



Embracing Magic (A Collection of Familiars Book 2)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Casper, with a magical compass in hand, hits the road to find his spark. He's not sure what to expect but he certainly isn't prepared for his spark, Ray, to not know that she's living in a world surrounded by the supernatural. Casper's determined to do everything in his power to help Ray embrace her magic.

Zeke is a banshee who helps usher ghosts into the afterlife. The last thing he's expecting is to find his true mate during one of these hunts. As happy as Zeke is, he can't help but worry how his mate will react when Casper learns he's mated to a monster.

Total Pages (Source): 14

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:22 am

My stomach flips as I stare down at the compass in my hand. I can't stop thinking about what the future is going to hold for me, the future that this compass is pointing me towards. My mind is racing a million miles an hour and there's no slowing it down in sight.

As a familiar, I've been thinking about finding my spark since I was a little boy. I can't speak for my cousins, but I'm almost positive they've been looking forward to meeting their magical counterpart as much as I am. In order to help us find our sparks, our grandmother gifted us this magical compass, enchanted to lead us to them.

Jude, our oldest cousin, found his spark and his true mate within the same night of using the compass while one of my other cousins, Willow, found his spark after five years of looking.

Will my journey be quick like Jude's? Or will it take years?

I flip onto my stomach, tucking the compass under my pillow so I don't keep myself awake all night staring at it. I can hear people downstairs talking. It's been about a week since Eileen, Willow and Callan's daughter, was born.

Harbor, Bently, and I wanted to be with Jude and Willow for Eileen's birth so we decided to take a pit stop on our road trip to visit the place Jude has set down roots. His spark and mate are both retired hunters who run a hunting network these days. Don't ask me how but Jeff, their unofficial leader, acquired this cul-de-sac for their group. One of those houses just so happens to be a large guest home that we're currently staying in.

If hunting pays this much, maybe I should look into it.

My hand reaches under my pillow, my fingers connecting with the hard edges of the compass. My stomach flips once it's in my hand.

I don't know why it's my turn to take the compass. Once Jude found Cooper, he passed the compass to Willow. And now that Willow has found Nash, he's passed it onto me.

Don't get me wrong, I genuinely want to find my spark. As a familiar, I can sense magic, but I can't wield it. There's a part inside of me that's filled with nothing but longing, wanting to be connected to my spark, to feel them wield magic through me. I crave being their catalyst. They're going to be brilliant.

But me? I'm just me.

I'm nothing special. I'm the funny guy who isn't afraid to say something stupid to make everyone laugh that they overlook once they're done having a chuckle. In my head, my spark is a rainbow and I'm just gray.

Part of me wonders if it would be better for everyone if I tried to pass the compass onto Bently instead of me. Surely it would be better for him to find his spark than for mine to be stuck with me, right?

Even as I think it, my stomach flips with something like disapproval. I let out a deep sigh, knowing there's no fighting against what Lady Fate wants. It's my turn. I need to keep my chin up and prepare myself for what that means. All I can do is present myself and hope for the best.

Lady Fate wouldn't lead me to someone who didn't want me, right?

This is all without thinking about possibly meeting my true mate! I thought Jude was an outlier, finding his spark and his true mate at the same time but now that the same exact thing has happened to Willow, I can't help but think this is becoming a pattern.

Am I ready to be someone's mate? Would I even be a good mate to someone? I've never dated. I've never kissed anyone. Hell, I've barely even attempted to flirt with anyone before! The idea of having some fling with a random person on the road was about as appealing as a tuna sandwich that's been sitting out in the sun all day. I'm just not interested, but will that change once I meet my true mate? Will those desires and instincts reveal themselves?

I've been in my cousins' pockets since we started this road trip, I haven't had time to learn how to flirt even if I wanted to. I have no idea how Jude and Willow went straight from being with us to being in a relationship. Can I handle doing the same or am I the cousin who's going to fuck it all up?

I pull the compass out from under the pillow, looking at it again. I swear it's moved ever so slightly. Is my spark on the move?

I'm starting to get a bit antsy about leaving this place. I'm sick to my stomach with nerves, but under that there's another feeling. Tentative excitement. As much as I adore being here with everyone and meeting the hunting crew, I'm ready to get this show on the road. For better or for worse, it's time to find my spark.

I just hope they're as excited to meet me as I am to meet them.

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We've been on the road for a few weeks, following the direction the compass is pointing. I don't know how I know, but somehow I just know that we're getting close.

"You look like you're gonna be sick," Harbor murmurs, squeezing my shoulder. "Take a deep breath, Casper."

Bently looks over at us from over his shoulder before turning back to the road. "It's starting to get dark. Do you wanna find somewhere to stop for the night?"

My hand clenches around the compass, my stomach going wild with butterflies. I swallow thickly and shake my head. "Can we keep going for a bit longer? Just another hour."

"It's happening, isn't it?" Harbor asks, smiling from ear to ear. "The compass senses your spark, doesn't it? Oh, I'm so excited! I can't wait to meet your spark! I bet they're going to be just as funny as you! You're gonna mesh instantly, I can just feel it!"

Harbor is so excited that it's hard to stay nervous. His attitude is infectious and I find myself mirroring his grin.

"We can keep driving all night," Bently says from behind the steering wheel. "I've got at least a few more hours in me before I'll need a break. This is your moment, Casper."

"Thanks," I say, running my fingers through my shaggy dark hair, tucking it behind

my ears and out of my face. “I’m so nervous. Holy shit. That poor bastard has no idea what they’re getting in for.”

Harbor smacks my arm. “Shut it, Casper. You’re amazing and they’re gonna adore you. Don’t be so hard on yourself like that.”

“Fine,” I say with a huff. “It’s going to be great and not at all cringeworthy.”

“That’s the spirit,” Bently deadpans.

“I hope you find your mate right away too. That would be extra exciting,” Harbor says, bouncing in his seat. He looks out the window, like maybe he’ll see my true mate out there waiting for me.

“Take this exit,” I murmur, my stomach flipping over itself as the compass moves ever so slightly. “This direction.”

Bently takes the exit, pulling off the highway towards a little town. My heart skips a beat as we continue driving. Despite the night still being fairly early, it seems this little town is already mostly sleeping. We pass only a few cars as we go.

Despite being drawn in a certain direction, Bently pulls the RV through the drive-thru of a fast food joint. When I give him a look he shrugs. “What? If we’re on the hunt then we need fuel to keep us going!”

I groan but order a cheeseburger and large fries despite the nerves in my stomach. Maybe the food will help calm me down a bit. We get our food and quickly get back onto the main drag of this little town, following it through. This town is basically a straight line for a main street, this main road having most of the businesses scattered on either side of it while smaller roads curve off in either direction where people’s homes seem to be.

“Keep following this road,” I say, watching as the small town fades away. I shove my cheeseburger into my mouth, scarfing it down quickly so I don’t miss anything. We follow the road until we see less and less buildings. The road turns from pavement to dirt. There are signs pointing in the direction of the main highway but we ignore that, following this road, following the compass.

Harbor eats his fries like he’s eating popcorn and watching the most intense movie of his life. “We’re so close,” he says, shoving another one into his mouth. “I can tell.”

Swallowing thickly, I can’t help but agree. The longing in my chest feels all consuming, like if I don’t find my spark soon, it’ll completely consume me. My eyes continue to dart between the compass and the road ahead of us. We pass a crossroad and I nearly jump out of my seat. “Wait! We passed them! Turn around.”

Bently carefully pulls a Y turn in order to turn the RV around, going back to the T and taking a left. There’s a rundown house in the distance. Even from here I can see that the house is barely holding on. The roof is caving in, some of the walls have holes in them and a lot of the windows are broken.

The house is very clearly abandoned and condemned. So what the hell is my spark doing here? Are they homeless and squatting here? Are they leaving graffiti? Are they a troublemaker?

Fuck, I can’t wait to finally find out.

There’s a car parked outside. I can feel it in the pit of my gut. The car holds my spark. I can sense them. Can they sense me too?

“Holy guacamole,” I breathe out, my eyes widening the closer we get to the car parked on the side of the road. “Oh my gods. That’s them. My spark is in that car. I think I’m gonna piss myself.”

“Please don’t,” Harbor says, wrinkling his nose. “That would make a terrible first impression.”

“Okay, okay. I’ll hold it. It’s fine. Everything is totally and completely fine.”

“Deep breath,” Bently tells me as he turns off the headlights and pulls the RV right behind the car. I might actually throw up that burger I just scarfed down, but again, that would be a shit first impression. I gotta keep it together. I gotta calm down.

My hands are shaking as I hold up the compass, letting my cousins see the same thing that I do; my spark is straight ahead. Sure, it could be a coincidence and they’re actually miles down this road, but I know in the pit of my very soul the truth. They’re right in front of me in that car.

“Willow and Jude should have warned me it would feel like this,” I whisper under my breath, trying my best to keep myself from leaping out of the RV. I can be composed. I can!

“They tried to explain it but I think it’s something you have to experience to really comprehend,” Harbor says with a shrug. He puts his hands on my shoulders. “Are you ready?”

“I have no fucking idea,” I tell him seriously. “Yes. No. Yes. Maybe. Oh my gods.”

The three of us climb out of the RV. I move to the left, watching as the arrow on the compass moves, keeping itself pointed at the little blue car in front of us. Even if I didn’t trust the feelings welling up inside my gut, the compass doesn’t lie.

Harbor walks around the RV so he can get to the car from the passenger side while Bently and I stay by the driver’s side. The window is open but the person inside is so engrossed on their phone that they haven’t even noticed us yet. From here I can tell

they have a buzz cut and a variety of piercings lining their left ear and wearing a denim coat covered in random patches.

They're so fucking cool.

I can't stop smiling. My smile is so wide it's starting to make my cheeks ache. This is it. This is the moment I've been looking forward to since I was a little boy. All of the lead up and chase has led me here, to this very person. My soul aches, reaching out for the person in front of me, longing for the spark that'll use us, embrace us, and complete us.

Just as I'm about to clear my throat and announce my presence, Harbor opens up the passenger door and slides inside the car. My spark flings her phone down, screaming at a pitch I didn't even think was possible. My head is buzzing from how loud and high pitched the noise is.

"Hey, chill!" Harbor says, shoving a few fries into my spark's open mouth.

My spark turns away from Harbor, spitting the fries through the open window to her left which just so happens to be where I'm leaning down. She spits them right into my face, her eyes widening when she sees Bently and I.

She screams again.

"What the fuck? Jesus Christ! Get the fuck out of my car! Who just gets into a stranger's car like this?"

"Just calm down," I say after spitting the fries out of my mouth that she just spit at me. I hold up my hands, showing that I mean her no harm. "This is all a really weird misunderstanding, I promise."

“Like fuck am I going to take your word for it! Random ass dudes creeping around my car spells future trauma. No fucking thank you!”

My spark picks up her phone, calling someone. Doesn't she feel the same connection I'm feeling? Doesn't she know that I'm not just some weirdo who's trying to creep on her?

I take a step away from her car. Okay, from any other point of view, this doesn't look good. We really are just some guys who're in the middle of nowhere bothering someone we don't know.

“You need to get your asses out here right now. I don't care how close you are to doing your dumbass ghost bullshit. There's some weirdos out here bothering me and I need some back up. Now.”

Harbor is staring at my spark in confusion. “We're not weirdos? Don't you feel that we're connected? Well, not you and me. You and him?”

“They're saying weird shit, Zeke. Get out here. Now.”

Bently pulls me back, leaning down so he can yell at Harbor. “Get out of her car, Harbor. You're not helping things!” Then he turns to look at my spark. “I'm really sorry about the confusion. We thought you were someone we already knew.”

“Right. Uh huh. Likely story, big guy.”

“I think if we all just settle down and take a step back, we're gonna look back at this someday and laugh.”

How the fuck have things gone so wrong? I was so happy to meet my spark but all I've done is convince her I'm some sort of asshole. Why doesn't she feel the longing

that I'm feeling? Why doesn't she want me? Was the compass wrong?

Before I can properly freak out and have a full blown breakdown, there's a noise behind me. I turn around as I hear a few people coming out of the rundown house across the street. A woman and a man come running out towards us, looking ready to raise hell.

Fuck. Could tonight get any worse?

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“Are you sure about this, Zeke? As creepy as this place is, I’m not so sure it’s actually haunted.”

“All the signs are here,” I say, pulling out my notebook and sitting down on the floor. “Strange noises at night, things moving on their own, cold spots, and the EMF monitor going off.”

Page nods her head as I speak, looking around the living room. “It all tracks. I’m not questioning you, for the record. Just curious why the ghost hasn’t shown its face for us yet.”

“Maybe he’s shy.”

Page hums as she looks around, squatting to pick up one of the fallen picture frames, careful not to step on any of the broken glass. She lets out a long sigh before putting it back onto the mantle.

All of the signs point to a haunting, that much is certain, but what I don’t voice out loud is that I can feel a presence here. Someone’s been stuck in this world instead of crossing the veil into the afterlife. They’re stuck, holding onto something so tightly that it’s caused them to twist themselves into something they’re not. They’ve made themselves into something that allows them to stay for whatever reason.

I’ve been best friends with Page and Ray since we were all awkward teenagers but recently, something happened to Page that made her realize the world as we all know it isn’t exactly all there is. Her eyes were opened to the very real fact that the supernatural exists. Though the circumstances of that were incredibly unfortunate, it

did have its upsides.

I can finally show her who I really am; a banshee. And in turn, she can trust me with her secret of being a vampire.

I've been a ghost hunter for many years now but once Page entered the supernatural world, I offered to show her what I really do on the weekends. It was her idea to record these sessions and edit them into silly videos we can put online. Throw a few ads onto the videos and bam, the funding for these excursions were finally entering our pockets.

Putting ghosts to rest isn't the most lucrative profession but our videos make up for that. Plus, I'd still be doing this even if I never got paid. It's what I feel like I was born to do. These ghosts used to be people. They deserve rest.

"Pete? Are you here? Can you hear me?"

The air begins to dip in temperature as I speak, my breath making little white clouds around my mouth.

"We're here to help," Page adds on, coming to squat near me. "Let's help you find some rest, old man."

"Don't insult the ghosts," I say under my breath, smiling over at Page. "Hopefully we can leave this one without a single bruise on me this time."

"You threaten a ghost one time and you never get to live it down."

I can feel the moment Pete steps foot into the room. He's still in that weird limbo between this plane of existence and the afterlife, holding onto something here with both hands. I nod my head in his direction and Page looks up. She might not be able

to see ghosts the same way that I can, but she's always done her best to make them feel seen.

"Hey there, Pete. Thanks for stopping by. How can we help?"

We always start our hunts like this, offering help, hoping that the ghosts we're hunting have enough humanity left not to lash out without reason. It doesn't always go smoothly but there's something about Pete that makes me feel like this will be one of our easier hunts.

"Where's my Anna-Beth?"

I look over at Page. "He's asking about someone named Anna-Beth."

"Your daughter? That's Anna-Beth?"

"Yes. Do you know her? Is she alright? I worry about her. Is anyone looking after her now that I'm gone?"

"He said he's worried about Anna-Beth. Can you look her up, Page? See how she's doing?"

Page is quick as she pulls out her phone, looking through social media for Pete's daughter. I can tell the moment she finds her, Page's face lighting up with glee. "I've found her, Pete. Oh my goodness, your daughter is beautiful."

I watch as Pete's form becomes less like that of a phantom. His features solidify as he steps closer to Page, hanging on her every word. The closer he gets and the more Page speaks, the more his form becomes human until he's standing over her shoulder, staring down at the phone. His last step sounds throughout the room.

“Looks like she’s settled down in a bigger city. She has a husband and a daughter of her own. Oh, look at that, she’s pregnant right now. Announced that she’ll be having PJ before the end of the year. Pete Junior. That’s so sweet.”

Pete’s face is serene as he smiles down at Page’s phone, looking at pictures of his daughter. He looks over at me and whispers, “thank you.” I nod my head as his form changes once more, fizzling out of existence as he moves from this place to the afterlife.

“Nice job,” I say to my partner in crime. “Pete’s no longer here. He’s found peace.”

Page puts her phone away. “Well, that was a bit anticlimactic.”

I can’t help but chuckle, shaking my head. “They can’t all be exciting. They’ve gotta keep us on our toes! Sometimes they’re easy as pie and other times we have to drag them into finding peace kicking and screaming.”

Sometimes when the ghosts show no sign of calming down or start doing things like tossing Page and I around the room, we have to call in Page’s girlfriend, Ray. She doesn’t believe in the supernatural which is really awkward as her best friend and girlfriend happen to be supernatural creatures.

I’ve never been able to pinpoint why exactly but there’s something about Ray that puts spirits at ease without doing anything more than being in the room with them. Or at least calms them down enough for them to go back into limbo and give us a moment to catch our breath.

“Shall we?”

“Yeah, let’s get the hell out of here. This place gives me the creeps,” Page says with a smirk. “It’s almost like it could be haunted, Zeke.”

“Gods, you’re such a dork. Why do I put up with you again?”

“Because I’m super hot. And hilarious. And when ghosts want to throw one of us like a rag doll you might as well have a vampire there as bait since I have supernatural healing?”

“Right, we’ll go with that.”

