



Fallen

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult, M-m Romance, New Adult

Description: A serial killer unicorn. A new designation. And protective Basilisks as mates.

What more could a Chameleon shifter possibly want?

Investigating a string of brutal deaths by a unicorn shifter isn't exactly my idea of a honeymoon present with my new mates. Especially when the next victim is found propped up in my truck like a sick game.

Whoever is one step ahead of us is just toying with my investigation. It doesn't help that I've barely gotten a handle on my designation and that my mates can't seem to stop touching me, my traitorous body constantly melting in their presence.

At this rate, we'll never find the creature leaving bodies all over the city.

Until the unicorn shifter leaves a clue that I can't possibly ignore. He's someone I know. Someone I've trusted. Someone I might have even loved once upon a time.

Hopefully, the new magic I've learned will help bring this case to a close.

Or maybe it'll get us killed.

Designation: Fallen is the second novella in an 18+ MMM shifter slow-burn cozy suspense featuring a Chameleon shifter and his basilisk mates, a murderous unicorn shifter, and a whole lot of chaos. Ends with an HFN. CW in the Author's note.

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Chapter 1

LEVIATHAN

I'm sprawled on the oversized red lounge in my Basilisks' condo, staring at the ceiling like it's going to reveal the secrets of the universe. Or at least tell me why I'm so damn restless. The leather pillows under my head are doing jack shit to keep me warm and I'm half-tempted to raid Amand's closet for one of his stupidly cozy hoodies.

It's been a week since we took down the psycho witch, and I'm still getting used to this... domestic thing. Me, Leviathan Dubois, former lone wolf—well, lonesomething—now cohabitating with two Basilisk shifters who can't seem to keep their hands off me. Not that I'm complaining. Much.

However, the mate bond is a sneaky bastard. It's like a constant rumble in my chest, tugging me toward Rowan and Amand whether I'm ready for it or not. Right now, Amand's in the kitchen, clattering around with what smells like coffee, and Rowan's off somewhere, probably brooding in that sexy way of his.

I should be content, right? I've got a roof over my head, two gorgeous mates who'd rip apart anyone who looked at me funny, and a mentor who understands me. But I'm itching for something to do, something to sink my teeth into that isn't Amand's neck or Rowan's...

Well, aren't we a horny little chameleon? I joke to myself and then immediately gag at how disgusting my own playful taunting sounds. I shift around on the corner,

grimacing as my cheek streaks against the leather. Heat blooms in my chest, a tired sigh falling from my lips as I feel the familiar flickering of my magic.

It always seems to be working against me, my abilities glitching every time I think I've stabilized. One minute, I'm solid; the next, I'm fading into the couch. It's embarrassing, especially when it happens mid-conversation. Or mid-make out session. Nothing kills the mood like my mates groping the air where I used to be.

A few weeks ago, when I 'disappeared', I was still physically there. Now, it's like I'm somehow transcending the plane of existence. Which is bullshit, to be honest.

"Lev, you gonna lie there all day, or are you actually gonna help unpack?" Amand's voice cuts through my brooding, and I tilt my head to see him leaning against the kitchen counter, a mug of coffee in one hand. His sea-glass eyes glint with that mix of amusement and heat that makes my stomach flip out, heat pooling in the pit of my belly. Stupid bonds. He's wearing that fitted black tee that shows off every damn muscle, my sorry ass momentarily distracted by the way his biceps flex when he lifts the mug to his lips.

"Unpack?" I scoff, sitting up and running a hand through my hair. "I moved in officially, what, three days ago? Give me a break, snake boy. Besides, I'm strategizing." I'm not. In fact, I'm enjoying doing all of nothing for the most part.

"Strategizing," he questions, raising an eyebrow. "Is that what you call staring at the ceiling for the past few hours?"

"Exactly." I shoot him a grin, but it's half-hearted. Truth is, I'm bored out of my skull. After the last case, I thought I'd be ready for a breather, but sitting still makes me twitchy. I need a case, a puzzle, something to keep my brain from spiraling into the what-ifs of this mate bond.

Like, what if I'm not cut out for this? What if fatal attraction kicks in and I'm dead in a year because I can't handle the venom coursing through me? What if—

“Levi, you're thinking too loud.” Amand sets his mug down and stalks over. Before I can protest, he's looming over me, one hand braced on the back of the couch, the other tipping my chin up. His thumb brushes my lower lip, my traitorous body lighting up beneath his touch. “What's got you so wound up?”

I swallow hard, trying to ignore the heat pooling in my gut. “Nothing. Just... antsy. Need something to do.”

His lips curve into a wicked smile, and I know I'm in trouble. “Oh, I can think of plenty to do.” He leans closer, his breath warm against my ear, and I'm about two seconds from melting into a puddle when the front door swings open.

“Save it, Amand,” Rowan's voice rumbles, laced with amusement. “We've got company.”

Amand pulls back with a dramatic sigh, and I scramble to sit up, my cheeks on fire. Rowan strides in, carrying a stack of files, Gerald filtering in behind. When I first met the guy, I was a little weirded out but it's a strange comfort knowing someone else has and understands my quirks. Kind of. He doesn't understand the disappearing part anymore than I do.

“Leviathan,” Gerald muses. “Hope I'm not interrupting.”

“Nope,” I say, a little too quickly, shooting Amand a glare as he chuckles. “Just, uh, strategizing.”

Rowan snorts, dropping the files on the coffee table. “Sure.Strategizing.”

I flip him off, but my attention's already on Gerald. "What's up? You didn't come all the way out here to admire my interior decorating."

He smirks, pulling a folder from the stack. "Got a case for you. Thought you'd want first crack at it, considering your... unique skills."

My heart kicks up a notch. A case. Finally. I lean forward, trying to play it cool even though I'm practically vibrating. "Lay it on me."

Gerald opens the folder and slides two photos across the table. I pick one up, my stomach lurching into my throat, the desire from a few moments before disappearing. The excessively bloody pictures are beyond gruesome, a young male shifter sprawled on the pavement. He's some kind of feline, well, was but beside that, I can't tell much of anything.

The only thing I can understand is the large, gaping hole in his chest. It's perfectly round, almost the shape of a drill but the pool of blood is making it hard to decipher anything else. The other two pictures are similar—different victims but the same MO. "What the hell did this? A javelin?"

The image of someone gallivanting on a horse past victims brings a morbid smile to my face before I wipe it off.

"Not quite," Gerald groans. "Unicorn."

I blink at him, waiting for the punchline. When none comes, a bitter laugh falls from my lips. "Unicorn? As in, sparkly horse with a murder stick? You're kidding, right? They're supposed to be prancing in meadows, not skewering people."

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My mates are on the verge of laughing but Gerald's expression doesn't change. "Unicorns are shifters, Leviathan. Rare, powerful, and not nearly as cuddly as the myths make out. When they shift, their horn is a deadly weapon, something nearly untraceable since the DNA of their shifter is not the same as their human form." He clears his throat, pointing to the victims. "There's no tie between them that I can tell, which means that your unique set of skills may come in handy."

"Why me? I mean, I'm flattered, but I'm still figuring out this Chameleon thing. You've got a whole team of badasses at Essence. Not to mention that you have my unique set of skills."

"You're correct," Gerald hums, tapping his nose. "We both can smell magic, track signatures no one else can. But there are a few traits you have that I never acquired. Besides, I can no longer go out in the field like I used to. If anyone's got a shot at sniffing out a unicorn shifter, it's you."

I'm never going to say no. Anything is better than staying in this place a moment longer. "Okay. I'm in. But if I end up with glitter in my hair, I'm billing you for emotional distress."

Gerald chuckles, but there's an edge to it. "Deal. I'll send the full case file in a little bit. Start tomorrow. And Leviathan? Be careful. Unicorns don't play nice." His smile twists a little bit, gaze darting to Rowan and then back to me.

I immediately frown and look back down at the pictures, finding something familiar about one of the victims. I've seen him before. A client, maybe? Years ago, when I was still scraping by as a solo PI. He'd hired me for something small—tracking a

missing heirloom, I think. My gut twists. This isn't just a case. It's personal. Well, fuck.

And yet, that doesn't seem to be what's making Gerald uncomfortable. "Can someone tell me what's going on so I don't feel like the butt of a joke?"

Rowan sighs, wrapping an arm around my shoulder and dragging me into his side. "Gerald couldn't get this case to us fast enough. He's done his homework on all of us and apparently, you knew one of the victims. Not that that's the connection, just that it's more evidence," he quickly adds when I start to protest. "The problem is the fact that it feels like you might be on this unicorn's shit list."

"Why?"

It's a dumb question. I'm on a lot of people's shit lists. For one reason or another—I'm not really nice and I play by my own rules.

"Because there's a corpse in your fucking front seat, Lev."

Dread curls in my chest as I pop to my feet, racing outside to where my beat-up beige Ford parked in the lot, looking as pathetic as ever. My men are right behind me, Gerald a little farther off as I stare at the driver's seat door flung wide open, a body slumped in the front seat. My heart pounds as I approach, the metallic tang of blood hitting my nose before I even see it.

"I know him," I whisper as I sink to my knees. How in the fuck did I piss off a motherfucking shifter unicorn? And why is he killing the very people I helped?

Chapter 2

LEVIATHAN

I always knew my luck would run out at some point but I didn't think it would end up with a young shifter in my truck, let alone one with a gaping hole where a unicorn horn tore through him. His face, frozen in terror, is hauntingly familiar. A former client, someone I tracked down a cheating ex for.

"Lev, breathe," Amand purrs as he steps up beside me, placing a warm hand against my back. His sea-glass eyes are darker than usual, the muscles in his jaw tightening as I realize he's just as pissed as I am.

"Breathing's overrated," I mutter, trying to bring humor to the situation, but my voice cracks. A tingle beneath my skin has me sighing, my magic threatening to blend me into the rusted paint of my truck. Great. Nothing says "professional investigator" like vanishing mid-crime scene.

Gerard is still a few feet off, Rowan beside him as he shouts into his phone at someone. Something about the fact that this is 'our' scene. With as many people who don't particularly like me at the station, I doubt they'll just let us have this one. Still, I watch as the muscles in Rowan's neck and shoulders constrict, veins just beneath the skin boldening. My traitorous body responds as his brown eyes flick to me, a possessive edge in his gaze that makes my stomach do a weird flip. Not the sexy kind. Okay, maybe a little sexy, but mostly it's the "I'm in deep shit" kind.

I shake my head, trying to focus on the issue at hand. The police will be here at any minute, which means I don't have very long to gather what I can from the body. I force myself to lean closer to the shifter, ignoring the way my gut churns. Yet again, my magic can only help in situations like this; the ability to smell someone's magic signature an ace rather than a hindrance.

I inhale deeply, wincing at the blood's coppery tang riding in the air, but there's something else. I've never caught it before but I can only assume the metallic, mysterious edge to the scent that comes from a unicorn. The problem is that twisted

in all of this magic is a familiar note, faint but still there, tugging at a memory I can't quite grasp. It's a combination of pine and musk, a hearty, earthy scent that brings back hazy parts of my past.

If only I could remember who that scent belonged to.

"Anything?" Amand asks, his hand sliding to my hip and squeezing softly.

I shake my head, frustrated. "Unicorn, definitely, I think that's what that is. But there's... something else. I know it, but I can't place it."

Rowan hangs up and strides over to stand on my other side. "Police are on their way. Maybe ten minutes and they're gonna want to talk to you, Lev."

"Fantastic," I deadpan, stepping back from the truck. "Nothing screams 'innocent' like a dead guy in my front seat. Should I just burn the damn thing?" Another joke but for some reason, they aren't hitting the right way in the last five minutes.

Amand's lips twitch as he exchanges a look with Rowan. "Not a bad idea," he says, his tone so serious I almost believe him.

"Burn it," Rowan agrees, grinning down at me with all the desire I've been trying to ignore. "We'll get you a new one. Something that doesn't look like it's held together by duct tape and spite."

I glare at them, but the banter eases the knot in my chest. "You're both hilarious. Remind me why I moved in with you?"

"Because we're irresistible," Amand purrs. He winks, a slow smile spreading across his lips that has heat swirling around in my belly. I fight my own smile, still trying to come to terms with how I ended up with mates who are biologically designed to kill

me. Even so, my body wants them. I'm still not sure if it's love or biology screwing with me, but right now, I'm grateful for their presence.

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Before I can throw back my own retort, my magic suddenly glitches. One second, I'm standing there; the next, I'm half-faded, my skin mimicking the gravel under my feet. Amand's hand tightens on my shoulder, snapping me back to visibility. If they grab me fast enough, I can usually stay present. The problem is actually catching me as it happens. "Fuck," I mutter, rubbing a hand down my face. "This Chameleon shit is gonna be the death of me."

Rowan chuckles as he drags me into his side and presses a kiss to my temple. "It's cute. Like you're playing hide-and-seek with the world."

"Cute?" I scoff, but leave it alone, leaning farther into his side so I don't accidentally disappear again. Things are fucked up enough right now that I don't need to explain that to the cops.

Amand's about to say something, that wicked grin on his face telling me it would be something dirty as fuck but he doesn't get the chance to.

Two black SUVs swerve into the parking lot. One of them is branded with the police department's insignia, the other from the medical examiner's office, suspiciously branded with Essence PI's logo. I usually would call my own people but this is a little too public.

However, I now have more questions. I twist around to meet Gerard's gaze, wondering how the fuck he got his logo on the city's car. He mouths 'connections', which just means he's got a contact somewhere on city payroll.

I'm not sure I want to know the how.

Two officers spill out of one vehicle, the other car unloading a cleanup crew that's all business. I recognize the medical examiner but not the others.

A woman with a clipboard approaches, her eyes narrowing at me.

"Leviathan Dubois?" she asks, her tone clipped. "This your vehicle?"

"Unfortunately. I didn't order the corpse, though. Can you guys, like, expedite this?"

Maybe that's insensitive but I kind of want to dig into this killer unicorn business and I can't really do that with the shifter in my car.

She doesn't smile, just jots something down. "We'll handle it. Stay out of the way. Once the medical examiner grabs what he needs and the police clear the scene, we'll be able to clean up the car."

The crew gets to work, taking several pictures before they extract the body as I step back a little further, mildly aware of the police officers approaching Gerard first. That's when it hits me—where that earthy scent came from. Silas. My ex from college, the panther shifter who charmed his way into my life and then broke my heart

It doesn't make sense that he'd be involved with something like this. Silas was a manipulative asshole, but a murderer? "Lev?" Rowan's voice pulls me back, and I open my eyes to find him watching me, concern etched into his features. "You're doing that fading thing again."

I glance down, cursing when I see my hands blending into my jacket. I focus and will myself solid. It works, mostly. "Sorry," I mutter.

Gerard nods to us, the officers moving toward the vehicle and subsequently me. It's just my luck that they're ones I know. After Vince's betrayal, we haven't spoken and

I've made every effort not to step into the precinct.

