



Dimitri (Paranormal Council Enforcers #14)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: They both come from powerful lines. What will that mean for their future together?

Dimitri Vasiliev has led an interesting life. Being the grandson of the created dragon comes with certain perks, but he's never let who he is dictate his life. He's always pulled his own weight, no matter what the task. Ready for a new change in life, Dimitri joined the council as an enforcer in hopes of helping right the wrongs of those who abuse power. Unfortunately, things didn't work out quite as expected, and until he had a craving for a donut, he considered leaving the council altogether.

Caspian Ainsworth needed a break. Work was getting to be too much, and although he loved his family, it was the newest member of their family that he longed to see. When he pops over to Treasure Ridge to see his brother and his One and daughter, the absolute last thing he expected was to come face-to-face with his fated mate in the council's bakery. But the sexy man is an alpha, and that means...could he carry their babies in order to have the family that he has always longed for?

Claiming each other is easy. But figuring out how to live with one another, on the same continent, is another story. Will these two be able to cohabitate by the time a new addition arrives? Or will their jobs keep them apart?

Dimitri is Book Fourteen in the Paranormal Council Enforcers series. Each book in this series will focus on a different couple, but these books are not standalones and should be read in order as there is an ongoing backstory that won't be resolved quickly. This is a fated mate story in an MPreg world, and there will be at least one baby in this story. You should expect all the normal shenanigans, heats, biting, and remember that sometimes even fated mates need a little help.

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Chapter 1

Dimitri

“What we know is Master Conti used his coven as a cover for his illegal activities,” Master Edison said in our morning meeting. “The more we’ve learned, the worse it’s become. We finally found evidence that he was involved in trafficking, and unfortunately, he didn’t limit his to paranormals.”

“So are you saying there are humans involved?” Atticus asked.

“We are, yes,” Master Ambrosius said.

That wasn’t good at all. It was bad enough when it was just paranormals we had to deal with. But when humans were involved, we had to be more careful. There would be humans missing children, siblings, other family members. They knew nothing of our kind, and now, some of them would be thrown into the mess that Master Conti had created.

“What are the plans?” Benjamin asked before I could.

“We have an offer of assistance from someone not in the council but close. He’s agreed to get us in contact with someone in Italy that he believes can help us locate the Gallo cousins and any others that might be helping them,” Master Ambrosius said.

You could tell there were several of us who were wondering who would be able to

provide assistance to us when there was a knock on the door. There were murmurs when a man walked through after Master Edison opened it to allow him in.

“Do you know who that is?” I whispered to Benjamin as I leaned closer to him.

“You seriously don’t know?” Benjamin asked. I shook my head, but before he could answer, Master Ambrosius leaned in and gave the other man a hug.

“Nikolai,” he said. “You are full of surprises. We must talk after this meeting though, before you are off with the team.”

I raised an eyebrow at Benjamin. He shrugged, seeming to be as clueless about things as I was. At least about some.

“If you don’t know, this is Master Nikolai. He is mated to one of Alpha Maynard’s sons and is master of the Beloved Gem coven in St. Louis. His coven helped with communication between the council and Justin’s former pack when they were hunting down Orsen and his crew.”

Ah, so that was why he seemed familiar. I had seen him before, but only from a distance. I wasn’t aware of what he had done for the council with regards to Orsen though. That was a bit before I joined the council.

“Nikolai still has connections in Italy and believes that he will be able to help us,” Master Edison said. “I’ll let him share with you all what he has in mind.”

“Thank you, Master Edison. I appreciate not only the welcome but the opportunity to help with this situation,” Master Nikolai said as he moved to the center of the front of the room to stand behind the main table. “As Master Edison said, I’m Nikolai. I first became involved with the council when Master Ambrosius and Lucius suddenly appeared on my boat, the Beloved Gem . That isn’t exactly relevant, but it’s how I

became involved with the council. Before coming to this country, my coven was in Italy. Tuscany, to be specific.”

There was a bit of a pause, and it was Atticus who spoke up. “Tuscany isn’t where we are looking though. How will that help us?”

Master Nikolai smiled. “My coven was in Tuscany. But because of my winery, I have friends all over the country. I believe that I can help—well, I can put the council in contact with others who can help locate those you are searching for.”

“Who?” Master Ambrosius asked. “Until this most recent incident, I was under the impression I knew of all of the vampire covens in Italy?”

Master Nikolai nodded slowly. He looked as if he were contemplating what he was about to say before he simply shrugged. “Vincent Vittone.”

A round of what I was certain were expletives came from Master Ambrosius. They were in Italian though, and although I spoke a few words of the language, my Italian was quite limited. Master Ambrosius walked away, then back toward Nikolai and pointed while shaking his head. “We will discuss this in a moment,” he said, then seemed to think better of it and took Nikolai’s arm and pulled him from the room.

I was a dragon shifter, and even if they had closed the door all the way, I still would have been able to hear their raised voices out in the hallway. Unfortunately for me, they were speaking Italian, and I couldn’t understand what they were saying. I looked to Benjamin, wondering if he could.

“Do you speak Italian? I never thought to ask.”

Benjamin chuckled. “Yes. Master Ambrosius is asking Master Nikolai how it is that he knows the head of the Sicilian paranormal mafia family.”

“Ah.” That was...interesting and not expected. “How does Master Ambrosius know?”

Benjamin gave me a look that I still hadn't quite mastered in understanding. “You did not just ask me how the created vampire knows all of the vampire covens in Sicily, did you? Does your grandfather not know all of the Russian dragon thunders?”

“Ja,” I responded. That was a very valid point. Dedushka knew all of them, including the bratva families, and there were more than a few. “So is it that Nikolai knows them that Master Ambrosius is upset about?”

Benjamin held up a finger while there were more raised voices. Then they went silent, and moments later, Master Ambrosius returned with Nikolai behind him. Master Ambrosius went to the far wall, turned around, leaned against it, and crossed his arms in front of him. Nikolai then went back to where he was before and cleared his throat.

“Yes, because he was under the impression that Master Nikolai was very...by the book.”

I nodded.

“I will still offer my connection with Vittone and his coven family if it is so desired,” Nikolai said. “I have reached out to him to ask about the situation with the Gallo cousins, as well as the rest of Conti's coven. They are not in agreement with Conti and are most willing to help with the situation if so desired.”

“What exactly does that mean?” Atticus asked.

It was Master Ambrosius who answered. “It means that if we accept help from Vincent, we the council will be in cahoots with the Sicilian mafia. We will be going

against everything we are here for.”

“Perhaps we should hold off on this meeting until after this situation can be discussed in greater detail, and we can make a more informed decision,” Master Edison said. He moved over to the wall where Master Ambrosius was standing, and I swore that the two had a conversation without actually saying a word. If they weren’t mated to alphas, I would be under the impression that they had something going. In reality, they were simply good friends, although their friendship was one of only a few years’ time.

Master Edison suddenly turned and then walked out of the room with Master Ambrosius and Nikolai following. That left the rest of us in the conference room wondering what to do. Atticus was the first to stand.

“Well, back to work for us, I guess. Apparently, they have things they need to discuss before having the rest of the meeting.”

“Who wants to bet that we end up in cahoots with Master Nikolai’s contact?” Benjamin asked.

“Oh, we’re definitely going to end up working with the mafia on this case. Possibly future ones as well,” Atticus answered.

I shrugged and shook my head at their laughter. When the others just stared at me, I sighed. “I know several bratva family heads, but I wouldn’t trust a single one of them with my own life, let alone those of the council. If Nikolai believes Vincent can be trusted with the omegas and carriers of the council, then so be it.”

“Why do you say that?” Benjamin asked. I could scent his concern and remembered he had an omega for a mate as well as two young children.

I stared at my teammate for a moment before shaking my head once more. “If there is any type of working together, that means the council will trust them to some extent, no?” I glanced at the others. “Then that bit of trust will eventually lead to them either being here at the council and near everyone’s mates and children or, at the very least, in closer proximity. Take that to mean what you will, but it will mean that they eventually will have access to those the council has access to.”

“You believe they will harm our mates and children?” Atticus asked.

I shrugged again. “I cannot speak specifically for whoever Vincent Vittone is or his character. He is mafia. Like the bratva, they are all about their own power, their own needs. Perhaps he is an exception to the stereotype.”

I had questions that I knew I wouldn’t find answers to here, so I left the conference room. Instead of heading toward the office I shared with the others of my team, I went to my dedushka’s office. It wasn’t my dedushka that I wished to speak to though. I was wanting to talk with my yéye.

I found him exactly where expected: on the couch in Dedushka’s office.

“Dimitri. How are you this morning? I thought you had a meeting regarding your next assignment?”

I nodded. “Ja.” Yéye stared at me, and without even knowing why I was here, he seemed to know. This was why I came to him and not his mate. I loved both equally, but it had always been Yéye that I had gone to when I needed advice or simply to talk about things.

“What is it that has you...” He paused a moment, seemed to study me, and then nodded. “You are concerned. Tell me why.”

I sighed. “You will know soon enough, I’m sure, but it has to do with the assignment. There is a Nikolai. He has a connection—Vincent. Vincent is not a good man.”

Yéye’s smile was slow to form but was there all the same. “You do not know this Vincent, correct?”

I shook my head. “Only his name and that he is from Sicily. It is apparent that Master Ambrosius at least knows of him though.”

“Just because someone is connected to something doesn’t necessarily identify who they are. Until you meet this person, you cannot fully understand who he is or why he’s the way he is.”

“Ja, but he is head of his family. It is like asking if I would trust Alexsey Volkov.”

Yéye chuckled. “It’s like that, is it?” I nodded. “Then I suggest you think about what it is that you’re doing. If you can no longer support where the council is going, then you should reconsider your position here. There is absolutely no shame if you were to leave the enforcers. It’s not for everyone, and those that join don’t always stay.”

I shook my head again. “Nyet. I am not quitting. I simply am conflicted. I know the council is doing what they feel is necessary, but I do not agree with the method.”

Yéye appeared to be contemplating his answer. “If you wish to remain an enforcer but don’t agree with the mission, you can ask to be assigned elsewhere, can you not?”

I could, and we both knew it. “Will that not make Dedushka look bad? I do not wish to bring shame to this family in any way.”

Yéye sighed. “There is no shame in having morals. If you truly believe the council isn’t making the best choices in this situation, you should ask for a different

assignment.”

I was torn. I had never asked for a different assignment. In fact, I had been on too few when I thought about what I had expected when joining the council as an enforcer. I had expected to be in Montana very little with the way I had been led to believe the council was so short with regards to enforcers. However, I’d only been on two assignments. It was a bit frustrating when there were others that were always out, and I was once more left behind.

“Your dragon is unsettled.”

“I am...considering my options. I know I wish to remain here as an enforcer. I am wondering if I will be able to do what is asked of me.”

“You do not have to. As I’ve said, you are allowed to have a conflict with your assignments and choose to reject it if you feel the need.”

I could, but I never would. If it came to that, I knew deep down I would use some other reason to leave the council rather than bring shame to my grandparents.

“Your dragon is not any happier.”

I chuckled. “I have much to think about. I only wished to talk things out a bit before going back to work.”

Yéye studied me for a moment before he shook his head. “You are only trying to placate me.”

“Nyet. I do need to return to my office. I left a meeting and came here instead of going there.” I stood up from where I had joined him on the other end of the sofa. “I will see you soon? I wish to spend time with Longwei in our scales again soon. He is

growing more powerful by the day, and I do enjoy sparring with him.” That had the effect I knew it would. Yéye’s smile was both instant and beaming. He and Dedushka both loved all of their children a great deal. Longwei was the youngest and, most suspected, their last. We all loved the young alpha, and although he was much younger than I, we got along well.

“You will be by for supper soon?” Yéye asked. Only I knew it wasn’t actually a question.

“Whenever you wish, as long as I am not on assignment.”

“You are welcome any day. Come when you have time. If not, we understand.” Yéye stood, and after he gave me a hug, I received one of his smiles. He had the ability to completely shift one’s mood with just a smile.

“You know you don’t have to, but I appreciate the open invitation all the same.”

“We are dragons. We are quite social, and although I knew it was a difficult choice for you to leave your parents and siblings, and that we aren’t them, we are still family. We very much enjoy having you here with us, Dimitri. You will always be welcome.”

I grinned. “àì n?, Yéye.”

The smile grew. He reached up and touched my cheek. We were interrupted by Dedushka entering the office. Immediately, he took in the scene and smiled.

“Is everything all right?” he asked in our native language.

“Ja,” I said immediately. “I will see the two of you tonight for our evening meal. I will stop at the bakery and bring Longwei’s favorite desserts.” Of course, they were

all my favorites as well. I had a thing for sweets but didn't share that with my fellow enforcers because if I did, I knew my desk would constantly be covered with sweets.

"Do not feel you have to leave simply because I am here."

I shook my head. "I need to go back to work as I am certain Benjamin is wondering where I am at this point."

I left the office before I could get held up longer. Dedushka had that ability. It didn't take much from him. One moment, you were answering a single question; the next, you realized you had been talking about various things for over an hour. That was just how he was. Well, at least with family.

I left the hallway for his office, took a left to the main entryway room, and then entered the hallway to our office. When I finally arrived, Benjamin wasn't there, but Raiden and Briggs were.

"Where's Benjamin?" I asked.

"Talking to his father. Something about family or something," Briggs said.

Ah. Yes, I understood that.

"Not that I blame either of you," Raiden said. "But I am so glad I don't have family here aside from Ramsey. But our family and clan aren't worth much." Raiden sighed.

"For us, family is everything. Dedushka would do anything for Yéye. He has always instilled family first in all of their children." I shook my head. "I cannot fathom not having a family such as ours, and I am sorry you did not have that growing up."

Raiden shrugged. "I had my twin. That was enough. We did what we could to make

sure we weren't too affected by what our clan insisted on."

I couldn't imagine such a life. I knew I was privileged in that I was the grandson of the created dragon and the golden dragon. There were stories, and I'd seen the drawings from many centuries ago of the golden dragon that could be seen at sunset flying in the sky. Most didn't believe that there was actually a golden dragon, but they humored those that swore they'd seen one. Those in our family knew why Yéye flew as much as he did back then. It was rare that he was spotted, and Dedushka knew there was no real danger to his cherished mate because there were very few near them at the time.

"He's lost in thought again like he gets."

I turned my head toward the voice, blinked a few times, and focused on the speaker.

"I have many memories. I was thinking about Yéye flying."

"Ah," Briggs said. "I can understand that. Alpha mate Chin's dragon is absolutely gorgeous."

I nodded. He truly was. I loved his golden color. I had a gold shimmer to my own scales when I was in my shift, and my wings were gold—something none of my brothers had.

"You know, you've never said what color your dragon is, Dimitri," Briggs said.

I shrugged.

"You didn't ask." I picked up the paperclip that was on my desk. Well, I tried. Then tried again. When I realized it was glued to the desk, I looked up at my office mates and glared. Raiden and Briggs both were completely blameless, or they were extremely good at playing innocent.

“Seriously?”

“Seriously what?” Benjamin asked as he walked into the office. I pointed at the paperclip on the desk. Benjamin chuckled before he sat down. “I have news.”

I glanced at the paperclip, intending to pry it off, but found it gone. When I turned my chair around to face the others, Benjamin gave me a smirk.

“What’s the news?”

“We’re not going to Sicily just yet. Apparently, someone is being sent there to bring Vincent here in order to discuss certain things.”

I shrugged. “What will our assignment be, then?” I asked.

“For now, not much. You could ask to go to one of the more local packs and see about knocking some sense into a wayward alpha, but beyond that, I don’t know that there are any major field assignments to be had.”

I sighed. It had already crossed my mind to wonder if Dedushka had anything to do with the fact that I was never chosen for those assignments. I was more than capable, but like Raiden and Briggs, I didn’t have magical powers as Benjamin and the other warlocks did.

“Something wrong?” Benjamin asked.

I shook my head before turning my chair back around. Perhaps it was time to do as Yéye had suggested. Maybe being an enforcer wasn’t necessarily for me. Especially since I didn’t really get much opportunity to actually...enforce.

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Chapter 2

Caspian

The thumping of the music usually didn't bother me, and the scent of alcohol and sweaty bodies usually put me in a better mood. But tonight, I wasn't feeling it. My mind was elsewhere, and wasn't that just an issue. I had long ago lost Lorenzo. Knowing him, he'd already found someone to spend the night with and had already left.

I downed what was left of my drink before placing it on the bar. I had just turned when I felt a hand on my arm. A quick glance had me looking at glassy eyes, and I wondered just how much she'd had to drink this evening. I wasn't interested no matter what, and after shaking my head, I rolled my eyes at her attempt at a pout. That simply wasn't my thing.

I left the club, not worrying about my brother. He was an alpha and could take care of himself. I had a car ordered by the time I made it to the corner of the block, which was still in sight of the club Lorenzo and I had gone to. It showed up moments later, and after I confirmed my address with the driver, I was on my way home.

I fought with myself, wondering if visiting Drew and Flora so soon again would be imposing on my brother and his One. I couldn't help how I felt, and little Flora was simply too precious to not spend time with. Of course, I enjoyed spending time with my youngest brother and his One, but I would be lying to myself if I denied the fact that I truly went to spend time with my little niece. I longed for that more than anything. Of course, I was happy for Sebastian and Drew, but I couldn't help but

wonder if I, too, would ever find my forever one.

Taking a chance, I opened the messaging app and clicked on Sebastian's name.

Me: Hey. I know I was just there a few weeks ago, but I was curious if it would be all right if I came to visit again? If it's too much, I understand.

I hit Send and waited for Sebastian's response. I knew he was several hours behind us, but it was possible that he was either busy with work or, more likely, busy with his One or daughter. I would be as well if I had a One to go home to. I grinned when a reply from my brother came swiftly.

Sebastian: Of course you can come visit. Drew absolutely loves you, and anytime someone wants to come dote on our little princess, he's all for it. That, and he seriously loves you.

I couldn't help but smile. I was quite fond of Drew as well. Strictly in a brotherly way, of course, but I was beyond thrilled for Sebastian. His little cheetah was quite the spitfire, and when he put our fathers in their place shortly after they had claimed one another, my admiration for the young omega grew immensely.

Me: I would love to come visit. Of course, I will stay elsewhere and wouldn't dream of intruding upon your and Drew's privacy. Uncle Rainier has secured a small cabin for us to stay in, just in case you didn't know. I have no issues staying there and would love to spend some time with Flora this weekend. It has been a rough week at work, and something happy is really what I think I need at the moment.

The car stopped at the same time my phone buzzed in my hand. I glanced up, noticing that we weren't at my place, and scowled.

“¿Dónde estamos?”

“Esperas aquí. Ya vuelvo.”

The driver was gone from the vehicle before I could respond. He disappeared into a building, and when I looked out the window, I realized we weren't in a very good area. I tried to open the door but found it either locked or somehow secured. True to his word, the driver came back into view only moments later, but he wasn't alone. I rolled my eyes. There was no way I was going to wait around and find out what they had planned because I knew it wasn't in my favor. I bent down in the cab and simply used magic to transport myself home. I would have done that at the club if I'd been able to, but my mind had honestly been preoccupied, much like it had been for most of the week.

I found myself in my bedroom at my condo and sighed in relief. This place was my sanctuary, and although my brothers and fathers had been to my home, that was the extent of others who had been allowed to visit. I'd purchased it after my last relationship had ended, and although since then it had felt like home, that hadn't been the case in recent times.

What did that mean? Was it time to move on? Did I need to start over somewhere else? Sebastian had done that, although he became an enforcer, and that wasn't necessarily something that interested me. I was more than capable of doing so, but I was much more someone who was happier behind a desk than out in the field, chasing bad guys. Did the council have positions like that? Was that the answer, or was it simply the fact that my baby brother had found his forever and had started a family?

I wanted that, more than anything. I had thought that I possibly would be able to have an unconventional family with my ex, but he wasn't having it. For him, it was with his fated mate or no one. I couldn't fault him for that. I would love nothing more than to find my fated one and have my own family. But at this point, I was beginning to believe I would need to go the adoption route. Would I love a child I had adopted?

Absolutely. But as a warlock, I could only adopt each child that was paranormal. Unfortunately, for me, it could be difficult to locate an orphaned paranormal child.

Remembering that my phone had vibrated just as the driver was returning with what was most likely bad news, I pulled my phone out of my pocket to see what my brother had to say.

Sebastian: When do you think you will arrive? And of course, you can stay here with us. Drew would have it no other way. But I do understand if you would like to be able to get away from Flora for a bit. She can be quite disruptive at night when she is hungry or needs to be changed.

I smiled at my brother's message. Did I want to stay with him and Drew? I never wanted to impose, and although Lorenzo and I used to stay with Sebastian when he was in enforcer housing, neither of us had stayed there since he had mated.

Me: I need to pack a few things, and then I will be there. I appreciate the offer, but I will be staying at Uncle Rainier's cabin simply to give you and Drew the privacy that you both deserve. But don't worry, I will be spending plenty of time on Treasure Ridge with you and your family.

Sebastian: They're your family too. But I do understand. Drew is excited to see you again. Will Lorenzo be joining you this time?

I thought about our brother and what he was most likely up to currently and smiled. There was absolutely no way that Sebastian could know that Lorenzo was, without a doubt, currently fucking some willing bottom.

Me: No, not at this time. We might be able to get him to join us later if he has time. But I know he has a lot going on this weekend.

Not to mention the fact that Lorenzo often spent entire weekends in bed with a surprisingly agreeable and willing partner. I hadn't seen him pick anyone up, what kind of partner he had found, but I also knew that despite his playboy ways, he could be a tad picky and didn't take just anyone to a hotel.

I packed up everything I would need for the weekend, not that I couldn't just magick something if I needed it, and then I thought about the charming cabin that Uncle Rainier had secured for us. I found myself standing in front of it moments later and quickly realized my mistake. It was November in Montana, and there was a drastic temperature difference between here and back home in Spain. I opened the door, swiftly removing myself from the biting wind, and then walked through what was basically a family vacation home.

My parents, my brothers, and I weren't the only ones that used it. I knew that our cousin Frederick's family had stayed there on more than one occasion when they were in the area to visit. After I tossed my weekend bag on the bed, I pulled out my phone again and found Uncle Rainier's contact to send him a message.

Me: I thought I would spend the weekend in the area and visit with Sebastian and Drew. I hope it is all right if I use the cabin?

I probably should have asked before I just showed up, but if there was someone who already had plans for the place for the weekend, I would simply accept Sebastian's offer to stay with him.

Uncle R: The place is yours. You know you are always welcome to stay whenever you come to visit. There are no other plans for the cabin until next summer at the moment. Stay as long as you wish. I heard from Benedict a little about what has been going on at the firm. In truth, I'm surprised you haven't come to visit sooner.

I had just about popped myself up onto Treasure Ridge but stopped myself for a

moment to reflect on what Uncle Rainier said. Work had been...rough. The firm had been dealing with a large case, and it had meant a lot of long hours for everyone involved. Even Father had been staying late, much to Papa's displeasure. I knew eventually something would have to give, but I wasn't sure what would be the cause of it.

But the fact that Father was talking to someone else about things, even in passing, was telling. I already knew the game though: the deeper we dug, the more corrupt our client was turning out to be. It was Father's final decision on whether or not to continue with the case, but we'd never dropped a client before. Was Father going to be stubborn enough and refuse to drop him?

Me: Thanks. I'll only be here for a long weekend. Lorenzo has other plans for his weekend off, but I thought about spending my time spoiling a certain little princess.

Uncle R: Enjoy your time. If you have a free moment or two, be sure to drop by and see Étienne. He always loves to see you when you are here.

I grinned. I enjoyed spending time with him as well. Our family dynamic, much like many paranormal ones, was a bit odd. Living several centuries made for larger families, and, well, sometimes cousins that were your age were actually parents' cousins. Or actual uncles. It could be confusing, and most of the time, we all just considered ourselves simply family.

Me: I will. I have to be back at work Wednesday morning, sadly, but I will make sure I have time to stop and see him. Thanks again for letting me use the cabin.

My phone vibrated before I could pocket it. There was another message from Sebastian, and I chuckled.

Sebastian: Did you change your mind? I know it's late in Madrid. It's afternoon here,

and I'm home from work. Flora is just going down for a nap though, so she will be out for the next couple hours.

My shoulders slumped with that news. I had looked forward to seeing her.

Me: I'm here. I'm getting settled into the cabin. I'll be by in a bit. Give me about an hour? That will give me time to get to the store and grab something to eat.

My stomach growling at me told me it had been too long since I'd last eaten, and I had to think about when I had, in fact, eaten last. It had been a quick sandwich at lunch, at my desk, and that simply wasn't sustainable. Technically, I didn't need to stop at the store, but it would give my brother and his One some time alone while their little one was napping. I knew that was precious to new parents, especially paranormal ones.

Sebastian: All right? Everything okay?

I chuckled and shook my head.

Me: We can talk later. It's fine, just a lot going on.

Sebastian would understand. He'd left the firm for a very similar reason. He'd wanted something different, and he was tired of the long hours and the constant push to be the absolute best. Our father was a wonderful man, and he loved each of us and absolutely adored our papa. But when it came to the firm, Benedict Ainsworth was a ruthless bulldog and was known for absolute perfection. We had a list of potential clients we had to turn away on a daily basis, and that added to the stress.

Since it was so incredibly cold outside, I put a long wool coat on, as well as smooth leather gloves. A wool scarf finished out my look, and I was off to Treasure Ridge. One moment, I was standing in the cabin; the next, I was standing in front of the

council's little store. I had every intention of going into the store to look around and see if anything had changed since I'd been there last, but the scent coming from the smaller bakery next door was too enticing to resist. I loved a good pastry, and I was certain the scent I was smelling was not something to pass up.

I left the storefront for the bakery, and when I entered, the amazing smells from outside only intensified. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and smiled as I let it out. Yes, that was pure bliss right there.

“What brought you in?”

I opened my eyes and looked at the younger female behind the counter. I'd, of course, met her the first time I'd been here. She was the daughter of the couple who ran the place, but I couldn't recall her name.

“I'm not sure. Something smells wonderful though. Is there something baking?”

She laughed. “There's always something baking, unless we're gone for the day. Is there anything in particular you're looking for?”

I stepped away from the door and toward the counter to look at the glass cases. There were so many things. “I'm not sure. I don't recall so many things in the cases the last time I was here.” I glanced up and found her tilting her head at me. “Something you need to ask?”

“No. I just don't recall seeing you. You're not a regular.”

I shook my head. “No. I'm not with the council. My brother is an enforcer; I'm just here visiting him and his One.”

“Ah, that's it. Well, from your accent, if you want something that reminds you of

home, I'd recommend the other cabinet."

I must have made a face because she giggled. "No. What do you have that is more from this region? Not that I'll say no to anything. I have a fondness for sweets, and I'll eat them all."

"Well, we, of course, have donuts—always. But in this area, we have a thing for s'mores. We just put out a fresh batch of s'mores muffins, and the cookies are cooling."

"S'mores?"

"Yes. Graham crackers, chocolate, and melted toasted marshmallows." She reached into the case and pulled out a muffin that looked...messy. "Here, try this." She set it on a plate and cut it into several smaller-sized pieces. She then placed one on another plate and handed it to me.

I glanced at it, then at her. I wasn't too sure about this thing. Not only was it quite messy-looking, but toasted marshmallows? She seemed to notice my hesitation.

"Not so sure?"

"How does one eat it?"

The young lady rolled her eyes. "I should have known with the way you're dressed." She held out a plastic fork, and I stared at it.

"I beg your pardon?" She snorted as she waved the fork at me. "Are you always this rude to customers?" That earned me another eye roll and another wave of the plastic utensil.

“You don’t scent of blood, nor do you have teeth like one, so that means you’re either a warlock or fae. I’m saying warlock because there are very few fae that I’ve seen.”

“What does me being a warlock have to do with anything?”

She snorted once more, but we were interrupted by the door dinging as someone entered. Before I could even turn, my body started reacting. I froze, immediately knowing what the tingling sensation coursing through my body meant. There was absolutely no way. I’d been to Treasure Ridge several times since Sebastian had joined the council. How had I somehow missed my One being here?

I turned just as the man, thank the fates, stepped up beside me. Immediately, I was mesmerized by dark brown eyes. He was taller than I was, which was something I hadn’t been expecting either. Then it hit me: my One was an alpha.

I sighed. “Well, I assumed it had to be one of us.” It wasn’t that I was upset with the fact that I was going to be the carrier. I simply hadn’t expected that, to be honest. I wasn’t sure why, other than the fact that I normally filled the other role in the bedroom.

“This is a problem?”

That accent absolutely did not fit that man. I shook my head. I handed the plate back to the young lady behind the counter. After she took it, I turned and simply left. I needed to talk to someone. As soon as I was outside, I popped myself over to Sebastian’s and knocked on the door.

He opened it seconds later with a smile on his face. It slowly dimmed, though, as he stared at me. “What’s wrong?”

I shook my head again. “I met my One,” I told him. Sebastian’s eyes widened. He

looked around, then pulled me into the house.

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Chapter 3

Dimitri

I could only stare at the gorgeous man as he left the bakery. He was a warlock but didn't belong to the council. That told me he was visiting, which meant he was either related to Master Edison or one of the other warlocks in the council.

"He does not seem too happy," I said absently.

"He asked about how to eat the muffin. Seemed stuck-up to me, but that could often be the case with those warlocks."

I glanced at Malorie, narrowed my eyes, then simply turned and left. I needed to follow my mate, but I knew he wouldn't be too difficult to locate. He was my mate, and my dragon had gotten his scent. I was an incredible tracker, and if needed, I could shift and find his scent anywhere on the mountaintop.

I honestly expected him to be outside somewhere, but a few steps away from the bakery, his scent disappeared. He was a warlock, and that told me he'd used magic to go wherever he'd disappeared to. That wasn't going to be an issue for me and my dragon though. But I was going to be logical about things and first ask about any warlocks visiting the area.

Knowing Master Edison was still in the council building, I returned to the building I'd left just moments ago.

“Forget something?” Slater asked as I checked back in with the front desk.

“Not exactly. More like found something and have a question.”

“Have fun with that, then, I guess.”

I nodded, and after putting my badge back in my pocket, I went to Master Edison’s hallway. As it so happened, that was also the hallway that my dedushka was in, and if nothing else, I knew he would be able to get the answers I needed.

I was a bit surprised when I approached Master Edison’s doorway and found so many in his office. I had paused long enough to gather attention though, and all talking ceased, and I found several pairs of eyes staring intently at me.

“Is something amiss, Dimitri? Your grandfather should be in his office, as far as I’m aware.”

I shook my head. “I had a question for you, Master Edison.”

“Then, by all means, come in and join us.”

I stepped into the office and glanced around. Master Edison was having some sort of meeting with his team, it seemed.

“I was curious if you knew of any warlocks visiting the area? His scent is familiar, which tells me he has family here.”

“Caspian is visiting,” Rainier said. “He was messaging me earlier about using our family’s cabin in Timber Valley. He should be here on the mountain by now though. He’s come to see his brother Sebastian.”

That gave me the answers I needed. I spent every day with Benjamin, and Benjamin was related to Sebastian, which was why my mate scented somewhat familiar.

“Thank you,” I said to Rainier. I turned to leave, my next destination Sebastian’s house to claim my mate.

“Wait,” Rainier said, his hand on my arm. I glanced down at it, then up at his face. “Why do you ask?”

“He’s my mate. I will go discuss claiming him now that I know where to look.”

“Hold up a moment,” Rainier said, his hand on my arm tightening. There were chuckles from the others in the room. It was Alistair who stepped forward.

“You can talk to him, yes, but you have to understand that Caspian might not necessarily be open to a dragon alpha bulldozing him. I had to tread carefully when I was courting River.”

I looked to Rainier. “Has my mate been traumatized?”

Rainier sighed as he shook his head. “No. But he lives in Spain, Dimitri. He’s a partner in his family’s law firm. It’s not exactly simple for him to just up and move here.”

“Then I will move to Spain until he can.” I looked around at the others in the room. “It is not as if my services as an enforcer are needed. It is always the warlocks that go out on the assignments.” Should I have said that? Most likely not. But even Dedushka knew there was an imbalance among the enforcers, and the warlocks and hellhounds tended to be favored. It was understandable: they had magical powers.

A glance at Master Edison showed his face was one of contemplation. I knew I was

in a position of privilege that others weren't, and I could say things of that nature. I didn't use the fact that my grandfather was the created dragon for exceptions, but I wasn't afraid to speak my mind when there was an obvious imbalance and others had started to talk about it.

"Have you discussed this with your grandfather?" Master Edison asked.

"Nyet." I didn't feel the need to talk about the fact that I'd met my mate with them. That and this was where the warlocks were. I needed to ask about one, so to me, it made sense to have come here. "I did not believe he would be aware of warlocks visiting the mountain."

Master Edison shook his head. "No, I meant the other comment."

"Ja. I am not the only enforcer who has noticed that those of us without magical powers are often left here to...twiddle our fingers? Is that the phrase?"

Alistair chuckled. "Thumbs," he told me.

Ah. "Yes, that." I looked to Rainier. "Thank you for the information. I will not be forceful with my mate. I can be patient. My dragon is known for his patience. It is how I am so skilled with my tracking."

"Tracking?" Alistair asked.

I shook my head. "You should read the enforcer files. But also, do not forget that as someone from the created dragon's line, I have other abilities. As I am certain you are as well?"

Alistair nodded.

“I will go talk to my dedushka about Caspian.” I looked back at Rainier. “Thank you for the information.”

I didn’t give them more of an opportunity to say anything. I wanted to share my news with my dedushka and yéye.

It only took moments to reach Dedushka’s office. I found him and Yéye there, talking to one another.

“Dimitri, back so soon?” Yéye asked.

“Ja. I have met my mate just moments ago.”

That expectedly brought excitement. “Moments ago when?” Yéye asked.

“Just before I came back into the building,” I told them. “I was at the bakery to get something for supper this evening,” I told them. “But when I arrived, there was a warlock I’ve not yet met there. I scented him immediately, but he left right away.” I sighed, going over the interaction, short as it was, in my mind again. “I came back here to talk to Master Edison and ask if there were any warlocks visiting.”

“What did he say?” Dedushka asked.

“It was Rainier that told me Sebastian’s brother Caspian was here to visit. I cannot be absolutely certain Caspian is my mate, but if he is the only warlock visiting, then that will give me my answer.”

“Where is he now?” Yéye asked.

I sighed again. “I am not sure. He left the bakery, and when I followed, he was already gone once I’d reached outside. I do not know if he was upset with me, with

the fact that we are mates, or if Mallorie had said something to him to upset him.”

Dedushka narrowed his eyes. “I will have a discussion with them again about their daughter. There have been several comments from enforcers about her being curt and rude.”

I shrugged. “I was not there for that conversation. She did mention how she thought Caspian was a bit rude and then mentioned it was expected because he was a warlock. I did not care for that comment.”

Dedushka’s displeasure could be felt in the room. “I will discuss it with them. It might be that they will need to not have her work in the front. They won’t want to lose their contract with the council.”

Yéye touched Dedushka’s arm. “I want to hear more about his mate. What all happened? You said he took off. Did he say anything to you at all?”

I nodded. “Just that he supposed it had to be one of us. I do not know what that meant. After that, he left. I followed, but not fast enough.”

Dedushka handed me a piece of paper. “This is Sebastian’s house number. You can go ask if Caspian is there. If not, Rainier has a cabin in Timber Valley that he donated to the pack. His family use it when they come to visit from Europe. Here is its location if he isn’t at Sebastian’s.” I took the slip of paper and placed it in my pocket.

“Thank you.”

“This means you won’t be joining us for supper, then?” Yéye said.

I shook my head. “I wish to locate my mate and at least have a full conversation with him. I do not know if that will be possible, but my dragon most likely will not rest

until I am able to learn who he is at the minimum.”

“That is to be expected,” Dedushka said. He wrapped his arm around Yéye and pulled him in close. “Do you remember when I first located you and how my dragon pushed?”

Yéye grinned. “You were relentless.”

“You know by now that alpha dragons will do anything for their mates.” Dedushka looked at me. “I will expect you to need time off, so I will put that in.”

“I haven’t claimed him yet.”

“I have no doubts. He is a warlock; you are a dragon. They are a great pair, if I do say so, and I have no doubts that you will have no issues with claiming your mate. A quick message to let us know though?”

I nodded.

“Do you want us to let your parents know?”

I was surprised by Yéye’s question. I’d not even thought about my parents, which told me that I was already having issues focusing on anything other than my mate.

“Yes. I expect they will head this way, which isn’t necessarily bad. But Rainier said that Caspian, if he does end up being who my mate is, works for his family’s law firm, and he might not be able to simply up and move here.”

Dedushka nodded, but Yéye seemed concerned. “Will you leave?”

“Ja. If Caspian wants to remain in Spain, I have no issue with joining him there. I will

miss being able to see you so often, but I will go where my mate wishes.”

Dedushka pulled Yéye in tighter when he started to say something else.

“Go. See if Caspian is your mate or not. Perhaps he left because he was simply flustered. I have never known a warlock to deny their One though.”

I nodded again. He wasn’t wrong. Although warlocks no longer had to be claimed by their Ones so quickly, they would still want to be with them just as much as any other paranormal would.

“Thank you. I will message later to let you know how things are going.”

Yéye held out his arms, and as I pulled him in for a hug, he squeezed me tightly. “I’m so happy for you, and I know your parents are going to be thrilled.”

I grinned. He wasn’t wrong. I wasn’t the only one who still hadn’t found my mate, but the fact that I had, or any dragon finding their mate, really, was always a reason to celebrate.

“I know they will. I am, as well. He’s quite stunning,” I told him. I let go and stepped back. My dragon was pushing, but it wasn’t anything I couldn’t control. I knew they both felt him just under the surface though.

“Go, find your mate. If you run into any issues, let us know.”

I nodded, then left the office. There was no reason to stay longer, and we all knew the longer I waited, the more irritated my dragon would become.

It didn’t take long for me to make it back down the hallway. I passed Master Edison’s office but didn’t stop. I didn’t feel the need to discuss things further with them. I’d

gotten information from Rainier already, and beyond that, I didn't need to talk to Master Edison for anything. No one in the office had mentioned any other warlocks that were visiting the mountain, which led me to believe that my mate truly was Caspian.

I left the building, waving to Slater on my way out the door. Dedushka would check me out if needed for more than the evening, and as I stepped out into the cold air, my mind seemed to clear. The breeze picked up, and there was no mistaking what I was scenting, or rather who. I turned toward the direction the wind was coming from and found him sitting on one of the benches outside the main entrance.

He truly was stunning. Yes, he was my mate, and I would be attracted to him no matter what, but this man, my perfect match, was absolutely gorgeous.

He looked my way as I approached, and when he stood, I walked close enough to get a deeper scent of him. This time though, it was only him; there was no interference with the scents coming from the bakery.

"Hello," I said as I stood there, taking him in. He had dark hair and eyes that weren't quite blue and not fully green. They were certainly eyes one could get lost in for a time though, and his skin looked like he spent time in the sun regularly. I wanted to see if it was that color everywhere, under all of that clothing. Would it be soft? Rough? Would his body be lightly toned, or would it be on the skinnier side?

"Hello," he said. We stood there staring at one another for a moment.

"Are you disappointed in who the fates paired you with?" I asked. I was a dragon, so of course, I knew how possessive we could be when it came to our mates. Not everyone wanted that, and perhaps he was such a person.

"No, not at all." He pulled his hand from his pocket and held it out. "I'm Caspian," he

said.

I grinned. Rainier's nephew. I took his hand, wishing the leather glove wasn't on it. "I am Dimitri, Caspian, and I am thrilled to meet you." I brought his hand upward, and when my lips touched it, they were met with warm skin and not the leather I was expecting. I took advantage and pulled his hand a bit closer, and after I turned it over, I placed another kiss on the inside of his wrist. The quiet moan I heard told me I had made the correct choice. When I looked up at my mate, his eyes were partially closed, and I smiled.

"You are a dragon," Caspian said.

I nodded. "And you are a warlock," I replied. "Would you care to spend the afternoon discussing things? I very much would like to get to know you."

"Is that all? You just want to talk?"

I snorted. "I am several centuries old. I very much wish to throw you over my shoulder and take you to my bed. I will refrain, though, as I understand you may not wish for such things."

"Oh, I very much want those types of things. Although I do believe we should probably discuss certain things before we get to those types of activities."

"Would you like to go to my place? It is just over there." I pointed behind us. "Or we can go to yours, although I will have to ask for a bit of help with that as I don't believe I can get to Spain nearly as quickly as you can."

Caspian's eyebrows rose. "How did you know I live in Spain?"

"When I followed you from the bakery, you were gone. It made the most sense to ask

Master Edison if there were any visiting warlocks on the mountain. I already knew you weren't an enforcer."

"Ah. And he told you who I was?"

I shook my head. "Rainier did."

Caspian's smile was instant. "What all did my uncle tell you?"

I shook my head. "Only your name and that you were visiting your brother. I also discovered that you are a lawyer for your family's firm in Spain. That is the extent of my information about you."

"Well, you know more than I do. I told my brother I would have to take a rain check for this visit, and I'd let him know more later. Then I left to hopefully not be too late to find you."

I ran my thumb across Caspian's knuckles. "I am here. I would not have left without trying to locate you. My dragon was fully prepared to track you down if needed." That earned me a smile.

"Well, I don't really wish to return to Spain just yet, although I think I will have to eventually. So maybe we can go to your place? I assume you live in the town houses like Sebastian did before he met Drew?"