Just as I’m packing up the last of our things, my phone starts to ring. I pick it up right away. “Hey, Ray! We’re just finishing up here.”

“You need to get your asses out here right now. I don’t care how close you are to doing your dumbass ghost bullshit. There’s some weirdos out here bothering me and I need some back up. Now.”

Shit. I look over at Page who has heard the whole thing, both of us moving without having to say anything.

“We’ll be out there in one second, Ray.”

“They’re saying weird shit, Zeke. Get out here. Now.”

We throw everything into our bags, strap them to our backs, and head outside. I can see Page is holding herself back from going at full supernatural speed, running beside me instead of sprinting. I have to take a steadying breath, keeping myself under control so my glamor doesn’t slip. I have no idea who these people are but I’d rather not terrify them with my true face, especially if they’re just a bunch of clueless humans.

There’s three guys standing beside the car, looking between us and Ray. First impressions I’m getting are they’re harmless but I don’t let my guard down. Even if

they seem innocent there's still the matter of them being weird towards my best friend. Plus, it's close to midnight, why the fuck are they out here in the middle of nowhere?

Ray gets out of the car. As she rushes over towards us, she stumbles. A few things happen all at once. Time seems to slow down to a crawl. Ray trips and to keep her from completely tumbling forward, one of the guys holds out a hand, catching her.

Something passes between them. Ray's eyes widen and she lets out a noise of surprise. The random guy's eyes close, like something is being rearranged inside of him, like he's experiencing something indescribable.

"What the actual fuck was that?" Ray asks, pulling herself away from him and closing the distance to her girlfriend. Page pulls her into her arms, looking between Ray and the random dude.

I take a deep breath through my mouth and my knees go weak. There's a scent in the air that pulls at my baser instincts, filling me with peace. I'm filled with an ache in my chest, pushing me towards this beautiful man, because yes, he's incredibly beautiful now that I'm close enough to take him in. Dark eyes, shaggy hair, strong shoulders. Gods, I want to get closer. I want to chase that smell.

Mate.

Holy fucking shit. There's no fucking way.

This man is my true mate.

How is that possible? How did he find me here of all places? And what the hell was that with Ray?

“I’m really sorry,” the guy says, holding up his hands in surrender. “This is incredibly awkward. I thought this was going to go differently. Fuck.”

I take a step towards him. “What’s going on here?”

“Hi,” someone says, pushing their way between both of our groups. My eyes snap over to him, realizing I was staring at my mate. “I’m Harbor! It’s really lovely to meet you all. Would you like a fry?”

“We don’t want any fries!” Ray says, her voice morphing from sounding upset to sounding confused.

“Suit yourself. These are my cousins, Bently and Casper.”

Casper. My mate’s name is Casper. I can’t stop looking at him, taking him in. I want to memorize every detail of this man. I want to smell him until I can pick out every tiny note of his scent. I want to touch him and explore him and use my phantom form to crawl under his skin until I can’t tell where he ends and I begin.

I take another step forward, like my feet are moving without my permission and I’m powerless to stop them. Casper’s face is filled with wonder as he stares over at Ray. As I move forward, he finally looks over at me.

I watch as a variety of emotions play across his face. He sucks in a sharp breath and I watch as it clicks into place. He can scent me just the same way I’m scenting him. We’re true mates.

Harbor hums, looking between Casper and I. “Something just happened,” he says, pointing a finger between the two of us. “Something’s going on here. I can tell.”

Casper covers his face with his hands, letting out a long groan. “Harbor,” he says

with a long sigh. "Please stop talking. I'm not sure it's helping."

Page grabs my shoulder, pulling me back towards her as my feet seem to continue slowly but surely move me towards Casper. "Zeke? What the hell is going on?"

I look at her then down at Ray then over at Casper. I open my mouth a few times, trying to find the right words before finally settling on a sigh. "Ray," I say slowly, "there's some shit that Page and I have to explain to you."

Page looks panicked. "What? No. There's nothing weird going on here. Nothing we need to explain. Absolutely normal day with nothing unusual happening. Nope."

"What the hell are you talking about? Do you know these guys?"

"No," Page says right away, "we've never met them before."

"Then why is everyone acting so weird?"

"Page, we've gotta tell her. She deserves to know," I say, looking at her for a long moment, trying to convey how much this needs to happen. We can't just keep her in the dark forever, especially now that I've met my true mate who's still giving Ray puppy eyes.

"Deserves to know what? You're freaking me out." Ray takes a step away from Page in order to look between the two of us. "Are you guys fucking or something?"

There's a growl that I'm pretty certain comes from my mate. The sound makes a shiver go down my spine.

"Absolutely not," Page says. "It's nothing like that, baby. I love you, you know that."

“Then just tell me whatever’s going on!”

“You know how we ghost hunt and you always sit in the car because you think it’s horseshit?” Ray raises her brow, nodding. “And how you think the supernatural as a whole is fake?”

“Yeah,” she says slowly. “Because it is. There’s no such thing as ghosts and demons and magic. It’s all fake.”

“Oh my gods,” Casper murmurs. “You don’t know? Really?”

She looks over at him with a glare. “Don’t know what? Somebody better start fucking talking.”

“All of it is real,” he says softly. “The supernatural. It’s real, Ray. And you’re part of it.”

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I probably shouldn't have just blurted that out like that. In my defense, how can she not be feeling it? How does someone grow into adulthood without even knowing they're a spark? Sure, Jude's spark didn't realize he was a spark until they met, but I thought that was an outlying case not the usual!

Plus, I can smell that my spark's girlfriend is a vampire and my mate is some sort of supernatural creature.

Oh my gods. I have a mate. I have a true mate. And he's right in front of me! There's so many emotions playing around inside of me I can't even pinpoint one of them. They're all jumbled up inside of me.

I'm happy. I'm excited. I'm filled with wonder. I'm anxious as fuck. I'm confused. I'm shocked.

"I'm sorry, what?"

The vampire winces. I think I heard someone call her Page? "It's true, babe."

"No. No, this is some sort of weird joke."

"It's not. The supernatural is real, Ray," my mate says gently. "Page and I really do hunt ghosts and put them to rest."

"Then why the fuck have I never seen anything? Any time you have me come inside with you, everything is still and quiet."

“There’s something about you, Ray, that puts the ghosts at ease. When we have any ghosts who are angry or upset, your presence seems to put them back into limbo without you even trying.”

“I might be able to explain that,” I say, holding up my hand and waving. “I’m sorry you’re getting all of this information dumped on you. I just assumed you knew.”

“Knew what?”

“You’re a spark,” I say gently. “You possess the ability to wield magic.”

“What? No, that’s not possible. Magic isn’t real.”

“It’s real. Close your eyes and feel what’s happening inside of you,” I tell her, my voice sounding almost pleading to my own ears. “Feel the connection between you and me. You must be able to sense it, Ray. You’re my spark and I’m your familiar.”

Ray looks like she’s about to be stubborn and tell me to fuck off but Page touches her shoulder, whispering something in her ear. Ray closes her eyes, letting out a long breath through her nose, her brows wrinkling. She must be able to feel something because when she opens her eyes again, she looks far less angry and much more confused.

Confused I can work with.

“Aren’t familiars like little animals usually? This still makes no sense.”

“Familiars have two forms,” I explain gently. “I have my human form obviously but I can also shift into a lion.”

“Prove it,” she says, crossing her arms over her chest. “If this is real, I need to

actually see it.”

I look both ways down the road, making sure no one is coming before breathing in deeply, tugging onto my inner lion and letting him take over. Light blue magic swirls around me as I change from this form into my other. One moment I’m standing on two feet and the next I’m on all fours. I let out a huff through my nose, breathing in deeply.

In this form, I can smell my mate that much better. I’ve been holding myself back, not wanting to rush anything or startle Ray, but in the form, those inhibitions are gone.

Sauntered over to my mate, I shake out my mane before nudging him with my giant nose.

“Holy fucking shit. That’s a lion. He’s a fucking lion.”

“Yes. Yes, he is,” Zeke says and I can hear a hint of pride in his voice. His fingers touch my skin between my eyes and I lean my body against his. He almost stumbles and I huff in amusement.

“He’s cuddly in this form,” Harbor says, grinning over at me. I can tell by that look that he’s pieced a few things together. I don’t mind, all I care about is being close to my mate and taking in his delicious scent. When his fingers bury themselves into my mane, I think I might literally be in heaven with how good it feels.

“If you have any questions, we’re happy to answer them,” Bently tells Ray. “The three of us are familiars and we’ve been on a road trip trying to track down our sparks.”

“This is a lot to take in,” Ray says softly, looking at all of us with wide eyes. Finally,

she looks at her girlfriend. “Did you know about all this?”

Page nods before letting out a long sigh. “I did. Do you remember a couple months ago, when I had to take that extended vacation?”

Ray’s eyes widen and she nods her head slowly. “You said there was an issue with your passport and you were stuck at the border until it got figured out.”

“That’s what I said, yes. That’s when I was ushered into the supernatural world. Something happened and I couldn’t be around you for a while.”

“Fuck,” she says and my heart hammers against my ribs, watching as this all hits my spark. I wish there was something I could do to smooth out the wrinkle in her brow, to help her stay calm. This must be so much to learn all at once.

“I think she knows you’re real,” my mate says softly, tapping me on my giant shoulder. “You can shift back.”

I nudge him once more with my head before taking a step back. I look inward, finding my human form once more, sliding from this form to the other with practiced ease. As the blue magic fades away into a mist, I look over at my spark. She’s staring at me once more and I can’t tell if she’s looking in wonder or horror. Maybe a little of both.

Now that I’m back in my human form, I take a step away from Zeke, my cheeks heating with embarrassment with how cuddly I just was. I don’t even know this man, I should not be rubbing myself all over him!

“Why don’t we go someplace and talk,” Page says softly, her hand squeezing Ray’s shoulder. “I can explain everything and answer any questions you might have.”

“In the car. Now.”

I watch as the two of them get into the backseat together before closing the door, giving themselves a little privacy while they talk. I turn to my mate, wincing. “I’m sorry. I guess we could have gone about this a bit better, huh?”

Zeke gives a shrug. “It could have gone a lot worse. I’ve tried hinting that things were real for a long time but she would never hear any of it. Page has wanted to tell Ray that she was a vampire since the moment it happened but she kept chickening out, saying it wasn’t the right moment.” He runs his fingers through his short, dark hair, looking almost lost. “This explains a few things though. She’s so against the supernatural existing that she literally dispels ghosts with her presence. Ray is putting off magical energies without even realizing it.”

“My offer was serious,” Bently says, always wanting to help however he can. Even since we were little, he’s been our unofficial protector and that extends to a lot of the people we meet. “If any of you have questions or anything, I’m happy to help as much as I can.”

“Thank you. It might be better coming from me and Page though.”

“So you two are mates?”

I make a surprised noise at Harbor’s question. I really should have expected him to realize what was going on and comment on it. All of Harbor’s inside thoughts become outside thoughts. He has no filter whatsoever.

I look over at Zeke, watching as his eyes soften. He glances over at me, giving me a tentative smile before turning back to Harbor. “We are, yeah.”

Hearing him say it out loud, confirming what I’m feeling leaves me breathless. My

stomach is turning itself into knots and my heart is somehow leaping around inside my chest while also melting into a giant sappy puddle. Gods, I've never felt anything like this before.

"If you wanna use the RV to consummate your mating, Bently and I would be happy to go for a little walk."

I cover my face with my hands, hoping it's not actually as red as it feels. "Jesus Christ," I murmur under my breath.

"As wonderful as that sounds," Zeke says slowly. I peek at him through my fingers, watching as he's grinning at my cousins. "I think I'd rather get to know Casper a bit before we jump right into that."

Harbor tilts his head to the side. "If you're sure. I always thought true mates would jump each other's bones the moment they met but that doesn't seem to be the case with Casper and Willow."

Bently shoves his elbow into Harbor's side. "Not everyone is comfortable with the idea of insta-lust like you are," he says gently.

In response, Harbor just shrugs. "Your true mate is literally made for you. Why not fuck on the first date?"

"You can do that when you meet your true mate."

Harbor practically grins from ear to ear. "That's my plan. If my true mate doesn't drop trou the moment we meet I'll be incredibly disappointed."

That makes all of us chuckle and the tension I was feeling a moment ago fades away. As much as I try not to stare, I keep finding my eyes drifting over to my mate. I can't

seem to get enough of him. I want to study him until I know every detail of his face, every speck of color in his eyes, every quirk.

Gods, he's so handsome.

I want to run my fingers over his head, feeling his short, dark hair under my fingers. His eyes are a dark brown color that I could absolutely get lost in. His smile is warm but when he's just listening, he's got the case of resting bitch face. I've just met him but I already feel so much fondness just looking at him.

I put my hands into my pockets, keeping myself from reaching over and touching him. I hold myself back because as much as my inner lion would like to crawl into this man's lap and rub myself against him, that's not something my human side is quite on board with. Not yet anyway.

"We live about two hours away from here," Zeke tells us. "The three of you are welcome to follow behind as we drive back."

"That sounds great," I say with a little smile, cursing the nerves nipping at my stomach.

It seems like they have an established thing going on. Would I even fit in with his plans? Ray is obviously freaking out, will she even want me around when things finally settle down? I feel so completely and utterly out of place.

Zeke takes a step towards me, leaning over so he can talk softly, just for my ears to hear. My entire body goes hot all over as I feel his breath against my ear. "I can see that look. You're starting to freak out about everything, aren't you?"

"I might be."

His warm chuckle lights a fire inside of me. I have to bite my bottom lip to keep myself from making an embarrassing noise in front of my cousins. “You don’t need to. I haven’t said this yet, but I’m really happy we met. I’m really happy we’re mates, Casper.”

“Oh,” I breathe out, my shoulders falling away from my ears. “Okay, good. Me too.”

“Would you like to ride back with me to my place?”

“I’d like that a lot.”

“Can we use your shower when we get to your place?” Harbor blurts out. “A hot shower sounds divine.”

“Yeah, you can use my shower,” Zeke says, nodding his head. “As much hot water as you want.”

“I already like you,” Harbor says with a grin.

“Good. Because it seems we’re family now. We’ll be in each other’s lives for a long time.”

I’m so giddy with emotions I could cry. Or hysterically laugh. Or maybe both. Thankfully, I have enough self control to keep it inside in front of everyone. If I’m not careful I’ll end up on my belly, kicking my feet and twirling my hair before the night is over.

Page opens the back door and steps outside. She frowns at us, looking a bit haggard.

“Everything alright?”

Page looks over at Zeke. “Yeah. I think it’ll just take some time. Right now she’s being stubborn,” Page explains with a shrug. “She’s in denial about everything and claims that she’s going to stay firm in her belief that the supernatural is not real.”

Zeke raises his brow. “Did you show her your fangs?”

“I did. She even touched them but claims they’re obviously prosthetic,” Page says, facepalming. “It’s fine. She’ll come around. At least she didn’t break up with me.”

My eyes dart over to the car, finding my spark tucked in on herself. My chest aches for her. This is all so much to learn at once. She must feel so confused, possibly betrayed by her friends as well. I wish there was something I could do to help but I’m just a stranger claiming to have a special bond with her. What could I possibly do?

“Everything will work out,” Zeke says softly and I can tell he’s directing the words at both myself and Page. “Let’s head back home. Everything will sound better after we get some sleep.”

“Maybe I should ride in the RV,” I say, nodding towards Ray. “It seems like maybe Ray could use a little space, while she processes all this?”

Zeke hums in agreement but I can tell he’s not happy about it. He seems to want to be glued to my side just as much as I want to be glued to his.

We all get into our respective vehicles and head down the road. Bently carefully follows behind Zeke while I scramble to get all of my shit packed up. I’m not sure what the plan is once we get to Zeke’s home but I want to be prepared to stay.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:22 am

“So,” I say, pulling my car onto the highway. We’ve got about two hours to kill and I’d rather not spend it in this awkward silence. “How are you feeling, Ray?”

Ray crosses her arms over her chest, staring out the window. She makes an annoyed sound in my direction. “Do we really have to talk about this?”

“I think we do. Get all your frustrations out. Let me have it so we can work past this.”

“How do I know this isn’t some fucked up prank?”

I raise my brow in the rear view mirror at her. “How do you explain Casper being able to shift? You saw him, Ray.”

“Some sort of holographic trick?”

“Oh yeah, because we totally have the funds for something like that. I’m not trying to push but come on, Ray. Seeing is believing and all that.”

“I don’t know what I saw,” she says with a huff. “Maybe I’m hallucinating and none of this is real. Maybe I’m incredibly sleep deprived!”

“Ah, so we’re still firmly in denial. You know that’s not just a river in Egypt, right?”

“Give her a break, Zeke,” Page says gently. There’s a fierceness in her eyes that I recognize and suddenly things seem to click into place for me.

“Oh my gods,” I blurt out, my eyes widening. “Holy shit. She’s your true mate, isn’t

she?”

Page isn't capable of blushing anymore unless she's freshly fed, but somehow I just know that if she could, she would be. She looks embarrassed, her eyes darting over to Ray for a moment before looking back at me.

“What's a true mate?”

I let out a long sigh. “Oh, so now you're interested?”

“Shut the fuck up and tell me,” Ray says with a pout.