Deep growls erupt on either side of me, Rowan stepping in front of me as if he's going to protect me from them. I resist the urge to roll my eyes. As hot as protective Basilisks are, they're also annoying.

I push Rowan out of the way and manage a smile when the petite Fae officer meets my gaze. She's always been a little skittish but she's never been wary of me. I'm not sure when that started. I nod toward the car. "Found it like this. Not sure what's going on." I leave off the part where I know the shifter because it'll only be a matter of time before someone thinks putting me in protective custody is the best answer.

Her obnoxious partner who is 100% a bastard, fucking Detective Chad, struts over, his chest puffed out as if he's going to make some revelation about this case in the next few seconds. "Dubois," he sneers. "Why am I not surprised you're mixed up in this?"

"Because you're predictable?" I quip, and Rowan lets out a low growl, stepping closer to Chad. The detective flinches, and I have to bite back a grin. It was a little stupid before how possessive they were but I'll enjoy it if they can make Chad freak the fuck out. He deserves to be brought down a peg or two.

Avery shoots Chad a look, then turns back to me. "We need a statement, Lev. And we're gonna have to impound the truck."

"Impound?" I groan, throwing my head back. "Come on, Avery, this thing's barely roadworthy." I don't have any sentimental attachment to the rickety thing but it has been mine for so long, it'll be sad to see it go. Not that I'd ever be able to drive it again. Not after seeing that shifter in the front seat. I'd never be able to clean it well enough without still catching the shifter's faint magical signature and remembering what happened.

Avery just nods as Gerard finally approaches us. I'm sensing that there's a certain transfer of power happening beneath our noses. Gerard clears his throat and manages a small bow to Chad and Avery that seems out of place. "I've spoken with the chief of police and he's allowed us to take this case. Because it is of the supernatural variety, Essence PI will be taking the lead and then involving the police as needed."

I had absolutely no idea Gerard had that kind of power.

Avery raises an eyebrow but nods again. "Fine. But we still need his statement."

"Tomorrow," Gerald states, no room for argument in his tone. "He's had a long night."

Chad mutters something under his breath, but Avery just sighs and gestures for him to back off. "We'll be in touch, Lev."

Once again, I'm not really sure what to say to fill the space, the medical examiner and cleanup crew still working on my truck. Gerard just waves and walks toward his car, leaving me with my men. We walk back to the condo in silence, a million questions running through my head.

Is the unicorn after me? Is he just trying to make a point? How the fuck does Gerard have that much pull?

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Chad's voice cuts through, dragging me back to reality. "Dubois! Don't think you're off the hook!"

Rowan stiffens, a growl rumbling in his chest, and before I can stop him, he stalks toward Chad. The detective takes a step back, his hand hovering near his holster, but Rowan's faster. He grabs Chad's collar and lifts him an inch off the ground, his fangs making a rare appearance before disappearing. "You don't talk to him," Rowan snarls. "Ever."

I should stop this but the fear in Chad's expression is hilarious. When Rowan roughly shakes Chad, Avery reaching up to stop my mate, I realize that something worse is going to happen if I don't step in.

"Rowan!" I yell, jogging over. "Put the idiot down. He's not worth it."

Rowan glares at Chad for another second, then drops him. Chad stumbles, his face red, and I grab Rowan's arm, pulling him back. "Chill, snake boy. I can handle myself." I pull him back toward the condo, waiting until we're inside to spill the beans. "Okay, so we have a problem. I recognized one of the shifters in the pictures that Gerard brought over, right? Well, the guy in my truck was someone else I did a job for too." The brothers frown as I drag a hand down my face. "I caught the unicorn's signature, I think, but there was another scent. My ex from college. Silas. But it can't be him. He was a panther shifter, not a unicorn." I plop down onto the couch, Amand following.

Rowan sits on my other side, his arm brushing mine. "You sure? People hide shit, Lev. Especially shifters."

I nod, but doubt creeps in. Silas was always cagey about his past. Could he have lied about his designation? “That’s what I’m worried about. Aside from the fact that I don’t really want to deal with him again.” Both Basilisks sit forward but I’m not entertaining that right now. No way in hell am I going to spill that Silas broke my heart.

So, I just stand and head toward the bedroom, throwing back at them. “You coming or am I sleeping alone?” The words are barely out of my mouth before Rowan has me over his shoulder, charging toward the bed.

Chapter 3

LEVIATHAN

I’ve been in the lobby of Essence PI’s headquarters once or twice since I met Gerard, but this is the first official time where I’ll be working with his employees and not just shown around. The place is sleek, all black glass and steel, with glowing runes etched into the walls that hum with magic.

It’s a far cry from my dingy office, where the only magic was the coffee maker occasionally working. My beat-up jacket and unruly curls scream “outsider,” and I’m half-expecting someone to escort me out for not matching the high-tech vibe. However, having Rowan and Amand flank me adds to the ambiance. It’s almost like I have my very own scary dog privilege.

Scary snake privilege?

I don’t really know anymore.

I blow out a heavy breath as Amand leans down to whisper in my ear. “Relax. We’ve been here before. Why are you so twitchy?”

“This place looks like it’s one gadget away from launching into space. I’m a PI, not a sci-fi hero.”

Rowan smirks, his hand running up and down my back before possessively landing on my ass. “You’d make a sexy space captain, though.”

I elbow him as my cheeks heat, glass doors just ahead sliding open. Gerard walks out, a tablet in his hand, a wry smile on his face. “Leviathan. Welcome to the big leagues. Ready to officially meet the team?”

“Big leagues?” I scoff, crossing my arms. “I’m still waiting for my decoder ring and secret handshake.”

Gerald’s lips twitch, but he gestures for us to follow anyway. Thank fuck he isn’t as uptight as Vince was and actually cracks a smile at my awful jokes. “You’ll fit in fine. Just try not to fade into the furniture.”

One wrong emotion, and I’m ghosting out, which is super awkward in social situations. Or, you know, when I’m trying to make a good impression at a fancy supernatural detective agency.

We follow Gerald through a maze of corridors, passing operatives who look like they stepped out of a superhero comic. There’s a werewolf with a cybernetic arm, a witch juggling glowing orbs, and a guy who I’m pretty sure is a vampire, given the fangs and brooding stare. I feel like I’m in over my head, but I shove that thought down. I’ve taken down a dark witch and survived two Basilisk mates. I can handle a little corporate chaos.

Gerald leads us to a conference room with a massive glass table and holographic displays floating above it. I whistle, unable to help myself. “Fancy gadgets, huh? What’s next, a teleporter?”

“Working on it,” Gerald deadpans and I can’t tell if he’s joking. He taps his tablet, and the holograms shift, showing crime scene photos from the unicorn case. Those quickly shift to reports and details that have been collected from Essence PI. It’s so much more organized than my heaps of paper and odd working hours that I’m not sure if I want to kiss Gerald or cry.

Maybe both.

Rowan pulls me back against his chest as the door opens behind us, three other people walking inside. Jace is one of the Alpha’s who helped and then there’s Lily who helped with the witch. The third guy, I don’t know but the magic humming off of him smells like a mage. While the other two wave, the third guy just grunts, not even looking up from the device he’s typing on.

“Team,” Gerald begins, introducing everyone—including Marcus, the mage, who still doesn’t look up. “This is Leviathan Dubois, our new Chameleon operative, and his mates, Rowan and Amand Petrov, Basilisk shifters. They’re taking point on the unicorn case.”

Jace raises an eyebrow. “Chameleon? Ah, so you’re the one our boss has been gushing over. You the one who sniffed out Ginny?”

I shrug, trying to play it cool. “Yeah, that was me. Nose like a bloodhound, minus the drool.”

Lily snorts as she pulls out a chair and drops into it. “Nice. But can you keep up with us, newbie?”

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God, I already like her. We didn't really get to meet during that whole witch fiasco a few weeks ago but she's a lot more down to earth than I expected. "Try me, witchy."

Marcus finally looks up, pushing his glasses up his nose. "Your file says you've got scent detection. That's gonna be key. Unicorns are nearly impossible to track—their magic masks their DNA in shifted form."

"If I hadn't seen one of the victims in my truck, I'd still think it sounded like a bad fairy tale. Sparkly horses with murder sticks? Really?"

Jace chuckles, but Gerald's expression stays grim. "Leviathan, I mentioned before that that's not how this works. There's no glitter. They're rare, powerful, and extremely volatile. They also seemed to have an issue regulating their emotions." I frown, silently demanding an explanation.

Marcus cuts in. "The only unicorn shifters we've met have been in jail. I haven't actually met one who's living a normal life."

Right, of course.

Gerald continues droning on about the case as we find a seat around the table and I don't even know that this little debriefing is over until he's stopped in front of me. "Leviathan, luck and diligence has brought you far. However, without training your magic, it'll be a hindrance, not a help. I'll be working with you so that you don't become the weak link."

His words hurt but he isn't wrong. He squeezes my shoulder and then rounds up the

others to leave, my mates and I left in the empty room. It takes me a few moments to finally breathe and realize that this is way more complicated than any of the other cases I've taken on. "Well, that was intense."

Amand snorts as he scoots closer, his hand reaching to squeeze my thigh beneath the table. "You weren't even listening, Lev," he chuckles. "Not that I blame you. This is all a lot. We've been working on cases for a while and if we had any of this high tech bullshit, I'm sure we would have worked a lot faster."

"It's not even about that," I push out, holding back a whine when Amand's hand trails higher. "It's more that I wonder if I've been going about it all wrong. Like sure, I did all this shit on my own, trying to figure out what I was and where I fit but this... this feels so much bigger. Like... we're only scratching the surface of whatever the fuck is going on."

Rowan sighs, scooting closer as well, his nose dragging along my cheek. Heat spreads through me, my cock thickening between my legs. This is the absolutely wrong time to be doing any of this but it feels so fucking good. Rowan hums as his nose runs across my jaw, his lips landing at the edge of my ear. "You're charming when you're not fading into walls."

I should push them away, tell them we need to focus now that we've been officially hired to an agency that means business. But it's been entirely too long since something has happened and I need it. Even if I wanted to pull away, I wouldn't be able to.

Especially when the sound of a zipper being undone echoes through the room. My protests get caught at the back of my throat as Amand pulls my chair from under the table, Rowan stealing my lips. I grunt as a warm hand encircles my cock, pumping slowly until I can't hold back a whine. Rowan swallows the sound, one of his hands moving to cup the front of my throat, both of my men lost in the same haze I am.

Fuck, Ireallyshould not be doing this here.

And yet, I can't stop.

Amand hisses, that forked tongue wrapping around my tip before he sucks me fully into his mouth. Holy Mother of Jesus, that feels wonderful. The heat coursing through my veins picks up, that slight magical signature that's doomed to kill me strengthening but it's a good kind of pain. My hips move of their own accord as I pump into Amand's mouth and then curl my hand into his hair, to keep him there. To keep me there.

If I don't get to come because I fucking fade into the background, everyone's going to have to deal with a pissed off Chameleon.

Rowan's tongue slips into my mouth, dragging along the inside of my cheeks as I grip his shirt with my free hand, my eyes rolling into the back of my head. One last pump and I'm a goner, Amand expertly pulling an orgasm from me. I sag back against the chair, Amand neatly packing me back into my pants.

I can't miss the smell of their arousal or the rather thick bulges between their thighs. However, we neither have the time for that, nor do I have the balls to let them fuck me here. Amand rises to his feet and pulls me against his chest. "I needed that. Haven't been able to touch you like Ireallywant since your magic started misbehaving." He starts nuzzling against me the same way Rowan did. "You should take up Gerald on that training stuff."

I nod, still coming down from the high as Rowan heads toward the door. "Let's go home, alright? We've got enough to start with." I'm all too ready to do that, even as I feel myself flickering in and out of reality.

This is different from before. The last few times, I somehow disappeared from the

plane of existence. My mates couldn't even touch me. But this feels like I'm being pulled toward something. Like when I reappear, I won't be standing in this room.

Rowan calls my name but I'm already gone, Gerald and Lily's voices hitting my ears. I'm not even sure where they are as I move toward the sound without even understanding how I'm moving. I can't really feel my body in this state.

"...risky, Gerald," Lily says. "He's green and his magic's unstable. He's a good P.I. and he was good during the last case. But... If the unicorn catches his scent—"

"He's our best shot," Gerald cuts in. "His nose is unmatched. Besides, those Basilisks won't let anything happen to him."

Lily grumbles. "You just see yourself in him and I get that. You're a rare designation and all that. However, that can't be the reason he's lead on this."

Lily's doubt stings but I was already a bit weirded out when it came down to being put on as point for this investigation, especially when Essence P.I. somehow outranks the police. I'm about to step away when my magic glitches again, and I reappear, stumbling into a door. It swings open, Gerald and Lily staring at me as Lily just grins.

"You're the worst spy ever," she says, crossing her arms. "Eavesdropping already?"

I flush, scrambling for an excuse. "I, uh, dropped my... pen. Yeah, pen."

Gerald seems to know exactly what happened, though, my mates rushing down the hall to come stand behind me. "Good instincts, Leviathan, but we need to work on the execution. Had I known that your magic had progressed this far, I would have taken you on sooner. Go home. Get some rest. We'll talk tomorrow."

Lily just glares at me, confused but I eagerly turn on my heel and make a beeline

outside.

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“Let me get this straight. Lev, did you just fuckingteleport?”

I nod. “That’s the only definition I have but I’m more worried about the fact that Gerald just mentioned how fast my magic is progressing. I’m wondering if it has something to do with this fatal attraction or whatever.” I hope it doesn’t because logically—the more magic I obtain or the stronger it becomes, the sooner I’ll die.

Chapter 4

LEVIATHAN

It’s been two days since we stepped into Essence PI’s offices and frankly, I don’t really want to return. It’s just... too much. I’m also widely sure that someone has watched the security tapes and found Amand sucking me off with his perfectly forked tongue.

Yep, no desire to return.

We’ll have to work with the other three soon but I’m hoping they’ll want to come out of their futuristic little hole and hang here. Or literallyanywhere else in the city.

For now, I’m more than happy to lounge on the couch and flip through the files of the victims, trying to find a connection between all of them.

Victim one: a fox shifter, 24, bartender. Victim two: a lion shifter, 27, mechanic. Victim three: the guy in my truck, a wolf shifter, 25, freelance artist. All male, all shifters, all young. No shared connections—no common workplace, no mutual

friends, no pack ties. I knew two of them, but the fox shifter I've never even seen while working in the city. The only link is the MO: a single, enchanted horn strike AND that scent, sharp and metallic like ozone, unmistakably unicorn, laced with that familiar pine and musk. It's driving me nuts.

"Lev, you're gonna burn a hole in that paper," Amand says, his voice pulling me out of my spiral. He sits on the coffee table in front of me, his elbows on his knees, watching me with that mix of amusement and concern that makes my heart do stupid things.