"I do. But there is nobody beside me, and I am on an end unit. I could have stayed in my grandfather's cabin, but I wanted a bit more privacy than that."

"Is your grandfather here?" Caspian's face was easy enough to read, and I knew the question was coming before he even asked it. "Grandfather. You sound Russian but look Chinese," he said out loud. "Your grandfather is the created dragon."

I nodded. “Ja. Sergei is my dedushka. Chin is my yéye.”

Caspian nodded. “I didn’t really see that coming. I was hoping to find my One soon, but I wasn’t expecting someone from your family line.”

I shrugged. “It is just family. Your family has a lineage as well.”

Caspian snorted. “Yes, but not impressive as yours.”

“It’s just family. They are quite happy for us,” I said. I brought Caspian’s hand to my mouth and kissed his knuckles again. “If you are ready? I wish to get you out of the cold. Although, you do seem as if you are dressed for it.”

Caspian nodded. “Better than you. I would ask if you were cold, but you’re a dragon, and I can feel the heat coming from you. I guess I won’t have to worry about ever being cold again.”

I grinned. “Nyet.”

“Your languages. You’ve spoken a bit of both Russian and Chinese. Will you teach me?”

“I will. I do not speak your language though. Perhaps we can teach each other?”

Caspian grinned. “You speak English well.”

I nodded. “My mother is English.”

“I can’t wait to hear all about your family. Are they still alive?”

I nodded. “They will most likely be here within a week. Not that we will need to see

them anytime soon. My grandparents are going to let them know I have found my mate, and they will, of course, come to celebrate. Even if without us, they will celebrate with my family. It is a joyous thing when a dragon finds his mate.”

“Well, I’m happy to meet them. Later.”

I nodded. I knew Sebastian’s parents were still alive. I’d seen them from afar when they’d been here after Sebastian had found Drew.

“Then I will ask that you follow me, and we can go to mine and get out of the cold and discuss our future together if that’s what you wish.”

Our hands still laced together, Caspian held his other one out and smiled.

“Lead the way.”

I could certainly do that.

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Chapter 4

Caspian

Dimitri. He was...gorgeous. I was still coming to terms with the fact that my One was an alpha, but I had a feeling I wouldn't mind so much. I had switched more than once with previous partners. It was sort of ingrained in us to want to please our Ones and mates. Did that mean Dimitri would be willing to switch every so often? I slowly shook my head. Why was I even worried about this? We had just met and had barely spoken. All I knew was his name, that his parents were still alive, and his grandfathers were Alpha Sergei and alpha mate Chin. How about that for a family line? I grinned. We would probably have at least one baby dragon. Would he look like Dimitri?

"You are smiling. It is a good thought, then?"

"It is."

"Care to share? Or is it a secret?"

I looked up at Dimitri. "Umm...I can share if you'd like. I'm getting ahead of myself though."

Dimitri glanced at me, then back ahead. "I can wait if you do not feel comfortable with sharing. I will never be upset with you sharing your thoughts or feelings with me though. I might be a dragon alpha, but I do try to be understanding and not impulsive."

“I don’t mind sharing. As I said, I was getting ahead of myself.”

Dimitri started up a walkway that led to a town house on the end, like he’d mentioned. He opened the door, then stepped back to allow me to enter. “We can discuss any and everything inside. I do not wish for you to remain out in the cold.”

I grinned as I passed by. Inside, it was dim, but after the door clicked shut behind us, Dimitri reached beside me and flipped a switch. “Can I take your coat?” he asked.

“Oh, sure.” I took it off, handing it to my One. I had every intention of simply using magic to store it elsewhere, but if he wished to take it, I wasn’t going to not let him be the gentleman that I knew he most likely was. Dimitri placed it on a hanger that was inside what I discovered was a closet beside the door.

“Would you like something to drink? Perhaps a meal? I would very much like to take you out on a date at some point in the very near future.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle. “I don’t need to be romanced, Dimitri. You’re my One, and either of us can fight it all we want, but the end result is going to remain: we will end up mated.” I shrugged at his shocked expression. “How old are you?”

“I am just over three hundred. Why?”

“Because I’m about half that, and I’m not exactly a young omega that needs to be reassured or that you have to romance in order to prove something to me. Although I will admit that I am a bit surprised my One is an alpha.”

Dimitri stopped, and I halted beside him. “You were expecting to be a sire?”

I shrugged. “I do go both ways, but in the past few decades, it seems as if most of my companions have been either omegas or they are humans that fill that role.” Dimitri

looked as if he was thinking deeply, and I wanted to reassure him that I wasn't disappointed. "It's not an issue for me. As I said in the bakery, one of us would have to be the carrier. I've honestly never thought it would be me."

"We will discuss that more, then. I cannot carry children, as I do not have that ability."

I nodded, then started thinking about that.

"You know, now I'm thinking."

"What?" Dimitri stopped again.

"I'm wondering if I've always had the pouch to carry children? If we did ultrasounds on a bunch of warlocks, would we discover differences?" This was something I definitely needed to ask the doctor. There was no doubt that I would be seeing one in the near future. "Oh, how long are dragon gestations? Do you know?"

"Ja." Dimitri tugged on my hand and pulled me toward the back of the house. His back room was open and had a cream-colored leather sofa centered in the room, with a light wood coffee table in front of it. There were matching end tables on either side, and both had stacks of books on them.

"Do you like to read?"

"Ja." Dimitri gestured to the sofa. I sat, and he sat right beside me. I stared at him, waiting. He didn't make me wait long. "I do read. I have always loved to read. I spend a lot of my off time flying though."

"I would imagine that brings you a sense of peace."

“It can. Here, it does. I have lived through times that it didn’t.”

I nodded. We would get there. We had the rest of our very long lives to learn everything about each other.

“Why do you wish to know about dragon gestations? You are a warlock.”

“Yes, but since my One isn’t another warlock, I will have the gestation length that dragons do.” Dimitri winced. That told me dragons had longer gestations, which made sense if you thought about it. “You have one of the longer ones, I take it?”

“Ja. Six months.”

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. I could deal with that. It was technically only six weeks longer than a warlock’s gestation, so it wasn’t too terrible.

“Well, if I were to mate with another warlock, it would have been four and a half months.” I shrugged. “Six months isn’t too terrible.”

“Ja. I can’t help you with that. I can help make you comfortable, but I cannot carry the baby for us, I am sorry.”

“You want children?”

“I would like at least one, ja. The number of children is up to you though. I will accept it if you do not wish to have children, but I do not feel that is the case.”

I grinned. “No. I want children. I’m the oldest of three. My fathers wanted more, but they were only ever gifted with the three of us. I would like more. I’ve spent a long time working and saving, and my hope was to not work for some time after I found my One. I’m not asking for you to support me financially. I have more than enough to

do that.”

Dimitri’s brow furrowed. “I have funds. We will have housing here. Or we can go back to Spain. I do not need to be an enforcer. I joined because I was ready for something different, and they needed more enforcers.” Dimitri shrugged.

I snorted. “I want to stay here if you are all right with that. I adore Drew and little Flora. I would love it if our children could grow up near Sebastian’s. My brothers and I have always been close, and Sebastian leaving has actually been a big adjustment.” Unlike Lorenzo, I had the ability to come and visit whenever I got the urge. He had to ask for a lift from either me or our father.

“We can stay here. My family is everywhere. My parents are currently in Australia.”

“Do they live there?”

“Ja.” Dimitri nodded. “My parents aren’t who you would expect.”

I grinned and turned to the side to get comfortable. “How so?”

“My mother is English. She is a fox shifter and met my father when she was on a quest to search for her mate. Her name is Mildred, but she goes by Millie.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “She’s really a fox shifter?” The size difference between them must have been drastic.

“Ja. My father was doing the same. He was flying though, and his dragon urged him to land and search the area. He found her, and we have been told he flew home with her on his back.”

“Do they still fly together?”

“Not as often as they used to. They are in Sydney. I do not know how they do it.”

“We live in Madrid. But my omega father is a Eurasian lynx. He can shift in the condo and does often. The same with Lorenzo. It’s not really an issue for me or my sire.”

“Do you live with your parents?”

I couldn’t help but snort. “Gah, no. Lorenzo and I live in the same condo building but on different floors. Our fathers live on the other side of the city, closer to the firm. We can keep my condo and use it for a vacation home if you’d like. I don’t want to get rid of it, but we don’t have to spend a lot of time there.”

“I have never been to Spain. I would like to visit, maybe move there one day. But the ability to fly every day here has made my dragon happy.”

I wanted to keep his dragon happy. If he could shift here, I saw no reason to leave the area. My brother was here, and I had no doubt that at some point, Lorenzo would relocate here as well. I didn’t know what that would mean for my parents, but they would have to figure something out. Papa was already unhappy that he was so far away from his only grandchild. When he realized he was going to have another early next year in the same area, I had a feeling Father would be selling the firm and would be joining the council, and they would be relocating here.

“You are smiling. Something has made you happy?”

I focused on Dimitri. “Many things, actually, but yes. I was thinking about my fathers.”

“What are they like?”

“My papa is going to love you. His name is Arturo. I was smiling because our father is no doubt going to end up having to decide to sell his law firm. Papa is going to insist on moving here once he realizes his grandchildren are going to all be in this location. There is no way that he’s going to stay in Madrid without complaining daily to our father.”

“I will move there. We do not need to remain here if that is where makes the most sense. I am not that tied to the council.”

I shook my head. “No. You can fly here whenever you wish. You won’t be able to do that in Madrid. There are too many people. Even if you don’t want to stay with the council, we can remain in this area. There is nothing that says children must stay near their parents, is there?”

Dimitri grinned while shaking his head. “Nyet. I have not lived near my parents for several decades. We visit often, but that is the extent.”

I tilted my head. “Are you not close to them?”

Dimitri shrugged. “I have five siblings. We are scattered far. Most are in Russia, but one lives in Australia, and another lives in Canada. They truly are all over.”

“Five? So you are number what of six?”

“Four. First is Andrey. He is a dragon. Then Alexander. Also a dragon. Beatrice is a fox shifter, then there is me. The two youngest are twins: Kira and Pyotr. They are both fox shifters.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “That is a large family. I’m not sure I want quite that many, but I would love at least three, possibly four. I don’t think I’ll have twins, but I know it can happen if a warlock is mated to a shifter.” I shrugged. I would imagine the

possibility would be a bit higher since he already had twins in his family, but I was the carrier, and we didn't have twins in ours that I could recall.

"I am happy with one. If you wish for more, I doubt that will be an issue." Dimitri took my hand and rubbed the back of it with his thumb again. "I do not mind if you wish to not work. I, too, have funds. Lots of them. Neither of us has to work ever again. I think that is most likely the case with most paranormals once they reach our age?"

I shrugged. "I'm not sure. I work because it gives me something to do. I don't necessarily need to. And for a while now, even before Sebastian found Drew, I was starting to feel as if I wanted to find something else. It can be difficult when you work for your family law firm though. There are certain expectations of you, and they can make things awkward if you start hinting that you wish to leave. Sebastian didn't have any pushback because he was joining the council."

"Your parents cannot keep us apart. It is not allowed."

I snorted. "Trust me when I say there is no chance my father will win against Papa if he so much as makes a complaint. Papa is all about family, and really, so is Father. But we are in the middle of a really large case at the moment, and I'm feeling a bit guilty already about leaving it all to Lorenzo. He will have to pick up what I will no longer be doing."

Dimitri nodded slowly. "Hear me out?" I nodded in return. "You are a warlock. Is it not possible for you to go to Spain during the day and then return here after work?"

I grinned. "I could. I do not wish for that to be expected of me though. It's possible I can do it for a few weeks until things are more settled. But Madrid is eight hours ahead of us. I would have to leave you in the middle of the night unless I waited until lunchtime to go into the office. That might be a possibility. But I'm curious if your

dragon would be all right with me so far away?” Wouldn’t he be possessive? I thought dragon alphas were supposed to be super possessive and protective of their mates and didn’t like for them to be far from them.

“I will be, yes. But it will only be for a short time? You will have a fertile period, no?” I nodded. That was another thing I wasn’t really expecting. Well, not to be the one experiencing it. I had thought I would be helping an omega or carrier through it. “You will discover that I am most certainly protective as well as possessive. But I do not see an issue with you being at work for a short time. Will my dragon have problems if you are gone for long? Most likely. But if I remain an enforcer, we will eventually be separated while I am on assignments.”

That was true. But Sebastian had said their assignments weren’t that long. The longest had only been a few weeks.

“What are you thinking?”

“About Sebastian, actually. He has been on assignments before. I don’t think he’s been on any since his daughter was born though. He’s been busy, and we don’t talk nearly as often as we used to.”

“Does that upset you?”

I shrugged. “It is simply how life is. He is busy now. He has Drew and Flora. They both take up his time now, and Lorenzo and I only have work and each other when we aren’t working. Sometimes we will spend our evenings together trying to relax; others, we are doing our own thing. We are all at different stages in our lives. That’s how things work. Same with you and your siblings?”

Dimitri nodded. “Ja. I am not as close to any of mine as you seem to be though. We all love one another a great deal, but we do not talk every day. We are happy with

once a month.”

I chuckled. “I can understand that. Sebastian moving here was a change to start with. Once he met Drew, that was another. Then Flora arrived.” Every event in his life pulled him away a bit. Did that mean we weren’t as close? No. It simply meant he had other things that took his time. He still found time to talk to us, but it was understandable that he didn’t talk to us every day. “Sebastian makes sure he reaches out every couple of weeks, but it’s not always a long phone conversation. Sometimes it’s just a text. Lately, it’s pictures of Flora. Those really make Papa happy.” I couldn’t help but wonder how Papa would react to my own child. Granted, I didn’t have one yet, and I’d not yet been claimed, but I didn’t see that as being too far in the future.

“What do you see happening between us?” Dimitri asked suddenly.

I thought about it a moment before I grinned. “Well, you said you are over three hundred.”

He nodded. “Just barely, but yes. What does my age have to do with it? I am not too old for a mate if that is what you are concerned about.”

I chuckled while shaking my head. “Not at all. But I would say that you have waited long enough for your mate. You’re here, I’m here, and I really don’t intend on returning to Spain. I will get my things, sure, but I like the idea of being near my brother and his family. Also being near your grandfathers. And you said you could fly here.” Dimitri nodded. “Then I would say that when you are ready, we will figure out how to find our way to the bedroom and see where that takes us.”

I had never really thought about it before, but after I said those words, I saw Dimitri’s gaze darken.

“We should date.”

That wasn't what I was expecting. Not after the way he had been looking at me just seconds before. “Sure. If that is what you need or want. I don't need it though.”

“I have little food here. I take most meals at the council or with my family. We will need to date for you to be fed. You will need to eat. It is evening mealtime.”

Ah, so that's what he meant. Possibly. “Just so I understand,” I said. “Are you saying we should go out to eat? Or are you saying we should wait for a few weeks before we claim each other?”

Dimitri's eyes widened at my question. “Nyet. We need to eat. I will take you on a date, and we will eat. Then we will come back here and discuss things in the bedroom.”

I couldn't stop my smile. “Is there really anything to discuss?” I asked. “Although, I should probably ask you where you want your claiming mark. Is there any place on your body that is super sensitive, in a sensual way?”

Dimitri nodded slowly. “Ja. I have several.”

I smiled. “Good. You can decide which one you want your claiming mark to be while you take me out to eat somewhere.” I gave his hand a squeeze before I stood. “I'm hungry and certainly agree we should eat before we expend more energy.”

It took Dimitri only seconds before he was on his feet, once more towering over me. I wasn't so sure about his taller height earlier, but I had to admit I could certainly get used to it. Dimitri looked as if he was going to say something, but instead, he laced our fingers together before he pulled me from the room. It looked like I was going to get not only a meal but a date with my newly discovered One as well. I certainly

wasn't going to complain about that.

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Chapter 5

Dimitri

I wasn't sure how I'd been gifted with such an amazing mate, but I wasn't going to question it. I had honestly expected to have to spend at least several weeks romancing my mate. I wasn't sure if it was because Caspian was a warlock or the fact that he was a bit older that caused him to have the attitude about it that he did. Either way, I wasn't going to take issue with it.

I hadn't been expecting to meet my mate, but I didn't think any of us ever did. That being said, I didn't have anything in my place to take care of a mate. I needed to make a quick trip to the store, at the minimum.

"You know, if you didn't want to go out, I could do supper for us," Caspian said.

I looked at him in question until it hit me. My mate was a warlock. He wouldn't need to go to the store for anything—he could simply use magic.

"What did you have in mind? I eat anything. I mean that. Anything."

"You don't have a favorite food?"

I shook my head.

"Nothing in particular at all?"

“Nyet. I eat everything. I am the least picky person you will probably meet when it comes to food. How about you? We can have your favorite. That will work for me.” I nodded, hoping he would take the hint and simply have what he wanted. “I eat at the council. I can cook though, so I will have no issues with taking care of you. I just need to go to the store, and we can get the things to use the kitchen.”

Caspian slowly shook his head as he walked toward the kitchen. “Do you even have the things needed to cook?” he asked as he opened a cabinet. He looked back at me, surprise evident on his face. “You have plates?”

I shrugged. “They came with the place. My house in Europe had everything. It still does. My brother looks after it for me, but maybe it is time to let it go.”

Caspian leaned against the counter. “You didn’t say where you’re from.”

I shook my head. “I was born in the middle of Dedushka’s territory on the Kamchatka Peninsula in what is now known as Russia. Most recently, I have lived in Estonia.”

Caspian made a face. “Do you like it? I shouldn’t be that way because I’ve never been. I fit in so well with the humans in Madrid.”

I shrugged. “I don’t quite have that luxury. I need to fly several times a month in order to keep my dragon happy.”

“Where did you do it there?”

“Over the Baltic Sea. My brother and I would go out together. It’s always safer in pairs when you aren’t somewhere completely secure. When we would all go home to Dedushka’s territory, there was no worry. We would fly every day. I fly most days here.”

Caspian bit his lip. I could tell he had a question, and he most likely wanted to know if he could either see my dragon or if I would take him flying. The answer would always be yes to both. “What is your question?”

“What color is your dragon? Will you show me?”

I nodded. “I will even take you flying if you wish. But my dragon is purple with a gold sheen to his scales. My wings are gold, as are the spines on my back.” Caspian’s mouth dropped open a bit. I chuckled.

“I definitely want to see your dragon. When can I meet him?”

My chuckle turned into laughter, which caused Caspian to smile. I couldn’t help it; I’d not touched him for long enough and reached out to pull him in closer. He came willingly, something I wondered if it would always be that way. I reached up and touched the side of his face gently. “I will always show you my dragon. He is more than ready for you to meet him. But perhaps I could feed you a meal first. Then we can discuss going flying after we eat?”

Caspian’s mouth opened again before he nodded. I thought that sounded like an excellent plan, and apparently, he didn’t disagree.

“Will you honestly eat anything?”

I nodded. “I will never lie to you. I cannot think of anything I won’t eat. I’ve eaten some questionable things in my lifetime, but I still ate them.”

Caspian took a step back, out of my embrace, and pointed at me. “See, that right there. What don’t you eat?”

I shrugged. “I ate them. I couldn’t tell you what they were simply because they

weren't made from any one recipe but were just random things thrown together."

Caspian sighed. "Very well. How about fajitas? Drew is fond of those, and I figured with you being a shifter, you would love the steak."

"Steak is always a good choice for me." I wasn't sure my mate understood just how not picky I was when it came to food. Steak, chicken, vegetables. I had no issues with eating any of them. Now, when I was in my scales, of course he preferred meat over vegetables, but even he would eat them.

The scent of steak and onions suddenly filling the room drew my focus toward the counter, where I had a trio of barstools sitting. On the counter was everything we'd need for our meal. "That's convenient," I said.

Caspian grinned. "It is. I can cook, but I don't." Caspian moved over and pulled out the barstool in the middle. I smiled as I rushed over to help him. Not that I needed to. I knew I didn't because he was more than capable. But it was the need of my dragon to care for my mate that had me rushing to his side to assist. That earned me another smile, this one bigger, if at all possible.

"So you do not cook?"

Caspian shrugged. "Why? I can use magic. Yes, I can cook, but in all honesty, I'm usually too tired at the end of the day to actually put thought and effort into cooking."

I slowly nodded, thinking about what my mate had just said. It was concerning if he was that tired at the end of his days. That wouldn't do. He needed to not be so exhausted when he came home from work. He was a lawyer. That wasn't an overly exhausting job, as far as I was aware. Why was he so tired after his day's work?

"Will you tell me about it?" I asked.

“About what?”

I tried to smile. “Your job. You mentioned you worked with your family?”

Caspian nodded. “Yes, although there isn’t a whole lot to share about it. My father has a law firm.” Caspian looked upward for a moment before nodding. “I guess fifteen years now. And really, it’s probably time for all of us to move on. There are going to be questions about us not aging if there already haven’t been.” Caspian shrugged. “But work itself ebbs and flows. There are a lot of hours because we lost not only Sebastian but another of the lawyers that was with the firm. None of us are upset about either. And, of course, we’re all thrilled Sebastian met his One. And little Flora is just the sweetest.”

Caspian’s smile grew at the mention of Flora. I knew that Sebastian’s mate had a baby, but beyond that, I didn’t know much else. Maybe I should be more in tune with what was going on in my fellow enforcers’ lives? Especially Sebastian since I was going to eventually claim his brother. I thought about it for a moment, and there was a possibility that we would have a daughter someday. I was under the impression that the chances were still very slim though.

“If we don’t have a daughter, would that be upsetting for you?”

Caspian’s eyebrows rose. “Absolutely not. I would be just as equally happy with a little baby boy. I know there is one female dragon now, although her existence is still very well hidden. I only know because of my family’s connections to the council.” Caspian shook his head. “I’ve not met her though.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “Little Fia is quite a handful at times but is super sweet,” I said absently. I’d met her and her twin on more than one occasion when they had been by Dedushka’s house. Their younger brother as well.

“You’ve met her?”

I nodded. “Yes. Dedushka was even there when she was born. It was quite an event, from what I understand.”

Caspian’s eyes widened. “You don’t expect our delivery room to be filled with people, do you?”

I chuckled while shaking my head. And because I couldn’t resist, I reached over and cupped his face. When I leaned in, I gently placed my forehead on his and closed my eyes. “I would never think of putting you in a position that made you uncomfortable. You will decide who all is at the birth of our children. I only hope that I am fortunate enough to be one of those you include.”

Caspian pulled from my gentle hold and looked at me with bewildered eyes. “Why wouldn’t you be? You’re going to be the other father. What would make you think that I wouldn’t wish for you to be there?”

I shrugged. “It happens from time to time. I know that sometimes alphas struggle with their mate being in pain during childbirth. And it’s possible you would wish for someone like your omega dad to be at the delivery instead.” I shrugged again. “My only concern will be to offer you as much support as I possibly can.”

Caspian shook his head. “I’ll want you to be there. You will have to be there,” he told me.

I didn’t know what he meant by that but nodded because he seemed to be stressed by something. Most likely what I’d said. “I did not wish to upset you.”

“Can we eat?” Caspian rubbed his forehead. “I think if I eat, I might have a bit less stress.”

I nodded before reaching for the flour tortilla. I placed one on Caspian's plate and then reached for the fork that was on the side of the plate with the steak. "Do you like yours with a lot of steak or a little?"

Caspian looked from the steak to his plate, then to me. "You don't have to do that," he said and reached out, placing his hand on mine. "I can make my own food."

"Yes, I'm aware of that. Just as you can also pull out your own chair and sit in it. But you provided the meal for us. I cannot do for you if that is what you wish," I said. "I am an alpha though, and it is just ingrained in me to provide for and care for my mate."

Caspian glanced back at the plate again before he looked up at me and smiled. "I'm sorry," he said. He pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. "It's been a very long day, and honestly, I should be asleep. It's the middle of the night back home, and work ran long." Caspian's shoulders slumped. "We've been dealing with a difficult client, which hasn't helped anything, really." Caspian went quiet for a moment. "I went out to the club with Lorenzo after work, but all I could really think about was taking the weekend off and coming here to see Sebastian and his family."

I mulled over what he'd just said and realized just how lucky I had been to meet him. Although, with Caspian being on the mountaintop, I had to wonder if my dragon would have somehow sensed him had I not met him at the bakery?

"Do you wish to retire for the evening?"

Caspian sighed once more. "Yes and no." He looked at me, and suddenly, I could see it. He was tired. But it was more than just being physically tired. He was mentally drained as well.

"I have but one bed. But you are more than welcome to it," I told him. "I can lie next

to you, be a comforting presence, or I can sleep elsewhere. The couch is comfortable, this I know.”

Caspian chuckled. “I know for a fact that I will not be able to sleep if you are not beside me,” he said. “I just...I am wondering if we could eat and possibly take things easy for the rest of the evening? I can feel it now: I’m going to most likely crash after I eat. I had something light earlier, but that was honestly hours ago if you go by your current time.”

I nodded before reaching for the steak once more. I placed several pieces on his tortilla as Caspian watched. “Then I suggest you eat something before we retire for the evening. I have sweats and T-shirts if you need something to sleep in, but I would imagine you only have to do your magic thing, and you will be covered.” Which was a bit of a pity. The thought of seeing my mate in my clothing was enticing. Of course, me removing that clothing from him was more so, but I needed to remind myself that although Caspian had said he had every intention of claiming each other soon, he was exhausted, and we were going to most likely be waiting for a bit. “Peppers?” I asked.

Caspian nodded. I spooned some peppers and onions on his tortilla before doing the same for myself. I added steak while Caspian finished setting up his fajita. When I had my first made, I glanced over and saw that Caspian still wasn’t eating.

“Not what you want?” I asked.

Caspian chuckled. “It’s fine. I’m the one who picked, remember?”

I did, and when he didn’t start eating, I had to wonder if he picked this simply because he thought I would like it. “Care to talk about it? Is something wrong?” I paused and set my rolled tortilla down. “Is it something more than work?”

Caspian looked directly at me. “Maybe. I’m getting ahead of myself in my own head,

I'm sure. But I'm wondering how things are going to play out. I feel bad for my brother because he's going to be left with the firm all by himself. Father will push Lorenzo even harder now, and that's not fair to him."

"Do you wish to stay there? I realize I've already asked this, and you said no. But it is no issue for me to leave the council. We can relocate there. Well, I can. You are already there."

Caspian shook his head. "No. I am ready for a change. And in all honesty, I'm ready to have a set place that I won't have to leave in a decade or so." Caspian smiled at me. "We won't have to do that here because everyone here knows who we are. We can safely be on the mountain without having to worry about someone seeing us." Caspian sighed. "And the thought of our children growing up so close to their cousins, I'm all for that. There are no other children that ours could play with in Madrid. The coven—" Caspian made a face. "—it's not bad. It's not great either. Mostly, it's just there if there are any issues with humans. But it's nothing like organized covens."

"If you are sure that here is what you wish, then we can live here. Did you want to see if there is housing near your brother?" I asked. "I have connections if you wish to live elsewhere though." I shrugged when Caspian raised an eyebrow at me. I had a cabin available on the mountaintop if I wanted it. Up until this point though, I'd chosen to live in enforcer housing. It was difficult enough to be who I was. When your dedushka was the created dragon, others tended to really watch themselves around you.

"By Sebastian is fine. But I'm curious as to where else we would live?" Caspian picked up his food and took a bite. It made my dragon happy to see our mate eating, so I hoped we were finally moving in the right direction.

"Because of my dedushka, I have the option to live in a cabin near him."

“Ah. Yes, I think that although your grandparents are probably amazing people, can we maybe not live that close to them?”

I couldn't help but chuckle. “Of course. Enforcer housing is perfectly fine with me. Or if you prefer, we can live off of the mountain. I am able to get up here every day for work. So that wouldn't be an issue either.”

Caspian shook his head. “On the mountain is fine. It's closest to your work, and in all honesty, I really want to be closer to my brother and his family. I feel like I'm missing so much with still being back in Madrid while Seb is here with Drew and Flora.”

I reached out and placed a hand on his shoulder. “Then here it is. I believe that Master Edison is in charge of housing. Perhaps you would like for me to talk to him?” Caspian's eyes rounded.

“Oh, that's a thing, then. You just talk to Master Edison, and you get a house? That's seriously how it works?”

I found myself chuckling again. “Yes, my mate. That is how it works.” I looked around the house. “This is single enforcer housing. Yes, you can be here with me. We can even spend your fertile period here together. But we will have to move once that is over.”

Caspian glanced around and shook his head. “I would rather we do that elsewhere. In what will be our place? Is that possible?”

I grinned. “Of course. Eat up, and I will make a call. We can go see what is available after our meal. Then it might be best if you were to turn in for the evening. I believe your day is going to catch up with you soon.” I would, of course, watch over him while he caught up on what I was sure was much-needed rest.

“But what about us?”

I shook my head. “Lyubimyy, we will be there tomorrow, and the day after, and the one after. There is no expiration date on us. We have forever, and one more day won’t hurt. Besides, I will watch over you.”

Caspian smiled. “What does it mean?”

I grinned back. “I’ll tell you after you’ve rested. My first thought about the moment isn’t of claiming you but of taking care of you. You are obviously needing rest if you came here to spend time with your brother and their young child.”

“Flora is relaxing. And it makes me feel good to be able to help Drew while Sebastian is at work.”

I wasn’t so sure it was relaxing being around babies. At least not my own nephews and nieces. Then again, I wasn’t a warlock and didn’t have the use of magical powers to help take care of them. Perhaps it was easier for him because of that, but I had always found my nephews and nieces to be a headache when they were incredibly young. But that was most likely due to my siblings and how they tended to raise their children.

“You seem...unsure.”

I shook my head. “I was thinking of my own nephews and nieces. They are not what I would call...relaxing.”

Caspian chuckled, and then it turned into full-out laughter. It was one of the most wonderful sounds I’d ever heard, and I could only sit there and stare at the beautiful man who had been gifted to me. I had a feeling that life was going to be wonderfully exciting and fulfilling.

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Chapter 6

Caspian

I was fading fast, and it was starting to show. I hadn't even thought about it until Dimitri had said something, but the fact that he did brought it to the forefront of my mind, and now it was about all I could think about. My One was an alpha. A dragon one at that. Although I didn't know much about dragon shifters, I had a feeling they were all protective and possessive.

His dragon was going to push him to take care of me in all ways. Did I want that? Although I hadn't been expecting my forever one to be an alpha, I was quickly discovering that I liked that idea. I enjoyed the thought of being the center of his care and attention. I had always assumed I would be the one doing all of the caring and looking after, but the thought of being the center of his attention was appealing. Now that I was here and we were discussing things, the past several months were catching up, and Dimitri was right; I was tired.

"You aren't hungry?"

I looked over at Dimitri and realized he'd eaten a good portion of the food. My own plate still had the first fajita on it, and I'd only taken a couple of bites. "You know, I'm not. I did eat earlier, but it's been quite some time." I sighed. "I think I'm just tired. You were right. Everything is catching up with me, and I'm ready to turn in for the night. I hope you aren't disappointed."

Dimitri gave me a look that spoke volumes. "I could never be disappointed when you

are only being honest with the both of us. Your time is vastly different than ours here in Montana. It is perfectly understandable to be tired and want to rest.” Dimitri glanced around the room for a moment before his beautiful eyes refocused on me. “Why don’t I show you to my bedroom, and while you have a rest, I will get in contact with Master Edison. Then, after you have rested, we can go see which houses are available. Does that sound like something you could agree with?”

I knew it was, but for some reason, my brain wasn’t completely connecting with my mouth at the moment, and I only nodded in agreement. Dimitri slid off of his barstool and then reached out for me. I took his hands, and once I was standing in front of him, I had to look up. That was also something that I had discovered I very much liked.

“We have forever, lyubimyy. Do not ever feel as if we are doing something incorrect simply because we have chosen to wait to claim one another. There is no set timeline. It is one of our own making.”

He wasn’t wrong, and if I was thinking fully, I would most likely have had the same thoughts. I let Dimitri lead me to his bedroom. It was multiple shades of gray and black, and I had to wonder if he would be willing to lighten things up a bit. It wasn’t that I wanted neon-colored throw pillows everywhere, but perhaps a little bit of color aside from the monochrome would be nice.

“I see your thoughts,” Dimitri said. “I do not care about the décor like others do. For me, this is simply a place to sleep, and that is about all. Please feel free to completely change everything once we are in what will be our home. This is not a home but a temporary lodging.”

How did he do that? We weren’t mated yet, but he knew exactly what I was thinking. Suddenly, a thought occurred to me. Was that something to do with his family’s line? That honestly didn’t really matter. I looked back at Dimitri and smiled.

“Perhaps just a bit of color,” I suggested. “I am not one to go full out. Everything needs a different color scheme. But maybe a few pieces that have more color in them could really bring the rest of the room together.”

Dimitri chuckled “Again, you are more than welcome to change any and everything. I ordered what I could not find in the council store, as well as in the larger stores down off of the mountain.”

He was so adorable, and he didn’t even realize it, which only added to his appeal. For dramatic flair, I snapped my fingers and was suddenly standing in front of him in a pair of flannel pajama pants and a T-shirt. I had a feeling that once we claimed one another, I would no longer wear anything to bed, but for the moment, I was going to wear something.

“That is a very convenient thing.”

I nodded. “It most certainly is. Care to tell me which side of the bed you normally sleep on? I usually sprawl out in the middle of my bed at home, and if you have a certain side, I am more than happy to take the other.”

Dimitri pointed to the far side of the room. “I would prefer you sleep over there. My dragon will not allow for our mate to be between us and the doorway. Yes, it is perfectly safe here on Treasure Ridge, and I realize and understand you are incredibly powerful in your own right. That does not mean my dragon is going to be rational in this. I do apologize.”

“Completely understandable.” I walked around the bed, and after pulling the thin blanket back, I pushed on the mattress and found it to be quite comfortable-feeling. My body was telling me it was past time for me to be resting, but my brain was arguing with the rest of me. It was just past dinnertime here, and my newly found One was very much still awake and would be for hours yet. There was an internal war

going on, but unfortunately, sleep was going to win. “I do apologize. I honestly did not expect to meet you on this trip. Not that I’m upset about it—nothing could be further from the truth. But I have been here several times to visit Sebastian, and I hadn’t ever detected that you were here.”

Dimitri rounded the bed, and with me sitting on it, his height seemed so much more than I knew it was. He reached out, and although I expected him to touch my face, instead, he gently pushed on my shoulder. “You rest now. I will take care of the cleanup from our meal, as well as contact Master Edison about housing. Did you wish for me to talk to your brother?”

Did I? I thought about it for a moment before shaking my head. This was something I honestly needed to discuss with my brother myself. He, of all people, would understand what it was like when suddenly discovering your One. “I’ll talk to him tomorrow. He knows I met you—well, not you specifically, but that I met my One and that my visit has certainly been altered.” I couldn’t keep from yawning as I lay back on the bed. The day had truly caught up with me, and it was simply time to get at least a few hours of rest. “I apologize. I wanted our first meeting to go so much differently.”

“There is no need. Rest now.”

This time, when Dimitri reached out, he did touch the side of my face. As his fingers tripped down to my chin, a smile appeared on his mouth. I couldn’t help but wonder what those luscious lips would feel like against mine. Would they be soft? Firm? Did he even enjoy kissing? I had a moment of panic before I remembered that, most likely, the man who was my perfect match would enjoy kissing as much as I did.

Dimitri’s touch disappeared, and moments later, I felt the blanket being pulled up my body. His hand briefly touched my shoulder before it was gone once more. Realizing I had closed my eyes, I opened them and watched as he slowly and silently left the

bedroom. There was so much more that I wanted to discuss with him. I wanted to know everything I could about the gorgeous dragon, but it truly would have to wait. Unable to fight it any longer, I closed my eyes and let my body finally get the rest it so desperately needed.

When I woke next, it was because I was incredibly hot. There was a very hard and immensely warm wall of sexy dragon curled up behind me. That was something entirely new but most definitely not unwelcome. I wasn't sure if he was a light sleeper, if his dragon told him I was awake, or if it merely was who he was and made him an excellent enforcer, but Dimitri seemed to know the moment I was awake, and the arm that I realized was lying across my stomach suddenly tightened and pulled me even closer to his chest.

He rambled off something in what I was certain was Russian, but I didn't speak even a single word of the language and started to laugh. "I'm sure that whatever you are saying is incredibly important, but you will have to repeat yourself in English, please," I told him.

"Apologies. I was simply saying good morning to you."

I was no language expert, but it sure seemed as if he had said more than only good morning. But Dimitri had no reason not to tell the truth, and I was sure he'd said that, among other things. I certainly needed to get on a fast track to learning his native languages.

"It indeed is." I rolled onto my back and then toward Dimitri and smiled. "Although I am not confident just how morning it is."

"Morning for you, middle of the night for us. But I am positive we can find something to entertain us while the rest of the mountain wakes up." Dimitri reached up, and when his hand touched the side of my face, I thought for sure I was finally

going to get a taste of his very enticing lips. Sadly, he simply smiled at me and then rolled away. “Get up. Come. I have an idea, and we can see the sunrise together.”

I was trying to understand what he was saying, but my brain absolutely was not computing. No, it was focused on the very magnificent ass that I was staring at. When I made no move to get out of bed, Dimitri turned, and my mouth opened in awe. Because I had been staring at the man’s rock-hard ass, my eyes were now focused on the gorgeous cock that I was certain would never fit into my mouth but I wanted nothing more than to try in that very moment.

“Is something wrong?”

It took me entirely too long to realize he was asking me a question.

“What? No. Umm, I should probably... Yeah, I should get dressed. Is there a bathroom I can use?” It was going to take some time to get used to the fact that I had a shifter for a One. They did not have nearly the same views about being naked. In fact, I’d just realized that Dimitri would be getting naked in front of others in order to shift. The sudden surge of jealousy was absolutely new and unexpected. I knew it was illogical and that it couldn’t be helped. That did not make me feel any more comfortable with the idea that my One undressed in front of others frequently.

“You are welcome to use this bathroom,” Dimitri said as he pointed to the bathroom that I knew was behind him. I was also aware that there was another full bathroom in the hallway, as well as a half one downstairs. This place had a very similar floor plan to the place Sebastian used to be in.

“I wouldn’t dream of taking your bathroom. Is it all right if I use the one in the hallway?” I was already partway to the door, simply waiting for him to say that it was all right.

“Yes, of course. Although, I do not have anything you would need in there. Perhaps some toilet paper, but beyond that, it is empty.”

“That isn’t an issue for me.” I was doing my best to not look down when I really wanted to take another long look at that magnificent cock. I had never considered myself to be someone who was focused on size before, but I couldn’t help but consider it now that...well, my One was an alpha, and he obviously had an alpha’s cock.

“I do not mind if you use the hallway bathroom. But you are more than welcome to use mine. It will have everything you could need.”

I nodded. I was certain it did. But right now, I really needed to get away for a moment or two. I’d had at least eight hours of sleep last night, it would seem, much more than I’d had over the past several days all combined. Now that my mind was clear and able to focus, all I could think about was getting naked with Dimitri and seeing where things went.

I didn’t wait for further instruction; I simply fled the bedroom. I quickly realized that his house seemed to be a mirrored version of what Sebastian’s floor plan used to be. The bathroom I was looking for was on the right instead of the left. No matter, I was able to find it just the same, and once inside, I quietly closed the door behind me, then leaned against it and closed my eyes. That man...oh my fates. He was absolutely gorgeous. I wasn’t a young omega, and I needed to remember that and get my act together. Dimitri was all mine, yet here I was in the hall bathroom, hiding.

I sighed before I pushed away from the door. I found the light switch on the wall, and with a simple flick of my finger, the bathroom was illuminated. I closed my eyes at the harshness of the sudden brightness before I used magic to dim the level of lumens in the room. That was much more pleasant. A glance at myself in the mirror had me wishing I’d not. My hair looked as if I’d gone to bed with it wet, and I’d not brushed

it for a week. I wanted to moan about first impressions but had to remind myself that I'd already had my first impression of my One, and I had, in fact, spent the night with the sexy dragon.

Granted, I'd not done more than eat half of a fajita and then pass out on the man, but he'd joined me in his bed, and we'd woken up with him lying right behind me in the bed. That meant something. I shook my head. It meant that he was my One, I was his mate, and his dragon told him he would sleep next to me, period. That and the fact that I was in the man's bed. His only bed.

I shook my head at my rambling thoughts before I flicked my wrist toward the shower. I needed at least a quick one, and yes, I could shower with magic, but I wanted to actually stand under the spray of hot water.

I stepped into the shower, immediately closing my eyes and sighing at the feeling of the hot water raining down on me. I gave myself a few minutes to relax under the spray before I went through the motions of showering. My bladder was telling me that I'd forgotten to empty it before I climbed in, and although it was most likely possible that I could aim for the toilet from the side of the shower, I wasn't going to take chances. I simply finished with my shower before I stepped out and reached for a towel.

Dimitri hadn't been kidding when he said there was nothing in this bathroom. That didn't bother me in the slightest though. Just a bit more magic and I had everything I needed, right down to the toothbrush and toothpaste. But bladder before I cleaned my teeth.

I dried just enough to get myself to the toilet and then sighed again as I was finally able to let go and relieve myself. I used magic once more to dry myself completely and then dress in a warm outfit. Dimitri had mentioned watching the sunrise, and that meant outside, which would undoubtedly be cold. It was November in Montana, and

yesterday afternoon, even when the sun was out, it was cold, so I could only imagine how chilly it would be before the sun actually rose and provided at least a bit of heat.

I quickly brushed my teeth and then cleaned and organized everything with a thought before I turned and pulled the door open. I wasn't expecting to encounter my One standing across the hallway, leaning against it in the dark.