“It's believed by most supernatural beings that Lady Fate created us. She's our Maker. She's our Mother. And when She was creating Her beloved creations, She didn't wish for us to be alone so She made soul ties that would allow us to find our soulmates. Later, the term true mate was used. It's the person your soul craves, someone you can be truly yourself around. It's the person out there that'll help you make the most authentic version of yourself.”

Ray closes her eyes, tilting her head towards the ceiling, grumbling to herself. “Great. First there's supernatural and shifters and vampires and magic. And now there's also soul mates?”

“I know this is a lot,” Page says gently, taking Ray's hand into her own, squeezing gently. I turn back to the road, wanting to give them their moment. “But it's true. After I turned, I was able to smell you. That's how a lot of us discover our true mates, through scent. You smell like mine, Ray.”

Ray makes an embarrassed noise. “Possessive much?” She's teasing which is a good sign compared to the rest of the night. Just maybe she'll be okay. Just maybe she'll figure out how to embrace this new side of herself.

I hope so. Not only for me and Page, but also for my mate's sake. The look of unadulterated longing in his eyes when he looked at Ray was almost too much to handle. I wish there was something I could do to help them bond, to help Ray understand.

"Okay," Ray says softly, her shoulders less hunched, her stare more determined. Okay, that's gotta be a good sign, right? "If true mates are a thing, do you have one, Zeke?"

My stomach is a mess of butterflies as I think about Casper. "I do indeed."

"Really? Who?"

"You just met him," I say with a grin. "Whether you like it or not, Casper is going to be a solid part of our lives. He's not just your spark, but he's also my mate."

Ray lets out a long, dramatic groan. "So I can't just ignore all of this and pretend it's not happening? He won't just go away?"

"Nope. He's here to stay."

"I'm surprised you can handle him being in the RV behind us," Page says, shaking her head at me. "True mate instincts are no joke." She turns towards Ray. "Remember all the sex we had when I came back from my fake vacation?"

Ray's eyes widen with understanding. "Jesus, Zeke, how are you keeping it in your pants right now?"

"Some of us have self-control," I tell them with a warm chuckle, happy with how this conversation has gone. If they can tease me, it means they're gonna be okay. They're gonna figure all of this out.

Ray lets out a jaw cracking yawn. “Fuck. Tonight has been a lot. I feel like I could sleep for a week.”

“Then sleep,” Page says, opening her arms. “Lay on me and sleep. I’ll wake you up when we get home.”

“Okay,” Ray says softly, snuggling up with her girlfriend. I give Page a soft smile before my eyes are back on the road. When I look at them, I can’t help but feel a pang of longing, wishing I could be doing the same with Casper.

Would Casper even want to snuggle? He seemed rather snuggly in his lion form but me, more than others, understand sometimes our other forms have a bit of a mind of their own. His human side might want to take things slow, and that’s okay too. Whatever he wants, I’m happy to follow so long as I get to be with him. That’s all that matters.

The trip back to town is quiet and I have a lot of time to think. A lot of time to overthink. Casper seems lovely. Why would Lady Fate pair him with someone like me? I’m a banshee, someone who has to feed in order to survive. I’m practically a monster. No, I am a monster, full stop.

I pull into my driveway and watch as the RV parks on the street.

“I’ll be right back,” I whisper to Page who gives me a nod. I get out and make my way over to the driver’s side of the RV.

“This is your place?”

“Yeah, I live in the duplex on the right. 4B.” I take my house key off my key ring and hand it over to Bently. “You guys can keep your RV parked here on the road and head inside. Feel free to use the shower and eat whatever you can find. Just try not to

be too loud as I have neighbors,” I say with a chuckle. “I’m gonna go drop the girls off and then come right back, okay?”

“Sounds good,” Bently says, taking the key.

Casper leans over so he’s in my line of sight. Just the vision of him brings a warmth to my chest and I can’t help but smile over at him. “Thank you, Zeke.”

“Anything for you,” I say with a wink. I watch as his cheeks pinken and his smile widens. Good lord, I’m already so far gone on this guy. How is that even possible?

I walk back to my car, making quick work of heading down the road and across town to where Ray and Page live. I park in their driveway and wait for them to get out before following them. At this point, it’s about 4am and we’re all a bit delirious, the same way we always are at the end of a hunt like this.

I pull Page into a hug before turning towards Ray, doing the same for her. “One last thing,” I say, smiling when Ray groans. “I know, I know. I’m the worst.”

“You are,” she agrees but she’s smiling when she says it.

“After you get a good amount of sleep and properly wake up, I want you to do some introspection. I know it’s not the most fun thing in the world but I think if you sit down and actually feel what’s going on inside of you, you’ll discover the bonds we’ve been talking about.”

Ray gives me a reluctant nod. “I don’t promise a damn thing,” she says but then her voice softens, “but I’ll give it a try.”

I put my hands on her shoulders, squeezing. “Thank you. We’ll talk soon.”

“Keep us posted about Casper,” Page says as I get into my car. I give them one last wave before heading back to my place.

My stomach is tying itself into knots during the entire drive. Nerves, anticipation, excitement, worry. So many things are playing over and over in my head and all of them are about Casper.

I never imagined myself getting to have a true mate. Sure, my parents were mated and seemed happy enough, but they’re both banshees. They understand the struggles and what comes with being a banshee. Casper is a familiar, and an adorable one at that. Will he think of me as a monster when he sees my true face? Will he be disgusted by my need to feed?

I really don’t think I would survive being rejected by my true mate. I think out of everything, that would be the thing to break me. I guess only time will tell. Surely Lady Fate wouldn’t have brought us together if we were destined to fail. Right?

As best as I can, I push my anxiety away as I pull into my driveway. After a steadying breath, I get out of my car and make my way up to my front door. I’m not sure what I was expecting but what I find isn’t that.

My front door leads straight into my kitchen and I find Harbor and Bently sitting on the floor, a bag of shredded cheese between them. Bently has changed into sweats while Harbor is wearing my bathrobe, complete with a towel wrapped around his head.

“Hi,” Harbor whispers, waving at me. He shoves a handful of cheese into his mouth, grinning up at me. “Casper’s already passed out on the couch.”

I look past the breakfast island towards my living room, finding my mate asleep. He looks incredibly adorable. I walk closer, leaning my hip against the island, just

watching him sleep. I'm overwhelmed by the amount of warm feelings welling up inside of me. I didn't think I had such soft feelings inside me. I didn't realize I was capable of this level of softness. It clashes with what I've come to associate with being a banshee.

"Thanks again for letting us crash here," Bently says softly, not wanting to wake Casper. I blush, realizing I've been caught staring. I turn away, giving Bently and Harbor my attention.

"It's no problem at all. I'm happy you're all here." I run my fingers over my short hair, letting the soft strands soothe me. "I should probably head to bed. It's been a long fucking night."

"Harbor and I are gonna crash in the RV. If you want, you can probably carry Casper to bed with you," he says with a soft smile.

"I wouldn't want to disturb his sleep."

Harbor rolls his eyes. "What is it with you guys all pussy footing around your mates. Take him to bed, Zeke!" He picks up the bag of shredded cheese, taking it with him out the front door, not caring he's still wearing my robe and towel. I can't do much more than stare at him as he goes with wide eyes.

Bently gives me a look that conveys 'what are you gonna do' before following behind Harbor.

Casper's cousins are strange but I'm already growing quite fond of them. They seem to have a strong bond, one that I'm a little jealous of. I'm an only child and always wished I could have grown up around other kids. Thankfully, I found Page and Ray in high school, the three of us thick as thieves ever since Mr. Southburn assigned us together for a group history project.

I kick off my shoes, hang up my coat, and clean up the random cheese from the floor before heading into the living room. Carefully, I squat down so I'm face to face with Casper.

His face looks so surreal, so innocent while he's sleeping. Normally, I would hold myself back but this is my true mate. I give into the impulse to touch him, gently moving his hair off of his face. The strands are ridiculously soft, his curls adorable how they bounce as I move them. My thumb strokes his cheek and I smile as he moves into my touch, chasing my hand even in his sleep.

"Casper," I whisper, watching as his lids flutter for a moment before they're slowly opening. His pretty brown eyes stare at me before his lips spread into a soft smile. "Hey."

"Hi," he whispers back, yawning as he speaks, "glad you made it back safe."

"Me too. Would you like to move to my bed? It's far more comfortable than the couch."

"I'd like that."

I place one arm under his knees, the other around his shoulders. I haul him up into my arms and he comes willingly, tucking his face against the side of my head, his arms going around my neck, holding on as I walk him from the couch into my bedroom.

While he's here, so close, I bury my nose against his hair, breathing him in. Casper smells citrusy, like fresh, juicy oranges. It's a smell I'll never get tired of, a smell that makes me think of summer days spent outside, eating oranges as sloppily as I see fit, knowing my dad will hose me off before letting me back inside. The smell makes me happy.

“Here you go,” I whisper, gently putting Casper in my bed. He shimmies himself under the comforter before burying his face against my pillow. I can hear him sniffing and I can’t help but chuckle. Apparently sleepy Casper isn’t very subtle, but that’s okay, I find the gesture incredibly adorable.

I quickly change into some pjs before sliding into the space beside my mate. I turn on my side, facing him, once again just taking him in. It’s hard to believe I started the day planning to help a ghost find peace and somehow ended the day with my true mate in my bed with me. Lady Fate runs on Her own schedule, that’s for sure.

“Sleep well,” I whisper, leaning forward and kissing the side of Casper’s head. He makes a happy little hum before tucking himself closer until our bodies are plastered together. He sighs and the noise resonates within my very bones. He’s at peace here with me and I can’t help but feel the same.

I give him a gentle squeeze before finally closing my eyes and letting myself find sleep.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:22 am

The first thing I register as I wake up is that I'm not in my usual bunk in the RV. I take a deep breath, freezing when I'm surrounded by the wonderful scent of fresh flowers. Mmm, that might be a new scent but I know exactly what that smell means. I'm with my true mate.

The next thing I realize is that I'm not only in my true mate's presence but he's got his arms wrapped around me from behind. I feel so safe, so warm in his arms. I feel like I could stay here forever.

I scoot back even further only to freeze once more when I feel something hard press against my lower back.

Oh.

Oh my gods.

My stomach warms with arousal as I realize my mate's morning wood is pressed against me. I don't think I've ever felt anything like this before. The warmth in the pit of my belly is new but not unwelcome. It leaves me feeling breathless and antsy to do even more.

It would be so fucking easy to press against him even harder, to wiggle my ass just right to feel good. My own cock begins to fill with blood, tingling with anticipation.

If this is how my cousins feel all the time, I have no idea how they can even think straight. I've only just started experiencing arousal and already I want to stay in bed all day, naked, with my mate.

“Morning,” a husky voice says right beside my ear and I bite my bottom lip, keeping myself from groaning. Fuck, Zeke’s morning voice is hot as fuck which does nothing to stop this budding arousal from rising even further. It feels like a volcano preparing to erupt and I don’t have the experience to even attempt to cut it off.

“Good morning,” I say back, my voice breaking. Zeke’s hand moves to my shoulder, pushing me until I flip over onto my back. He leans up on my elbow so he can properly look down at me.

I am so fucking lucky. Zeke is so incredibly handsome with his short hair, dark eyes, and strong jaw. I’m struck with how much I want to kiss him. I want to feel him pressed against me. I want so fucking much with this man.

It’s almost scary, the strength of these impulses, the intensity of these wants for someone I’ve only just met. Experiencing all of this for the first time makes them all the more overwhelming. Is this a true mate thing or is this a thing happening for just the two of us, something special. Either way, I’m very much on board with it.

“Wow,” Zeke whispers, his eyes soft, his face the picture of awe. “I thought maybe I’d dreamed you up.”

“Nope,” I assure him with a grin. “I’m really here.”

Zeke touches my cheek and I lean my face against his palm. If I was in my lion skin, I’d practically be purring at the simple touch. “I feel so goddamn lucky, Casper. I didn’t think I had a true mate out there for me, but Lady Fate proved my worries wrong.”

“Why didn’t you think you had one?”

I watch as emotions play across my mate’s face, something close to fear before it’s

fading away, replaced with a smile that I can tell is forced. “I just didn’t think She’d want to force someone to put up with me,” he says, trying to change the topic with a joke.

“If it makes you feel any better I used to say the same things to my cousins.”

Zeke hums. “Then I guess we really are meant for each other.”

I run my hand over his wrist, holding onto the hand that’s against my cheek. “Hey, Zeke?”

“Yeah?”

“Will you kiss me? Please?”

“I can’t think of a single thing I’d like more,” he breathes out, leaning down in order to kiss me.

As lips press against mine, I feel like something inside of me is moving, rearranging to make room for Zeke. My head swims yet at the same time I’m completely present in the moment. The kiss is achingly gentle, but the emotions inside of me are rambunctious.

It’s a perfect first kiss.

My hand tightens around Zeke’s wrist. His lips move against mine and I mimic the movement, opening for him. His tongue traces my bottom lip before moving deeper, touching my own tongue. I make a broken noise at the back of my throat that’s caught with Zeke’s mouth, my cock throbbing with desire, craving more from my mate. Craving things I don’t even know about yet, only that unfamiliar instincts are rising up inside of me. I want to rut against him until I make myself come. I want to

hear the noises Zeke makes when he feels good. Fuck, I want everything with this man. The feeling is heady.

Zeke moves until he's more than just hovering over me. He moves until his body is leaning against my own and I can feel his hard cock pressing against the side of my hip. It's long and hard and hot.

Oh my fucking gods. He's just as aroused as me, the realization makes me want to whine, it makes me feel more desperate than I've ever felt before. It makes me want.

My free hand goes around Zeke's back, tucking itself under his shirt so I can feel his hot skin. His back is toned and strong. His hips move and I can't stop myself from whining this time, the noise breaking free without my permission. Our kisses grow even sloppier as we chase each other's tongues, chase each other's taste.

I'm about to pull his shirt over his head when we're startled apart by the sound of the fire alarm going off. Zeke quickly pulls away, turning away and hiding his face in his hands. My heart is hammering against my ribs and my breaths come out in sharp pants. I'm overwhelmed by the way I was so utterly captivated by his kisses. I felt like I was drowning in Zeke. Is that normal? Is that the pull true mates have on each other?

"Are you okay?"

Zeke takes a steadying breath before turning back towards me. He gives me a soft smile. "Yeah. Just overwhelmed," he says with a little chuckle. "I should go check on your cousins and make sure they're okay."

He leans back towards me, giving me one last, quick kiss before standing up and heading out of the room. I lay back against the pillows, blowing out a long breath. My cock still aches but now that Zeke is no longer here, it's easier to ignore. The

tingling sensations running through me slowly fade until I feel in control once more.

I can't remember a time I've felt like that before, that type of all consuming lust. Sure, I've gotten boners in the past but they never felt like that before. I felt like I couldn't get enough of Zeke, like I was going to explode unless we kept kissing, kept touching each other. A longing for physical affection so strong it threatened to choke me. It was overwhelming in the most delightful way. I can't wait to explore that further with Zeke. Once we're alone, of course.

My cheeks are bright red as I get myself out of bed. Gods, I hope my cousins don't realize what we were just doing. They'll never stop teasing me!

I quickly dart out of the bedroom and into the bathroom. After relieving myself, I make my way into the kitchen, only pausing to grab the compass from my discarded jeans and slipping it into the pocket of my sleep pants. I lean my hip against the breakfast bar with my arms crossed over my chest, watching these three dart around the kitchen.

Zeke is at the front door, opening and closing the door quickly, trying to get fresh air into the duplex while Harbor waves a towel around the fire alarm. Bently is at the stove, rotating the bacon and trying to keep it from burning. Well, from burning more than it already has.

They look absolutely ridiculous. I'm struck with fondness. They might be ridiculous but they're my family and I wouldn't trade them for anything.

Harbor makes a happy noise as the fire alarm finally turns off. I'm so glad it's one in the afternoon so the sound couldn't wake any of Zeke's neighbors. I'd rather not start this new relationship on people's bad sides, especially if I plan on staying here long term. Which I do. Hopefully. As long as Zeke is okay with that.

Fuck, we should probably talk about all this.

“Morning!” Bently says, looking over at me. “Sleep well?”

Despite wanting to keep as neutral as possible to keep my cousins from teasing me, I can’t help but get a lovesick smile on my face. “I slept great,” I say softly, thinking about how lovely it was to sleep next to Zeke. He was so warm and made me feel so safe. It was wonderful.

“You look well rested for someone who just found their true mate,” Harbor says with a giggle. “I’m surprised there wasn’t more than just sleeping going on. Are you waiting until Bently and I are gone before you go at it rabbit style?”

I sputter. “Rabbit style? What the fuck is that? You know what, no. I don’t wanna know.”

“We’re all adults here,” Harbor says with a huff. “Don’t act like you don’t know what sex is, Casper. And if you actually don’t know, then ask your true mate. I’m sure he’d be more than happy to teach you.”

My cheeks warm brighter and brighter the more Harbor speaks. Zeke shuts the door and walks over to me, putting his arm around my shoulders. “Don’t worry, he’s in good hands, Harbor,” he says with a warm chuckle. “Plus, wouldn’t we be doing it lion style?”

“Oh my gods,” I blurt out, covering my face with my hands. “I hate you all so much.”

