice was deep and gentle. Holding out a hand, he helped me to my feet.

Deciding to tease him. I turned my back to him, slowly working my pants over my hips while watching him over my shoulder. Jack responded by grasping his erection and giving it a hard squeeze. My mouth went dry, and I could feel my panties grow wet as wave after wave of lust washed through me.

I wiggled out of my pants as gracefully as I could, and then I laid back on the sand, meeting his eyes. “I want you.” I barely recognized my husky voice.

Jack knelt beside me. The lust in his eyes took my breath away. “I’ve never

wanted anything as much as I want you right now.”

His hand teased across my nipple, traveling down my flat stomach until he reached the smooth skin at the apex of my legs. “Last night, I was so jealous. I wanted to kill Zon and Rez for being inside of you, but I also wanted to watch. You tried so hard to hide it, but your face is expressive.” He parted my lower lips, stroking and teasing until his finger slipped inside me. “I could tell every time they slid their fingers in. By the time you came, I was harder than granite. I’ve never been that hard in my life. Even the friction of my pants was painful.”

His finger moved languidly, as though he had all the time in the world. “I can’t wait until I can return the favor.”

“Show me what you wanted to do last night,” I whispered.

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That's all it took. His finger disappeared from inside me, replaced by his erection pressing against my entrance. Shifting his hips, he sank inside me. While Rez and Zon were rough, Jack was not. He made unhurried, tender love for me on that beach. Each time we neared our release, he would change his rhythm. Over and over, he brought us to the brink, only to pull us back. It was incredible and torturous. The man had stamina for days.

"I swear. If you stop again, I will pin you down and ride you like a bicycle down a staircase." I tried to imitate Zon's snarl.

Jack only laughed, pinning me harder into the sand. But his rhythm changed, and he thrust inside me with a growing sense of urgency. Yes. This is what I needed. I clung to him, loving the way the saltwater caused our skin to stick together.

My magic had been a faint throb when we started, but it had grown to a pounding drumbeat. There was too much, but I was helpless to stop. I needed Jack. I longed for the assurance of the claiming that he would always be mine. Just like Rez and Zon were mine. Why had I been so scared to accept their promise of a lifetime of love? No more hesitation; these were my men. Now and forever.

My chest felt like it was on fire, and then my palms began to burn. And suddenly I knew what to do. "Jack? Are you sure?" I strained against my instinct, wanting to give him the chance to change his mind.

"Yes. A thousand times, yes." His thrusts were frantic, but his kiss was gentle.

"Even though it means sharing me? I'm still trying to get used to the idea, so I know



it has to be insane to you,” I whimpered as he shifted his hips, rubbing me in all the right places with each thrust.

“Arizona, I want you any way I can have you.”

My release bore down on me, and I screamed in ecstasy.

“Just don’t forget about me when you have a house full of sexy men ready to please you.” His words were teasing, but there was a pensive note that told me he thought that was a possibility. “I need you, Arizona.”

“I need you more, Jack Oliver.” I pressed my hand to the side of his neck, sparks flying at the contact.

Jack yelled my name as he came, his erection pulsing inside me. Over and over, his body jerked, one orgasm after another, exploding inside him as my magic bound our souls together. When I finally removed my hand, Jack collapsed, unmoving, on top of me.

When I’d wished that the claiming wouldn’t hurt him and he would enjoy it, I hadn’t specified that he should orgasm the entire time. Men weren’t designed for prolonged pleasure like that, and Jack hadn’t been warned. Now he was hurt, and it was my fault.

Tears ran down my cheeks as I pushed him off me and onto the sand. Magic swirled in the air, my rollercoaster emotions stirring it into a frenzy. Curling around us, it crackled and popped before expanding out around us like an electrified dome. Rez’s beast had been right. My insane emotions had my magic prepared to defend me from an unseen threat.

I focused on Jack just in time to see him drag in a breath. He looked around,

confused.

“You’re okay!” I threw myself onto his chest. “I’m sorry. I’ll never do something that again.” Covering his face with kisses.

“Are you kidding? That was mind-blowing, Firefly. Give me a head’s up next time, though.” Jack’s arms wrapped around me, holding me tight against his chest. He buried his face in my hair. “I could feel our souls binding together. It was incredible.”