"Paper's fine," I mutter, not looking up. "My brain, on the other hand..."

Rowan pokes his head out of the kitchen. "You've been at it for hours. We all have and nothing is just going to jump out from the paper. Take a break before you fade into the floor."

I shoot him a glare, but there's no heat in it. "I'm not fading. I'm investigating. Big difference. Besides, I haven't faded for an entire 24 hours." Gerald gave me a few tricks to practice and then just gave me a cheat sheet which said that having a little pouch of ginger would keep me whole regardless.

Fucker could have given me that weeks ago.

My mates, however, don't seem very fond of the new scent hanging around me. For whatever reason, their instinctual biology despises ginger, their nostrils flaring and a whole lot of hissing when near me.

Rowan joins us, carrying a plate of what might be toast, if toast can look like charcoal. "Eat," he says, setting it on the coffee table. "You're no good to anyone if you starve."

I eye the toast warily. “Is that... food? Or a science experiment?”

He smirks, sitting cross-legged beside me. “It’s food. Mostly.”

I grab a piece, nibbling the least burnt corner. It’s terrible, but I force it down, if only to see Rowan’s satisfied nod. Amand settles on my other side, his thigh brushing mine, and I’m suddenly hyper-aware of their proximity. I shove it down, focusing on the files. Work, Lev. Not sexy snake sandwich time.

Not that anything will happen with my trusty ginger pouch in my pocket.

Amand reaches forward and grabs another file before opening it, the official crime scene report for the victim in my truck. “You said that you smelled your ex on him, right?”

I nod, taking another bite of burnt toast. “Yeah. Silas.”

Rowan hums as he drags me into his lap, wrapping his arms around my waist. He hisses as the scent of ginger hits his nose, one of his hands dipping into my pocket and then chucking the pouch onto the table. “We need to find something else because it makes my skin tingle and not in a good way. Now, tell me what this Silas was like.”

A bitter laugh tears from my throat. As much as I don’t want to talk about Silas, it’s going to come out with this investigation anyway. “He was the kind who could charm the scales off a dragon, then leave you wondering what you did wrong. We dated during my sophomore year. He was magnetic with a killer smile, the works, the whole nine yards. But he ghosted me after six months with no explanation. When I finally did get to ask him what the fuck happened, he told me I had been the flavor of the month. Broke my heart, if I’m being honest.”

Rowan growls, the sound vibrating through his chest and settling deep in my gut. “Sounds like a piece of shit. You think he’s tied to this?”

I shake my head, even as doubt creeps in. “I don’t know. His scent was there but he’s a panther shifter. From what little research I could pick up about unicorns, panthers would be nowhere near them.” I wrack my brain for answers, frowning when I remember something from college. I blocked most of those years out but this might actually be helpful because Silas was oddly interested in other shifters. I don’t think he ever mentioned unicorns, though.

“There might be something in one of my old journals from college. Hold on.” I catch my mates snickering as I throw the toast onto the plate and dash off to my bedroom, a room I rarely use at this point. However, it holds all of my shit that I refused to get rid of and now I’m glad I kept things from college just in case. It takes a few tries to find the right box and even longer to find the one dated for sophomore year.

My handwriting is atrocious and just opening to the first page makes me grimace. God, I was so fucking weird then. Still, I head back to the living room. “Okay, brace yourselves,” I say, clearing my throat. “This is peak Leviathan drama.” I read aloud, my voice dripping with mock gravitas. “Silas smiled at me today, and it’s like the sun came out. His eyes are like forests, deep and wild. I think I’m in love.”

Rowan snickers, leaning back. “You were a sap.”

“Was?” Amand teases, dodging my swat. “Still is.”

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I shoot them each a glare but keep reading anyway, skimming entries about Silas—his charm, his scent, the way he made me feel like I was everything. But there's nothing about unicorns, just vague mentions of his "mysterious past." One entry catches my eye, though: "Silas got weird tonight, talking about power and destiny. Said some shifters are meant to rule. Creeped me out."

I pause, my gut twisting. "That's... odd," I say, closing the journal. "He never mentioned unicorns, but this power talk? That doesn't sound like a panther thing." I remember religiously researching panthers at one point, wanting to impress Silas and make sure he was comfortable. Panthers are prideful and like to hang with other feline shifters but they don't crave power, not like wolf shifters—especially the Alphas.

Rowan's eyes narrow. "You sure he was a panther?"

"He shifted once in front of me. He was very proud of his form. I just—fuck, I'm sorry I didn't say anything. Silas kind of fucked me up, okay?" I still haven't even told the others at Essence PI. Gerald probably already knows but I hate that all of this unicorn bullshit is tied to me.

"No more secrets, Lev. We can't do anything if we don't know the full picture," Amand starts. "I'm not asking you to tell everyone. I just don't want to be blindsided."

That, I can do.

I think.

The soft moment is interrupted when my stomach growls. Rowan cackles as he pushes to his feet. “Okay, no more burnt toast. Let’s order pizza.”

“Thank fuck,” I grumble. “Can we also ban Rowan from the kitchen? I thought I was going to die from crusty carbs.”

Chapter 5

ROWAN

I’m already regretting agreeing to this. Lev’s idea to scope out this supernatural hangout for unicorn leads is solid, but The Horned Haven is a cesspool. Shifters, witches, and a few vampires slink through the dimly lit bar, chatter full of secrets and betrayal from what I can gather. My instincts are on edge, my beast itching to shift and clear the room. But I keep it locked down, my focus on Lev, who’s weaving through the crowd like he was born for this.

The way he has somehow mastered part of his magic, fading into the shadows so smoothly is almost eerie. One second, he’s there, his unruly curls catching the glow from the lights; the next, he’s gone, blending into the graffiti-covered walls.

It’s sexy as hell, but it’s also driving me nuts. I can’t protect him if I can’t see him. Amand’s beside me, scanning the room, his hand twitching like he’s ready to grab Lev the moment he reappears.

“Relax, Rowan,” Amand murmurs. “He’s got this.”

“Relax?” I growl, keeping my voice down. “He’s playing ghost in a bar full of predators. You know how much I hate this. Besides, you’re just as much on edge as I am.”

Amand's lips twitch as he claps a hand on my shoulder. "Yeah, but we can't smother him, unfortunately."

I grunt, folding my arms across my chest. He's not wrong. But every time he fades, my beast roars to drag him back, to pin him down and keep him safe. It's not just protectiveness; it's the venom in my veins, the mate bond that makes me want to claim him in every way possible. I shake my head, trying to focus. We're here for answers, not to lose myself in Lev's orbit.

The bar's a riot of color and noise, with glittery cocktails named after unicorns—Moonlit Horn, Stardust Stab, you name it. I don't even know how the fuck Lev found this place or how we've never come through here just for shits and giggles.

Lev's voice pops into my head, his deadpan commentary from earlier: "Unicorn-themed cocktails? What's next, glitter shots that make you prance?" I smirk at the memory, but it fades when I spot him reappearing near the bar, his expression tense. He's talking to a wiry shifter with a mohawk, keeping his voice low. I strain to hear, but the music drowns them out.

Amand nudges me, nodding toward the back. "Over there."

I follow his gaze to a corner booth where a burly shifter is holding court, his voice carrying over the noise. He's got a wolfish grin, his eyes gleaming with booze and bravado. "Horn jobs, man," he's saying, slamming his drink down. "Clean, quick, and no one sees it coming. Best way to take out the trash."

My blood runs cold. Horn jobs. A euphemism for unicorn killings, no doubt. Our first real lead, but I don't trust this place. Too many eyes, too many scents. Lev's still at the bar, his back to us, and I'm itching to drag him out of here before trouble finds us.

"Rowan," Amand warns, sensing my tension. "Don't start anything."

“Too late,” I mutter, my gaze locking onto a vampire who’s sidling up to Lev. He leans in, his hand grazing Lev’s arm, and my beast roars. Lev’s trying to play it cool, his magic flickering as he half-fades, but the vampire does not back off. He says something, Lev obviously forcing a laugh when his eyes dart to us.

That’s it. I’m across the room before Amand can stop me, my fists curled at my side. “Back off,” I snarl, shoving between Lev and the vampire.

The vampire’s eyes narrow, but he doesn’t move. “Relax, snake. Just making conversation.”

“Make it somewhere else,” I say, pulling Lev behind me. His scent floods my senses, calming my beast but not enough to back down.

Lev’s hand tugs at my jacket. “Rowan, chill. I’m fine.”

I don’t look at him, my focus on the vampire. The bar’s gone quiet as heads turn to face us. The vampire smirks and raises his hands in defeat. “Alright, tough guy. No need to get territorial.”

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But he doesn't move fast enough, and my patience snaps. I grab his collar, slamming him against the bar. "You don't touch him," I growl, my voice barely human. My tongue darts out, a hiss following, the strange urge to sink my claws into his neck and release my venom growing.

"Rowan!" Lev's voice cuts through to me. He's fully visible now, his hands on my arm, pulling me back. "You're gonna get us kicked out."

The vampire nervously laughs, slipping away the moment I release him, the crowd returning to their buzzing chaos again. Amand's at my side, his hand on my shoulder. "Nice one, Rowan. Subtle."

"Fuck subtle," I mutter, turning to Lev. His cheeks are flushed, his green eyes bright with a mix of annoyance and something else—heat.

"You're impossible," Lev says, but there's no real bite in it. He's trying to hide a smile, and it's doing things to me. "I was handling it."

"Sure you were," I say, stepping closer, my hand sliding to his waist.

Amand clears his throat, breaking the moment. "As much as I'm enjoying the show, we've got a lead to follow."

I glance at the corner booth, where the braggart shifter is still talking, oblivious to the chaos. "He's been flapping his gums about 'horn jobs'. Let's get closer and maybe find a table."

We weave through the crowd, Lev fading slightly to blend into the shadows. It's unnerving, watching him disappear, but I trust his magic. Amand and I stick to the edges, trying to look casual, but we're not exactly subtle. Two Basilisks in a bar full of shifters? We're like bulls in a china shop.

Lev reappears near the booth, his back to the wall. Guess the table idea is out. I position myself a few feet away, pretending to sip a glittery cocktail that tastes like regret. The shifter's voice carries, slurred but much clearer from where I'm standing. "Silas knows how it's done," he says, leaning forward. "Guy's got connections. Says the horn jobs are just the start."

My blood runs cold. Silas. Lev's ex. I glance at Lev, who's gone still, his face pale. He hears it too, and the mate bond flares with his panic. Amand's eyes meet mine, and I know he's thinking the same thing: this just got way more personal.

Before we can move, a drunk werewolf stumbles into Lev, knocking him into the booth. The braggart shifter spins, his eyes narrowing. "Who the fuck are you?" he snarls, grabbing Lev's arm.

Big mistake. My beast surges, and I'm on him in a second, yanking him off Lev and slamming him against the table. The booth erupts, the shifter's buddies lunging at me, before Amand steps in, his fist connecting with a jaw. Lev's shouting something, but it's lost in the chaos as fists fly and glasses shatter.

I take a hit to the arm, a claw slicing through my jacket, and I hiss, my fangs itching to extend. But I keep it together, shoving the shifter back as Lev fades into the background, dodging a punch. Amand's got another guy pinned, his eyes glinting with that deadly calm he gets before things get bloody. The bar's a mess, patrons scattering, and the bartender's yelling about calling the cops.

I don't wait for that, dragging Lev out into the parking lot, Amand on my heels.

Lev whirls around me as we reach the car, our mate angrily poking me in the chest. “You two are gonna get us killed,” he says, but there’s a grin tugging at his lips. “You can’t fight everyone that looks at me wrong.”

I can and I will but I keep my mouth shut. My jaw tightens as a spike of pain runs through my arm, something Lev notices.

“Shit, Rowan, you’re hurt.”

“It’s nothing,” I say, but he’s already rummaging in his jacket for a bandage, prepared more than we ever are. His fingers glide over my skin, his gentle touch stirring up the ever present need when it comes to him. I can’t help it—I pull him against me, my lips crashing against his.

He gasps before melting into me, his hands fisting my jacket. The kiss is hungry and desperate, a clash of tongue and teeth that brings a moan from his lips.

Amand clears his throat as I pull away from Lev. “Really? Now?” he muses. “We just started a bar fight, and you’re making out by the car?”

Lev grins as he leans back against the car. “Blame him,” he says, jerking a thumb at me. “He’s the one with no self-control.”

I smirk, not sorry at all. “Not sorry. But you’re right, we need to get out of here. I think we might also need to meet up with your ex-boyfriend...”

Lev grimaces, letting out a heavy sigh. “I really didn’t ever want to see him again. I don’t even know what to think. I didn’t ever think he’d turn out evil.”

I can’t imagine what’s going through Lev’s mind now. Some part of me just wants to wrap Lev up in a big safe cocoon, away from the rest of the world. The other part

wants Silas dead. If Silas is tied to this unicorn killer, I'll make sure he regrets ever crossing Lev's path.

Chapter 6

LEVIATHAN

“Hello?”

I clear my throat, terrified of hearing Silas' voice over the phone in so long. I was sure it wouldn't be that easy to track him down, to just call him up and reach out to him. However, of course, Gerald has his contacts, the man already waiting for the information as if he knew who was involved.

And now I'm staring at my phone, wondering what to say to a man I thought I loved once upon a time.

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“Hello? Who is this?”

“Leviathan.”

A bout of silence slips through, both of my mates standing a few feet away as I lean forward on the couch. I should just come out with it, accuse Silas of whatever the fuck I think he did, grab some answers and move on.

“Baby? Jesus Christ, it’s been a while. We should catch up. Come to Lunar Fang! God, it’s going to be amazing to see your pretty face. What like, 8 pm sound good? Excellent.”

Then he just hangs up.

Rowan chuckles. “Was he always like that?”

“Yeah. And once he got you with his charm, it felt impossible to say no to him. People don’t always get a word in when he’s around. I just... didn’t think we’d find him so fast or that he’d be so eager to meet up with me. I don’t know how I feel about that.” One look at my mates and I can see that they aren’t sure how they feel about that either.

Which is why I’m now standing in front of yet another little dive bar on the other end of town, my stomach in knots. I’ve been to Lunar Fang a few times when meeting a client who doesn’t want to be seen reaching out for my help. However, never once

did I bring someone here on a date or a casual meetup.

Always just business.

“Lev,” Rowan growls, his hand grazing my lower back. “You sure about this? We can go in guns blazing and drag him out instead.”

I snort, adjusting my jacket. I pat my pocket a few times to ensure the ginger is in there. It’ll help my mates keep their hands to themselves and also to keep me from fading into the background. I don’t trust Silas and showing him my magic abilities seems like giving the keys to the wrong player. “As much as I’d love to see you fight my ex, we need answers right now. I also just want to put this shit behind me.”

