



Juno (Portal Matchmaking #1)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Juno:

My home world is losing its magic and I'm one of the few lucky ones to travel through portals, searching for another world we can relocate to if needed. When we find a world that's a perfect match, the only difference is that theirs holds no magic. I travel through with my closest friends and find more than I ever planned for.

My mate.

Attraction and all other feelings that were once alien to me rush through my body, all because of my mate, but before I can even greet him properly, he turns around and runs for his life.

Now I'm left standing in the hallway, wondering what I've done wrong.

I know I'll win him over though. We're meant to be.

And somehow, I know he's the key to saving my world. And me.

Remi:

I thought I knew who I was, but when my eyes connect with his everything changes. Attraction, lust, want, butterflies—he makes me feel it all. I thought I was ace, something my girlfriend initially accepted but clearly wasn't happy with in the end. But this stranger proves just how little I know about myself.

I know I shouldn't have run, but how else was I supposed to stop myself from jumping him on sight? What happens next, I don't know but the mysterious stranger consumes my every thought.

Portal Matchmaking is an MM fantasy romance with fated mates and magic. A college setting with portals and so many butterflies and swoon worthy moments await, so get ready! HEA guaranteed.

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Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 8:03 am

Chapter One

Juno

I woke up feeling giddier than usual. The new portal Astro had located yesterday showed more promise than the fifty or so portals before. We might finally get to explore a new world! I all but ran out of my tiny house and down the street towards the palace. Our rulers didn't live there, it was simply their place of work, and I should know, my father being one of the five rulers.

I hadn't dressed up for the occasion, having donned my usual clothes. I didn't want to seem too eager and somehow jinx us. Our magic was dying out and finding a new world was our biggest priority, so I didn't want to be the reason anything went wrong today.

Astro was our portal seeker. Using his magic he opened tiny portals and by touching them, he could search for living beings, intellect, and if the world would be habitable for us. This one was the first one with all three things.

I was one of the lucky few who got to enter portals, this being the first we would all enter through, though. My dad hadn't been too excited about me risking my life in another world, but I felt like there wasn't much left for me here. Not that I used that as my explanation, no, that would only hurt my father's feelings if I did. No, I simply told him I needed to experience things for myself and this was something I felt passionate about. He didn't argue further, which actually surprised me. Maybe he did trust me just a little bit after all.

When the palace came into view, so did Charlotta. She was skipping along the pavement happily, clearly feeling the same giddiness as I was. She, like me, would enter the portal and explore the new world. I was the one who got her the job, wanting my best friend to experience it with me. I only needed to find Nix, our other bestie. He was on our team too, though so far nowhere to be found.

I ran up to Charlotta, bumping my shoulder against hers playfully. “This is so exciting!” I greeted her.

She matched my enthusiasm with a bright smile. “It truly is! Although, I’ve heard there is no magic in it.” No magic?

“Then why are we entering it? Wasn’t finding magic our goal?” It was the whole reason why they’d started opening portals in the first place. Our planet was turning duller in color, our plants not flourishing as they used to, our newborns born without much power.

She shrugged. “I believe they want a safe place for us to evacuate to if things turn.... Worse. Either way I’m still hopeful.” I didn’t know how to answer that, too stuck on the no magic part. “Do you think they’ll let us through today?” she asked when we’d been silent for a while.

I shrugged; it wasn’t always easy knowing what our rulers thought. “Astro found it yesterday and we’ve all been summoned. It seems like they want us through,” I finally replied. The fact was that our rulers were desperate. We had no idea how long our planet could sustain itself. Normally, whenever a baby was born, they would be placed on the ground somewhere and their magic would join our planet, fueling our world. It didn’t hurt the babies. It had been more of a ritual on our planet for as long as anyone could remember. But a year ago things suddenly started changing. Babies no longer glowed up and shared their magic. The planet didn’t get any offerings, since our babies were too weak to give any magic away.

“Juno! Charlotta! What’re you doing here so early?” Henriette, one of our rulers, called out from the palace doors. She was smiling knowingly at us, of course aware that we were too excited to wait.

“Sorry!” we yelled back in unison, both of us grinning like excited children, even though we were twenty-two.

She shook her head, but still had a smile on her face as we followed her inside to the portal room. Upon entering, it appeared we weren’t the only ones ready to burst with excitement. Everyone was in the room, even Nix, who was known for sleeping in.

“Juno!” my father’s voice carried through the room. I already knew his speech was coming.

“Oh, good morning, Dad,” I greeted him with a hug.

“Hi, son. Are you nervous?” he asked, looking me over for any hidden nerves.

I shook my head. “I’m just excited,” I assured him, still waiting on the speech.

“You do realize it can be dangerous,” he began. “We have no knowledge of their world or their beings.” I fought an eye roll.

“It’ll be fine, Dad. Remember I was trained for this. I want this.” He nodded, knowing from experience that I wouldn’t budge. I could just tell him my soul begged for me to leave our world, but he wouldn’t take kindly to that, so this was how it was going to be.

Astro clapped loudly, gaining everyone’s attention. I looked around and saw all the rulers had joined us in the room. They truly were invested in this. The fact that they were all present could only mean we were leaving today. I tried really hard not to let

my giddiness show, since this was supposed to be serious, but tell that to my heart, which was now beating so fast I was afraid to move.

“Now that I have everyone’s attention,” Astro spoke loudly. “We need room to open the portal, so everyone, move over to this wall,” he pointed to the wall behind me. “Once the portal is stable, you’ll go through.” I couldn’t contain my smile. I was leaving! “Only ten of you will go through it today and then return in eight hours to tell us your findings. You’ll use your slate to communicate with us throughout the day, and if all goes well, tomorrow all twenty of you will be leaving for a month.”

Only ten of us? My mood plummeted instantly. Would that mean I wasn’t going?

Before I could ask who would be travelling today, the other portal makers came forward, joining Astro as they began working on opening the portal together. We all huddled together to give them room to work and watched in silence as a huge bluish portal opened against the wall.

“It’s stable,” Astro exhaled with evident relief. “And from what I felt, there’s a lot of intelligent life there.”

“What wonderful news!” Trise, one of the rulers, gushed excitedly.

“Indeed!” My dad joined in, looking pleased. “Who travels through today?”

Astro shrugged. “Who volunteers to?” he asked, looking at all twenty of us. We all raised our hands, each of us desperate to explore this new world. The rulers and Astro laughed at our clear display of eagerness.

“Maybe we can let them all through?” Henriette asked with a smile. “Just five at a time, and we need you to confirm you’ve travelled there safely through your slates.” The other rulers nodded their agreement and proceeded to divide us into four groups.

I was in the group that would travel through the second time, with Nix beside me. Charlotta was in the group to go through last.

Astro clapped his hands before letting the first group through with some instructions. “Remember, observe how they look, speak and behave. Use glamour to fit in and keep us updated. Locate a school and places to live if you find the time. Ten of you will be attending school, and ten will be working. I’m sure they must have educational centers since they’re so highly intelligent, but if they don’t, you’ll all work.” We nodded, having heard this a million times before already. “There’s no magic,” Astro quickly added. “So, no public displays of magic. Use it only sparingly and do it without them noticing.”

The first group was let through, and three long minutes passed before the rulers’ slates dinged with messages alerting them that they had travelled through safely.

I stepped up to the portal, holding Nix’s hand in mine, squeezing it as we stepped through the blue smoke and travelled to the new world.

I couldn’t see anything at first, only smell this new wonderful world. Their trees were like ours but where our world now lacked the luster of colors, theirs was wonderfully vibrant. Blue skies, green trees, birds flying above us—that was what greeted us on the other side. It seemed like a copy of our world, which would make it easier to adapt if we needed to relocate in the future. I dutifully sent my dad a message on my slate, telling him we were all fine. Our slates were made of a combination of magic and technology. Their design was fitted around our wrists, and we could transform them into a bigger piece if we needed a computer to work on, always having our own personal one with us.

“This is amazing,” Nix said softly behind me. I gave him a side hug, grateful that we could share this moment together. Charlotta was yet to come through, so we all waited until the rest arrived safely. I looked around and I had to guess we were in a

forest, trees everywhere and no loud noises. It could take us a while to reach civilization, not that I minded. Every minute spent here felt like I could breathe easier, like I already belonged. I'd never felt this way before. Looking at Nix he seemed to share my fondness for this new world, grinning broadly as his gaze moved around. I could talk to him about it later, when we were back home, but for now I just wanted both of us to enjoy the moment.

Once everyone was through, Nolen, our portal leader, stepped forward. "We'll travel in pairs of two. Make sure you're always connected through your slates. We meet back here tonight. I'll just call the rulers to show them this world before we head out." We nodded silently as he called Trise, and projected the rulers in the air above his slate, showing us all a clear view of all five of them. My dad was the only one who sought anyone out, me, then after seeing I was alive and well, he looked around, taking in the trees and the vivid colors.

"Oh, it's gorgeous," Henriette gushed. She seemed almost enthralled as her gaze travelled around the area where we stood.

"It is. The air is fresh, and we find ourselves in some kind of forest," Nolen replied dutifully. "We'll pair off now and contact you when we're ready to return home." His mention of home made me realize I didn't want to leave, not already. I knew I would be back again tomorrow, but just thinking about leaving again so soon seemed wrong, somehow.

"Have fun, and be safe!" Trise told us before they ended the call.

Nolen clapped his hands excitedly, no longer the serious leader. "Let's go explore!"

An hour later, we finally reached the end of the forest, using our glamour to become invisible as we approached a road. The others had gone in different directions, all of us spread out. I had Nix as my partner and since we were so in tune with one another

we'd both turned invisible at the same time.

"Look," Nix said, likely pointing to the building with a restaurant sign out front. There was a parking space for cars, almost identical to our world. I couldn't see Nix, only hear and touch him, so I grabbed his wrist as we made our way over to the restaurant. On closer inspection it looked like a diner and honestly, so far this world was a copy of ours. The restaurant door slammed open and a woman carrying a child came through balancing her food and the child. We froze mid step as we looked her over. She was identical to us; the only difference was her bright colored clothes. We didn't wear anything bright or patterned where we came from, but her blue dress with flowers was really pretty.

It was a relief that they were human like us. We'd figured as much, our worlds being so similar, but it was still a relief.

As she passed, we neared the windows. Peeking in, we saw everyone looking human inside as well. We exhaled in relief. This would make our job here much easier. Two men exited from the same door the woman had, one wearing a black leather jacket and denim pants. I already knew what I wanted to wear. Letting my glamour do its thing I copied his clothes as my own, excited to see how I looked in a mirror. We were still invisible so I couldn't even show off to Nix.

"Let's head around the building and become visible there," Nix whispered and tugged me behind him. As soon as we were hidden from sight, we became visible.

"Nooo," I whined. "I was supposed to be the biker daddy!" Looking down at Nix's leather clad body, I was instantly jealous. I hadn't thought about adding leather pants too, instead mimicking the guy from before perfectly.

Nix grinned and made sunglasses appear too along with a few facial piercings that the other guy had too. I rolled my eyes but was once again filled with envy. Why hadn't I

thought of that?

“Should we go inside?” Nix asked as we stopped in front of the door.

“I don’t actually know,” I replied in a low voice, since we still didn’t know how they spoke. There was a risk that we would stand out. “Maybe continue down the road to those buildings?” I pointed further down the road where bigger buildings could be spotted in the distance. It looked like a thirty-minute walk downhill from where we were, but we needed to search for a place of education and that wouldn’t be this far out.

“Good idea. We can walk on the side of the road,” Nix took my hand in his as we walked together, slowly getting closer to what appeared to be a town.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 8:03 am

Chapter Two

Juno

When we entered the town, we quickly sought out a café, desperate to find people talking so we could learn their language. Inside we found a group of five young humans, sipping on coffees and chatting. We sat down next to their table and with our magic we picked up their language, learning it in its entirety.

“I can’t believe your professor said that to you!” One of the women said with a shocked expression.

“Cheer up,” a man said. “It’s not like you can’t just write another article. You’ve got two weeks until it’s due.” He gave her a tender kiss on the cheek. They were clearly mates. The sight made Nix and me grin at one another, pleased mates were a thing here too. Well, it kind of had to be to create more humans, but finding your mate was what everyone dreamed about. Finally feeling attraction towards another being, getting to experience that kind of love and want. I couldn’t wait until I met mine.

I shared a look with Nix and together we rose and went to their table, awkwardly trying to find the courage to speak in their language. I cleared my throat and tried to appear welcoming and confident as I smiled at the group of people.

“Hi, I’m sorry, but I just overheard you speaking about a professor. We’re new in town and are looking to get an education here. Where’s the education center you attend?” Something about education center sounded off in their language and from the way they tilted their heads showed they thought so, too.

“You mean school?” One of the men said, not unkindly, but clearly confused.

“Yes, sorry. We’re not from here,” I answered honestly, hoping they, like us, had a big world where people talked differently depending on where they lived.

One of the girls brightened into a big smile. “We attend the local college here, but you can’t just show up and get accepted.” She didn’t seem to scold us, more amused by us than anything. Another woman rolled her eyes at her friend but it seemed to be an inside joke we weren’t privy to.