Bently plates us all some eggs and bacon with toast, shaking his head fondly at us. We all sit down at Zeke’s table, digging into our food. Despite the bacon being a bit burnt, the rest turned out delicious.

I'm glad everyone's mouths are full because it gives me a moment just to think and process everything that's happened. I've found my spark. I've found Ray. A tiny voice inside my head is still sure that I'm not good enough for a spark-familiar bond, but I have to hold onto hope that everything will be made right in the end. It might take some time for Ray to come around to the idea of using magic but someday when she's ready, I'll be there to help.

And now my true mate is sitting beside me, eating a strip of bacon and looking adorably ruffled from waking up. Everything has changed in so little time. Am I ready to be someone's mate? Am I ready to leave my cousins behind? Am I ready to help Ray embrace her inner magic?

I have no fucking idea, but there's only one way to find out.

Taking the compass out of my pocket, I stare down at it. It's so strange to see it inactive, lazily spinning but never pointing in one direction for very long. I close my eyes, feeling the magic resonate within me until I know who's getting it next.

Looking up, I find my cousins staring at me, waiting for my announcement. I suddenly feel like I have so much power. For just a moment, I'm the only one who knows which of them is going next. Thankfully for them, I'm not cruel.

I toss the compass over to Harbor who snatches it out of the air, pinning it to his chest. "Oh my gods. Really? My turn?"

"Yep. Sorry, Bently. Seems the compass wants to save the best for last."

"Fine by me," he says with a soft smile, turning towards Harbor. "Come on, look at it. Is it pointing in a direction yet?"

Harbor pulls it away from his chest, holding it out for us all to see. The compass

seems to be calibrating for a moment before spinning wildly around and around and around. Finally, it slows, pointing in a North West direction.

Harbor makes a happy little noise, bouncing in his seat. “I hope it’s pointing towards the coast. I want my mate to be somewhere close to the beach so we can have our toes in the sand together.”

“Depends on how West the compass makes us go,” Bently says with a shrug. “Could end up in Canada and your beach will be more snowy.”

“Snow. Eww. I hope not.” I can’t help but chuckle at Harbor’s nose wrinkle. “Maybe your spark loves snow forts. You won’t know until you find them.”

Harbor pouts. “But but but. Beaches!”

“Don’t worry, no matter where they are, you’re gonna be happy to meet them,” I tell him seriously. “Hopefully your spark has a better reaction to you though.”

Zeke puts his hand on my back, rubbing up and down. “Ray will be happy to meet you once she’s had some time to let everything sink in. Give her time.”

“She can have all the time she needs,” I promise, picking up another piece of bacon and popping it into my mouth. “I’m not surprised by her reaction. She had a normal life and then I showed up with all these complications and bonds and stuff. I feel bad.”

“Lady Fate wouldn’t have crossed your paths if She didn’t think Ray was ready for this next step of life. Focus on that, Casper,” Bently says, giving me a sympathetic look.

“You’re right. I guess I’m just a little jealous after seeing the way Jude and Willow’s

meetings went, you know?”

Harbor reaches across the table and flicks me. “Comparison is the thief of joy. Just because your story is different doesn’t mean it’s bad.”

I do the mature thing and blow a fart with my mouth in his direction. Once we’re all done eating, I pick up everyone’s plates and take them over to the sink.

“I guess this is farewell for now,” Bently says, pulling me into a tight hug. I hug him back, squeezing him so tight that he makes a pained noise.

I look over at my mate with bright red cheeks. “I know we haven’t talked about this yet,” I start to say. Thankfully, Zeke must know what I’m going to say. He cuts me off, giving me an achingly soft smile.

“I want you to stay.”

“Oh,” I breathe out, feeling my stomach flutter happily at the confirmation. “Okay, good. I want to stay.”

“Then it’s settled!” Harbor says, dropping my bags onto the floor and when the fuck did he sneak out and grab those without me noticing? He’s like a little ninja! “You’re staying here with your mate while I head off to find my spark. This is so exciting!”

“I mean, you don’t have to leave right this second,” I say with a pout.

“Yes, we do. I’m not waiting around while my spark is out there missing me! Plus, I might find my true mate like you guys have and I want to start boning as soon as possible! I’ve been waiting so long already. I have needs, Casper.”

“Jesus Christ,” I breathe out with a groan, pinching the bridge of my nose. “Fine,

weirdo. Get out of here and get your needs met.”

“That’s the spirit!” Harbor bounds over, pulling me into a hug. “I’m going to miss you but we’re still gonna do our Sunday calls. If you miss out I’ll turn the RV around and have Bently fight you. We both know he could take you down no problem.”

“He’d have to go through me,” Zeke tells him with a grin. “I don’t look quite as tough as Bently but I assure you, I’d take him down no problem.”

Hmm, I’m conflicted. On the one hand, I really don’t want anyone to fight. On the other hand, why is the idea of Zeke defending my honor or fighting someone on my behalf so fucking sexy?

Gods, what’s gotten into me? It’s like now that the can of worms that is my libido has been cracked open I can’t seem to put the lid back on.

Maybe my cousins leaving won’t be such a bad thing if it means getting to be alone with my mate.

“There will be no fighting,” Bently says with a laugh. Then he quickly adds, “and for the record, I would give you a run for your money.”

Bently and Harbor give me giant hugs. This is such a bittersweet moment. I’m so excited to start this next chapter but I’m starting to panic at the idea of my cousins leaving me here. What if I need them? What if I screw this up somehow and Zeke kicks me out? What if Ray never comes around?

Harbor squeezes my shoulders. “You’ve got this,” he says under his breath, giving me a knowing look. “This is your true mate. Things are gonna be great, Casper. Embrace them, okay? Don’t fight it.”

Harbor's bluntness sometimes comes off as overbearing or borderline insensitive but other times, it's exactly what I need to hear.

"Thank you," I tell him seriously, hugging him one more time before he's heading out the door with Bently. I sit in the doorway, watching them climb into the RV. I give them a wave as they pull away from the driveway and head down the road.

I turn away and close the door. Leaning against it, I let out a shaky breath, desperately trying to get my nerves under control. Just because they're gone doesn't mean everything is about to go to shit. I don't need them as a crutch.

I don't!

"You look like you're about to toss up your breakfast," Zeke says softly, ducking his head down so I look into his eyes. "You doing okay? Second thoughts?"

Seeing him so openly concerned for me makes some of those nerves inside my belly fade away. I'm not alone in this. I can see the same anxieties and uncertainty mirrored in Zeke's face. The same things I'm feeling, my mate is feeling them too. It helps calm my racing heart, knowing we're on the same exact playing field.

"I'm okay," I tell him truthfully. "Kinda nervous, but I think I'll be okay as long as I'm here with you. You'll help me through this transition, right?"

"Of course." Zeke gives me a soft smile as he holds out his hand for me. I take it and sparks dance over my skin at his warm touch. He leads me to the couch, sitting beside me. "I'm not going anywhere. We're both jumping into the deep end and learning to swim."

"Can I ask you something?"

“Anything.”

I take a moment just to look over his face, breathing in his lovely scent. “Actually, I want to ask you a million and one questions but I’ll start with one.” Zeke hums, spurring me on. “I don’t want this to come out weird but I’m curious. You know I’m a familiar and my other skin is a lion. I can’t tell what you are by scent alone, so what exactly are you?”

Something crosses Zeke’s face. It’s almost like a part of him doesn’t want me to actually know. He’s holding something back. The moment passes quickly. He swallows and looks away before he’s finally whispering, “I’m a banshee.”

“Okay,” I say right away, not wanting him to second guess my feelings for him. Him being a banshee doesn’t bother me even a little bit. Do I know anything about banshees? Not even a single thing. Does that change my feelings? Nope. “Thank you for telling me, Zeke. I have no idea what that entails but it must be wonderful because from what I know, you’re wonderful.”

“I kinda like that you’re sappy. Are you always like this with your partners?”

I feel my cheeks heat and I look away, biting my bottom lip. “Well,” I say slowly, “I guess I am since I’m being sappy with you and you’re my one and only partner.”

“I’m your first?”

“My first everything. We were gifted this compass by our grandmother when Harbor turned eighteen. I never had a desire to date or have one night stands while on our travels. To be honest, I didn’t have any desire for anything like that, until I met you. You’re awakening all these desires and instincts inside of me. They’re so fucking overwhelming, Zeke. Is this how everyone feels or is it special because you’re my true mate?”

Zeke tilts his head to the side. “I can’t answer that because I have no idea what other people experience, but my feelings? They’re overwhelming too.”

I reach for him, needing to touch him, needing it like I need to breathe. In turn, Zeke leans closer, kissing my cheek. When his mouth is near my ear, he whispers, “I want you more than words can say, Casper. I want you here with me, but I also want you.”

I swallow thickly, feeling my body heat up. I don’t even recognize my voice as I whisper back, “how do you want me. Tell me. Please.”

“Gods,” Zeke curses, pulling back so he can look at my face. His eyes are lidded with desire, his cheeks turning a pretty rosy color. Gods, I need to hear that he wants me the same way I want him. “When you say please it takes all of my self-control not to take you right here, right now.”

I suck in a sharp breath, my cock twitching in my jeans. I just barely keep myself from squirming or doing something ridiculous, like rutting myself against his leg. I’ve never felt so horny in my entire life.

“I want you in the most animalistic way,” Zeke confesses slowly. “The fact that I’m going to be your first means I’m going to show you pleasure you’d never be able to experience with your own hand. I want to mark you and claim you. I want to fuck you and mark you with my cum. I want to learn what makes you moan and what makes you tick.”

My breathing is coming out in sharp pants, overwhelmed with my mate’s words. I want all of that. I want so much more than that. I want everything.

“Take me,” I breathe out, wrapping my arms around Zeke’s neck. I quickly shift until I’m straddling his lap. “Please, Zeke. Claim me. Mate me. Make me yours.”

Are we going too fast? Maybe some people would think that. But this is my true mate and I don't want to spend another minute not being his.

Zeke stands up, placing his hands on my ass to hold me against him, walking me to his bedroom. As my lips collide with his, I know this isn't too fast. This is just right for us.

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Oh my gods. Oh my gods. Oh my gods.

“Fuck,” I gasp out as our lips finally part. We breathe in each other’s air as Casper leans his forehead against my own. It’s becoming harder to keep my glamor in check, to keep this face in place. Kissing Casper is like nothing I’ve ever experienced before. I’ve kissed other people but it was never like this.

“Yeah,” Casper says with a grin, “I think that’s the plan.”

I swallow thickly. “If that’s what you want. But there’s no rush, Casper. We go at your pace.”

“My pace is getting naked and rutting against each other like overwhelmed teenagers. That sound good?”

I can’t help but smile, huffing in amusement. “Yeah, that sounds fucking perfect.”

I walk a few more steps before depositing Casper onto the bed. He starts stripping out of his clothes and I’m suddenly frozen in place, unable to do anything but watch as more and more skin is revealed. Holy shit. Holy fuck. I was not prepared for how hot my mate would be out

of his clothes!

Once Casper is down to his boxers, he looks at me with a raised brow. “Really? Are you just gonna watch? I don’t think I’m gonna last long so if you wanna be involved, you better hurry your ass up, Zeke.”

Casper touches his erection through his boxers and the sight of that spurs me into action. There's no way I'm not getting my hands on him. There's no way he's coming before I've even had a chance to fully appreciate him the way he deserves.

Casper lets out a gasp as I grip his ankle, tugging him until he's laid on his back at the edge of the bed. I tower over him, looking him up and down before pulling his hand away for his cock. Then I lean down and kiss his lips briefly before straightening. His eyes are wide, his cheeks red, his chest raising and falling with each breath. Gods, he's gorgeous.

"Don't you dare come," I tell him, watching in wonder as his eyes dilate with lust. "I was busy admiring you, Casper."

"Me? I'm not--" he cuts himself off, shaking his head. "I've never thought of myself as something worth admiring." My chest aches with the soft confession and I promise myself to do everything in my power to show him that he is.

"You are. You deserve to be properly worshiped, Casper."

"Then show me."

I don't think I've ever stripped out of my clothes faster and I almost worry I've somehow gone into my phantom form to get myself naked. Thankfully, I can tell I'm still completely corporeal.

Glancing up at Casper, making sure I have permission, I slowly pull his boxers away, tossing them over my shoulder. The little display puts him at ease and he gives me a little huff of amusement.

As I run my fingers over the inside of his calf, Casper opens his thighs, making a place for me between them. I kneel up on the bed between his legs, touching him

reverently, amazed that I even get to have this, that Lady Fate has brought the two of us together. I'm in complete awe.

My fingers touch over his thighs, feeling them tense. I'm not sure if he's nervous or if I've hit a ticklish spot. Someday soon I plan on learning every single thing his body is telling me, I'll learn how to properly play him without a single word. Until then, words are necessary.

"Everything okay so far? If anything is too much or something doesn't feel good, all you have to do is tell me. I want this to be good for both of us."

"I'm good," Casper says, raising his left foot and placing it on my back, pushing me until I'm falling down onto my arms. Then he wraps both his legs around my waist, tugging me even further until our cocks are pressed together. "Fuck," he gasps out. "There we go. That's better. I was promised rutting."

"I somehow already adore you," I tell him with a grin so wide my cheeks start to hurt. "I promised rutting so that's exactly what you'll get. But if you want more, all you have to do is ask, okay?"

Casper whines. "Okay, fine. I'll ask. Now come on," he says with a huff, raising his own hips off the bed in order to himself against me. We both moan as he moves against me, our dicks rubbing against each other.

My mouth finds Casper's jaw, laying wet, opened mouth kisses against his skin as we grind together. There's absolutely no finesse, no rhyme or reason to our rutting, but it's somehow perfect. Precum wets our stomachs. It feels good. So good. But I want more.

Thankfully, apparently Casper does as well.

“More,” he breathes out, his fingers running over my hair before his nails are digging into my shoulder. “Please, Zeke. I want you.” “How do you want me, Casper? Tell me?”

“In me. Please.”

“Are you sure?”

Casper makes an annoyed noise, biting my shoulder hard before pulling back and glaring up at me. “You said all I had to do was ask. Well, I’m asking. Fuck me, Zeke. Mate me. Make me yours.”

A noise that sounds suspiciously like a growl leaves me, rumbling in the center of my chest. Fuck. The things Casper is asking of me is turning my insides upside down. I want it. I need it. So that’s exactly what I’m going to do.

I flip us until we’re side to side with Casper’s leg around my hip, leaving me room to reach his ass. I run my hand over his ass cheek a few times until I feel him let out a sigh, relaxing, only then do I venture further, running the pad of my finger over his hole.

“Oh,” I breathe out, finding him wet and ready for me. “I didn’t know familiars worked like that.”

“Banshee’s don’t?”

I smile against Casper’s lips. “Only during mating season.”

“Banshee’s have mating seasons? Oh, we are so exploring that in the future,” he says but then his voice is cut off with a moan as I push my finger inside him. “Oh my gods. Zeke. Fuck, that feels so--” his voice trails off as he pushes back against my

hand, fucking himself on my finger.

As he buries his face against my throat, Casper continues to make the prettiest noises, begging for more. When I feel him soft and ready around my finger, I push in a second, quickly followed by a third. He's so responsive, so sensitive to every touch. His noises are addicting, making me ache with how badly I want him.

Casper is mine and I plan on claiming him as such. No one will be able to smell him or look at him without knowing that he's taken. I want to possess him, body and soul.

"Enough of this," Casper says, making a frustrated noise. He flips me onto my back before climbing into my lap. "Enough teasing. I need you, Zeke."

"Then take me."

Casper reaches back, positioning me at his entrance before taking me into his body. I groan in pleasure as my cock is encompassed in wet heat. Fuck. Holy shit. He feels so good and not only does it feel good physically but I feel connected to him emotionally.

I'm overwhelmed. I can't breathe. I'm exactly where I need to be.

I feel like I'm coming home.

"Fuck, Zeke. Fuck."

"Yeah. That's what we're doing."

Casper snorts, smacking my chest and making me chuckle. He leans down in order to kiss me, his hips moving up ever so slightly, shifting on my cock. It must feel good because he's gasping. I can't believe we're doing this. I can't believe I'm inside my

mate right now when just yesterday I didn't even know he existed.

We kiss, hurried and frantic as Casper begins to properly move, fucking himself on my cock. I should probably be embarrassed by how quickly my orgasm is rushing towards me but I'm too lost in Casper's kisses, too overwhelmed by how fucking right he feels around me and over me.

"Bite me," I whisper against his lips, desperately needing to be marked by my mate.
"Claim me, Casper."

Casper stares down at me with wide eyes before he's moving faster than I thought possible. His teeth find my shoulder, biting down hard enough to break skin. It hurts but also feels so fucking good at the same time. Goosebumps raise across my skin and my stomach floods with warmth and arousal like I've never felt before. I cry out as pleasure rushes through me.

"Fuck!" My cock throbs within Casper's ass, panting his inner walls with my seed, filling him up. I feel our mating bond begin to settle within me, but it's not fully complete, not until I bite him back. I need to mark him the same way he's marked me.

But first...

Grabbing Casper's hips, I pull him away from my cock. He begins to whine in frustration but that whine quickly turns into a surprised squeak as I turn him around above me. With him on his hands and knees with his ass just above my face, I quickly get to work.