"Is something wrong?" I asked, repeating Dimitri's earlier words.

"No. Would you like to go flying with me?" he asked.

Flying? Flying as in... "Do you mean on your dragon?" I asked.

"Ja. I would very much like to take you flying and show you not only the mountain but the sunrise. There is no better way to see the sunrise except from the air. My dragon wants to meet you. Will you trust me to take care of you? I would never allow any harm to come to you."

I nodded. I knew what type of gift he was offering. The only time I'd ever seen dragons in their shifted form was when Lorenzo and I had been visiting Sebastian here on Treasure Ridge. We'd been out for a walk and had stumbled upon the waterfall. There, we saw an enormous black dragon flying around with a breathtaking golden dragon.

"Of course I trust you," I told him. It was true. I did. But more than that, I knew that no matter what, I could get us out of a situation if needed. Well, unless I was unconscious. Then there would be issues.

"Then shall we go? It is actually a bit earlier than I thought. Although the sun will not be up for some time still, I thought we could have a bite to eat before we went flying?"

I glanced down at Dimitri's outstretched arm and reached for his hand. "I'm not sure where you had in mind for breakfast, but if you're hungry, I don't mind feeding you whatever it is you wish."

Dimitri gave me a lingering look before he shook his head. "You do not realize just what it is that I would love to eat at the moment, so perhaps don't make such offers. I am and will always be a gentleman. But I am still an alpha who had to spend several hours lying next to my unclaimed mate. My dragon is pushing me hard at the moment to claim you."

I stopped Dimitri with a gentle tug on his hand. "I will not object to that."

Dimitri shook his head. "You asked that we wait until we were in our own home and not here. Have you changed your mind?"

I'd asked such nonsense? When? I sighed, trying to remember yesterday evening. It was there, albeit things were a bit jumbled. It had been an incredibly long week at work, and when you added in the fact that I'd met Dimitri unexpectedly, a whole lot had happened.

"You're right. I would very much like to wait until we are in whatever house you are given. I'd like to know we won't be interrupted, nor will we have to worry about disturbing neighbors." I wasn't on suppressors—I'd not needed them. And I didn't wish to wait to start our family. I very much wanted a baby as soon as possible. Unfortunately for me, I would have to wait a good six months, though, since Dimitri was a dragon, and they had a longer gestation. It would be more than worth it though, I just knew.

"Then we wait." Dimitri started walking again but stopped suddenly. I'd just taken a large step to keep up and managed to run right into his side. The man truly was a wall of solid muscles. "But not too long?"

I smiled up at him as I shook my head. “If you had a house assignment already, I’d ask that you take me there instead,” I told him. “As it is, it was a very close thing just a bit ago when you jumped out of bed and I saw you naked.” I stepped back, and although he was dressed in a pair of cargo pants and a long-sleeve shirt that was very much like a second skin, I now knew what was under those clothes, and, well, my imagination was running with all the things I wanted to do with him. “You are absolutely gorgeous, Dimitri. Not that you probably don’t already know that.”

Dimitri surprised me when he suddenly cupped my face with both hands. “It is you who is the gorgeous one.” Dimitri’s eyes moved from mine to my lips, where they lingered for so long that I was certain I was finally going to get that kiss. Sadly, he raised his eyes as he let go of my cheeks and dropped his hands. “We should go,” he said quietly.

I nodded, but on the inside, I was growling in frustration. Soon, I kept telling myself.

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Chapter 7

Dimitri

My mate was more enticing than I was certain he realized. More than once, the temptation that he was had pulled on me. But I knew that once I got a taste of him, it would be too difficult to pull away, and we would end up in bed together. That was why, despite both of our desires, I hadn't yet kissed him.

I had done as I'd told him I would last evening. I cleaned up after our meal, contacted Master Edison, and then had a very long shower. What he didn't know or realize was that I had little control over myself in the shower while thinking about the gorgeous man who was passed out in my bed. I'd stroked myself to completion twice before I was sure I would be able to lie next to and scent him throughout the night without doing something that I felt we would regret.

I would, of course, never force myself on anyone, let alone my mate, but even I could only be tempted so far before I needed to remove myself from the situation. With the way Caspian was looking at me this morning, it was becoming a very close thing. That was why I suggested we go flying. My dragon wanted to meet him, and it would be a good way to distract both of us, as far as I was concerned.

"Are you really going to take me flying?" Caspian asked as we descended the stairs.

"Ja. Unless you do not wish to go flying?" I could tell he was torn. I stopped just in front of the front door and waited. "We can simply go look at the houses. I have the house numbers, and they are not locked."

Caspian's eyebrows rose. "Houses? There are houses to look at?"

I nodded. "Ja. There is one next door to your brother, then another on the other side of the street. If you do not like either of those, then there are a few others on the other side of the neighborhood to choose from."

"Right beside Sebastian?" Caspian said.

I couldn't keep from smiling. When talking to Master Edison last evening, and he had informed me that the house next to his brother's was available, I chuckled and told him that would most likely be our choice. Just from the little bits of conversations that I'd had with Caspian by that time told me how close he was to his brother. Master Edison then pointed out that Benjamin lived on the other side of Sebastian. I worked with Benjamin, every day. We were on the same team. I had no issues with the warlock and actually liked him quite a bit. If Caspian's brother and cousin were both right there, I had no doubt we would end up in that house.

The plan was to take Caspian flying, get something to eat, and then take him to the house and show it to him. If he agreed, we could be moved in shortly after everyone else on the mountain was waking and getting ready for their day. Possibly. That was the hope, at least.

Caspian opened the front door, and a blast of cold air hit us immediately. Instinctively, I moved in front of my mate and pulled him behind me when I stepped outside.

"You can't go out without a coat," Caspian said behind me.

I looked back and grinned. "If you think so. But you're really going to be upset with the fact that I'm about to strip naked out here."

Caspian's eyes widened in the porch light. "You wouldn't." Caspian looked around. There was nothing to see. It was still the middle of the night, and aside from the enforcer or two that was on patrol, there was nobody out here.

"I would. You have to remember, you might be cold, but I'm not," I told him. "I have fire within me, even in this form, and it will keep me warm. Even if I were to become dangerously cold in my human form, my dragon will not allow any harm to come to me. He will push himself out in order to protect me."

Caspian nodded before he looked up at the sky. I thought about it for a moment and wondered what he was thinking. "Will I be warm enough up there?"

"Just as my dragon will keep me warm, you on my back will be plenty warm enough. If you feel you are becoming too cold, all you need to do is tap me twice on my neck, and I will return us to the ground."

With that, I pulled my shirt off over my head and handed it to my mate. It might have been dark and windy, but I could certainly see him observing me as I removed my clothing. Caspian realized I didn't have any shoes on when I pushed my jeans down and off without any issue. I handed those to him as well, and when I caught him staring at my now flaccid dick, I smirked. Caspian finally met my eyes, and when he appeared to be embarrassed, I shook my head. "It's all completely yours to look at whenever you wish. But perhaps we should get in the air, and then maybe you can explore as you wish later?"

"How much later?"

"Just as soon as I take you flying and then we have a bite to eat. Of course, we must first pick a house and let Master Edison know which one we have chosen."

I thought for sure Caspian was going to pout, but instead, he took a deep breath and

then nodded in agreement. “Do we really need to choose a house? Can’t we just pick the one next to my brother and be good?”

I chuckled again. “We can most certainly let him know that is our house of choice. But you must take into consideration the time of day.” I glanced up at the sky before looking back to my mate. “Or rather night. Master Edison will not be awake for several hours yet, most likely. We cannot call him in the middle of the night for anything other than a true emergency.” I took several steps away, moving out into the area in front of my town house. “I promise you my dragon absolutely will not harm you. I understand his size can be quite intimidating, but he only wishes to meet you and will always protect you.”

“I understand that.” Caspian took a step toward me, but when I held out my hand and shook my hand, he stopped.

“After I shift, I will lie down on the ground so you can climb up on my back. You will know where it is best for you to sit. There is a break in the spines, and that is the perfect spot for you to climb onto.”

“You know you don’t have to lie down with me, correct? I can simply pop up there without any issue.”

I was going to respond but then stopped when I realized that he was absolutely correct. My mate was magical. That was going to take time to get used to. “Very well, then. When you are ready to take off, simply squeeze my neck with your thighs and then hang on.” It was bitterly cold out here, and although I wasn’t necessarily feeling the bite of the temperature, I was sure Caspian was starting to. That would all change once he was on my dragon’s back. That meant it was time to shift and take care of my mate.

I knelt down and called for my dragon. It only took a moment before I felt my body

start to transform from the average-sized human to the massive scaled dragon. Seconds after calling for him, everything shifted, and I was looking at the night sky through my dragon's eyes.

“Whoa.”

I heard my mate despite the fact that he had said the word just barely above a whisper. I turned my massive head his way, and of course, my dragon took a long breath, getting his first deep scent of our mate. I wish we had already claimed each other so I could talk to him, but that would come soon enough. For now, I bent down, getting close enough to Caspian so he could reach out and touch my nose if he so chose.

“You are massive,” he said as his hand reached out. “And you weren’t kidding when you said you were warm. I can feel the heat coming from you already.”

I slowly nodded my head up and down. Even without him being a warlock and having magical abilities to keep himself warm, my dragon would be able to keep him warm. I felt a hand touch my nose and closed my eyes. My mate was touching me. That was everything to me. Well, to dragons in general. We understood we were intimidating when in our scales, and more than a few times, mates ran away screaming when they first saw their dragon mate in their magnificent scaled version.

“I’m going to get up there now,” he told me.

I nodded again, suddenly wondering if I really did pick the right thing. It was bitterly cold and windy. I wouldn’t have any issues with flying, but I had never flown with anyone on my back before. I would rather die than allow anything to happen to my mate, but it was inky dark out, and when I looked skyward, I could see a lot of cloud cover up there. Perhaps a short flight for now. Then I could go show him the house, and if he agreed to it, we could get, at minimum, a bed in place, and, well...then the

fun times would begin.

I felt Caspian on my back suddenly, his weight minimal on my massive form. I took a few steps farther away from the building and then jumped. When I did, I opened my wings and then flapped once, twice, a third time before I truly caught air.

I heard a shriek from my mate, and then his body was leaning over onto my neck, and he was holding on for all his might. I didn't know if he would enjoy flying on my back or not, but at least at the moment, he didn't have the daylight to show him just how high we had gone already.

My dragon could see just as well at night as my human half could during the day, and what I not only saw ahead of us but scented now that we were over Dragon Falls told me I needed to get my mate inside. My dragon rumbled at our first meeting being cut so short. I rolled to the left a bit, trying not to bank too steeply because of the precious cargo on my back. It wasn't enough though, and the wall of snow hit us.

I heard Caspian call out, and then his legs tightened around my shoulders as I tucked my wings backward and downward, away from the storm. It didn't take long for me to get ahead of the squall, but I knew it would quickly catch up with us.

I was now flying just above the buildings on the mountaintop, and when the lights of the council building came into view, I made the decision to abandon our plans and turned toward my house. If we'd only woken even ten minutes later, the storm would have been here, and we never would have been out in it.

My dragon landed a bit more roughly than I had hoped, but Caspian was suddenly off my shoulders and standing in front of me. He was covered in snow in places, and I spread my wings to shield him against the line of snow that was arriving in seconds. Caspian's eyes widened, and he thankfully seemed to be unharmed. He started to walk backward, then turned and hurried to the door that we'd left only moments

before. He opened it, then stood just inside and called out to me.

“Dimitri! You must come inside.”

My dragon wasn't pleased with our mate's upset tone, and thankfully, he understood that I needed to be in my human form in order to take care of him. I shifted quickly, my scales and the protection they provided against the weather disappearing before I was once more in my human form. The snow hit, pelting my skin with stinging bites. I rushed to the doorway, and when I was through, I wrapped my arms around Caspian's waist and picked him up and out of the way as I kicked it shut behind me.

“Are you all right?” I asked, worried. “I never would have taken you up if I had known we were going to be getting a storm.”

Caspian smiled. “I'm good. It was cold for about a second, but I'm not harmed in any way.” Caspian's hands slid up my chest and then around my shoulders and into my hair, which I was certain was standing every which way. “You're naked.”

I couldn't help but chuckle. “Ja, but you are fully clothed.”

Caspian raised an eyebrow at me. “I can remedy that in a blink.”

“You told me you wished to be claimed not in single enforcer housing. Have you changed your mind?” I would try to behave, I truly would. But I wanted nothing more than to explore Caspian's body with my mouth and hands.

His entire body sagged against mine. “No. It's silly, I know, but at least for a time, I would like to be able to look at the place that we shared together. I can't do that if we claim each other here.”

I nodded. That was true. “We have two options. Three, really. We either let me get

dressed, or we go back to bed and try to behave.” Caspian scowled, which caused me to chuckle. “Not option one, I see,” I said. “You either pop us over to your brother’s house, or we rush across the yard, and we check out the house next door and hope it’s the one you want.”

“That’s promising. I like the sound of that one.”

I chuckled again. “The other option is for you to take us to your home in Spain and we claim each other there.” There truly were no other options that I could think of.

“I’ll take option two,” Caspian said. I felt two things at once: my body was suddenly wearing the clothing I had on earlier, only this time, I was wearing shoes, and then my stomach felt a gentle roll. The air around us was once again cold, and the wind could be heard howling from my right. We were outside, and it didn’t take long to realize that we were standing in front of mated enforcer houses.

“Which one is Sebastian’s?” I asked.

Caspian pointed to the house that was behind him and in front of me. I knew the large house on the end was Benjamin’s. That meant the house to my left was available, and I hurried that way, tugging Caspian along with me. We were once more chased by the snow, but as promised, the house was unlocked, and I was able to open it without issue.

I reached for the switch that was on the wall just inside the door, and when the entryway was suddenly illuminated, Caspian looked around. His arms were still around my neck but then slowly slid down my chest and then to my sides.

“So this is it, huh?”

“Ja. Your brother’s house is next door, and your cousin at the end beside him.”

Caspian nodded, then took my hand and pulled me into the house. He walked slowly, checking it out. I could scent his indifference, which was unexpected.

“What is wrong? You do not seem pleased.”

Caspian turned back toward me and shook his head. “I don’t know. I thought I would feel something. Some sort of connection to this place, but I don’t.”

“Do you wish to look at other houses? We can return to the one I’m currently in, and once the sun is up, we can come back to look and see what else is available.” I truly did not care where we lived. If he wanted to be in Spain, I would go without a thought. If he wished to be here, then here we would be.

Caspian turned in a circle, and when he was facing me again, he had half a smile on his face. It dropped, along with his shoulders, once he was looking at me. “This isn’t it,” he told me. “I know I said I wanted to live next to my brother, but this doesn’t feel like home. This isn’t the one.”

I nodded before I closed the distance between us. “Then we will keep searching.” I wrapped my arms around Caspian’s shoulders before I pulled him close. “If you could do your thing and pop us back into the other house, we can discuss it further if you wish.”

My stomach flipped in response, and when the familiar scents of the place I’d called home surrounded us, I reached for Caspian’s coat. I stopped, though, when a thought occurred to me. “Can you use your magic to get us anywhere?”

“Within reason. Certainly, if I’ve been there before. I might struggle with a place if I’ve not been there or at least nearby before.”

I nodded, still thinking. “You know where the council building is,” I said. “It’s just

south of us a bit.”

“Yes. What about it?”

“My dedushka and yéye live in a house over by Dragon Falls. I have a cabin about ten minutes from them if I choose to live there. Perhaps that place would feel like home to you?” It was a gorgeous house and had a beautiful view of the falls. It was actually farther away from the falls, but the view was still there. It was near the other dragons’ cabins, and although I didn’t necessarily feel I rated a cabin away from the others, I understood the reasoning for it.

“Is it not for someone else? Is it truly yours?”

I nodded. “Mine. I chose not to live there. Perhaps I was waiting for you to come along before I moved in. The other dragons live close by, all within walking distance, and with you having magic, you would not have issues with visiting your brother and his family.” I would move into the cabin if that was where I felt like home to Caspian.

“I’ve not been there. How will I know I’m in the correct place?”

I didn’t know how to describe the surrounding area. “Have you been to any of the other dragons’ houses?”

Caspian slowly shook his head. “When we visited, we were always here to see Sebastian. I did go walking before though, back in the spring while Seb was at work. There were some houses here and there. I remember one had a large back deck and chairs and a swing on the front porch.”

Without a doubt, that was Reinhold’s house. He’d been there. “Can you take us there? To that cabin?”

“Is that yours?”

I shook my head. “Mine is about a ten-minute walk from there. Is it possible for you to try and get us there?”

Caspian shrugged seconds before my stomach flipped again. I expected to be on or near Reinhold’s porch, but instead, we were standing on another porch. This one was completely bare, except for the snow that was piled up on it. How my mate had gotten us to the cabin, I wasn’t sure, but I would ask once we were inside and out of the storm. I pushed the door open, and after tugging my mate inside, I shut it, closing out the storm.

I heard a gasp, and when I looked over at my mate, despite the darkness in the place, there was a radiant smile on his face. Apparently, this place felt like home to him, which was perfectly fine with me. It made no difference where I lived as long as he was with me.

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Chapter 8

Caspian

I wasn't trying to be difficult. That was never my goal in life. I wasn't sure why the first house didn't feel welcoming, but there was simply something that just felt off. But the cabin that Dimitri had been provided? This place immediately called to me in a way that I couldn't explain.

"There is nothing here," Dimitri told me. "Not even a dish to prepare a meal."

I grinned at him. "Are you saying there were things at the other house?"

Dimitri shook his head. "We will have to move everything in from my place in single enforcer housing. Even then, there is not enough stuff to fill this cabin."

"I can move it whenever you are ready," I told him. The fact that Dimitri didn't have a whole lot wouldn't be an issue. I wanted to bring some of my things from Madrid. Not all, but some. And I had quite a bit of furniture that could be moved from there to here. "The real question is are you comfortable with living here? You didn't before, and I'm sure there's a reason for it."

"I wanted to fit in with my fellow enforcers. As it is, I still get some questionable looks, and at times, others stop talking when I enter a room."

That was terrible. "Why? Because of your grandfather?"

Dimitri shrugged. “I have to assume that is the reason, but I do not know for certain. I understand it can be a bit off-putting when the grandson of the created dragon is hanging out with you. I’m just another enforcer though, and that’s what I wanted. It took a lot for me to get my grandfather to agree to me being in the position I’m in instead of joining the council in some other capacity.”

That was interesting. “In what way?”

“I’m not sure. I only wished to be an enforcer. I understand the other positions on the council are important as well, but I felt I could be the most helpful as an enforcer.”

“Do you still feel that way?”

Dimitri stared off to the side for a moment, and I struggled to see what he was looking at. The light in the entryway didn’t reach far, and I hadn’t bothered to venture farther into the house. “I’m not sure. I have been on only one assignment.” Dimitri looked at me and smiled while shaking his head. “Do not for one moment think I have issue with warlocks. I truly do not. But the majority of the assignments have gone to them and the hellhounds. I understand the reason for it, but it still is frustrating to continually be left behind because I don’t have the same magical abilities.”

I raised my eyebrows at that. “Did you need me to help? I can be your magic wielder,” I asked as I moved closer to Dimitri. When I reached him, I placed my hands on his sides and held on. Even in this form, he was incredibly warm.

“You most certainly are, but I would worry about you going to some of the places. Especially if you’re carrying our baby.”

“Babies,” I told him. I wanted to have more than one.

“Babies? Are you planning on twins? It is possible, you know.”

That wasn't...I didn't wish to think about that particular scenario. In all honesty, that was a bit terrifying to consider. One was going to be a lot. But carrying two of Dimitri's children at the same time? I glanced down at my slim waist and felt a moment of panic. How was it possible?

“Master Ambrosius carried twins.”

Master Ambrosius. I was trying to place the name. Ambrosius? I was certain I'd met the man. Then it hit me. “The created vampire?”

Dimitri nodded. “Ja. He had twins his first pregnancy. He is slender like you. The body is an amazing thing.”

I was, and I knew it. I didn't know why I was suddenly worried about carrying babies for Dimitri. “Although I wouldn't be terribly upset with twins, I was actually referring to babies, as in more than one pregnancy. I would like more than one child?”

“Ja. You have said as much. If after the first you still want more, I will gladly help with that in all ways.”

Dimitri smiled at me, and I returned the expression. “So...now what?” I asked. I dropped my arms and started to move away, but Dimitri wrapped his hands around my upper arms and pulled me back to him.

“Now, we decide when and how we wish for the rest of the day to go. I can move the furniture once the sun is up and the storm passes.” Dimitri raised a shoulder. “Or you can do your thing and bring the stuff from the other place over here.”

I could do that. I nodded slowly as I tried to look up at my One. “Are there more lights in this place? I can always use magic to illuminate the place, but if you have lights, I would much rather simply turn them on.”

“Ja.” Dimitri let go, and after he took a few steps, lights came on, going back through the house.

My eyes widened as I got my first good look at the place. The far back of the house was still dark, and I wasn’t sure if that was because it was so dark outside or if it was simply that far away. I looked at Dimitri, shocked. “Why didn’t you live here?” I asked but shook my head. “I understand why. You already told me, but this place—” I started walking back through the cabin. It was gorgeous. “—it’s amazing. And the floor plan is so open.” It reminded me a lot of my condo back in Madrid. I didn’t have nearly as high of ceilings as there were in the back room, nor did I have the natural beam and stone, but that was beside the point.

“I am glad you like the place. I assume this place feels like it could be home?”

I smiled again. “Absolutely. I do have a question, though, before I bring your things over here.” I took a few steps, bringing Dimitri with me. “Do you think we will be here for some time? I would hate to get settled and then it be time to find somewhere new.”

“This place is ours. There will never be another that lives here, unless we allow it. There will be no more moving, no more remaking ourselves. Here at the council, we do not have to continually worry about not aging. We can be here for as long as you wish.”

That was a relief. If I was going to start a family now that I had my One, I wasn’t looking forward to moving around so often.

“Can you show me the rest of the house? I need to know where I’m putting everything.”

Dimitri took my hand, and when he immediately started toward the stairs, I smiled. Yes, please show me where the bedroom is because I really need to get that amazing bed here so we can get to other things. Specifically, claiming each other. I was a patient man for the most part, but I was more than ready to have the sexy dragon’s bite on my shoulder.

I could admit that it had been a bit too long since I’d been intimate. But Dimitri was so much more than just a random hookup. He was my last lover. He was going to be my forever one. I couldn’t help but send a silent thank-you for the magnificent man that fate had paired me with. Granted, I didn’t know him all that well, but I knew that with him being an enforcer, he had to be a good man. Not only that, but I’d all but passed out on him last night, and he’d been a complete gentleman and had simply gone to bed beside me.

“This is the main bedroom,” Dimitri said as we reached the door at the top of the stairs. There were several doors on either side, but this bedroom was at the end of the hallway. “You cannot see yet, but there is a beautiful view during the daytime. The falls can be seen in the distance. It’s not nearly as close of a view as Dedushka has, but he lives quite a bit closer to the falls.”

“This is to be our bedroom, then?” I asked.

“Ja. Unless you wish for one of the smaller ones.”

I shook my head. “And that furniture? That is all yours?”

“Ja. We can replace it if...” Dimitri trailed off when the room was suddenly filled with everything that had been in the bedroom we’d been in not even an hour ago. I

used more magic to bring the sofa and other things that had been at Dimitri's house. His clothes were now hanging in the closet along with mine. Our bathroom things were here as well. The kitchen was stocked with everything he had, which wasn't much, but we could and would work on that.

I turned and looked up at my One. "I want you to claim me," I told him. "We're both old enough to know that there truly is no getting around it, and in all honesty, I have no issue with who the fates have chosen for me." Dimitri tilted his head. "I know it's not romantic, but I don't need romance."

Dimitri shook his head, but he reached out for me. "You may not need it, but you deserve it. I will gladly claim you, but I ask that you do not rush it. We can only claim once for the first time. I would like for it to be special."

I nodded. "I would like that."

"Good. Then perhaps we can start by removing your coat," Dimitri said. He slid his hands inside my heavy wool coat, and when he pushed it off my shoulders, I let it drop to the floor. His fingers then moved to the buttons on my shirt, and I wanted to help, but I was going to let him do this. "I cannot tell you how much I wanted to explore you last night. You were sleeping so peacefully though. You barely moved when I joined you in my bed."

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "It was a very long week, and it caught up with me."

"You will not have to worry about long weeks any longer," Dimitri told me. His hands moved swiftly down my torso, and when he reached my waist, he yanked on my shirt, pulling it from my slacks. The last few buttons were undone, and then his hands once more pushed something off my shoulders. This time, it was my shirt though. Dimitri's hands were not only incredibly warm against my skin, but his caress was unlike anything I had ever felt.

I let my head fall back and closed my eyes, enjoying the feeling of his hands on my body finally. I moaned when his hands caressed lower to my waist. Because I had my head back and my eyes closed, I didn't realize he had moved until I felt his lips on my neck. The quiet moan from only moments ago was repeated, only this time much louder and longer. I swallowed hard and held my breath as his lips moved up my neck toward my jaw.

"Dimitri," I whispered.

"You taste just as good as I imagined."

His lips moved up under my chin, and then they were gone. Seconds later, they brushed against my lips, and I whimpered when the fleeting touch was gone too soon. I should have known he wouldn't deny us for long though, or at least anticipated when they returned, this time with more pressure. His hands slid around my torso, pulling me tightly to his body as his lips moved against mine. I moaned as I opened my mouth, letting his probing tongue in. We moaned in unison when our tongues touched for the first time.

I had been kissed plenty in my lifetime, but nothing had ever compared to what Dimitri was doing to me. My entire body felt as if it were tingling, and then it hit me—it was. My aura had been talking to me all this time, and I'd simply ignored it. After the first meeting at the bakery, I hadn't paid much attention to what my body had been telling me. Now, I couldn't deny it any longer.

My entire body was lit up like it was being stimulated everywhere and not just where he was actively touching me. My own hands moved to Dimitri's waist, and when I tugged on his shirt, it easily pulled free from his pants. I slid my hands inside, touching that hot, smooth skin once more.

Dimitri pulled his tongue back and then his mouth from mine. "Just to be certain.

You absolutely want this? I will struggle to stop if we get much further. I will do it, but it will be difficult.”

I blinked a few times, trying to focus on what he was asking. I knew that as an alpha, he would make certain that I was on board with being claimed. I myself had been prepared to ask something very similar. “Yes. I want your bite, Dimitri. I want to carry your children, to make a home and family here with you.”

That was all it seemed to take. Dimitri’s mouth was on mine again, and then we were moving. I assumed we were working our way to the bed, and when I felt it against my legs, I reached for the button of Dimitri’s pants. He groaned into my mouth as our tongues dueled with one another.

Once I had his pants undone, I slid my hands up, taking his shirt with them. Dimitri broke from the kiss again, and when he pulled his shirt over his head, I chuckled at the ripping sound that could be heard.

“I have others,” he said, seconds before his mouth was on mine again, and then we were moving. I lay back as Dimitri climbed on top of me. It took a bit of maneuvering, but I was able to crawl backward enough to where my body was completely on the bed with a very sexy man hovering just above me.

He gently pressed his hips down onto mine, both of us moaning when hardness met hardness. I couldn’t help my reaction: press upward into his body with mine. That earned me a growl, and suddenly, there were hands that were tugging on my pants. There was more ripping, but I didn’t care. I could fix them, and my mind was simply thinking that the quicker he got us naked, the faster he could bury his cock inside me.

I discovered that Dimitri seemed to have the ability to surprise me because as he started moving back up my body after pulling my pants from my legs, his tongue licked up my cock and then swirled around the head.

I was sure I said something a bit incoherent as his hot hand wrapped around the base of my cock and lifted. When he did, it was instantly surrounded by hot, wet heat as his mouth swallowed me down to the base.

I gasped, the tingling in my body intensifying in my cock. It felt as if I were wearing a vibrating cock ring, and the sensations brought me closer to orgasm than I'd ever gotten there. "Dimitri," I warned when his mouth continued to move up and down my length, sucking tightly as he moved up and off. Either he didn't hear me, or he chose to ignore my warning because his mouth never ceased, and when his fingers trailed down my balls and then behind, I opened my legs as wide as I could to give him room.

When I felt a finger circle easily and then press in, I was done. I shouted as my body overloaded, and the orgasm couldn't be stopped. Dimitri moaned after the first pulse of cum filled his mouth, and when my body continued to pulse in pleasure, I grabbed the bedding below me to hold on.

The pleasure became too much, and I pushed on Dimitri's shoulder. Only then did he pull up and off my still-hard length. His fingers moved, and I moaned when they touched a very sensitive spot inside me. I knew if he rubbed over it enough, I would find release again, but I wanted him inside me before that happened.

"Please," I said.

"You need to be stretched," he replied. His fingers continued to move in and out of me, and it wasn't until several minutes later that I heard a grunt, and then finally, his fingers pulled from my body. There were some harsh words in his native language that I was sure I would never remember to ask about. They were accompanied by more tearing sounds, and I gave mercy to my One and used magic to completely undress both of us.

Dimitri froze for all of two seconds before he moved in between my legs. He reached under them, then wrapped his hands around my thighs and pulled me up onto his own muscular legs. I never knew I would be so turned on by being manhandled, but I'd never had sex with a sexy dragon alpha before either. I was already very much enjoying it, and when the head of his cock pressed against my opening, I knew I was about to love it even more.

He pressed forward, gentle at first, and then with more pressure until his cockhead slipped in, and he froze. I felt a moment of burn and took a deep breath in hopes of helping myself relax, but it took longer than I'd hoped.

"When you're ready," Dimitri said after several minutes.

I took another moment before I gently raised my hips a bit. When I did, it moved Dimitri out of me slightly, and he took the hint that I was ready for him to move. As he gently pushed in, the burn was still there, but it quickly subsided. Dimitri pulled out a little, then slid back in. Every time he did, I moaned. When his dick was finally deep enough to touch my prostate, my body reacted accordingly. I groaned when he pulled out, and his cock rubbed over my prostate once more.

Dimitri moaned this time and then pushed back into me, going deeper and deeper with every inward thrust. When his hips were touching the back of my ass, he froze. I wiggled a little, still very much ready for him to get on with things.

"Dimitri?"

"A moment. I do not wish to finish already."

I grinned up at him. "But if you were to finish already, you could claim me. When you claim me, we can hear each other's thoughts. That means you will know exactly what I'm thinking and how much I wish for you to do certain things to my body."

I wanted him to do everything, actually. The question was, would my One give in and give me what I asked for? I got my answer seconds later when Dimitri pulled his length from me and then pushed inward and groaned.

My body had already been tingling, but as my next orgasm was building, I did everything I could to fight it off. I wanted us to come together this time. Dimitri was having none of that. Instead, he started thrusting just a bit more forcefully. When his upper body fell forward and he caught himself on his arms, I expected his lower half to stop. Only it didn't. His lips crashed down onto mine, and I thought to myself that I could die a very happy man just by our experience together thus far.

Dimitri's mouth pulled from mine as his hips sped up even more. When he started making sexy grunting noises as he thrust inward and his mouth moved down my neck and to my shoulder, I tilted my head to the side to allow him more room. He took it, and seconds later, there was a sharp pain that lasted only an instant. Dimitri groaned loudly against my neck at the same time my body suddenly filled with heat. There was a feeling of impossible fullness that I hadn't expected.

I felt as if there was a burning sensation that entered me in my neck through Dimitri's teeth as well as where his cock was throbbing inside me. What someone might consider a painful experience, I could only moan as my body was suddenly an intense, vibrating mess. My cock swelled, and then a forceful orgasm ripped through my body, and I came between our torsos. I had just enough thought to imprint on Dimitri's ribs before I felt my body spiraling downward into a heaviness that was unexpected but not unpleasant.

Chapter 9

Dimitri

Never before had my dragon pushed me so when having a sexual encounter with someone. Then again, I had never been with my mate for the very first time either. I had hoped for a bit longer experience, but my dick had other ideas. The tingling at the base and then the struggle to push back into my mate told me that my knot was expanding.

When I finally slid back into Caspian's body, I felt my knot expand and my canines tingling as they dropped. Caspian was absolutely perfect, and when he tilted his head to the side to give me more room, it was all over. I moved over to where his neck met his shoulder and bit. The sudden flood of blood in my mouth was new and only fueled my dragon further. I moaned as my own body found intense release.

There was a sudden, quick, burning sensation in my ribs. It was gone in a moment, and then I felt...Caspian. I knew enough about warlocks to understand that the burning sensation I'd just felt was him claiming me. When I felt him in my mind, that confirmed it. Caspian was experiencing intense pleasure, contentment, and then was suddenly asleep.

I pulled my teeth from his neck, licked over the bite, and pushed up on my arms enough to look down at my mate. Sure enough, he was fast asleep. I couldn't help but chuckle. Never before had I fucked someone unconscious. Then again, I'd never claimed anyone before either.

I tried to move, which caused Caspian to groan, even in his sleep. I understood immediately: my knot had pulled on his opening in a not-pleasant way. I hadn't thought things through when I claimed Caspian face-to-face, but I wanted to be able to kiss my beautiful mate.

No matter how I tried, I couldn't seem to move us to where it wasn't painful for either of us. In the end, I simply stayed where I was, resting on my arms above my mate. His legs had fallen to the side, one on the bed and the other on my hip. I would remember this next time we made love. I didn't know how long I hung out there—there was absolutely nowhere for me to go—when Caspian finally started to wake. I felt him in my mind before he started moaning and moving around.

“I wouldn't wiggle too much,” I warned. There was more than one consequence when he moved around. Not only did it tug on my knot and cause discomfort, but in doing so, it seemed to stimulate my knot, which caused a surge of desire to shoot through me.

Caspian moaned again, and then I saw his eyes open. When they did, a smile appeared slowly on his face.

“Hello, mate,” I said before leaning down and touching my lips to his. Caspian moaned, and his arms touched my shoulders and then wrapped up and around my neck before they threaded into the hair on the back of my head.

“Mmm,” Caspian moaned into the kiss. “More kisses,” I heard through our bond.

“All the kisses,” I replied in the same manner.

Caspian flinched, his tongue stilling before he groaned. Once he did, he pushed his tongue against mine and fisted his fingers in my hair. His lower body lifted, and then I felt it through our bond: a new surge of sexual desire had hit him.

I wasn't sure what all was feasible with my knot still very much present, but I was willing to do whatever I could to give him as much pleasure as possible.

Caspian continued to moan while I basically wiggled around, rolling my hips over and over. I was doing no more than that, but that was all it seemed he needed. I could feel his pleasure building until it became too much for him. When it did, he pulled his mouth from mine and shouted my name as his body squeezed me over and over. I moaned when that caused my own orgasm. Or perhaps it just intensified my first. Either way, I had a feeling we were going to be stuck together for quite some time.

When Caspian's body finally relaxed, he sighed. "That was...by far the best I've ever had."

I raised an eyebrow at him. "Now is not the time to compare me to past lovers. I am not insecure in any way, but I am still a possessive alpha. I am currently knotted inside of you, but that won't stop my dragon from seeking out all of your past lovers to cause pain."

Caspian's eyes widened. "That wasn't...I have never lost consciousness, Dimitri. I didn't mean anything beyond that. But since you've already mentioned it, I'll go ahead and say that you are the best I've ever had. Fated mates aside, you truly are."

I snorted. "I know nothing about sex with a mate beyond what we've experienced. I would venture to say that you passed out because we claimed one another though." I was suddenly fighting with my dragon. He wanted to rush out and obliterate every previous lover that Caspian had. The human side of me knew that wasn't logical and that my mate honestly didn't mean anything negative by what he'd said.

"Oh, probably. I guess I could ask my fathers. Or my brother, but it's not really something I want to discuss with them." I nodded slowly. "How long do you think we'll be stuck together?"

“I cannot say. What I do know of alphas’ knots and how long they last vary. We have just claimed one another, so I would imagine it will last a good while. Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?”

Caspian sighed. “I’m not sure. Maybe we can try to roll over? If I sit up a bit, maybe it will work?”

“It’s possible. I had tried to roll us earlier while you were sleeping, but I couldn’t seem to do so without causing you to wince or grunt in pain.”

Caspian made a noise. “That doesn’t sound encouraging. I’m awake now though, and I’m definitely willing to give it a try.”

With Caspian awake, we were able to roll over without too much discomfort. He had to mostly sit up, which wasn’t exactly what he had been hoping for. Caspian bent at the waist, leaning his arms on my chest, and stared at me with a smile on his face. “Hello.”

I grinned back up at him. “Hello to you as well. How are you feeling?” I asked. I reached out and gently touched the new bite on his shoulder. Caspian closed his eyes before he shivered when I gently ran my finger along the scar.

“Aside from the giant dick knotted in my ass, I’m good. Excellent, I’d say.”

I couldn’t help it; I chuckled at that. When Caspian made a face, I fought myself and stopped laughing because I realized the movement tugged on my knot and his opening.

“What’s so funny?”

“That comment. It just didn’t seem like you.” I shook my head. “I work with

Benjamin every day. He and most of the other warlocks are incredibly..." I did not wish to insult my mate, but how did one say that most of the warlocks he had met were quite stuck-up? "Proper," I went with. "Benjamin is much more relaxed than many others. I've worked with Frederick from a distance, and he seems as if he's fairly easygoing."

It was Caspian who chuckled now. He did it twice before he winced again. "Yes, well, my cousins and myself try to be not stuffy. I know there are some older warlocks that can be much more formal, my own sire being one of them. I love him though, and despite the fact he's much more serious, he is quite open to suggestions when he is called out." Caspian moved his arm, and suddenly, there was a dim light coming from the bedside table. "Are you calling me stuffy?" he asked, a mischievous look on his face.

"I wouldn't," I told him with what I hoped was a straight face. Honestly, I didn't know my mate quite well enough yet to be able to make such a judgment. If I went by our first meeting, I would say he was on the stuffier side. But after spending time with him shortly after, I would say that he was fairly laid-back.

Caspian traced a line from my collarbone to my nipple. When he swirled around it with his finger, my body reacted as I expected: my cock twitched. I knew Caspian felt it when his eyes widened.

"If you want it to go down, you need to not stimulate it," I told him.

"I didn't," Caspian argued. "All I did was..." He trailed off as he looked at my nipple. When he cleared his throat, I fought off a laugh. Yeah, he did. "Sorry about that," Caspian said. He moved his fingers to the middle of my chest and started lightly rubbing there. "Is this place safe?"

I smiled. "Safer. You touching me anywhere is going to turn me on. There are places

that will cause more of a reaction than others, and you will learn what those are in time.”

Caspian got a glint in his eye before his fingers moved back over to my nipple. I reached up, gently holding his hand in mine to keep him from touching there again. “Behave,” I warned.

“Seriously?”

“Ja. I want to make love to you again. But I cannot do it if I cannot move. Let my knot go down. We can then have a shower and some breakfast, and then perhaps we can figure out what it’s like to make love in front of the fireplace downstairs?” The floor was currently bare, but I knew Caspian would remedy that in a blink.

“That’s not if...that’s definitely happening. When?”

My smile widened. “Later this morning work for you?”

“Yes. Absolutely. What else do you want to do today?”

I raised an eyebrow at my mate. Was he being serious? We had just claimed one another. Did he not want me as much as I did him? “Are you being serious? Or facetious?”

Caspian blinked at me several times before his eyes widened again. “Oh,” he said. “You want to spend the day in bed?”

I shrugged a little. “Or on the sofa. Or the shower. In front of the fireplace? All sound like good places to get to know you. I want to explore your body as much as I possibly can.”

Caspian smiled. “I want that too. So today, we fuck like rabbits.”

I couldn't help it; I chuckled. Caspian winced a little, but the laughter wouldn't stop. I felt terrible, but that didn't change the fact that my mate had a witty side that I couldn't wait to experience more. “I do not believe there are rabbit shifters, but yes. I would very much like to spend the day knotted to you as much as possible. Is that agreeable with you?” I asked once I stopped laughing.

Caspian smiled. “Yes. Although, I'm beginning to wonder how many of those we will get to experience with how long your knot seems to be lasting.”

I felt bad for my mate. “I do not know, but I feel a tingle at the base of my cock when it starts to expand. I can make sure I don't knot you. That will allow for us to not be tied together for so long. There was no getting out of it this time though.”

Caspian sighed. He leaned down and rested his chin on his hands on my chest. “No. I like it. It's not what I expected at all, but I've already come to terms with the fact that I'm going to be carrying our babies.”

I would carry them for him if I could. We'd talked about this briefly. I did not have the parts that were required for that.

“I know you would. You said as much earlier,” Caspian said. I realized he had heard my thoughts. “It's enough that you say as much. I hope that means you will be supportive throughout the pregnancy.”

“I will dote on you every chance I have.” I would. I knew others didn't get to see the side of Dedushka and Yéye that our family did, but Dedushka spoiled Yéye at every opportunity. They had given all of their sons an excellent example of what a mated pair should be like.

“What are they like?” Caspian asked suddenly.

“Who?”

“Your grandparents,” he said. “Your thoughts are completely open with me.”

“I have nothing to hide or keep from you. They are amazing. Dedushka is firm and strict but also patient and an amazing mentor. Yéye is his entire world, and without him, I do not believe Dedushka would be the man he is today. Yéye calms his dragon, as well as the man at times.”

Caspian tilted his head. “Does he have a temper?”

“No more than any other shifter. But at times, like most dragons, Dedushka’s dragon will push, and Yéye will be the calm that he needs.”