“I’m Ria,” she introduced herself. “I’m heading back to class now. You can follow me if you want?” We nodded and once outside, I introduced us.

“Juno and Nix,” she replied. “I like your names.” She seemed oddly comfortable around strangers, not that we knew how friendly people normally acted in this world, but it was refreshing.

The college was only a five-minute walk from the café, and as soon as we spotted it, it was obvious it was a school. “Down there you’ll find the main entrance, and I know Loretta, our student counsellor, is in there working right now if you have questions.” We just nodded and waved goodbye, searching for this Loretta person immediately.

“If their technology really is like ours, maybe our magic can alter it, enrolling us into this school effortlessly,” Nix whispered as we walked inside the building. A list of names on the side of a wall had us finding Loretta easily.

“Maybe they have homes here too,” I whispered back, hoping to live close to the school.

Loretta’s office came into view as we headed down a long hallway. We knocked on the door and waited, not sure how to behave accordingly, but deciding to do what we

would normally do. Everything else had seemed a mirror image of our world so far, maybe manners were too.

“Enter,” a raspy woman’s voice called out from inside. We entered with Nix coming in behind me. “What can I do for you, boys?” she asked kindly while Nix closed the door behind him. She was maybe in her fifties and wore a knitted cardigan over a floral dress. We hadn’t decided on what to tell her and I worried Nix wouldn’t be thinking the same as me and blurt something.

“We’re new students,” Nix lied easily. My left eye twitched from the effort it took me to stifle my laugh. Nix had always been an amazing liar, easily getting out of trouble even as a kid.

“Oh,” she replied, sounding confused. “What’re your names?” she started tapping on the machine in front of her.

“My name is Nix Cinnen and this is Juno Maxwell.” The names he gave were our true names, something I found worrisome, not that she could do much with it.

“Ah,” she exclaimed. “Here you are,” she continued her tapping. “You’re the ones from Snivem. Let me just check your dorm room... and yes that’s ready too... and your forms... Yes, everything is there,” she spoke mostly to herself as I eyed Nix. He was amazing with his magic when it came to technology, but I had to admit I was impressed it’d worked without me even noticing him using it.

“Alright, boys,” Loretta said, getting up from her squeaking chair. “I’ve printed some papers for you to sign and here are your keys.” She handed us each a key to our room and turned around to grab the papers. It seemed way too easy, but they didn’t have magic so maybe we were just in luck.

Loretta spent a few minutes filling us in on the cafeteria and where our dorm room

was located. We had more questions but when she hinted at something called a website being up to date and filled with answers, we knew it was her way of telling us to get out of her office.

We left in search of our dorm room. It wasn't hard to find with Loretta's guidance and soon we were inside with the door locked, finally free to talk and act as we wanted.

"Snivem?" I asked. The name had obviously worked for Loretta, and we needed to keep our story straight if others asked too.

Nix shrugged easily. "I used my magic on their world map and chose a place far from here. It'll hopefully help us out that they know we come from another country than this one." I had to give him that.

"Should we call the rulers?" Nix asked, lying down on his bed.

"We kinda need to, considering we've got class in the morning," I grinned. We both wanted to stay here, and even the thought of returning home already wasn't a pleasant one.

Joining Nix on his bed, I called my dad. His worried voice filled the room, "Juno? Are you in danger?" Nix rolled his eyes, something my dad thankfully couldn't see, this only being a simple call.

"Nix and I are fine, Dad," I replied with a smile. "We just wanted to update you and the other rulers."

I heard some rustling and then my dad changed the call to one where we could see one another. I accepted and saw all the rulers looking expectantly at us. We sat up, acting like the professionals we were hired to be. "Hi, everyone," I greeted them with

a smile.

“Yes, yes, what news do you have for us, boys?” Henriette asked with bright eyes.

“We’ve enrolled in a college here,” I replied, then quickly added, “We got our schedule already and have class in the morning.” I let them figure out what I meant and waited for their reaction.

“Oh, then you must stay!” Trise said easily. “Where are you now?”

“Our dorm room,” Nix replied. I was too busy grinning. We didn’t have to go home!

“Wait, Trise. Are you sure that’s a wise choice?” My dad cut in. “What about their things and the briefing.”

“Nonsense,” Henriette said, clearly agreeing with Trise. “The boys are attending the school and we need to respect their progress. Now tell me, boys, are they truly like us?” The others had reported back with their findings too it seemed.

“They are very similar actually,” Nix answered. “We could easily learn their language and I was able to enroll us without any issue with my magic, even providing us this room.”

“What about your needs there? Food, clothing, other things that you need to pay for?” My dad asked, ever the serious ruler.

“I haven’t had the chance to see how they deal with payments yet,” Nix answered seriously. “We don’t want to steal so we need to make sure whatever money we spend doesn’t hurt someone else.” It was one of our most valued beliefs that we shouldn’t steal from others.

“If you can make money appear with magic and use that, that’ll have to do,” Henriette said seriously. “If they use cards or their phones to pay, use that.” Phones?

“Phones?” Nix asked just before I could.

“Yes, the others reported back that humans use something called phones much like our slates, though theirs can’t change forms without magic,” Trise replied.

“Cool,” both Nix and I replied simultaneously, then shared a knowing look. We had been close since we were three, being neighbors until we moved out as adults, our parents still living next to each other.

“Well, boys. The others are getting back to the forest soon, we’ll tell them you’re staying. In the meantime, try to find out how to pay for stuff and get settled in,” Trise said, ending the call.

“I can’t believe we’re staying!” I laughed, feeling so damn happy and relieved.

“I know!” Nix beamed next to me, then he turned serious. “Can I ask you something?” The shyness in his tone had me turning serious too.

“Sure, everything okay?”

He nodded, “Yeah, it’s just... I feel at home here, you know, and we’ve only been here a few hours. Is that weird?”

He felt like me. The relief of knowing I wasn’t alone, that I wasn’t feeling something abnormal hit me. “I,” I swallowed, trying to find the right words. “I feel the same way.” His eyes lit up as I continued, now unable to stop voicing my feelings. “I honestly felt this way before we came here. Something inside of me told me to leave, to explore. Being here feels... right. Even just the thought of leaving has me gasping

for air, it feels wrong to leave.”

“Exactly!” Nix jumped up from his bed and began pacing the floor. “I feel like I can finally breathe! Like I am where I’m supposed to be. For the first time in my life, I feel... home .”

“Home,” I agreed.

Nix and I left our room in search of some clothing stores, not wanting to use up all our magic on glamour. Our clothes weren’t too out there, but they were plain and boring compared to how people here were dressed. We also figured stores would be the perfect place to figure out how to use money.

“Do you think they use their phones?” Nix asked as we walked down into town where the stores lay. We had a map on our slates using our magic to combine their technology with ours, making it possible to access their maps and internet.

“You already figured out how to pay for stuff online, maybe we’ll just stick with that,” I said, ignoring the small detail of how we wouldn’t be able to pay for food online, unless food deliveries would be our only sustenance.

“Let’s just try,” Nix rolled his eyes. Soon after, a store appeared to our left, featuring male clothing. We entered and a woman with blonde hair glided over to us, effortlessly showing us everything we needed. When it came to paying, Nix used his slate and the woman didn’t even question it, likely just pleased to be paid for her service.

A few feet away from the store, Nix bumped his shoulder against mine, “See! It went perfectly!” I smiled at him, glad that he was pushing me to do things I felt awkward about doing. It always worked out somehow in the end every time. “Now, let’s find a place to eat.”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 8:03 am

Chapter Three

Remi

I was late for work, which lately wasn't new. I had, like many other times before, lost track of time in the library the night before, writing yet another brilliant idea down on what I could do with my life once college was over. It caused me to sleep through my alarm, again.

I'd had a few brilliant ideas, if I had to say so myself. Unlucky for me, those ideas always came to me at night, stealing away those late-night hours from me without me even noticing. Which was why I was late, yet again. My parents, and girlfriend, Hayley, weren't as ecstatic about my ideas as I was. To be honest, they were getting increasingly more annoyed with me and fed up with my ideas. They were, according to them, "a waste of time".

So, I often sat in the library jotting down idea after idea, although, unlike in the past, now I kept them hidden from others, not wanting my happiness to be tainted by their hateful words. I understood not all of us shared the same hobbies, but at least I showed interest in my mother's sewing and gardening, my father's cooking, and Hayley's makeup and crystal obsession. Why would I need to know how to figure out your undertone? So, I could find the perfect foundation that matched my skin? I tried using makeup when I was riddled with acne as a young teen, but the feel of it on my skin was the worst, so I just accepted being the acne kid. Now my skin was normal and no makeup would touch it, not unless I had to dress up or wanted my eyes to really pop with some eyeliner.

Hayley had shown interest in my ideas at first, back when we were just friends. I could show her everything and she would match my enthusiasm and support me as I researched if they would work out. A week into dating her, I'd gotten the amazing idea for a machine that could make waffles and ice cream, so on one side you had the hot waffles and on the other side was the cold ice-cream. She had been so excited for me to figure out if such an invention was possible in real life and not just in theory. Three weeks later she was over it, and every idea I had ever since was turned down as being a waste of my time. I stopped sharing my ideas, lying about studying in the library instead of telling her the truth.

Hayley and I had been together a year now, and other than the lack of support for my ideas, she was the perfect girlfriend for me. I needed my space and wasn't huge on touching. She seemed to respect that and gave me plenty of space to just be me. We'd been friends since we were kids, attending the same high school, until one day when our friendship changed into more. I hadn't told anyone other than Hayley and my parents of my ideas, too afraid someone would steal them and make a fortune before I could. So having zero support hurt more than I cared to admit. And I hated having secrets from Hayley, but her thinking I was studying was sort of true, in a way.

"Get moving or you'll be fired!" Hayley hissed, kicking me out of bed.

"Ow!" I exclaimed indignantly from the floor. "I was just about to get up!" I wasn't.

"Liar," she replied, no remorse in her tone about kicking me, as she simply went back to her beauty sleep.

She had an apartment close to college and I stayed here more than in my own dorm room. I had a rather interesting roommate, who I wanted to avoid as much as possible. Luckily, Hayley had given me a key, so her place was somewhat mine as well.

I got up from the floor and took a quick shower before sprinting to work. I worked at a coffee shop from seven a.m. to ten a.m. Monday to Friday. My boss Earl usually didn't give me too much of a hard time over my tardiness, because he, too, had once been a college student with too much to deal with daily. But even though he was understanding, I didn't want to take advantage of his kindness.

The short distance from Hayley's apartment to the coffeeshop meant I only had to walk ten minutes before arriving at work. Campus was just another ten minutes from there so everything was close enough that I didn't have to drive around daily and waste money on gas.

The door opened easily as I pushed through and greeted a smiling Earl. "Only two minutes late today! I have to admit, I'm impressed," Earl chuckled.

I winced. It was clear I needed to up my game. "Sorry about that, Earl. I'll do better, I promise."

He waved me off. "I know you will, Remi." He gave my shoulder a squeeze and left to get his morning pastry from across the street. Earl always started his day with a Danish and some cookies from Darcy's bakery. I had a strong suspicion it was Darcy he was hooked on and not her baking, but since I never joined him at her store, I couldn't be certain.

The door opened just as I finished tying my apron around my waist. I spotted the familiar faces of a couple of regulars; college students like me who needed their daily caffeine fix to survive yet another day.

The morning would fly by in a rush like every other morning once people started piling in. I greeted the customers and got to work.

I found myself back at the library, deep in Idea Land as I scribbled down thought

after thought. They didn't normally hit me like this. Usually, I would get an idea and then spend hours figuring out if it could work out or not. I wasn't into actually building the machines. It was more about the creative process for me. Figuring out if and how they could work in real life was what I felt passionate about. It was what I wanted to do with my life, regardless of what my parents and Hayley thought.

My latest idea came to me when I saw how dirty my tips from work were. As I struggled to identify the individual coins, I thought more about how the banks should clean the ones that got back to them somehow. Like with the machines that collected your coins and you got the money put into your bank account. If all banks had coin washers, then coins would be noticeably cleaner over time and we wouldn't be so put off by touching them. Brilliant, right? Or maybe that was just me? Anyway, a coin washer was what I was researching now, but it was harder than I thought since most searches came up with washing machines that accepted coins. I had not thought this through, it seemed.

My vibrating pocket interrupted my focus and I pulled out my phone to see my friend Jason had texted me.

Jason: How are you not in class right now? Mr. Trent is going to kick your ass.

Fuck! I'd completely lost track of time. I looked at my phone and sure enough, I was ten minutes late to class. I was so not going to pass. I'd already received two warnings from Mr. Trent, the last one stating that he would fail me if I missed one more of his classes.

I could sprint over there and maybe beg him to let me in?

Jason's name appeared on my phone again.

Jason: He fucking locked the door! Where are you, man?

Shit!

I frantically opened my email and started writing out an apology, my last hope of continuing his class.