“I felt it too,” I whispered dreamily.

“Um, Arizona?”

“Yes?”

“I think you might want to reel your magic back in a bit...” Jack’s voice trailed off.

In my relief over Jack being alive, I’d forgotten about our impending doom from my magic. Pushing off his chest, I stared wide-eyed at my out-of-control magic. The dome was larger than it was just minutes before. I continued trying to hang onto the magic, fearing what would happen if I let go. Worse yet, my emotions were still all over the place and continued to feed the chaos both inside me and out.

This was really bad.

### ARIZONA

If a pig hurts itself, what should you put on the wound?

Oink-ment.

\* \* \*

Panic was rising inside me at a dizzying pace. “Hurry! You have to get away from me. Now! I don’t want to hurt you.”

I tried to scramble off Jack and onto the sand, but he kept hold of me as he sat up.

“I’m not leaving you, Firefly.” His arms tightened around me.

“Don’t be an idiot. You’re more fragile than me. Probably. Maybe? The point is, I’m not willing to risk your life.”

I focused on the semi-transparent dome wall, wishing a Jack-sized hole would appear. To my relief, it did.

“Please, Jack.”

He shook his head. “I made the decision to throw caution to the wind for a chance to be with you. There’s not a chance I’m leaving now.”

Frustration and fear consumed me, causing my magic to crackle in response. I

couldn't help but notice how beautiful it was, though. Pale pink sparks showered down the side of the dome, like flower petals in the spring. It would have been incredibly romantic if I wasn't absolutely terrified it was going to go nuclear at any moment.

I chewed on my bottom lip. "I wish the guys were here. They might know what to do." Closing my eyes, I tried to focus on my emotions, but I was a hot mess and couldn't figure out where to start.

Jack stiffened behind me. "What the—"

Another voice I recognized asked, "Jack? Why are you here?"

Opening my eyes, I found myself staring at Zon, Rez... and Albert Einswine?

It was one of the weirdest scenes I'd ever laid eyes on, shocking me enough that I momentarily forgot about my ever-growing magical dilemma. Both men looked guilty, like they'd been caught pranking the devil himself. Rez held Albert out in front of him using two plastic salad tossing forks, while Zon was busy wrapping my disgruntled teacup pig up tight in white fabric.

I couldn't tell if they were aiming to turn Albert into a mummy or a pork burrito. "Why are you here? And what are you doing to Albert?" I demanded, stress making me sound a little hysterical. Today was not the day to test the limits of my sanity. My worry for Albert temporarily overrode my concern over the impending magical doomsday.

Rez and Zon looked at each other, eyes widening and brows raising as they carried on a silent conversation.

"I want the truth," I demanded.

Rez kneeled, and careful not to jostle Albert, he set my tiny ham in the sand. Standing and backing away from the pig, Rez met my eye. “Honestly, he scares us.”

“Yeah, we live in fear every moment we are in the apartment without you,” Zon added in all seriousness. “We thought we could wrap him like a newborn, and perhaps he would sleep contentedly until you arrived. It is stressful to have him always popping out from behind doors and furniture. He finds enjoyment in our screams.”

Trying to save their pride, I bit down hard on the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing at their sincere expressions. How could the only two dinosaurs who walked the earth fear a six-pound pig?

Jack didn’t get the memo about fragile masculinity and burst into loud laughter. “You weren’t joking about their terror over a pig. If this is a taste of how our life together is going to be, I can’t wait for what comes next.”

Jacked wiped the tears from his eyes. “But seriously, guys, a pig? She told me you two were dinosaurs, and that was honestly more believable than when she said you feared one of the cutest creatures on earth. Did you know pigs are incredibly smart?”

Rez scowled. “Yes. We are very aware of how smart they are. Just as we know the terror that they caused during our time.”

“They think Albert is the kind of creature you don’t feed after midnight,” I whispered to Jack, sending him into another fit of laughter.

I watched Albert shake like a wet dog, freeing himself from Zon’s attempts at swaddling him. Once he was free, he pranced around Zon and Rez, playfully kicking up sand. A white crab darted across the sand, and Albert chased after it, his adorable butt jiggling as he romped on the beach.