Caspian smiled. “That’s my parents. Father, don’t think he’s a horrible person. He’s not. He’s strict, but he’s an amazing teacher. He pushes us because he wants what’s best for not only us but what we can do to help others.”

“Your father though, you said he can push too hard at times. Will he push for you to return to Madrid?”

Caspian’s eyes unfocused for a moment or two before he blinked. “Possibly. I have responsibilities there. I know I said I’m not returning to Madrid, and I won’t. At least not permanently. I do have to go back though. Even if it’s only for a week or two, I will have to return to the firm to turn over my clients.”

I had honestly expected as much. It wasn’t too much of a surprise that he would go back. I would have been immensely surprised if he’d simply never returned. That didn’t seem like something he would do.

“I can go with you, if that is what you wish.”

Caspian shook his head. “No. I will go in the morning when you get up for work. I’ll work a partial day, then pop back over here. It’s not ideal, but I can’t leave Lorenzo like that.”

I understood that. I wouldn’t say I was a pivotal part of the council, but I still wouldn’t up and leave tomorrow without a backward glance. I wasn’t completely attached, but I also knew that was because my dragon was bored with sitting at the council building every day. But at the same time, I would very much like to go to Madrid with him. At least once. I wasn’t sure how my dragon would respond to our mate being halfway around the globe. He, of course, could return to me in a blink, but we’d just claimed one another. He wasn’t going to like the thought of our mate being out of our sight for a while yet.

“Do you think—” Caspian stopped midsentence when my knot let go. When it did, my cock immediately slipped from his body with a gush. We both groaned, but I was certain for different reasons. Me because my cock slapped against my hip and thigh, and it was still very sensitive. Caspian, I was sure because of the amount of fluid gushing from him. “Oh, that’s such an odd feeling,” Caspian said. He sat up, and the amount of fluid on my cock and legs increased when more came out.

Caspian gave me another look. If I wasn’t mated to him, I wouldn’t have sensed that he was feeling a bit of discomfort. That made complete sense though. It was a lot of cum and slick.

“It will most likely not be quite that much when I am not claiming you for the first time,” I told him, hoping that made him feel better. “I will admit that I’ve never come that much before, but I do know that alphas, especially dragon alphas, produce a lot of...seed,” I said and cleared my throat.

Caspian sighed. “Yeah, I get it. You have to ensure your mates carry your babies.”

“Dragon babies are extremely precious to us.”

Caspian smiled. “I would hope so.” He winced when he moved but continued to roll to his side. “I don’t know about you, but I want a shower.”

“Yes,” I said. It was going to be a messy dash to the bathroom, but I was completely in agreement with having a shower. “I do not know how long it will take for the water to heat up though. I haven’t been in the cabin in some time, although I think my family watches over it from time to time.”

Caspian stood and nodded. “No worry about that. I can have hot water waiting on us.”

I felt a cool breeze on my cock, followed by warmth. When I looked down, it was to find that the mess that had been covering me was now gone. I grinned. It was going to be quite the experience being mated to a warlock.

Caspian had started for the bathroom door, and I lay there for a moment on my side, staring at his backside as he walked away. He was truly a beautiful man, and I was incredibly grateful that he was now mine.

“Are you coming, or are you going to lie there and stare at my ass?”

I chuckled again. “I already came, remember?” I called out. Caspian’s head reappeared in the doorway, and he shook his head at me.

“Tell me why again that you didn’t live here already?”

I rolled out of bed and followed my mate at a slow pace. I entered the bathroom,

knowing why he had asked that question. There was a large window on one wall, and in the daytime, it provided a gorgeous view of the mountain.

“There is a massive window in here. And a tub right in front of it big enough for two.” Caspian pointed at the shower. “Should we even discuss that shower?”

I chuckled. “You know the reason I did not live here before.”

Caspian nodded. “Would you rather we live in the enforcer housing?”

“Nyet,” I told him. “You wish to be here. I want to be here with you. This cabin will provide us with all of the room we could possibly need for our future family.” There were five bedrooms, including ours. That meant we could have four children before they would need to share rooms. Once the babies started arriving, I wasn’t sure Caspian would still wish for so many, but if he was, I wouldn’t say no.

The water in the shower was already steaming and falling from the showerhead on the ceiling. There were glass walls enclosing it on two sides, and the shorter side that was natural stone had a full-length bench. Aside from being useful during sex, I didn’t understand why there was a bench in the shower. But we were paranormals, and we were all about our mates.

“Did you wish for a tour? Or are you ready to step into the shower?”

Caspian reached out, and after he took my hand, he led me to the enclosed shower that was filled with steam. Some of it billowed out as we opened the door and stepped in. Shortly after, I discovered that Caspian wet and soapy was one of my new favorite things. That and having a warlock for a mate definitely had its advantages.

Chapter 10

Caspian

Every day was a new experience with Dimitri. Plans had been made for the day after we had claimed one another, but the storm outside was relentless and kept us inside. Not that either of us would ever complain about that. But plans were quickly altered when my mind began to become fuzzy, and I started to feel incredibly hot later that evening. Dimitri knew exactly what was happening, and my next actual coherent thought was when I woke up in bed in our new cabin.

I was alone, which was a bit of a surprise. The room was full of natural light, so perhaps that was why. I rolled over onto my back and groaned. My body hurt. I couldn't ever remember hurting like this before. My head was throbbing, and my mouth was dry and tasted...not fresh.

I heard Dimitri before he entered the bedroom, but when he did, he was wearing a pair of very low-hanging sweatpants and nothing else. He was also carrying a tray of some sort. When he noticed me, he hurried to set it on the foot of the bed and moved to my side.

"What day is it?" I asked.

"Sunday."

"Really?"

“Ja.”

It was hard to believe that it was only Sunday. It was a good thing, though, because I would need to call my fathers and let them know I wouldn't be returning to Madrid just yet. I needed a few more days with Dimitri before I considered going back, even half days.

“That's good. I would have thought I'd been here more than two days with how I'm feeling.”

Dimitri looked at me with concern. “It is not the first Sunday. You have been here over a week now.”

I froze for a moment before panic set in. I sat up quickly, immediately regretting it. My head started throbbing, and the sharp pain in my ass told me that it had seen quite a bit of action in the very recent past.

“Are you all right?” Dimitri asked, his hand warm on my bare shoulder.

I rubbed my forehead. “I ache in places I didn't know was possible. In fact, I don't think I've ever hurt like this before.”

“I asked for advice this morning. A warlock's first fertile period is usually the most intense.”

Fertile period? What Dimitri had told me about it not being the first Sunday made sense now. “How long?”

“Five days. It came on suddenly and hit you hard. Your brother has called your family in Madrid to let them know what has happened. At least the basics. He also brought all of your things over from the cabin you were in off of the mountain.”

I nodded. I would need to call my family in Madrid. I didn't want to, but there was no getting out of it.

"I need the bathroom," I said when my body told me it had been a while.

"Do you want me to carry you?"

I looked at Dimitri, surprised. Memories came flooding into my mind just then, and he had absolutely carried me to and from the bathroom over the past several days. He also sat with me in the oversized tub and bathed me while I went in and out of consciousness.

"I think my legs will work," I told him.

Dimitri nodded, then stood before reaching for the covers. I realized I was naked in the bed, wondering how I'd somehow missed that before. I honestly didn't care. I usually slept naked at home and didn't really have plans to suddenly become shy.

Dimitri helped me to my feet, and as I started my trek toward the bathroom, he followed, staying right beside me in case my legs decided to give out. It was a good thing because when I was within reaching distance of the doorframe, they started shaking. My sexy dragon carefully picked me up without even a grunt and carried me the rest of the way to the bathroom. He set me on my feet in front of the toilet, something I was grateful for.

"I'll be just outside in the bedroom," he said. Dimitri kissed my nose before he turned. Instead of leaving right away, he walked over to the tub and turned on the faucet, then left the bathroom. A long soak in hot, soothing water sounded perfect right now, and it touched me that he'd thought of me enough to do that before he left to give me some privacy.

I took care of business, brushed my teeth, and then climbed into the tub. I winced at first but sighed when the hot water started to work its magic. I had just leaned back in the tub and closed my eyes when Dimitri returned to the bathroom.

“I hope the water is to your satisfaction.”

I peeked one eye open before closing it again. “It’s wonderful. The only thing that would make the soak more enjoyable would be to have you behind me with your arms wrapped around me.”

I heard Dimitri’s sweats drop to the floor and leaned forward. He stepped in behind me, and then the water level rose significantly when he settled in behind me. I sighed when I leaned back and his arms wrapped around me. The water continued to rise and was getting to the point it should be turned off, but I couldn’t be bothered to move out of Dimitri’s arms, so I used magic.

“Has it seriously been a week?”

“Yes. My dedushka knew I had met you, as did Rainier. I am certain that all is sorted.” Dimitri kissed the side of my head before he leaned back and relaxed.

“I don’t want to go back to Madrid. I know what will be waiting for me, and it’s completely irresponsible, but all I want to do is hide out here with you.”

“I can take time and go with you. There is absolutely nobody at the council that will say anything to me about taking time off.”

I wanted that. Although he was probably correct with who his grandparents were, I did not want Dimitri to face any sort of resentment from the other enforcers. I knew Sebastian would never be an issue; neither would Benjamin or Frederick. But I did not know any of the other enforcers beyond what my brother and cousins had said in

passing.

“Just a few hours a day. That’s all I’m going to go for. One week, maybe two. Beyond that, my father will have to figure things out. My life is here with you now.” I knew Dimitri was going to struggle. Rather, his dragon would struggle with me being so far away. But I would absolutely return to him in a moment if he started to have issues that he could not control. In my eyes, that did not make him any less than. Alphas were different.

“How are you feeling?”

I took a moment to take stock of every part of me. My head was still throbbing but was slowly getting better. The rest of me ached, but it wasn’t nearly as bad as it had been even ten minutes ago.

“I’m doing okay. My head is throbbing, and I’m trying to figure out if it’s because I need something to drink, or do I need more sleep? I thought I had been sleeping though, right?”

“Ja. You pulled away from me yesterday afternoon.”

Yesterday afternoon? “What time is it?”

“Almost time for lunch.”

Oh, food. That sounded wonderful. “You mentioned Sebastian. Do you know what our parents said to him, if anything?”

“Nyet. There was a note on the counter. It appeared at some point yesterday. It was from Master Edison. It simply said that your brother had contacted your parents and that you should drink the tea that was left on the counter.”

Master Edison and tea. I knew all about the tea from when Drew was pregnant. I turned a little to look up at Dimitri. “Do you think I’m pregnant?”

Dimitri shrugged. “With as much as I was knotted to you, I would be surprised if you weren’t. Why do you ask?”

“That tea. You said it came from Master Edison. He has a tea that he distributes to all of the pregnant omegas. It’s supposed to help with morning sickness.”

“Ah. I understand now. I believe we will not know until another few weeks for certain. Unless you are one of the warlocks that can tell early in a pregnancy.”

I nodded. Sebastian had been able to tell not only when Drew was pregnant but also the species he was carrying. I had no doubt that I, too, would be able to do the same. If it turned out I was the oddball in our family and I couldn’t detect the baby, I knew my brother would be more than happy to share the news with us.

“Aside from your head, how are you feeling?” Dimitri asked.

“Hungry. Will you share your memories with me?” I asked. “I don’t necessarily need or want to relive all of them, but during my fertile period. Would you share those? I don’t really recall too much from those five days. It’s a lot of fuzzy memories about need and sex.”

Dimitri did not respond verbally. Instead, he did exactly as I had asked. My mind was suddenly filled with images of me reaching for Dimitri, him showing me attention that I had never experienced before, and us spending a great deal of time knotted together. Dimitri showed me memories of me sucking on him. Of me riding his cock until I sprayed his chest with my own cum. The memories kept coming, and I realized that I was apparently quite a bit more adventurous than I ever realized.

“You seem to be enjoying what I am sharing with you,” Dimitri said. His hands ran up and down my torso, paying special attention to my nipples. When his lips started to trail down my neck, I moaned. How was it possible that after a five-day fuck fest, I still wanted more? “Yes. You very much like that,” Dimitri whispered. “Do you want me to bring you pleasure?” Dimitri asked as his hand slid down my torso. When it wrapped around my hard cock underwater, I instinctively pressed my hips upward in hopes of getting more friction.

“How is it even possible that I am turned on?”

Dimitri kissed the bite mark on my neck, and I thought I was going to jump out of my own body. There was an intense surge of pleasure that started coursing through me.

“You are my mate. Your body recognizes me as such. Your body will crave the connection that we now have. Our intense need for one another will not be simply during your fertile period. It will always be there. As time goes on, it is possible it will diminish a little, but I will always have this effect on you. Just as you will do the same to me.”

I knew that. Somewhere deep down, I was already aware of that. My parents had been together for centuries. To this day, my father absolutely adored Papa. He would do anything for him, and it wasn't uncommon for them to still disappear into their bedroom together.

Dimitri continued to slowly stroke my cock under the warm water, and I could feel my balls start to tingle. Despite everything that we had just gone through, my body's need seemed to be unsatiable.

“Come for me,” Dimitri said just before he bit down on my shoulder. I screamed as an orgasm rushed through my body, and pulse after pulse of cum shot into the water.

What felt like forever, but in reality was less than a minute later, my body seemed to relax, and I went completely limp in the tub. “Such a good mate. That is what I mean when I say your body will always react to mine. But you feel better now, yes?”

I sighed, too exhausted to do more, but Dimitri deserved an answer. “Yes,” I whispered out. “Did you bite me again?”

“Yes, but I did not break the skin. It was not necessary for me to bring you pleasure. Just as you touching, kissing, or playing with the mark you put on me, me doing the same to yours will have the same effect. You act as if you know little to nothing about how mates work.”

If I were a shifter, I would growl at Dimitri. As it were, I instead chose to find the strength to sit up so I could turn and glare at him. “I know exactly how mates work. It’s just that my brain isn’t exactly functioning at full capacity at the moment. You try spending five days delirious with fever and intense sexual desire and need, and see how clearly you can think shortly after waking up.”

“Apologies. I know you are speaking the truth,” Dimitri said as he reached out for me. I let him pull me back to his chest, and as I leaned against him, this time, my ear was resting just above his heart. The rhythmic thumping of his heart, combined with the exhaustion my body was experiencing, quickly lulled me into a light sleep.

When I felt Dimitri move behind me, I opened my eyes. He stood up and then reached down for me. I took his hands, and he easily pulled me to my feet before he wrapped his arms around my waist. “Can you walk?”

I nodded and looked around, wondering where the towels were. I didn’t see any, and I’d not thought to grab one before I stepped into the tub. With a little bit of magic, the tub was empty, and we were both dry. Dimitri stepped out, never letting go of me. He held my hands while I joined him on the rug that was off on one side.

“Since there was no rug before, I have to assume it is your doing?”

“Yes. I dried us as well because I didn’t know where the towels were.”

“I do not have any. I did at the other house, but I am unsure where they went. Did you bring all of the things over?”

“Yes. I couldn’t tell you where they ended up though. I sent them to the closet, wherever that happens to be.” I hadn’t looked around much. But my magic knew what a closet was, and I had to hope that the towels and other things were where they were supposed to be.

Dimitri pointed to a door on the other end of the room. I followed as he walked that way, not that I had much of a choice since he was still holding my hand, and when he opened the door, my eyes widened. I followed him inside, taking in the vast space. It made my closet in Madrid look like a broom closet.

“Why do you need so much space?” I asked as I walked to the middle of the walk-in closet and turned around in a slow circle.

“My family had this place built. There was, of course, magical help from certain warlocks. But Dedushka was provided with a couple of cabins for himself as well as his family. The thunder that was here, the ones that originally settled this mountaintop, were too happy to have the created dragon here.” Dimitri walked over to a line of shirts that were hanging on the rod and pulled one down. He slipped it over his head and stood there in nothing but a shirt. I looked pointedly at his dick, remembering that he’d given me another orgasm without having one of his own. You wouldn’t know, though, because his dick was flaccid. It was still impressive; my guy was not only a grower but a shower as well.

“So how did you end up with the cabin, and why is it so big?”

“I was the only one that had decided to join Dedushka and Yéye here on the mountain. Longwei was still too young to live on his own.”

“And?”

“And...” Dimitri walked slowly toward me. “This place is so large because there was, of course, the hope that I would meet my mate and decide to stay. Dedushka would love nothing more than to have the majority of his family near him again.” Dimitri looked as if he was thinking. “Actually, most likely, it would be Yéye. Dedushka loves all of his children, but I know he sometimes questions some of us grandchildren.”

I chuckled. My own fathers only had the one grandchild, but I was certain that would change soon enough.

Because I could feel the heat coming from Dimitri, I didn’t notice the cool air temperature in the closet. When he moved away, it was apparent. I glanced at the empty rod on the other side of the closet, and after a deep thought about all of my clothes hanging in my closet in Madrid, I had them all here. They were still organized by color, then weight of material, and then fit. The same with my button-downs.

Dimitri noticed and stopped. He looked back at me with raised eyebrows. “You have a lot of suits.”

I shrugged. I was getting cold, so with more magic, I was dressed in flannel sleep pants and a long-sleeve T-shirt. “I’m a lawyer. What else did you think I wore to work?” More often than not, I wore the slacks and a button-down on the weekends as well. I had absolutely no life and often found myself either working from my home office or just giving in and going into the office. That was going to change now though.

“I should have expected it, actually,” Dimitri said. I glanced down at him again, and although he didn’t look or feel chilled, I used magic to put the sweatpants back on him that he’d dropped beside the tub. Dimitri glanced down and shook his head, but he was smiling when he raised it to make eye contact with me. “That is going to take time to get used to.”

“I can simply not do it. I know some don’t enjoy the sudden feeling of being dressed or undressed.” Or things suddenly appearing in front of them. I wasn’t the only warlock to ever surprise someone, and not in a good way, by using magic to have something appear out of thin air.

“Nyet. It is fine. I very much like it. I simply am used to doing things for myself. I do not mind you doing these things for me.” Dimitri moved closer, and when he cupped my face, I instinctively held my breath. Would he kiss me? He did when we claimed each other, and he had definitely kissed me in all the places when I was having my fertile period. His lips slowly moved closer to mine, and as they made contact, I closed my eyes and moaned. My hands went to his hips, and I held on as Dimitri gave me what was by far one of the best kisses of my life.

His tongue swiped over my lips, causing them to open and allow entrance. He then slowly swirled his tongue around mine before retreating. He repeated the movement several times before my stomach had to go and ruin it. A loud growling noise interrupted us, and I wanted to scream in frustration because Dimitri’s kisses were already addictive.

Sadly, his tongue retreated, and then his lips rubbed across mine once before he pulled away. His right hand dropped to my shoulder while the other stayed on my cheek.

“I should feed you. My dragon will be grouchy if I don’t.”

I pouted, or at least I tried to. “I can use magic. Then we will have food right away.” My hope was that if we ate in a hurry, then we could get back to kissing all that much faster.

“You can if that is what you wish. I still want to take you downstairs to feed you though. We have not had a full tour of the house yet. Perhaps you would like to see it?”

I would, but I was going to live here with him. I would have time later? Dimitri was determined though, and after taking my hand, he led me from the closet. We went through the bathroom and into the bedroom, where he went to the bed and picked up the mug that was on the tray. There was also a plate, but it was empty. I took the mug and gave Dimitri a look. He shrugged.

“It had toast on it. You were in the bathroom though, and when you didn’t come back out for the tea, I ate the toast. The tea is supposed to help you feel better though. I would hope it will help with your throbbing head.”

I nodded. I took a sip of the tea and winced when I found it had cooled. A little magic and it was once again steaming. I tried again and this time found it much more pleasant.

“Lead the way,” I told my One. “You wished to give me a tour. Let’s start with all of these doors that are up here. I assume they are the other bedrooms?”

Dimitri nodded. He took my free hand and started toward the door. It was time to get a look at the place that was going to be our home.

Chapter 11

Dimitri

I discovered that I very much enjoyed being mated. Sex aside, it was so much more than that. The connection with Caspian was unlike anything I had expected. Sure, I'd heard from my family just how mates connected, but hearing and experiencing it were two completely different things.

"You checked the weather forecast?" Caspian asked. I smiled.

"Yes. It is currently cold but bright and sunny. It shall remain that way until the day after tomorrow. Well, except for when the sun sets. If you are still unsure about going flying with me, we can simply work on decorating the cabin more."

Caspian shook his head. "No, I want to go flying with you. Do you think there will be other dragons out?"

I nodded. I knew for a fact there would be others out flying. "Ja. We will see them, and since we are mated, I will be able to talk to you through our bond. I will be able to answer any questions you might have." Dedushka and Yéye would be there at a minimum. If Longwei wasn't busy with schoolwork, he would most likely be there as well. I wasn't sure if Ferdinand would be joining us or not, but it was a possibility. You simply never knew who all would be at the falls.

Caspian stood there, nodding his head. Because we were mated, I could hear the internal conversation he was having with himself, and it was a bit comical. I closed

the distance between us and pulled him into my arms. “If you are unsure, it is all right. It can take time for the mate of a dragon to get used to flying with him. Some never do. It doesn’t mean you care less for me or that you are unsuited to be a dragon’s mate. Being mated to a temperamental beast can be difficult enough. When you throw in flying on their back at high altitudes, it can be a lot for anyone.” I would never pressure him to do something that he was uncomfortable doing.

“I want to. It’s just that the last time we did this, I couldn’t see, and then a minute after we took flight, we were hit with a storm.”

I still was upset with myself. I knew we weren’t really in danger. Not with as quickly as I got us out of there. But I should have looked at the forecast before taking my mate up to the skies.

“If you wish to go flying, we will do so.”

Caspian nodded. That was all it took for me to lead him through the house and out onto the back deck. It would never hold my weight when I was in my dragon form, but there were stairs that led to the ground that could be used. The back deck had been designed for enjoyment. It was currently empty, but I knew that Caspian had plans to add furniture, as well as a hammock to relax in, come spring.

Caspian closed the door behind us, and his hand in mine was suddenly covered. I smiled to myself at the ability of my mate. When I glanced back at him, he was dressed in his warm wool coat and had a thick scarf wrapped around his neck. His hands were covered in smooth leather gloves, and yes, he was even wearing a hat. He looked nothing like the man I had made love with in front of the fireplace hours ago, but he was certainly still my mate.

We carefully navigated the stairs, and once we were on the ground, I started to walk away so I could shift. Caspian stopped me, though, by tightening his grip on my

hand.

“Is something wrong?”

“No. I just wanted a kiss.”

I grinned. I would kiss him every chance I got, and I quickly found out that Caspian loved to be kissed. My lips touched his briefly before he smiled against my lips. I pulled away to a grinning, sexy man staring at me.

“Thank you.”

I tilted my head. “You’re welcome. But you do not need to thank me for kissing you. I am more than happy to do so. I enjoy it as much as you do.” To me, it was a part of intimacy that was beyond sexual intimacy. Both were needed in order to have a healthy relationship, and I was thankful that Caspian seemed to feel as much as I did on the matter.

“I know, but you came back and gave me the kiss. That made me feel important to you. It was something small, but to me, it means a lot.”

We needed to have a conversation, apparently. We’d done some talking, but we had been spending a lot of time doing other things. Newly mated things.

“You are the most important person to me. You have become my entire world, Caspian. I will always do what I can to make you happy. If that is giving you a kiss, I will gladly do so.”

Caspian’s smile grew. I knew all about his last lover, Peter. He had been in a relationship with him for two years, and although they both knew they weren’t fated for one another, they were committed. But Peter didn’t give Caspian those little

things: kisses, holding hands, gentle touches, heated looks. It was a natural thing for me to do because Caspian was my everything. Now, he was going flying with me, and that made my dragon incredibly happy. Our mate trusted us.

“Stay here until I’ve shifted. Then we’ll take off. This time, you won’t have to pat me if you need something though.” I leaned in and kissed him again quickly before I removed my sweats and the shirt I was wearing. After handing them to Caspian, I moved several yards away and called for my dragon.

It was a quick transformation, as he was eager to see our mate again. My body grew, and once I had shifted, I moved around, stretching out my body. I heard a gasp from Caspian and turned my head toward him.

“I knew you were big. I did. But the last time I saw your dragon, it was inky dark.”

I chuckled through our bond. “Yes, and this time, it is bright and sunny. What do you think of my dragon now that you can see him?” I couldn’t help but ask. My dragon, despite knowing he was quite a sight to see, needed to be reassured by our mate. He needed to know that our mate found him pleasing to look at.

“I haven’t seen a whole lot of dragons, Dimitri. Maybe one or two when I was here before visiting. But yours is by far the most beautiful one I’ve seen,” Caspian told me. He walked right up to me, and when he reached out and started rubbing up and down the scales on my leg, my dragon held perfectly still to allow our mate to touch him as he pleased. “I have never seen a dragon the color of yours. And when you move, you have a gold sheen to your scales.”

“Yes. The gold comes from Yéye. As far as we know, he is the only golden dragon aside from their children that it was passed down to.”

“Do any of the grandchildren have gold scales?”

“Nyet. Gold sheen, but that is the extent of inheriting the color. Only Yéye, Ming, and Longwei are gold. Others might have a sheen or, like me, gold wings, but that is it.”

Caspian rubbed up and down my leg some more before he was suddenly on my back. “Well, I think you’re absolutely gorgeous. I’m ready to go flying whenever you are.”

If my dragon could smile, he would. As it was, I started walking slowly. I needed to be farther away from the house in order to get a good jump and be able to open my wings without worry of hitting the house or any of the trees. Once I was far enough away, I decided to warn Caspian. “Ready?”

“Yes!”

Taking him at his word, I took a few more steps, these ones faster, and then jumped. I spread my wings, flapped a few times, and then we were suddenly airborne.

“Whoa,” Caspian said as I flew over the evergreen trees. They were getting farther down as I gained altitude, moving down the mountain and into the gorge. “Do you always fly this high?” Caspian shouted.

“This is low, lyubimyy.”

“What does that mean?” Caspian shouted again.

I chuckled through our bond once more. “Perhaps instead of shouting, use our bond? Although I can hear you.” I made a gentle turn to the left. The falls were just ahead, and when Caspian seemed to notice them, I felt it through our bond.

“Oh, wow. They’re gorgeous. I’ve seen them before, but it was from over there.”

We were directly over the river at the bottom of the gorge now and flying straight toward the falls.

“It is a much different view,” Caspian told me.

“This view is so much better.” One I preferred, but I was a dragon and loved being in my scales. Caspian moved around a little, but he didn’t seem to be feeling anything but happiness and contentment though our bond.

We arrived at the falls within a couple of minutes of taking off. Since we were already at the top, I did what I’d come to do: the mating flight. I got into position, then started the downward spiral. When we reached the bottom, I flew back up to the top and did it again. And again.

On the fourth spiral down, I felt it through our bond. Caspian lay forward on my neck and sighed. He was feeling the pull, the sensual flight that I was doing with him.

“This is absolutely wonderful.”

“It is. I cannot tell you how much it means that I can finally do this with you.”

“What does it mean?” Caspian sighed again. “And you never told me what that ‘lyub’ word means.”

“Darling. My darling. It is a term of endearment in my native language.”

“So it’s something like mi corazón.”

“What does that one mean?” We hadn’t started teaching each other our languages just yet, but it was probably past time that we’d done so.

“My heart. You have it, you know.”

You couldn't tell, but my dragon was smiling.

“You have had mine since that first moment in the bakery,” I told him. “You were so handsome yet upset about something.”

“I did not expect to be the carrier. Now, I cannot imagine it any other way.” Caspian sighed again. “Do you really think I'm going to be pregnant?”

“Do you not? We made sure to spend a lot of time knotted together.” I flapped four times to take us back up to the top of the falls. When we arrived, I saw another dragon in the distance. Then, a second one came from behind him. I knew they had to either be associated with the council or one of the dragons from Treasure Ridge.

“Yes, but I've not detected a baby yet. I would have thought I would have by now. My fertile period was almost a week ago.”

My mate was impatient, apparently. “Would it please you if I told you that your scent has started to shift?” Immediately, I wanted to take the words back. It wasn't that they weren't true; Caspian's scent had started to change. But when I said those words, he immediately sat up on my back, and it felt like he almost fell off.

“What? Why didn't you say—who is that?” Caspian asked when he finally realized the other two dragons. I'd been watching Ferdinand and Egon approach since I had first spotted them.

“The large blue dragon is Ferdinand. The red one is his mate, Egon. They are the two that settled this mountaintop centuries ago along with their son, Aleric, and his mate, Konrad.”

“They won’t be upset we’re here, will they?”

“No. They welcome the council and especially the dragons. They have come to join us in flight, it seems,” I told him when they started circling one another on their own downward spirals.

I heard Caspian sigh as he watched Ferdinand and Egon do their own mating dance. I flapped back up one last time, spiraled down with my mate once more, and then flew off down the river with him. I felt him lie back down on my neck and hold on.

“Are you tired, lyubimyy?”

“A little. Is it possible for us to go home? I think I need to be on my own feet for a bit.”

I could understand that. “Do me a favor when we get home though. Would you use your magic to pop yourself into the house and onto the sofa? It’s said that oftentimes, a mate’s legs are a bit weak when they slide off their dragon’s back. I would hate for you to be harmed.” Not only that, but Caspian’s scent had started to change. It had already altered once right after we’d claimed one another. The fact it was changing again told me that he had most likely caught and was with child.

“I can do that. Are you going to come in too, or are you going to continue flying?”

“I will be joining you just as soon as I shift.” My dragon had no desire to fly around without our mate. Would it happen again? Of course. But we had been mated for two weeks, and he very much still desired to be with our mate at all times if possible.

I started my climb out of the gorge, and when I saw our cabin, I slowed my speed and landed as smoothly as possible.

“I’ll see you inside,” Caspian said, and then his weight was gone. I started walking in dragon form but initiated my shift as I moved. One moment, I was a massive purple dragon, and the next, I was walking on my human legs.

I heard a loud groan through our bond and smiled. The pain had hit him, it seemed. I wish it wasn’t like that, and I’d been told it would get better, but riding on a dragon’s back was a challenge for anyone.

I hurried up the steps and found my mate on the sofa, rubbing his legs as fast as he could. He saw me when I entered and looked at me with wide eyes.

“You weren’t kidding.”

“Nyet.” I rushed to him, knelt down, and started rubbing his legs for him. “Lie back.” Caspian did as told, and when I was able to, I started massaging the muscles of his inner thighs.

“Oh, that’s so nice. Why does it hurt?”

“I do not know for certain, but I would imagine because dragons are so wide, and your legs are not used to being spread so wide for such a long period of time.”

“We weren’t gone that long,” Caspian said.

“You would have been in agony if we had. I am told it does get better with time. But if you choose not to fly with my dragon, I do understand.” It would upset my dragon, but he would get over it. He wanted our mate to be happy first and foremost.

Caspian held himself up on his elbows and looked directly at me. “Did my scent really change?”

I gently pushed on his shoulder. When he lay back down, I continued rubbing. “Yes, your scent has started to change. I noticed it this morning. It is still very subtle, and the only reason I noticed was because of where I was at that particular moment.” I gave my mate a pointed look. It took him all of three seconds to understand when I had noticed his scent. We’d been making love, and I had been pleasuring him in my favorite way. I loved sucking his cock, and he was quite vocal about it.

“Were you going to say something to me?”

I stopped and looked at my mate when I felt the hurt through our bond. I reached up and cupped the side of his face. “I was, yes. I was going to wait another day or two to see if the scent grew stronger or if you detected a baby.”

I did not know for a fact that Caspian was pregnant, but I would be surprised if he wasn’t. We both desired a family, and we had certainly been knotted together enough during his fertile period.

Caspian sighed. “Perhaps my father could tell me. Or Rainier. He was always good at being able to detect pregnancies early on.”

I chuckled. “You are so impatient, lyubimyy. Wait a few more days, and I am certain you will be able to tell us both if you are with child or not.”

Caspian smiled. I ran my thumb over his lips before I moved my hand back down his body.

“If you roll over, I will massage the backs of your thighs,” I told him. Caspian rolled quickly, and when I started rubbing where his thighs met his ass, he moaned loudly into the cushion below him.

“Oh, how did you know that was the spot?”

I chuckled. “I can feel it through our bond. Just as I feel your desire when it builds.” I rubbed his thighs and ass, pulling moans and sighs from him until he was completely relaxed. My movements changed from deep, massaging rubs to gentle caresses. I felt exactly when Caspian dropped off into sleep, and I stood and went searching for my clothes. I found them folded on one of the barstools.

Once dressed, I went back to the den and sat in the chair that Caspian had added to our furniture. I went from looking at my mate to glancing around the room. My sofa was here, but Caspian’s touch could be seen everywhere. There were now two comfortable chairs on opposite sides of the room. In the middle was a new low table, and there were matching side tables. Both had lamps, and one had a few books on it, while the other had some sort of marble sculpture. The television had been placed above the fireplace on the wall, and of course, there was the thick, plush rug that was in front of the hearth. I wasn’t sure how a rug could be that soft, but I was certain Caspian’s magic had something to do with it.

But this room wasn’t the only change. Caspian’s influence could be seen in every room of the house, and it made me and my dragon incredibly happy that our mate wanted to be here with us. I had been offered this cabin when I first arrived, and I’d declined. At the time, I had wanted to fit in as much as I could. Now, my only desire was to make my mate happy. This place felt like home to him, and I had to wonder if my grandparents had known something I didn’t. There was only one way to find out. After locating my phone, I found Yéye’s contact and gave him a call.

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Chapter 12

Caspian

“The longer we wait, the more difficult it will be to go back,” Dimitri told me. He wasn’t wrong, and we both knew it. But we’d only been mated just over two weeks. We were supposed to have more time together, just the two of us in our own little bubble. But apparently, the world wouldn’t stop for me to spend time with my newly claimed alpha.

“I know. I just thought I would get more time.” I sighed. I knew I would have to go back, despite not wanting to. I kept trying to tell myself that I was only going to be back for a week of half days, and beyond that, I didn’t care any longer. Father would have to tell his clients that I was no longer with the family’s firm.

“You will be back here with me before you realize it. It’s just for a few hours every day. Four? Maybe five at most,” Dimitri said as he pulled me into his arms. I was wearing a suit for the first time since I’d met him, and it felt...off. “Hey,” Dimitri said as I kept my face buried in his neck. “Look at me, please?”

I looked up at my One and tried to smile. It wasn’t the end of the world, and I wasn’t a young omega that had just found his alpha. I shouldn’t be acting like this.

“If you wish, I will go with you. I can sit in the corner of your office and be silent. I understand you have clients, but I can find something else to do nearby while you are dealing with them.”

I was incredibly tempted. But I knew that not only would Dimitri be a distraction for me, but he truly would be bored out of his mind.

“You should stay here and enjoy yourself,” I told him. “Go flying to where you don’t have to worry about me either getting sick or having to worry about my legs not working when we are finished.” Pregnancy sickness had set in. It was a good thing I liked tea because the sickness tea from Master Edison had been a lifesaver.

Dimitri’s hand gently touched my lower stomach. It was still very flat. But we were both ecstatic that I was pregnant. I had been so concerned about it when he had mentioned that my scent had started to change five days ago, but three days after, I’d felt the baby. Dimitri had been so damn adorable when I’d told him he would be getting his own little dragon baby.

“You will reach out if you need anything?”

I nodded. I would. He was going to talk to Benjamin if he needed to come to me, but I had no doubt that everything would be fine. If Dimitri needed me, I had already decided I would be making a quick trip to the nearest bathroom and then popping back here to my One.

Dimitri kissed me and then sighed as he took a step back. “You should go to work. I want nothing more than to slowly peel you out of that suit. It is...very much you, yet I know a different side of you.”

I grinned. He certainly did. “I’ll be back in a few hours,” I told him. It was already just after two in the afternoon in Madrid, and although it was only just after six in the morning here, despite the fact that it was still dark out, there were quite a few that were already up and around on the mountaintop.

“You will, and when you return, I have plans to remove that suit from you, slowly.”

Something to look forward to. I could hardly wait. I moved in, gave Dimitri another kiss, and then took a step back. He nodded to me once, and with a thought of my condo in Madrid, I suddenly found myself standing in the middle of my living room there.

I looked around, noticing that a few things had been moved, and there were definitely signs that someone had been here boxing things up. There was a stack of boxes in the corner by the bookshelf, and I noticed it was now empty. I didn't know if it had been Lorenzo or Papa. I smiled either way because it meant a lot to me that they would take time out of their day to help me out. Especially since they both knew I could have the entire place packed with a simple thought.

I heard keys in the door, and when I turned toward it, I expected Lorenzo since he had the spare key. He lived in the same building but on a different floor, and we'd given each other our spare keys just in case one of us ever needed the other. When Papa entered, I realized just how much I'd missed him over the past several weeks.

I'd only been in Montana for three weeks, but I'd been so busy with work that I'd actually not had a whole lot of time to spend with my fathers. Well, outside of being at work. Papa seemed to have scented me because his head suddenly flew upward, and he inhaled deeply. When he spotted me in the corner by the bookshelf, he squeaked. The stack of boxes he was carrying fell to the floor, and he was suddenly rushing over toward me.

"?Mijo!"

I braced myself for Papa's embrace. He quickly wrapped his arms around me and held on tightly.

"Hi, Papa," I said.

“Hi? Hi?” he said as he stepped back from me.

I grinned. “Dimitri doesn’t speak Spanish, and I don’t speak Russian or Mandarin, so we’ve resorted to speaking English since we’re both fluent in it.”

“Russian? Mandarin?” Papa took another step away before he held my arms and looked me over. “And where is this Dimitri? Why is it that you are here and he isn’t? Did your mate not come with you?”

I shook my head. “No. Since I was going to be at work for a few hours, we decided it would be best he stayed at the council. He was maybe going to go for a flight or possibly go visit his grandparents.” I was both excited and terrified about meeting his grandparents. It wasn’t every day that you simply joined the created dragon’s family. Well, it apparently was a thing for me, but that wasn’t something most paranormals did.

“Tell me about him. I’ve asked your brother more times than I can count, and he won’t say more than the fact that Dimitri is an amazing guy and he’s a dragon shifter.”

I snorted. I didn’t know how well Sebastian actually knew Dimitri. I’d asked my One how well he knew my brother and had been told that they were on different teams, and although he knew who my brother was, he hadn’t spent a whole lot of time with him. They saw each other frequently but hadn’t been on any assignments together yet.

“You aren’t listening,” Papa said. “You must be quite taken with your One.”

I shook my head. “Such nonsense. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“And your One. Is he with child?”

My eyes widened.

“Oh, come tell,” Papa said. “I wish to have more grandbabies to spoil. I believe Lorenzo will never find his mate because he’s too busy chasing barely legal humans.”

I pointed to the sofa and started in that direction. Once Papa was sitting beside me, I turned toward him a bit and reached for his hands. “Did Sebastian not tell you anything about Dimitri?”

“No. Just his name, and he’s a dragon.”

I tilted my head. “Papa, Dimitri is an enforcer,” I told him and waited. I waited some more, and when it didn’t seem to click, I shook my head. “Papa, Dimitri is an enforcer. He’s a dragon alpha.”

Papa blinked at me, and I saw the moment it clicked. Papa’s eyes widened as his mouth dropped open. He looked down at my stomach, which caused me to laugh.

“Yes, Papa, I’m with child,” I told him. I knew that in another few weeks, Papa would be able to scent the baby, but for now, it was still too early. “Dimitri and I will be having a little dragon shifter sometime in May, we guess.”

Papa’s eyes widened. “May? You have to carry the baby until May?”

I laughed again. “Yes. Dragons have a six-month gestation period. Therefore, I’ll be pregnant until sometime in May.” There was obviously nothing I could do about how long I would be pregnant. I was quite slender in comparison to Dimitri, and I had a feeling that by the end of the pregnancy, I was going to be incredibly uncomfortable. But in the end, I would get a beautiful little baby boy.

Papa glanced down at my stomach again, then back up at me. “I expected all three of

you to have omega mates.”

I chuckled and shook my head. “I expected to be a sire, honestly, but I have no complaints about Dimitri. He’s so loving and attentive. He’s brought out a side of me I didn’t realize I had.” Papa raised an eyebrow at me in question, and I shook my head. “I am not going to discuss my intimate life with you.” I was close to my fathers, but I wasn’t going to discuss my sex life with Papa. Or my brothers, for that matter. We all knew it happened, and we knew that certain things obviously happened when Sebastian was with Drew, and now between me and Dimitri, but that was the extent of things. They were known. They were not to be discussed.

“I will not ask, but I need to know, you are happy?”

I nodded. I didn’t even need to think about it. Dimitri made me so incredibly happy. Before him, I hadn’t realized just how happy I could be. I had been in long-term relationships before, but they were nothing compared to what I had with Dimitri. I realized it was because he was my One, and that was how things worked. The fates somehow knew who our perfect match was, and they figured out how to get us to meet. I did have to wonder though: why hadn’t I met Dimitri before now? He had been at the council for some time, and he’d been working with Benjamin since. But yet, despite all of the times that I’d been to Treasure Ridge to see Sebastian, I’d not felt Dimitri even once.

“It’s going to be so perfect,” Papa said, pulling me from my thoughts again.

I focused on him, more than curious about that comment. “What is?”

“Our move to Montana.”

I blinked at Papa for a moment. “What?” I asked quietly.

“Lyubimyy? Are you all right? I’m getting feelings of unease through our bond. Is something wrong?” Dimitri asked through our bond. I felt a great deal of concern from him. The sudden desire to bring him to me so he could see firsthand that I was perfectly fine was a bit overwhelming.