With that sent, I closed my laptop and quickly replied to Jason, thanking him for reminding me of my fuck up. Then I grabbed my things and headed out of the library. I had dinner with my parents tonight and I tended to show up late for them, too, if I didn't forget altogether. They, like my professor, didn't care much for my forgetfulness, and I had to agree it wasn't something I was proud of either. I just got so into my ideas and how things worked that I lost all sense of time.

Knowing Hayley didn't have any classes today, I called her and asked if she wanted to join me. She couldn't, though, having what she called a girls' night planned with her closest friends. I wished them a good night and hung up, actually relieved I would see my parents without her, since they tended to gang up on me whenever the topic of my future came up. Tonight, I would just be facing my parents. Yay me.

The walk to my parents took around twenty minutes, and as soon as my childhood home came into view, I mentally prepared myself. I reminded myself that they loved me and only wanted what was best for me. They weren't against me. Even though I kept saying those words to myself, I still found myself unable to believe them.

Mom was in the garden pulling up weeds, her back to the road as she worked. I headed for the front door to greet my father first, he would either be in the kitchen or the living room. In their house it was only my dad who cooked, since my mom couldn't for the life of her cook anything without either burning it or over salting it to the point of preserving it forever. Thankfully, my dad loved cooking. It had been his mother's love language and since my grandma wasn't a person who ever said I love you or gave out hugs, cooking had been what my dad saw as showing love. He was a hugger though, and both my parents told me they loved me often, so I got love in

many different ways as I grew up.

“Hey, Dad!” I called out as I entered the living room. He was on the couch watching some home renovation program, his favorite thing to watch lately.

“Hey, son! You’re early.” He stood and gave me a tight hug. I couldn’t tell him I’d missed class and start their grilling early, so I lied. Like the mature person I was.

“Oh, class was cancelled,” I lied easily and sat down next to where he had been sitting. He joined me with a raised brow, not a total “I don’t believe you”, but a “I’m not certain you’re speaking the truth” raise of brow. What could I say, the man knew how to communicate with his big bushy brows.

Ignoring said brows, I looked over at the TV. “So, how’re you and Mom?” I asked, trying to control the conversation.

“Can’t complain,” he shrugged and looked at the TV again. “Is Hayley joining us for dinner?”

“She’s having a girls’ night,” I replied, happy to finally tell a truth.

Dad stood up and walked to the kitchen with me right behind him. “I’m glad she’s taking time to nurture her friendships. You should do the same.” He used a teasing tone that seemed forced, like he wanted me to receive his message, but also didn’t want me to feel like it was a pointed finger. Whatever he intended, I received it nonetheless.

I knew they worried that I neglected my friends after starting college and dating Hayley. It was hard finding time for everything, friends, school, work, Hayley, my parents, and then my ideas.

“I know, Dad,” I finally replied. “Just trying to learn how to balance it all.” Look at that! Another truth. I knew he was worried and just wanted to help, but every time they said stuff like that, I felt like I was failing somehow. If I worked too much, I would hear about it. If I didn’t work enough, I would hear about it. I honestly couldn’t win.

The back door opened and mom breezed in to wash her hands in the kitchen sink. Dad gave her a kiss on the cheek as he started on dinner.

“Hey, honey,” Mom said after drying her hands. She gave me a soft hug and kissed my cheek.

“Hi, Mom. Anything new you’re growing?” It was the perfect conversation starter, because if I really got her going, I could get her to talk about nothing other than her garden until I left. Well, that or sewing, but seeing as she just came in from the garden this seemed the most natural choice.

“I just planted the loveliest rose bushes,” she gushed. “They’re placed along the house and will grow up over time so I’ll have roses just outside the windows.” She started handing me the plates so we could set the table while Dad cooked. “The PH levels had to be perfect before I could plant them, but I think I got it just right.”

“I can’t wait to see them bloom,” I told her honestly. Why couldn’t they care about my passions as I did with theirs? Was it really that hard to fake enthusiasm for my sake? I didn’t care about gardening, but I loved seeing my mom’s eyes glow as she lectured me about the different kinds of flowers she wanted each year in her pots, and whenever she made a bigger and more permanent decision, like the rose bushes. Why couldn’t they do the same for me?

“Me neither, honey. Is Hayley coming?”

“She’s having fun with friends,” Dad answered before I could. He’d used a certain tone and I knew what he was doing.

“That’s lovely! You should spend time with your friends too,” Mom said, just as I predicted she would.

“Then I wouldn’t have time to visit you, though,” I muttered in response. I took out our cutlery and sat down sullenly. I was already over this visit.

Mom joined me and batted my arm. “Nonsense! You’re a smart man, you can figure out how to manage your time. We made sure to give you all the smart brain cells when we made you. Right, dear?” she looked expectantly at my dad.

“Of course we did,” he answered, always the dutiful husband. “That’s why you’re an only child, son. We feared all the good cells were gone.” He looked smugly at my mom who beamed in return.

“This would all make perfect sense if I wasn’t conceived using a donor,” I replied drooly.

Why did I visit them? I could’ve spent a lovely night at the library instead of this.

I was six minutes early to work the next day. Earl had truly been surprised, and that had been worth leaving Hayley’s soft bed for. I wanted to show him I was a worthy employee.

I had two boring classes after work, but one amazing thing happened just as I headed home. Mr. Trent had answered my email and told me that he had a few ideas on how I could earn some points to stay in his class. It was really my last chance now. He was still working out what I would have to do, so in the meantime I simply had to show up and that would be a start. He wasn’t lacking humor that man.

I was basically skipping on the way to Hayley's apartment. I wasn't going to mess this up. Mr. Trent had given me one last chance and I was going to do my best to please him.

Opening the front door had me immediately wishing I'd chosen the library instead. There were ten or more people in the apartment, all drinking and having a good time. I wasn't a boring person, like Hayley's friends thought, but not liking parties meant I was boring to them. I had been looking forward to a quiet night with Hayley, but that wasn't going to happen tonight, it seemed.

"Babe!" Hayley yelled out in greeting when she spotted me. "Have a drink!" She pushed a glass with nearly glowing pink liquid inside. Even without the deadly color to it, I still wouldn't have tasted it. I had work in the morning, and after that I had a group project to work on. I had no intentions of getting drunk whatsoever.

I shook my head and handed her the deathly potion. "No thanks. I have work tomorrow. But you guys have fun. I'll just sleep in my dorm tonight." I gave her a peck on the cheek, not wanting to taste the alcohol on her.

I turned to walk out, but Hayley wasn't okay with that. "You're such a killjoy!" She yelled after me, clearly annoyed. I sighed. We never fought and I wasn't in the mood to do it in front of her friends while she was drunk.

"I'll call you tomorrow after work," I said, ignoring her angry eyes and walking out. I heard her friends scoff behind my back. Maybe they thought she deserved someone more fun and outgoing, someone more like her. But Hayley knew me. If she wanted someone she could party with, she was with the wrong guy.

As I walked closer to the dorms, I thought about me and Hayley, like really thought about us, something I tended to brush off since it was easier. Were we a good match? I loved her, but was I in love with her? I couldn't quite figure it out. I mentally put it

all in a box to sort out later as I fumbled with my key.

I was relieved to find the room empty. My roommate Derek was always in the room working on his computer. He was a smart man, I had to give him that, he just lacked some social cues that made me sort of fear him. Last time I spoke with him he was developing an app, something he did for fun to earn some cash while attending college. Fun. He was good at coding and honestly, I had no idea what else he did, having fled our room as soon as Hayley had given me a key.

It wasn't only Derek's fault that I'd basically moved out. Yes, he lacked some social cues, but I also knew he didn't realize it himself so I couldn't really blame him for that. I'd moved out to spend more time with Hayley. It was just easier with me, always losing track of time to spend the nights at her place, and even if we never really did spend time together, we were at least in the same apartment.

The night I truly moved out, Derek had worn my t-shirt and when I confronted him about it, he'd simply told me it smelled like me so he liked to sleep in it.

I hadn't been back since.

But now I was back, and relived to find my stuff seemingly untouched. With the room empty, I decided to go through my stuff. Some of it I'd missed and other stuff I hadn't. I went through what I wanted to bring back to Hayley's tomorrow, then stopped myself after having that thought. Was I going back? The box I'd mentally filed away burst open and now I had to deal with all these confusing emotions.

Were we better off as friends? Honestly, yes.

I felt relieved once the truth of those words really hit. I still had my parents I had to deal with on a weekly basis, but Hayley had been like them lately, and she shouldn't be. I shouldn't want to spend all my time at a library instead of at her place. I told her

the nights I did spend there were because it was quiet, but I actually just needed a break from her. Whenever we were both at her place, I sought out the room she wasn't in and studied there, desperate for some alone time. And Hayley had respected that, but was that normal? Hayley was my first girlfriend and I her first boyfriend. We didn't have any other relationship experience, but maybe what we had wasn't working. I wasn't happy and hadn't been in a long time. Hayley partied more now, likely trying to find some happiness elsewhere herself.

I had to talk to her tomorrow after work. Face to face. Tonight, I had to sort my stuff out and mentally prepare myself for living here again. With Derek. Who still had my t-shirt.

Chapter Four

Juno

“They’re calling us,” Nix warned me just as I returned after having showered and changed. We’d eaten at a restaurant that served food similar to ours, making it way easier than we thought to fit in. They had the same vegetables and animals as us from what we could see. Nix told me to research their world through the internet, which was easy to do from my slate now. I would need to do that before bed, if I could stay awake that long. The warm shower hadn’t helped my tired body, only made me ache for my new bed.

“Answer,” I replied, joining him on his bed. While eating, we got a message from my dad that they would call us once the others had returned home, having us join in on the meeting to go over their findings. I was glad we still got to be a part of the meeting. I really wanted to know what the others had experienced today, and if they would attend our school too.

Nix accepted the call; the rulers and the rest of our team were projected into the middle of our room soon after. They took in our surroundings before Henriette greeted us. “Good evening, boys! Are you well fed and ready?”

We nodded, smiling happily at everyone. We spotted sandwiches in our teammates’ hands; they hadn’t even finished eating before the rulers called us which really showed their eagerness.

They made each pair recount their findings, asking questions as they went. None of

the others had found work yet or like us, a school to attend. They'd spent the day people-watching and browsing the internet on their slates, having done like Nix did and used magic to combine their technology to ours. I was the least tech savvy in the group, eager to learn, but failing to understand how our magic could work with something so different. Luckily, Nix knew this and always did the work for me, relying on me being the person to do most of the talking instead, despite my awkwardness in new situations.

"I think the gas station we found would be a great place to work," Nolen continued. "People come and go all day, different types too, all needing gas for their cars to run."

"Hmm," Mia, another of our rulers, hummed. She was the least talkative of our leaders, but insanely intelligent. "I would like for all of you to choose different workplaces, spreading out as far as possible but still within a few hours' drive from the portal."

"How long are we staying for?" I asked, dreading the thought of leaving already.

The rulers shared a look I couldn't decipher. In the end it was my dad who answered for them. "We simply do not know yet. We need to see how you feel living there for a period, and right now we think a week before for the next check-in. While you were gone, we discussed that, and in order to let you truly be immersed in their world, you need to push our world to the back of your mind and only focus on your job there. We hate to think about not hearing from you, since we are just as interested in learning about this new world as you are, but we also know we need to let you do your own thing."

I didn't know what to say. They were letting us roam freely for a week before our next check-in? I had thought daily check-ins would be necessary.

“What if one of us doesn’t want to return when our mission is over?” Nix asked, surprising me. It was brave to ask that already. Would they force us back if we didn’t want to leave? I’d like to think they would respect our choice, but they ruled over us, didn’t they? Technically we weren’t in their world anymore, but did that mean we were we free?

“We don’t know if you can live there without consequences yet,” Trise answered calmly. “Until then we want you all to return when we order it, however, we wouldn’t force you to do anything you didn’t want to do, including returning.” My dad’s gaze found me and his slightly narrowed eyes told me to not even think about it. Too bad it was all I could think about since coming here.

We ended the call after that. The others would return in the morning and each find schooling and jobs. If they couldn’t find a place to live, they would use hotels until they did, making everyone stay in this world without contact with our rulers for a week.

“Nervous?” Nix asked now that we were alone again.

“A little. Mostly about the other students. I keep fearing we won’t be able to talk to them about anything.”

“Like what?”

“Like what kind of books they read or series they watch on TV. It’s similar to our world but also not.”

Nix nodded looking like he hadn’t thought about that. “Shit, now I’m nervous.”

I grinned at him, loving we got to do this together. “Maybe we should each study what humans our age like to do, before we go to bed?”

“Good idea,” Nix already had his pajamas on and quickly got under the covers to play around on his slate. I did the same, using mine as a laptop on my lap as I browsed their internet.

I really hoped I would be able to sleep tonight. It was our first day of school tomorrow and I really wanted to make some friends here.

The next day Nix and I were both giddy with excitement and nerves. We sadly only shared one class, but it was twice a week so we at least got some time together. We gave each other a hug before splitting up on our own for the first time since coming here.