I wondered why I'd never brought him to the ocean, and I made a mental note to bring him back since he seemed to enjoy it.

That was assuming we lived through the day. That thought caused my anxiety to begin rising again. My magic expanded as though it had taken a breath, and another cascade of crackling sparks fell around us, bringing my focus back to the issue at hand. I turned to my dinos. "Guys. I have a problem."

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Zon snorted. “I assume a pretty big one if you were desperate enough and created enough energy to will us here. That’s no small feat, even for someone well versed in magic.”

“Yeah, well. Desperate times call for desperate measures, right?” I tried to make a joke, but my chin wobbled.

Zon reached out a hand, allowing the shower of pale pink sparkles to flow between his fingers.

“Be careful! Remember what Rez’s beast said about taking in too much of my magic?” I warned.

“I remember,” Zon replied, turning toward me with glowing eyes. He stalked toward me, like a tiger hunting its prey. “He also said that sex was a great way to release it.”

“That part might have been a lie since sex is mostly what caused the current problem.” I motioned at the dome, my cheeks burning.

“You’ve claimed your first human mate.” Rez circled Jack, eyeing his neck. “And your claiming mark is intricate. Well done, Ari.”

I hoped Jack was the only one. I was already worried about the surprise gifts grandma Tsufnu had planned for me. I certainly didn’t need to be adding my own. Honestly, I had doubts if I could handle the three I already had.

I watched Zon warily as he circled us. “Rez’s beast also said it was dangerous for you

to be around so much of my magic.”

“He said it was dangerous if we were in a populated area where people could be injured if we lost control of our beasts and shifted. But it’s secluded here. There are no innocent bystanders to witness a shift or to become injured.” Zon grinned.

“If I explode, I could kill the three of you!” I protested.

Dropping to the sand in front of me, Zon’s mouth captured mine in a white-hot kiss. His fingers sank into my hair, holding me in place as his tongue delved into my mouth.

You taste incredible, and your magic is intoxicating. Let us enjoy this moment, Arizona. It’s so much magic, Zon pleaded.

“I’ve felt nothing like this in all my existence. Your taste is in the air, and your magic is teasing my skin,” Rez murmured, his mouth trailing kisses along my shoulder and arm. “I once read about a succubus who fed off the pleasure of men to survive. The men were happy to oblige because of how intense sex was with her. It was the best sex of your life, according to legend. In your case, it’s the opposite. It’s like the magic you create is an edible treat for those around you. Heightening our sensations and causing us to lust after you.”

“Are you saying my magic is a feel-good drug?” I really wasn’t thrilled about where this seemed to be going.

“I don’t know, but maybe. Only time will tell how it affects people who aren’t your mate. I just know I can’t get enough of it. It is almost as intoxicating as you are.” Rez was breathing hard just from kissing my shoulder. This could get interesting.

“Let us stay, Ari.” Zon kissed down my throat.



I hesitated, my body on fire from just their kisses. The thought of their mouths and hands exploring other parts of my body made my resolve to send them away waver. “If I let you stay, swear to me you will take Jack, Rez, and Albert away from here if things go wrong.”

I saw the hesitation in his eyes and, with effort, shook my head. “If you can’t promise me that, then it’s no deal. I have to know that you guys will be safe if you decide to follow through with this experiment. It is my final offer. Take it or leave it.” I wanted him to agree because my body had begun to vibrate with magic and need. What would it feel like to make love with this much of my wild magic enhancing every sensation?

“Agreed.” Zon’s jaw clenched. He wasn’t happy about the possibility of being forced to leave me, but he would do as I asked.

That settled, I focused on my magic, trying to use it purposefully to reach out to Zon’s mind and his mind only. I needed to speak with him without the chance of Rez overhearing.

Zon? I know you understand Rez, probably better than he understands himself. I’m going to claim Rez before you, and I need you to know it’s not because he matters more to me, but because he needs to be the first dino mate. He needs that reassurance.

Zon’s eyes widened. You’re in my mind.

Yes.

You blocked Rez?

Yes. I needed a chance to explain things to you without him hearing.