I realized in that moment that I couldn’t multitask and listen to Dimitri and Papa at the same time. I held up my finger, hoping Papa would hold off a moment. Thankfully, he seemed to catch on quickly to what the issue was.

“I’m good. Papa showed up at my condo before I could leave. We were talking about things. I have lots to share once I find out everything from him.”

“Are you certain?”

I could feel some of the earlier concern wane, which was a relief. I didn’t wish to cause Dimitri stress as I knew he and his dragon were already struggling with me being so far away, despite my ability to pop back to him in a blink.

“Yes,” I told him. “I’ll be sharing news in just a few.”

I nodded at Papa, ready to hear what all he had to share. “Continue. I had to reassure Dimitri.”

Papa’s smile was huge. “I wish to meet him. Hopefully, I won’t annoy you or Drew once we are in Montana full-time.”

I was struggling to understand. “All right, I need you to elaborate. I honestly assumed you and Father would eventually relocate to Montana, but you’re talking as if it’s happening soon.”

Papa nodded. “Sí. We will be there by the end of the year if all goes well.”

That was news. There was just over a month left in the year. “How?”

“He hasn’t shared it before, despite me warning that he should.”

I was completely lost. “Who should share what?”

“Your father has been looking into selling off the firm since Sebastian and Drew mated. When we met Drew for the first time, he had already started looking for a buyer or to simply dissolve the firm.”

My eyebrows rose, and my eyes widened. “Was he going to tell me? What about Lorenzo?”

Papa sighed. “This is why I told him he should have shared the news. Your father knows how much it pains me to be missing so much of little Flora’s milestones.”

I chuckled. She hadn’t had any milestones as of yet. She was only eight weeks old. “Papa, she’s not even rolling over yet.”

“Shh. I have finally gotten him to agree to move. Do not bring up specifics.”

This was news to me. “Why now? It has to be more than just Flora.”

“Sure. You are mated now. You will be relocating to Montana, will you not?”

I nodded. “Dimitri’s grandparents are there. He is an enforcer, and we plan on raising our family there near Sebastian and Drew.”

“That is why. I do not wish to miss more of my grandchildren’s lives.”

I had expected this, honestly, but not quite so quickly. “What does Lorenzo have to

say about this? What are his plans? Is he just going to find something else here?" I'd admit that these past three weeks were the longest I had ever gone without talking to either of my brothers. I saw Lorenzo every day during work. It used to be that I saw Sebastian daily before he up and joined the enforcers. Now though, I talked to him at least two or three times a week.

"Lorenzo has already put in his application to join the enforcers. And your father will be joining Master Edison's committee."

My eyes couldn't get any larger, and I knew it.

"Lyubimyy?"

"Papa, hang on a moment," I said. "Dimitri needs to be here with me before his dragon becomes an issue." I didn't wait; I simply popped back home because I wasn't sure how Dimitri would react to suddenly not being at home.

I popped back into the back room at the cabin, but Dimitri wasn't there. "Dimitri?" I called out.

I heard him before I saw him. When he came running out of what was most likely supposed to be the home office, I smiled and once more braced for the impact. I knew this hello would be quite different, and he didn't disappoint. When Dimitri reached me, he immediately cupped my face and gave me a soft kiss. "You are back so soon?"

I nodded. "I felt that your dragon wasn't doing so well."

"You were having so many emotions."

I sighed. "Yes. Would you like to meet Papa? He is at the condo and was sharing

some unexpected news with me.”

Dimitri raised an eyebrow at me. “It is bad news? You were feeling upset.”

Was I? I hadn’t thought so, but maybe I had. “I guess I was upset, but no, it’s not overly bad news. I just wasn’t expecting it quite as early as this.”

“What is wrong?”

I shook my head. “Just...come with me?” I had no idea what the day would bring, but with everything changing, I had no idea if I was even going to go into the office.

“Of course. You know I will always go with you if I’m able to.”

I grinned because I knew he was referring to him being on assignments.

Seconds later, we were standing in the middle of my condo, directly in front of Papa. His eyes widened when we arrived, and seconds later, he was up and moving around the oversized ottoman I had in front of the sofa.

“Oh, es tan guapo.”

Dimitri gazed at me, then back at Papa, before his gaze settled on mine. I chuckled. “Papa said you are handsome. I happen to agree with him.”

Dimitri grinned. “It is nice to meet you, Arturo,” Dimitri said as he held out a hand. Papa took it, and after shaking his hand, he glanced between me and Dimitri.

“I do believe your babies will be breathtaking.”

I felt Dimitri’s embarrassment through our bond and tried to change the subject.

“Dimitri was worried because my emotions are going all over.”

Papa looked at him before he turned his gaze to me. “Why?”

I just frowned for a moment before snorting. “Because I’m pregnant, my hormones are all over the place, and suddenly, you tell me that after years of being incredibly driven, Father is just selling the firm and moving to Montana with you and Lorenzo? Maybe that’s why?”

“Zhdat’, chto?”

We both stared at Dimitri. He pulled me into his arms and lowered his forehead to mine. “Is this a good thing, lyubimyy?”

“Yes, but frustrating that all of a sudden, after so many years of working long hours and endless days, he simply decides to up and change jobs.”

Dimitri pulled away and, after staring deeply into my eyes, nodded slowly.

“He should not be upset,” Dimitri said as he looked over to Papa.

Papa, despite having been the one to give me the news, appeared as if he were the one who was upset. “That wasn’t my intent. I was simply catching him up on the news. A lot has happened in the three weeks since he’s been gone.” Papa pointed to the sofa. “If you two would join me, I’ll tell you more about it.”

I nodded. I really needed to know all that was going on. I wasn’t sure I could handle more surprises.

“Your father has been looking into ways to change ownership of the firm for about a year now,” Papa said.

“A year?” I asked, shocked. Dimitri took my hand and held it tightly.

“Yes. There have been some issues with a few of his clients. They have been too curious about asking how he looks so young, especially since he has sons who are in their thirties.”

I snorted at that. We were well beyond that, but everyone believed we were all in our thirties.

“Sí.”

“Why didn’t he mention it to us?”

Papa sighed. “With as close as the three of you were, I think on some level, he expected you and Lorenzo to follow Sebastian and join the council. When you didn’t, he decided to go ahead and get things going with offloading the firm.”

It took a moment, but I finally realized that the emotion I was feeling was frustration and a bit of betrayal. We had been close. Or so I thought. But the fact that he had decided to just uproot our lives without so much as giving us a heads-up was where I felt betrayed.

“You seem upset?” Papa said.

“Why wouldn’t I be? I understand my life is sorted. I now have my One, and we’re happy in Montana. But what if I’d not met him? Would Father still have just up and sold the firm without telling us?” Dimitri started rubbing up and down my back.

Papa shook his head. “He’s just started looking for a buyer and put it out there that the firm is going to be going up for sale. It’s taken him a year to finally come to the conclusion that he needs to sell the firm. We’ve been here a very long time, Caspian.

Too long, and even you have to realize that.”

I nodded. “Yes, but why not talk to us?” I asked. “I guess I’m just overly emotional. I’ve not been feeling the best this week, and I think the pregnancy is starting to have an impact on my normally level head.”

Dimitri leaned in and kissed the side of my head. “You have a lot going on, lyubimyy. Do not feel bad. It is understandable that you are not only emotional but upset.”

Was it though? I was a partner in the firm, and I had shares in it, but I’d not been consulted about selling it. Yeah, I did have the right to be upset about it.

“We were going to come and talk to you a few weeks from now,” Papa said.

I nodded. Did that make it better? Possibly, but still. “I can’t say I’m too terribly upset. My life is in Montana now. But I should have been consulted before it was announced that the firm was going up for sale. I am part owner.” I think that perhaps that was what struck such a nerve. I wasn’t considered. What if I wasn’t ready to let it go? Of course, I actually was, which was why I seemed to be warring with myself.

“What would you like for us to do? I can discuss it with your father. Perhaps he will be willing to sell it to you? But did you not just say you were going to be making your life in Montana now?”

I narrowed my eyes at Papa because he had a somewhat smug look on his face. “Yes, and there is no reason for you to talk to Father.” I sighed. I was suddenly tired, and it was still early in Montana. Incredibly so. But I was newly mated, and, well, we weren’t exactly going to sleep early. We, of course, went to bed early, but sleep? No. Add in that I suddenly just felt off and then was up entirely too early in order to rush to the toilet, and I was simply tired and had little energy.

“Do you need a nap, lyubimyy?”

“No. I think I’ll get my things I’m taking to Montana sent, and then instead of going to the firm, I’ll just go home with you.” I glanced at Papa. “I’m not really needed here.”

“It’s not like that, mijo.”

I knew that. I reached out and gave Papa’s hand a squeeze. “I just need to go home, Papa, and home is with Dimitri in Montana now.”

Papa stared at me for a long moment before he nodded. “We will see you in a few weeks? Is that acceptable?”

“Of course,” I told him. Why was he talking nonsense? I wasn’t upset with Papa, nor did I wish to not see him. I was simply irritated.

Chapter 13

Dimitri

“Returning to work at the council wasn’t nearly as stressful for my dragon as it had been when Caspian had gone to Madrid. As it was, he’d only been there for not even an hour before we were reunited, and then he came home with me after talking with Arturo for a little while.

When I left our bed this morning, it was to a still-sleeping mate who had yet another rough night. I felt bad for him and wondered if there was anything I could do to help alleviate his pregnancy pains.

My plan was to talk to Master Edison and see if he knew what I could do to help my mate. He himself had been pregnant four times and had five children. He should understand warlock pregnancies, shouldn’t he?

I was so lost in thought that when I walked up to the door of the council building, I simply stood there and tried to remember what I needed to do to open the door. I heard laughter behind me, and when I turned, I was surprised to see Reinhold standing there.

“Thoughts elsewhere?” he asked as he approached.

“Ja.”

Reinhold pulled out his badge, and after scanning it on the reader, he typed in his

code. “Ready to go in?” Reinhold asked as he opened the door. I followed, wondering how the day was going to go. So far, my dragon was content knowing that our mate was at home, soundly asleep in our bed.

“Dimitri? What, are you going back already?” Slater asked from the front desk.

“It is time to return?” I asked, looking over at Reinhold. It had been a month now, and as far as I knew, it was time for me to return to work.

“Has it been that long already?” Slater asked. I wasn’t certain if he realized how his question sounded but wasn’t going to comment on it.

“Ja,” I simply said. Slater scanned my badge and then Reinhold’s before he waved to us. I started toward the hallway Master Edison’s office was in, wondering if he was already at work. He was usually one of the first to arrive, as were most of the other created ones.

“How is mated life treating you?” Reinhold asked as we walked across the main foyer.

“It is by far the best experience I have ever had.” I looked at the other dragon and wondered if he might have some advice for me. “When your mate was pregnant, did he have aches?”

Reinhold made a face. “Oh, is Caspian sick in other ways as well?”

“Ja. He throws up at times. He is drinking the tea, but it does not always work.”

Reinhold winced. “Is it the tea that makes him sleep?”

“No. Why would we want him to sleep?”

He shook his head and pointed at the hallway where I had intended to go. “You should probably talk to Master Edison. Or better yet, go see Dr. King when he’s in his office later today. Has Caspian seen him yet?”

I shook my head. “Is that something he needs to do? We did not think it was necessary just yet.”

Reinhold nodded. “The sleepy-time tea will help with more than just the sickness. I hate to say it, but it sounds like Caspian will most likely need it.”

I sighed. “He has almost no energy as it is anyway. It has only gotten worse as the days progress. I do not think a tea that makes him sleep will matter much in that regard. But his sleep is not relaxing. He cannot seem to get comfortable, and he is constantly up throughout the night.”

Reinhold nodded. “Definitely talk to Master Edison. It sounds like the other tea will be a great help. He’ll sleep a lot more, but it sounds as if his body could use the rest, and it’s not getting what it needs.”

“Master Edison can help me with that for him?”

Reinhold nodded. “He did with Chase. I know he has helped many other omegas and carriers.”

“Thank you,” I told Reinhold as we reached the hallway. I went down, and Reinhold went another way. I wasn’t sure how long my discussion with Master Edison would be, but I knew I needed to talk to him before anything else.

I found him where I had hoped to: in his office. He wasn’t alone though, but I didn’t mind if his One was there for this conversation or not. You would often find the alpha mates or, in Master Edison’s case, the alpha to the created one, in their office with

them.

“Dimitri, welcome. Are you due back already?” Master Edison asked when he saw me standing in his doorway.

“Thank you. I thought I was to be back after a month. Has that changed?”

Master Edison shook his head. “Only if needed. How is Caspian doing?”

“I was talking to Reinhold on the way in. He said you had a tea that would help Caspian?”

Immediately, Master Edison showed concern. “Help how? I thought he was already drinking the tea?”

“Ja. He still gets sick though, and he is not sleeping well. He is always tired, and that is partly because he does not sleep well. It is more than that though. He aches. He often looks as if he does not feel well.”

Master Edison sighed. “I will send Maxwell over to see him as soon as possible. I don’t know what his schedule is like this morning, but I know he will be able to get to him soon.” Master Edison shook his head. “Why did the two of you wait?”

I shrugged. “He is not that sick, and Caspian said he wasn’t worried about how he was feeling. It wasn’t always this way. But his symptoms have been getting worse if you ask me.”

Master Edison nodded. “From the sounds of it, they will only continue to do so. If you would like to be with your mate, we will all understand.”

“Thank you, Master Edison. I would, but I know there is nothing I can do for him,

and Caspian will push me to come to work rather than watch him sleeping.” We had already had this conversation more than once.

“Very well. If you wish for time off to take care of him, you only need to ask.”

“I appreciate it.” I was about to leave but remembered a question I wanted to ask. “Will this last the entire pregnancy?”

“It depends. Sometimes, pregnancy sickness lasts the entire length of the pregnancy. Other times, it is only for what is considered the first trimester. And what happens this pregnancy might not necessarily be how the second or third pregnancies are. There is a whole lot that happens, and we simply do not know all that goes on during pregnancies.”

That made sense. I’d been around a few pregnancies before but had obviously never experienced them in such a close way.

“Thank you. I am going to go talk to my grandfather. I appreciate your input.”

“Of course.”

I left the doorway and immediately headed toward Dedushka’s office. I was curious about what Yéye’s pregnancies had been like. Was it possible that Caspian was so ill because I was a dragon and he was a warlock?

I found Dedushka alone in his office and had to wonder where Yéye was. It was unlike him to not be with Dedushka.

“Dimitri, it is so good to see you. Come in.”

I grinned as I did as instructed. “Tell me how you are getting along with your mate.

Are the two of you happy?"

I smiled while shaking my head. "Do you need to ask such silly questions? Do mates not get along?"

Dedushka's smile lessened. "It doesn't happen often, but it has occurred before in the past. It is a sad day when it does. Sometimes, those couples are able to work through the issues. Others, they live a long and miserable life."

I couldn't imagine such a thing.

"Tell me what brings you to my office. Not that I am not happy to see you. Chin will be upset he wasn't here to see you this morning."

"Where is Yéye?"

"He is at the college with Longwei. Nothing to worry about, just a simple thing that needed to be seen to this morning."

I sat down on the sofa that Yéye usually occupied.

"Is everything all right?"

I nodded slowly while staring down at the floor. "As far as I am aware," I told him. "Caspian has the pregnancy sickness. I have just been to see Master Edison. He said he would send Dr. King to the cabin to see him. Hopefully, the other tea will help with the random sickness as well as the other aches and issues he's having."

"How bad is it?" Dedushka asked.

"Not too terrible. He's been having aches. They are causing him to have issues

sleeping. He cannot find comfort. He is also having the upset stomach issue.”

Dedushka made a face. As paranormals, we didn’t get sick. But when omegas and carriers were pregnant, it was absolutely possible for them to become ill.

“I hope he feels better soon. I do not know of the tea personally, but I know a lot of omegas have benefited from it greatly.”

That was a relief to hear. “That is good. I hope that Caspian has a similar experience.”

“We noticed the cabin had someone in it. When we went to check on it, we were able to scent that you were there. Does that mean you have decided to move there instead of to mated enforcer housing?”

“Ja. Caspian felt as if the cabin was much more home to him than the house beside his brother. I did not mind where we lived. I just wanted him to be happy.”

“Chin is happy that the two of you seemed to have moved into the cabin.”

I grinned. They might be my grandparents, but they were like so much more. “It is where we will be raising our family. At least for the next several years.” I had no doubt we would be here for decades to come. I knew that Caspian had been upset about his father deciding to sell his law firm, at least at first. But he’d also mentioned how they had all been in Madrid for too long, and more than once, someone had commented on their appearances.

“And the enforcers? You will be staying on?”

I raised an eyebrow at the question. There had been a lot of going back and forth in the beginning. Dedushka, although I knew he loved me a great deal, had conveniently

lost my application for some time. I knew he had only been looking out for me and that he didn't have any true issues with me or my character, but he had fought a bit about me joining the enforcers. We had moved past that now though, something I was grateful for.

"I will, yes. At least for the time being. Caspian has no issues with me continuing with the council. His brother is an enforcer, and we learned that the other brother was considering joining as well."

Dedushka furrowed his brow. "I have heard that Benedict will be joining Edison's committee, but I did not know of Sebastian's other brother joining in any capacity."

"It is what his omega father shared with us. Perhaps he has since changed his mind. I cannot be certain. I have not met Lorenzo as of yet nor Benedict. I had the pleasure of meeting Arturo though. I very much like him."

It took but a few seconds for Dedushka to start chuckling. "Then I am certain Chin and I will as well. Might I ask how you met one parent and not the other?"

"I was with Caspian when he went to Madrid to get some of his things. Arturo had been at the condo to help pack it up." I thought back to that meeting, and although it hadn't been a terrible one, it still upset my dragon that our mate had been so upset about the news that had been shared. "Arturo shared everything going on with Caspian's family. We did not stay long, though, because Caspian had become upset." My dragon had started to become on edge the longer we were there, and I had finally put my foot down and made sure my mate rested when we arrived back at the cabin.

"I will not pretend to know what all is going on in the Ainsworth family. I have not heard any news from Sebastian, but I haven't asked. How is your mate doing now?"

"Good. He will be seeing Dr. King for his pregnancy sickness. He has little energy,

so I hope the meeting with the doctor helps him to feel better,” I said. “I wanted to ask if you thought that perhaps Caspian is ill because he is carrying a dragon baby? I have been around a few of my brothers’ mates when pregnant, and sometimes they were ill and others not.”

Dedushka shook his head. “One never knows what a pregnancy may bring. I hope he feels better soon though. I do know that if Dr. King is going to be taking care of your mate, he will improve. I have seen, firsthand, cases where the carrier has become incredibly sick and weak. With constant care, they have pulled through quite well.” Dedushka tilted his head. “Caspian is not that ill, is he?”

I shook my head. “Just a bit. He is tired, no appetite, throws up at times when he does eat, but it’s mostly aches and pains. He hurts for no reason.” I wish I could take his pain for him. It wasn’t possible though, and I hoped that Dr. King was able to do something for him.

“You should go back to your mate,” Dedushka said. “Take care of him for the day, perhaps the next week.” I wanted to argue, but Dedushka held up a hand. “Nyet. When he is under care and is feeling better, return. You will be brought up to date about the Venice coven then and how and where we are going with that. You will get to meet the new enforcers as well.”

That caught my attention. “We have new enforcers?”

“Yes. There is a new gargoyle named Vaughn. He is quiet but seems to be fitting in well. Then there are the fae. They aren’t nearly as quiet, but I’m also told that the alphas that have joined the council aren’t as troublesome as some of the fae omegas that have come over in recent times.”

It seemed as if the council was truly finally becoming much more rounded. “That all sounds like good news.”

“Yes, quite. But enough of that now. Go home and take care of your mate. He will need you, and we are still at a standstill when it comes to locating the Gallo cousins. The Vittone family is helping, despite Ambrosius’s objection.”

It took me a moment to place the names, but when I did, I remembered the meeting that fateful day. I’d met Caspian that afternoon, and my life hasn’t been the same since. No, it had been so much better. I hadn’t realized I could be as happy or love someone—my mind froze at that thought. Did I love Caspian? It didn’t take much thinking to realize that I did. Deeply.

I abruptly stood. “Thank you, Dedushka. I’ll go home and see to Caspian’s care. I will be sure to let you or Yéye know how the appointment with Dr. King goes.” I needed to get home. I had a mate to not only care for but to tell him I loved him. I should have already said those words. It was true, Caspian hadn’t said them to me as of yet, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t feeling much the same as I was.

“Is something amiss?”

“No. I simply wish to get home to Caspian. I appreciate the talk,” I said. Dedushka was standing now, and after I gave him a quick hug, he squeezed my upper arms before letting me go.

“I will not say I understand the very sudden shift, but if you feel you need to be with your mate, then you should go. I will see you in a week if I do not hear from you beforehand.”

I nodded before I turned and left the office. I checked in on Caspian through our bond and found him still sleeping. That was good because he was most likely going to become ill once he woke. I knew he could very much take care of himself if that were the case, but that didn’t mean I did not wish to be there with him.

I knew that, logically, it didn't take me any longer to leave the council than it had to arrive, but it felt as if it took a great deal longer to make it out of the council building. I quickly checked out with Slater and then left the building.

I knew Caspian was still asleep, thanks to our bond, but that didn't change the fact that my dragon was pushing me to return to him. What did that mean for my position in the council? Would I have issues with simply going a fifteen-minute walk to the council building? Was it because we were so newly mated?

I made a mental note to ask Reinhold if his experience with his own mate was similar. Once I was out of the building, I took off toward Dragon Falls and the cabin I now called home and shared with Caspian. That act alone helped to calm my dragon on some level. This was all new to me, and although I could admit that I loved my mate, I hoped that the inability to be apart subsided some in the future. Not that I had an issue with being with Caspian. Nothing could be further from the truth. But even I understood we needed to ensure we both still were individuals as well as a joined unit as a mated couple.

I made it almost completely home before I felt Caspian wake. Moments later, I felt the familiar sensation he got before getting sick and did what I could to rush home to him. If my mate truly did need me, I wanted to be there for him.

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Chapter 14

Caspian

It was obviously going to be a difficult day when unease in my stomach woke me, and I barely made it to the bathroom in time before the nothingness that was in my stomach decided to exit it. I was hugging the toilet, trying to calm my shaking body, when I heard Dimitri call out to me. At first, I had thought it was through our bond, but I realized he was actually here at the cabin with me when I heard stomping on the stairs.

Moments later, he was there with me, which was not only a surprise but a relief. This morning seemed as if it was so much worse than any other, and yes, I was an adult and capable of taking care of myself, but at the moment, I really wanted my One. He was here, and I didn't know why, but I suddenly became even more emotional about the entire thing.

"Shh," he told me. "I'm here. What do you need for me to do for you?"

I couldn't answer, though, because my stomach was too busy revolting on me. It took several minutes before I was able to relax, and when I did, I felt something cool rubbing along the back of my neck. It took a moment to realize that Dimitri was gently wiping my neck with a wet cloth.

"That feels good."

"It is supposed to. Are you finished with the sickness?"

I wanted to say yes, but I couldn't. Not for certain. "Perhaps for now. I'm not sure about later."

"Later will not matter nearly as much as now. Let me get you up and back into bed after we clean you up."

Honestly, I wanted nothing more than to have a shower. I suddenly felt grubby, and it wasn't a refreshing feeling. "I want to shower," I told him.

Dimitri stopped while helping me stand. "Are you certain? Do you feel strong enough for one?"

I wasn't sure if I was or not, but either way, I still wanted a shower. "I don't know. But I feel icky."

Dimitri nodded, and after he helped me sit on the now closed toilet, he turned the water on in the shower. The bathroom was absolutely gorgeous, and I wondered, honestly, why did one need such a bathroom? We spent so little time in it, really.

"Did you need me to join you?"

I took a deep breath to try and calm my emotions. Why did he have to be so amazing and wonderful? I was feeling wretched, and he was being the sweetest.

"I love you," I blurted out. This absolutely was not the most romantic time to tell him, but I did. I loved my sexy and caring dragon. He was not who I was expecting when I'd thought about my One, but he was, without a doubt, exactly who I needed. Dimitri's smile had me grinning, despite how terrible I felt.

He cupped the side of my face. "I love you too. And I'll still love you if you don't want me in the shower with you. I know you are feeling poorly."

I couldn't help it; despite how horrid I felt, I laughed. It was exactly what I needed, but my stomach started protesting, so I stopped laughing. "I'm sorry," I told him as I grabbed my stomach.

"Why?"

"I'm not laughing at you or because you told me you loved me for the first time too. Just that despite me having just puked nothing into the toilet, you still love me and are offering to be near me."

Dimitri tilted his head to the side. "I love you. I will take care of you no matter what. If you are feeling poorly, I'll take care of you. It is what alphas do for their fated mates. Dedushka, to this day, still takes care of Yéye." Dimitri placed his hands on my sides and pulled me close. "I'll always take care of you."

"Yes, Dimitri. I would very much like for you to join me in the shower. I'm feeling absolutely terrible and not like myself in the least."

Dimitri pulled his shirt over his head and dropped it to the floor. Instead of removing his boots though, he tugged on the T-shirt I'd been sleeping in—one of his—and pulled it off me. Then, he reached for my sleep pants and pushed them down.

"You get into the shower. It's hot, and if you are feeling weak, sit on the seat. I'll be in as soon as I get my boots and pants off."

I nodded and did as instructed. I made it to the bench and sighed. My body felt achy, more so than it had been, so I sat on the stone bench. I was starting to feel dizzy, so I thought it was probably best that I wasn't standing, especially in a slippery environment.

"Would you rather have a bath?" Dimitri asked as he joined me in the shower.

I looked up at my One and wanted to cry. I couldn't tell you the last time I had done so, but in that moment, I was incredibly emotional and truly wanted to cry.

"I'm not sure. I think if I can just have you help me stand under the spray for a few minutes, I'll feel a little better."

Dimitri nodded, and then without even being asked, he pulled me to my feet and moved us to where we were both standing under the relaxing rain shower spray. I sighed and let my head fall forward onto his shoulder.

"I know you feel poorly. I talked to Master Edison a little while ago. He is going to be having Dr. King come by to see you. Dr. King will be bringing you the other tea, as well as checking you out for the pregnancy."

I nodded a little. I had assumed I would be getting the other tea. I'd heard about it from Drew, and although I didn't really fancy the idea of spending so much time sleeping, I was already sleeping quite a bit and still felt like shit. If I could sleep and feel better while awake, I would gladly guzzle the stuff.

"Do you know when he'll be here?" I asked quietly. I knew that Dimitri would hear me though, so I wasn't worried about it too much.

"Master Edison did not say. Just that he would have him check his schedule and then come to see you. I was sent home for at least the day to take care of you."

I lifted my head and gave Dimitri a tired smile. "That's so sweet. I feel bad though. I didn't want for you to have to take more time off work because of me."

Dimitri gave me a look. It wasn't really a glare, but it wasn't a smile like before. "You do realize I will get time off when the baby comes, do you not?" I nodded. "And did your brother not get time off to take care of his own One?"

He had me there. “Yes. I just feel bad. I have magic, and I could use it to clean myself and make myself a snack if I really needed to.”

Dimitri nodded. “Ja. I am here for the day. Let me take care of you. I was sent home because everyone at the council knows my dragon wouldn’t allow for me to stay there if you were in need of me.”

I shook my head. “What will your dragon do if you are out on assignment?” It was easy enough for someone like Sebastian. He could simply use magic to get himself home to Drew. But Dimitri didn’t have that ability.

“We all have at least one warlock or hellhound on our teams. Benjamin would make sure I was brought home to you if needed.”

“There are that many with magic?”

Dimitri nodded. “More have arrived. I did not get a chance to meet them yet, but I was told we now have more fae as well. The council is growing. More are becoming aware of its existence, and more assignments are happening. Some small, some much larger.”

“Will you be going out on assignments?” I had to ask. I knew he’d been frustrated because he hadn’t been on many since he’d become an enforcer. He’d been on a few shorter ones, but for the most part, Dimitri had filled a support position here at the council.

“If they send me, I will.” Dimitri rubbed up and down my back. “I will miss you while I am gone, but I came here to join the council and help others.”

I tried to smile again. “I will have support. I have lots of family here, and when Father joins Master Edison’s committee, Papa will be here. Don’t think for even a

moment that he won't be by as often as he can so he can visit with the baby." I had talked to him more than once since we'd come back from my very short trip to Madrid. He was keeping himself busy deciding what to bring and what to leave behind. It was going to be a drastic change for him, but Papa was more than ready for it.

"I will still miss you. Even knowing you have help here, that does not change the fact I will miss being here with you and our baby." Dimitri placed his hand on my lower stomach, which caused me to sigh. How was he so incredibly sweet?

"Do we need to talk about anything?" I asked.

"I do not know what you mean. About what?"

I shrugged. "Have you changed your mind about going back to work?"

"Did you wish for me to? We can easily find a cabin off the mountain if you would like to be closer to where your parents will be living. Even if I choose to leave the enforcers, we do not need to leave this cabin. It is ours for as long as we choose to live here."

I nodded. I knew I was being a bit irrational. Normally, I was very levelheaded and didn't have these rambling thoughts. I was completely blaming it on the pregnancy.

"Ignore me," I told him.

"I can do no such thing." Dimitri placed a finger under my chin and raised my head. When I looked up at him, I sighed.

"I think the lack of sleep, the ickiness I'm feeling, it's all making me irrational. I don't wish to leave. I know you love it here, and I do too. Even though I've only been

here a short time, I've always loved visiting Sebastian—even before he met Drew.”

“How about this...” Dimitri said. “We wait a month or two, then revisit this conversation. We'll see if we still wish to be here or if we feel it would be better if we went elsewhere.” I stared at Dimitri for a moment before nodding. “Good. Now, we need to get you cleaned up and then back into bed. I'll make you a tea and bring some crackers or something of that sort.”

I was all for that. Right now, tea sounded delightful. Crackers did as well. “That would be nice,” I told him. That was all it seemed to take for Dimitri to reach for the shampoo. He lathered my hair, and after he gently rinsed it, he took a clean cloth and ran it with bodywash over my body. There was absolutely nothing sexual about what Dimitri was doing. It was completely caring and nurturing, and by the time he was finished, I was completely relaxed despite the fact I still felt terrible.

“Did you want me to dry you? Or are you feeling up to doing it yourself?”

“I'll do it,” I told him. I was still feeling wretched, but my magic worked just fine. Yes, I could have used it to clean myself, but I wanted to stand under the spray and feel its relaxing capabilities rain down on me. With a little magical thought, I had not only myself but Dimitri dried off.

He suddenly seemed to be on alert and looked at me with urgency. “Would you mind dressing me? There is someone knocking on the door.”

My eyes widened, and seconds later, I had Dimitri redressed, and he took off running. I wasn't upset that he left me behind, although that was exactly what he had done. I dressed myself in clean pajama pants and another one of Dimitri's T-shirts and followed at a much slower pace.

I was just starting down the stairs when Dimitri appeared at the base of them with

someone else. I assumed it was Dr. King from the description I'd been given by both Sebastian and Drew. Unsure if I should come down or not, I decided to start that way, but when Dimitri rushed up to me, I stopped.

"You should lie down," he told me.

"I was going to rest on the couch. I know there are more things for you to do downstairs."

"Nyet. To the bed," Dimitri said. "You will be more comfortable, and if we are to have other visitors, then you will not be disturbed."

I smiled. He was once again right, but that didn't change the fact that I still wanted to be on the couch and near him if at all possible. Dimitri took the choice away from me when he carefully spun me on the stairs and stepped up to the rung below me. "Up you go," he whispered.

It didn't take long to go back up the three steps I'd managed, and once at the top, we went back to our bedroom. I heard the footsteps of a third person, and when I turned, I saw the other warlock.

"Hello. I'm Dr. King," he said in greeting. "Congratulations on your mating and upcoming baby."

"Thank you," I told him. "I wish I were meeting you under different circumstances though."

Dr. King chuckled. "Funny, they always say that." Dr. King gestured not to the bed but to the side of the room with the small sofa. "Shall we sit? I'm told you are experiencing sickness that goes beyond the usual inability to keep foods down."

I nodded but didn't really like the sound of that. "I guess that's the case," I told him. "On and off, even with drinking the tea regularly, I'm not feeling well. Just a bit ago, I woke up because my stomach decided to revolt." I sat, and when Dimitri stood off to the side, I looked up at him instead of at the doctor.

"And your other symptoms?"

When I stared directly at Dr. King, I noticed he was now sitting in a chair that wasn't ours. Warlocks could do that, but that wasn't what he was here for. "Aches. Weakness. Constantly tired. All the time. I cannot seem to get enough rest."

"He also gets dizzy spells."

I glanced up at Dimitri. "Oh yeah. Those too."

"Very good. What about eating? How is your appetite?" I made a face, and Dr. King chuckled. "I understand."

"I try. I have better luck with dry things. Crackers, toast, or just plain rolls or other breads."

Dr. King nodded. "Yes, they can tend to be calming to the stomach. We will get that all sorted though, and you will be able to keep other things down soon enough."

Dr. King held out his hand, and in it was a large mug of steaming liquid. I already knew it was the tea that would make me sleepy.

"We're going to start you on this tea three times a day. If needed, you can drink it up to four times a day. If it still doesn't help with the symptoms, we might have to try something else if you feel you need to."

“Such as?” Dimitri asked.

Dr. King focused on Dimitri. “There are certain meds that are often prescribed to human women when pregnant that can help with severe morning sickness. Luckily for us, whatever is in these particular tea leaves from the fae realm seems to be all that are needed in most cases. We will give this a try first before looking into other routes though.”

I could tell that Dimitri wasn’t fond of the idea of me taking any sort of medicine that humans normally took. I knew they wouldn’t have the same level of effectiveness on me as they did them, but there was no true danger to me if they were given to human women while pregnant, correct?

“I’ll gladly try the tea first,” I said as I took a sip. It tasted exactly like the other tea I had been drinking, so I didn’t quite understand the difference. “It tastes the same,” I stated.

“Yes. It is slightly different, I understand. I’m not sure other than it’s fae magic, I believe. One is more for upset stomach, nausea, and light pregnancy ailments. The other”—Dr. King indicated the mug in my hand—“is for much severe pregnancy issues.”

“How quickly will it work?” Dimitri asked.

Dr. King looked over at my One. “Previous omegas and carriers usually start to feel sleepy within half an hour of starting to drink it. I did wish to ask about dates—generalized, of course—for my notes for your file so we can know when to schedule scans and when to expect your little one.”

I swallowed the tea I’d been drinking before nodding. I glanced up at Dimitri, who grinned and then winked. “He had his fertile period from November thirteenth to the

seventeenth.”

“Very good.” Dr. King was suddenly holding a tablet. “I would say your due date would be around May eleventh. I know that seems like a very long time from now, but it will be here before you know it.” Dr. King held out a book that he definitely wasn’t holding when he arrived. It wasn’t at all a surprise to me though. “Here is a pregnancy book for omegas and carriers. My colleague and friend Constantine put it together because human pregnancy books simply don’t cover a lot of the things that omegas and carriers go through.”

I took the book and set it beside me on the seat. “Thank you.”

“It’s my pleasure. As for a scan, if you wish for me to do it in the office, I recommend sometime in the first half of February. Call the office and see about getting that scheduled. Also, I can do the scan here if you prefer, although those appointments are a bit longer and can take more time to schedule.”

Dimitri seemed like he was a bit lost. I chuckled. “No, I’m good with coming to the clinic. It will most likely be good for me to get out of the cabin anyway.” I had no idea how long I would feel as I did or how long I would need to drink the tea, but if I spent the next several weeks sleeping, I was all for it if that meant our baby was healthy and my body was finally on board with being pregnant.

“You have my number on the card in the front of the book. The number to the clinic is on there as well. Call if you have any questions at all. I have no idea when or if Cecil will be back, but he just had twins a couple weeks ago, so it won’t be for some time. Todd tries, and he mostly gets things correct, and I haven’t missed any messages yet, so perhaps we’re getting there.”

I couldn’t help but smile. I’d had more than one assistant who just never got there and had to be let go. But others, they struggled at first but eventually made it.

“Any questions from either of you?”

I shook my head.

“How do we get more tea?” Dimitri asked.

“I apologize. It’s already down in the kitchen. It is in the blue tin, and directions on how to make it are on it.”

“Thank you,” I told him. I realized I’d drunk over half of it, and although I wasn’t feeling amazing, I was starting to feel better. “I think I’ll grab some crackers and then take a nap. I know Dimitri is going to fuss over me if I don’t.” I looked up at my One with what I hoped was love in my gaze.

“I cannot help but worry. You are my lyubimyy, my love, my mate. And you carry our child. My dragon and I need to ensure you are well taken care of.”

I was smiling when I looked back at Dr. King. “They are all like that. Call if you need anything. If I don’t answer, I’m most likely with a patient if it’s during business hours. Leave a message, or text if it’s an emergency.”

“Thank you again,” I said.

“Ja. Spasibo.”

Dr. King smiled as he stood. “I’ll see myself out,” he said. “No need to follow me down.” He held out his hand to Dimitri, and after they shook, he held his hand out to me. In it was a plate of various different crackers and biscuits. I grinned and took it.

“Congratulations. We’ll get you through this. It just takes time sometimes.”

I nodded. Dr. King walked out of the bedroom, leaving me with my One and the plate of goodies he'd given me. I wondered how many of them I would be able to keep down because despite not feeling well, I actually was hungry. I picked up a plain-looking cracker and decided to see.

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Chapter 15

Dimitri

I felt a sense of déjà vu when I ran into Reinhold once more on my way into the council building.

“Fancy meeting you here.”

I chuckled. “I seem to recall meeting you like this a week ago,” I replied. This time, it was me who swiped my badge and input my code. When the door clicked, Reinhold pulled it open, and in we went.

“Good morning,” Slater said. “Hey, the two of you came in together last week, didn’t you?”

“We did,” Reinhold said. “With both of us living in the same area now, it’ll probably happen more often.”

“Huh. I didn’t think about that.” Slater scanned my badge before handing it back. “Have a good day,” he told us. We walked off, both of us heading toward the cafeteria it seemed.

“How is Caspian feeling? I heard from his brother that he was having some issues with pregnancy sickness.”

I sighed. “He’s doing better but still feels poorly at times. I am thankful he can finally

keep food down. He sleeps a lot though, and although I was given an extra week to spend with him, I feel like I didn't do anything helpful."

Reinhold offered a smile. "I remember those days. Chase hates tea. To this day won't drink it still. He did drink the magical tea though. That was the only way he kept anything down, I'm sure."

"Did it get better?"

"Eventually. I know that despite him feeling better toward the middle of his pregnancy, he still had days to the end that he didn't feel well."

I sighed. That was not what I wanted for my mate. "I thank you for being honest. We have gotten a lot of 'it will get better' from others. I have seen it firsthand how he is able to keep more things down now, but he is sleeping almost continually."

"Yeah, that happens. It'll be like that in the last trimester as well. But by then, he'll have a bump at minimum and will be irritable because he's over being pregnant."

I sighed. "I believe he is already there. He says he's happy to be having a baby with me, but I know he's not exactly thrilled with how things are going. Not that I blame him. I would not like to be sick all the time either. I would, though, for him and our child."

Reinhold smiled. "We all would. I would do the same for Chase as well. Unfortunately, all we can do is cater to their needs and try to spoil them as best as we can."

I nodded. "I try. I feel bad though. I left this morning, much like last week, and he was still sleeping. I did make him a tea before I left though. He drank it, then promptly went back to sleep. I left some crackers for him for when he wakes. I do not

know what else to do for him though.”

Reinhold shook his head. “Not much you can when he’s at that stage, I don’t believe. Love him, take care of him, try to be supportive and understanding.”

“I am all of those things,” I told him as we entered the cafeteria. We made our way over to the buffet line, and after grabbing trays and plates, we started piling them high with food.

“Did you not eat because you didn’t want to upset your mate with the scent? Or some other reason?” Reinhold asked.

I looked at the other dragon’s equally piled-high plate of food and filled bowl and raised an eyebrow at him from across the buffet table.

“Really? You have a mate at home as well. Yet you are eating here.”

Reinhold snorted. “Yes, but I did eat at home. Well, sort of. The twins were fussy, and when Da arrived, he sent me on my way.” Reinhold stopped to shrug and grab a few more pieces of bacon. “I was in the middle of eating my breakfast when he all but pushed me out the door. I’m not sure why, but I wasn’t going to argue.”

I shook my head. “I left without eating because I didn’t want to upset Caspian’s stomach with the scents. Unfortunately for me, cooking meat seems to be an issue for him.”

Reinhold’s eyes widened. “All meat? Or just certain ones?”

“So far, all.”

Reinhold looked offended on my behalf. “Please tell me you aren’t serious. I’ve

heard of egg aversions and sometimes certain meats. But all?”

I nodded. “I wish I wasn’t, but sadly, it is true. I cannot cook meat without him feeling sick. Sometimes he gets sick, so I have just taken to not cooking. Whatever he eats, I’m happy with. If we’re eating nothing but crackers and fruit, then that’s what we eat.”

Reinhold shook his head. “Chase was never that bad. I feel for you. I hope he’s feeling better soon and you can get back to eating. At least if you’re here, you can eat full meals.”

I nodded. Caspian felt terrible about it all, but I wasn’t going to have any of that. It was outside of his control, and I absolutely did not blame him for anything.

It got to the point where I couldn’t fit anything else on my plate or tray, so I left the buffet line and went to the drink station. After I poured myself a large mug of coffee, I went over to an empty table. I was a bit surprised to see so many in the cafeteria, but the council was growing, and that meant more single enforcers.