After being a little lost, I finally found my first class of the day. Nix and I had bought laptops yesterday, since changing our slates wouldn't work in front of the non-magic humans. The rulers had told us to use as little magic as possible to get used to the idea of it never returning fully, but also to stop us from accidentally exposing our magic to the people here. It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be, not using my magic. Being surrounded by non-magic humans helped since they seemed to manage just fine without it.

It may have sounded odd to my friends, but I actually held a bit of anger towards the magic. Having it fade over time, caused our rulers and our people much anguish and worry. Being here, where I was able to think about something else, was freeing in a way I hadn't expected.

Our professor walked in and quickly got the class started. I felt like an imposter but tried my best to keep up with the others. Nix and I had agreed that we would use the excuse of any misunderstandings or lack of knowledge to be because of us just moving here. Loretta had seemed to understand us better after she saw we were from Snivem, and hopefully our professors would be understanding of it too.

My first and second class had been filled with new information and I found my brain too full. I needed some food and water to get my brain ready for my next and final class of the day.

I met Nix at the cafeteria and we sat down to eat our food in shared silence. It was obvious he was just as information overloaded as I was. Once we finished eating, we realized many were looking at us and whispering amongst themselves. I shared a worried look with Nix and decided to message the rest of our team for help.

Juno: So, we might be in trouble... We're eating in the cafeteria at our school and everyone keeps looking at us weird and whispering to their companions. Are you experiencing this too?

Evie: OMG YES! I even had a man follow me and whistle after me. He only stopped once I entered a random shop to get away from him.

Nolen: We are getting looks as well. I asked a random lady kindly if I was looking weird since many had stared at me, but she simply told me I was handsome and that was why. No idea why that matters since none of them were my mate, but maybe it matters here?

Charlotta: I was thinking the same thing! Maybe they appreciate beauty more than we do? Maybe they notice beauty in general and not only in their mates?

Sid: Let's all share whatever we figure out about beauty and so on in a few days' time. From their advertisements it is clear that beauty matters to these people.

Nolen: Agreed. Have a safe day everyone!

"So... we're handsome?" Nix stated with a worried expression, after having looked at their messages.

“I guess so. Let’s just finish eating and once our classes are done for today, we’ll figure out this beauty thing.” He nodded, and as we parted I noticed several people looking after him as he walked in the opposite direction of me. Why hadn’t I noticed the stares in class? Now I felt like all eyes were suddenly on me.

Brushing the feel of being watched away, I headed to my final class with renewed energy.

I was ten minutes early but since I’d gotten lost earlier, I figured being early was the right choice until I learned where everything was.

I saw two men smiling and laughing in front of the classroom, and I felt a strange pull towards one of them. The sensation travelled through my body, begging me to erase the space between me and the stranger. I had no idea what that feeling meant, but as soon as the man turned around with a confused frown on his face, I knew.

His eyes locked with mine and I just fucking knew.

He was my mate.

I couldn’t stop smiling. I’d found my mate! And in this world of all places. That just further proved that we were meant to be here. I couldn’t wait to tell my dad. But first I needed to introduce myself to my mate.

I walked closer and saw his eyes widen in surprise. He was obviously just as shocked as me. His friend patted him on the arm and left just as I stopped in front of him.

“Hi,” I beamed at him. He was gorgeous. Brown hair and the greenest eyes. One black piercing in his ear, and I found that I really loved piercings, as of yesterday, and especially now.

“H-hi,” my mate stammered nervously, looking me up and down, obviously trying to sort out his feelings. I understood him completely. I, too, was fascinated with finally feeling attraction, want, lust. I’d been told it was an amazing feeling wanting another person like that, but when you didn’t know how it felt it wasn’t something you believed you needed in your life. But I needed this man now. Needed him like I needed to breathe. He was everything I would ever want or need.

“You’re so beautiful!” I blurted, unable to help myself. I was ready to announce my undying love for him right there in the halls.

His eyes widened further, mouth gaping, as he took a step back. Huh? That wasn’t the reaction I’d expected. Did he not like me? I’d never heard about mates moving away from one another after having their first moment of recognition.

“Did I say something wrong?” I asked cautiously. I would hate myself if I’d said something hurtful to him. I’d called him beautiful but we still hadn’t researched what that meant to people here. Should I have said handsome instead?

“N-no I... I just... need to,” he stuttered, almost like he was afraid of me. Then he spun on his heel and rushed out of the hall, disappearing from my sight.

I felt my chest ache at the thought of scaring my mate. We were going to spend the rest of our lives together, this hardly seemed like a good start. I just wanted to kiss him, hold him, touch him. I felt the first rush of arousal in my life and I had no mate to share that with. A tear escaped me as a silent sob broke out.

I walked back to my dorm room feeling defeated and heartbroken.

I didn’t even get his name.

Page 5

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Chapter Five

Remi

Holy shit! There I was, joking and laughing with Jason when this weird tugging in my heart started, forcing my body to turn around, and when I did, that's when I saw... him.

The man with the blonde hair and light blue eyes.

The man who made me lose my breath.

The man who awakened something inside of me.

He'd walked up to me, smiling so brightly, like he was happy to see me. Why? Who was he? And why did I run away like a scared puppy?

He'd called me beautiful. I almost whimpered when the words flew out of his perfect lips. I'd never been called beautiful before. The forced back whimper was what had me escaping the hall as fast as possible. I was with Hayley. I couldn't just stand there whimpering and offering myself up to a complete stranger. A stranger I was ready to tackle to the ground and hump. It was maddening! I'd never felt this need to have someone. To touch someone. Not even Hayley. Sex and kissing weren't something I was interested in. Hayley again, respected I didn't have the same sexual need as others. I'd been perfectly honest about it when we started dating. So why did a stranger unleash something so foreign in me? And why was I aching to be near him again?

I'd planned to see Hayley today, to break up with her on good terms, but even though I was emotionally and mentally over Hayley, I still felt like a cheater over my feelings towards a man I'd just met.

That's why I'd run. I was ready to jump the blonde stranger. Had I stayed I would've done something I couldn't take back, and Hayley didn't deserve that. Neither did I honestly. I didn't want to be a cheater. So, I'd run to save myself. From myself.

Tall and handsome would have to wait until I'd spoken with Hayley. I just needed to figure out who he was, then I would approach him and hopefully stay put.

But first, Hayley.

I had no idea if Hayley would be home or not. Having slept in my dorm for the first time in months, I no longer knew her whereabouts like I usually did. She'd been drunk the night before and I knew she'd been pissed when I left. I mentally prepared myself as I opened the door to her apartment.

To call the apartment a mess would be an understatement. Hell, there was fucking gravel in the hallway. How?! I was glad I didn't have to clean anything up but also felt guilty over leaving Hayley when I knew she would have a banging hangover.

I found her in the bedroom. She was wearing a towel while finding her outfit for the day. I leaned against the doorframe and knocked gently to get her attention.

She whirled around and gave me a soft smile. "I'm so sorry about yesterday!" she rushed out, quickly grabbing something and pulling it on.

"It's okay," I assured her, sitting down on the bed as she pushed her legs through her favorite jeans. "You're allowed to have fun with your friends." She smiled at that, seemingly relieved I wasn't mad. "But we do need to talk." Her smile disappeared.

Those words never meant anything good, and we both knew it.

“Okay,” she said, nodding slowly. I patted the spot next to me and waited for her to join me. I wanted a serious conversation and I felt with her standing and me sitting it wouldn’t feel like an intimate conversation, and I really wanted this to end well. I still loved her, even if it was only as a friend. She still deserved for me to do this properly.

She sat and I just blurted the words. “I realized yesterday that I wasn’t in love with you anymore.” She blinked at me, her mouth gaping, so I continued. “I still love you, but yesterday it became clear that it wasn’t romantic love, in fact, I don’t think it ever really was like that for me.” I hated admitting that. I knew it would hurt her feelings hearing I might’ve never truly loved her, but I also didn’t want to lie to her. I took her hand in mine and looked at her, truly looked at her. And there was no attraction at all. Nothing at all like I’d found with the handsome stranger.

“I had the same realization,” she admitted softly. I felt my shoulders relax. “I just figured it out two weeks ago. That’s why I started seeing my friends more. I hoped it would help our relationship if I tended to myself a bit more. But it didn’t, it only showed me we weren’t compatible as partners, maybe we never were. But I also knew I didn’t want either of us to change.”

I rubbed her hand with my thumb, showing her I was listening. “I just hope we can go back to being friends,” I told her honestly. “I don’t want to lose you in my life.”

“Me too,” she replied with teary eyes. She took in a deep breath, gearing up to say something else it seemed. “I also have another... confession . I..” she sighed, then continued. “I have a crush on one of my friends. He doesn’t know it yet, and I haven’t cheated on you with him. But my growing feelings for him are also a part of why I know we don’t work anymore. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have fallen for him.”

Her words didn’t hurt. It was actually the opposite, and having her come clean meant

I could too. “I met a guy today, at school,” I blurted, feeling vulnerable speaking about him out loud. She looked at me confused but nodded for me to continue. “He made me feel things, Hayley. Things I’ve never felt before. God, Hayley, the man had me so turned on I almost jumped him on sight. That’s not me. That’s never been me.” Her eyes grew comically wide as I continued. “He’s just so beautiful. I don’t think I ever really knew what attraction felt like until today. No offense,” I quickly added.

She grinned. “None taken.” I could tell, though, that my words did sting a bit and why wouldn’t they? She truly deserved someone who would look at her and be attracted to her beauty. “So, you found a guy you could possibly date?” she sounded worried on my behalf. I understood it might take a while for her to get used to me being into a guy and no longer her boyfriend. Hell, even I needed to get used to it. Ten minutes ago, we were dating and now we talked about our crushes on other people. It was a weird day.

“Well, he did call me beautiful,” I admitted, feeling a blush forming on my cheeks.

“Seriously? The first guy you like and he’s gay too? What are the fucking odds?” She teased and bumped her shoulder against mine. “Ask him out! You’re single now and I have my eyes on someone else too. We don’t have to wait with dating others if we’re both okay with it.”

“I agree with you on that. There’s just a tiny issue about me dating him,” I looked away feeling stupid as I revisited the horrible moment where I ran.

“Oh, honey, there are videos for that! And I think books too,” she calmly assured me.

“What?! No not that issue!” I quickly defended myself.

“Hey! I’m not judging! If I was going to ask out a girl I’d want to read up on things

too beforehand. There's no shame in that, Remi."

I shook my head. "I ran!" I blurted, desperate for a change in topic.

"Ran where?" she asked confused.

I gulped. "Away from him."

"You did not!"

"Oh, but I did." I sighed. "He was so beautiful and sexy, I feared I couldn't control myself. I wasn't going to do anything that would hurt your feelings, so I ran."

"Aww, honey. I love that you thought of my feelings, but maybe next time act like a normal person? Besides I'm sure you can move past it. He called you beautiful, right?" I nodded. "So, he's interested. Did you get his number?"

"Not even his name," I realized.

"Well, then get your ass back there and find him! Maybe Jason knows him, he seems to know everyone." She patted my arm and went to put on her makeup.

"I'll ask him," I told her and pressed a quick kiss on her cheek before I started packing my things from her apartment. This was likely the weirdest breakup in history, but it was very us. Hayley and I had been friends for so long and it was obvious now we worked better that way. We'd returned to the ease of being supportive friends immediately, and it was clear that we were both relieved. I felt grateful that I still had her in my life and that she had someone else she wanted to pursue. It might seem selfish, but I really wanted the blonde stranger, and knowing she wasn't hurting helped. I could get to know the man without feeling guilty and having Hayley's support would be a huge help since she knew me better than anyone.

I shot Jason a quick text and asked if he knew the guy that walked up to us outside of class. OMG! Class! Mr. Trent was so going to dump my ass.

Back outside my dorm room, I prepared myself for Derek to be home. He'd gotten home late last night and I'd pretended to sleep, hoping to stall our inevitable conversation about why I'd been gone for months.

The sound of his keyboard clacking away alerted me he was indeed home. I sighed and walked in, prepared to be a grown up. I had to live here again now, and I didn't want this weird vibe to continue between us.

"Hi, Derek," I greeted cheerily. He jumped at my loud and awfully chipper tone.

"Um, hi," he all but whispered. I needed to work on faking friendly conversations. Noted.

"How've you been?" I asked, my voice calmer and less loud this time.

"Um, good?" he replied sounding unsure. I remembered him being shy, but why did he seem afraid? We'd been somewhat friendly until he'd stolen my t-shirt.

"That's good," I said lamely, acing this friendship thing. "I'm sorry I sort of moved out and didn't tell you about it," I eventually admitted. It was a shitty thing since he'd probably seen me as a friend until that day. Other people would likely just be happy to live without a roommate, but Derek had nightmares pretty often and I couldn't imagine it was fun waking up from those alone. Then there was the fact that he wouldn't meet my gaze whenever we passed in the halls, always looking anywhere else but at me. If that didn't tell me he was hurt, nothing could.

"Oh, so you did move out?" he asked, his eyes all big and innocent.

“Yeah, I lived with my girlfriend, or now ex.” It felt weird talking to him again. I’d forgotten how timid he was.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he said, looking like he actually meant it. “Are you living here again then?”

I nodded. “I hope you didn’t take it personally that I left.”