Babe, this skill is way beyond your abilities. The Vazi weren't known for their abilities with telepathy, so how are you better than most benders at it? Zon looked a little freaked out.

Fine. Let's add it to my ever-growing list of weird quirks. Do you understand, Zon? I can't stand the idea of hurting you. One of you has to be claimed before the other.

Stop worrying. You are making the right decision. Rez will treasure being your first dino mate. I'd rather wait my turn so that I can take all the time I want. Zon flashed me a wicked smile that had my body clenching with need.

Giving Zon one more kiss, I turned my full attention to Rez. Sliding off Jack's lap, I shoved Rez back on the sand and crawled up his body. Reaching his head, I pressed my hands to either side of Rez's face and kissed him as though it were the last kiss I'd ever have. I poured every ounce of emotion I had into the dance of my tongue against his.

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I wanted this memory to be embedded in Rez's head, erasing his hurt over never experiencing love. Today he would know what it was like to be loved, even if it killed us. Which it totally might.

When both our breaths were coming in harsh gasps, I kissed my way down his neck. Rez was still clothed, which was a problem I wished I didn't have.

And abracadabra... the man was deliciously naked beneath me. I made a mental note to be more careful about what I wished for in public.

Taking my time, I trailed kisses down every inch of his chest and abs. When I moved lower, Rez growled.

"You've tasted me. Now it's my turn." My voice had turned husky, and Rez's eyes glowed in response.

I slid the tip of his erection into my mouth, sucking and teasing. Rez had stopped breathing completely.

A hand buried in my hair. Not Rez's hand, but Zon's.

"You look so sexy, baby," Zon trilled, a sound I was falling in love with. "Now relax, and take him deeper."

Zon pressed my head down on Rez's erection. Not all the way, since Rez was far too long for that, but far enough to elicit a strangled moan from Rez and a slight gag from me. Whispering praise in my ear, Zon continued to guide my mouth down Rez's

shaft. It was something straight from one of my dirty books, and my body was here for it.

I knew wild animals were unpredictable, and technically I understood these men weren't fully human, but when Rez's control slipped, I wasn't ready. Zon had released his hold on my hair and leaned down to kiss me, intending to back away. Rez's body slammed into Zon, tossing Zon several feet away.

Zon's eyes flashed with rage, but he held his temper in check and backed away slowly, leaving Rez to crouch protectively over my body. They really needed to decide whether they were cool with sharing or not.

We are fine with it, but sometimes our beasts cannot discern a threat from an ally during times of intense emotion, Zon explained.

Rez hissed at Zon, his muscles bunching as though he intended to launch an attack.

"Rez. Look at me." I tried to soothe his anger.

He slowly looked down at me, his pupils the unnerving thin slits of his beast. I rested my hand over his heart.

"Claim me." I almost added 'like one of your dino girls' but resisted, knowing he wouldn't get the reference.

"I'll hurt you." The words were strained.

"No, you won't. You've waited to claim your mate since the prehistoric era. Isn't that long enough?" Rez lost his battle with self-control. Grabbing my hips, he turned me around and brought me up on my hands and knees. My muscles clenched and quivered, eager to feel him inside me, and desperately curious to know what it was

about this position that worried the dinos so much.

He slid inside me, and the first three strokes were surprisingly gentle. Then things changed.

And by changed, I mean they freaking changed.

One minute his slick, smooth erection was pumping in and out of me, and the next, he was screwing me. Literally.

As he pulled out, I glanced over my shoulder and caught a glimpse of his mighty morphing manhood. It was like a corkscrew. A really thick, really long corkscrew.

Rez buried himself inside me in a single hard thrust, and I felt my body burn as it stretched to accommodate him, even while on the verge of tearing. Dizziness had my vision growing black around the edges, and a sheen of sweat coated my body.

Right when I felt like I was going to rip in half, and a scream was building in my chest, my magic responded. Tingles poured through my body and shot to my core. I felt my insides shifting. Rez thrust again, and I cried out, not from pain but the absolute most amazing feeling I'd ever experienced. My magic was on board and ready to claim him as mine for eternity, adapting my body to fit him perfectly. And I do mean perfectly.