Yet another reason I let Gerald know that I was going to follow this lead on my own. Involving Lily and Jace seemed like a terrible idea.

Amand offers me a lop-sided grin that’s eviler than it should be, silently letting me know that if Silas tries anything, he’s dead. It’s just as well, I guess. Blowing out a heavy breath, I gather up the courage to step inside, just past a massive bear shifter who merely glances at us with a nod.

Lunar Fang is a sensory overload with all of the strobe lights and thumping music, a stark contrast to the last bar we went into. The unicorn’s scent isn’t here but Silas’ is, my ex always one for a show. Which is why I’m not surprised when I spot him near the VIP section. His black hair is slicked back, his tailored suit hugging a frame that’s leaner and more polished than I remember. His smile is still magnetic, the kind that could charm just about anyone. He’s surrounded by shifters, all hanging on his every word, and I feel a pang of something I don’t want to name. Nostalgia? Regret? Whatever it is, I shove it down.

“Found him,” I nod toward my ex. Rowan and Amand close ranks, their bodies a wall

of heat behind me. I can feel their tension through the bond, and I know they're itching to drag me out of here. I don't suspect that this will go sideways but finding out that Silas is part of these murders will just make it harder to process everything.

Silas spots me before I reach him, his hazel eyes locking onto mine. That smile widens, and it's like a punch to the gut. "Leviathan Dubois," he purrs. "Hello, love."

I raise an eyebrow, disgusted at the fact that he's still calling me pet names after all these years. After he broke my heart. After he discarded me and told me he never really had feelings for me. "Yeah, well, you've had a glow-up, Silas. Club owner now? Quite the leap from college dropout." I'm making a wild guess but it seems like something he'd do. I just don't know how I missed that since I've been here before.

He laughs, waving away the shifters around him before stepping closer. There's that faint metallic edge of a Unicorn again which either means Silas knows something or someone he's acquainted with does. "I've reformed," he teases. "Cleanslate, new life. You look good, Lev. Better than I remember. When things die down a bit, we should go out."

Clearly, he doesn't remember shit from years ago. I twist around to glare at my mates before they start growling or something equally stupid before addressing Silas' comment. "No thanks. Not after you told me I was the flavor of the month in school. No amount of glow up can make me forgive that."

He grimaces. "Jesus, yeah. Sorry about that. So, I guess all business then?"

"I'm not here to reminisce," I snap at him, one of the shifters perking up at my tone. Silas waves him off again and then leads us into one of the VIP's booths away from the chaos. I wait until he's seated across from me, my mates on either side of me, before I speak again. "Three shifters are dead, and your name came up. Talk."

Silas sighs and drags a hand through his hair, his shoulders falling. “I heard about the killings. Nasty business. But I’m clean, Lev. I run a club, not a murder ring.”

I lean forward, my nose working overtime. The unicorn scent is stronger now, clinging to his clothes like a second skin. “You’re not the killer,” I say, watching his reaction, a mixture of hurt and shock. “But your smell is all wrong, so tell me what’s going on.” I have skipped over several steps, including my sense of smell or the fact that I’ve been mated to creatures who will eventually kill me with their venom.

Silas’ eyes widen for a second before he regains his composure. “Damn, I never really thought we’d be meeting like this. When I came back to the city, I looked you up, you know? Found out that you were this awesome PI. Almost made it out to your office a few times but never had the courage.”

That makes me feel worse about all of this. “Yeah, great. Back to the murders,” I push out through gritted teeth. I’m 99% sure that if Silas keeps bringing up whatever these misguided feelings are, one or both of my mates is going to pitch a fit.

“Fine,” Silas states. “I’ve heard rumors. A lot of people come through here, spewing a lot of bullshit but it seems like whatever you might be looking for could be out in the forest preserve, near the old oak grove. That’s all I know.”

Rowan chuckles as he places his folded hands on the table. His tongue slips out, hissing with annoyance. “Why the fuck would you not call the police if you realized you might have information?” Silas’ eyes just get wide again. “Because you’re somehow connected to this bullshit. So, please, explain why your name would come up if you’re not tangled up in this.”

Silas swallows nervously, looking around the bar before focusing on me. Dismissing my mates seems like a terrible play but as long as I get my information, I’m not picky. “Look, I know how your nose works, okay? You can sniff out just about

everything, which is how I'm assuming you really picked my name out of a hat." He digs into his pocket and produces a small notebook with a logo from Oak Grove Preserve. "Someone left it here and the shit they were talking about was just a bit too dark for my liking. Other than that? I couldn't tell you. I'll keep my ears peeled, though."

This clue feels forced, though, almost too easy. Like Silas is just trying to charm me all over again. Silas throws his hand out for me to shake and I oblige, trying to be professional, however, when he lingers too long, I know he has a death wish.

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Amand reaches over to clasp Silas' hand as well, his claws extending at the same time his fangs make an appearance. The air crackles with his magic, his eyes turning an almost electric blue. "You might have a hard on for Lev but he's not yours to touch anymore, Silas."

Silas pulls back, a quiver in his voice as he speaks. "No harm meant. Just catching up with an old friend."

"Friend?" I scoff, pocketing the notebook. "You ghosted me, Silas. Left me thinking I was nothing. And then you came back and told me I didn't matter. Letting me know you've been in town, owning this place, but couldn't bring yourself to face me just makes it worse. Apparently, I did mean more to you at some point but it's too late now." I pat the table, effectively ending the conversation.

It doesn't look like I'll be getting anything else out of him but at least I know where he hangs. If I have additional questions, it'll be easy enough to get to him.

I slide out of the booth, heading toward the entrance with only one thought on my mind. "Do you actually believe Silas isn't connected? I didn't smell anything else on him other than the unicorn." My mates just grunt, agreeing with me. Since the scent is still lingering around Silas, it's someone he's been around multiple times. Someone close.

And I have a feeling it's someone way closer than I think.

Chapter 7

LEVIATHAN

I came back to Essence PI's headquarters like a good little chameleon to debrief the team on what I found. And instead of being thrown out into the wild to investigate my newest clue, I was told to go home and turn up the next morning for training. Apparently, disappearing on Lily and ending up on Marcus' lap across the hall was grounds for an immediate intervention.

Explaining that I was tired and that Rowan had chucked my piece of ginger out the window on the drive over wasn't excuse enough for Gerald.

Which is... fair.

"Leviathan," Gerald growls, his tone a mixture of control and frustration. It doesn't quite make sense but it's putting me on edge. "Focus. Your magic is instinctual, but it's also a muscle. You need to train it, not fight it."

"Easy for you to say," I mutter, wiping my palms on my jeans. "You're not the one accidentally ghosting mid-conversation." I'm beginning to wonder if many of the things natural to magicare things that Gerald ever experienced. So far, he hasn't really demonstrated any of the things he supposedly can do.

Gerald's lips twitch, but he doesn't laugh. "You're raw, but you've got potential. Let's start with scent-shifting. It's your strongest asset. Close your eyes," Gerald instructs, stepping closer. "Feel your magic. It's like a current flowing through you. Find the part that senses scents."

I obey, shutting my eyes and taking a deep breath. My magic stirs, a tingling warmth under my skin. I focus on the scents around me: Gerald's earthy Chameleon musk, Rowan's spicy Basilisk heat, Amand's cooler, oceanic tang. It's overwhelming, like trying to tune a radio in a storm, but I latch onto Gerald's scent, letting it fill my

senses.

“Good,” he states. “Now, shift your own scent to match mine. Imagine it like changing clothes—slip out of yours, into mine.”

I frown, the metaphor not helping. “Sounds like I’m stealing your laundry.”

Rowan snickers, and I flip him off without opening my eyes. Focus, Lev. The problem is that most of the morning, Gerald gave me an abbreviated lesson on everything Chameleon which included all of the things I’m rumored to be able to do. No one actually knows the extent of my magic because most of it is horse shit or legend. Very few people have ever met a Chameleon shifter to then be able to record our biology for the history books.

“I can do this,” I mutter to myself before digging deeper and focusing on Gerald’s scent. It’s like trying to sculpt water, except I’m not a water bender and Gerald didn’t actually explain how to do this. My skin tingles, and I feel a shift, like I’m wearing someone else’s skin. I open my eyes, hopeful, but Gerald shakes his head.

“Not quite,” he says. “You’re closer to a werewolf now. Try again.”

I think of Jace and immediately gag. Yeah, no, I don’t want to smell like that. Amand’s laugh echoes through the room and I just glare at him. “Not helping, snake boy.” He clams up but I can still see his shoulders shaking. Asshole. I try again, feeling more of a shift this time. When I open my eyes, there’s a look of approval on Gerald’s face.

“Better,” he says, nodding. “You’re close. Keep practicing. Now, let’s try mimicking appearances.”

We tried that earlier and I thought I was going to die. That’s when Gerald scaled back

the exercises to theory and then scents. I've only just mastered that but I feel like some kind of whackass avatar that has to figure out my magic within hours. I don't even get the cool adventure with friends.

"I think we should cap it at that, today, yeah?"

Gerald shakes his head. "No. We shouldn't. Your magic could be the key to everything, Leviathan. The sooner you can master these bits, the sooner you can do so much more than bejusta PI. Think about it. If you have the ability to shift and to mimic, you'll be able to slip into any situation regardless of the risk!"

Yeah, this feels like a trap but I'm also wildly curious.

"Just focus on your magic. Try... mimicking your mates. They're the closest ones to you at the moment, ones you share a bond with. It's easier to feel their magic. Start small and work your way up. I'm going to focus on the new case that passed across my desk but come find me when you can do that. Then I'll let you go trapezing out into the forest."

Then he just leaves us there, my mates shuffling over to me. They slot themselves in front and back, pressing closer until I feel their cocks thick against my belly and the small of my back. "What the fuck?" I groan, heat building in my belly. "What—"

"We've been doing a little reading, too," Amand purrs as he leans down to kiss me. "And whatever the fuck you're doing is releasing magic. It's making it really hard to focus."

Rowan starts nibbling on my ear, my body melting between them. "With practice, you won't release that much but fuck, I need you."

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I snort and shake my head, knowing that this can only go south. “I need to do this so we can go and figure out who’s killing those shifters.”

Amand hums, stealing another kiss before meeting my eyes. “Then shift, Lev. Show us how beautiful of a snake you make. And then we’re going to fuck you.”

“Right here?” I twist around to look at the office door. It’s closed and suspiciously locked, something I suspect Gerald was in on. The fucker absolutely knew what this was going to do to Rowan and Amand. I swallow nervously and focus on Amand before letting my magic do its job. I still have no idea what I’m doing, Rowan pulling a moan from me when he rocks against my ass.

My magic shifts and pulls and twists, heat bleeding through me before Amand grabs my face in his hands. His thumb runs along my bottom lip before tugging it down and then pricking the edge of my canine. Well, a fang. “Eerie as fuck, really. You’ve got one of my eyes and the other from Rowan but the fangs are new. I like them.” He growls out the last sentence before diving in for another kiss.

Rowan drags my pants down, fear spiking in my chest that he’s just going to fuck me raw. And then I hear a wrapper and then the sound of lube being squirted. At least, they come prepared for something, right?

I don’t have a lot of time to process whatever the fuck is going on as my body continues to heat up, Rowan roughly prepping my ass. Amand kisses me again, his tongue running across my fangs several times. “Don’t you dare disappear on us, Lev. Not this time.”

I can only moan as I'm walked backward, Rowan's presence disappearing from behind me for a second. I twist around to find him sitting down, his cock hanging out of his pants, precum already beading along the tip. He reaches for me, slowly lowering me onto his cock, the stretch just on the edge of painful but it's also the best feeling ever.

A small cry tears from my throat as he completely fills me, Amand pulling out his own cock as well. I frown, unsure of how this is going to work when Rowan lowers his chair, putting us almost on the floor, my mouth now at the perfect level. All three of us are working on instinct, on need, my magic heightening this moment until it's just a mess of pheromones and desire.

Anyone could unlock the door with a key but I'm more focused on being filled by my mates, Amand's taste on my tongue is everything I didn't know I needed. I sag between them, letting them use me for their pleasure and my own. Amand's hand sifts into my hair as he fucks into my mouth, Rowan gripping my waist hard enough to bruise.

"Careful with those teeth, Lev. I like a little pain but I'd like to keep my cock," Amand purrs.

I will my magic to shrink back, reverting me to my old self so that I can just feel. It doesn't take long for each of us to fall over the edge, my mates filling my ass and mouth as I jack myself off, covering my palm and stomach.

That's when the embarrassment sets in, the three of us just kind of staring while I sit on Rowan's cock, my body a mess of cum and magical sweat. "Right. So, I need a lot of practice lest we have an orgy in the middle of the forest." I slowly stand up and pull my pants back up, unable to cover up most of the mess we just made.

One look at Amand and I realize they're absolutely ecstatic that I'm covered in their

filth, despite the fact that we're at work and I still have to walk through the halls to get to my car. Everyone at this place is going to know what we just did.

My phone buzzes and I scramble toward it on wobbly legs.

I assume by now that you've figured out why not everyone throws around shapeshifting when they aren't a shapeshifter to begin with. We'll work on control tomorrow. There's a change of clothes in the desk for each of you should you need it.

I just stare at the message, about to text back when I think better of it. I can only handle so much embarrassment at once. "So, Gerald knew exactly what was going to happen here which now makes this weird." I can feel Rowan's need to make a joke but I just shake my head. "Not now. Please, not now. Let's go home, shower, and then we're going out to the grove."

I get no complaints. Well, just one.

Amand mumbles something about shifting again because I looked really sexy with fangs.

Chapter 8

AMAND

The last day and a half has been interesting. The plan to visit the grove was a bust when we found Lev passed out from how much energy he had expended. We're on edge, our need to fuck our Chameleon growing every time he walks past us in the condo. Something about using his magic to mimic scents and creatures is strengthening the mate bond way more than normal. Even with Gerald's training, every time he shifts, we get all bent out of shape over Lev.

We've fucked him four times since the time in the office, each one rougher and wilder than the last. Lev finally got a grip on how much magic is leaking out with each shift, finally mimicking a gray wolf. It's a start but this is torture.

My need to claim him keeps screaming out but I'm desperately trying to get that shit under control. So, I just focus on Lev's grumbling instead, the poor guy whining about having to trudge through the forest yet again. I don't remember this much complaining last time when we had to confront the witch but I find it entertaining.

"Fucking forest," Lev mutters, brushing dirt off his jeans. "Why can't unicorns hide in, like, a coffee shop? Somewhere with Wi-Fi and no mosquitoes?"

I chuckle, stepping closer to steady him. "It's not that bad. We were in a forest similar to this a few weeks ago."

He glares at me, his green eyes glinting in the fading light, but there's a spark of humor there. "No, that was a forest. This is a swamp. Are you guys seriously not bothered? I'm one step away from becoming a swamp monster. This is your fault, you know."