“I just assumed I’d done or said something wrong. I tend to do that with people without realizing it.” Just fucking kick me already. I was the bad guy here. Fuck.

“No, no,” I lied easily. It was totally normal stealing other people’s t-shirts and sleeping in them, but saying it was because they smelled like the other person? That was where the line between okay to not fucking okay went!

“Okay,” he smiled. “I’ve missed you.” Damn... we were nearing the line that shouldn’t be crossed again!

“Me too,” I lied, again . Fuck, this was hard.

“Your natural scent calms me,” he continued, dragging his metaphorical feet over my invisible line of what was acceptable behavior and what wasn’t. “My nightmares got worse once your t-shirt lost its scent.” Aaand... he’d officially crossed the line.

“My scent?”

“Yes.”

“Why?” I dared ask.

“I don’t know why,” he shrugged. “It just calls to me and calms me down.”

“Cool,” I replied lamely, not knowing what to fucking say in this situation. “I’ll find you a new one.” What?! Did I just offer him another one of my t-shirts? What was wrong with me?!

“Thank you!” he beamed brighter than I’d ever seen. “Then I might actually get some sleep.” Oh no, his eyes were getting glassy. I wouldn’t do well with tears, I needed out fast.

“I have class!” I blurted and hurried to the door.

“Wait!” he called after me, stopping me halfway through to freedom. “Some guy came looking for you.” He got up from his chair and handed me a Post-it. There was a number on it with the name Juno written underneath. Could it be him ?

“What did he look like?” I asked Derek, no longer itching to leave.

“Blonde hair, blue eyes, leather jacket,” he replied, sitting back down at his desk, not seeing how much those words affected me. I felt a flutter in my stomach. It was him! I was almost shaking with nerves as I added his number to my phone.

I should text him, right? But what did you text someone you ran away from when they called you beautiful? I feared not even Google could help me with that one.

Remi: Hi. So, I just got your number from my roommate. Who am I texting? – Remi

I felt stupid as I sent the text, since he’d written his damn name on the note. Was it weird that he clearly knew who I was? He even knew where I lived. Should that concern me? Was this in the stalkerish type of not okay behavior? I wouldn’t mind him stalking me, though. I was not okay.

My phone dinged almost immediately. I felt the butterflies take flight and cause more

fluttering inside me.

Juno: Hi! I hope it was okay I gave Derek my number. I wanted to apologize again if I said anything that offended you earlier, it truly wasn't my intention. I'm the guy that called you beautiful by the way. – Juno

Okay, calm down. It's just a text. You can do this.

Remi: Hi Juno. No, you didn't do anything wrong. I was just surprised when I saw you.

That was a valid reason for running away, right?

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 8:03 am

Chapter Six

Juno

I stared at the beautiful words Remi had sent me, “ I was just surprised when I saw you. ” Those words had to mean he wasn’t rejecting me, right? That he wasn’t saddened to be mated with me? I at least hoped so. I’d been restless ever since he’d turned my world around, only to leave me behind, confused and with a broken heart. I’d briefly thought about chasing him, since my body longed to stay with him, and I was afraid of having my mate out of sight. But I’d stayed strong and fought every instinct as I’d watched his body disappear from my sight.

My new professor, Mr. Trent, had sent me an email about not attending my first class. It seemed like the sort of message he sent to several students who hadn’t shown up. But nonetheless I needed to fix that. My mate aside, I still had a job to do, and failing classes wasn’t part of it.

I got the brilliant idea of sending an email back to Mr. Trent, asking for a brief meeting. I couldn’t work my magic well enough from technology, so I needed to be in his presence for my charm to truly work. It had given me something to do while I figured out how to approach my mate again, without him escaping me. I was surprised when I got a response just an hour later from Mr. Trent that he had what he called open office hours now. I rushed down to find his office and after sitting down and being my charming self, I let my magic do its job.

It wasn’t noticeable for non-magic humans, and he likely didn’t feel anything off. My magic was like smoke, moving where I needed it to, doing whatever I wished, with

certain limitations, of course. I selfishly searched his memories of anything related to my mate, wanting to know more. Remi. Mr. Trent wasn't too fond of him, much to my displeasure. My poor mate wasn't known for being on time or for showing up at all. I saw it all, while Mr. Trent was in somewhat of a daze, which allowed me to work through his mind efficiently. He wouldn't remember anything, I made sure of that. But I also added something to his memories, something that rested on those limitations, almost making it illegal for me to do so. Memory alteration was something you were only allowed to do if it was truly needed, the same with searching through someone's past. Remi being my mate allowed me to do it, not that I was even certain there were rules for our magic in this world, anyway. I saw he was failing Remi. I changed it so he would give Remi one last chance instead, and made sure that it would somehow involve me, the new guy. I was so clever.

My slate dinged with a new message. I still hadn't responded to Remi's message, too lost on how to respond properly.

Remi: Sorry for, you know, running off like that.

Shit, now he thought I wasn't replying because I was upset? Well, I was, but not anymore. Quickly typing out a response I hoped would be seen as okay, I sent it, not wanting to stall again and make him worry.

Juno: No need to apologize. I was actually wondering if you'd like to meet up?

I had no idea if he wanted to be near me, but he texted me and told me he was just surprised. I had to trust that my mate felt the same as me. And it truly was a surprise, I had to give him that. My dick was equally confused, constantly getting hard whenever I pictured his green eyes.

Before Remi could respond, I called my father. I was in the safety of our dorm room and I needed his advice more than ever now.

“Are you in danger?!” My dad’s worried voice reached me before his face showed up in the projection. The other rulers were around him, likely worried since we were told not to contact them for a week.

“I found my mate!” I blurted. They watched me with astonishment, none of them blinking.

“What do you mean?” Henriette asked with clear confusion.

“He’s from this world,” I explained, even though they must’ve gathered that already. I wasn’t worried that they would keep us apart or anything like that, even though mating with non-magic humans wasn’t something we ever thought possible, or at least they hadn’t told my team and me if they had seen it as a possibility.

They gasped in unison and then Trise’s face was all I could see. “Are you certain?” She smiled hopefully.

“I am.” I had zero doubt that Remi was mine.

“That’s wonderful news, son!” Dad gushed excitedly. “My son has found his mate! We need to celebrate as soon as possible.” I grimaced. Considering how Remi had acted meeting me just hours before, I couldn’t imagine him taking another world too well.

“Um, we need to wait with the celebrations a bit,” I said rather sheepishly. It was normal to mate the same day you met, since the urges were mostly too strong to fight and why would you want to wait anyway when you found your person? Many mated and had a celebration with family and friends a few days later. That was just normal for us. But Remi was a non-magic human from another world, and I had to take into account that they might do things differently here.

“Why?” Dad asked, concerned. I was his only child, my mother died when I was ten, leaving just me and my dad. I knew that was why my leaving had been hard for him.

“Well,” I started, already embarrassed. “I went over and introduced myself to him, called him beautiful, because he really is,” I added. “And then he kind of... ran .” I waited for a gasp, lecture, hell even a laugh, but when they just stared and waited for me to go on, I continued. “He might not realize we’re mates. I know they’re able to feel attraction and romantic feelings here, having seen it myself. But they might do things differently from us. What should I do?”

“I hadn’t thought about that,” Henriette said thoughtfully. “You might scare him off if you tell him of our world. And if he told someone who then tells someone else, you and the others could be in danger.” I felt anger rise within me. How dared she think so lowly of my Remi. He wouldn’t do that! “He needs to trust you before you tell him about our world. Try befriending him first, then do some research about how these humans mate.” My anger subsided as the logic of her words registered in me. Befriend him . I could do that.

“I don’t want to lie,” I admitted. Lying to Remi felt wrong, since he was supposed to be the one person I could tell anything to. My person.

It was Dad who spoke this time. “We trust that you’ll do and say what you find acceptable.” That eased some of my worries.

“Thanks. I’ll do my best,” I reassured them. “I promise to keep you updated.” I hung up and noticed that Remi had responded.

Remi: Um, sure. When?

I couldn’t help smiling. I was so glad I found his room, not a hard thing to do with my magic, having access to find the information through the school system. It seemed

that technology was easy enough for me when it involved my mate, and since I got his name from my meeting with Mr. Trent, it all worked out perfectly. His roommate assured me he would give him the note, after sniffing the air around me a little too obviously. I decided not to think too hard about that part, maybe it was normal here.

Just as I was about to reply, Nix walked in. “You found your mate?!” I was a little disappointed our rulers had told the others. I’d wanted to tell Nix and Charlotta myself. But I knew they worked freakishly fast whenever there was gossip involved.

“Yeah,” I grinned as he closed the door behind him. “He’s in one of my classes.”

“That’s amazing! What’s he like?” I couldn’t stop smiling as I thought about how wonderful Remi was, even without knowing him, yet. I told Nix everything, filling him in on my dilemma and that I’d yet to reply when I wanted to see Remi.

“Then reply, you idiot!” Nix blurted, shoving my slate against my face, like that would make me work faster. I laughed and started typing.

Juno: Tomorrow?

When the message was sent, I saw several new ones waiting from our team.

Nolen: Juno! I just heard from the rulers! They told me you found your mate! And that he’s from this world?

Evie: What!?

Charlotta: Congratulations, Juno!

Nim: I didn’t even know that was a possibility! Congrats!

Nolen: Neither did the rulers! They are all buzzing with excitement! They hope we all find mates here. Can you imagine if we can procreate with non-magic humans? This could be our answer to save our dwindling numbers and maybe the magic!

Sid : I can't wait to hear more about your mate, Juno. Is he okay with you not being his kind of human?

I looked at all the messages and took a calming breath before replying.

Juno: Thanks! I still don't know him that well and I need to research more about how these humans mate. Could you all help me with that? I need to spend my time getting to know my mate so anything you could help with would be greatly appreciated.

Juno: Also, I'm not allowed to tell him my true identity before I fully trust him. I'll keep you updated on that.

A reply from Remi came through, diverting my focus to him as I closed the other messages down.

Remi: I would like that. I heard you're new around here, so maybe the harbor? They have a few places to eat that aren't too expensive.

He'd asked around about me? The thought made me smile. And he wanted to eat with me? I'd thought we would meet up to talk or something, but eating was much more intimate.

Remi: Or we can just walk around talking. I'd like for us to be friends.

Was he nervous? Maybe I was taking too long smiling like an idiot when I should be replying.

Juno: Food sounds good, I'll pay. And I'd like to be your friend.

It sounded awfully childish, but I'd already sent the message.

Remi: You don't have to pay, it's not like it's a date, lol

Oh. That left me feeling like shit. I was so out of my comfort zone here, not knowing how this mating thing worked for him. I kept getting mixed signals, but maybe he truly meant the friend thing as friends only. Was that how they treated their mates here? It was horrible. I wanted kisses, dammit!

Juno: Oh, okay.

I didn't really know what to reply, so I opted for that and not what I truly wanted to write, which would be, "please love me and have my babies".

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 8:03 am

Chapter Seven

Remi

Juno: Oh, okay.

I'd fucked up. Why had I backpedaled? I'd been so nervous he was gearing up to reject the weirdo that ran from him, that when he took too long to answer I shot down the payment thing, joking about it not being a date so he wouldn't reject me. But I'd ended up rejecting him instead. Fuck, he'd been okay with going on a date with me. Before I fucked everything up.

I flung myself dramatically down on my bed, feeling like the biggest idiot ever. I could fix this! I would fix this! I had no idea what was up with my feelings towards Juno, but I knew I wanted to date him. Feeling determined, I quickly typed out a new text.

Remi: Unless you want it to be a date?

Knowing he took forever to reply, I forced myself not to take the words back this time. A ding came a few seconds later.

Juno: Yes, please.

The smile I had on my face almost hurt my cheeks. I didn't even care that Derek eyed me warily from his computer. I was glad the date wasn't until tomorrow, since I felt like I needed to truly let my feelings sink in. I was attracted to a man. A blonde, blue

eyed man. A beautiful man. And what I'd first thought was attraction to others, wasn't attraction at all, maybe more like an appreciation for their beauty? No matter, I now knew that wasn't attraction. This, though, what I felt for Juno, was real attraction. And I wasn't going to let him slip through my fingers. Something told me I needed him, and I wasn't going to let logic ruin that for me.

Quickly remembering to answer Juno I typed out what I hoped was a flirty response. I still had to earn a lot of points to make up for running away.

Remi: Looking forward to seeing you again.

Was that fine? Too much? Too formal? I sucked at texting, not seeing the other person was tricky for me. I much preferred speaking to people in person to feel their presence as we conversed, this made me second-guess every word.

Juno: Me too, beautiful.

A choked whimper escaped me. How could the word beautiful affect me so much? I felt the word all the way to my toes and back again, my dick hardening just from those few written words. I really needed a breather to prepare myself for tomorrow. I couldn't get hard just from hearing his voice, that would be mortifying.