"Oh my gods. You're-- I can't believe you're doing that. Zeke!"

My tongue lavishes his pink hole, licking his slick and my cum into my mouth. Our

flavors mixed together are downright divine. It's salty and sweet and musky and delicious. I place my lips over his hole and suck, rewarded by Casper's legs nearly giving out and the most glorious scream of pleasure.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Zeke. Please. I'm so close!"

I wedge my tongue into his hole in order to chase the taste, thankful for once that my banshee tongue is longer than that of a human's, capable of reaching every last drop. Casper's hips move against my face, riding my tongue. My cock gives a valiant twitch, lust pooling heavy in my gut as I eat my mate out.

Reaching beneath him, I grab Casper's cock, stroking him as I lick his hole over and over and over again. His breathing picks up, his cries becoming closer and closer together.

I plunge two fingers into his hole with my free hand, wanting to stimulate his prostate while I'm stroking his cock and licking around my fingers. He's so close, I can tell.

"Please," Casper says, his voice breaking. As much as I want to continue eating him out, I need to claim my mate. I move my mouth away from his hole, but don't go far. Right when I know the pleasure is getting to be too much for him, I dig my teeth into the meaty part of Casper's outer thigh until I hear him cry out and feel the warm splash of his cum on my chest.

I can feel him. I can feel my mate at the center of my chest. Our bond is firmly in place and I know without a shadow of a doubt this is exactly where I'm supposed to be, with the person I'm meant to be with. Nothing will ever be able to break this bond, it's unshakable. His pleasure is my pleasure, his sorrow will be mine.

Casper leans his forehead against my thigh, trying to get his breathing under control. As gently as possible, I remove my fingers from his ass, quickly licking them clean

before helping him move until he's beside me once more.

"Jesus," Casper breathes out, putting his hand on the center of my chest, looking at me like he's just seen Lady Fate Herself. If I'm being honest, I understand the feeling because I'm feeling it too.

I place my hand against Casper's face, cupping his cheek gently. "Do you feel that?"

"I do," he whispers back, his smile stealing my breath for how soft it is. "You're mine. I always joked that my poor mate would be so unlucky to find me. Now though, I realize how foolish that was. We were meant to be."

I can't help but place a gentle peck against his lips, overwhelmed by the soft confession. "I may or may not have thought the same. We really are a pair, aren't we? We can work on this whole 'self-acceptance thing'. Together."

"Together," Casper says, his voice just barely audible. I can feel him smiling against my skin. "I like that."

Me too. I like that more than words can say, so instead of saying anything more, I just hold my mate tight.

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I stretch my arms over my head, letting out a satisfied groan as I feel all my sore muscles move. The last few days have been wonderful. Every time Zeke or I started to get ready to get out of bed, the other would pull the other back in. It was like we were under a spell and now that we've started experiencing each other carnally, we couldn't stop ourselves. We were addicted to bringing each other pleasure.

My ass is pleasantly tender from how often I ended up bouncing on Zeke's cock. I felt like I couldn't satisfy my needs to the point that even after we were done, I would beg for his fingers inside of me just so I didn't feel empty.

My cheeks flame as I think about how much of a cock slut I apparently am. I never gave much thought to what I would want sex wise, because before meeting Zeke, I didn't really have desires like this. But there's something about being with Zeke that makes me absolutely wild.

Is this the honeymoon phase people talk about?

Thankfully, Zeke didn't tease me at all about my newfound desires. He embraced them. Hell, I'd go so far as to say he celebrated them.

I want to do the same for him. Which is how I've finally found the strength to get myself out of bed and move into the living room. I pull out my phone, sending a couple messages into the group chat I have with my cousins.

First, I let them all know I'm okay, update them on the fact that Zeke and I are mated, and ask how the road trip is going for Harbor and Bently. Then I ask Willow to talk to his spark, Nash, for me; specifically to give me any information on sparks who

deal with ghosts and spirits. Finally, I ask Jude to talk to his spark, Cooper, about getting me any and all information about banshees.

Just as much as Zeke has accepted me, I want to do the same for him. I want to know everything I can about him. I want him to experience the euphoria of being seen, truly.

I want the same for Ray.

I realize I've only just met these two people but they already mean so much to me. As much as I joke around and tease, it's no secret I'm insecure as fuck. I want them to want me the same way I want them. Jesus, that's a lot of wants, isn't it?

The shower turns off and a few minutes later, Zeke steps out of the bathroom with a towel slung low on his waist. My mouth goes dry as I look at his bare chest, my eyes devouring every inch of skin I can see. I bite my bottom lip to keep myself from doing something ridiculous, like outright moaning at the sight.

I've loved everything we've done the last few days, but I really need to get a grip on my overeager libido! Just because instant gratification is delicious doesn't mean I can't let things simmer and enjoy the wait. Plus, I'd like to actually get to know things about my mate outside the bedroom!

"Go get dressed before we start up again. If I didn't know any better I'd think you were a bunny shifter with how much we've been going at it," I say with a giggle. Zeke gives me a grin before darting into the bedroom and closing the door behind him.

Good. If I'm not staring at him, maybe I can get my erection to go down before he comes back out.

While I'm waiting, my phone pings with a new message from Willow. Nash says that someone capable of using their magic to interact with ghosts and spirits is called a spiritmancer. He says things like the EMF reader and Ouiji board were created by spiritmancers and that I could try getting a board for Ray to use so she gets used to how it feels to purposely interact with spirits rather than by accident.

Whatever will help, I'm willing to give it a shot. That's if she even wants to try interacting with her own magic. Last time we spoke, she was still incredibly spooked by the entire situation.

"What's with the frown?" I look up at my mate, doing my best to smooth out my features. He tilts his head to the side in confusion, his brows furrowing. "Sorry. Is everything okay?"

I quickly nod my head. "I think so. I'm just worried about Ray. I just got a message from another spark explaining what sort of spark Ray is. He suspects she's what's called a spiritmancer and he suggested we get a few tools that'll help Ray interact with spirits better until she gets a handle on her magic."

"I think that's a great idea," Zeke says right away, flopping down onto the couch beside me. He takes my hand in his own, bringing it to his mouth and kissing the back of it. My stomach flutters at the gentle gesture. "So what's with the frowny face?"

"What if she doesn't want to get a handle on her magic? What if she truly wishes I'd never found her?" I bite my bottom lip, looking anywhere but at Zeke. "What if I fucked everything up just by existing?"

Zeke's free hand goes to my face, tilting my chin until I'm looking at him. "Your existence is a blessing I'll never stop thanking Lady Fate for," he says softly, his words fierce in their sincerity. They threaten to make tears spring to my eyes. I'm not

only wanted, I'm a blessing in someone's life. I hold onto those words, keeping them close to my chest. "Ray will come around when she's ready. This was a lot for her to take all at once, not only that her best friends are supernatural creatures but that she herself possesses magic. But she's strong. She'll bounce back and be here asking questions before you know it."

I lean into Zeke's hand, letting his words soothe me. "If you're sure."

"I am," he says straight away, leaning forward for a kiss only to move away from my lips at the last second and lay a smooch against the tip of my nose instead. The gesture makes me chuckle, warmth flooding my stomach.

"Now come on, let's make some food."

Zeke pulls me off of the couch and into the kitchen. I lean my hip against the counter, watching as he digs through the fridge. Gods, his ass looks amazing in those sweats. My hand clenches, keeping myself from reaching out and pinching it.

I look away and shake my head. As much as the idea of topping Zeke intrigues me, I don't think it's anything I really need to explore. With how needy I get when we're naked, I think I would be happy to always bottom. Having him sliding in and out of me is everything I've ever wanted. Riding him until he's whimpering has been so empowering. I love it so fucking much.

"Whatcha thinking about?"

I look up, finding Zeke grinning at me. Caught staring, great.

"Nothing. Umm, what are you making?"

"Your blush tells me everything I need to know," Zeke says, shaking his head in

amusement. “I’m gonna make some mac n cheese with hotdogs. Does that sound okay? It’s one of my comfort meals.”

“Absolutely! Do you need any help?”

“Nah, just stay here looking adorable and keep me company?”

“You think I’m adorable?”

Zeke grabs a pot and fills it with water, setting it down on the stove. “Is that even a real question? Of course I do.” He says it like it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

“Whatever,” I say, rolling my eyes. “I want to get to know more about you. Before the temptation to take you back to bed grows too hard to resist.”

“Gods,” Zeke breathes out, taking a step over me and wrapping a possessive hand around my hip. “You’re insatiable, aren’t you?”

“I’m only getting started. I feel like I’ve been waiting forever to experience these types of feelings. Now that I have you, I can’t seem to get enough,” I confess softly, ignoring the way my cheeks are heating up despite having already fucked so much. Will I ever get used to how hot and bothered my mate makes me?

Zeke leans down, kissing my lips gently. He’s careful to pull away before things can move into a more heated territory. He steps back over to the stove, popping a few hotdogs into a pan so they can warm up while he’s boiling the pasta.

“Tell me about your family. Are you all familiars?”

I nod my head. “My grandparents are both familiars and so are my parents and all of

my aunts and uncles. It's kind of amazing how we're all familiars, a lot of other families are at least a bit more mixed."

"What are your parents like?"

"They're fine," I say with a shrug. "They moved around a lot, always jumping into different projects or finding random jobs to do. Whenever they were gone I stayed with one of my cousins or with my grandma. We all kinda shifted households frequently."

"That must have been hard growing up, not having a stable place that was yours."

I look away, doing my best not to show how he's somehow hit the nail on the head without even trying. "It wasn't horrible. I had my grandma. And my parents loved me, they were just always busy, you know?"

Zeke hums, stirring the pasta. "Still. That doesn't sound like the most pleasant childhood. I'm really glad you had your cousins and your grandma though."

"Me too. It feels so strange not to have them here," I tell Zeke, running my fingers through my shaggy hair and pushing it behind my ear. "I'm so used to being glued to their sides. We spent five years in that RV together tracking down Willow's spark."

"That RV must have been so fucking stinky," Zeke says with a hearty laugh. "That many dudes all stuck together in an enclosed space? No, thank you!"

"Hey! We regularly stopped to shower! We were not stinky, how dare you!" We both laugh, me from the absolute audacity of the comment and Zeke from my reaction. I step over to him, wrapping my arms around his middle and lean my face against his back.

Oh. This is lovely. This is wonderful. I love being near Zeke. I love being able to touch him so freely. I love smelling him.

“What about your family? Are you an only child?”

“I am,” Zeke says, running his fingers over my forearm, making me shiver. “It was just me, my dad, and my mom growing up. They’re wonderful and before you ask, yes, they’re both banshees just like me.”

“One good thing about that is everyone knows each other’s habits and quirks, I suppose. Although with familiars you never know your animal skin until later on.”

Zeke tenses at my words before he’s letting out a long breath, forcing himself to relax. “What do you mean by that?”

Instead of questioning what that was about, I answer his question. “Familiars can shift into an animal skin in addition to the other things they’re capable of. When familiars are little, they can try out different animal skins to see which feels the best or the form that resonates with them the most.”

“That’s really interesting,” Zeke says as he pulls my hands away from his middle. Putting space between us, he walks to the fridge, pulling out some milk and butter. “Did you always feel best as a lion?”

I shake my head. “I was all over the place. It took until I hit about 14 to find my lion form.”

“I loved seeing you in your lion form. You were so fucking cuddly.”

“Oh my gods, don’t remind me. That was so embarrassing.”

“Nah, it was adorable. Just like your human form,” he says, giving me a quick kiss on the cheek before going back to cooking.

I want to argue but I don’t, letting my mate’s teasing compliments in as best as I can. I want to believe him, I really do. So for once, I don’t make a joke and just accept it. “Do you have a job?”

“I do! I’m an internet ghost hunter,” Zeke says, laughing at himself. “I hunt them for real and then record it as best as I can before editing out anything that proves it’s real. Page and I dub over some of the sounds, making it spooky in all the right places before posting them online.”

“And you make money from that? Really?”

“Don’t sound so skeptical! I really do make money from that. The sight we post on puts ads on our videos and we make revenue from that. Page also has a trust fund from one of her grandparents, so she lives off that while I live off the videos.”

“What about Ray?”

“Oh, she’s got a normal job,” Zeke explains with a smile, pulling two bowls from the cabinet and piling two heaping portions of mac n cheese into them. “She’s a receptionist at a local paper factory. She absolutely doesn’t look like the receptionist type but she loves it. Mostly because she holds all the power when directing calls and making sure her bosses schedules aren’t completely fucked.”

“I can see it,” I say, taking one of the bowls from Zeke and stepping over to the table. “That makes me happy, that she’s got a job she enjoys.” I let out a long sigh. “I should probably look around for a job. I don’t want to be a freeloader or overstay my welcome.”

Zeke sets his bowl down before kneeling on the ground beside me. He takes my face between his palms. “You’re not a freeloader, Casper. You are my mate. I want you here. You can get a job if you’d like, but you don’t have to. I can support the both of us just fine, okay?”

I open my mouth a few times before snapping it closed, too shocked to find a single word. Zeke must realize this because he gives me a moment to process before leaning up and kissing my lips.

“Okay,” I say softly against his lips. I feel so much for this man kneeling before me. We’ve only just met but I already never want to leave his side. I want to be near him for as long as he’ll have me. I want to learn about him, embrace him, and learn how to properly love him.

Before Zeke can stand up and move to his chair beside me, the front door is rattling. Someone uses a spare key and steps inside.

“Oh shit! We should have knocked! He’s blowing him! Cover your eyes!”

“Ewwwww!”

“Oh my fucking gods,” Zeke says, standing up and putting his hands on his hips. “I gave you that key for emergencies, Page!”

“Sorry, sorry! I wasn’t thinking! I forgot you’d be in that honeymoon freshly mated phase!”

“My dick is not out!” I yell over everyone else. Three sets of eyes look over at me, blinking slowly before we’re all overwhelmed with laughter. Ray shakes her head in my direction but it’s from amusement, not disappointment. Not a bad way to restart this whole ‘getting to know your spark’ thing. My chest blooms with hope. Maybe

we'll all be alright after all.

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“I’d offer you some food but I’ve only made enough for two.”

“That’s fine,” Page says, coming into the kitchen fully and sitting down at the table with us. Ray sits beside her. Despite just laughing a moment ago, she’s stiff once more, looking unsure. My heart aches for them. I just want their bond to fall into place, knowing they’ll both be so much happier once that happens.

“Oh my gods,” I blurt out, grabbing Ray’s wrist and pulling it towards myself so I can get a better look at it. Her cheeks turn bright pink. “Holy shit!”

“It’s nothing,” Ray says right away, pulling her hand back.

“Nothing? That’s a mating mark!”

“Aww,” Casper coos through a full mouth of pasta. “That’s so cute. I’m so happy for you,” he murmurs around his food.

Ray’s eyes soften and she ducks her head. “Thanks,” she whispers.

“Where’s yours?” I ask Page, looking for an obvious place and not finding it.

“None of your business,” she says with a smirk that tells me it’s someplace fun.

I pull my shirt to the side, showing off the bite Casper gave me. Page squeals in delight, getting out of her seat and pulling me into a tight hug.

“Gods, this has been the most wonderful weekend,” she gushes before sitting back

down. She turns towards Ray. “I know this has been bombshell after bombshell but you have to admit that overall, it’s been amazing.”

Ray rolls his eyes playfully. “Yeah, whatever. It’s been alright, I guess.”

“You’re such a bitch,” Page says, grinning ear to ear before pulling Ray into a smacking kiss. The two of them giggle against each other’s lips.

“And they said we were in the honeymoon phase,” I say to Casper. His eyes sparkle with amusement but I can tell he’s still holding himself back. I wish there was a way I could bridge the gap between them, to somehow be their bridge.

“Shut the fuck up,” Ray says, flipping me off before kissing Page one last time. She turns towards us, her eyes darting between the two of us before blowing out a long, exaggerated breath. “I’d like to apologize for how I acted when we met.”

“Oh, no. You don’t have to apologize. I totally understand that I was way too much.”

Ray frowns. “Don’t put words in my mouth,” she says sternly. “You were not too much. The situation was overwhelming but I could have handled myself better.”

I fake cough, “understatement of the world.”

“Do we need to ask you to leave?” Page asks, raising her brow at me. I shake my head, pretending to zip my lips closed.

“I’m sorry that I hurt you with how I acted. That couldn’t have been easy for you. This weekend, though fun,” she says, looking at Page pointedly who just grins back, “was hard because things felt unresolved between us. I may only be dipping my toes into the supernatural world right now, but I can still feel our bond, Casper.”

Casper's shoulders fall away. "Oh, thank Lady Fate," he breathes out, rubbing at his eyes. "I was so worried all of this was in my head or something."

"It's not. You and I are connected." Ray swallows thickly, looking away. "I'm your spark. Sorry you got stuck with me."

"I'm not stuck," Casper quickly says, reaching across the table and taking Ray's hand. Her eyes widen but she doesn't say anything, waiting for Casper to speak. "I'm choosing you. I want to stick around. I want to watch you grow and learn to use your magic. I want to be your conduit and your familiar. If you'll have me, of course."