I grin, my hand lingering on his arm. "You're the one who wanted to chase Silas's lead. Don't blame me for your detective instincts."

Rowan glances back, his brown eyes narrowing. "Focus, you two. This place reeks of magic. Unicorns or not, something's here."

He's right. The grove is alive with energy, the air thick with the scent of old magic. It's supposedly a dingy but known hotspot for shifters, who use its dense cover to shift unseen. It's not exactly a lawless land but it's one most normal creatures and humans never really venture out to.

Lev's plan is ballsy: use his newly mastered scent-shifting to mimic an Omega wolf, the kind of prey a unicorn killer might target. It's brilliant, but it's also dangerous, and my beast is clawing at me to keep him safe.

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“Ready, Lev?” I ask. We’re deep in the grove now, the trees towering overhead, their branches blotting out the moon. The notebook from Silas pointed us here, but it feels like a trap, and my beast is on high alert.

“Yeah. Let’s do this before I lose my nerve or before one of you try to fuck me again.”

I hold back a laugh as he closes his eyes, his face scrunching in concentration, his magic shifting through the bond. His scent changes and gives way to something softer, sweeter. It’s uncanny, and my beast growls, not liking the idea of him smelling like prey. Rowan’s eyes slit, his fangs peeking out, and I know he’s feeling it too.

“Easy,” I murmur to Rowan, my hand on his arm. “He’s still ours.”

Lev opens his eyes, exhaling. “Did it work?”

I lean in, sniffing his neck, and my beast stirs at the Omega scent, even though I know it’s fake. “Yeah. You’re a walking wolf snack. Be careful.”

He rolls his eyes, but there’s a tremor in his voice. “Let’s get this over with.”

We spread out, keeping Lev in sight as he moves deeper into the clearing. His magic lets him fade slightly, blending into the shadows, but I can still track him through the bond.

A rustle in the bushes makes my beast surge, and I signal Rowan to stay alert. Lev’s moving slower now, his fake Omega scent wafting through the air like a beacon. I

hate this plan, but it's working—maybe too well. A shadow moves in the trees, my heart pounding at whatever is going to surface. It's here.

I would have thought this place was crawling with the darker shifters but there's no one out here. Except for that.

A long, iridescent horn peeks through the underbrush before the rest of the unicorn bursts forth, faster than I've seen almost anything move. It's massive, its white coat shimmering in the darkness, absent of any light to reflect off of it. I don't expect the black eyes or the way they're pointed at Lev, hunger radiating off of him.

I move before I can think, shifting into my Basilisk form. Scales ripple over my skin as my body elongates, my fangs extending until they're nearly as large as my head. Rowan's right beside me, his own shift seamless, and we charge, a twin wall of venom and muscle.

The unicorn scrapes its hoof on the ground before lowering his head and lunging toward Lev, its horn aimed for his chest. Lev fades a second later, the unicorn's horn grazing a trunk and splintering through a large branch like it's butter. Gerald mentioned that their horns were weapons but I didn't realize how sharp they were.

I slither forward and slam into the unicorn's side, my coils wrapping around its front legs. Rowan is a few inches away, about to grab his back legs when the unicorn twists at an odd angle and stabs into my flesh. A hiss vibrates through the grove, my coils loosening enough for the unicorn to dart away.

"Fuck," I shout before shifting back to my human form. "Seriously?"

Lev reappears and rushes over to me, checking the small graze on my leg. It's already healing, my magic working much faster when I'm shifted. "I had no idea... fuck, we shouldn't have come out here alone."

I wave him off, breathing a bit heavier as my magic works through the wound. Rowan drags Lev into his chest and kisses the top of his head. “Get anything?”

Lev nods. “He smells like Silas, which is weird as fuck. I need to talk to him again because none of this makes any sense.” I can see that that’s the last thing Lev wants to do so I offer a different solution.

“Maybe we don’t need to talk to Silas again. Do you know anyone closely related to him, family members, etc? Scents tend to be fairly similar for close relatives or at least in the same general group. Occasionally, they’re different like mine and Rowan’s but otherwise...”

Lev shakes his head, tilting his face to look at me. “Silas never mentioned any family and I never met anyone. The only thing I can think of is that it has to do with his past. He always avoided talking about it.”

I jog back over to where we originally shifted and grab my phone from my tattered clothes. I grab Rowan’s too and gesture that we might want to start heading back. As glad as I am that this area is mostly deserted at the moment, I’d rather not be caught by something else unaware.

“The only thing I can think of is a twin,” Lev finally says. “You don’t share a scent like that without being super close. The problem is I never met a twin.”

Rowan grunts. “What if you did? Think about it. Silas ghosted you and then called you the flavor of the month before coming back and looking for you? What if those weren’t the same people?”

That’s a whole conspiracy I’m sure no one wants to think of. It also makes things worse because that means that Silas not only broke Lev’s heart, but he also just outright lied about his own family. It also means that Silas absolutely knows who is

responsible for these murders.

Lev pulls out his phone and sends a text before letting out a grimace. “Fucking hell. I guess we just ran into a brother or a twin or something. Rowan, Amand, you have my permission to gut Silas now. What a fucking bastard.”

Chapter 9

LEVIATHAN

After a thorough shower, both of my mates bending me over, blaming the fact that I smelled all wrong, I find myself in Silas’ bar again. I’m back to my regular scent, both my mates possessively on either side of me, snarls lifting their lips as they glare at my ex.

I don’t blame them.

We also shouldn’t be here.

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I didn't tell Gerald or the others where we were going or what we found, a requirement of my new employment. However, I'm so used to doing all this shit on my own that it kind of slipped my mind.

In the time where the unicorn nearly speared through me and coming to sit in front of my ask, I used every last moment to research a man I thought I knew. Or at least, knew well enough. The problem is that with a few, quick, pointed searches, I found out that I didn't really know him at all.

He didn't have a rap sheet a mile long but he had more than just family. He had grandparents that he never mentioned. He also had a twin. Elias. Someone who just happened to attend the same college we did.

I never thought to research Silas before this moment. Even after we broke up, I just tried to move on. His 'secrets' or past life didn't really bother me. I was too hurt to care. And now, I wish I had.

My shoulders fall as I stare at Silas, wondering what the fuck is going on in his head. He sips the whiskey in front of him, mine untouched. I'm not here for a social call. Although, Silas looks like I very well might have called him out here for a date. "It's really nice to see you again, Leviathan."

"Cut the crap, Silas," I snap, leaning forward. My magic flickers, and I force myself to stay visible, my hands gripping the table. After Rowan threw out my ginger pouch, I decided to just try harder and control my magic. Hearing my mates constantly grumble about the smell wasn't worth it. "Your twin, Elias. He's the unicorn killer, isn't he? And you knew."

Silas's smile fades as he sets his mug down, his fingers tightening around the handle. "You always were sharp like that. I didn't know where he was until only recently and there's a lot of unicorn shifters so it never crossed my mind that it could be him." He manages a shrug like none of this phases him.

I narrow my gaze at him. "Bullshit. You gave me that notebook and pointed me to the preserve. You knew he'd be there."

He sighs, running a hand through his hair. "I suspected. Elias and I... we haven't been close in years. We had a falling-out after college. He got into some dark shit—smuggling, black-market magic. I tried to pull him out, but he went off the deep end. Started ranting about unicorn superiority, how he's meant to rule over other shifters."

I scoff, my voice dripping with sarcasm. "Great family reunion. One twin's a sleaze, the other's a serial killer. You must be so proud. Why the fuck did you not tell me you had a fucking twin?" Silas winces, and I feel a pang of guilt, but I shove it down. He doesn't get to play the victim here. "What's his deal, Silas? Why's he killing young male shifters? And why the hell is your scent all over this? Because, I get that yours are similar but distinctly yours is the one I found on the last body."

He leans back, his eyes darting to Rowan and Amand, who are glaring daggers back at him. Silas lowers his voice. "Elias... he's unstable. Always has been. He's got this idea that unicorns are the apex predators, that other shifters are weak. He's proving a point, I think. Killing to show he's untouchable."

"And the scent? You're not a unicorn, Silas. You shifted for me once, panther, clear as day. So why do you smell like one?"

He hesitates. "We're twins, Lev. Our magic's linked, even if we're different shifters. I'm a panther, yeah, but Elias's unicorn magic bleeds into mine. And the other way

around. It's why you caught it on me. I'm not the killer, I swear."

He's telling the truth, mostly, but he's holding back. "What aren't you telling me, Silas? Because Elias isn't just killing random shifters. He's targeting me. People I know. People I've helped. That body in my truck? That wasn't a coincidence."

Silas's eyes widen, and for a moment, he looks genuinely shaken. "He's... targeting you?"

"Don't play dumb," I snap, my magic flaring. I feel myself fade, my skin blending into the booth, and I curse, focusing to reappear. Silas stares, shock filtering into his expression but I push past it. "Yeah, I'm a Chameleon shifter. Surprise. Now talk." Probably not the best thing to reveal to him but I need his explanations. The more I give him, the more likely he is to open up.

And if he tries anything, my mates will be right there.

"Elias... he's obsessed with you. I told him about you back in college, when we were still close. About us, how much you meant to me. He got it in his head that you were... special. When I cut him off, he fixated on you, said you were the key to proving his point. I didn't know he'd go this far, Lev. I thought he was just... unhinged, not a murderer."

Elias's obsession with me is because of Silas's stories? It's like a bad soap opera and I'm the unwilling star. "You told him about me? And now he's killing because of it? Fuck, Silas, you really know how to screw up my life. And why now? College was years ago."

He flinches, his eyes pleading. "I'm sorry, Lev. I didn't know. He only found me a couple of months ago and then found you while you were on that last case with the witch. I thought giving you the notebook would help you stop him."

A bitter laugh falls from my lips. “Help? You led me into a trap! He nearly skewered me last night!”

Rowan’s chair scrapes across the floor, and I glance over to see him standing, his eyes slitted, fangs peeking out from his upper lip. Amand is mirroring his stance on my other side, my head hanging low at their need to put Silas in his place. I just shake my head and continue questioning Silas. “What else, Silas? What’s Elias planning? And don’t you dare lie to me.”

Silas exhales, his shoulders slumping. “I don’t know his endgame, Lev. He’s in the grove after driving out some of the other rogue shifters. Only those loyal to him are still hanging around. He’s got this... cult thing going, preaching unicorn supremacy. I heard he’s planning something big, but I don’t know what. I swear, that’s all I’ve got.”

I stay for a few more seconds before pushing Amand out of the way to leave the bar. This time, I’m not coming back here. If I need something else, I’ll call. Silas calls out after me but I just throw him the middle finger and stalk outside. Now that I know Elias is targeting me for some asinine jealous reason, I need a plan.

And I think I know just the one.

Chapter 10

ROWAN

“No. Absolutely not. I veto this idea.”

Lev grins at me as he fixes his bowtie in the rear mirror, the fucker somehow convincing Gerald to let him play bait at the shifter ball. It’s some supernatural gala that happens at least three times a year, perfectly coinciding with this case. After

debriefing Gerald and the others on what we found, we all agreed that Lev sticking his neck out there was what would bring Elias out into the open.

The problem was how we agreed on making that happen. Amand and I thought about setting up a meeting, just to meet and not let him know that we were on to him or conducting more investigative work regarding his whereabouts.

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But then Lily mentioned bait and Jace hopped onboard. Gerald was ecstatic, telling Lev that he'd be able to practice his magic which is great except for the fact that it's our mate who will be in danger. I hate it. I hate it so goddamn much.

And yet, it's the only good plan we have.

I huff out a sigh as Lev slips out of the passenger seat and smooths down his suit before heading toward the entrance. I can't even hang by his side if this is going to work. Gerald pulls up in his sleek car beside us, Lily and Jace piling out as well. They're all impeccably dressed—we all are—courtesy of Gerald's bank account but that doesn't make me feel any better.

"He'll be just fine," Gerald murmurs.

I glare at him, not believing that for a second. "Why do I feel like you keep pushing him toward something? Like you're testing him?" Gerald doesn't answer me but I don't expect him to. I follow Amand into the gala, confused when I find the absence of Lev's scent. He told us before that he would mimic another creature's scent but it's still strange not to immediately lock on to him. When I finally find him, I relax a little bit but my beast is on edge.

The uncertainty in Lev's eyes this morning, the way he blamed himself for trusting Silas, for not seeing Elias coming almost had me stopping this whole operation. It makes me want to rip both twins apart, but right now, my focus is on keeping Lev safe.

He's near the dance floor now, his movements awkward as he tries to blend in. He's

mimicking a fox shifter, complete with a bushy tail that's more hindrance than help. I smirk despite myself as he trips over it, catching himself on a table with a muttered curse. Amand chuckles, leaning closer. "Graceful," he murmurs, and I know Lev would flip us off if he heard.

Lev's out of his element in this glitzy chaos, but he's trying, his green eyes sharp as he scans the crowd. He's playing the part as a vulnerable, nervous, shifter, the kind Elias would target but I can feel his tension through the bond. Lev's ability to shift into something else will intrigue Elias and bring him forth but ultimately, it might only be Lev's real form that will grab the unicorn's attention.

Regardless, at least we know what he looks like.

A fae in a shimmering gown sidles up to him, her hand grazing his arm, and my beast snarls. Lev flashes a charming smile, deflecting her with a quip I can't hear, but it's enough to make her laugh and move on. Good. The last thing we need is a flirtatious distraction. But then a wolf shifter approaches, his eyes glinting with interest, and I'm moving before I think.

Amand grabs my arm, halting my approach. "Easy, Rowan. He's handling it."

I glare at him, my fangs itching to extend. "He's handling too much. That wolf's looking at him like dinner."

Amand's lips twitch, but he doesn't let go. "Trust him. He's got his magic, and we're here if it goes south."

I force myself to stop, my eyes locked on Lev. He's brushing off the wolf now, his tail swishing awkwardly, and I catch a glimpse of his smirk, all confidence and snark. It eases the knot in my chest, but only slightly.

Lev moves toward the bar, his fox form fading as he shifts back to his own appearance, Silas' scent still clinging to him. He orders a drink, leaning against the counter, and I catch a flicker of movement in the shadows behind him.

Amand jostles my shoulder, stealing my attention. "Over there, near the balcony. Dark hair, moving fast."

I follow his gaze, spotting a figure in a black suit, his movements a little too fluid for my liking. My nose catches a whiff of something similar to what was lingering on the shifter in Lev's car. It's faint, masked by the crowd, but it's there. Elias. My beast roars as I get ready to charge, but Amand's hand on my arm stops me.

"Wait," he says. "Let Lev draw him out. We jump too soon, he bolts."

He's right, but every second we wait feels like an eternity. Lev's still at the bar, his drink untouched, his eyes darting to the balcony. He's sensed the same thing we have, Lev moving toward the open doors, and my heart lurches. He's baiting Elias and it's working.