Another ding from my phone alerted me I had an email. I quickly checked it and immediately felt my dick deflate and my face paling. Mr. Trent. I opened the email, fearing I was out of luck and that he'd finally failed me, but to my surprise he'd given me what appeared to be one last chance. I had an assignment with a new student, a paper we would write together outside of class that would make up for my, in his words, "lacking performance". I was okay with that, more than okay! I wasn't letting this chance go to waste, whoever this new student was, he or she would get the perfect partner to work with.

Sitting down on my bed, no longer wanting to flee from Derek, I read through the assignment and took screenshots of what we needed to do. We had a month before the assignment was due and he only needed it sent to his email, not printed which helped immensely with the deadline too. He'd invited my partner and me to a meeting tomorrow to go over the details and introduce us. I only had one class tomorrow after work so that suited me just fine. I just had to make a good impression on the new student. Then after the meeting I would get ready for my date with Juno.

I dried off my still damp body as I looked over my clothing choices for the day. If Juno saw me before our date I didn't want to look like a slob, and I also didn't want him to see that I'd changed for our date. What if he thought that was putting too much effort into a dinner date? Casual dinner date? I hated this. I'd never been this nervous about how I looked. Why did I care so much about what Juno thought of me? Was it just because he was the only one I'd ever been truly attracted to? Or was it just because it was Juno? Since my brain couldn't answer those questions, I let it slide and picked a light blue hoodie. Why? Because it was the cleanest thing I owned.

Derek was snoring softly while I admired myself in our mirror. Thinking of Juno admiring my looks sent a flutter of excitement through me. I would have to skip breakfast; no way was I going to keep my food down with these damn butterflies occupying the space.

I left poor Derek to sleep peacefully; he'd had a terrible nightmare that had woken both of us up at two a.m. I'd hastily tugged off my t-shirt and thrown it at him, a desperate solution I hoped would help, and it had. He'd picked it up and breathed it in like his soul needed it. Still creepy but I found myself less bothered by it now that we'd spoken more. I couldn't judge him for his ways of self-soothing. I didn't have nightmares like he did, never had. Whatever demons he dealt with were his own, and like hell was I going to continue to judge him on what helped.

I made it to work five minutes early and had an uneventful morning shift. My

thoughts had wandered to Juno so many times I actually had no idea how I managed to work through it. I'd only seen the man once and texted him a tiny bit. How was I such a mess? Maybe I should text Jason before class? He was gay so maybe he understood? He'd had his own awakening when he saw a former exchange student and had been out and proud ever since, even with the exchange student going back to his country and leaving Jason heartbroken.

I left work feeling determined to ask Jason a few questions before class started, sending him a text to meet up with me earlier than usual. I found Jason waiting for me outside of Mrs. Lousen's class. It was the only other class we shared, aside from Mr. Trent's. "Hey, man," Jason greeted with a warm smile. "Did you remember to study this time?"

Study? Fuck!

"The test," I whispered, looking off into the distance like my life was a movie and this was the final test and I'd failed.

Jason winced. "You forgot." I nodded, he already knew but I figured I owed him at least a nod.

"I'm so messed up lately," I admitted, more to myself than to Jason.

"This guy you mentioned in your text, is it because of him?" He asked in a tentative way, prodding for answers without raising my defenses.

"I only met him yesterday. Can't really blame it on him." I'd only texted Jason that I needed his advice on a guy I was interested in, coming out to him over text wasn't even something I'd thought about, I'd just needed his advice and for him to understand the situation.

“Hmm,” was all he said, looking me up and down. “Why are you wearing your blue hoodie?”

I looked down at myself, regretting all my life choices. Why hadn’t I studied fashion more? What color would even make my green eyes pop?

Without thinking I answered truthfully. “Because his eyes are the same shade.” I felt my cheeks heat as Jason’s eyes widened in shock. It wasn’t until I’d spoken the words that I realized it was the truth. I picked this one, not because it was clean, but because it reminded me of Juno’s eyes.

“Man.... I need to see this dude!” he looked around like Juno was hiding out of sight somewhere close. I rolled my eyes and crossed my arms protectively over my chest.

“I told you I needed your help,” I reminded him, hoping this would make me seem less insane. It had to act a bit in my favor to show I knew I was acting strange, right?

Jason shook his head. “I doubt I can help you, Remi. I mean, it’s adorable as fuck that you matched your outfit to his eyes, but maybe he’ll find that less adorable and more...”

“Creepy?” I finished for him.

He nodded, “Yep, creepy. You can still wear it; light colors just aren’t your normal thing. I don’t want you changing because of some guy.” I smiled at that. Jason truly was a good friend. I would need to make more time for him, not that he ever asked that of me. He knew I was busy and never made me feel bad about not making our friendship a priority. Maybe that was why I’d failed to spend more time with him lately. Instead, I’d spent it in the library, with Hayley, or my parents. And since my parents made me feel like shit, and now that Hayley and I were over, I figured Jason and I could spend more time together now, even if things with Juno worked out.

“I think I’ll wear my normal colors tomorrow,” I replied with a smile. “Did you hear from Hayley?” They were friends too, not as close as me and Jason, but they attended the same parties and social circles.

“Yeah, she and Camille came by the café yesterday, told me all about your break-up.” I nodded, feeling guilty I hadn’t told him myself.

“Did she seem fine?” I asked, knowing she was, but also not wanting to look like a jerk talking about a guy I liked the day after ending a one-year relationship.

He grinned. “She’s allegedly seeing Wren now; I think that’s her way of showing she’s fine and ready to move on.” I nodded, happy that Hayley’s crush was returned. It wasn’t too surprising, since Hayley was a beautiful woman, inside and out. Whatever had soured her towards me was likely coming from our lack of intimacy. I’d had some time to think things through and I believed the reason she sided with my parents and took less interest in my ideas was simply her way of fighting me back because I wasn’t giving her what she needed.

“You don’t seem too broken up about it either,” Jason pressed with a raised eyebrow. He lived for gossip and honestly, I did too sometimes.

“I’m not,” I decided to answer honestly. “We are better as friends. And it seems we both have someone else on our minds, which I like for us.” I appreciated that he didn’t focus on the fact that I was into a guy, not that I thought he would, but this just further proved that confiding in him was the right choice.

“True. I can appreciate healthy honesty. She seemed genuinely okay and neither of them spoke ill of you, so good for you guys.” Before I could snort in response, the doors opened and Mrs. Lousen came into view, letting us trail in one after the other.

When we sat, Jason bumped my shoulder lightly. “And you’re sure this guy likes you

back?”

Feeling myself blush I admitted, “He called me beautiful.”

Jason’s smile widened with glee. “Beautiful, huh?” he grinned. “But seeing as he’s the first guy you’ve liked, I would take things slow at first. You might not find it too pleasurable if you just... jump into things.” I felt the heat in my cheeks spread to my neck. And now I was thinking of said things. With Juno. My dick perked up and I had to mentally let the images of Juno go and focus on our professor who looked bored as always with her grey hair done perfectly and her cat pin firmly attached to secure her cardigan in place on her chest.

I could take things easy with Juno. It wasn’t as though I was actually going to sleep with him tonight. I hoped for a kiss, but even just that was enough to cause the butterflies to stir to life again. Sex could definitely wait. I felt like just holding his hand would fuel me with more pleasure than anything else I’d ever experienced before.

Friends. Easy.

It didn’t hurt too much that I’d failed to study, lucky me. She had us do a surprise test, which wasn’t truly a surprise anymore since she did it once every two months on the same week day. Like we were too stupid to figure out she’d made a schedule of it and it wasn’t just a “surprise” anymore. I had enough knowledge on the subject to pass the test and since I was fine with just passing, I let my mind focus on the next part of my day. The meeting with Mr. Trent.

I was sitting outside his office and waiting for him to let me in. The other student hadn’t shown up yet and I feared they would be late. I couldn’t really blame them since I was here because I was late for class too often. But I needed them to help me out or I would fail this class, so they’d better hurry up!

The door opened and my breath caught. Mr. Trent was smiling. Smiling! I was too stunned by the sheer happiness that beamed out of him that I didn't even stand up, just continued to stare at him like a creep.

"Remi?" a beautiful voice spoke behind Mr. Trent. Juno? Blinking out of whatever spell Mr. Trent's smile caused, I saw Juno smiling behind him. Was he the reason Mr. Trent had been so happy? My stomach coiled around itself and the horrible feeling was jealousy. What was he doing there? And why did they seem so... friendly? Mr. Trent was in his thirties and was a good-looking man, so of course Juno would find him attractive.

Looking down at the floor to hide my glassy eyes and paling face, I stood and moved inside the office. When Juno sat down on the chair next to me, I finally looked up at him and met his worried gaze. He was definitely rethinking our date later. Maybe he would date Mr. Trent instead.

"I called you both here to go over your assignment," Mr. Trent said as he sat down in his chair, opening his laptop and reading a few lines for us. "The top of your assignment says you need a subject you both find interesting, and I've decided I don't need to approve what you choose, simply pick something you both would love to learn more about. Then, you need to add sources of your information, and not just this book and that website, I need the page and full quote, plus edition if it's a book and date from the website."

I spaced out after that. Juno was my assigned partner and whatever I saw between them made me want to disappear. I had looked forward to the date, not seeing this meeting as anything other than a meeting, but now? I felt like a joke, I felt dirty, and honestly? I really felt like crying. My whole body had been through so many foreign feelings ever since I met Juno and each of them had been strong, even the bad ones I felt right now. I'd never felt so sick to my stomach with jealousy before. I just had to survive this meeting and then I would flee to find a space to cry.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 8:03 am

Chapter Eight

Juno

Remi looked like he'd seen a ghost. I tried to focus on whatever Mr. Trent was saying, but all I could think about was Remi. I wanted to hug him, offer him comfort. Whatever he was dealing with didn't seem healthy. When Mr. Trent handed us each a paper with his requirements, we stood and thanked him. As soon as we were out in the hall Remi bolted. This time, I followed. Was it wise? Probably not. But I couldn't stand the thought of him being alone and miserable. And he'd looked about ready to puke in there.

I saw him escaping into the bathrooms and followed him in there silently. He'd been too distraught to notice me following him and I needed to keep it that way, otherwise he would've kept his true feelings hidden and I needed to know how he felt. I needed to fix it.

A broken sob came from the stall furthest from the door. Quietly, I moved over there, leaning against the cool tiles as I felt my heart break inside my chest. Remi's silent crying was my undoing. I felt my legs shake and started to glide down to the dirty floor, not caring about my new clothes, only caring about Remi.

I couldn't stand the wall between us anymore, even if it wasn't an actual wall but a stall, so I spoke carefully. "Remi?" The sobbing stopped but he didn't answer. "Please let me in?" I begged, my own voice sounding broken as I pleaded with him.

"It's open," he rasped, his voice quivering. I stood on weak legs and opened the stall.

He sat on the floor, arms around his bent knees, his face hidden between them.

“Remi,” I whispered, feeling my heart breaking all over again. “What’s wrong?”

He shook his still hidden head. “Nothing,” he mumbled.

“You cry in bathrooms often then?” I asked, fearing I would need to deal with seeing him cry often. I would do anything I could to stop that from happening. Remi needed happiness in his life, not tears.

To my surprise, Remi laughed. It was a broken laugh, but genuine. “No, can’t say that I do,” he finally answered.

“What can I do to help?” Please let me help.

He finally moved his head from its hiding place and met my gaze. His vibrant green eyes were red and swollen and I felt my hands tighten into fists at my sides. “Did someone hurt you?” I growled, feeling a bit unhinged as I pictured hurting whoever caused this.

He shook his head and smiled weakly at me. “No one did this,” he took a deep breath. “I just have a lot of feelings lately that I can’t fully control. It’s not easy.” His admission helped a lot; this I knew too well now myself.

Sitting down next to him, I took his hand in mine, feeling my body sing with contentment as I finally touched my mate. He gasped softly, clearly feeling the same calm wash over him. We needed to touch now that we’d found one another, but since I hadn’t found anything about human mates that wasn’t fiction, I knew they worked differently. Remi, however, seemed to function like we did, much to my pleasure, since I would hate to be the only one in this mating that felt our pull.

“I feel them too,” I assured him. “The attraction, the worry, the lust.” His eyes widened and he gaped at me as I continued to hold his hand and his gaze.

“You... what?” he looked truly confused, which then made me confused, too.

“This,” I waved my free hand between us. “Us meeting. It started these feelings and we can’t function without one another anymore. Did no one teach you this?” I was going to have words with his parents. But then again, mates didn’t seem normal here, people dated many people in their lifetimes before they found someone that fit them, and often they never did. It was sad really. And exhausting to think about. Not that Remi needed to think about dating others, he was mine.

“We can’t?” he asked, again with that puzzled tone. “Why?” I’d promised not to tell him about me until I trusted him, and since I trusted him, I could easily tell him now. But seeing as he’d already had a meltdown in a school bathroom, I figured half the truth would be sufficient enough.

“When you saw me, you found me attractive, right?” I asked and he nodded timidly. “And you now feel wrong whenever we’re apart?” He nodded again. “I feel the same towards you, this need to have you close, this new feeling of wanting someone, touching them.” I squeezed his hand a little tighter.

“But why?” Remi asked, his eyes still wet and seeking. With my free hand I brushed his tears away.