"I will," Ray says, nodding her head seriously, like the two of them are making some sort of blood pact. And maybe they are. Well, minus the blood. "I want to be the best spark for you that I can be."

"You already are just by being yourself," Casper promises with a grin. Ray cracks, her face softening until she's smiling back.

"That was the sappiest thing I've heard in a long time, which is saying something because I literally confessed my undying love to Ray this weekend."

"Oh my gods," I say with a groan, shoving Page. "Way to ruin their moment."

"I didn't ruin anything! I was simply lightening the mood! Tell him, babe!"

Ray snickers, looking over at her mate. "You did kinda ruin the moment." Page starts to pout but Ray just rolls her eyes, telling her, "it's fine. I still love you, my mate," adding the last part under her breath, her cheeks heating once more.

Oh no. They're so cute together. I feel like my teeth are aching just watching them. Ray's never been this affectionate before, but I guess that's what happens when you

realize someone was literally made to be your soul mate. Things change. People change. It's beautiful.

"I'm so glad we don't have to keep hiding shit from you," I blurt out and then immediately regret it when Ray's glare is back in place.

"You're both such assholes! I was left in the dark for so long! I didn't even know my girlfriend was a fucking vampire!"

"I said I was sorry," Page says, crossing her arms over her chest.

"But you haven't apologized! And I still have no fucking idea what you even are because Page wouldn't tell me."

"I'm a banshee. There. I'm sorry I kept it a secret."

"I'm sorry, a what now?"

I roll my eyes. "A banshee."

"Like the spooky long haired ladies who scream when someone dies."

"Yes, exactly that. Sorry, I chopped all my hair off so I don't really fit the description anymore."

"Don't be sassy," Ray says with a pout, "I'm trying to figure all this shit out. Give me a break."

I quickly shove a giant bite of pasta into my mouth, giving myself a moment to calm my racing heart. Will explaining this stuff get any easier? Will it ever not make me panic with the thought of my favorite people rejecting me?

“A lot of the lore around banshees are true. I have the ability to scream when I sense death but I’m not compelled to do it. If I ever did it, the scream could scramble someone’s brain so I try to keep that to myself,” I explain softly. “The only thing you really need to know is that you’re safe around me, Ray.”

Ray reaches over and pats my cheek. “That was never in question, idiot. Plus, if you ever try to fight me, I’ll just shoot lightning up your ass. Or or or! I don’t know, apparently I have magic or something.”

Casper snorts so hard I’m worried he’s accidentally inhaled a noodle up his nose. He coughs, getting himself back under control. “Sorry. I’m just amazed you’ve gone from denying your magic to embracing it so wholeheartedly you’d use it to shoot lightning up someone’s ass.”

“What else would I do? Continue to run from this until I’m an old lady? That sounds exhausting. Better to embrace it now and learn to live with these abilities. And hey, maybe it’ll help you guys out when you’re investigating these hauntings. If things turn to shit, I’ll be there to actually communicate with these spirits instead of sending them running.”

“Speaking of hauntings,” I say, looking at everyone at the table. “How do we feel about a road trip this coming weekend?”

“You found something?”

“It looks like a standard haunted house about three hours from here. It should be a pretty easy case, but what better way to let Ray dip her toes into things?”

Ray bites her bottom lip for a moment before finally nodding. “Okay. Let’s do it.”

“It’s a date,” Page says with a giggle, laying an obnoxiously loud kiss against Ray’s

cheek. A hand touches my thigh under the table, giving it a squeeze. I look over at my mate and give him an encouraging smile.

His body language is the picture of ease now that this has all gotten taken care of. Ray is accepting of their bond which brings me more joy than I can understand. A part of him has settled. I want nothing but the best for him.

I'm surprised by the depth of my feelings for Casper already. Sure, we're true mates, but I didn't realize it was possible to fall for someone this quickly. I'm lucky to call him mine and to have him accept me as his.

I lace my fingers with his, giving him a squeeze right back. The smile he gives me in response steals my breath. Gods, he's so pretty. As much as I feel lucky, I also feel like there's no way this will last. I need to tell Casper everything that comes with being a banshee. I need to show him my true face. The sooner I rip this band-aid free the sooner I'll know if Casper can handle the truth.

"Well," Page says, standing up and pretending to dust off her pants. "This has been lovely. We should really do it again soon."

"Going so soon?"

"Yeah," she says, nodding her head and pointing her thumb towards the door. "Gotta run to the hardware store before going back home."

"What do you need there?"

I watch in fascination as Ray's face turns the brightest red I've ever seen while Page is grinning from ear to ear. "We need new light bulbs. Apparently magical manifestation equates to orgasms making the lights explode in our house."

Ray covers her face with her hands, groaning at her mate. “I hate you. I hate you so much. You did not have to tell them that.”

“I’m sure you’ll think of a creative way to get back at me. Maybe you can shoot lightning up my ass. Might be fun,” Page says, giggling as she pulls Ray out the door.

Casper and I stare after them, a moment of silence passing between us before we’re both laughing at the ridiculousness of the situation we just witnessed. “You don’t think she’ll actually try that, right?”

I look at my mate with wide eyes. “Well, if Page can’t sit properly in the car this weekend, we’ll know what happened.”

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“Okay,” I say under my breath, checking and re-checking that I have everything we might need. “I think I’ve got it all.”

“You seem nervous,” Ray says, putting her hands on her hips. “If you’re nervous, I’m gonna start getting nervous and that smells like a recipe for disaster. So get your shit together, Casper.”

I run my fingers through my hair. I have no idea how time moved so quickly. One moment I was enjoying being a couch potato while Zeke worked on edits and putting together a new video from the last haunting he took care of and the next moment he was packing me up into the car, preparing for our next adventure. “This is my first time too, you know! It’s not like I’ve been bonded to a spark before!”

Gods, I’m so fucking nervous. What if I fuck all of this up and Ray hates her magic even more? What if we can’t get the spirit to show itself? What if everything goes wrong?

“So we’re two idiots figuring this out as we go along?”

I set the bag down on the ground, letting out a long breath and trying to get my stomach to settle and stop feeling like I’m going to upchuck dinner. “Yeah,” I say softly, returning Ray’s amused smile. “We really are. You good with that?”

“Hell yeah,” she says with a grin. “What’s the worst that could happen? Whoever’s in there is already dead!”

“That’s the spirit!” Zeke says, putting his hands on my shoulders from behind. “This

story isn't a happy one. Apparently it's a teenage girl who's death got ruled a murder. Abusive step dad. Her mother moved away, too grief stricken to stick around and the guy did go to prison. Though it was so long ago that he's long dead now."

"Well fuck," Page breathes out, tying her hair into a braid before tossing it over her shoulder and out of the way. "You think she'll go easy on us?"

"Nope," Zeke tells us right away. "I can feel how uneasy this place is. She's pissed."

"Oh goodie," Page says, clapping her hands excitedly. "The last time we had a ghost that was pissed I got to watch it throw random shit at you. I hope Ray gets to see that for her first haunt!"

"Why do I have to be the target? You're the one with vampire healing!"

"I'm too pretty for them to ever target me."

Zeke puffs out his bottom lip. I wrap my arm around his waist, squeezing him tight. "It's okay, Zeke, I think you're pretty."

Ray makes a gagging noise and I flip her off, my stomach warming at the ease with which we've started teasing each other. I've come to know teasing as a sort of love language between myself and my cousins and it makes me happy that Ray seems to feel the same way.

"Let's head inside and set everything up," Zeke says before pressing a kiss to my temple. I pick up my bag, following behind.

The moment we set through the back door, the air around us is noticeably chiller. I blow out a breath, watching it puff with mist. Fuck. Okay. If I didn't already know this place was haunted, our foggy breaths would be an obvious tell.

Page is in the lead, taking us through the house until we find an open space in what I assume used to be a dining room. There's a set of stairs that leads up to the second floor in the corner and two doorways, one leading to the kitchen and the other leading to what used to be a sitting room in the front of the house, or maybe a living room.

Page carefully lays a blanket onto the floor for Ray and I. "You two sit here and try to work out your magic. Zeke and I are gonna set up the cameras and stuff."

Ray and I make ourselves comfortable on the floor. Before I can even begin to pull things from my bag, Ray startles, going completely stiff beside me.

"What?"

"She's here," Ray breathes out, her eyes widening. She reaches over, grabbing my hand and I can suddenly see her as well, Ray using her magic to bridge the gap between me and this ghost. Holy shit. She's doing it! Ray is using her magic, using me as her conduit. I'm so fucking proud of her, the emotions welling up inside of me so overwhelming I'm worried I might actually burst into tears.

I don't even have time to congratulate my spark on using her magic without even having to think about it because the ghost is getting angry with our presence.

"How dare you come here!"

The ghost is tall and lanky, a teenager who hasn't been able to properly grow into her limbs yet. Her hair is long and blond, flowing around her head. She screams and I can hear Zeke grunt in the kitchen.

"Oh fuck! It's fine! Everything's fine," Page calls to us, her voice borderline hysterical.

I look over, watching as Zeke literally flies across the doorway. It's almost comical if it wasn't my mate being tossed to and from like a ragdoll! "Hi," Ray says softly, sitting up a little straighter. "I'm not here to hurt you, I promise."

The ghost huffs in annoyance. "Right. That's what they all say. In the end, everyone hurts me."

"I won't. I pinky promise."

The ghost tilts her head slightly and it's an unnerving sight, going just a little further than should be possible. Finally she nods, swooping down from her place in the air to sit on the blanket across from us. I hear Zeke hit another wall with a thud.

"He's fine! I'm blocking his impacts. Keep focused, you two!"

I turn back to Ray and the ghost, doing my best to stay focused on the task at hand. Now that the ghost is this close, goosebumps raise across my body. Not only is the air so cold that it burns my skin, but there's an ache about it, like my heart is literally breaking just for being in her presence.

"What's your name?"

"Lou."

"Can you talk to me about what happened?"

Lou's form flickers, her body twitching in agitation. That might not be the best question to ask an angry teenager but fuck it, we're getting to the bottom of this one way or another.

"He hurt me."

“Who did?”

“My stepfather,” she growls out, things flying across the room and slamming into the wall. Glass shatters around us but now that I’m staring at this girl, I don’t feel fear. I understand her rage, it’s deserved. “He never laid a hand on me, but was always hitting my mother. He was awful. I tried to stop him and he pushed me down the stairs to get me out of the way.”

Ray hums in understanding. “I’m sorry that happened to you.”

The twitching stops and Lou’s form becomes solid once more. She stares at Ray for a long time. “Really?”

“Yeah. That must have been really hard, Lou. I’m so sorry.”

“Oh,” Lou breathes out, suddenly looking completely and utterly lost. “I’ve been so angry for so long. I’m not sure I can be anything else.”

Her words are soft, barely audible. In the background, I hear Zeke hit another wall, still flying across the kitchen with Page using her vampire super speed to cushion him over and over.

“That’s okay,” Ray says softly. “But you have to try.” Lou looks like she’s about to argue but Ray keeps going, cutting her off. “That man is dead, Lou. He got what he deserved. He went to prison and now he’s gone. Now it’s time that you get what you deserve because he isn’t worth another second of your time.”

“What do I deserve?”

Ray raises her hand, waving at something behind Lou. My eyes dart up, staring in awe as another form becomes visible. I squeeze Ray’s hand, silently supporting her,

letting her use me as her catalyst even if she doesn't realize she's even doing it.

"Peace."

Lou's eyes widen before she's turning around, darting from her place on the blanket and over to the man standing behind her. She throws her arms around him and he catches her. "Daddy?"

"I'm here, sweetheart. I think it's finally time that we moved on. Don't you?"

Lou holds on tight, both of them slowly floating down until their feet are touching the floor. Their forms become solid. "How are you here?"

"I couldn't leave you," he says softly, running his fingers through the back of her long hair. "And thanks to them, I was finally able to reach out to you. They helped bridge the gap."

Lou looks over her shoulder at us, tears streaming down her face. "Thank you." Ray gives her a nod. "I'm ready, Daddy. Let's go."

Lou's father takes her hand and they both walk away, their forms shimmering with the most brilliant golden color before they're disappearing into the afterlife. Another thud comes from the kitchen, signaling that Zeke has hit the floor. Better than the wall again, I suppose.

"You okay?"

My breath is stolen as I'm practically tackled. Ray grabs hold of me, hugging me so tight I can't breathe, but that's okay, I don't mind. I wrap my arms around her, holding her as she lets out a silent sob against my shoulder.

“Thank you,” she finally says, her voice just barely above a whisper. “I was able to help them. I helped that girl finally find peace. This is important.”

“Yeah,” I breathe out. “You did so well, Ray. I’m so proud of you.”

She pulls back, doing her best to wipe her face and get the running eyeliner off her cheeks. “I couldn’t have done this without you. The moment I grabbed your hand, everything just kinda fell into place. I could reach out to them and tug them together.”

“As you practice it’ll come even easier to you.”

“I’m gonna give that spark whisperer a call. Nash, you said his name was? I don’t think I need a full lesson or anything but talking this out with him will probably be good.”

My chest blooms bright with affection. I’m so fucking proud of Ray. I’m so happy she’s finally embracing herself. I’m so happy tonight went so well and we ended up with a happy ending for Lou and her father.

“I think that sounds great.”

A groan sounds behind me and my stomach drops, remembering my mate was just tossed through the wringer quite literally. He’s leaning against the doorframe, holding his arm against his chest.

“Fuck, Zeke. Are you okay?”

“Oh yeah, totally fine. Don’t worry about me. I’ve had much worse.”

“That does not reassure me like you think it does,” I say right away, quickly leaving my seat and walking over to him, looking him over. He’s got a few scuffs, some

bruises, and a scrape that's bleeding a little bit at his elbow, but otherwise looks okay. I breathe a sigh of relief.

"Gods, you were amazing, babe," Page gushes, pulling Ray into her arms and swinging her around in a circle. "Mastered this whole thing on the first try. I think we need to celebrate!"

Zeke hums. "Can we celebrate after I've gotten some rest. I'm gonna be so fucking sore tomorrow."

"Party pooper."

A growl rumbles through my chest and I glare over at Page. "He said he needs rest. Fuck off."

As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I throw a hand over it. Oh my gods. I cannot believe I just said that!

"Well," Zeke says with a grin, putting his hands on my shoulders. "My mate has spoken."

"Wow," Ray breathes out, giving me a pleased look. "I didn't think you had it in you, Casper. Good for you."

"I-I. That wasn't. Oh my gods. Fuck. I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Page tells me quickly. "Sometimes instincts make us say things. I'm happy to lay off. Especially with all that going on," she explains, waving a hand in my general direction. Does she mean the fact that we're newly mated? Yeah, that must be it. I'm glad they seem to understand I didn't mean anything by the comment other than being overprotective of my mate.

“Let’s get our shit and get out of here. Hotel or drive back home?”

I look at the wince on my mate’s face and make the decision for him. “Hotel. Zeke needs to rest before we head back home.”

Under her breathe I hear Page say, “fuck yeah, hotel sex.”

Ray snorts, shoving her elbow into her mate’s stomach. “Shut the fuck up.”

They giggle together as they gather everything up. I put my arm around Zeke, letting him lean against me as I lead him back outside and to the car. “Okay, now that it’s just you and me, how are you actually feeling?”

“I’ll be fine by the morning, baby, I promise.”

I hum, my stomach flipping delightfully at the pet name. “I’ll take good care of you. Promise.”

It takes about a half hour to pack everything up and find our way into our hotel room. It’s dead this time of night so we thankfully don’t run into anyone in the lobby or hallway.

Once we’re in our room, I push Zeke into sitting at the end of the bed. I carefully remove his shoes, and then his sweater, and then his jeans. He gives me the softest smile as I do. I would do a lot of things to keep that smile on his face.

I pull the sheets back, helping him scooch back and cover him with the comforter. “There we go,” I murmur, kissing the middle of his forehead. “Now rest.”

“You’re so good to me,” Zeke murmurs through a wide yawn. “So good to a monster.”

My brows furrow. I want to question the comment but he's already completely dead to the world. Instead, I get into the bed with him, snuggling against his side.

I'm not sure how long I'm asleep or what exactly wakes me. I open my eyes, blinking and trying to gain my bearings. I swear I see something move in the corner of my peripherals.

I sit up, my entire body going frozen as I see someone, or maybe something, in the corner of our room. I try to put my hand on Zeke in order to shake him awake but find the bed beside me empty. My stomach swoops with something close to fear, wondering what the hell is going on. "What the fuck?"

The thing is what I can only describe as a phantom. It's like a black sheet flickering in the wind, with two arms and a very clear face. As it gets closer, it tilts its head to the side and the gestures are so like Zeke that my breath is stolen.

Oh.

Oh my gods.

"Zeke?"

Instead of answering, the phantom flies over to the empty space beside me on the bed. I watch with wide eyes as the phantom seems to sink itself onto the bed, slowly morphing from a flickering phantom to Zeke, corporeal once more.

"Zeke?" I ask again.

Zeke's eyes flick open, blinking a few times. He looks over at me and his eyes look frantic, like he's terrified of my reaction. Reaching forward, my heart breaks as he flinches. I continue on, touching his cheek softly.