I'm just a little worried about how far Lev is from us. At this distance, we can't easily step in. Still, we move toward him, watching as the black figure steps out once Lev reaches the balcony. It's like watching in slow motion as Lev presses his hand over his pocket, my brows frowning when my phone rings. I slip it from my jacket, only to see the black figure whisper something into Lev's ear and then disappear into the darkness.

One second, they're there and the next second, the balcony is empty.

"Fuck!" I snarl, sprinting to where they were just standing. I fucking knew that this was a horrible idea. Amand's already calling for backup but Lily's drunk answer just pisses me off. They said they'd have our backs and now this? Lev is gone. Gerald is

Amand's next call, the shifter kicking it into high gear as he mentions that he'll be monitoring the parking lot.

I'm pretty sure they're far gone, though, with whatever stupid ass unicorn magic Elias just used. This feels like a bad fucking dream. My phone continues to buzz in my hand and I finally pick it up, relieved to hear Lev's voice and then furious because he's not at our side.

"Elias, you don't have to do this. Let me go, and we can talk."

"Shut up," a voice hisses back. "You're mine, Lev. Silas doesn't deserve you."

My blood runs cold, and Amand's eyes meet mine, his face paling slightly. "Track it. Essence has tech for this, right?"

He nods, already texting Gerald. "He's already on it. Oh, wow, seems Gerald already installed tracking technology on our devices. That's not creepy at all. Wonderful. They're headed back to the grove. Let's go."

I'm already moving. "Do we have backup?"

Amand nods again. "Yeah, a few shifters from Essence." He snorts. "Gerald is going to have a word with Lily."

Wonderful. I hope he strangles her magic or something, too. "Let's go get our mate back. This time, I'm not waiting to kill Elias or Silas for that matter." I put the phone on speaker as we rush to the entrance and hop into our car to speed toward the edge of the grove. There's silence on the other line but I can hear Lev's faint breathing.

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At least he's alive.

He better still be that way when we get there.

Chapter 11

LEVIATHAN

Tied to a rickety wooden post in an abandoned stable, I'm seriously questioning my life choices. Elias is pacing in front of me, his black suit disheveled from our scuffle at the gala. His eyes—hazel like Silas's but wilder, unhinged—keep darting to me, and I'm fighting to keep my Chameleon magic from fading me into the splintered wood behind me. I've tried disappearing my wrists to loosen the ropes but they must be doused in something because I can't get myself untied. In fact, I can't make my entire body disappear.

Just parts of it. Which is not helpful.

So, now I just get to wait for backup and hope that Rowan answered my call. I had no idea Elias had magic like that—the ability to transport me across distances which makes sense as to why he's never been caught.

“You're perfect, Lev,” Elias purrs, his voice a mix of reverence and madness. He stops pacing and crouches in front of me, his face a little too close for comfort. “Silas doesn't deserve you. He never did.”

I force a laugh, my voice hoarse from the chokehold he had me in earlier. “Yeah,

well, this is why I don't date. Creepy shrines and kidnapping? Hard pass." Mentioning my current mates seems like it would be in bad taste.

His eyes narrow, but there's a flicker of amusement in his gaze, like he's enjoying my defiance. The stable's far wall is littered with photos of me at my office, at the diner with Silas, even one from college I didn't know existed. It's a full-on stalker setup, and I mutter under my breath. Silas really wasn't kidding when he said his brother was obsessed with me.

Elias stands, his metallic, forest scent filling my nose. It's the same scent from the last body, which means I was right but hell, I wish I was wrong, just this once. I trusted Silas, and now his twin's got me trussed up like a turkey, ranting about winning my love by framing his brother for murder.

It'd be funny if I wasn't strapped to this pole.

"Elias, can we be real for a second? What's the real reason for all this bullshit?" I still haven't figured out how he's going to frame Silas for this but that's not really my problem right now.

He spins, his eyes blazing with fury. "Silas betrayed me," he spits, his hands clenching into fists at his side. "He was supposed to stand with me, prove unicorns are superior. But he chose his pathetic little bar, his fake life. He told me about you, Lev—how special you were, how you made him feel alive. I wanted that. I deserve that."

I swallow, my throat dry. "So, you're killing to... what? Prove a point? Win me over? That's not how love works, dude." I think back to the night where he told me I was the flavor of the month, pulling on whatever details I can remember. Something in his eyes was unfamiliar and at that time, I hadn't mastered my ability to smell magic. Which means, Elias was probably the man I spoke to. Not Silas.

A cackle rings through the small space. “Love? It’s power, Lev. You’re a Chameleon. Rare, perfect, all mine. With you, I can show the world what unicorns are capable of. Silas will rot for my crimes, and you’ll be mine.”

I grimace, trying to focus so that I can loosen the ropes. My magic isn’t doing it so I’ll have to do this bullshit the old fashioned way. “You’re delusional,” I say, trying to buy time. “How’re you even pulling this off? What’s the trick?”

His smile is smug, and I know I’ve got him. He wants to brag. “Magic. Pure and simple magic. However, add a little bit of black magic to it and you’ve got yourself an entirely different beast.”

“Right, right. And in the forest, why the fuck did you try to kill me?” For someone who’s obsessed with me, that doesn’t make any sense.

“Honest mistake. You smelled weird.”

Understandable in a weird, twisted way, I guess. “But why young male shifters? Why not, I don’t know, go after Silas directly?”

Elias’s face darkens, and he steps closer. “They were practice. Weak shifters, unworthy of you. I had to perfect my kills, make sure Silas took the fall. Every death was a message—to him, to you. You’re mine, Lev.”

My stomach churns, but I keep my expression neutral. The mate bond thrums with energy, letting me know that they’re on their way. “That’s all sorts of fucked up. I didn’t even date any of those shifters. One of them, I didn’t even fucking know.” I wiggle the slightest bit, easing my thumb out from one of the ropes. It’s just enough leverage to loosen the restraints so that they fall away. “Besides, I’m not yours and I was never really Silas’. I’ve also got mates, Elias. They’re coming for me, and you’re not gonna like what happens when they get here.”

“Your Basilisks? They’re too late. By the time they find you, you’ll be mine, or you’ll be dead.”

I fade fully now, my body blending into the post, only the ropes left. I try to sift out of this small place and into the clearing but it seems he’s smarter than he looks. The area is laced with something, the faint scent of ginger reaching my nose. How convenient.

“I caught onto your precious little tricks, Leviathan but you see, I’m not going to lose you that easily.” He steps forward, his gaze traveling the length of the stable. “Silas thought he could keep you. He told me everything a few months ago. How you loved him, how you trusted him. How he never understood why you left. That’s when I told him I stepped in because he never deserved you.”

A few years ago, I might have reacted. I might have flung myself at Elias and fought him for what he ruined. But right now, I just want to get out of here. I take a few steps to the side, placing myself closer to the entrance. “So, a bit of jealousy-fueled murder? Silas had me, and you didn’t. That’s what this is about, isn’t it?”

He spins, his eyes wild, and I flinch as he lunges, his horn shimmering into existence. It grazes the post where I was, splintering the wood into tiny pieces. I scramble back as my magic flickers and I reappear, the scent of ginger stronger in this corner. “You don’t get to leave me,” he growls. “You’re mine, Lev.”

I dodge another swing, my magic fading me again. “You’re pathetic,” I say, my voice echoing to throw him off. “Killing to frame your brother? Obsessing over me? Get a hobby, Elias.” He roars, his horn slashing through crates inches from where I am, and I dive, rolling across the dirt floor. “You’ll never win. Silas was a mistake, but I’m not that kid anymore. I’ve got a family now.”

Elias’ frustrated scream lashes out through the room, the magic forcing me to become

visible. I'm only inches away from his shifted form, the unicorn grinning at my helpless body. That's when I realize, I can't move.

Chapter 12

ROWAN

I tear through the forest preserve, Amand's heavy breaths matching mine. All I can focus on is Lev taken by that psychotic unicorn shifter. His phone signal is a faint beacon on Amand's device, guiding us to an abandoned stable deep in the woods, but every second feels like a lifetime.

The mate bond burns in my chest, sharp with Lev's fear, my beast roaring, clawing to be let out. I want to shift now, to slither through these trees and rip Elias apart, but I hold it back, saving my strength for the fight I know is coming.

Amand's sea-glass eyes glint in the moonlight, his face set with the same rage I feel. "We're close," he says, checking the signal. "Stable's just ahead. Gerald's team is ten minutes out, but we're not waiting."

"Damn right, we aren't," I growl, my fangs itching to extend.

When I lock onto Lev's scent, my beast surges forward and I don't fight it this time. I let the shift overtake me, my body elongating, scales rippling over my skin, my vision sharpening tonight clarity. I'm ten feet of muscle and venom, my coils gliding silently over the ground. Amand shifts beside me, both of us moving as one, a deadly pair honed by years of partnership and now bound by our mate.

I can taste ginger in the air which is the only explanation for why Lev would still be here. He can't disappear through the walls and with a horn like Elias', it's probably

impossible to just slip past. But we're here now.

This time, I'm not letting the fucker go.

I slam through the entrance, my coils shattering the doorframe as Elias spins, the massive unicorn pointing his horn directly at me. He charges, aiming for my chest. I dodge easily as Amand strikes, his fangs sinking into Elias's flank. The unicorn screeches as I wrap my coils around his legs and pin him down, careful to strangle his movement so that he can't strike me like before.

Elias slashes around anyway, Amand sinking his teeth into the poor bastard, the venom already working its magic. I add my own bite to the mix, watching as the unicorn's movements turn sluggish. He's not done, though, aiming his horn at Amand's scales.

I see red.

My protective rage takes over, and I slam my full weight into him, knocking him fully to the ground. My fangs sink into his neck, venom flooding his system, his strangled cry echoing through the room. I want to end him, to tear him apart for touching Lev, but Amand's hiss pulls me back.

Not yet, his eyes say, and I know he's right. We need Elias alive, at least until we get answers. My gaze runs around the room to find Lev pressed back against the wall, fear running through his expression. He's unscathed and alive, just terrified. I release Elias as soon as I feel him go limp before shifting back. Then I rush over to Lev and scoop him up against my chest.

"Thank fuck, you're okay."

He chuckles against me, a strained sound that has my heart in two. "Yeah, but Elias is

fucked in the head. He wants to frame Silas and then take me as his win.”

“We heard, Lev. Everything. Gerald’s team should be here in a few minutes.”

Lev pulls back and looks over at Elias before focusing on Amand. “About him. I don’t trust him. All of this was just a little too easy. Elias has got this place laced in ginger and he somehow knows about Chameleons. Not to mention the fact that Gerald always seems to be one step ahead of us.”

I nearly say something when Jace and another shifter from Essence piles in. Their eyebrows rise clean off their head as they stare. “Damn,” Jace whistles. “Gerald said you guys were good but I had no idea. Leave some fun for the rest of us next time.” The other shifter bends down to check Elias’ pulse, the unicorn shifting back to his human form. “He still alive?” Jace asks.

I nod. “Barely. But I’m going to let you guys handle it. I’m taking Lev home.” No one pushes back which is just as well but we’re barely two steps out of the stable when we hear ‘fuck’. I twist around, Lev pressed against my side as the sound of splintering wood and galloping hits my ears. There’s no fucking way that unicorn is still moving.

Jace bursts out of the front, yelling at us to go home as his partner shouts something into a phone about them tracking the unicorn east.

Lev growls. “See what I mean? Like how the fuck did Elias even get up?”

I’ve had my suspicions before but it was one of those things I thought I was reading into. Now? I definitely think we’re caught in some kind of experiment and Lev is the guinea pig.

Chapter 13

LEVIATHAN

My body feels like it's been through a meat grinder, the stable's musty stench still clinging to my clothes, and my wrists burn from the ropes Elias used to tie me up. My Chameleon magic is quiet for once, too exhausted to glitch, but my mind's a chaotic mess. Elias got away somehow, wounded but alive, and the thought of him out there makes my stomach churn.

And now, Rowan and Amand are hovering. I'm torn between soaking up their comfort and pushing them away before I get them killed.

Rowan kneels in front of me as he dabs a wet cloth on my wrists, cleaning the raw skin. Amand's beside me, his sea-glass eyes soft but watchful, his hand resting on my thigh like he's afraid I'll disappear all over again. I want to cling to that bit of ginger so I don't but I also want nothing to do with that bullshit for now.

"Lev, you need to eat," Amand says as he heads toward the kitchen. He reappears a few minutes later holding a plate of pizza, the smell making my stomach growl despite my nausea. "You're shaking."

"I'm fine," I mutter, pulling my hands away from Rowan. My voice is sharper than I mean, and I wince, hating how raw I feel. "Just... need a minute."

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Rowan's jaw tightens, but he doesn't push, setting the cloth aside. "You're not fine. You were kidnapped by a psycho who wants to make you his trophy. And this is thesecondtime you've been taken in so many weeks. Talk to us."

A laugh tumbles from my lips as I stand up and start pacing. My legs are shaky, but moving feels better than sitting still. "Talk? What's there to say? Elias is still out there, probably plotting to skewer someone again, and it's my fault. I trusted Silas, and now you're both in danger because of me."

Amand's hand drops the pizza plate onto the coffee table with a clatter, and he stands, his eyes narrowing. "Your fault? Lev, that's bullshit. Elias is a nutcase, and Silas is a manipulative prick. You didn't make them do this."

I shake my head, my magic tingling like it wants to fade me into the wall. "You don't get it. I should've seen it coming. Silas was always trouble, and I let him charm me, let him tell Elias about me. If I'd been smarter, those shifters wouldn't be dead, and you wouldn't be bleeding."

Rowan's on his feet now, his growl vibrating through the bond. "Enough, Lev. You're not responsible for their choices. Hell, you didn't even know Elias existed a few days ago. And we're not bleeding because of you—we're bleeding because we'd do anything to keep you safe."

I stop pacing and face them both. "That's the problem!" I snap. "I thought all this mate stuff was bullshit, that it was just biology, that maybe it'd go away at some point. And then when that didn't happen, I started to like you. Likereallylike you. Maybeit's way too soon but I can't lose you. Either of you. Elias is after me, I'll

never forgive myself.”

Amand’s expression hardens as he steps closer, his hand gripping my shoulder. “Lev, we’re your mates. We’re here to love you, protect you, and to work together.”

I pull back, my magic flaring, and I fade, my body blending into the concrete wall behind me. I curse under my breath, focusing to reappear. “I’m a Chameleon, not adamsel. I don’t need to be protected.” I say, trying to lighten the mood, but it falls flat, especially after the fact that they did just rescue me.

Amand rolls his eyes. “Sure, princess,” he muses. “But you’re not going after Elias without us. That’s non-negotiable.”

“You don’t get to decide that. This is my mess, Amand. I need to fix it.”

Rowan’s growl is louder now, and he grabs my arms, pinning me against the wall. “Your mess is our mess, Lev. You think we’d let you face that bastard alone? You think we could live with ourselves if something happened to you?”