I had just sat down and reached for the coffee when another tray was placed on my table. I looked up at Reinhold as he sat on the chair across from me.

“Is this all right?” he asked. “I guess I should have asked before I simply invited myself to your table.”

“Ja.” I took a drink of coffee and closed my eyes. When I opened them, it was to find Reinhold staring at me. He chuckled and then picked up his fork and started eating. I did the same but at a somewhat slower pace. I was busy looking around, noticing that there were quite a few new people in the cafeteria who I hadn’t ever seen before.

“Who are they?” I asked as I indicated the group of eight that were sitting over at a

pair of tables they had pushed together.

“Those are the new fae alphas that joined the council. They seem nice enough. I know they feel a bit out of place and they pretty much stick to themselves. But I’ve not heard anything but good things about any of them. I’ve met them in passing; we were all introduced to them, and they seem nice enough. A few brought family with them, but I’ve not met anyone outside those eight.”

I nodded while looking around. I happened to notice another new face, this one sitting with Raiden. I could ask him once we were in our office since he was on my team. He looked to be just as tall as Raiden and his brother while sitting, so I had to wonder if he was a gargoyle or dragon.

“How’s my favorite brother-in-law,” Sebastian said as he suddenly sat down beside me. “More importantly, how’s my brother? I’m surprised you’re at work. But since our fathers are here now, I imagine that Papa will be by today to fuss over him.”

I looked over at my mate’s brother, my brain still processing what he’d just said. “Arturo is here?”

Sebastian nodded. “You didn’t know?”

I shook my head. “I do not think that Caspian knew they were arriving. He hasn’t talked to your parents in a couple of weeks. When he is awake, it is usually only for short spurts, and he eats something small before falling asleep again.”

Sebastian’s face showed concern but also something more. Understanding, perhaps? “Drew was sick like that. It only lasted around a month though, which was a good thing for him, I guess. I’m not sure how long it’ll be like that for Cas though. How is he doing? Seriously.”

“Not bad, considering. In the week since Dr. King saw him, he has gotten ill only once. He sleeps a lot though. The tea makes him incredibly tired, and although he tries to stay awake to spend time with me, he usually falls asleep within half an hour of drinking it.” I didn’t mind. I spent a lot of time sitting near him. My dragon wanted to watch over our mate, and I wasn’t going to argue with him. “Your fathers are here?”

“They arrived a couple days ago. We’ve seen them for supper, but beyond that, they’re still working on getting settled into their new place. Father was supposed to start this morning, as far as I know, so I figured that Papa would be up here at some point to check in not only on Drew and Flora but Caspian as well.”

I wasn’t sure what to think about all of that information. I knew they were moving to Treasure Ridge. Arturo had mentioned that when we were in Madrid. I had not had any contact with him since though, and I knew that Caspian’s had been very little.

“Does he know where our cabin is?” I asked, suddenly wondering if he would even know where to look.

“You’re not in mated enforcer housing?” Sebastian asked. He looked up at someone, and when I followed his gaze, I found Benjamin walking around the table and setting his tray in the spot beside Reinhold. I glanced at Reinhold, who smirked.

“You’re the one who mated into a family of warlocks. They just help themselves to wherever it seems.”

“Welcome to the family,” Benjamin said. “We have to have a get-together. My dads are itching to welcome you to the family, and you, of course, need to invite your grandparents.”

“I will talk to Yéye.”

“Not Alpha Sergei?”

I shrugged. “Dedushka will come if Yéye tells him there is a dinner. Does your family not work like that?” I couldn’t imagine Rainier not doing what his One, étienne, had planned for them.

Sebastian touched my arm. I looked back over at my brother-in-law. “Ja?”

“You didn’t answer my question. Do you not live in mated enforcer housing? I thought the two of you moved to the other side of the neighborhood or something.”

I shook my head. “Your brother fell in love with my cabin. We live next to him,” I said as I pointed to Reinhold.

When Sebastian looked at Reinhold, the other dragon was chuckling. “You can’t blame him. The cabins for the thunder are a bit more isolated, and some of them have amazing views.”

“You don’t live near us?”

“He’s a fifteen-, twenty-minute walk, Seb,” Benjamin said. “And it’s not like you can’t pop yourself and Drew over there in a blink.”

Sebastian scowled. “But I thought Caspian would live near us. Why did he have to live elsewhere?”

“It’s not far, Sebastian,” Reinhold said. “Nowhere on the mountain is, really. And you’re a warlock, like Benjamin said. Just use magic to go over to visit.”

“Your brother looked at a house with me. It was next to yours,” I told Sebastian. “He liked the cabin my family had for me more.” I was a bit surprised about it as well, but

if Caspian wanted to live in the cabin, obviously, that was where we would live.

I went back to eating my breakfast, and when Benjamin noticed, he gave me a sympathetic look. “I was there before. Probably will be again if and when Eli becomes pregnant again.”

I nodded while eating my eggs and sausage. “I did not wish to wake Caspian with the scent of cooking food when I could just as easily eat here. The scent of all meat cooking has made him ill so far. I am happy to forego eating it at the house for his comfort.”

Sebastian touched my arm again, and I looked at him, then at where his hand was touching me, and then back up at my mate’s brother. They were certainly a touchy family. I, of course, didn’t mind Caspian touching me at any point in time, but it was going to take some time to get used to the rest of his family doing so as well.

“What do you mean?” Sebastian asked finally. He dropped his hand, and I took another bite of my food before answering.

“Your brother cannot handle the scent of cooking meat at the moment. All of it makes him ill to his stomach, and he must rush off to the bathroom. We have tried all meats, and they all have the same reaction from him.”

Sebastian’s mouth opened a bit. Benjamin shrugged. “Eli couldn’t handle the scent of a lot of things when he was pregnant with the twins. I imagine it will be the same the next time he gets pregnant.” Benjamin pointed his fork at Sebastian. “Drew was sick. You know what it’s like.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t think Caspian would be.”

“Why?” Reinhold asked. “He’s the carrier and can just as easily have pregnancy

sickness as the next one.” Reinhold looked my way and shook his head.

“What does that have to do with anything?” Sebastian asked.

“Eli was sick too,” Benjamin added. “And we all know Drew was.”

“Yeah, and?”

“Just because he’s your brother doesn’t mean you should have expected him to not be sick,” Benjamin said. “But Caspian is doing what he must in order to have a child with his One.”

Sebastian looked as if he was going to argue but then stopped.

“I would gladly carry the baby for my mate if I could. I am trying to keep him as comfortable as I can, but there is only so much I can do. My dragon watches over him, and we enjoy having time with him even if he is sleeping. But I cannot take away the fact that he has pregnancy sickness. I am eating here, though, because I do not wish to cause him any more discomfort than possible,” I told Sebastian.

“I do understand.” Sebastian sighed. “I just never thought of Caspian as being sick. He’s my older brother. He’s always been so commanding and just...more. It is hard to put him as being ill. I understand it’s part of it. Trust me, I do. Our fathers really struggled with the fact that I was busy taking care of Drew when we first were mated. Drew was sick, and I was too busy taking care of him to let them know I even met my One.” He looked directly at me. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to imply that you had done something wrong. I just...thinking about Caspian being anything but my older brother who was incredibly full of life and this powerful warlock is difficult, I guess.”

I nodded at him. “I understand,” I told him. I did, to some extent. I hadn’t known Caspian long, but what I had seen of his memories and had experienced firsthand

before pregnancy sickness set in told me that he was a lot like Sebastian was describing.

I took another bite but wished I hadn't when a tall man walked up to the table. Reinhold stared at him while Benjamin and Sebastian grinned. The man—warlock now that he was closer—glanced between me and Reinhold, his gaze settling on me. I knew from scent alone that this had to be my father-in-law, which meant this was Benedict. I'd not gotten to meet him when Caspian and I had been in Madrid. Caspian had thought to go into the firm for partial days in order to turn things over, but after learning news from Arturo, he decided he was simply finished and was going to move his things in a blink and spend more time here with me. I wasn't going to complain.

"You must be my son's One," he said.

"Father, this is most certainly Dimitri. We were just discussing how Cas is doing."

"Yes, how is my oldest? I was a bit put out to learn the two of you were in Madrid but did not stop by the firm for so much as a hello."

I looked up at Benedict and nodded slowly before I picked up my cup of coffee and took a long sip.

"Caspian is doing as well as he can. The tea the doctor has him drinking causes him to sleep quite a bit. A lot of scents upset his stomach, so we simply avoid them. As for us not stopping in, that was Caspian's choice. He had a change of plans after he talked to his omega father."

Benedict was about to speak, but a hush came over the cafeteria, causing most everyone to glance around. Immediately, I saw why: Dedushka was quickly making his way across the room toward our table.

There was a sigh, and I turned to look at Sebastian. “What?”

“I was enjoying breakfast.”

“And?”

“He’s going to cause a whole thing.”

I rolled my eyes. “As if your father isn’t?” I asked. I turned and looked back up at Benedict before I slid my chair back and stood just as Dedushka arrived at our table. Immediately, I found myself pulled into a hug, and greetings were exchanged.

“Dedushka, this is my father-in-law,” I said as I indicated Benedict. Benedict looked back and forth between us before his gaze finally settled on his son.

“Yes, Father, Caspian’s grandfather-in-law is the created dragon. Have you truly not spoken to him at all?”

“No,” Benedict said.

Dedushka nodded to Benedict before looking back my way. “Your parents are here. They are excited to meet Caspian.”

I groaned. Yes, it was going to be a complete shitstorm. Everyone was now here, yet Caspian was still quite ill.

“He is not up for it,” I said. “Perhaps in a few more weeks, but at the moment, he is spending around twenty hours a day sleeping, if not more.” I could tell that Benedict wanted to say something but held off.

“It can wait. Whenever your mate is ready. But your parents would like to see you

when you feel up for it.”

I nodded. “Please have Yéye tell them I will see them as soon as I can. I will try for today, but I do not know how things will go with Caspian. He was still sleeping when I left.”

“Chin can come by to see to him. Perhaps he will be able to help. He knows remedies that have worked in the past.”

I nodded. “I will see what he thinks. Thank you, Dedushka.”

“It is what family does,” he told me before he turned to Benedict. “Welcome to the council, Benedict. I have heard good things about you, and if your son is any indicator, you have raised an amazing man, so I would hope that is a reflection of your own character.”

“Alpha Sergei, I appreciate it. My One and I are thrilled to not only be near our sons but for the new chance here at the council.”

Dedushka and Benedict walked away, talking about the council, among other things, and I told myself I would have to thank him for redirecting Benedict’s attention. I sat back down, more than accepting that my breakfast was now going to be cold, but I found it to be steaming hot still. I glanced at Sebastian, who was busy staring after his father and my grandfather. When Benjamin caught my eye, he smiled.

“Cold eggs are never good, unless they are in a salad.”

“Thank you,” I told him. He nodded at me, and we went back to eating breakfast. There would be time for further discussions about things later. For now, Benjamin was right. Cold eggs weren’t all that great, and I needed to finish mine before they became cold once more.

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Chapter 16

Caspian

I didn't mind sleeping. I rather enjoyed it after spending so many years getting too little of it. But I was a bit over sleeping so much and not having "time" with my One. Yes, Dimitri was almost always nearby, unless he was at work, but it did no good when he was with me and I was simply slumbering the day away.

Immediately, I knew he was at work when I woke up. Not only did the house feel empty, but my sexy dragon knew exactly when I rolled over and realized he was not in the house.

"Good morning, lyubimyy. I left you tea on your bedside table. It is most likely cold at this point, but you should be able to fix that with no issues. How are you feeling?"

I sat up and looked around the room, hoping to clear the fog from my brain a bit. "I'm feeling better. I think I'll sit outside on the back deck for a bit today." I looked toward the window and noticed how bright it was outside. "What time is it?"

"Almost eleven. I'm in a meeting that will be ending shortly. Do you need me to come home?"

That explained why it was so bright outside. Dimitri was absolutely the sweetest, but I was feeling all right and knew he needed to do something other than watch over me while I slept. "I'm good for now." I tossed the covers back and moved to the edge of the bed. My stomach didn't revolt, so I considered my options. "I'm going to have a

shower and then drink my tea on the back deck.”

I was steady on my feet and walking toward the bathroom when Dimitri dropped the news on me.

“Your fathers are here,” he told me. I reached for the doorframe, trying to steady myself.

“What?”

“I met Benedict this morning. He seemed nice enough. I don’t think he quite knew what to expect of me. Dedushka walked in to welcome me back and then left with your father, which was so very kind of him. I got a chance to finish my breakfast.” Dimitri was silent for a moment before he continued. “Oh, your brother says hello, and he would like to see you when you are up for it. As would Drew.”

I smiled at that. “Maybe in a day or two if I wake up feeling like this for the next couple of days?” I honestly was feeling better than I had in a while, and I had to wonder if I was truly turning a corner or if it was false hope.

“All on your schedule. My parents are in the area as well. They are excited to meet you, but again, all on your schedule. It can be a week from now or a month or longer. They are simply here to see us and offer support if needed.”

I glanced back into the bedroom at the mug sitting on the bedside table before I shook my head. It was certainly a bit overwhelming, but I knew that guzzling the tea simply to avoid thinking about everyone who was here to see us wasn’t the answer.

“I’m going to hop into the shower. I’ll see how I’m feeling in a bit and let you know.”

“No rush at all. I love you, Caspian. We do everything on your schedule because you

are the one that is carrying our baby. You are the one that isn't feeling up to visitors."

I smiled again. He really was the absolute sweetest. I had no doubt that could change in a blink. Not toward me but to someone else who happened to be a threat.

I took care of my morning needs, then stepped into the shower area. The water was steaming and felt amazing on my body. I didn't know I could ever feel this way until I became pregnant. But here we were. I stood under the spray for a few minutes before I went through the routine of cleaning myself. It took only minutes to complete, and then, after relaxing under the spray again, I realized I should get something into my stomach before I became ill.

I was dry as I stepped out of the shower, and before I made it halfway across the bathroom, I had myself dressed with a bit more magic.

I picked up the mug of cold tea and used more magic to heat it. I stared down into the brown liquid and wondered if it was possible at this point that the other tea would be enough. Should I give it a try? The worst thing that could happen was that I ended up sick again. Was it worth the chance? Halfway down the stairs, I decided that, yes, it was most certainly worth the chance. Once I was in the kitchen, I poured out the tea that Dimitri had made for me and placed the mug in the sink. I grabbed a clean mug and one of the other tea bags and then poured steaming hot water from the kettle over it.

It was December, and I knew it was bitterly cold outside, but that wasn't going to stop me from enjoying the sunshine I could see. I had myself bundled and was stepping out onto the deck within moments. The breeze was light, the sun bright, and both seemed to help rejuvenate my soul. Dimitri had insisted on patio heaters because, unlike him, I couldn't keep myself warm from fire within myself. I was grateful for those at the moment and had them going before I even sat down on the lounge chair.

Despite my wool coat and stocking cap, it didn't take long for the cold to creep in. Even with the heaters, my body simply wasn't used to these much cooler temperatures. A little more magic had a thick blanket across my lap, and I leaned back to enjoy my time outside. I took a sip of the tea and smiled at the subtle, sweet, and fruity flavor. I had just taken a bite of a sweet cracker when I saw something shimmer off to my right.

When I turned my head in that direction, I didn't see anything or anyone. Thinking it was just my eyes playing tricks on me, I shrugged and shook my head. As I took another sip of tea, I most certainly saw something shimmering, and it was now in front of me. I didn't feel threatened, even when it seemed to move closer.

When a sudden warmth felt as if it wrapped around me, I smiled. "Well, hello there. And who might you be?" Whatever or whoever it was was certainly something. Now that it was closer, I could see a bit of its aura, and I had to wonder as to who or what it belonged to. I felt it give me what I would only classify as a gentle hug before it let go and then moved several feet away. "Do you have a name?" Whatever it was simply hung out beside me for a moment or two before it appeared to move away. "You don't have to go. I won't hurt you," I told it. It stopped moving for a moment but then suddenly simply disappeared.

I sat up, wondering where it had gone and why it seemed so spooked. Then I heard it. I looked around but saw nothing. I was just about to stand up and go inside when I heard someone call out.

"Hello? Are you still there, Caspian?"

I realized whoever it was obviously knew who I was, but since I only knew a few people on this mountain, I had no clue as to who it could be. I didn't recognize the voice.

“I am,” I called out.

“May I come up?”

I wasn't too worried about it. I was a warlock, and whoever it was happened to be on the mountain, so they most likely weren't a threat. “Sure,” I called back.

Moments later, black hair came into view, then the most adorable man. He was a bit older, and his resemblance to Dimitri told me immediately who it was. I was looking at Chin. I smiled at my One's grandfather.

“Hi there,” I told him. “Are you Chin?”

His smile lit up his already lovely face. “Yes. I do apologize for dropping in like this. Sergei said that Dimitri told him you still weren't feeling the best. I came to see if you needed anything or if I could help in any way.”

That was so incredibly sweet of him. “Would you like to join me?” I asked, indicating the other chair. There was also a glider that sat two, but I hadn't chosen it because Dimitri wasn't here with me.

“I do not wish to impose. I only came over because I know that Dimitri is back at work and you were alone. I realize you are a warlock and can most likely take care of yourself better than I can, but I did wish to come by and check on you.”

“That is very kind of you. Please sit and join me. I have been wanting to meet you and Alpha Sergei for some time. My body just seems to have other plans.”

Chin sat, and I could tell he was studying me. I didn't blame him. I was mated to his grandson, and of course, he was most likely curious about who the fates had chosen for one of his.

“Can I offer you something to drink?” I asked before taking a sip of the tea. “We have things other than the pregnancy tea, I promise.”

Chin chuckled. “I completely understand the need for the tea. I did not have the luxury of its benefits while pregnant with any of mine.” Chin held up his hand. “I made do with ginger tea, and there is a pressure point just here,” he said, indicating a spot on his arm. “If you rub it in a circular motion, it can also help reduce nausea.”

“Seriously?” I asked. I set the tea over on the table that was between us and held out my arm. My coat was bulky, but I wasn’t going to let that stop me.

“May I?” Chin asked, holding out his hands.

“Of course.” I wasn’t sure what he was asking, but I wasn’t going to tell him no, no matter what. Chin moved over to where I was and sat on the lounge by my knees. He reached for my arm, and when he pushed the sleeve back, he touched the inside of my wrist and then applied pressure with his thumb just before it started moving.

“You apply pressure and rub for a couple of minutes on each wrist. It should help with the nausea as well.”

I closed my eyes and sighed. There was just something about what Chin was doing that I found relaxing. When the pressure and his hand were suddenly gone, I opened my eyes to find him smiling at me.

“Sorry. That was nice though. Thank you.”

“You are most welcome. I can rub the other one if you wish.”

I did, but I wasn’t going to impose more than I felt I already had. “You don’t need to. I will certainly give this a try and see if it helps.” I sighed. “I’ve been drinking the tea

that knocks me out. It seems to be working well, but I miss spending time with Dimitri. I'm only awake long enough to drink more tea and fall asleep, it seems."

"Your pregnancy sickness is more on the severe side."

I nodded. "Yes," I said and sighed again. "I didn't expect to be the one getting pregnant, actually. I don't mind though, and I adore your grandson, don't think I don't."

Chin smiled. "We all know how much he loves you. It is good to know that is reciprocated. I can understand the surprise though," he said. "With you being the carrier, that is. You aren't the first warlock or vampire to surprisingly be a carrier when you discovered your mate in an alpha. Even Ambrosius was surprised when he met his beloved." Chin chuckled. "Yet another dragon." He touched his chin. "I wonder if the fates have a thing with putting unsuspecting vampires and warlocks with dragon alphas."

I knew the shock showed on my face because Chin chuckled while nodding his head. "Please, I need to know that story. Seriously?"

"Yes. It's a bit tragic in the beginning. He had a beloved a long time ago. Most likely around the same time the rest of the created ones were gifted their perfect other halves. But Ambrosius's seemed to have a fear of being bitten. He ran away before they could claim one another, never to be seen again."

My mouth dropped open before I caught myself.

"Yes," Chin said. "That wasn't even really the most tragic part. Instead of being gifted a new beloved, Ambrosius spent centuries alone. He helped others find their beloveds, helped them through trying times, taught them what he needed to, all while being alone. It wasn't until he arrived here at the council that the fates realized that

one of the created ones had been overlooked. Ambrosius was given a mate who could match his needs.” Chin chuckled. “He was given an alpha that most certainly doesn’t have issues with being bitten.”

“A dragon alpha?”

Chin was still smiling. “Yes. Ambrosius’s beloved is Aleric and Conrad’s youngest son. They first settled this mountain with Aleric’s parents.”

That was certainly an interesting story. “They are happy?”

Chin nodded. “The love you can see between them is undeniable. If you didn’t know the story of them, one would certainly believe they had been together just as long as the rest of us.”

I couldn’t seem to stop smiling. “That’s so incredibly lovely.” I sighed. “Are there more? More dragon and warlock or vampire pairings?”

Chin nodded. “Not in the council. Not until you and Dimitri. But there are others. We have a few warlocks in our own family. It happens.”

I vaguely remembered something about that from Dimitri’s memories. It was a distant cousin or something along those lines. None of his uncles were mated to a warlock, but perhaps one of their children? Or grandchildren? I couldn’t recall at the moment. I’d not had a whole lot of time to be able to sort my way through Dimitri’s memories.

“Would you like tea? Coffee?” I asked again. “You’re sitting out here in the cold, talking to me. Or perhaps you would prefer to go inside? I could make us a snack? Or a meal? It’s almost time for the midday meal, is it not?”

Chin shook his head. "I am perfectly fine, but I appreciate the offer. It is almost time for lunch, and I usually join Sergei at the council. Would you like for me to get you something?" Chin asked. "I realize you can use magic to get whatever you need, but perhaps I can help with something for you?"

"That really is very kind. I am going to have some crackers, drink my tea, and probably have a nap on the sofa. I'm not drinking the sleepy tea, but I have a feeling that no matter, my body is simply too used to sleeping all of the time, and I'll end up passed out in the living room," I told him. "If you happen to see Dimitri, can you tell him you stopped by and that I'm doing fine? He checks in with me frequently, but I'm always sleeping, it seems, and I'm afraid I'll be sleeping again when he tries to check in next."

Chin smiled. "If he's not in a meeting, I can make sure I stop by to see him and let him know I was here to check on you and that you were doing well."

I grinned back. "Thank you. I really hope to be feeling better soon. I've wanted to meet not only you and Alpha Sergei but Dimitri's parents as well. He told me they were here, and although I'm not exactly feeling up for a long visit with a lot of people just yet, I hope I will be soon." I missed being around people. Most of all, I missed spending time with Dimitri. I knew this was only temporary, at least that was my hope, but I wasn't sure I would be able to go on like this for an extended period.

"Everyone is thrilled for you and Dimitri. I couldn't tell you who is more so, but just know that his parents are excited to welcome you into the family. As is Sergei."

Chin stood, and if I had been feeling better, I would have stood with him, despite the fact that he held up his hands when I started to lean forward. "Please don't disturb your comfort. I truly understand the need for comfort when pregnant, and you seem to be most comfortable in your little cocoon with your blanket and heaters."

I looked up at the heaters as Chin did. “Yes. Your grandson insisted on them since I was so drawn to the deck here. I have a gorgeous balcony in Madrid, but the temperatures there aren’t quite so drastic, and I can use it year-round. Dimitri didn’t mind beyond the fact that I would be cold here, so heaters it was.”

Chin smiled. “He loves you.”

“I know. I love him too. More than I thought I would love someone. I’ve heard stories about how the love of your fated mate is indescribable, but until Dimitri, until I experienced it myself firsthand, I didn’t know what to expect.”

“From experience, it only grows as time goes on.” Chin started toward the stairs. “I won’t keep you longer. I only wanted to stop in and see if I could help in any way. I very much look forward to getting to know you better, Caspian. Please take care, and don’t hesitate to reach out to us if you should need anything. I am almost always available if you should need me.”

I smiled. “Thank you. I wish I was a better host.”

Chin shook his head. “You are exactly as you should be, and don’t let anyone else tell you different or make you feel guilty because you aren’t feeling the greatest. Your body is going through a lot of changes, and you are growing a new life. You get to skip family functions if you feel like it.”

My grin grew. I was going to like Chin, I was sure. “Thank you. I hope to see you again soon.”

Chin nodded at me. “You are most welcome. I do hate to run, but I should go before Sergei starts bugging me, wondering where I am.”

Chin turned and walked down the stairs. I stared off into the distance for a moment

before I reached for my tea. It had cooled considerably, but that was easily enough fixed. I had it steaming once again with a wiggle of my fingers. A few crackers to go with it, and I was a happy warlock snuggled under my blanket on the deck of the gorgeous cabin I got to share with my One. The only thing missing was Dimitri, but he would be home in a few hours. Perhaps I would be feeling well enough to spend some waking hours with him. Wouldn't that be lovely?

Chapter 17

Dimitri

DIMITRI 17

Once we finished our breakfast, Benjamin and I walked to our office together. On the way there, he filled me in on everything I'd missed over the past several weeks.

"So many new enforcers."

"Yes. They are needed though. There are a lot of enforcers that haven't been sent out on many assignments, and the council is trying to change that."

I raised an eyebrow. I was one of those. I'd been on exactly one assignment, and it had been a weekend trip to a somewhat local pack to deal with an alpha that was trying to overthrow the current alpha. It had gotten to the point that the encroaching alpha had threatened the standing alpha's family, and the council decided to step in after help was requested.

"Yes, I know. You are one of the many who haven't been given the number of assignments that you are due. They're working on it. But I have to agree with the council that the jungle in Colombia was no place for anyone who didn't have magical powers. Even we struggled a bit down there, and I wouldn't wish that assignment on anyone."

I'd read the briefing on the assignment. I'd heard about the recovery of some of the

survivors that were rescued. And I knew that it had been a truly horrible situation. But that wasn't the only assignment.

Before we could even sit down at our desks, Briggs came into the office. "Conference room three," he said. "Oh, hey, Dimitri. Are you back now?"

I nodded at the wolf shifter. "Caspian is feeling a bit better, and he'd insisted I come to work since I was only sitting around watching him sleep."

Briggs grinned. "I don't know. I would think that any alpha wouldn't mind watching over their mate who was pregnant. Sleeping or not."

I shook my head. "I had no issues with watching over him. He felt bad for it though, so I am here. I do not mind either way. I only wish for him to be happy."

We followed Briggs out of the office and met up with Raiden on the way. He was making his way toward our office, but when he saw the three of us going in the opposite direction, he turned around without a thought and simply joined us.

"How is mated life treating you?" he asked me.

"Good. I know it is like a broken record, but I couldn't ask for a better mate. Caspian, although we haven't gotten to spend a whole lot of time actually together, he has been incredibly loving when he is awake."

Raiden nodded. "I understand that. Alexander was so sick. And then during the delivery, I..." He shook his head.

"But you have Rowan, and that makes the two of you happy, no?"

Immediately, there was a smile on Raiden's face. That was all the answer I needed.

We arrived at the conference room Briggs had mentioned, and when we entered, I was a bit surprised to see so many others in there. Not that others weren't supposed to have assignments as well. Not that this meeting was going to be about an assignment. One could hope, but so far, they hadn't been more than briefings.

"Please sit down," Master Edison said before he turned toward Master Ambrosius, who did not look happy at all.

"We're going to get started now that Benjamin's team is here," Master Ambrosius said. I glanced at the others on my team, wondering if we had truly been the ones to hold up the meeting.

"We're still waiting for Sergei and Benedict. We need the rest of Frederick's team as well," Master Edison said. He shook his head. But we didn't have long to wait because Dedushka and my father-in-law entered the room in front of a few others. Immediately, I saw that the man who came in directly behind Frederick was the other tall man who had been talking to Raiden during breakfast. I leaned over, my curiosity was too much to not ask.

"Who is right behind Frederick?"

"That is Vaughn, another new enforcer. He's a gargoyle from Washington state. He joined a few weeks ago while you were on leave. He seems nice. Ramsey and myself are trying to get to know him and make him feel welcome. He's pushing back a bit because we're mated, and he doesn't want to intrude."

"Now can we start?" Master Ambrosius asked.

"One more," Master Edison said as he held up a hand. Seconds later, another walked in beside Atticus. There was an audible growling noise, and it put me on edge, but the others around me didn't seem to be affected by it in the least. It took entirely too long

to realize it was coming from Master Ambrosius.

“What is he doing here?”

“Really? We can’t do this without their help. We’ve tried, and they have so graciously agreed to help us. Put your differences aside for the time being so we can find the Gallo cousins and possibly put this all behind us,” Master Edison said.

I leaned closer to Raiden again. “Who is that?”

He chuckled quietly.

“That’s Marcello. He belongs to the Vittone coven that is going to help us find the Gallo cousins. He’s Vincent Vittone’s second. For a second in a mafia family, he seems nice enough. I don’t know that I would fully trust him with my brother though. Definitely not with Alexander.”

I snorted and sat up. I could understand Raiden’s stance. Although I knew Caspian could more than handle himself because he had magical abilities, I still was protective of my mate and wouldn’t want him to be alone with the questionable vampire either.

“Knock it off,” Master Edison finally said. When he did, he put his hands on Master Ambrosius’s shoulders and moved him over to the other side of the room. That left Dedushka to move into his place and sigh.

“Meeting will start. We have news, which is why Marcello is here. He will be sharing the new information. Then we will be briefing everyone as to what assignment they will be receiving, and plans will be made for departures.”

That caught my attention. I had waited for months to be sent on assignment. Now, I was torn. Did I want to go? Caspian was carrying our child and was having sickness.

Who would take care of him if not me? It was my responsibility to look after my mate.

Dedushka sighed and shook his head as Master Edison and Master Ambrosius seemed to quietly argue off to the side of the room.

“Marcello?” he said and then stepped to the side. It didn’t go unnoticed to me that Dedushka moved to where he was standing in between Marcello and the created warlock and vampire.

“Thank you, Alpha Sergei. I won’t take too much of your time. We have a confirmed sighting of the Gallo cousins. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing if they are still in that area. They were spotted multiple times in Naples. There are a few islands just off the coast there, and it’s possible that they are using them as a base of sorts. Or they are simply popping around from place to place like always,” he told us.

I shared a look with Benjamin, who nodded. I wasn’t certain what that meant, but I would find out.

“If you don’t have them in hand, why are you even here?” someone asked from the other side of the room.

“We are working on getting men out to the islands to watch over things and to scout the areas. These take time and resources. We do not have an unlimited number of people we can send places. Despite Master Vincent’s agreement to help with your issue, we still have a family to watch over and businesses to run.”

“We appreciate everything you’ve helped with thus far,” Master Edison said, joining the meeting. Master Ambrosius was still standing against the wall, scowling. “We are ready to send teams to Italy and help look for them. Is there anything specifically you need so we can help you help us?”

Italy? I was possibly going to Italy? I checked in with Caspian and found him still sleeping, which was a relief. I knew my emotions were running around, and the last thing I wanted to do was cause my not-quite-well mate to worry.

“There is nothing, Master Edison,” said Marcello. “The help of your enforcers to search and watch out for them is more than enough. If our coven was larger, we wouldn’t ask even that. As it is, we cannot do everything and ask for that assistance so we can get this matter taken care of quickly.” Marcello looked over at Master Ambrosius. “The quicker this is solved, the sooner you no longer have to deal with any of us.” He sighed. “Or even acknowledge our existence.”

I couldn’t help but wonder about the entire situation. What had caused them to go the path they chose? Did they decide, or was it decided for them?

“And the other news?” Master Edison asked.

Marcello nodded. “Yes. We have discovered that Rocco had a business partner that nobody knew of. We are looking into it further, but there is confusion as to whether it was someone in his own coven or if they were the scapegoat in that entire situation. We hope to know more about that by the end of the week.”

“Very well,” Master Edison said. “Anything else?” he added after a few minutes.

“No, Master Edison. That is unfortunately all of the news I have for you at the moment. I need to get back to Italy at the earliest convenience in order to help Master Vittone with the entire situation as much as possible. I will be available to discuss things more if needed though,” he said.

Master Edison nodded before he looked toward the doorway. “Atticus will take you back to Italy. If you need anything or discover something vital, you have my number.”

“Of course.”

The pair left the meeting, and after the door clicked shut behind them, Master Edison waited only a moment before he turned back toward the rest of the room.

“To get right to it, we need to go to Italy. I understand and realize there are a few of you in here who might not wish to leave at the moment. That won’t be held against you if you choose to stay behind at the moment,” he said.

I covertly glanced around, knowing full well that I was one of them that they were referring to. My dragon was torn. We were here to help others. This was what I’d joined the council for. But at the same time, Caspian was pregnant, and his body didn’t seem to be responding well to the pregnancy. But I had Dedushka and Yéye here. And now, Caspian had his own parents here. They could all help watch after my mate if needed. Was this something I could do though? A month ago, I thought without a doubt I was ready to go out on assignment, and I was. Now? I wasn’t so sure.

“Your aura is one of someone who is struggling with conflict. I imagine it’s about Caspian and the upcoming assignment?” Benjamin asked.

I nodded. “How did you do it?”

He held up a finger, and I nodded. It could wait.

“We will be going to Italy in rotation. There will be two teams there starting tomorrow. After three days, another two teams will join, and the first two teams will stay an additional two days before returning for five days. It will be five-day rotations. Five days out, five days back. If it goes beyond ten days, a third set of teams will be sent. Any questions?”

“Where will we be staying?” someone asked. “And how do we know we can trust the vampires? They’re not exactly known for being the good guys.”

“You don’t trust them,” Master Ambrosius said from his position against the wall. “Make sure you are never alone with any of them. Vittone knows I will personally remove his head if he harms one of our enforcers, but that doesn’t mean he cares enough to watch out for any of you. Go into this assignment as if everyone except your fellow enforcers is an enemy.”

That sounded...stressful. It wasn’t anything I couldn’t handle. I’d seen a whole lot worse in my lifetime. That didn’t mean I wanted to continue to endure such things.

There was some quiet talking among the enforcers, and when I looked up at Master Edison, I found him staring our way. I wasn’t going to back out of my assignment. It was frustrating that I had spent so long just waiting to go anywhere, and now I was finally getting to. Now that I was mated and we had a baby on the way. It was incredibly vexing.

“Any other questions? It is always wise to take what Ambrosius has said to heart. Make it a rule. Even if you are only visiting a pack or den within the States here, make sure you are always on guard. That pack beta or den enforcer could seem like the friendliest person out there and the most helpful, but sometimes they have gotten so good at being deceiving that even we cannot pick up on it and are duped,” Master Edison told us.

“Do we know which teams will be going first and which are going second?” Benjamin asked.

“Yes,” Master Edison said. “Your team, Benjamin, is scheduled to leave in four days’ time. You will travel with Augustus’s team. Atticus’s team will be leaving tomorrow, as will Frederick’s. The other teams, if needed, will be Damien’s, as well as

Sebastian's. Warwick's and Carrington's will be on other assignments."

"Is Warwick back, then?" Benjamin asked.

"Not yet, but the rest of his team is available, and Dion has offered to come back and take the lead on that if and when needed. Also, everyone will have a new team member. We will be adding a fae to each team, and the hope is that you all will play nice and help guide them through these first few assignments. This isn't necessarily the best time to throw them in, but we're not given much choice. We had hoped they would be able to get a few more outings with fewer possibilities, but we need more than one who is able to utilize magical powers. We will be introducing you all to your new team members throughout the day. Anyone have other questions?" Master Edison looked around the room, and when nobody spoke up, he nodded. "Very well. Please don't wander far. We will be doing briefings for each team shortly."

"If Atticus's and Frederick's teams would stay, we will get right on their briefing," Dedushka said. The rest of us stood, and as we were leaving, we all noticed the new faces standing on the other side of the hallway, leaning against the wall. It had to be uncomfortable being new and from a completely different realm. I'd been new not too terribly long ago, and although I hadn't traveled nearly as far, I had spent a good deal of time feeling like an outsider. It hadn't taken long for me to understand that my fellow enforcers didn't know what to make of me. I was the created dragon's grandson, and nobody wanted to upset Dedushka.

I followed Benjamin, Raiden, and Briggs back to our office and found it already occupied by a familiar face.

"Father?" Benjamin said.

"This is Felix," Rainier told us. "He will be joining your team, at least for the next few months. Please be kind."

Briggs snorted, which earned him a glare from the older warlock. I couldn't help but chuckle, and Rainier had no issues with turning those narrowed eyes my way. He then sighed as he looked at Benjamin. "Please keep your team members in line, Benjamin."

"They are only acting like that because everyone in the council seems to think we are all hooligans and are going to mistreat the new enforcers. When has that ever happened?" Benjamin asked. He pushed on Raiden's shoulder gently. "The most any of them have ever done is between Raiden and Ramsey, and that's because they're twins, and they've always pranked one another."

"If you say so," Rainier said. "Please just make sure you all are kind and watch out for him." Rainier glanced at Felix before he left the office. It didn't take long for the fae to look back our way and shrug.

"You don't have to be kind. I know we're not exactly wanted here."

"Why would you say that?" Benjamin asked.

"Naw, we want you," Briggs said. "The more, the merrier." Briggs held out his hand. "I'm Briggs."

Felix took the hand and shook it. He looked to the rest of us in question.

"Dimitri," I said, holding out my own hand.

Benjamin held out his own hand. "I'm Benjamin, and that was my sire father. And the gargoyle down there is Raiden." Raiden held out his hand for a shake. "Seriously though, why is it that you think you aren't wanted?"

"We were warned there might be some resistance from the council and the enforcers

when we were asked to volunteer. I know that in my village, there isn't a single one of us who wasn't more than willing, even if we weren't wanted. None of us were finding our mates, and we were told it was a possibility, but probably not right away."

"Well, that would be great for you if you did," Raiden said. "But bad for the council if all of the new fae enforcers were to find their mates at once. The entire point was because we needed more enforcers. A lot of us have found our mates since joining, which puts the council at a disadvantage."

Felix shrugged. "I don't really care either way. I just wanted something else to do besides working in my family's store. It was pretty boring, and the idea of being able to come here was more than enough for me."

"Well, welcome to the council and the team," Benjamin said.

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Chapter 18

Caspian

I could tell Dimitri was concerned about something. Through our bond, he seemed to be uncertain. I did my best to not bother him while he was at work, and when he reached out and let me know he was on his way home, I had worked myself into a mess. That was how he found me when he arrived home.

“Caspian?”

“Back here,” I called out. I was sitting on the sofa—more like lounging. I’d been here on and off most of the day, and although I had a couple of shorter naps despite not drinking the sleepy-time tea, I felt as if I had taken a step forward because I wasn’t sleeping deeply in our bed.

“There you are.”

I looked up at Dimitri. When our eyes met, his widened, and he rushed the last several feet separating us. “What is wrong, lyubimyy?” Dimitri was kneeling in front of me in moments.

“You are...I’m not sure. Conflicted, perhaps? Have I done something? Are there issues?”

Dimitri shook his head. “Nyet.” He ran his fingers through my hair, which I knew was a mess; I just couldn’t care enough at the moment. I was up and out of bed and

felt somewhat decent after feeling like death for longer than I ever wanted to. I was going to pick my battles, and right now, hair wasn't going to win.

“What's wrong? I've felt it through our bond since this morning.”

“Apologies, my heart. I never meant to worry you so.” Dimitri cupped my face, and when he leaned in, I gladly accepted the kiss. It didn't go further than a simple joining of our lips, but it spoke volumes. When Dimitri pulled away, I wanted to follow, but the need to know what was going on was stronger, and I sat up and waited.

“What is going on? Do we need to leave? Your grandfather was here earlier,” I told him. “He said we would be welcome here always. My mind is spiraling, Dimitri. Share something.”

Dimitri grinned. “I would if you would give me a moment to talk.”

I rolled my lips inward to keep from responding. Dimitri's smile grew. I wasn't going to say a word until he'd told me what was going on.

“My dragon has been struggling today a bit. I've been given an assignment, and although I want to go, I'm torn because I have you now, and I will be leaving you behind.”

I released my lips and blinked at my One. “That's it? That was the issue? You're fighting yourself internally because you are being sent out on assignment?”

Dimitri nodded. I wasn't sure if it was the stress I'd felt for the past several hours, the fact that I wasn't feeling completely myself just yet, or that it was something insignificant, but I started laughing. It wasn't a little chuckle either. It was full-on laughter that I couldn't seem to stop once I started. By the time I had myself under

control, Dimitri was smiling with me. We stared at one another for a moment before he shook his head.

“I love you.” He leaned in and kissed me again, and when he pulled away this time, I suddenly felt better—much more relaxed and surer of everything.

“I love you too. But were you seriously struggling with the fact that you are going out on assignment all day instead of reaching out to me? We knew this was a possibility. If you are going to struggle like this, maybe we should both retire completely and just move away somewhere and raise our family there.”

Dimitri gave me a look. “Do not tempt me. I want to be helpful. I believe it is a family-honor thing. I am the only one, aside from Dedushka, that has joined the council to help. It is not a requirement, but I wish to help others.”

I reached out, and it was me who cupped his face this time. “That is what makes you so wonderful. Well, in part. You are a good person all around, and you have such a loving and protective person inside of you. I couldn’t help but fall in love quickly.” I smiled again. “But reach out. I know we’re new to being mated still. But I’ve been sitting here, worrying all day, because I could feel your conflict. I’ll be fine. Do not worry about me. I have a huge support system here. All right?”