The twists and curves of his dino-dong pressed against every sensitive spot inside me as he moved, the edges creating a friction that had a need growing inside me like I'd never experienced. I couldn't breathe or even whimper as Rezkac ravished me, staking his claim with a dominance that had me soaked.

I could feel my climax approaching with all the subtlety of an F5 tornado. Not positive I would survive the havoc it would release on my body, I choked out the

words that I'd never said to any lover.

"I love you."

I screamed his name as the full force of my orgasm exploded inside me, sending my out-of-control magic surging to my skin's surface before flowing out from me in a single pulse.

Rez thrust deep inside me as he looped an arm under me and pulled my back tight against his chest. He roared his release and sank his teeth into the back of my neck, holding me still as aftershocks rocked his body.

Sliding a hand behind me, I pressed it to his neck. "You're mine forever," I promised. Feeling the burn in my palm, that meant my magic was marking him.

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Rez made an unintelligible sound that I think was supposed to be ‘I love you.’

I relaxed in his arms, basking in the afterglow of our lovemaking. Rez made a new sound, a sound that was otherworldly in its beauty. It was as though a whale’s sound had been blended with thunder. My body responded instantly to the sound, turning to putty against him as a contented calm settled inside me.

The magic dome collapsed harmlessly into the sand.

“What’s that sound?” I whispered, voice hoarse.

Rez was slow to respond, and when he did, it was through the mental link. It is the mate call for my kind. Every dinosaur has a unique call that only he, or she, can produce for their mate. It is the dinosaur version of I love you.

Tears blurred my vision. “It’s beautiful. And it is only for me?”

Only for you. Always for you, Rez promised.

When Rez spoke next, it was out loud, his voice rough. “I love you, Arizona.”

“I love you too, Rez.”

A shuffling to our left had me glancing over. Zon and Jack looked sheepish.

My body ached from Rez’s lovemaking, and all I wanted was sleep, but guilt wormed its way through me at disappointing Rez.

They don't want to admit it, but when you orgasmed and released your magic, it affected them. Rez chuckled.

Affected them how? I searched them for injuries but found none.

They came instantly when your magic hit them full force. It would have done the same to me, but I was already there. Rez was amused.

Setting me on the sand, Rez gathered our scattered clothing, and we began to dress. When everyone was ready to leave, Zon scooped me into his arms. "I'm sorry we didn't complete our claiming, Zon."

"Don't be! That was the hottest thing I've ever seen, baby girl. It's better this way. Rez is going to be a little clingy over the next couple of days. His beast is going to feel even more protective over you due to the claiming, and Rez will need your constant touch to calm him. Focus on him right now. We will have our time, and I want all your attention on me. Like I said, I'm willing to wait. It will just make it sweeter."

Zon gave me a quick kiss as Rez snatched me away.

My heart had never felt so full.



### ARIZONA

What do you say to a procrastinating pig?

It's snout or never.

\* \* \*

After leaving the beach, Jack drove us to my apartment. He'd taken one look at the size of my bed and told us to pack what we needed because he was taking us home with him. Once we'd finished packing, he'd taken us to his beautiful home nestled at the end of a cul-de-sac down a quiet tree-lined street. It wasn't far from the park Zon had popped us to the night before, and the tall trees around the property gave the home quite a bit of privacy.

Jack unlocked the bright red front door and stepped back, motioning for us to enter ahead of him. The home wasn't a mansion, but it was spacious. Jack gave us a tour, apologizing for the sparse furnishings. It seemed he was a workaholic who wasn't home a lot, and decorating wasn't high on his list of priorities.

We'd taken turns showering, trying to wash away the sand that managed to be in all the places it shouldn't be. Collapsing on Jack's California King, we lay motionless, too tired to do anything but sleep.

"Arizona?" Jack rolled to face me.

Rez was spooning me, while Zon lay across the foot of the bed, his large hand

wrapped around my ankle. They didn't care where they touched so long as our skin remained in contact.

"Yes?" I traced along his jawline, memorizing his face.

"I would love it if the three of you would consider moving in permanently and making this house our home. I understand if you are attached to your apartment, though, and if that's the case, I will sell this place."