I struggle against his grip, but he’s too strong. It takes me a few minutes but I finally give in, tilting my head up to meet his gaze. “Fine, but after that we’re investigating Gerald. If you really want to protect me, that’s what’s next. Something is off about all of this.”

Rowan hums as he leans down to steal a kiss, Amand not waiting long before pulling up to my side, his lips on my neck. I relax further against them, taking in their warmth and their magic, grunting when Rowan starts stroking me through my pants.

“What are you doing?” I push out between kisses.

“You’re not you when you’re horny,” he murmurs against my lips, picking up his

pace.

Jesus Christ, I'm mated to a bunch of corny snakes.

Chapter 14

LEVIATHAN

Another whole day and no answers from Essence PI regarding Elias' whereabouts. When I asked Gerald last night what happened and how Elias could have possibly known about the ginger, his answer was cryptic at best. Something about how ginger grows in that part of the forest.

I really hoped meeting someone like me would give me meaning but it's really just starting to piss me off. Which is why I'm at the condo rather than in the office I've been given, poring over papers and trying to make sense of what Elias said to me.

My phone buzzes, Rowan grabbing it from the kitchen table and chucking it at me.

Silas: I've been tracking Elias. Found something. Meet me at the diner, midnight.

As much as I don't want to do this, it might be the only thing we have. I tell my mates, Rowan shaking his head. "Lev, this screams trap," Rowan growls, stopping to glare at my phone. "Silas already led you into one ambush. Why the hell would you trust him now?"

I sigh, running a hand through my unruly curls. "I don't trust him. But he's not the killer, Rowan. Elias is. And if Silas knows where he's hiding, we need to hear him out. I'm not saying to give him another chance but maybe he's feeling enough guilt to help us end this."

Amand's jaw tightens, his hand gripping the counter. "Hear him out? He's been playing you since the nightclub. That notebook, the sob story about Elias—how do you know he's not setting you up again?"

"I don't," I admit. "But we're out of leads and I can't trust Gerald to truly help us without one of us getting hurt. Elias is wounded, but he's still out there, and he's coming for me. If Silas has something, I have to take the risk."

Rowan's growl vibrates through the bond, and he stalks over, looming over me. "You're not going alone. That's non-negotiable."

I roll my eyes, but my heart does a stupid flip at his protectiveness. "I wasn't planning to, snake boy. You and Amand are coming, whether Silas likes it or not."

Amand's lips twitch. "Good. Because if he tries anything, I'm sinking my fangs into him again. And this time, it'll be fatal."

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I head toward the back of the diner, confused when my gaze falls on Silas. He looks worse than last time—hair mussed, eyes shadowed, his tailored suit replaced by a wrinkled jacket. “Lev,” Silas says, his voice low. “Thanks for coming. I know you don’t trust me.”

“Understatement of the century,” I mutter, crossing my arms. “What’s this lead, Silas? And don’t waste my time.”

He leans forward, his hands clasped on the table. “Elias is holed up in a hidden enclave in the forest preserve, near the old oak grove. I’ve been tracking him since he took you the other night.”

Knowing Silas figured out I was taken and didn’t do anything about it just pisses me off. He’s definitely on my shit list, still. “What’s in it for you?”

Silas hesitates, his eyes flicking to Rowan and Amand. “I want Elias stopped. He’s my brother, but he’s gone too far. And... I owe you, Lev. For college, for everything.”

I scoff, the old hurt bubbling up. “You owe me? That’s rich. Elias stepped in and told me I was nothing, pretending to be you and you never came back to right that wrong. And now your twin’s killing because of me. Spare me the guilt trip.”

Silas flinches, his expression pained. “I know I fucked up. But this is real. The enclave’s dangerous, but you’re the only one who can get close. Your Chameleon magic—it’s perfect for infiltration. I... uh studied it a little bit and it looks like it might work if the legends are true.”

“Fine,” I say, standing. “Give me the coordinates. We’ll check it out.” It could be another trap but I’m going to call a different kind of backup this time. Shifters I’ve worked with personally, which have no ties to Gerald and Essence PI.

Silas slides a folded paper across the table, his fingers lingering. “Be careful, Lev. Elias... he’s not himself anymore.”

I pocket the paper, ignoring his touch. “Yeah, well, neither am I. Stay out of my way, Silas.” He has the decency to look hurt as we head back outside, driving in silence to the edge of the preserve.

Few words are said as we move through the underbrush, careful to stay quiet until we reach what is supposedly the enclave. It feels like we’ve been walking for hours but it’s barely been thirty minutes. After tonight, I demand that the police start clearing out the forest because this is the second case I’ve dealt with deep in the trees, with people believing they don’t have to follow the law.

We slip through the enclave’s barrier with ease—mostly because I assume no one is coming out here by accident. And that’s when I catch the god awful setup of every stereotypical unicorn thing laid out in front of me. Horns, stars, and glittery bullshit are plastered everywhere. I mutter under my breath, “Unicorns need a new interior designer,” and feel Amand’s silent chuckle right behind me.

Unicorn magic coats this entire place, shifters moving through the camp, their eyes glazed, chanting about purity and power. It’s creepy as hell, and I’m hyper-aware of Rowan and Amand’s tension, their beasts ready to strike.

We duck behind a tent, and I peer through a gap, spotting a central altar draped in white cloth, a unicorn horn gleaming on it. I’m about to signal the guys when a hand grazes my back, and I nearly jump. It’s Rowan, his human form pressed close, his hand slipping beneath my shirt to rest on my bare skin.

“You got this, Lev,” he whispers against my ear. “We’re right here.”

Chapter 15

LEVIATHAN

I take a deep breath and focus on my magic, Gerald’s training about to get a real test. I’m going to mimic a unicorn shifter to infiltrate their inner circle. It’s a risky move, but my scent-shifting and appearance-mimicking skills are my best shot at getting close without being spotted.

I close my eyes, picturing the unicorn form I saw Elias take in the stable: shimmering white coat, a single glowing horn, eyes wild with power. My magic surges as my body begins to shift, my skin prickling as it takes on a pearlescent sheen, my hair lengthening into a silvery mane, a horn sprouting from my forehead. It’s awkward, like wearing a costume two sizes too big, and when I try to move, my legs wobble, unused to the equine grace.

Both of my mates slap a hand over their mouths to hide their smiles as I step out from behind the tent, trying to “prance” like I’ve seen in old shifter lore, but it’s more of a stumble. A wiry shifter with a unicorn tattoo on his neck eyes me suspiciously. “Are you drunk?”

I force a laugh, my voice deeper in this form. “Just... new to this,” I say, hoping my fake unicorn scent holds. The shifter narrows his eyes but shrugs, gesturing for me to join the circle around the altar. I had absolutely no idea I could speak in this form so yay me, I guess.

I fall into step, my heart racing as I scan for Rowan and Amand. They’re still behind that one tent and as I draw closer to the altar, I catch a whiff of nearly ancient magic. It feels like it means more than just something to worship, as if it’s what Elias has

been using to strengthen his killings. If I can steal it, we might have leverage to stop him.

The chanting grows louder, Elias moving toward the altar, his black suit stark against the rainbow colors worn by the shifters. He's mumbling about something, about cleansing the city of "impure" shifters, making me feel sick. This isn't just a killing spree—it's a crusade, and I'm the prize he's after, thanks to Silas's stories about me.

I edge closer to the altar, my unicorn form feeling more natural now, though I'm still clumsy. I'm not sure how long I stand there, in the midst of other shifters—some in human forms and others not but before I know it, the sky is nearing toward dawn. What the fuck? I move closer, terrified when I catch a glimpse of my mates tied up toward the back.

I hadn't even felt anything through the bond, something about this place taking away some of my senses. A shifter bumps into me, willing me to shift. I have to act quick, focusing on someone I know to make the transformation easier. Fuck becoming my mates. Gerald is a heck no and Lily... So, Marcus it is... I tell myself, focusing on Marcus' form. It's awkward and hurts like hell cramming into his form but I take the cup, pretending to sip it to keep off suspicion. A woman beside me gently squeezes my arms, a wide smile on her face. "The cleansing begins tonight. Elias will lead us, with the Chameleon at his side."

I nod, my stomach twisting. "Yeah, sounds... epic," I say, keeping my voice light. I'm close to the altar now, the horn within reach, but Elias's eyes lock onto me, and I freeze. My magic flickers beneath his gaze and I force myself to focus.

"You," he says, his voice cutting through the chant. "Step forward."

I swallow, my heart pounding, and step up, trying to channel unicorn arrogance. "What's up?" I say, hoping my fake scent holds. "Ready to serve the cause."

However, I have only ever met one unicorn and well, he's kind of crazy.

His lips curl up into a deviant smile, but there's suspicion in his eyes. "You smell... familiar," he says, stepping closer. My magic strains, and I know I'm seconds from being exposed. I need a distraction, and I need it now.

I stumble and shift back into my unicorn form, deliberately tripping over my own hooves, and crash into the altar, knocking the chalice over. Everyone gasps, Elias snarling at my display, but I grab the horn, and tuck it under my mane as I fade, my Chameleon magic kicking in. The camp erupts in chaos, everyone shouting as I bolt toward Rowan and Amand, my unicorn form dissolving as I run.

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“Lev!” Rowan’s voice is a growl, his eyes slitted as I reach them. I use the horn to slice through their ropes, hoping and praying that it’s enough.

“Had no idea I was there that long. Let’s get out of here!”

We sprint for the trees, the horn heavy against my chest, but Elias’s roar stops us. I can hear his uneven hooves against the forest floor, the wounds my mates dealt still present. “You can’t take that!” he bellows, charging toward us.

I start moving again. We can’t afford him catching us.

Chapter 16

ROWAN

We’re nearing the clearing where our car’s parked when a crack splits the night, and Elias’s scent hits me in the face. He’s here. I hiss, my coils tightening around Lev, and Amand’s fangs flash, ready for a fight. Lev’s magic flickers, his body fading slightly, and I feel his tension through the bond. “Rowan,” he whispers, his voice shaky but defiant, “he’s coming.”

“Let him,” I growl, my voice a deep rumble in my shifted form. I set Lev down, my coils forming a protective barrier, and Amand moves to his other side, our bodies a wall of scales and venom. Lev’s clutching the horn, his green eyes wide, and I know he’s planning something reckless. Our mate’s too damn brave for his own good.

Elias bursts from the trees, his eyes are wild and locked on Lev. My beast surges,

rage blinding me. He charges, his horn aimed for Lev's chest, but Lev's magic kicks in, shifting his scent to something sharp and unfamiliar—not his own, not Silas's, but a confusing mix that throws Elias off. The unicorn stumbles, his horn grazing a tree, and I seize the chance, slamming my coils into his side.

Amand strikes from the other side, his fangs tearing into Elias's shoulder, the both of us a synchronized storm, our years of partnership honed to a deadly edge. Lev's fading in and out, dodging Elias's wild swings, his magic keeping him just out of reach. I'm proud as hell, but I'm also terrified—one wrong move, and that horn could end him.

“Lev, stay back!” I hiss, my voice garbled in my shifted form. Elias bucks, his horn slashing my side as pain sears through me. I tighten my coils, refusing to let go, and Amand's venom slows Elias down, his movements sluggish.

We're not stupid enough to let go this time. I need to see him actually transported back to Essence before I can relax.

Headlights flash through the trees, and I catch the scent of magic as the car skids to a stop, Lily and Jace jumping out to help. Jace immediately shifts into his wolf, flanked by two other operatives. They charge into the fray, but my focus is on Elias, who's still fighting, his horn aimed at Lev again.

Lev fades, his body blending into the underbrush, and the horn misses, splintering a tree. “Missed me, asshole!” he yells, reappearing behind a boulder, a defiant grin on his lips. I'd kiss him if I wasn't busy trying to crush Elias's ribs.

Lily reaches the clearing, her eyes locking on the horn in Lev's hands. “Give it to me!” she shouts, and Lev tosses it, his aim perfect despite his shaking hands. Lily catches it, chanting a spell, and the horn pulses, light flaring off of it. Elias screams, his own magic faltering as the artifact's power disrupts his enchantments. His horn

dims, his form wavering, and I seize the chance, slamming him to the ground.

Amand's coils wrap around Elias's legs and pins him to the ground, Jace's wolf clawing into the unicorn's side. The unicorn further weakens, blood pooling beneath him, but his eyes burn with hatred, locked on Lev. "You're mine," he rasps, his voice slurred but venomous. "If I die, you all die."

I freeze, my coils loosening slightly. "What the fuck does that mean?" I growl, shifting back to human form, my side bleeding but ignored. Amand shifts too, his eyes blazing, and we haul Elias up, his body limp but his smirk chilling.

"A bomb," he says, coughing blood. "Hidden in the city. Shifters, humans—it'll wipe them out if I don't make it back. Kill me, and you're all dead."

My blood runs cold, and I glance at Lev, clutching the boulder for support. "He's bluffing," he says, but his voice shakes, and I know he's not sure.

Lily steps forward, the horn still glowing in her hands. "He's not. I can feel it—dark magic, tied to his life force. If we kill him, it triggers the bomb and it'll go off."

I snarl, my hand tightening on Elias's throat. "Where's the bomb, you bastard?"

He laughs, weak but defiant. "You'll never find it in time."

Jace's growl vibrates through the clearing, but Lev's voice cuts through. "We'll find it," he says, stepping forward. "However, you're done, Elias. Bomb or no bomb. Fucking hell, I didn't think I had crazy exes."

I want to end him, to sink my fangs into his neck and watch him bleed out, but Lily's right—we can't risk it. Amand's hand grips my arm and I nod, stepping back. Jace's team moves in, binding Elias with enchanted cuffs that nullify his magic, and Lily

tucks the horn into a satchel, her expression grim.

Lev moves toward us and I eagerly pull him against me, my arms wrapping around him. Amand's lips find Lev's, a fierce kiss that's all teeth and venom, their magic intertwining, drawing out one of those delicious sounds Lev makes. I join in, my lips brushing Lev's neck, murmuring, "Our brave mate."

Their kiss is raw and desperate, a reminder that we're together and alive. Lev's hands fist my shirt, Amand's gripping his hips, and for a moment, the chaos fades, the bond anchoring us.

Lily clears her throat, breaking the moment. "As much as I hate to interrupt," she smirks, "we've got a bomb to find."

Lev pulls back, his cheeks flushed, his eyes dazed. "Right," he says, his voice hoarse. "Let's get this asshole to Essence and figure out his failsafe."

I nod, my hand lingering on Lev's waist. "You did good. Saved our asses back there."

He grins, weak but real. "Yeah, well, someone's gotta keep you snakes in line."

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Amand chuckles, his arm around Lev's shoulders. "Let's go, princess."

Chapter 17

LEVIATHAN

I'm hunched over a glowing holographic map in Essence PI's command center, my eyes burning from staring at the blinking dots that mark potential bomb locations across the city.