“Wow,” I breathe out, unable to find the words to say what I’m feeling. Was that scary? Yes, but that’s mostly because I didn’t know what the hell I was looking at. Now that I know that was Zeke’s true banshee form, I can appreciate just how magnificent it was.

Finding understanding and acceptance in my eyes, Zeke makes a broken noise. He rushes forward, burying himself in my arms.

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This is not how I planned things. This is not how I wanted to show my mate my true form. Fuck. Fuckity fuck. Shit.

I wait for his reaction. I wait for him to leave this room screaming. I'm prepared for him to push me away and ask to never see me again. I'm ready for the worst.

Instead, I somehow see acceptance and dare I say it, love, in his eyes.

"Hey," he breathes out, his fingers running over the back of my head, doing his best to soothe me. The broken little whimpers that keep sounding through the room are coming from me, and I do my best to stop them to no avail. I'm overwhelmed with how much this means to me, how unbelieving it is that Casper would accept me, all of me. "It's okay, Zeke. I'm here and I'm not going anywhere."

I bury my face against his shoulder, just desperately holding on, doing my best to believe his words. He accepts me. He's seen the monster I can be and is sticking around.

"I had to feed," I tell him, my words coming out slurred against his shoulder. "I had to feed so I could heal up."

"That's okay," he says, still petting the back of my head. "What do you feed on, Zeke?"

"Brains. Disgusting, I know."

"Shh," he shushes me, pulling me away from his shoulder so he can look into my

eyes. “If they heal you and are something you need, then they’re not disgusting. Nothing you do is disgusting, Zeke.” He waits a moment before asking, “they’re not like live brains, are they? Like should we be getting out of here before someone wakes up screaming that their husband’s brain is missing overnight?”

“What? No! Of course not! There’s a local hospital that I drifted over to. I found someone in their morgue to snack on.”

Casper lets out a breath he was holding, giving me a nod. “Okay, then. It sounds like we’re all good then.”

“That’s your big issue? Ethically sourced brains?”

“Well, yeah. What else would I be worried about?”

I blink at him, trying to wrap my head around this conversation. “Seriously? You’re not upset that I’m literally a monster who eats brains.”

“You’re a banshee who eats ethically sourced brains. Just like I’m a familiar who can shift into a lion. We all have our quirks.”

How could I stay anxious when my mate is calling what I think of monstrous just another quirk. He accepts me just as I am. I feel giddy with relief.

“Quirks? Baby, please.”

Casper gets the most ridiculously love sick look in his eyes. “I like it when you call me that.”

My breath is stolen from me. I can’t believe he’s okay with me being a banshee and everything that comes with that. All I can do is pull him into a kiss, pouring all of my

emotions into it, silently telling him what this all means to me.

Casper makes a surprised noise against my lips but quickly begins to kiss me back, his arms holding me tight. How could I not love this man? How could I experience this level of acceptance and not fall, head over heels for him? Sure, these feelings have come on fast, but I have the rest of our lives to settle into them now that they're here.

That's how true mates work. The feelings come on strong and hard, two pieces of a puzzle snapping into place, two sides of the same coin finally finding each other.

"Casper," I breathe out, overwhelmed by the amount of emotions slamming into me. I give him one last kiss before reaching behind myself, flicking on the lamp. Casper blinks a few times, adjusting to the light. "I wanna show you my true face."

Casper's hand touches my cheek, keeping me from looking away. "There's nothing I want more than to see you, Zeke."

I let out a shaky breath before letting my glamor fall. I know my true face isn't as conventionally attractive as how I present myself. Red veins run down from below my eyes which are completely different now. The whites are completely black while my irises are white without a pupil. My mouth stretches ever so slightly wider, becoming uncanny in appearance. Instead of ears, I have small holes on the side of my head.

Like this, anyone would see a monster.

Anyone but my mate, apparently.

"Oh, Zeke. You've been holding onto this for so long, thinking it was something bad," he says, his fingers tracing the red veins of my cheeks. "You're not bad. You're

not a monster. You're still my wonderful mate. You're still mine."

"I was so scared to show you," I confess softly.

"You don't have to hide things from me. I'm here and I'm not going anywhere, Zeke. Through the bad and the difficult just as much as the good times. You're it for me."

"You have no idea what that means to me," I tell him, leaning my forehead against his.

"I think I might have an idea or two. You mean so much to me."

I kiss him again, unable to stop myself. He's perfect. Lady Fate truly knew what She was doing when She picked Casper as my mate. Someone who could see every part of myself and embrace it. Someone who could put my mind at ease. Someone who could love me just the same way I love him.

I pull back, brushing my thumb over Casper's cheek, imitating the way he's petting my face. "I have one more thing to tell you."

"Just one more?" Casper asks with a giant grin, his eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Yes," I tell him, mirroring his smile. My stomach swoops with affection intermixed with nerves, now for an entirely different reason. "When I was in my phantom form, I saw something."

"Something? What did you see?"

"I saw that there's actually three people in this hotel room instead of two."

Casper chuckles, tilting his head in confusion. "Right," he says slowly, looking

around the room for another person.”

“No, no. That’s not. There’s no one else in the room with us. What I meant was there’s someone else here.”

“You’re not making any sense, Zeke.” He puts the back of his hand against my forehead. “Do you have a fever or something? Was the brain you ate bad?”

I playfully smack his hand away. “Oh my gods. Casper, you’re pregnant.”

“I’m sorry, what? I’m what? It sounded like you said I was pregnant.”

I stare at him for a long moment, waiting for the words to sink in. “Yeah, you’re pregnant.”

“What? But I can’t be.”

“I assure you, you absolutely can. With how much we’ve been doing it since we met,” I say, letting my words trail off. Casper’s eyes are wide, darting between mine before finally, he moves, jumping into my lap and wrapping his arms around my shoulder and burying his face against my neck.

“Holy shit! Oh my gods! I’m pregnant? Are you sure?”

“Very,” I say softly. “Are you happy?”

“I’m so happy I could pee myself.”

I can’t help but snort. “Please don’t pee on me.”

“I won’t. I’ll hold it, I promise. But yes, I’m so fucking happy, Zeke.” He touches his

stomach, grinning down at it. “We’re gonna have a baby. Oh my gods, I can’t believe it.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever felt more lucky that a monster like me was gifted someone like you.”

Casper frowns, pinching my arm. “Don’t call yourself that. You’re not a monster. Would you call our baby a monster if they’re a phantom?”

“Of course not.”

“Then you’re not allowed to call yourself that either.”

My perspective changes in an instant. Our child might be a phantom just like me and no matter how I feel about myself, I know without a doubt that they’ll have the innocence and perfection of a child. We don’t get to choose the vessel we’re born into, but we do get to choose how we’ll treat that vessel, we get to choose the type of person we’re going to be.

I’m choosing to embrace myself.

“You’re right,” I say softly. “Thank you.”

Casper shifts us until we’re laying down once more. He wraps himself around me, trading soft, barely there kisses with me until we’re too tired to keep kissing even a moment longer. Pressed against my mate with his taste still against my tongue and the knowledge that our family is growing leaves me with the most peaceful sleep I think I’ve ever gotten.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:22 am

Iflop down against my mate, huffing with amusement when he grunts. I wiggle myself onto the couch that can barely fit me in this form, not caring that my mate is getting a mouthful of my fur.

Ever since finding out I was pregnant, I've found myself in this form more often than not. I'm so comfortable in my lion form. It makes me feel like I'm being hugged but like emotionally instead of physically.

"Warn a guy," Zeke says, pushing me away slightly so he can get his head uncovered. I lay across the couch, my middle across Zeke's lap. He buries his fingers in my fur, petting me and a rumble sounds throughout the room as I begin to purr.

Oh yes, that's wonderful. Divine. I don't think anything is better than this.

Okay, maybe sex. Sex with Zeke is much better than this. But this is a very close second.

I turn my head to look at my mate. If it was possible to smile, I would be grinning from ear to ear. Zeke has started keeping his true face on display when it's just the two of us at home. I still think that Ray and Page wouldn't mind it, but baby steps. I'm just happy he's comfortable enough to have his glamor down when I'm around. He's taken strides at accepting himself and it's been wonderful to see. I'm so proud of him.

Cooper eventually got back to me about everything I needed to know about banshees. Even though Zeke had already shared his true face with me and his special diet, it was nice to read up about banshees. I want to know everything I can, especially if the

little one growing inside of me happens to be a banshee. I've also read up about banshee mating seasons and let me just say, I cannot wait to experience a week of hot and sweaty sex where Zeke's instincts are trying to breed.

Oh lord, I'm getting horny again.

I shift out of my lion skin, still laying across Zeke's lap. I flip over onto my back so I can give him a grin, pointedly looking down at my erection which is tenting the front of my sweats.

"Oh? Did you need something?"

I hum. "Yes, please. Could I get a hand?"

Zeke snorts in amusement before running a single finger over my erection. I moan, long and low and completely unabashed. What a fucking tease! I am carrying his child! How dare he tease me!

"Oh, don't give me that look, baby, you know I'll make you come. Let me play a little first."

His hand moves away from my erection and I whimper in frustration. Sure, we've just started but I'm horny and pregnant and want to come. I should be able to get my way while being pregnant!

"You're such a pillow prince now that you're pregnant. Just because you're round with my child doesn't mean you get to be a brat."

I stick my tongue out at him. How dare he call me a brat! He's the one who made me this horny, it's his job as my mate to take care of it.

That's the story and I'm sticking to it!

"Please? Pretty please with sugar on top? You wouldn't want your poor, pregnant mate to be needy when you can fix that, right?" I stick out my bottom lip and bat my lashes at him until he's finally cracking.

"Fine. Get naked and get in bed."

"Fuck yes!" I scramble out of my mate's lap, running into the bedroom. I almost trip as I tug my pants down, but just barely keep myself from falling over. As quickly as I can, I get my clothes tossed off before leaping onto the bed on my hands and knees.

I stick my hips up into the air, putting my head on my pillow, arching my back as prettily as possible. Do I look like a desperate slut? Probably. Do I care even a little bit? Not if it gets me what I want.

"Jesus," Zeke hisses out as he steps into the bedroom. "Fuck, baby. You have no idea how sexy you look right now."

"Then quit looking and start doing," I say, not trying to disguise the desperation in my voice. "Need you. Please."

"I've got you," he says and a moment later I feel the bed dip behind me. Anticipation runs through me and I dig my fingers into the sheets beneath me. I wiggle my ass back and forth, trying to tempt my mate further.

A slap sounds in the room followed by a low groan of pleasure. Oh. Okay. I've never been spanked before but I won't lie, that felt really good. My hips somehow lift even further and Zeke chuckles.

"Get on with it already," I start to say, my words cut off by a noise of surprise as

Zeke pulls apart my cheeks and something wet and warm slides over my hole.

Oh my gods. Oh my gods.

Zeke licks over my hole over and over, teasing me until my hips are shifting against his face, riding that amazingly talented tongue. Fuck, I love that his tongue is longer and more dexterous than a human tongue. He might still be learning to accept everything that comes with being a banshee, but I fucking love every little difference.

Without my permission, I'm making barely there whimpers of pleasure. My body breaks out into goosebumps and my cock hangs hard and heavy between my legs.

"Please. Please, Zeke. More. I need more."

Zeke pushes two fingers into my ass and the stretch is downright divine, exactly what I needed. I whine, pushing back against his fingers, fucking myself on his long digits. It's the perfect tease, but I want more. Gods, I feel so greedy for it, wanting nothing less than my mate's cock stretching me wide.

"Gods," Zeke says, leaning back on his heels. He kisses my ass cheek. "You're so fucking wet for me, baby. Dripping down the back of your thighs just from my fingers."

I groan, long and low, biting down on my pillow for a moment as I fuck back on my mate's fingers. I look over my shoulder, finding him staring down where his fingers are disappearing inside of me. With his glamor off, his eyes somehow look even hungrier than usual. My stomach flutters with how much I want him, how much I fucking crave him, how much I need him.

"Please. Fuck me."

“I am, baby.”

“Fuck me with your cock.”

Zeke pulls his fingers free. Before I can start cussing him out for leaving me empty, he’s pushing at my hip, guiding me onto my back. I flip over with a huff, opening my thighs wide for him. He’s still completely clothed, his jeans pulled open enough for his cock to be free. Gods, why the fuck is that so hot? It really shouldn’t be this hot to be naked while he’s almost completely covered.

“Please. Come on.”

Zeke gives me a smirk as he puts his cock against my own. He wraps his hand around them both, stroking us together. It feels good. So good. I don’t know what it is about being pregnant but everything is more sensitive. I moan in pleasure, lightning bolts running down my spine at the sensation.

“There we go. That feels good, doesn’t it?”

“So good,” I confess breathlessly. “But want more. Please.”

“You could come from this, couldn’t you? Isn’t this enough, baby?”

I whimper in frustration because he’s right. I absolutely could come just from this. I could cover my swollen belly with my cum so easily. “It wouldn’t feel as good,” I tell him with a pout. “Feels better when you’re inside me. Please, Zeke.”

Zeke hums. “Alright, because you asked so nicely. You can have exactly what you want. No more teasing.”

“Thank all the fucking gods,” I say with a long, drawn out groan. Zeke pushes inside

of me and I close my eyes, enjoying the sensation of being penetrated, of feeling so stretched and full. Gods, this is literally perfection. Nothing has ever felt this good before or ever will again. This is like seeing the face of god.

“Gods, you always feel so perfect.”

“Literally made for you,” I babble, doing my best to wrap my legs around Zeke’s waist. “Made for you to be inside me. Never wanna come without you in me. Fuck, Zeke. Can’t get enough.”

“I love it when you get like this,” Zeke says, finally starting to move inside of me. He pulls my hips into his lap as best as he can, fucking into me with long, slow strokes. It hits my insides just right to have my toes curling in pleasure. “You’re so desperate and needy. It’s like you’re drunk off my cock. I could ask anything of you and you’d say yes in order to come.”

Zeke’s movements pick up speed, fucking into me harder. I cry out in pleasure, feeling my cock throb, my balls drawing up tight as my orgasm rushes towards me. Zeke touches my cock but I quickly bat his hand away.

“No. No touching. Just keeping fucking me, just like this. Wanna come from your cock alone.”

“Gods, you look amazing like this. Whining and panting. Fuck. You’re so desperate for it, aren’t you, baby?”

“Yes. Please, Zeke. Make me come. I’m so close. Harder.”

Zeke doubles his efforts, the sound of his hips slapping against my ass mixes with the sound of our moans and my whimpers. The room grows thick with the scent of our lust mixing with our sweat. I feel drunk off of it. Desperate in a way I only feel when

I'm around Zeke.

With one hand gripping my hip so tight it'll leave a mark later, Zeke uses the other to tweak at my nipple. The slight pain mixes with my pleasure.

"Zeke! Fuck!" I cry out as I'm overwhelmed, my head dunking under the waves of pleasure washing over me. My cock jolts, spurting cum across my swollen middle, my ass clamping down on Zeke's dick.

"That's it. Let it all out. Feel it all," my mate says, punctuating his words with hard thrusts, nailing my prostate over and over until I'm crying out with how over sensitive everything is. I'm completely wrung dry, sated to my very core.

"Fuck," I whisper, hissing out a sharp breath as Zeke pulls himself free of my ass. He leans down, licking all of my cum off of my belly. I stare down at him with wide eyes, my cock giving a vaillant twitch despite being completely sated already.

Zeke lays on his side beside me, pulling me into a kiss. He pushes my cum into my mouth and I moan around his tongue, my stomach flipping almost violently by how hot that is. There's something about cum that Zeke gets really into, always wanting to lick it up and rub it into our skin. Fuck, I love it.

As we kiss, I reach down and grab hold of Zeke's erection. It's still covered with my slick, making my strokes silky smooth. He moans into my mouth, his hips fucking into the grip I'm providing.

"That's it. I want it, Zeke. Mark what's yours," I tell him between fevered kisses. I stroke him, making sure his cock is pressed against my swollen belly. "Give it to me."

Zeke makes a broken noise into my mouth as his body goes tense. I feel him come

across my belly, his cum warm against my skin. His hand reaches between us, rubbing his cum into my belly, bringing some of it to my soft cock and covering that as well.

I feel claimed. I feel loved.

“I love you,” I tell him between kisses that are slowly growing less out of control with lust and more soft with affection. “I love you, Zeke.”

Zeke pulls back, his eyes wide. “Oh, Casper,” he breathes out, his face breaking out into a grin. “I love you too. I love you so fucking much.”

“I was so nervous when we met,” I find myself saying, my heart racing against my ribs. I’ve known I loved Zeke for a while now but was too nervous to tell him until now, in this perfect bubble of post orgasm peace. “I was so worried you’d be upset to be stuck with someone like me. But now I’m just so thankful that Lady Fate crossed our paths. I can’t imagine a better mate.”

Zeke’s hand touches my cheek, stroking just under my eye. “I feel the same way across the board, baby. I was so nervous you’d be upset with me, especially before you knew my true face. You’ve surprised me at every turn. I love you, Casper.”

We kiss again, this time without an ounce of the overwhelming lust I was feeling before. That’s been replaced by warm fondness. I love this man more than words can say and he loves me right back.

“Our baby is so lucky to have you as their dad.”