It took a moment, but Dimitri nodded finally. “You do. Yéye said he stopped by.”

I nodded. “He did. He is just the most adorable. I can now see where you get a lot of your looks.”

Dimitri’s smile grew. “Yes. But my father also looks a lot like Yéye. My mother, of course, is not of Asian ancestry. But then they had me, and, well, you would not know that I was hers, to be honest.”

I chuckled. “I can’t wait to meet them. I got a message from Papa today. They’re here, but he’s being patient and waiting to pounce on us.”

Dimitri shook his head. “I met your father. He was at the council this morning. I am not sure he likes me.”

I rolled my eyes. “He likes you just fine.” I thought back to when Drew first met Father. It had been both comical as well as enlightening. I think Father learned quite a bit from that little cheetah omega that day. Lorenzo and I both adored Drew, as did Papa, and Father, he very much liked Drew. But he and Papa had both been a bit judgmental of Sebastian and were quite upset that he’d not informed them of his meeting his One right away.

“What?”

I blinked and smiled at Dimitri. “I was thinking about the first time Father met Drew. Much like me, Drew was sick during his first several weeks of his pregnancy. Sebastian had been so wrapped up in newly mated life and then taking care of Drew that he didn’t consider letting our parents know he’d met his forever.” I shook my head. “Our parents didn’t really take that too well. They have since learned because I think they did a lot of reflecting on how it was when they first met each other.”

Dimitri looked concerned. “Did I do something wrong? Should I have let Arturo know you were ill?”

I shook my head as I smiled at Dimitri. “You have done everything right.” I reached out and cupped his face again. “Tell me about your assignment,” I said, changing the subject.

Dimitri got up from where he’d been kneeling on the floor and sat down beside me. “It is something that has been in the works for a while now. There will be two teams

in Italy at all times. We are looking for a pair of enforcers, and unfortunately, they are warlocks and can easily evade the council.”

I grinned. “We can do that, yes. What have they done to warrant so many after them? You mentioned two teams. How many are on a team?”

“Usually four. My team is Benjamin, myself, Raiden, and Briggs. We will be leaving for Italy in four days’ time. If I choose to go, that is.”

I slowly shook my head. “Why wouldn’t you? We were in agreement from the beginning that we would both do what we needed to do for work. I was going to go to Madrid for a week or so and turn over my clients. Granted, I ended up not having to do that, but still, I was going to.”

“Ja. I will go as long as I know you will be all right. I know Benjamin will send me home at a moment’s notice if you should need me for anything.”

“You should go. I’ll be fine. Not only are my parents here, but Chin as well. And although I don’t know your parents, they’re in the area. I have so many to help take care of me if I need them. But I’m not exactly helpless.”

“I realize that. I also cannot help but worry. I will go if you insist though.”

I grinned while nodding. “I do. Now, tell me all about your day. I spent mine drinking tea, not the sleepy kind, and eating crackers and fruit. I did have a couple of shorter naps, but nothing like I have been. I actually feel as if I’m starting to recover from my body adjusting to being pregnant.” At least, that was the hope. I wanted to have the ability to have a life and to enjoy being mated as well as pregnant. One couldn’t do that when they spent twenty-plus hours a day sleeping.

I shouldn’t be nervous. I wasn’t certain why I was exactly. At my insistence, we were

having a “family get-together” before Dimitri left tomorrow. He was leaving for Italy in the morning, and I was sure that was the actual reason for my anxiety. I knew he would be safe. He was a dragon, after all, but even a dragon could be overpowered by a warlock. And he would be after a pair of them.

“We can return to our cabin if it is too much.”

I looked over at Dimitri and shook my head. I was bundled up in not only jeans and a thick sweater, but I had warm boots, my wool coat, a hat, my scarf, and gloves on. It was a bit difficult to move, actually, but Dimitri had insisted, and now that we were out in the wind, I understood why. My dragon though? Nope. He was wearing a thick shirt and what I would consider a thin jacket, but beyond that, he had on what he always wore: cargo pants and boots. The fact that he’d put on the jacket was a bit of a surprise.

“Are you cold?” I asked, suddenly wondering if he’d chosen to wear it because he realized just how cold it would be.

“I am not.” He raised his hand, and when I looked up from the ground, I saw the cabin that I really hoped we were heading toward. “That is Dedushka’s cabin. You will know where it is now, and if you need, you can come to it?”

I nodded. It did no good to smile because the only part of my face that was visible was my eyes. The rest was covered by either my hat or my scarf.

“I will. But my parents are here. They’re in the cabin Rainier has for the family. At least for now.” I had talked to Papa two days ago when I was feeling up for it. It had gone exactly as I’d expected. That wasn’t bad, just that it had been an emotional conversation as I had assumed it would be. “I can go there as well. Or to Sebastian’s.”

Dimitri nodded. I knew he wanted to be with me, but we both understood that as long as Dimitri remained an enforcer, he would be sent out on assignments.

“I can come here if it makes you feel the most secure,” I told him.

“I do not require you to come to my family over yours. I know your family will help just as much as mine would.” Dimitri stopped, pulling me to a halt with him as I was holding on to his arm while walking through the deep snow. “I want you where you are most comfortable. But yes, I do wish for you to reach out for help if you should need it. Even if it is through our bond and you ask for me to be returned, that is what I wish.”

I was smiling but, again, knew he couldn’t see it. “I will,” I told him. “I am feeling so much better. Even you have commented on how much more energy I seem to be having.” I did have to drink the other tea at night. It wasn’t that I couldn’t sleep without it. That wasn’t an issue. But I had problems with staying asleep. I wasn’t nearly pregnant enough to have the aches that I did, but they had appeared from the beginning and were still keeping me from resting as I needed, so Dimitri and I had agreed that having a cup of the other tea before bed was my best course.

“I know, lyubimyy.” Dimitri leaned in and placed his forehead on mine. “We can continue this conversation inside. Or even later. Right now, if I don’t get you over to that porch and inside, I believe my mother is going to come running over here, and that, in turn, will upset my father.”

I turned my head and saw a couple standing on the front porch. There was a tiny woman standing there with a rather large man with his arms wrapped around her. That could only be Dimitri’s parents. It could be nobody else.

“Oh. We should probably hurry up. If your father is anything like you, then I would imagine he’s not going to be too happy with your mom being outside in the cold.”

“Nyet.”

I chuckled as I tugged on Dimitri’s arm to get him moving again. It didn’t take long, and we were climbing the steps to the porch. Dimitri’s father was holding his mate back, and I couldn’t help but smile.

I heard him say something, but I didn’t understand, so I looked up at Dimitri in question.

“He told her that she has been through this before and to be patient.”

“Ah.”

Dimitri moved across the porch, bringing me with him. “Caspian, these are my parents, Shen and Millie,” he said.

I smiled, but since I still had my scarf wrapped around my face, I knew they couldn’t see it, so I pulled it down and continued to smile. “It’s so nice to finally meet you,” I told them. I chuckled when Millie started wiggling in her mate’s arms. She was so tiny, but that seemed to be the normal thing for fox shifters, but the size difference between her and Dimitri’s father was quite a bit.

Dimitri said something to them, and his father opened his arms, freeing his mate, and then Millie was rushing toward us. I wasn’t sure if it was because he knew what to expect or if it was because Dimitri was being protective, but he stiffened his arm and held me in place while taking a step forward. I wasn’t sure if Millie picked up on it or not, but Dimitri effectively kept his mother from plowing into me. He held out his free arm and wrapped it around her when she reached him.

“Hello, Mother. It is good to see you again.”

I let go of Dimitri's arm and gave him an encouraging smile. Dimitri took his now free arm and wrapped it around his mother. I couldn't help but notice the tall, imposing man who was Dimitri's father as he approached us. I looked up at him and smiled.

"Hi. I'm Caspian," I said, holding out my hand.

"Shen," he told me. "We are pleased that Dimitri has found his mate." He glanced at his son and mate and smiled. "Perhaps we could continue with hellos inside out of the wind and cold?" Shen asked. "I am certain Dimitri does not want his pregnant mate out in the cold any longer than necessary."

I was a bit surprised by Shen's words, but I shouldn't have been. Everyone knew I was pregnant.

"Ja," Dimitri said. Dimitri managed to disentangle himself from his mother before he wrapped his arm around my shoulders. "I do not wish for Caspian to be outside in this weather. It wasn't a far walk, but it is exceptionally cold today."

"Inside," Shen said. "Everyone else is already here."

I looked at Dimitri, worried we had been the ones holding up everyone. "We're last?" I asked. "I thought we had plenty of time?"

"We do. Everyone else is early. Do not worry." Dimitri sent his father a look, but I found myself suddenly being pulled into the massive cabin. The temperature inside was drastically different than what was outside, but I wouldn't call it exactly warm. At least not to my own standards. Would I freeze? No. But I had to remember that this was a cabin full of dragons, and they went around outside without a coat on most of the time.

While Dimitri was helping me out of my coat, I picked up on the auras in the cabin. Four were incredibly familiar to me, two more were becoming so, and I looked back at Dimitri with wide eyes. “My family is here?”

He smiled at me. “Ja. It cannot be a family dinner without all of the family.”

“Little Flora is just the sweetest,” Millie said. I looked over at my new mother-in-law.

“She is.” I reached out, and although her eyes widened briefly, she quickly wrapped her arms around my waist. “It is nice to finally meet you,” I told her. Her arms tightened on my waist before they loosened, and she took a step away. I noticed she stepped back into Shen’s arms.

“I was wrong. You do look like Chin, but you most certainly look like your father. Almost his clone, to be exactly.”

I heard Dimitri chuckling through our bond. “Much to Mother’s heartbreak. Although there are a couple of my siblings that take after her, but yes, Yéye’s genes run strong in our family.” Dimitri looked at me. “I hear Arturo and have a feeling that if I don’t get you into the den where he can hug you again, I might get scolded.”

I rolled my eyes. “Papa loves you,” I told him. “But I agree. We should get in there so nobody has to wait any longer for us.”

Shen and Millie led the way, and although Dimitri walked at a slower pace, I didn’t pick up on anything out of the ordinary. When we got to the back room though, there was certainly a good time being had. Papa, of course, noticed us, but I was certain he had been watching. He came rushing over, and instead of hugging just one of us, his arms were wrapped around the two of us. I had seen him a few weeks ago, but now that he was hugging me, it felt as if it had been so much longer.

“Look at the two of you,” Papa said. He gave us a squeeze and then stepped back. Immediately, his hands went to my face. “You are looking a bit pale. Are you still feeling poorly? Do you need to sit down?”

I shook my head before looking over at Dimitri. “Do I look that bad?” I had thought I was doing so much better.

“You are as handsome as ever,” Dimitri said.

“Smart man,” Father said joining us. He held out his hand, and Dimitri took it. “It’s nice to see you again,” Father said. “Don’t ever tell your mate that he looks anything but beautiful.” He pulled Papa into his side and smiled at him. “Even if he has the worst bed head and absolute wretched morning breath, he is still the most charming and beautiful person to you.”

Papa’s mouth dropped open as he looked up at Father. “You didn’t.”

Father smiled at Papa. “I said you are beautiful no matter what. Is that not good enough?”

There was chuckling, and when I looked behind my fathers, I knew I was staring at the created dragon.

“Caspian, this is Dedushka.”

I smiled at him and noticed Chin standing just behind Alpha Sergei.

“Alpha Sergei, it is an honor to meet you,” I told him.

“As it is you, Caspian. Welcome to the family. And please, call me Sergei. You are family.” I smiled and nodded. I wasn’t sure I could call him by his given name just

yet, but I would certainly try. He seemed to pick up on that immediately. “Whatever you are comfortable with,” he added.

I nodded again, then smiled at Chin. “It is nice to see you again, Chin. Thank you for inviting us.”

“You are always welcome here, Caspian. I won’t push, but please feel as if you can come anytime you need to.”

I just smiled and grabbed on to Dimitri’s hand a bit tighter. When I looked at him, I hoped he would understand. The moment was broken by Drew, bless him.

“There’s my favorite brother-in-law,” Drew said as he came over. Immediately, Lorenzo called out.

“Hey. I thought I was your favorite.” We all chuckled, and when Drew walked up to me, I pulled him into a hug.

“How are you? Sorry my visit was drastically changed last month.”

“Are you kidding? This is so much better. You live here now. The entire family is here, and we’re going to have a nephew.” Drew took a step back. “It is a boy, right?”

I smiled.

“Yes, the dragon baby is a boy,” Dimitri said. “I believe that Master Ambrosius is going to remain the lucky one with a female dragon child.”

Drew shrugged. “No matter. Flora will have a dragon for a cousin, which is totally cool. Have you seen the view?” Drew asked, taking my hand. “You can see the waterfall from out back. Although it’s covered in snow right now, but the water is

still flowing.”

I let Drew pull me into the house and grinned at the others as we slowly walked by. I saw Lorenzo, who was holding a bundle of pink, and felt a pang. I hadn’t gotten to hold her in some time, and although I was going to have my own baby to cherish, I still wanted time with Flora. What were my chances of getting her away from my brother, I wondered. I’d try after I let Drew show me Dragon Falls.

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Chapter 19

Dimitri

“ I t’s only a few days. You will be gone five days and then home. Five days isn’t even a full week. And we can talk anytime we want through our bond.”

I pulled Caspian just a bit closer. I was due to leave for our assignment in Italy in less than an hour, but I was finding it difficult to pull myself from our bed. Caspian had woken up with me, and when he wrapped himself around my body, I couldn’t deny him.

“I will be thinking of you often.”

“I know you will. But I want you to focus on your assignment there. I need you to come home to me and the baby. We have only just found one another, and we haven’t made a whole lot of memories yet.”

“You are distracted.”

I looked over at Benjamin and shook my head before nodding.

“Caspian shouldn’t be awake. Unless he’s adjusted his schedule to accommodate ours?”

“My mate is very much asleep. But yes, I was thinking about him. About the morning before we left three days ago.”

Benjamin held up his hands and shook his head. “I do not need to hear about your sex life with my cousin.”

I snorted. “Nyet. We were not doing that.” I sighed. I would have loved to make love to my mate, but he wasn’t feeling up for it. I would never pressure him for such things, and it was almost as if my body was completely in sync with his because, despite being newly mated, I didn’t feel the need to connect with him in that way. I was more than content to cuddle him, which was exactly what we’d done that morning until I had to leave.

“Sure you weren’t,” Briggs said, coming up behind us.

I glared at the wolf shifter, who didn’t realize Raiden was walking up behind him. When the gargoyle whacked Briggs on the back of the shoulder, Briggs turned and glared at him.

“His mate is pregnant. Most likely, he’s not doing anything like you’re thinking at the moment.”

Briggs turned and looked at me, a sad look on his face. “Seriously? I thought that if I finally found my mate, I’d finally be able to have sex frequently.”

“You can,” Raiden said. “When your mate is willing. But one thing to remember is when they are pregnant, and especially if they’re experiencing pregnancy sickness, the last thing they are going to want to do is have sex.” Raiden pointed in my direction. “Caspian has been really sick and spends a lot of his time sleeping still.”

Briggs turned back my way, and when I nodded at him, his shoulders fell. “Well, that’s just sad. Why would I want to find my mate, then? If I have someone who is tempting, but I can’t have sex, why?”

I rolled my eyes and walked away to the sounds of Raiden and Benjamin trying to explain the realities of finding your fated mate and how things actually work. Sure, sex with them was beyond any that you had ever experienced before, but that didn't mean you got an endless supply of it. Did I love it? Absolutely, but I loved Caspian more. His pleasure, health, and happiness were all that mattered to me and my dragon. We needed to know he was well taken care of, and in order to do that at the moment, that meant Caspian got plenty of rest and lots of smaller meals.

"Marcello just messaged me. He wants to meet at the café," Benjamin said.

"I don't like him," Briggs said. "He's too eager to help, and I believe Master Ambrosius when he says don't trust them."

"We don't," Benjamin said. "At least not fully. Vincent has a desire for the Gallo cousins to be out of his territory and keep the attention of the council away from him and his coven." Benjamin checked his phone again. "Why don't you and Raiden meet up with Damien's and Sebastian's teams? We'll be turning things over to them in another two days, and they just arrived and need to be caught up."

"Perfect," Briggs said. "I have worked closely with vampires for a while now, and it wasn't until I came here that I actually ever felt like I was unsafe and on the menu."

I chuckled at that; I couldn't help myself.

"Unless you want to go with me, Raiden?"

"No, I'm good with sticking to here at the hotel."

Benjamin looked at me. "Do you want to go with? Or should I take Damien?"

"I will go. Marcello does not bother me." I actually found the vampire somewhat

amusing. He was incredibly serious about his job and what he did for his “family,” and that I could understand and appreciate. Even if he was mafia and not to be trusted. The distraction would be good for me anyway. I was still waiting for Caspian to wake for the day and reach out and tell me good morning. That had been, by far, one of the highlights of my assignment. I didn’t mind being on assignment here, and my team had been amazing. Well, Benjamin and Raiden had. Briggs was still Briggs. He wasn’t mated and didn’t quite understand the ins and outs of being mated yet. Perhaps sometime soon, he would find his mate and would fully understand.

“Then we should probably head that way,” Benjamin said.

I got up and waved to Raiden and Briggs where they were still sitting. We were in the outer room of the hotel suite we were in. The council had procured two, and we were simply using them in rotation.

“Don’t forget to go meet up with Damien’s team. They need to know what has been happening since our last communication with the council,” Benjamin called out as we reached the door. I didn’t even stop; I simply opened it and walked through. I was curious about what we might find out when we reached Marcello, but I would know soon enough.

“How are you holding up? You’ve been quiet.”

I looked at Benjamin. “When am I not quiet?”

“True.” He turned to where he was facing me as we waited on the elevator. “Still, how are you doing? I know it was difficult at times for me when I first had to leave Eli behind. Then, when I had to leave him and the twins, it was even more so.”

I nodded. “I can understand that. I am doing well though.” The elevator arrived, and when it chimed and the door opened, we were suddenly looking at a familiar face.

“Fancy meeting you here.”

We all grinned.

“Damien,” Benjamin said. “Shouldn’t you be in your suite?”

“I thought you would be as well.” Damien glanced between us. “What gives?”

Benjamin chuckled. “We’re meeting Marcello. He called and said he has something that might be of use.”

“And I’m not going, why?”

I looked to Benjamin, more than ready to stay behind and let Damien go with. It made sense, actually, since Damien’s team was about to take over and replace us.

“You can go. I’m sure Marcello won’t have an issue with you showing up at the café. Just let your team know that you’re going with us. Raiden and Briggs are about to bring your team up to date on everything that we’ve discovered since yesterday.”

“How much have you actually unearthed since then?” Damien asked with a smirk on his face.

I couldn’t help it. I chuckled. He wasn’t wrong though. We hadn’t actually discovered a whole lot since then. In fact, it was my understanding that not a whole lot had really happened since we arrived. Not just our team but the team before us as well.

“True. We will have to figure something out because this assignment seems to be moving at a snail’s pace.”

“That was how things happened before though, no?” Damien asked. “In New Orleans?”

Benjamin nodded slowly. I had not been part of the council then. I had come in after most of that had happened but had heard all about it.

“Shall we?” Benjamin asked, indicating the now closed elevator door. “The last thing I want to do is upset Marcello by being late when he and his family have agreed to work with the council.”

“It’s not as if they are going to complain too harshly,” Damien said as he pushed the button for the elevator again. “They know that on some level, they are now on the council’s radar, and they have to watch their steps more closely.”

“True. I want to maintain a professional relationship with them and feel that if we were to continually be late, it would reflect poorly on the council.”

Damien sighed. “Why do you always have to be the voice of reason? Why?”

I chuckled, which earned me a glare from the hellhound.

“Behave,” Benjamin said.

“I didn’t say a thing,” I replied.

“I wasn’t talking to you.” Benjamin made a point to look directly at Damien, who held up his hands.

“I’ll behave.” He glanced my way before he smirked. I rolled my eyes.

“How is Ledger?” I asked. I had almost said “your mate” but caught myself at the last

moment. Our rooms were secure, but we never knew for certain in the public areas.

“Good. He’s upset at his brother’s decision to move away but understands that Levi needs space. There are too many things and people in Montana that trigger his memories, and it wasn’t really helping with his ability to heal.”

I felt bad for Ledger with regards to that. I knew he and his brother had been incredibly close, and knowing he was moving away would most likely be difficult on Damien’s mate.

“I am sorry to hear that.” The elevator chimed, indicating that we were on the ground floor. “Hopefully, it will not be a permanent move, and he will return to Montana soon.” I knew every family was different. Some siblings were incredibly close, while others were more distant. From what I had heard, Ledger and his brother had been very close before his brother went missing.

We stepped off of the elevator and, in moments, were walking out the front door. It wasn’t an overly large hotel, only a few floors, but it was a higher-end resort and spa. Not that any of us were taking advantage of its luxury.

“What’s the plan?” Dimitri asked once we were out on the street, walking toward what I assumed was the café that Marcello wanted to meet at.

“Nothing at the moment, beyond meeting with Marcello. We have to see what this new information he has is,” Benjamin said.

Damien stopped him with a hand on his arm. “Why couldn’t he tell us over the phone? Or mention it to the council through the normal channels they’ve been going through?”

We all glanced at one another. Damien had a point. A very valid one. What if we

were walking into a trap?

“Is he expecting you to come alone?” I asked.

Benjamin shrugged. “It wouldn’t matter. He is no match for me. A warlock is more powerful than a vampire simply because of our magic.”

“What if Marcello isn’t going to arrive alone? What if he’s setting up a trap?” Damien asked. To that, Benjamin snorted.

“This isn’t some cheesy crime sitcom. Even if he has a dozen other vampires with him, he still wouldn’t be a match for me.” Benjamin shook his head. “I’m not from Master Edison’s line, but I am from an original line, and I am a bit more powerful than a lot of warlocks. I’m not worried about this meeting. It’s possible that he didn’t let the council know because he hasn’t had time. We won’t know until we actually arrive and see what it is that he wants.”

Those were all valid points. He had only said he wished to speak to Benjamin. Or perhaps to one of us; I had not been the one contacted.

“What time does he wish to meet?” I asked.

Benjamin glanced at the watch on his wrist before answering. “In about ten minutes. Since the café is still a good fifteen-minute walk, we should probably hurry and try to keep from distracting ourselves anymore.”

With that, we started back down the sidewalk. It truly was a beautiful place. When you were near the resort and the other touristy areas. When you got away from there, things went downhill in a hurry. It was obvious that the island and most of the buildings were old. Much older than anywhere we saw in Montana on a regular basis. That really wasn’t the point of our trip though—simply my observations from being

here.

It was a good thing I had long legs because Benjamin and Dimitri were both walking at a clipped pace in order to not be nearly as late as it looked as if we were going to be. I, on the other hand, didn't have to put nearly as many steps into my stride in order to keep up. When we arrived at the café, the other two seemed to realize it, and both gave me a look.

"What? You could have just done your poof thing, and we would have been here before he is." I leaned in closer. "I smell more than one vampire, so be on the lookout."

Benjamin nodded. "I agree. I'm picking up at least two others. They might not be with Marcello, but it's a probability."

"Well, I didn't come alone either, did I?"

We entered the café, and immediately, the scents of coffee and baked goods hit my nose. They were stronger inside than they were when we were standing outside, but that was normal. What wasn't, though, was the overpowering scent of blood. Benjamin couldn't pick up on it. Damien and I could, and we both picked up on it at the same time.

Nothing looked out of the ordinary, and when I took a closer look, the café seemed as if everyone that was there was as they should be and weren't distressed even a little.

Benjamin brushed my arm before indicating that Marcello was sitting against the back wall. I wasn't even remotely surprised that the vampire enforcer was sitting with his back to the wall. It was simply how things were done. We approached, and when Damien caught my eye, we both zeroed in on the table two over that had three vampires sitting at it. Marcello, though, was alone at his. Benjamin pulled out a chair

and sat, placing his arms on the table in front of him. Damien sat to Benjamin's left, his back to the vampires, and I sat to his right, staring directly at them.

"Marcello," Benjamin said.

"Benjamin." He glanced at me and then at Damien. "I see you decided to bring backup."

Benjamin shrugged. "You aren't exactly alone, now, are you?"

"There are only a few instances where I am ever truly alone." Marcello smirked, and it didn't take much to understand what he was implying.

"You called for me to meet you. Do not disrespect the council simply because you aren't in the presence of Master Ambrosius. You can be sure that he will know of each and every meeting we have."

Marcello's smile fell a bit. "Very well. We have discovered something that might be of interest. We do not know if it is factual as of yet, but we assumed that the council could work out those details at a more rapid pace than us."

"And what is it that we need to discover?" Damien asked. Marcello looked his way before back at Benjamin, then over at me.

"Does this one talk?" he asked, pointing at me.

"Ya delayu, kogda eto neobkhodimo," I said in Dedushka's language. I wasn't sure if it was because I felt like messing with Marcello or if it was because I felt as if he was becoming a bit too sure of his position simply because the council was working with his family at the moment. Either way, I got a measure of satisfaction from the fact that what was left of his smirk vanished when I spoke. It often did, simply because

that language wasn't one expected to come from me.

"What did he say?"

Benjamin shrugged. "He talked though, so there's your answer. Now, are you going to share with us what it is that you asked me to come here to meet you about? Or perhaps I should call my father." Benjamin pulled out his phone. "He works directly with Master Edison, after all. And we all know how much he has been vouching for you and Vinnie."

I wish I had a camera. Marcello's face changed instantly. "Do not ever let him hear you call him that. It will be your death."

It was Benjamin who snorted this time. I noticed movement behind Damien, and his subtle nod to me when we made eye contact told me he knew the vampires behind him were getting antsy.

"You are wasting our time, Marcello. We're trying to help you, remember?" Benjamin said. "We don't have to be here. In fact, Master Ambrosius would very much like for this arrangement between us to end so that he can turn the other way if and when something just might happen to a few in your family."

"Last warning, warlock. Do not threaten my family."

Benjamin smirked, and when Marcello's eyes widened for several seconds and his body became tense and stiff, I wondered what Benjamin did to him. I was certain he would share once we left, but until then, I would have to remain in the dark.

"I'll tell," Marcello said. When his body suddenly relaxed, I glanced at Benjamin, who smirked before he winked.

“Hurry up. I have a phone call to make, and I want this meeting over before I need to do it.”

“We found a laptop. I don’t know if it was planted, but if I had to guess, I would say most likely. It indicates that there were at least three other warlocks in the coven that were directly involved. Three that the council has already cleared and deemed safe.” Marcello paused, letting us take that information in.

I shared a look with the other two, wondering if this was actually true or was a ploy to lead us astray.

“Who?” Benjamin asked.

Marcello shook his head and reached for something below him. Instantly, Damien and I were on alert, but when Marcello pulled up a laptop, I relaxed a bit.

“How do we know you yourself aren’t doing this as a scheme to keep stringing us along?” Damien asked.

Marcello looked directly at Damien. “The last thing my master and our family want is to continue this situation. You haven’t ever had to deal with the Gallo duo. Everyone in this country knows of them, and nobody likes them. They are true evil and make no exceptions. Even my family has its limits. Marco and Riccardo do not, and the last thing we wish is for them to continue their existence where they can cause our families harm.” Marcello pushed the laptop across the table. “I know some electronics. This was left behind in a run-down room on Capri. Riccardo was seen about two blocks from the place, but like always, he seemed to realize we were following him.”

This was news and possibly what we had been waiting for. “Capri?” I asked. We weren’t on Capri, but it wouldn’t be an issue for any of us.

“My team will head there and check things out,” Damien said as he stood.

Marcello held up a hand. Two more chairs slid back, and when two vampires moved toward us, Marcello nodded to them.

“Armando and Vittorio will be able to show you exactly where it was found. Perhaps a bit of extra help will be able to locate one or both.”

Damien and Benjamin shared a look before Damien turned and walked away. I sat there, staring at the last remaining vampire at the other table.

“We appreciate your help,” Benjamin said. “Is there anything else, or are you sending my teammate on a blind chase?”

“The room had been occupied for some time if you were to go by the amount of trash in it. It’s most likely a lost cause, though, because Riccardo hasn’t been back to the room since.”

“When did this occur?”

“This morning. We have been watching the room since. I called you as soon as I had news.”

Benjamin sat there a moment before he picked up the laptop. He nodded slowly. “I’ll let the council know. If they’ve been sighted, you can most likely expect an increase in council presence. I only say that because I know that despite agreeing to help the council, you are still not being completely truthful.” Marcello’s brow furrowed. “Tell me what my teammates picked up on when we first entered the café,” Benjamin said.

Marcello looked my way, most likely hoping I would speak up and keep him from giving away something he didn’t wish to disclose.

“I do not know. You will have to ask them. The room had other items, but the only thing that could really be useful would be the laptop. There were some papers but nothing beyond receipts from shops.”

Benjamin nodded slowly. “Thanks for the help. If there is nothing else, we’ll be taking our leave.” Benjamin stood and was holding the laptop by the time I joined him. We left the café, and once outside and half a block away, he gave me a look.

“Blood. There was the scent of blood in the room, and it was strong.”

Benjamin stopped and turned toward me. “Do you think they killed someone?”

I shrugged. “Possibly. It is also a possibility that they fed from some of the other patrons. I could not say though. The scent was still there when we left.”

Benjamin sighed. He shoved the laptop toward me and pulled out his phone. I started walking when he did. When he directed me toward a narrow pathway, I knew exactly what he was planning. Not that I would mind getting a quick ride back to our suite. We had only taken three steps into the pathway when everything changed and we were walking into the suite.

I felt Caspian waking as we did and couldn’t help but smile. I would have news to share with my mate for a change, and that made me feel better about having to leave him in Montana.

Chapter 20

Caspian

It was the same every day since he left. I thought about Dimitri constantly, and when he wasn't busy with work, he was more than happy to chat with me through our bond. I didn't realize that I could become so attached to my One so quickly. Not until he was away for several days. I made sure to keep that little bit hidden though. I did not wish to cause Dimitri stress about his job.

When I woke, he immediately reached out to me and told me how much he loved me. That immediately brightened my day, even if we couldn't spend it together. This was part of our relationship though: Dimitri was a council enforcer, and like my brother, he had to go out on assignments.

This morning would be different though. It already was. I grinned, thinking about our good-morning conversation. I was still mostly asleep when he reached out, but I quickly woke, anticipation building in my entire being.

“Dobroye utro, lyubimyy.”

“Buenos dias, amore.”

“I am at the council building. As soon as we are finished with our briefing, I will be home to you. I will have today off, but I will have to go back to work tomorrow, unfortunately.”

“Tomorrow here or tomorrow in Italy?” Had things changed? Was he going back out right away?

“Tomorrow here. I will be here for a week before having to return.”

I smiled sleepily. I could deal with a week of him home in the evenings. The schedule was going to wear on everyone quickly, but I knew this assignment was important.

“I can’t wait to see you. I’m trying to drag myself out of bed, but it’s warm and cozy, and I just want to snuggle in a bit longer.”

I heard chuckling. “Stay. I’ll join you when I get there.”

It had been so tempting. I had plans though. Or at least that had been my intent. I was going to get up and shower. I was going to shave and be ready for my sexy dragon. I had the best intentions, but the bed seriously was cozy and warm. I dozed back off until I was jolted awake.

I heard something. Or felt someone’s presence in the cabin. I pushed a bit of magic out to figure out who it was. When I felt a very familiar aura, my heart started racing. Dimitri was home. A moment later, panic set in. I’d not gone through the shower like I’d planned. Not that I hadn’t showered during the week he was gone, but I was hoping for a very happy homecoming.

Luckily for me, I was a warlock and could simply magick myself clean. That was exactly what I did without having to leave the comforts of our bed. Same with brushing my teeth. I decided to leave the few days’ growth on my face. It wasn’t that thick, nor had it ever been, and I didn’t think Dimitri would care too much.

“Lyubimyy?”

My heart started racing.

“I dozed back off. I’m still in bed.” I rolled over, my body rapidly reacting to the fact that Dimitri was home. “Naked.” I wasn’t sure Dimitri would be willing, but one could hope. It was perfectly safe, and in all honesty, it had been too long. I understood. I had been incredibly sick. But that seemed to have passed. Well, mostly. But I was feeling so much better, and my body wanted to spend the day getting reacquainted with my sexy dragon.

I heard a thud and then loud footsteps racing up the stairs. Dimitri came racing into the bedroom just as I pushed up onto my elbows to look at him. He was just gorgeous. “Gah, you’re so sexy,” I told him. That absolutely was not what I had intended to say, but that was what had come out of my mouth. I wanted to groan and hide, but when Dimitri’s eyes seemed to widen, and then his face became tense, I knew I had probably said the right thing with how I had hoped the day would go.

“You are the gorgeous one,” Dimitri said as he slowly approached me. He walked right up to the side of the bed and sat.

I sat up more, the blanket falling and pooling around my waist. “I missed you,” I told him. I reached out and closed my eyes briefly when my hands made contact with my One. He was actually here. This wasn’t a dream, and he was home to me. I opened my eyes, finding him staring at me intently. “You’re really here,” I whispered.

“I am. I missed you as well. My dragon is happy to be here with you.”

I tried to give him a look of irritation, but I wasn’t sure I succeeded. “Only your dragon?”

“I am very happy to be here with you. Would you like to go flying with me?”

I shook my head. I slid my left hand from Dimitri's shoulder to his neck and then behind it. "No. I do not wish to go flying, Dimitri." I pulled his head closer to mine. "Can you honestly say you would rather go flying in the cold instead of getting naked and knotting yourself inside of me?" I wasn't sure I wanted the answer to that question, but it was out before I could think better of it, and there was no pulling it back now.

Dimitri gasped. "Lyubimyy?"

"I want you, Dimitri. I never intended to be sick, and I certainly didn't want to not be able to make love with you. But I've been feeling so much better, and I really want to explore your body." As I said those words, Dimitri's head moved closer to mine. When his lips finally made contact, I moaned. Dimitri's hands touched my face gently, and we were slowly falling back onto the bed.

I had thought we would be frantic, but that wasn't the case at all. Dimitri's lips moved against mine until I opened my mouth for him. When his tongue met mine, something inside me seemed to click. My body had already been vibrating against his aura, but now my claiming bite was throbbing in unison with my painfully hard cock.

But something told me to not rush things. Sure, we could find relief quickly, but that wasn't what I wanted. I had a lifetime with Dimitri, and we would have moments of rushed fucking, but that wasn't what this was, and we both knew it.

Dimitri's hands moved from my face to my shoulders, and as I rolled toward him more, I reached for the blanket to get it out of the way. The room had been chilly without Dimitri in it, and I had needed it for warmth. That wasn't the case now that my dragon was home.

I became a bit frustrated when I pulled on the blanket and it wouldn't move, and when I pulled my mouth away to see what the issue was, I realized it was because

Dimitri was lying on top of it. Irritated, I used magic to move it completely out of the way. Without it for a barrier, the drastic difference between the warmth under it and the cool room was noticeable, but I could already feel the heat coming from my One. I would never be cold when near him. It simply wasn't possible.

Dimitri's lips started moving down my neck, and I was only too happy to move my head to the side to give him more room. He nibbled on my claiming bite, and I moaned into the room. My fingers threaded into his head, and when his lips moved farther down to my nipple, I closed my eyes and pressed up into him a bit.

Dimitri's tongue flicked over it before he pulled away and gently blew across the now wet bud. That, combined with the coolness of the room, caused me to shiver. Dimitri's warmth was suddenly gone, and it took me too long to open my eyes to see where he'd gone. I found him standing next to the bed, now shirtless. His jeans were undone, but instead of pushing them down, he bent down.

I had his boots, socks, and jeans gone with a thought. Dimitri stood, and my breath caught at the sight. He was stunning and all mine.

"Come here," I said.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I truly am feeling better. Please make love to me?"

Thankfully, Dimitri didn't question me again. He crawled back onto the bed, this time directly on top of me, and I sighed when I was suddenly enveloped in his warmth.

"You are so warm." I smiled up at him.

"It's a dragon thing."

I chuckled. “Yes, it is. Now, about this,” I said as I slid my hand between us. Dimitri rose up a bit, and when my hand wrapped around his thick cock, his eyes closed, and he moaned. I gave it several strokes, feeling Dimitri’s desire increase as I did.

When he opened his eyes, they were black and heated. “You are playing with fire there, mate. If you keep that up, I will not be able to get into you fully because my knot is already tingling. It has been weeks since we have been together.”

My hand froze before I slowly pulled it away. I wanted him inside me—I wanted his knot. If you had asked me that two months ago, I never would have said those words. Now? I wanted Dimitri and his knot any chance I could get.

“Then I think we should refocus my efforts elsewhere.”

Dimitri smirked at me before his mouth lowered to me again. I met his kiss with as much need and desire as I could. He moaned into my mouth, and when his body lowered onto mine once more, I was the one moaning. He felt amazing, and I couldn’t wait to feel him inside me again.

Dimitri pulled from the kiss just as I ran my hands up his back. He moved down my body, his lips and tongue trailing their way to their target. He didn’t hesitate to pull my cock away from my body before he sucked the head into his mouth.

My hands found his hair again, and I couldn’t keep from grabbing ahold of his already messy locks while my hips rolled upward. Dimitri sucked me down to the base seconds later, and I gasped.

“Dimitri...” I moaned out in warning. He wasn’t the only one who had been without for weeks. I was on edge in seconds, and when my balls started to tingle, I didn’t even try to stop the orgasm. I knew that Dimitri wouldn’t mind.

“Come for me, lyubimyy. Then I will fill you with my knot, and you will come again.”

That was it. Too many things happening all at once, and there was no hope of holding back at all. My body tingled, and in pulses, the sensation traveled inward toward my cock. I shouted as I came. Dimitri groaned and sucked harder. My body continued to give me until it became too much, and I started squirming.

“Too sensitive,” I said as I gently pushed on his head.

Dimitri pulled off my cock and grinned. “Now it is my turn,” he told me. I wasn’t expecting him to suddenly sit up, grab my hips, and then flip me over onto my stomach. When he did though, I squeaked. Dimitri’s body covered mine, and his hard cock pressed against my ass.

I looked over my shoulder when he made a noise. His gaze was focused on what he was doing, and when I opened my legs and tried to get them under me, Dimitri took the invitation. He moved enough to where I could get up on my knees, and then his cock was sliding through my crack.

“Tell me if I’m going too fast,” he said.

“You’re not. I want you in me. I need to feel you knot me again.”

Dimitri moaned. His hips rolled, moving his length through my slick, getting everything ready for his invasion. He took his cock in hand, and when he started rubbing the head against my opening, I pressed back a bit. Dimitri froze when it pressed in a bit. I applied more pressure and took a deep breath.

I wasn’t going to tell him that a bit of magical help had been used. Not yet. Later? Possibly. Most likely. But at the moment, I really wanted him inside me. I pressed

back more, and then he started pushing forward. It didn't take much for the thick head of his cock to slip inside me. My breath caught at the sudden burn from the fullness though.

“Do not let me hurt you.”

I could feel the tension in Dimitri's body through our bond, and that was absolutely not what I wanted. I bit my lower lip and rocked my hips back with a bit of force. Dimitri closed his eyes and moaned. Bingo. That was exactly what I wanted to hear.

“You are not hurting me,” I told him as I did it again and again. “You feel amazing,” I added as I worked my ass onto his cock. “But you need to help me here.”

Dimitri grabbed my hips, his grip a bit painful as he held me in place. “I want to snap my hips forward and then hold you down on the bed and fuck you.”

I groaned. He'd done that several times during my fertile period. But not since. I took a chance and looked over my shoulder again. Dimitri was already looking at me, waiting.

“Yes,” I said. That was all I was able to get out before Dimitri's hips slammed forward. At the same time his hips hit my ass, he pushed on my shoulder. My chest hit the bed with an oof, but I didn't care. Dimitri's hips pulled back and then thrust forward in an instant, dragging a deep moan from me.

I could feel his knot already. Not only as it started to swell and tug on my rim as he pulled from my body but through our bond; the base of my own hard cock was tingling.

Dimitri's hips slowly sped up, and I could only grab fistfuls of the bedding below us. His body suddenly covered mine, but that didn't stop his movements. If anything, it

felt as if his hips were thrusting his cock in and out of me at a quicker pace.

He kissed me on the back of my shoulder before he grunted and pushed his cock into me one last time.

Dimitri moaned as his cock swelled impossibly big, and then a flush of heat coursed through my body. Dimitri pulled on my shoulder, and without warning, his teeth sunk in. I shouted into the pillow as a second, more intense orgasm raced through my body. I came on the bed below us, and when Dimitri's teeth pulled from my shoulder, my body grew heavy.

"I love you," Dimitri said before the full weight of him covered me. Seconds later, we were rolled to our left, and Dimitri quickly pulled my upper body tightly to his.

"I love you," I managed to whisper back.

I felt the blanket being pulled over us and sighed. It was good to be mated. I was finally feeling better, and Dimitri had just given me two intense orgasms shortly after he'd returned from assignment. Definitely good to be mated.

"You are pleased?" Dimitri asked.

I opened my eyes and stared at the bathroom doorway. "You know I am. You are an incredible lover."

Dimitri kissed my shoulder again as his hands tightened on my chest. "I try. My only goal is to ensure you enjoy yourself."

I wanted to argue, but I was too relaxed from the orgasms he'd just given me. "Goal attained." I felt myself getting sleepy. I didn't think it was because I was actually tired but relaxed that much. That and I had my One with me. We were naked, he was

knotted inside of me, and I had made a complete mess of the bed in front of us. I should be relaxed and ready for a small nap.