Elias is cuffed in a holding cell downstairs, but his parting shot about a bomb set to wipe out shifters and humans alike has us all on edge. The command center is a chaos of controlled panic. Gerald is barking orders at a team of operatives, his forked tongue flicking with agitation. Lily is hunched over a tablet, muttering spells to trace Elias's magic. Jace is coordinating with Marcus, who's typing furiously on a glowing keyboard.

The stolen unicorn horn sits on a table nearby, its enchanted light dimmed but still pulsing, a reminder of the chaos we just escaped. I'm supposed to be the key to finding this bomb, but all I can think about is how my past with Silas led us here.

"Lev, focus," Rowan mutters. His hand rests on my thigh under the table, his touch warm through my jeans, and I lean into it, craving the touch.

"I'm trying," I shoot back at him, rubbing my temples. "But unicorns and their dramatic flair? A bomb? Really? Overkill much?" I force a laugh, hoping the humor hides how freaked out I am, but Rowan's not buying it.

Amand's gaze meets mine from my other side, his hand brushing my shoulder. "You're doing fine, Lev," he says, his voice softer than usual. "Your nose is our best shot. Just breathe."

I nod, closing my eyes and letting my magic flare. I focus on the map, the city grid glowing in shades of blue and red, and inhale deeply, sifting through the magical signatures in the air. I catch all of the employees' scents, Gerald's, and even my mates' but there's another one, fainter but definitely there. It's Elias's signature, but it's mixed with something familiar—Silas's scent.

My eyes snap open, my heart trying to leap out of my chest. "Fuck. It's Silas. Lily said that the bomb is infused with blood magic but the reason we can't find it is because we're using Elias as the base to find the spells. It has to be that it's linked to Silas."

Gerald's head whips around, his eyes narrowing at me. He looks both intrigued and amused... which is odd. "Silas? Your ex? Explain."

I swallow, the guilt clawing at me. "Elias said the bomb's linked to his life force, right? But the magical signature I'm picking up—it's got Silas's scent all over it. They're twins, their magic's linked, but this feels deliberate. Silas must've helped set it up."

Lily curses, her fingers pausing on the tablet. "That explains why the spell's so complex. Blood magic's tricky—ties the trigger to both of them. If Elias dies, it goes off, but Silas's blood is the anchor."

I lean back, my head spinning. "Fuck," I whisper. "I trusted him, and he's been playing me this whole time. The notebook, the enclave—he's been using me to get to Elias, but he's in on the bomb, too."

Rowan's hand squeezes my thigh, his voice a low growl. "This isn't your fault, Lev. Silas is a manipulative bastard. You couldn't have known."

I shake my head, my throat tight. "I should've. I let him charm me in college, let him get in my head. Now people could die because I was too stupid to see it."

Amand's hand slides to my neck, his thumb brushing over my pulse. "Stop, Lev," he purrs. "You're not stupid. You're the one who got us the horn, who got Elias in cuffs. You're saving people, not hurting them."

I want to argue, to let the guilt swallow me, but their warmth brings me back to reality. "Right, yeah. Let's find this bomb."

I focus again, my nose sifting through the magical signatures. The unicorn's scent is stronger now, like a beacon, and I trace it on the map, my finger landing on a blinking dot in the city's east side. "There. Abandoned shifter community center, near the old warehouse district. That's where it's hidden."

Gerald nods, already relaying coordinates to Jace. "Good work, Leviathan. I'm going to assume Silas is there as well."

Lily sighs, falling back into her seat. "With the location, I should be able to disarm the magic surrounding the bomb. Then it's just a regular old piece of shit. As long as you get whatever he's using to detonate it, then he won't be able to make anything go off."

Gerald stands and moves toward the door. "Great. We move now. Lily, prep the horn and let us know when it's disarmed. Rowan, Amand, you're with Lev. No heroics."

I manage a weak grin. "No heroics? You're talking to the wrong Chameleon."

Lily snorts, tucking the horn into a satchel. “Keep that snark, Lev. You’re gonna need it.”

We pile into SUVs, the city blurring past as we speed toward the old community center. Rowan and Amand stay close, their bodies bracketing me in the back seat, their hands never far.

Chapter 18

LEVIATHAN

“Lev, you sure he’s in there?” Rowan asks, his brown eyes scanning the warehouse’s boarded windows. His hand brushes my back, a grounding touch that keeps my magic from fading me into the graffiti-covered wall.

“Yeah,” I say, my nose twitching as I catch Silas’s scent. “He’s close. And he’s nervous.”

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Amand steps up on my other side, resting his hand on my shoulder. “Good. He should be. After this, he’s done.”

I nod, but my stomach twists. Silas’s betrayal hurts more than I want to admit. He was my first love, the guy who made me feel alive before all this shit happened, leaving me to pick up the pieces. Now he’s tied to a bomb that could kill half the city, and I’m the idiot who let him back into my life. I shove the guilt down, focusing on the task. “Let’s move.”

Gerald’s with us, his Chameleon scent blending with mine as he signals for Essence PI’s backup to surround the building. I still don’t trust the fucker but that’s an issue for another time. Lily’s back at the community center, working to disarm the bomb with the stolen unicorn horn, while Jace’s team has Elias cuffed at headquarters. This is our shot to end Silas’s game, but I’m not naive enough to think it’ll be easy.

The door creaks as I push it open, my magic fading me into the shadows. The warehouse is a maze of crates and rusted machinery, the air thick with dust and Silas’s scent. I follow it, Rowan and Amand close behind, my mates ready to shift if things go south. My nose leads us to a back room, where Silas is hunched over a table, a burner phone in his hand. He’s muttering into the earpiece, and I catch the faint metallic tang of unicorn magic—Elias’s influence, bleeding through their twin bond.

I step into the light, my magic snapping me visible. “Silas, game’s over.”

He spins toward me, the panic in his eyes making an appearance before he masks it with that charming smile I used to fall for. “Lev,” he says, his voice smooth despite

the tremor. “I knew you’d find me. You’re too smart for your own good.”

“Flattery won’t help you,” I snap, stepping closer. “You planted the bomb, didn’t you? To frame Elias, to get rid of him and play the hero. What was the plan, Silas? Win me back with a fucking explosion?”

He laughs and raises his hands. “You’ve got it wrong, Lev. I was trying to stop Elias. He’s the killer, not me.”

I shake my head, my magic flaring as I sift through his scent. “Bullshit. Your blood’s the anchor for the bomb. You set it up, hoping Elias would take the fall. You’re the worst ex ever, Silas. A bomb? Really? Try flowers next time.”

Gerald steps forward, taking over the moment, “You’re done, Silas. Tell us how to disarm it, or you’re going down with your brother.”

Silas’s smile falters, and he backs up, his hands shaking. “You don’t understand. Elias was going to ruin everything. I had to stop him, had to make him pay. The bomb was insurance—if he didn’t back off, I’d take him out and save the city. I’d be the hero, Lev. For you.”

I stare at him, my heart twisting. “For me? You used me, Silas. You told Elias about me, got him obsessed, and now you’re playing savior? You’re pathetic.”

His face crumples, and for a moment, I see the guy I loved in college—charming, flawed, human. But it’s gone as fast as it came, replaced by desperation. He lunges for the phone, probably to trigger the bomb, but I’m faster. My magic flares, fading me into the shadows, and I tackle him, pinning him to the floor. He struggles but Gerald’s there, his own Chameleon magic blending with mine as we cuff him with enchanted restraints.

“You’re done,” I say, my voice shaking with anger. “You don’t get to hurt anyone else.”

Silas glares up at me, his eyes burning. “You’ll regret this, Lev. You think you’re safe with them? They’ll die for you, and you’ll be alone again.”

Rowan’s growl vibrates through the bond, and he steps forward. “Keep talking, asshole. See how fast I rip you apart.”

My phone buzzes, and I check it—Lily’s text: Bomb disarmed. Horn worked. Get Silas to HQ. Relief floods me, but it’s tinged with guilt. Silas’s betrayal cuts deep, a reminder that I let him in, let him manipulate me. If I’d been smarter, none of this would’ve happened. I also just hate how easy this all is. There’s no fucking way this is over like that.

We head to Essence PI, Silas cuffed in the back of an SUV, his silence deafening. The command center is quieter now, the bomb threat is neutralized, but Elias’ shifters are still a problem, its remnants scattered across the city. I’m exhausted, my body aching, but the weight of Silas’s words lingers. You’ll be alone again. I know he’s wrong, but the fear is there.

I twist around to stare at the car Silas is in, Gerald and his other employees making sure to keep Silas contained. We now have more problems than we started with. Shifters to track down and a boss to investigate. At least I have my mates, right?

Amand strings an arm around my side and tugs me against him, Rowan meeting my gaze through the rearview mirror. “We’re not going anywhere, Lev. Alright? And we’ll figure all this out. For now, let’s just be happy that we stopped the bomb. Yeah?”

I nod, tilting my head up for a kiss that Amand gladly gives. I might not be able to

save everyone but knowing that Silas and Elias are no longer on the street provides me some solace. “Great, when we get home, can we fuck?”

There’s a bout of silence and then laughter as Rowan makes a sharp left turn. “Yeah, we can debrief everyone later.”

Chapter 19

LEVIATHAN

Three weeks after the unicorn case, I feel like I’ve finally found my place. Especially since Gerald gave me an office and allowed me to use paper. He calls it barbaric with all of the stacks littered around my space but I call it home.

He even let me bring in my coffee pot which is absolutely falling apart. My magic keeps it running, my mates sitting on just the other side of the glass wall, both of them looking up every so often into my space. Granted, they spend more time sprawled across the couch I requested in here rather than at their manicured desks like everyone else.

Am I the favorite child? Probably.

Am I going to milk the fuck out of it? Why yes, yes I am.

The general hum of typing and beeps from all the gadgets suddenly goes quiet, my entire body on alert. I head toward the entrance of my office and peek my head out, confused as everyone is doing the same. And then in the next second, they scurry back into their private spaces, only Gerald slowly approaching my office.

I swallow nervously as I meet the culprit of the disturbance. A woman strides in through the hallway, her hair a writhing mass of snakes that hiss softly, their eyes

glinting like jewels. She's tall, draped in a flowing black dress that shimmers with subtle magic, her piercing gaze directly focused on me. And when her eyes meet mine, I feel the full brunt of her aura, a shudder running down my spine.

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My jaw drops, because holy shit, that's Medusa—or some facsimile of her. My Chameleon magic tingles, but I don't fade, my curiosity overriding my instinct to hide or at the very least bow my fucking head. I twist around to see my mates standing just behind me but their gazes are downcast.

“What the hell?” I mutter before turning to look back at the woman. There's a spark of amusement in her green eyes as she stops a few feet away from me, her lips curving into a smirk.

“Well, well,” she purrs, her voice smooth as silk. “It's been a damn long time since I've had someone look me in the eye so confidently. You're something special, aren't you?”

I blink, my brain catching up. “Uh, thanks?” I say, my voice higher than I'd like. “Just... doing my thing. You're Medusa, right?” Which wouldn't be a problem except for the fact that if she is, I should be turning to stone. I should already be stone, and yet, I'm standing here, staring at her.

She laughs, a rich sound that makes the snakes sway. “The one and only. And you must be Leviathan Dubois, the Chameleon who's been stirring up trouble. I've heard a lot about you.”

Gerald grins as he throws out a hand to greet the woman. She firmly shakes it, her gaze never leaving mine. “Leviathan, meet Medusa. She's a client. And an old... friend.”

I raise an eyebrow, glancing between them. “Friend? You're telling me you

dated Medusa? Aren't you like, really old, Gerald?"

Medusa's smirk widens. "So am I, darling. Snake venom keeps me young."

"Okay, that's... a lot. So, what's the deal? Why's everyone acting like you're gonna turn us to stone? Because obviously, that's not the case. Right?"

Gerald sighs, rubbing his temples. "Because she can, Lev. Medusa's magic comes with perks—turning people to stone being one of them. However, we are immune for some reason. You'll still feel her magic but you aren't affected by it."

It makes sense why Medusa would date Gerald now. I probably would do the same if I found the one person in the whole world who wouldn't turn to stone if they looked at me.

Medusa clears her throat and leans forward, her dress shifting to reveal a patch of her hair where one snake is missing, the stump jagged like it was chopped off. "My latest boyfriend," she grimaces. "Decidedly chopped off one of my snakes and ran. A fucking gargoyle of all things. I need you to track him down."

I stare, my brain struggling to process. "A gargoyle? Stole your... snake hair? Great, so I'm fighting a stone monster now? What am I watching out for, flying boulders?"

Medusa chuckles, her snakes hissing in unison. "Something like that. But it's worse. That snake carries my magic. There are very few individuals who can wield it, a gargoyle being one of them. I had no idea he'd be able to keep the fucking snake alive, though."

Gerald doesn't say anything, as if he's trying to stay out of it. Or maybe he already knew she was going to stop by. Which would be reckless as fuck seeing as not everyone else in this office is immune to her snakes. "Okay, that's a new one. And I'm guessing you couldn't just turn him to stone because he's basically already

that.”

Her eyes narrow, but there’s a glint of humor. “Yes. I was already a bit... distracted. It seems that gargoyles have quite the set of...”

I hold up my hand and shake my head. “Distracted, huh? No details, please.” I raise an eyebrow, catching Gerald’s grimace. “Wonderful, where do we start?” I look around to see Lily, Jace, and Marcus scarce. There’s a few other employees in the building but none of them seem to be present. I twist to look at Gerald. “Want to clue me in on what’s going on?”

“Leviathan, the last case was a trial to see where you would fit best. You’ve run your PI business for years, so none of this is new. Your expertise is invaluable but there’s also a few cases that would be best suited for you and others that are best suited for my witch, wolf, and mage. Everyone works where they are best needed. Which means, Medusa is all yours.”

There’s something in the undercurrent of his words but I don’t press it. “Yeah, sure. I’m on it.”

Medusa grins. “He’s hanging out in the quarry district, over in the next city but he won’t be there for long. Especially once he actually figures out how to use my hair.”

“Okay, but like, you’re not distracted now. Why not just go get it?”

“Because turning things to stone is my magical signature, not strength in any capacity. I fight at a distance and what good is that magic when a creature is already stone himself?” A flicker of uncertainty runs through her expression, her shoulders sagging in defeat.

Something feels off about all of this but I decide not to press it. “Yeah, we’ll head over there and figure out what we can.” I force a smile and move to slip back into my

office just as I hear Medusa ask Gerald on a date. Waiting until the door is closed, I then face my mates. “Something’s weird, right?”

Rowan hums. “You mean like how it seems Gerald is trying to figure out how far your magic extends? No, no, nothing is weird, Lev. Nothing at all.”

I can only nervously laugh and hope that Gerald’s interest in me isn’t part of some twisted experiment.