Zeke grins from ear to ear, almost literally with how wide his true mouth stretches. It makes butterflies go wild inside my stomach. Before I can make a comment about how cute I find his smile, my phone is ringing.

“Oh shit,” I gasp out, flipping over and grabbing my phone. “Don’t answer that,” Zeke tries to say but it’s too late. I answer the call, smiling at my cousins as their faces pop up on the screen.

“Hi!”

“Hey, everyone! Wait,” Harbor says, putting his face even closer to the screen. “Casper? Are you naked?”

I look down at myself, flushing when I realize duh, yeah, I am currently naked. “Umm?”

“Oh my gods,” Willow starts giggling. “Is that Zeke next to you? Where you guys fucking?”

Jude lets out a long sigh. “Please tell me you didn’t stop fucking to answer this call.”

“I didn’t! I wouldn’t do that!”

“I bet he just finished,” Bently says with a warm chuckle.

I quickly pull the blanket over my chest, my cheeks bright red. “So anyway,” I say, trying to get the conversation off of me. “How is everyone? Harbor?” I clear my throat. “You look like you’re glowing!”

“I know what you’re doing,” Harbor says, smiling into the camera. “But I’m willing to talk about myself! We need to compare notes because you’re only a few weeks more along than I am!”

I sit back and listen as Harbor talks about his mate and how wonderful he is. He tells us about his pregnancy and how everything is going. I can’t wait until we all meet up

again. This time, there'll be a handful more babies to pass around than there was last time.

Bently tells us that he's finally left Harbor's place. He apparently knows where to find his mate and spark. Lucky bastard. I'm surprised he didn't head their way the moment he knew, but he's always been the most level headed one of us all.

As I listen, I can't help but smile, completely content. Sure, leaving my cousins was hard, but finding my place here has been good. It's been better than good, it's been perfect. My life here with Ray, Page, and Zeke is wonderful. I finally feel like I'm at home, like I'm where I'm supposed to be.

I look over at my mate and mouth 'I love you' to him. He smiles, taking my hand and kissing it.

"Hey, Casper?"

I turn back to the screen. "Yeah?"

"Is that cum on your cheek?"

I don't think I've ever hung up a call so quickly in my life.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:22 am

There's a knock at the door. I quickly shift my glamor back into place, my brows wrinkled with confusion. I don't think either of us are expecting a visitor right now and if it was Page or Ray, they'd just use their key to crack open the door and yell at us about having clothes in place.

Stepping over to the door, I look through the peephole, still super confused. There's a woman standing on my doorstep, looking impatient. She's short with stark white hair that has a streak of bright green in the front.

Opening the door, I give this woman a polite smile. "Hello? Can I help you?"

"You cannot," she says with a grin. "But I can certainly help you."

"Uhh?"

"Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself," she says, holding out her hand for me to shake. "My name is Star. I'm here to help your mate with bringing your child into the world."

Oh, right! Casper told me about how someone named Star would be coming to help when it was time. Apparently she's helped his other cousins with their births along with all of the hunting crew. It's so cool that she can make her way across the country to help birth all these babies. She must have the most amazing rewards card when it comes to flying so much!

"It's really lovely to meet you!" I shake her hand firmly before opening the door further, letting her inside. "Though, you might be a bit early. Nothing's been

happening yet.”

Star gives me a knowing smile, her eyes shining with something I can’t quite name.

“You sure about that?”

“Zeke!” Casper calls from the bathroom followed by a pained groan. “Zeke! Get in here! Ouch!”

I look at Star with wide eyes before darting towards the bathroom. I can hear her following behind me, chuckling to herself. How the fuck did she know?

“I’m here, baby. Are you okay?”

“I either pissed myself or my water just broke.”

“Handy that you were already in the shower.”

I pull the curtain back slightly so I can check on Casper. He’s leaning against the side of the shower wall, breathing heavily, his hands clutching his round belly. The hot water is running over him. He’s beautiful but I can’t fully appreciate it because he’s in pain.

Casper’s dark eyes snap over to me. “It’s time. I can’t believe it’s happening. Holy shit.”

“It’s okay,” I tell him as gently as I can. “It usually takes awhile for these things to progress. Deep breaths.”

“Oh yeah? You think it’s gonna take awhile?” Casper asks, his voice taking on a high-pitched whine. “It better not take a while because it already hurts really badly.”

Star touches my shoulder, her other hand holding a towel. Gods, she's stealthy. How did she already get all those supplies? "You should probably get in there with him?"

My eyes widen. "What?"

"You wanna catch your baby, don't you?"

"Catch? What? Already?"

She gives me a look. "Deep breath." I suck in a sharp breath, trying to get my heart to stop racing. "We need you to be the calm one here. Can you do that?" I nod my head. "Good boy. Now get in there and help your mate birth your babe."

I strip out of my shirt, pants, and socks, keeping my boxers on before tucking myself into the shower. Casper turns around, leaning his face against me, letting the water fall against his back. I run my hands up and down his spine, digging my fingers into his lower back, doing my best to help the pain.

"You're okay," I breathe out, my voice shaking despite my best efforts, "you're doing so well. You've got this, Casper."

"You're freaking the fuck out right now, aren't you?" Casper pulls away so he can look up at me with amusement. He's amused. That's got to be a good sign, right?

"A little bit. Yeah. Sorry."

"It's okay. It's kind of adorable. The big bad banshee is freaking out about having a baby."

I roll my eyes at my mate, keeping my fingers busy by massaging Casper's back. "It's not the baby part that freaks me out. It's the seeing-you-in-pain part. You seem

okay right now, so I'm okay."

"Oh, I'm absolutely not okay," he says with a laugh. "Contractions keep ripping through me and they hurt so badly, but now that you're in here with me I feel okay. I can tough it out."

"You're so strong. I'm so proud of you."

"Fuck," Casper says in response, his face contorting with pain. He breathes out through his nose. "Okay. Fuck. It's happening. It's happening right now, Zeke."

"Like now now? Right this second?"

"Mhmm," Casper hums, nodding his head. He spreads his legs wider, pushing me until I'm kneeling before him. "Need you to catch them. Don't overthink. Just catch."

I don't have time to marvel at the fact that Casper is so composed while literally pushing a baby out of his body. Everything happens so quickly and all I can do is brace myself for impact. One moment I'm thinking about what to make for breakfast and the next I'm in the shower catching my baby!

Thankfully, some buried instinct takes over. I hold out my hands and catch the baby that's sliding free from Casper's body. He groans, I squawk, and from outside the shower, Star chuckles.

"Well done, boys!"

I slip onto my ass, completely uncaring. All I can do is stare down at the baby in my hands, wonder overwhelming me. The physical manifestation of my love for Casper. Our little baby. I look them over, making sure they have ten fingers and ten toes, unable to stop smiling.

“We have a little boy,” I breathe out, looking up at Casper who’s leaning against the shower wall, looking down at me with such soft eyes. He looks incredible for someone who’s literally just given birth. “Gods, baby, you did so amazing. I’m in awe of you.”

“As you should be,” he says with a nod, making me chuckle.

“Hand the babe over and you can help your mate out of the shower,” Star says, pulling the shower curtain back enough for me to hand our baby over. She swaddles him in a towel, getting him dry for me.

I stand up, wrapping Casper up in my arms. I hug him tight, wanting him to feel how much I love him, how proud of him I am. What an amazing man my mate is and somehow, he’s my mate.

I turn the shower off before pulling the shower curtain to the side. Grabbing a towel, I carefully dry my mate off. Once he’s dry, I help him step out of the tub and get him into a comfy pair of clothes.

“Dry yourself,” he says with a chuckle. “I don’t want you dripping all over the house.”

I shuck my wet boxers off and away, drying myself much more hasty than I did for Casper. Once I’m dry enough, I throw my clothes back on.

“Oh! No boxers! How scandalous, Zeke.”

“Jesus,” I breathe out, shaking my head. “You’ve just given birth, cool off, Casper.”

Casper sticks out his bottom lip at me. “Spoilsport.”

I put my arm around his shoulders, letting him lean on me as we shuffle our way to our bedroom. Star is already there. Our son has been put into a diaper and Star has a bottle in her hands, waiting for us.

“Thank you,” I say, unable to convey the level of thankfulness I’m feeling. She somehow knew exactly when we’d need her and knew exactly what each of us needed. It’s almost magical with how perfect her arrival was.

Star gives me a soft smile. “You’re very welcome, dearie . Now why don’t you help your mate into bed so he can hold his son for the first time.”

“Mm, yes. Do as she’s told you, Zeke. Chop chop.”

I snort, but do as I’m asked, helping Casper into bed. Once he’s comfortable, I pull the comforter over him. “You’re bossy. It’s like you just had a baby or something.”

“Something like that. I expect to be treated like a prince for a while. That was hard work, babe.”

“How about forever?”

“I suppose I could get used to that,” he says with a soft smile, taking my hand in his own. He tugs me forward, kissing the back of my hand before shoving me away. “Okay, gimme gimme!”

“I’ve been replaced,” I say, pretending to be wounded but there’s clearly a smile on my face. Star steps over, handing our baby over to Casper along with the bottle.

Casper takes in our baby’s face, his eyes growing moist with unshed tears. I can understand because I’m feeling like I’ve got something in my eye as well. Our baby is beautiful. Pink and perfect with dark hair atop his head.

“Is he a banshee?” Casper asks, looking up at me.

I nod my head, already able to feel the connection I have with him. When a banshee is born, they’re connected with their banshee parent. Until he hits puberty, his glamor is fixed with mine to keep him safe from discovery. Once he’s older, he’ll learn to get into his phantom form and he’ll need to start hunting for himself, but for now, I can keep him safe.

I let my glamor fall away so that Casper can look at our son’s true face. I always thought the red veins looked haunting, the white and black eyes something from nightmares. But now that I see those reflected on my son’s face, I can see just how wrong I was. The things that make him a banshee don’t make him any less perfect, any less beautiful.

Words cannot describe how much I love this little man already. I promise myself to work on accepting myself so that when he’s older, he’ll have an example of self-acceptance. I’ll show him that we’re not monsters, just people gifted a little bit differently than others.

“He’s beautiful,” Casper whispers, his voice breaking. “Just like his daddy.”

I lean onto the bed so I can kiss the side of Casper’s head. “I love you so much,” I tell him.

“I love you too.”

“Did you two come up with a name for this little one?”

I nod my head, giving Star a grin. “His name is Ash.”

“That’s lovely. Very fitting,” she tells me. “There are a few people outside. Would

you like some alone time, or would you like them here to meet Ash as well?"

I look over at my mate, raising my brow. "If it's okay with you," he says slowly, "I'd like Ray here."

"Of course," I tell him, cupping his cheek. "She's your spark. You deserve her support here just as much as mine."

"Thank you," he breathes out. Casper brings the bottle to Ash's mouth, grinning as our baby takes to it immediately, suckling at his bottle.

I turn towards Star and give her a nod. "Let the troublemakers in."

Star steps outside of our room and before I even have a moment to share with my mate alone, Ray is running into the room, her eyes wide and frantic. I'm not sure I've ever seen her this worried before.

"Casper! You can't just have a baby without warning me! What the hell, man?"

Casper giggles. "You knew this was happening. Besides, how'd you get here so fast?"

Ray makes her way over to the other side of the bed, getting into bed beside my mate without asking. She knows that place was meant for her. Seeing how much she's grown in the past few months fills me with pride and emotion. This is the relationship my mate was longing for when they first met, and now they finally have it.

"I had a feeling," she says, crawling under the blankets and resting her head against Casper's shoulder. "Knew something was going down so I made Page drive me over here."

“I’m glad you’re here. It would feel wrong not to have you here for Ash’s first day.”

“Ash? Your son’s name is Ash,” Ray whispers, staring down at the baby in Casper’s arms.

I’ve known Ray for a long time and I’ve never seen her show this level of emotions. She stares and stares until silent tears are falling down her cheeks.

“Hey,” Casper whispers, sensing something’s wrong. “What’s going on? Are you okay?”

Ray quickly wipes the tears away. “I’m okay. Just emotional. Hormones will do that.”

“Are you on your period?”

“No,” she says right away, “if you didn’t just have a baby I would be punching you right now.” Ray looks up at Page, the two of them sharing a look. When Page nods, Ray says, “I’m pregnant.”

“No fucking way,” Casper gets out. He hands Ash over to me before he’s practically tackling Ray. The two of them lay together on the bed, just holding each other. “I’m so fucking happy for you, Ray. Oh my gods. Our kids are gonna grow up together. They’re basically honorary siblings. Or cousins. Or something, I don’t know.”

I turn towards Page. “Congrats, Page. I’m so excited for you guys.”

“Me too,” she says, pulling me into a side hug, getting a good look at Ash as she does. “I didn’t even know this was possible. I thought the whole being a vampire thing would make it impossible.”

Seemingly out of nowhere, Star is there, answering, “true mate vampires are able to have babies with their mates. Lady Fate saw a great injustice happen when the first vampire was created. She did Her best to offset that injustice by making vampires have true mates and make families of their own. It wasn’t right for them to be destined to be alone, so She made sure that wouldn’t happen.”

“That’s a lovely story,” Page says with a soft smile. “And I’m eternally grateful for that. I didn’t know life could be this wonderful. I thought this part of myself was gone when I was turned, but somehow it was only the beginning.”

“Hey, Zeke?”

I turn towards Ray. “Yeah, what’s up?”

“I like your face.”

I touch my cheek, my stomach sinking as I realize I never put my glamor back up in place. Casper is grinning, giving me a look of encouragement. Turning towards Page, she just shrugs. “I didn’t wanna say something and spook you,” she says.

“Umm, thank you? I guess?”

“No more hiding,” Ray says with her usual stern look. “No more hiding for all four of us. We’re in this together.”

“If you insist,” I say, playfully rolling my eyes. With my baby in my arms, surrounded by my favorite people in the world, and my mate safely tucked in bed, I’m completely and utterly at peace.

When I imagined my future, I never thought I would have this. I have a loving mate who adores me and calls me out when I need it. I have two best friends who are by

my side, supporting me and loving me. I have a really exciting job that allows me to help people pass onto the afterlife and help people find peace. And my mate has his spark.

I don't think it gets any better than this.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 7:22 am

“If you keep hovering, I’m going to stake you.”

“You wouldn’t. You love me way too much.”

I shove my beautiful and amazing mate away. She might be a walking wet dream come to life and one of the best things that’s ever happened to me but that doesn’t mean I appreciate her hovering. I’m only pregnant. I don’t need her to help me with every little thing. I’m not some helpless princess, thank you very much.

“I do,” I concede, “but you’re on thin fucking ice.”

Page helps me sit down in the grass. My stomach is round and I can feel our baby kicking around inside of me. It still fills me with wonder that I get to have this at all. A baby? A mate? A familiar?

Fuck, it really wasn’t that long ago that I was mystified by all of this, so fucking sure that it was all an elaborate prank. Turns out, just because I refused to see the truth doesn’t mean the truth wasn’t right there in front of me the entire time. I just needed to open my eyes and see it.

Speaking of my familiar. “Where’s Casper? He’s supposed to be here by now.”

Casper sits down beside me with Ash in his lap. “I’m here. Sorry I’m late. Ash was taking a nap and I didn’t want to wake him,” he says but there’s a blush to his cheeks that tells me he’s only telling half the story. His hair is a mess and there’s a new love bite on his throat.

“Right,” I say slowly, “naptime went long. Uh huh.”

“Shut up,” he says back, elbowing my arm.

Page growls at him before she can stop herself. “Hey, babe?” She looks at me like a love sick puppy. “Can you go get us some ice cream?”

“I’m on it.”

Once she’s gone, I pull Ash into my lap. “Hello, my little love bug. How’s my favorite godson?”

Ash smiles up at me. I never used to like babies. And maybe I still don’t. But this baby? I love this baby.

The five of us have no plans for the day for once, just meeting at a park and enjoying the gorgeous weather before it starts to get cold. I lean forward, kissing Ash’s adorable face until he’s screaming and pushing me away with a giggle.

A little purple butterfly flitters over to where we’re sitting and I smile to myself.

Not every spirit I meet is someone in need. Not all of them are here against their will until they learn to find peace. Some of them flit across the veil, just to take a peek, just to make sure their loved ones are doing alright.

I hold out my hand, letting the wispy, translucent butterfly land on my pointer finger. I reach over and take Casper’s hand. He opens himself up to me like he always does, allowing me to run my magic through him until he can see what I’m seeing.

“Oh, that’s lovely,” he breathes out.

“Yeah, it’s beautiful, isn’t it?” I turn towards him, squeezing his hand. “And I

wouldn't have it if it weren't for you."

"Lady Fate brought us together," Casper says with a grin. "Her timing might not have been your timing, but it all worked out nonetheless."

"It really did." I lift my hand higher, watching as the butterfly flies up into the sky before disappearing once more. I have no idea who it was checking up on us, but I have a feeling they liked what they were able to see.

I lean back into the grass, putting my hands on my round belly. I breathe a sigh of contentment. Lady Fate has a sense of humor to make someone as cynical and emo as me into someone who helps usher people into the afterlife, but hey, at least I have the aesthetic for it?

This isn't the life I pictured for myself, but it turns out, Lady Fate really does know best because it's the best life for me and those around me. I can't wait to see what else She has in store for us.

The End