“I did not hurt you?” Dimitri asked me.

“No. I’m very satisfied. This is a great way to reunite, but if you’re not up for it every time, we don’t have to.”

Dimitri snorted, and I chuckled. “You just told an alpha that he didn’t have to have sex with his pregnant mate after being apart for several days. You say that as if I don’t think about having sex with you multiple times a day.”

I grinned. “I don’t know. I was trying to make sure you knew I didn’t expect us to do this.” I reached up and grabbed Dimitri’s hand where it was resting against my chest. I laced my fingers through his and held his hand against my chest. “I know you will never pressure me for this,” I told him. And I did. He would have already done so if he was going to. But for well over a month, Dimitri had been more than content to hold me while my body adjusted to being pregnant with our son.

“Never,” Dimitri said. His lips met my shoulder again, and I closed my eyes once more. It would be so easy to doze off, but I wanted to be awake so I could talk to my mate. We had our bond, sure. But that was different than him finally being here again.

“I want to ask about your trip, but not while you’re knotted inside me.”

Dimitri chuckled. His hand slid down my torso, taking mine with it. When he placed his hand over my lower stomach, I felt our baby for the first time. It pushed out against our joined hands, and I gasped.

“Did you feel that?”

“Feel what?”

“The baby,” I told him.

“Nyet. What did the baby do? Is he moving around and you are feeling the flutters?”

I closed my eyes. “No. He was saying hello, I think,” I told him. “I felt him push out against our hands.”

Dimitri opened his palm and held it against my lower stomach. He kissed my shoulder again and sighed. “I love you so much. You and our baby are my everything.”

I couldn’t help but smile at that. I felt the same. But sleep was pulling at me like a bitch, and there was no way I was going to be able to stay awake.

“I love you,” I said as I yawned.

“I love you too,” Dimitri said. “More than I thought possible, but you are my everything. I mean that.”

I smiled. I could live with that. We had a long road ahead of us, even to become fathers, but we would get there soon enough. When Dimitri was with me, everything seemed to click, and all seemed right. I smiled as I said a thank-you for the dragon alpha that I hadn’t been expecting but certainly needed in my life. Dimitri was everything I wasn’t, and that was probably why we were so perfect together.

Chapter 21

Dimitri

They say that pregnancy moods often go up and down. I could attest to that, despite the fact that I'd not ever been pregnant. But my mate was and for the first several weeks of his pregnancy, he'd been mostly exhausted and sick. Now though? His energy level was still lower than what was usual for him, but the sickness seemed to be mostly gone, thankfully. In its place was an increase in his sexual desire. That was not something I would ever complain about.

Sadly, for us I was only home for a week before I went back out for five days. That meant I was headed back to Italy tomorrow morning. I wouldn't complain. I had wanted to be sent out on assignments. Now that I was, I wouldn't complain. But things were certainly different now that I had a mate to leave behind and then come home to.

"There's been a development," Benjamin said hurriedly from the doorway when he suddenly appeared. "We're needed in conference room two." Benjamin took off before the rest of us could stand. We quickly followed, and I realized that Atticus and his team were already headed that way. If they were pulling in all of the teams, what exactly had happened?

"What do you think this development is?" Briggs asked as we walked down the hallway.

I shrugged. "I do not know. Maybe they found something on the laptop that Marcello

gave to Benjamin? Or perhaps Damien or Sebastian's teams found something else while there." I looked at Briggs and wondered what went through his mind at times. I was just as in the dark about this as he was. Did the wolf shifter not think things through completely before voicing them out loud?

We entered the conference room and found it, well, in chaos. It was difficult to understand what was happening, so I grabbed Briggs and pulled him against a wall next to Benjamin. "You said there was a development. This seems much more than something as simple as a development ." Raiden joined us, crossing his arms in front of him, glaring at the mess that was the created ones arguing.

"What is happening here?" Raiden finally asked.

We all looked to Benjamin who had brought us here, so perhaps he knew.

"Don't look at me. I'm just as unknowing as you all are. My father told me to gather the team and meet here." Benjamin gestured to the room. "Here we are."

We refocused on the others and watched as Master Edison argued with Master Ambrosius, who was being held by Chief Daegal. Dedushka walked in and with a loud clearing of his throat, the room fell into silence.

"I understand the urgency, but this is not the time." Dedushka made a show of looking around the room. "Or the place." Dedushka made direct eye contact with Frederick. "Frederick, you and your team are to go to Amherst immediately and assist Master Arthur in securing the coven."

That had me looking at Benjamin straightaway. "Is that not Master Edison's coven?"

"Yes," Benjamin said as he stepped away from the wall. "I'll go to help," he said out loud. "I know Amherst and the area well."

“We appreciate the offer, Benjamin,” Dedushka said. “But we would like for you to remain here. Dante’s team will be traveling with Frederick and joining him there. They will return with Dante once everything has been dealt with.”

Benjamin looked as if wanted to say more, but I grabbed his sleeve and pulled him back to the wall. Dedushka shared a look with me before he turned to the rest of the room.

“I’m sure you are all wondering what is going on. Two things. The first, and most important one is that Riccardo Gallo has been captured.” There were several that started talking around the room, but Dedushka quickly got it under control. “It was the collaboration of Damien and Sebastian’s teams along with a few of Vincent’s enforcers that he was able to be apprehended. We are still searching for Marco, but the hope is that with his cousin in custody he will lead us to him.”

“If he’s in custody, why is there an issue with the Amherst coven?” Frederick asked. “Not that I mind going to Amherst. I’m simply curious as to why.”

“We were certainly going to inform you of any information we have regarding that situation before we sent you,” Dedushka said. “The laptop that was retrieved from Italy has been broken and Salvatore’s team as a list of names of companies and organizations that are working with Rocco. Two of those names, Dominic De Luca and Tullio Gambino, were sent to Amherst until things calmed down. Arthur has said they have been nothing but model guests thus far, but he is being understandably cautious with this new information. We do not wish to tip them off that we are aware of this new information. That is where you come in.”

“Understood,” Frederick said. “I’ll prepare to leave as soon as needed,” Frederick said before turning to his team that was standing near him. They started talking quietly, and I had to wonder if this was going to end the assignment in Italy or if this would only amplify it. We had caught one of the Gallo cousins, but where was the

other? Would he be a serious threat to us?

“What are the rest of us going to do?” Benjamin asked. “Are we going back to Italy still?”

“The assignment continues. We still need to locate Marco, and now there is new information that must be found to either be factual or not. The Vittone coven is still willing to work with the council. They want Marco found just as much as we do, possibly more.”

I nodded, noticing others did as well. It looked as if I would be going back to Italy. I didn't mind. Well, not overly. It was important that we took care of the issue before it became a larger problem. If having his cousin in captivity meant that Marco would become even more ruthless, we needed to ensure we found him before he could harm anyone else.

But my dragon grumbled at the thought of leaving our pregnant mate behind. It helped that Dedushka and Yéye were here. My parents were going to be in and out between now and when the baby was born. They had some things to take care of back home, which was completely understandable. Caspian's parents were here and would remain here, which also helped reassure my dragon.

I tuned out what else was being said to Frederick. Once his team left the room, Benjamin touched me on the shoulder, getting my attention.

“Ja?”

“We need to go back to the office.”

I nodded, realizing that I had obviously been more distracted than expected. “Dimitri,” Dedushka said. I looked at Benjamin who nodded and then left the

conference room. I closed the distance between me and Dedushka and waited. He finished talking to Master Edison.

“How is Caspian?” He asked, throwing me a bit off.

“Well. Why do you ask?”

Dedushka nodded. “You are all right to go back to Italy?”

“Ja. He has a support system here. My dragon...” I thought about it a moment, looking for the right words. “He is understanding when it comes to assignments. He would prefer to be with our mate, but he does not give me fits while apart.” I raised an eyebrow at him. “Is there something that I should be worried about?”

“You are certain?”

I narrowed my eyes. “Is there a reason you do not wish for me to return to Italy? I am sure I will be fine with going. I can talk to Caspian through our bond, and it has worked out well so far.”

Dedushka stared at me a moment before nodding. “I only wish to be sure.” Dedushka glanced over my left shoulder before his eyes returned to me. “I do not wish for you to become injured. It has not been announced yet. One of Vincent’s vampires was killed by Riccardo before he could be bound. Sebastian will be sore for a few days most likely, as will Lukan.”

I looked at Dedushka with concern. “If it is going to be an issue for the council, I do not need to go. But it is my job to go on assignments. I hope you remember that.” By council, I meant him specifically. I knew he would never forbid me from going, as it would cause issues within the council. I understood his position though. He was all about family, and he never wished for any to be put into a position of danger.

Dedushka sighed. “I do. I also know that your mate is pregnant. Marco is more ruthless than his cousin, and I am only trying to ensure your safety.”

I thought about it a moment before shaking my head. “I will go,” I told him. “It is my job to do so. I will not back down because there might be a fight. I could not live with the fact that I used my position of being your grandson as a way to get out of an assignment and another of my fellow enforcers was hurt in my place. That is not how I was raised. That is not the family values you have instilled in us.”

Dedushka smiled. It looked as if he didn’t wish to, and was fighting it. He did anyway. He took a deep breath, let it out slowly, and began to nod.

“You are right. It was wrong of me to even contemplate suggesting it. I am thinking of a worried grandparent, and not as the person in my position. I overstepped and let my fear think rather than the rational side.”

I moved in and gave Dedushka a hug. “I understand. I am not upset, but I cannot stay behind. I will be extra careful though,” I told him quietly. When I stepped back, Dedushka nodded at me. “I must go see what my team needs from me. We will be leaving soon.” I would need to spend as much time with Caspian as I could. He would need to know what had happened, if he didn’t already. Dedushka said that Sebastian would be sore for a few days. Did that mean he was wounded severely? How would my mate take that news? Sebastian was his baby brother.

I decided to reach out to Caspian while on my way back to the office I shared with the rest of my team.

“Caspian?”

“Hmm? What do you think you would like for supper? Steak? Chicken? Lamb?”

I was incredibly thankful he was feeling better. In all ways. My dragon was happy to be able to eat meat around our mate once more.

“My love, I will eat whatever it is you feel up to having. I needed to know how you were doing. Have you heard any news from your parents?”

“News? About what?”

Caspian had not been informed. “I do not know as of yet. I heard that half of the duo we are looking for has been captured.”

“That’s wonderful. But why would I have heard about that?”

I took a deep breath. “I heard that your brother was slightly injured during the situation.”

“Oh, that. Yes. Sebastian had a rather large and powerful ball of magic thrown at him. He’ll be fine in a few days. He saw it coming and was able to block most of it. He was thrown backwards though, and I think the landing hurt more than the impact.”

I stopped in the middle of the hallway. There was nobody around, and I took a moment to digest what my mate had told me.

“You act as if this isn’t an issue.”

“When warlocks are first learning to master their powers, part of our training is to understand what we can do if we are ever up against another warlock. Sebastian and I grew up throwing balls of magic at each other. We didn’t do it to try and kill one another though.”

This was...not expected. “You are sure you are not upset about this?”

“I don’t wish my brother any harm. But he is fine. His ass hurts, as does his hip from what I’ve heard. Drew is fussing over him, and Papa looked in on the two of them. He took Flora for a bit so they could spend time together without having to worry about the baby.”

I bit my lower lip to keep from snorting and my mate could hear it through our bond. I had no doubt what Sebastian and Drew would be doing. I couldn’t say I blamed them. I would need to reconnect with Caspian if anything of that nature ever happened to me or him.

I pushed away from the wall and continued on to the office. “I am glad you are not more upset about your brother.”

“I cannot let my emotions run away. I of course am happy he wasn’t seriously injured. If I dwell on it, I will only worry about you. Especially since you are about to return to Italy.”

I felt the worry sneak in through our bond. I felt for my mate. There wasn’t a whole lot I could do at the moment. “I will be home early,” I told him.

“Sounds wonderful. I will see you then.”

I stopped just outside the office and tried to tell myself it would be all right. “I love you, Caspian. We will talk this evening.”

“There are more enjoyable things I would rather do with you than spend the evening talking.”

I couldn’t stop from smiling. “We will do that as well. For now, I need to finish this meeting I am about to go into, and then I will see what my day holds. I will be home to you early though. We will spend as much time together as possible.”

I felt happiness through our bond. “I love you too, Dimitri. Come home when you can.”

I felt Caspian drop back and took that to mean he was finished talking for the moment. When I stepped into the office, I found Benjamin missing, but the others in the office. Briggs was leaning back in his chair while Felix, our fae new addition to the team, was spinning around in his. I looked at Raiden and raised both eyebrows.

“Benjamin left with his father. Did you hear about Sebastian?”

I nodded. “Caspian said he had a ball of magic thrown at him. He was able to deflect most of it.”

Briggs lifted his head. “That’s good. All we knew was Rainier came in and said he needed to talk to Benjamin about Sebastian.”

“We’d heard that some were hurt,” Raiden added.

“That is all I know at the moment. I reached out to Caspian because Dedushka told me Sebastian had been hurt.” I thought about the vampire that lost his life today. Did he have a beloved? Parents or siblings that would miss him? “There was a loss,” I said out loud. That had Briggs sitting completely upright.

“Who?” He asked.

“One of the vampires. I do not know more than that. Sebastian was hurt, as was someone named Lukan.”

That caught Felix’s attention. He leaned forward in his chair. “How bad was Lukan injured?”

I shook my head. "I am sorry; I do not know. I was told he would be sore for a few days. Much like Sebastian. We can call someone to find out if you are worried."

Felix shook his head. "No. I was curious. Lukan is from my village. He's a few years older than I am, and we didn't really know one another until we came here."

"I will ask," I said. I understood. "I did not think to inquire about him, and I should have."

Felix shrugged while making a face. "I don't expect you to. I just thought you might have been told something when you were told about Sebastian."

"Sebastian is Dimitri's brother-in-law," Raiden said.

"Oh," Felix said. "So that's why. I'm glad your brother-in-law is all right."

"Ja. Me too."

Benjamin came back into the office with concern all over his face. He saw me and looked like he wanted to avoid me.

"I know about Sebastian," I said.

Benjamin's shoulders dropped. "What were you told?"

I stared at the warlock before narrowing my eyes. "What did I need to be told? Caspian said that he would be fine."

Benjamin sighed now. "If Caspian told you what happened, I'm not worried."

"He said a ball of magic, an impact from it, and a store ass."

Benjamin smiled, then stopped, then smiled again. He lost the fight and chuckled. “Yes, that is what Father said happened. I did not know if you had been informed.”

“I reached out to Caspian. Dedushka only said that Sebastian would be sore. As would Lukan.”

Benjamin nodded.

“He’s all right though?” Felix asked. Benjamin turned his way.

“Yes. Same. He was hit with part of the ball of magic. More like the shockwave from it, actually. They went airborne for a bit, and the landing was rough. Sebastian had already thrown a ball of magic of his own, and it managed to hit Riccardo before his ball hit the others. Damien was able to finish binding him, and now Riccardo is a guest in a cell in the basement here.”

That was all good news.

“What now? When are we going back? Still tomorrow?” Briggs asked.

Benjamin nodded slowly. “No. We will go out in a few days from what Father said. The council is pulling the rest of Damien and Sebastian’s teams back. We will go to Italy later in the week. Vincent wished to inquire at a few places. Frederick will be going to Amherst this evening, but that’s it for the moment.”

I wouldn’t necessarily say that was terrible news. I would get a few more days with Caspian, and that would always be a positive thing as far as I was concerned.

“One more meeting,” Benjamin said. “In an hour in the same conference room. After that, we are to go home for the day.”

I wondered about that, and sent Benjamin a look. That was earlier than expected. Was there more going on than what we were being told? Benjamin gave no more information, so I could only wait. Perhaps we would be informed at the meeting. No matter what, there was nothing I could do until then. The prospect of getting to spend even more time with my mate was enough to have my dragon content for the moment and that was all I needed.

Chapter 22

Caspian

“Dimitri?” I called out. My One had gone quiet in the cabin, and I didn’t know why. I was officially halfway through my pregnancy, and we were going to our scan this morning with Dr. King. Now if I could find the other father of our child so we could go.

When I still didn’t get a response, I pushed magic out to search for him. I located him in the dining room. That was odd, because we had already had breakfast, and I had cleaned up everything. I walked back that way, curious if he’d simply not heard me. He was a dragon though, and I swore that man heard every little noise. How had he not heard me?

“Dimitri?” I called out again as I approached the dining room. When I arrived at the doorway, I stopped and took in what I was looking at. Standing there was my sexy and amazing dragon with a smile on his face. He was beside the table, which had been transformed. It was normally completely clear, but now it had several vases full of flowers, and there was a huge plate piled high with...my eyes widened. “Are those cinnamon rolls?”

“Ja. They are your favorite, but you never have them.”

My mouth opened a bit at the sight of those things. They were huge. They had a layer of frosting on them that looked absolutely delicious. I looked up at Dimitri. “I can’t. I want to, so much, but I’m already getting fat.”

Dimitri's smile dropped instantly, and he was coming around the table toward me. "You are not fat. You could never be." Dimitri reached me and without a thought pulled me into his arms. "You are pregnant. You are creating a whole new life. Our son. You can have your cinnamon rolls if you wish. Especially after everything you had to go through in the beginning of this pregnancy."

I wanted to agree and give in, but I couldn't. I glanced down at my no-so-small bump and shook my head. "I already can't see my feet, Dimitri. I would love nothing more than to indulge, but I'm going to be huge if I gain much more weight." The thought of wearing my pre-pregnancy clothing was long gone. I lived in sweats and oversized shirts now. Sure, I could use magic and have some amazingly fitted pregnancy clothing, but why? I spent my days lounging around the house, trying not to be bored while Dimitri was doing his enforcer thing. At least the rotation of assignments to Italy had stopped.

"You can have a cinnamon roll. We will talk to Dr. King about this. I do not like that you are forbidding yourself from having things because you are concerned about your weight."

Immediately I felt bad. Dimitri had done something incredibly nice and sweet, and I basically said no, you shouldn't have."

"Dimitri, I apologize. Would you eat one with me?" I asked. "You went to effort, and I've invalidated it. I'm so sorry."

Dimitri leaned in and gave me a slow kiss. "I will always eat a cinnamon roll with you. But do not feel you have to limit yourself because you have gained weight." Dimitri placed his hand on my stomach. I felt the baby kick and smiled. When I met Dimitri's eyes, he was smiling while looking down at my stomach between us. He'd been able to feel the baby for a few weeks now, and we often spent evenings on the couch, or lounging in bed with Dimitri's hand resting on my rounded stomach.

“How about we have a cinnamon roll, and then go to our scan?” I asked. “You went to all this trouble.” I looked back at the table. “How did you get so many flowers here? Not that I don’t love them, because I do.”

“It is Valentine’s Day,” Dimitri told me. “I should get you flowers and sweets, no?”

It took a moment for me to pull my gaze away from the roses, lilies, and tulips. They were all beautiful. “What?” I asked absently. Then what he’d said seemed to compute in my brain. “Dimitri,” I said, chuckling. “You do not need to use a human holiday in order to get me flowers or sweets. I’m not complaining though, I absolutely love them,” I told him. “I’ve not put flowers out in the cabin as of yet because you didn’t have flowers anywhere when I met you. I looked, and didn’t see any in your memories. I thought perhaps their scent bothered you.” I knew he was sensitive to some scents, but wasn’t exactly sure if it was in a negative way.

“I like flowers,” Dimitri kissed me again. “We will have more flowers in the cabin. They brighten the rooms. I wish for you to make any and all changes you want. This is your home. Make it yours.”

I smiled. “It’s ours.” I looked around the room. “I have made changes. This dining room set was chosen together. You had a tiny one before.”

“But the flowers. I have made the mistake of not getting you flowers before now. I will get you flowers. Often.”

“Where did you get the flowers? There isn’t a flower shop here on the mountain, and they weren’t here when we ate just a bit ago.”

Dimitri smiled. “No. I had help. I did go yesterday during my lunch break. Benjamin helped me by keeping them at his place. Then I messaged him this morning after we finished eating and you were upstairs just now. He helped get the flowers here. The

cinnamon rolls as well.” I smiled and shook my head. “It was the only way I could surprise you with them.”

I leaned in and kissed Dimitri. “I love it. You are an amazing One, and it really makes me feel cherished that you did this for me. If we hurry, we will have time to eat a cinnamon roll before our scan. Did you want coffee with yours?”

“Ja.”

Dimitri and I sat at the table, and once I got a closer look at the sweets, I really wanted to kick myself at considering not indulging. He was right, of course. I wasn’t fat. I was pregnant. I was half through my pregnancy now, and still trying to adjust. Would I ever get used to carrying another life inside me? Possibly. I needed to talk to Papa about some things.

Dimitri handed me a plate with a giant cinnamon roll on it, and I wondered for a moment if I’d be able to eat the entire thing. Now that it was sitting right in front of me, I could smell it, and my mouth started to water in anticipation. I picked up the fork, and took a small bite. I closed my eyes and moaned when the warm treat hit my tongue. It was soft and had the perfect amount of cinnamon gooeyness in it. The frosting was cream cheese, and I couldn’t stop from dancing in my chair. It was perfect.

When I swallowed and opened my eyes, I found Dimitri staring at me. “I am glad you are enjoying your treat.”

“I’m an idiot,” I said as I pulled the plate a little closer. “When my stomach sorted itself out, I should have started eating more things I love. I focused too much on eating only healthy foods.”

“All things in moderation,” Dimitri said. I nodded in agreement. When I glanced

down at his plate, I saw that his cinnamon roll was almost gone. I needed to step up my game, and dove in. I managed to get several more bites in while Dimitri finished his and drank the cup of coffee I'd magicked up for him.

I gave up trying to finish it though. I just didn't have the same appetite that Dimitri did, and we'd eaten breakfast not long ago.

"I can't." I said and pushed my plate away.

"It is all right. It makes me very happy that you ate any of it. I do not like that you deny yourself. What if our baby wanted a cinnamon roll?"

I looked over at Dimitri and snorted. He was absolutely serious, and it was just adorable. "Then our baby will get a cinnamon roll," I told him. "If he's old enough." I felt full, perhaps a bit too full, but it didn't take much for me to feel that way anymore. "We need to go," I said. "We're going to be late if we don't hurry."

"You can use magic to get us there, can you not?"

I nodded. "Then we can go that way. We will not be late. If you still wish to have a walk, we can walk home."

"I thought you had to go to work after? It's Wednesday." He wasn't going out on assignments at the moment since the trail to locate Marco had died. He was simply nowhere to be found.

"I am not working today. My only task is to see that you get to your scan and then spend the day with you while we decide what we wish to do for the baby's room."

I grinned. I had so few days where I got to spend the entire day with Dimitri, and I wasn't going to complain about not having an extra one with him in the middle of the

week.

“Then we should go,” I told him as I stood. Dimitri hurried to touch the back of my chair to steady it. Once I was fully upright, he reached for my hand. With our fingers laced together, I thought about the clinic that was over behind the council building. We were standing outside it in a blink, and Dimitri immediately reached for the door with his free hand. I entered, only too happy to get out of the cold. It was February, and even the air felt frozen. Add in two feet of snow, and the mountain was beautiful, but bitterly cold.

“Good morning.”

We looked up at the greeting and found Todd. He looked...frazzled.

“Hello Todd. How are you doing today?” I asked as we approached him. Dimitri was still beside me, his hand still holding mine.

“Do you know anything about computers?” He asked. There was such a hopeful look in his eyes. “I don’t know what I did.” He turned the monitor around and showed that it was a rainbow of colors.

“Oh my. Did you spill something on the computer?” I asked. Todd shook his head. “Drop it?” Another shake.

I flicked my fingers toward the monitor and when it went from the rainbow to what looked like a schedule, I grinned. Todd turned the monitor back around his way, and I watched as his eyes widened and then became watery.

“Todd, did you ever...oh, you did. Good job,” Dr. King said. “I don’t know how you fixed it, but good job.”

Todd opened his mouth, but Dimitri cut him off. “We apologize for being a bit late,” Dimitri said. “I finally got Caspian to eat a cinnamon roll.”

“Cinnamon roll, huh?” Dr. King said. “Well, that sounds like a treat. Are you ready for your scan?”

I winked at Todd, hoping he understood that it didn’t matter how the computer got fixed, just that it did. I knew he had struggled a great deal when it came to working his position. He was replacing Cecil, who had been Dr. King’s last office manager, but had decided that he was going to spend the next few years at home with their little ones. Not that I blamed him. I had every intention on not returning to work in any capacity for at least a decade. Of course, I said that now. Give me a year or two and I might be singing a different tune.

I followed Dr. King down the hallway, turning into the second room on the right. It had a cozy looking bed in it that I went directly to and climbed on. It was already in an upright position, so I found myself in what I would describe as an oversized lounge.

“How have you been feeling? I know you were experiencing pregnancy illness in the very beginning. Somewhat severe at that.” Dr. King glanced at Dimitri who had sat in the chair that was beside the exam bed. “But your One has mentioned having a cinnamon roll. Is that completely gone then?”

“Yes. He surprised me with them this morning. They’re my favorite, but I’ve not had one since before I met Dimitri.”

Dr. King’s expression changed. “Why is that? If they are your favorite, why would you deny having them? Do they not sit well in your stomach?”

I sighed. “No, that’s not it.” I placed my hands on my bump. Well, my pregnant

stomach because it was a lot more than just a bump. “I feel fat most days, and I’ve been focusing on eating healthy things. Cinnamon rolls are anything but healthy.”

“Ah. Yes, well, you are growing an entire new person. A dragon at that.” Dr. King looked at Dimitri. “Were you a small baby?”

Dimitri snorted. “No. None of us were. My mother is a fox shifter, and is tiny. It has been said that she swore she would not let our father touch her again, yet I have six siblings. The last two were even twins. They were the smallest, but only because they are twins.”

Dr. King nodded, then focused on me. “You will have a large baby. You are carrying a dragon baby, and I have never seen one that was small. I say eat that cinnamon roll, because you are going to gain a larger stomach and more weight. The baby will appreciate the healthy food, but daddies who are creating and carrying babies need to have treats for all of their hard work.”

I couldn’t help but smile. He wasn’t wrong. “I know what you say is true. I’m still trying to come to terms with having a baby I think?” I reached for Dimitri’s hand and gave it a squeeze once he took mine. When he brought it to his mouth and kissed it, I smiled over at him. “I love being the one carrying our baby, but it’s been difficult to get used to it completely.”

“Perfectly normal. Perhaps seeing your baby again will help?” Dr. King suggested.

I nodded, and that was all it took for the table to start reclining. It didn’t lay flat, but reclined enough that I found myself staring up toward the ceiling. The room lights dimmed, and then there was our baby. He was in the air in front of us, and my heart melted.

“There he is,” Dr. King said. “Still a dragon, still having a male one at that. His

development is exactly as expected for the gestational age.” The image above us zoomed in on the tiny toes. Dimitri squeezed my hand. “His feet are fully developed, and although they are still small, he himself is not. His size is a bit larger than most other babies for his gestational age.”

“I thought you said he was where he should be?” I asked.

“For development, yes. His organ development is where it should be.” Dr. King offered a sympathetic smile. “Your baby is large, Caspian. Dimitri isn’t exactly a small man.” I looked over at my One. “So we’re going to have huge babies?”

Dimitri shrugged. “It is most likely. But my mother did it, and you are so much bigger than she is. You will be a pro at it.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle. What else could I do? I was destined to have large dragon babies for my One apparently. Dimitri wasn’t wrong though. His mother was tiny. Especially compared to me even. And she had given birth to three dragon babies.

“If I am to have large dragon babies, so be it,” I said. “Do you think I’ll go to my due date?” I asked. “I know it’s still three months away, but I thought I would ask.”

Dr. King nodded. “It is hard to tell. If you were carrying twins, I would say that without a doubt you would deliver early. You are carrying only one baby though. Sometimes larger babies come early, sometimes they can be stubborn and make their parents wait to meet them.”

I turned back to Dimitri and shook my head. “Our son,” I said. “Why do I think he’s going to be a stubborn one and make us wait until the very end to meet him?”

Dimitri’s eyes widened. “I am not overly stubborn. He must get that from you.” He sat there; his face completely expressionless. Slowly a smile crept in though.

“You are probably correct.” Dimitri raised an eyebrow at me. I rolled my eyes. “Fine. You’re right. I’m the more stubborn of the two of us.”

Dr. King chuckling drew my attention. “Overall, he looks great,” Dr. King said. “Aside from him being on the larger side, he’s doing well. Continue eating healthy, but be sure to put some treats in there. You deserve it,” he told me.

Dimitri squeezed my hand. I turned back to him and found him giving me a look. I sighed. “I’ll eat treats. But I like fruit and salads as well.”

“There is nothing wrong with that,” Dimitri told me. “But I miss cookies,” he told me. Immediately I felt bad.

“You can have cookies.”

“I still do. There are cookies, pies, cakes, all sorts of things at the council in the cafeteria. But I used to have them as snacks before bed sometimes. I do not go to the bakery anymore because you do not like to have them in the house.”

I winced. “I’m sorry. I promise I won’t say anything again. We can stop at the bakery on our way home. Does that work?” I would make him a large batch of cookies as soon as we got home as well. Dimitri nodded at me.

Dr. King cleared his throat. When I looked back at him, he was holding a strip of paper. I knew it had adorable pictures of our baby on it.

“Do either of you have questions?” He asked.

I shook my head before looking at Dimitri. “He is fine?” Dimitri asked. “I worry about my mate, and want him to be healthy and all right.”

Dr. King smiled. “Your mate is perfectly healthy, Dimitri. So is your son.”

Dimitri nodded. I felt something through our bond, and when I focused on it, I realized it was him relaxing. How had I missed that he was concerned?

“Same story as last time. Sex is okay until it is uncomfortable. Call if you have sudden gushes of fluid or pain. If the baby stops moving, try coffee or something else to make him active. Sometimes coffee works, sometimes patients say having sex with their alpha does the trick.” Dr. King shook his head. “I do not care how you go about it as long as it doesn’t harm either of you. If you cannot get the baby to move, call me.” Dr. King glanced at a tablet he’d picked up. “I wish to see you in a month, if you don’t have any other questions or issues before then.”

“A month?” Dimitri asked.

“It is just routine. I want to check the baby’s size at that time. We’ll check the development then as well. That’s all. Nothing to worry about, honestly.”

I sat up and turned toward my One. “Are you ready to go to the bakery?” I asked, hoping I could distract him.

“Ja.” Dimitri took my free hand to help me off of the bed. Once I was on my own two feet, we followed Dr. King out of the exam room. Todd wasn’t behind the counter when we arrived back at the waiting area, and Dr. King sighed.

“He’s probably in the bathroom. Would you like me to make your appointment or do you want to call back?”

I grinned. “I’ll call back. Todd tries, and I know he does.”

Dr. King’s expression softened. “He does. I was spoiled by Cecil. He was a natural.

Todd...he's not the best with computers. He's good at other things though. The break room is incredibly organized, and we've not run out of anything since he's been here."

"Occasionally, it just takes longer for some to figure out how they fit in places," I said. Dr. King nodded slowly. I gave Dimitri's hand a squeeze, and he stepped away, taking me with him. I hoped that Todd worked out. He seemed like he enjoyed his job well enough, even if he did struggle with some aspects of it. "What type of cookies do you think you want?" I asked Dimitri. His smile was contagious and I couldn't help but mirror it. I wasn't too worried about the extra calories for a day. I knew my dragon would be more than happy and willing to help me work them off later.

Dimitri

My nerves were done. Caspian was due. Our not-so-little dragon was being stubborn, and his daddy was paying the price. He was due two days ago, and still nothing. No contractions, and no signs of going into labor. The only thing that Caspian had experienced was being uncomfortable to the point he was miserable. My mate was amazing and perfect and wasn't complaining even a little, but I knew he was over being pregnant and had been for some time. Not that I blamed him. From the beginning the pregnancy had been less than ideal.

"Dimitri!"

The urgency in Caspian's voice, as well as the sudden sharp pain in my lower stomach had me rushing toward him. He was in the bathroom taking a warm bath in hopes of alleviating some of his discomfort. I hurried into the bathroom and found my mate on his knees and holding onto the side of the tub.

"What is it? Is the baby coming?" I asked as I reached him. I placed my arms on his shoulders and felt the tension in them. Caspian was panting, and when another pain punched my stomach, I nodded. "I will be back. I need my phone. It is just in the bedroom."

I didn't wait for Caspian to answer me. I took off and hurried to our bedroom. I had the phone in my hand and was calling Dr. King's number before I even made it back to the bathroom.

"Dimitri? Is it finally time?"

“Dr. King, I think it is. I’m feeling sharp pains through our bond. Does that mean he’s in a lot of discomfort?”

“It’s possible,” he told me. “I will be right there. Is it all right for me to come into the house?”

“Ja. We are in the bedroom.” I made it back to Caspian who was still holding onto the side of the tub. His face looked white, and my concern for him amplified. “We are actually in the bathroom. Caspian was in the bath, trying to relax, but he looks as if he’s not doing well. Please hurry.”

“I’m walking into the house now,” Dr. King said. I pulled my phone away and after touching the red button to end the call, I dropped the phone on the floor. “Caspian, lyubimyy? Dr. King is here. He’s here, my love. He will help.”

Caspian looked up at me, and all I saw was tension in his face.

“Hello?”

“In here!” I called out. Dr. King entered the bathroom seconds later, and was across the room in a blink. “How is he?”

“I do not know,” I said. “He seems frozen in pain.”

Dr. King gave me a concerned look. He knelt down, and placed a hand on Caspian’s other shoulder. When he did, a green light came from his hand. It seemed to enter Caspian, who looked up at the doctor.

“How are you doing? Ready to have the baby it seems.”

“Hurts.”

“Yes, I don’t doubt that. If you were an omega, I would say you could push the baby out in the tub, but you don’t have an omega line. I need to get you to the bed so I can deliver the baby, all right?”

Caspian nodded. Dr. King looked at me.

“I can use magic to move him. Is your dragon going to be all right with me doing that?”

“Ja. Please help him.”

“I will. I promise. Now let’s go to the bedroom and your little guy can be born.”

I nodded. Caspian and Dr. King disappeared as I turned to look at my mate. I knew he was only in the bedroom. I found Caspian on our bed with Dr. King beside him. His hand was hovering over his stomach, glowing again. Once the hand was above Caspian’s large stomach, I saw the tension leave Caspian’s face.

I closed the distance between us and knelt down beside my mate and took his hand. “I’m here, Caspian.” I pulled his hand to my mouth and gave it a kiss.

“I don’t know what happened. I was relaxing finally, and then there was a sharp pain. I called out to you, and then felt the water get really warm.”

“Your waters broke,” Dr. King said. “Your little one is ready to be born.” He looked at us and smiled. “I’ll start now. Let me know if you feel any more pain.”

“I feel wonderful now. I wish I could have felt this light throughout the pregnancy.”

Dr. King chuckled. I watched as his hand moved across Caspian’s stomach. When my mate squeezed my hand, I looked back at him. “Are you in pain?”

“No. I’m nervous though.”

I pulled his hand close and kissed it again. “You are going to be an amazing daddy. Our son is going to adore you like I do.”

“A little bit of movement here while I work to get him out,” Dr. King said.

“He’s almost here,” I said.

“He is. We’re finally going to meet our son,” Caspian said. I saw movement out of the corner of my eye and turned my head enough just in time to see Dr. King pull the baby from Caspian. My eyes widened, and I felt terrible about it instantly. “What’s wrong?” Caspian asked as he squeezed my hand harder than I would have thought.

“Nothing,” I said. “He’s a big baby.”

Dr. King chuckled. “He really is. He’s the biggest I’ve ever delivered.” Seconds later there was a loud cry in the room. Caspian’s breath caught, and he tried to look down his body. I knew his stomach was still most likely in the way, which had brought him a great deal of frustration in the past month.

“His lungs sure work,” I said. Caspian looked at me and shook his head.

“They do,” Dr. King said. “You have a very large, very healthy alpha here,” he told us. When moved toward us, he was holding the baby that was now wrapped in a blue blanket. “Here you go, Daddy. I need to take care of the placenta and then close you,” he said to Caspian as he carefully placed the baby on Caspian’s chest. “You can get to know your little dragon in the meantime.”

I moved closer, staring at my mate holding our child. I was already hopelessly in love with my mate, but I somehow managed to fall even more in love with him in that moment. He was holding our child, and looked more beautiful than ever.

“You would think that he would at least look a little like me,” Caspian said. “Especially after everything he put me through.” Caspian looked directly at me. “He’s beautiful, but he has to be because he’s your clone.”

Dr. King chuckled. “His eyes are blue though,” he told us.

“But that’s it? This kid put me through so much yuck and all I get is blue eyes?” Caspian smiled at me, and shook his head. “He’s so beautiful, Dimitri.”

“He is your son, of course he is.”

Caspian rolled his eyes. “I love him. He needs brothers though.”

Dr. King snorted, and I couldn’t blame him. “You are literally still giving birth. Are you sure you are thinking with a clear mind?”

Caspian sighed. “I am. We’re still going with the name Ayden, right?”

I smiled. “Ja, we are. It is fitting, no? He is our little fighter I think.” I leaned in and kissed Caspian. He turned his head toward me, meeting my lips with his. “I love you,” I told him after we parted. “We will have as many as you wish. But let’s wait until he’s a little older.”

“We have to since I won’t have a fertile period for a year.” Caspian glanced at the baby and then back at me. “Or did you mean for us to wait several years?”

I reached out and ran my fingers through his hair. “We will have them as soon as you would like. I only meant that we cannot have another baby just yet.”

“You are closed,” Dr. King said. It was difficult, but I pulled my gaze away from my mate and son. “Your baby is just over eleven pounds, and perfectly healthy.”

I looked at Caspian. “Still wish to have more babies?” Dr. King chuckled, and Caspian was staring at me with wide eyes.

“Yes. At least one more. I can’t do only one.”

“Lyubimyy, it does not have to be decided now,” I told him. I caressed his face and moved in for another kiss. “I was only joking. We will have as many as you wish. If you say you want seven and then change your mind after the next one, I will not be upset. I only wish for you and our babies to be healthy.”

“Do you want to sit up?” Dr. King asked. “You cannot walk as of yet. You need to remain in the bed until the feeling returns to your lower half.”

“Can I?”

“Of course,” Dr. King said. He carefully took the baby and held him out to me. “You meet your son, and I’ll help your mate. Then I’ll leave the two of you so you can bond with the baby.”

I quickly stood before carefully taking the baby from the doctor. Immediately I saw what Caspian said. He looked so much like me. Well, except for those blue eyes. “Hello little Ayden. You are so beautiful. So is your daddy.” I said quietly. Ayden yawned and then closed his eyes as I stood there holding my son.

I looked down at Caspian and realized that he was now lounging against a pile of pillows on our bed. Dr. King was gone, and when I looked toward the door, it was still open, but the doctor was nowhere to be seen.

“He went downstairs. You were talking to him in Russian. I could pick up on a word here and there, but I still don’t know it all that well.”

“I apologize,” I told him. “I was telling him of his grandfather and great-grandfather.

How they are strong dragons, and will be amazing men in his life.” I pulled the baby closer, kissed his forehead, and then bent down to hand him back to my mate. Caspian took the baby and did the same before he held him close and closed his own eyes. “Are you feeling all right?”

Caspian’s eyes immediately opened. “I am. My lower half is still numb, but there is a sudden lightness overall. Dr. King said it would take a few days, at the minimum, for my body to really start to feel better, but it will happen soon. I love our son already, but the pregnancy was a lot.”

I nodded. I carefully sat beside him on the edge of the bed. I placed my hand on top of his where it was cradling Ayden. “We will let everyone know he is here once you are feeling up to it.” I was in no rush to have our lives disrupted.

“Later this evening,” Caspian said. “Once I can walk, we should let everyone know. Your parents are back, right?”

I nodded. They had returned a few days ago, but Caspian had been so miserable the last week that he’d spent most of his time in bed or in the bath. I could not relate, but I was sympathetic and felt for him. I had done everything I could to care for my mate, and at times I had succeeded, but others I felt as if I wasn’t doing enough for him.

“Stop,” Caspian said. I pulled my eyes from the baby and met blue eyes that I dreamed about. “You did everything perfectly. Some pregnancies are just more difficult than others. You though, were exactly what I needed, and you took such amazing care of me.”

“I wish I could have taken your pain and discomfort.”

Caspian looked down at the baby and smiled. “He was worth every day spent sick or uncomfortable.” Caspian looked up at me and gestured for me to move closer. I did, but he shook his head. “No, you should join us on the bed. I want to cuddle with my

guys.”

I chuckled, but did exactly as he'd suggested. I would never deny him anything. My entire world was right there on the bed, and if Caspian wanted me to cuddle with them, I would be there for as long as he wished.

I carefully climbed onto the bed from the other side, and once I was settled beside them, Caspian carefully placed the baby on my chest. He leaned in and turned his upper body toward us before he sighed. I wrapped my arm around him, pulling him closer. I could feel the love and contentment through our bond. I kissed Ayden's black hair before I leaned in and kissed Caspian's. In that moment, I could not have asked for more.

“I love you,” I said.

Caspian looked up at me and smiled. “I love you too.” I leaned down and kissed his forehead. When Caspian snuggled in, I sat there and held my mate and our son. It didn't take long before I felt Caspian drift off into sleep. He more than earned it, and I wasn't going to do a thing to disturb him. Why would it? I was holding my loves in my arms. Life truly had blessed me.

Curious to know more about why Frederick was sent to Amherst? Be sure to check out Frederick to find out more!