“Because that’s how mates work.”

Remi snorted. “Right, how could I forget.” He seemed to believe I was joking, then proceeded to pinch himself before wincing from the pain it caused him. What the hell should I do? I couldn’t leave him here. But I also needed to research how to help him. This couldn’t be healthy. He truly seemed close to a psychotic breakdown, his eyes

glassy and distant as a broken laugh escaped his plump lips.

Then I did something I never thought I would. Against my mate, without his consent, I used my magic to lull him to sleep, watching his face relax until his whole body slumped and I caught him just before he fell over. Once I had him in my lap, I messaged Nix.

Juno: Emergency. Bathroom, furthest stall.

I added my exact location and when a confirmation beep reached my ears, I relaxed and waited.

“That took more magic than I thought,” Nix winced as he rubbed his temples. We carried Remi back to our room, making us invisible as we did so no one would see Remi out cold. But holding magic while carrying a person wasn’t as easy as it sounded. Plus, Remi was a tall guy, a sexy tall guy, and taller than both Nix and I. Carrying him here wasn’t an easy feat, but we succeeded and now he was sleeping. In my bed.

“Thanks for your help,” I said, looking over at Remi as he continued to sleep peacefully.

“Always. But what will you do when he wakes?” Nix had a point. I hadn’t thought about that part, only that I needed Remi to shut down before he had another meltdown, not wanting him to experience it.

“I don’t know. These feelings newly mated couples experience scared him. He told me so, and since they don’t have mates here, I couldn’t exactly comfort him.”

“Call the rulers, this isn’t something we can figure out on our own,” Nix said, gesturing to my slate.

“You’re right,” I admitted and called my dad. His face was projected into our room and soon the other rulers joined.

“What is it, son?” my dad asked with a worried tone when he spotted Remi sleeping in the background.

“I um, need your help,” I admitted.

“Did you kill someone?!” Trise gasped.

“No!” We said in unison.

“Then why is there a man on one of the beds who’s not moving?” Henriette demanded.

“That’s Remi,” I replied as they gasped in mortification.

“What did you do to your mate, son?” My dad asked with caution.

“He had a meltdown in the school bathroom because of all his feelings. They’re not used to this here, it scared him. And I couldn’t comfort him without telling him the truth and seeing as he was already losing it, I couldn’t tell him I was from another world, could I?” I snapped the last part, angry at the world and letting it out on them.

“Son,” my dad warned and I instantly calmed down, blushing from embarrassment. I couldn’t talk like that to our rulers. “Bring him here,” my dad ordered.

“What?!” Both Nix and I said simultaneously.

“He needs to see our world to believe it,” Dad answered calmly.

“I’m not kidnapping him through a portal so he’ll believe I’m from another world!” I snapped again, only this time not sorry about it. “He’s my mate, Dad! I won’t treat him like that.”

Henriette came closer and narrowed her eyes at me. “Remi is your mate and he’s hurting. If you can’t figure out how to help him through this you need to come home. This isn’t about you, Juno, and how you see yourself as a mate, this is about Remi and his needs.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 8:03 am

Chapter Nine

Remi

How long would it take for them to realize I was awake? Listening to Juno talk to his father and someone else was actually comforting. He cared for me. Called me his mate. I was for sure either in a coma or dreaming, but it was nice. He refused to kidnap me. Green flag right there. Maybe this dream would end with a kiss or something?

“Doesn’t he feel the pull?” his father asked. He was the only one I knew who was since he kept calling Juno “son”.

“It seems like it,” Juno replied. “He found me attractive and told me his feelings were heightened.”

“That’s normal behavior for new mates,” one of the women spoke. “He just needs your touch and for you to mate. No reason to worry about that.”

“That’s not reassuring at all,” Juno said with a forced calmness. “They don’t have mates here. How can I convince him to mate with me when we’ve only just met? How do you think he’ll react to me telling him his feelings will sort themselves out after we mate?”

“Yeah, the kidnapping sounds better than that option,” the other guy in the room muttered.

“Don’t encourage their kidnapping idea!” Juno snapped at the guy.

“Don’t be mad at me! I’m on your side!”

“We’re all on Juno’s side,” his dad assured them. “Have you kissed him?”

“Not yet,” Juno sounded more like a pouting child now, it almost caused me to smile, but I hid it, not ready for them to see I was awake yet.

“It could help,” his dad spoke again.

“Okay,” Juno replied.

After a few seconds of silence his dad became impatient. “Well?”

“I’m not kissing him now!” Juno exclaimed.

“Why not?” one of the women spoke.

“Firstly, he’s asleep! Secondly, my dad is watching!”

“He’s your mate!” one of the women snapped, like that made consent not matter. I honestly liked Juno more and more. I liked him so much I hoped this was real and not a coma slash dream thing. I could totally see this being real, it felt real. The sheets under me. The scents. The voices. My normal dreams weren’t this realistic, so either real or a coma.

“Kiss him when he wakes up,” his dad ordered. “If he’s not willing to kiss you, which he will be, then come back here with him.”

“Fine,” Juno replied. “But not until I’ve tried everything.”

“We understand that,” another man spoke this time. “Just remember the longer you wait to mate, the more anguish you’ll both feel. It’s not normal to wait with mating, and your bodies will punish you for it.”

With those comforting words, Juno hung up and sighed. “I can’t kiss him without his consent, and I can’t just ask him for a kiss.”

“Why not?” I asked, sitting up, laughing when both men jumped in fright. “Sorry I startled you.” I wasn’t really sorry, more eager to see if this was still a dream or not.

Before I could ask if I was, in fact, dreaming, sleepiness came over me in a rush and then the world turned black.

I woke up in my bed, or I rather jumped up, looking around for Juno, hoping he was near. Had it been a dream? Fuck, that had felt so real! I was immensely disappointed. I wanted Juno to kiss me. I’d been so desperate that Dream Me had given away that I wasn’t sleeping anymore. What a wonderful dream, weird, but wonderful. I remembered every detail, like how his father had sounded, about them not being from this world, and then his friend who was with him in the dorm room. I hadn’t seen his friend before, and that wasn’t normal for dreams. Had it truly happened? I would need to ask Juno.

I rushed out of bed and looked at the time. It was six in the morning, giving me plenty of time to get dressed and head to work on time. Had I truly slept the day away? I’d had a date planned with Juno! Had I forgotten? Or was everything that happened real? But what had happened between then and now?

Looking at my phone I found no texts from Juno which was weird, right? We had plans so he would’ve definitely texted me to ask where I was and what we were doing. This seemed like proof enough that last night was real. But why did I then not remember anything else? I needed to find Juno straight after work.

Earl was impressed with yet another early arrival. I preened internally at finally being a good employee as I started my work day, letting everything that had happened move into the back of my mind as I made coffee and greeted our regulars.

I left work, feeling determined and eager to see Juno. Hayley's laugh reached me from across the street, momentarily taking my mind off him. She was walking with Wren, sending him looks of utter devotion and happiness. It made me smile to see her so happy. She was so into him she didn't even look my way, and I didn't bother waving or disturbing them, just continued on my way.

My phone started buzzing in my pocket, so I eagerly pulled it out, only to see my mother was the one calling me. I sighed and answered. I could chat a bit before I found Juno.

"Hi, honey!" she greeted me. "Dinner tonight? And make sure to bring Hayley this time." Was she here? I looked around the street, waiting to find my mother somewhere watching Hayley with another man. When I knew she wasn't lurking in the shadows, I sighed out loud.

"Can't do that Mom."

"Oh, then tomorrow?"

"Hayley and I broke up." I figured it would be best just to get it out there, rip the bandage off or whatever.

"Are you yanking my stocking right now?"

Eww. "What does that even mean?!" I exclaimed, already done with the conversation.

“I can’t believe you would let a perfectly nice girl like Hayley get away. Do you know how hard finding a girl like that is nowadays? Oh , she broke up with you. Is that it? I told you those “ ideas ” of yours were a waste of time! And now she dumped you, hon.” Wow , my mom truly thought little of me.

“It was a mutual decision,” I explained as calmly as I could.

“Sure, it was, hon,” she replied with a condescending tone. I rolled my eyes, truly contemplating breaking up with my mother too.

“So, she won’t be joining us for dinner anymore,” I added, moving the conversation along as I neared campus.

“You’re not even gonna fight for her?” My mom sounded like she was clutching her heart dramatically.

“Why would I? We both wanted to break up,” I reminded her.

“Yes, you said that. I just don’t think it’s the best option for you. Sure, Hayley could find another guy easily, but not many good girls would like to date a guy who spends hours in the library, forgetting their partners needs and wastes his time on ‘ ideas ’.” I was furious now. This was my life. Why was she acting like she cared about me? This wasn’t caring, this was about control. She liked Hayley and needed her back in the family, no matter what I wanted. No matter what I said.

“She already has. Great guy by the way,” I sassed, regretting it immediately. Now it would take ages for the phone call to end.

“Did you just sass me?” she asked with deathly calm. I knew now was the time to retreat, to apologize and take my words back, but then I spotted Juno walking out with the guy from yesterday, and how his eyes brightened when he spotted me, his

lips pulling into a beaming smile as he made his way over to me.

I found myself hanging up on my mom, no longer caring about being a good son, as I smiled back at Juno.

“Hi,” Juno said, smiling big enough to show just how perfectly white his teeth were.

“Hi,” I sighed dreamily, feeling like I could breathe again.

“Ready for our date tonight?” he asked casually.

What? “Um, wasn’t it yesterday?” I asked confused.

He blinked and then shook his head. “No, I’m sure it was today.” Was he trying to act like yesterday hadn’t happened? I knew it had, I recognized his friend who had sneaked off when Juno spotted me.

“Nope,” I replied. “It was yesterday, I just somehow slept through most of the day and night.”

He gave me a weak smile, his confidence faltering. “What happened before you fell asleep?” Was he for real?

“I asked you to kiss me, but you didn’t and then I fell asleep,” I replied, feeling my stomach sink. Was that why I fell asleep? I couldn’t really rule out magical powers considering everything. But... Did he do it so he wouldn’t have to kiss me? Was everything he told his dad and the others a lie? Maybe he didn’t want me. Maybe his friend helped him out so they could continue to act like I was his mate when I wasn’t. Juno was from another world. Portals existed. And Juno could somehow make me fall asleep. Then there was the whole mate thing. If it wasn’t because I could feel the truth in my own body, I wouldn’t have believed it, but I could, so I knew we were

mates or whatever Juno had claimed, but that didn't mean he wanted me. Maybe he lied because he was waiting for someone else, another mate, a better mate. I had no idea what being mates meant for us, but I felt this pull towards him, like my heart knew him, however corny that sounded even to my own ears. Was I not enough? And then there was the whole thing with Mr. Trent.

"Are you fucking Mr. Trent?" I blurted, stopping Juno from what he was going to say.

"What?"

"Mr. Trent," I replied, needing to know. "Are you fucking him? Is that why you don't want me?" Fuck these heightened feelings! Now I had tears gathering in my eyes as Juno stared unblinkingly at me.

"Um, no?" he replied with uncertainty, which only angered me.

"Well, are you or aren't you!?" I yelled, done with his confusing words. It was bad enough that he saw how huge of a mess I was yesterday, and now he had me doubting my sanity, but this? This was a fucking easy question to answer. Yes, it wasn't illegal for professors to have a relationship with their students, but it wasn't allowed if said student was in their classes, and Juno was.

"I'm not!" Juno defended himself, looking slightly offended at this point.

"Then why didn't you kiss me?!" I demanded, knowing full well I was acting very strange and out of character. I wasn't an angry person; I was the sort of guy you'd step on and then I would apologize for being in your way. Once again, these strong feelings were messing with me. Hadn't Juno's dad mentioned something about it only getting worse? Or was it the other guy? It was hard remembering the details, to be honest. I'd been too busy pretending to sleep to truly pay full attention.

When all Juno did was blink at me, I did what I was getting pretty good at. I ran. I didn't even care if people were looking, we were outside, I was allowed to yell.

Blindly running back to my dorm room, I felt the tears trail down my face. Then I remembered that Juno knew where my room was, and I didn't want to see him. If he even wanted to find me after this. I'd just made a huge scene, accusing him of sleeping with Mr. Trent, and then asked why he hadn't kissed me. If dying of mortification was a possibility, I would've been gone by now.

Changing my directions, I headed towards the library instead. My sanctuary. The top floor of the three-story building had huge windows that overlooked the forested area behind the building. There were comfortable chairs you could sit on and look outside while studying, but there were also tables with less comfortable chairs if you needed to study with others.

Whenever I needed to quiet my mind, I sat in the comfy chairs and looked outside. At night you could see the stars, which was my favorite time of day. It was around lunch time now, but the top floor was always deserted, having the least borrowed books and since the librarians didn't like walking up and down the stairs too much, they'd sorted the books out so that the main floor was where the most popular books were.

I actually preferred this. Peace and quiet. Privacy. I was so in my own head most of the time that having people around was scary to me. Like an instinctual part of me didn't like being vulnerable around others. I also appreciated that the library was open until two a.m. and only closed between two-six a.m. allowing me to hide away here whenever I needed to. Like now.