"Attached to that tiny closet? Not a chance. It was all I could afford. We had already talked about the need to find a house. So if you are sure, then yes, I'd love to begin our life together here." I scooted forward as much as Rez's embrace allowed and pressed a gentle kiss to Jack's lips.

Rez spoke, "Your home is nice, and the privacy is appreciated. The constant noise of the city is unsettling to our beasts. Thank you, Jack."

"It's our home," Jack emphasized.

"For now. I have a feeling we may grow out of it if our little mate starts finding the rest of her gifts." Zon laughed.

"I'm glad that's settled." I sighed, relaxing into the plush mattress.

"I think you should consider quitting your job, Ari." Rez rumbled behind me. "We need to figure out how to keep your emotions from supercharging your magic. Maybe Tsufnu left information with your other gifts. She always did enjoy a good treasure hunt, so it would not surprise me if that was the case."

"And how are we going to afford to eat if I'm not working?" I asked. I didn't hate the idea of leaving my job, but it was scary to think of not having a steady, if meager,

paycheck each week.

“I’m financially comfortable, Firefly. I work because I would go crazy just sitting around twiddling my thumbs. Solving puzzles is a favorite hobby of mine, so being a detective allowed me to do it as a profession. Don’t worry about money. Work only if you want to.” Jack brushed his thumb across my bottom lip.”

“If I don’t work, what am I going to do?” All three men wiggled their eyebrows suggestively. I groaned. “Besides having sex! We are not having sex all day, every day.”

Albert landed with a soft thud on the downy comforter. Rez and Zon cursed at his sudden appearance.

Jack chuckled and stroked Albert’s head. “How’d you manage to get up here, little guy?”

Albert oinked in response and marched up to me, carrying something in his mouth.

“What do you have there? Did my invitation to the wizard school finally show up?” I joked, taking the envelope and opening it. Heck, if there was a school for people like me, I needed it.

“Well? What is it?” Jack asked, scooting closer to read along with me.

“It’s an invitation. Not to a school, but to a huge museum in Texas. Apparently, they saw a video on social media of my street performance with my lifelike animatronics. They are having their annual benefactor party, and they want me to come as a special guest and provide entertainment.”

I eyed the paper and then looked over at the tiny pig, who stared back at me with

innocent eyes. Suspicion crept through my mind.

“Can I use your phone, Jack?” I asked. Jack grabbed his phone from the nightstand and handed it to me.

Dialing the number, I asked for Claire, the party coordinator. She picked up on the first ring, and was surprised to hear from me so fast. We chatted for a few minutes over the party details, and I promised to call her back the next day with my decision.

“I did have one more question, Claire. When did you mail this invitation?” I listened, my eyes never leaving Albert.

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Clicking the phone off, I handed it back to Jack.

“There is no way that invitation arrived the same day it was mailed in a state that’s over a thousand miles away,” I spoke directly to my pet.

Albert gave a happy oink.

“And you just happened to have it right when I was wondering what my next step should be?” I narrowed my eyes at him.

Albert’s only response was to stretch his tiny front legs and flop down on the mattress to sleep.

Rez and Zon tossed out their ‘I told you so’s,’ while Jack laughed at me for being suspicious of Albert. But I ignored his teasing and continued to watch my beloved pet long after the guys had drifted off to sleep.

Unable to stop myself, I whispered, “Albert Einswine, you are just a pig. Right?”

Albert’s eyes opened instantly. While he’d always been a smart cookie, there was an inhuman intelligence shimmering in those depths, which made no sense. If he were a mate, why wouldn’t he shift?

My cheeks grew hot as I thought back to the nights he’d watched me cry into a pint of ice cream while watching my favorite chick flicks. I’d confided all my secret worries and fears to him, thinking he couldn’t understand.

And horror of all horrors... had he watched me use my pocket pleaser to take care of certain biological needs? I'd always shut him out of the room, but now that I thought back on it... there were more than a few times he managed to get through closed doors.

I was tired and overreacting. Right?

We stared, neither of us blinking. Just as I told myself I was being silly, Albert winked before going back to sleep.

Maybe the dinos had been onto something when it came to pigs...

Why did I get the feeling nothing in my life would ever be normal again?