As I hurried inside, I breathed easier knowing it was lunchtime and only a few people would see my distraught face as I headed up to my favorite floor. Keeping my head down as I walked up the stairs, I heard no one whispering or conversing, which meant the building truly was deserted. I smiled in relief when my feet reached the top floor.

I walked over to the comfy chairs and sat down, admiring the forest as I let myself calm down.

Fuck feelings. I'd never been this... emotional before, not even as a kid, always calm and logical, that was Remi. Not this mentally unstable person, crying in bathrooms and yelling at people. God, I yelled at Juno! Why was I like this?!

Hiding my face in my hands, I tried to erase the haunting memories of our conversation. There was no way he'd want to date me now. And we still had to do the paper together. Fuck my life ... Maybe I should just quit school? The only thing I was passionate about were my ideas. I only attended school because of my parents' insistence that my "ideas" weren't going to pay the bills.

Letting the comfort of my favorite place wash over me, I started to calm down enough to take out my journal. It was where I wrote every idea down before making a detailed document on my laptop. I then saved the doc on the cloud, ensuring my ideas were protected. Opening my journal, I browsed through it, admiring my old ideas as I reached a blank page. I figured getting lost in my mind was the best solution for now. I needed to hide away, and for today to end already. This was what I needed.

Sitting back in the chair more comfortably, I looked outside again, emptying my mind and allowing ideas to form. I hardly ever tried to force the ideas to come, they just came whenever I went about my normal day, but my mind had been so busy these days that no idea had time to form. This was the best attempt I had at making ideas come to me.

With my pen ready, I closed my eyes and just waited.

Chapter Ten

Juno

I was the worst mate ever.

Nix and I had decided the best action would be for us to act like yesterday never happened, for me to go out with Remi and then kiss him like humans did after a date. I'd gotten the others from our team to help me out and they'd seen movies and read books on dating, so I would have more to go on. I'd let Remi fall into a deep sleep, then carried him back to his room with Nix, erasing his roommate's memory of us bringing him back, and then returned to our own room.

This morning, I had the pleasure of yet another call from the rulers, stating that I wasn't allowed to kiss Remi until he knew where I was from. Why? Because they suddenly realized he might get magic once we mated, and it could happen when we kissed. So, that was fun.

Then I attended classes and made plans with Nix on how to act around Remi, pretending today was our date and hoping he was confused enough to believe it. I hadn't expected his emotions, though. Those had to be a lot to deal with, and even worse, he'd run away from me. Again. I wasn't faring any better, my own emotions warring with me, begging me to kiss him. To hold him. I simply knew why and that was the only way to sort of deal with it. Getting Remi somewhere private was crucial. There was just the tiny issue of where he was hiding.

An hour later, I was truly desperate. Remi was nowhere to be found. I'd checked all

the bathrooms, the cafeteria, his dorm, outside. He was gone and I was losing it. Calling Nix was the only solution.

“Hey,” he greeted immediately.

Ignoring his greeting I said, “I can’t find him, can you?”

He was silent, but I knew it meant his magic was doing its job. “I tracked his phone to the library.”

“Thank you!” I said, ending the call, all but running towards the library. It was after lunch, meaning a lot of students were heading in the same direction as me, but that didn’t stop me from using my magic to slow their pace without them noticing. When I reached the doors, I calmed immensely, just the sheer relief of being near Remi was enough for my body to calm itself. I hoped he could feel the same, knowing I was coming. I ignored the part where he ran from me, since that hadn’t been about me, or I hoped it hadn’t. He’d asked if I’d been intimate with our professor. It truly made no sense to me, why he would even ask me that. Was that normal here? It seemed highly unprofessional.

When the main floor was cleared, and no Remi was found, I made my way to the second floor. No Remi there either. The next floor had a whole different feel to it, there was a peacefulness and just... quiet. A library should be somewhat quiet, but this was soothingly quiet.

Not wanting to disturb the ambiance, I walked silently around the floor until I spotted him. He was so beautiful. His dark brown hair mussed; his green eyes vibrant as he scribbled down notes in a journal. I sat down in the chair opposite him and waited for him to notice me. It didn’t take long. A sharp intake and then his gaze landed on mine, his eyes wide and gorgeous and his mouth open in shock.

“Hi, beautiful,” I greeted him carefully.

“Hi,” he whispered, not taking his eyes off mine.

“Are we still on for our date tonight?” I asked, trying to move on from whatever had happened an hour ago.

He sighed and closed his journal. “I’m not stupid, Juno. Please don’t lie to me.”

I sat up a little straighter. “It was never my intention to lie to you,” I admitted, not really knowing which lie he was referring to.

“I remember everything from yesterday. Don’t try to act like it never happened, or I’m leaving again.” The fierce look he gave me was so hot, I found myself smiling at him, too enamored to do anything else. “Juno?”

Oh, right. “How much do you remember?”

“Your call with your father and the other people, the part where you spoke about us being mates and you being from another world, or I guess that’s what the portal talk meant. Then the kidnapping, which I have to thank you for shutting down, since that wouldn’t have been pleasant for me.”

I gaped at him. He was taking this way too well. “How are you not freaking out right now?” I demanded. “Do you truly believe everything you heard?”

“I didn’t believe it at first, but how else would I fall asleep? I wasn’t even tired. And it makes sense that we’re mates. I haven’t felt this way about anyone before. Then they mentioned emotions and feelings being heightened and I definitely feel that. So, believing it was easy. I had plenty of proof.”

He was so amazing. A little crazy, maybe. But mostly amazing. “You do realize this is our first true conversation, right?” I asked, knowing we still needed to get to know one another, especially before visiting my dad. This was also a way to make him realize he was taking this awfully well, considering we were mostly strangers still. This was normal to me, not him. He should’ve been freaking out or maybe he was right and his body told him we belonged together. If he had magic, which he should have to mate with me, then he would feel the pull.

He smiled. “We’ve had plenty of conversations, they were just short ones. And I knew I wanted you as soon as I saw you, I just had a girlfriend at the time and got scared.” He shrugged, still a little embarrassed about that, I thought.

I thought I would be the one to hunt him down and get him to love me, but he seemed just as determined to be my mate as I was for him to be mine. It was a huge relief, knowing he was mad because I lied, not because of whatever he’d yelled about, and not because he was afraid. He definitely took everything better than expected.

“What does girlfriend mean? Is it a friend who’s a girl? We just use the word friend where I’m from, regardless of gender,” I smiled back, pleased to finally have a real conversation, without yelling, crying, or him running away.

“Oh, no. It means I dated her, romantically,” Remi explained, putting his journal back in his backpack.

“What?” I squeaked. He’d been romantic with someone else? Why?

He tilted his head. “I had a girlfriend. Is it only same sex couples where you’re from?” he questioned, looking interested in my world.

“We’re only with our mates,” I explained, still confused and honestly, kind of hurt. “We aren’t attracted to anyone else, only our mates.”

“That explains so much,” Remi said, sighing as he slumped back in his chair. “I thought maybe I was ace or something. Even when I was with Hayley, I wasn’t interested in being intimate, hugging and cuddling sure, but anything else wasn’t something I needed or wanted. To be honest, I wasn’t even that big of a cuddler.”

“I have to admit that hearing that you’ve been with someone else is eating me alive,” I said, hugging my stomach. I could puke just thinking about Remi with someone else.

His eyes widened and he stood in a rush to kneel at my side. “I’m so sorry, Juno! I had no idea I was yours at the time.”

“And now? Do you truly trust it or?” I asked, fearing he was messing with me somehow.

“I do, which is strange, I’ll admit that. But it made sense when I saw you, like I was alive for the first time or something. I have to trust my heart, and it wants you. That has to mean something.”

I smiled. How could I not? My mate spoke about trusting his heart and that it wanted me. That was so romantic. “Normally when mates meet, they mate the same day, then get to know one another after,” I told him, laughing when he gaped at me.

“Seriously?”

“Yes. Why wait? They are meant to be. And often the rush of attraction makes it harder to control the new urges and wants.” I was still struggling with that, but I refused to rush Remi. He was already taking this better than most would’ve. Mating could wait until he was truly ready. We just needed some cuddles to get by.

“Sure, I can see that part,” he admitted, looking at my body like he, too, was feeling

the pull. I slowly reached out and grabbed his chin, forcing his eyes to meet mine.

“I really want to kiss you,” I whispered, seeing his eyes turn dark as he nodded eagerly. I didn’t even care about the warning from the rulers, I wasn’t waiting another second. Remi’s lips were too perfect to resist any longer. I leaned forward, closing my eyes as I pressed my lips to his, softly, then firmer as he melted into it. Letting our need for one another take over, we deepened the kiss, adding our tongues, feeling the rush of finally kissing someone you desired. Your mate.

“Juno,” Remi whispered against my lips.

“Remi?” I answered, not moving away but also not kissing him.

“I feel weird.” That was all he said before his eyes rolled back and he slumped in front of me.

He fainted. Fuck!

I quickly called Nix. “Remi fainted after kissing me. We need to head back to the portal, can you help?”

“Library?” he asked.

“Top floor.”

“On my way.”

We hung up and I called my dad. “Hi Dad,” I quickly said, interrupting whatever greeting he was going for. “I kissed Remi, and he fainted. We’re heading to the portal.”

He didn't waste any time and quickly replied in a calm but firm tone, "We'll be ready for your return. Call the others and ask if anyone can help. It will take a lot of magic getting him out there without people seeing."

"Thanks, Dad," I replied, ending the call, grateful that he didn't ask any questions.

I called the team, and all but Sid answered and after explaining the situation it became clear only Nolen would be able to help, the others being too far away to do anything. Nolen had a car and could drive it, so we planned for me and Nix to get Remi to his dorm, pack a bag, and then Nolen would meet us there, helping with the glamour.

Nix reached us, panting as he stopped next to where Remi was on the floor. His timing was perfect. He'd likely sprinted over here, being the amazing friend he was.

"Nolen is helping us," I informed him while he caught his breath. "He's bringing a car and will meet us at Remi's dorm."

"Great," Nix wheezed. "Never running again," he complained, his hands resting on his thighs.

"We need to move around invisible, but also without bumping into anyone," I explained, kneeling beside Remi, ready to pick him up.

"I know. Just like yesterday, I haven't forgotten," Nix huffed, amused that it was only twenty-four hours since last time we had to carry Remi around. "You couldn't have picked a shorter mate?"

"Whoever picks our mates chose perfectly for me," I informed my best friend with a smirk.

He just smiled back and got ready to lift Remi with me.

Just like yesterday.

Derek was staring at us as we picked random things to add to Remi's bag. He was still out cold, but thankfully alive. We figured Derek could help us out with what to pack and then after, we would deal with his memory. It wasn't something we liked doing, but it was needed in this situation.

"So, you're his mate?" Derek questioned while I packed some of Remi's socks.

"Yes," I replied, not caring what we told Derek since his memory would be erased soon anyway.

"Cool," he muttered looking at Remi with concern. "Why do the three of you smell the same?" That had both Nix and I stopping our random packing.

"What?" Nix asked, clearly just as confused as me.

Derek pointed to us. "You all have this smell that's super comforting to me. Right now I feel so safe. Like I'm home somehow, and I technically am, since I live here, but like home home. You know?"

"No," Nix and I replied at the same time which had Derek slumping in defeat.

"Whatever," he muttered, trying to ignore our presence and resumed his work.

Three knocks on the door alerted us to Nolen's arrival. I swiftly opened and ushered him in. Nolen was a tall, bulky guy, a real bear. I was glad he was helping us carry Remi, especially since the portal was an hour away, deep into the forest.

A soft gasp came from where Derek was sitting, causing all our attention to shift to him. Nolen took in a startled breath, then in two determined strides knelt in front of Derek.

“Who—?” Derek began but was interrupted by Nolen.

“Mate,” Nolen stated.

“Fuck,” Nix muttered. “Horrible timing, man.”

“Please, Nolen,” I begged. “You can return to Derek as soon as we’re back home.”

Nolen seemed to remember my poor mate was unconscious and nodded as he stood. He looked back at Derek, “Please stay here. I’ll be back in three hours.” Derek nodded, his eyes wide and vibrant. Nolen walked over to Remi, but then seemed to think something over. He quickly removed his shirt and handed it to Derek without a word. Derek took it and held it close like it was the most important thing to him.

Nix and I ignored whatever was happening, and with Nolen back on task, we carried Remi out to the car while invisible. We drove in silence to the forest, which was a ten-minute drive, then carried Remi all the way to the portal. It was only visible for those with magic. I feared Remi wouldn’t be able to pass, but the others had assured me he would be fine.

I had to trust our rulers and they’d told me to bring him back home. I let that thought calm my nerves as we waved goodbye to Nolen when we reached the portal. I needed to remember to thank Nix for coming with me. He didn’t like leaving our new world either, but he did it for me, which meant a lot.

Nolen rushed out of there and I completely understood him. He was shirtless and had just found and left his mate. I would need to thank him, too.

“Do you think your mate is from here too?” I asked Nix just before we entered the portal.

“Yeah, I think so,” he replied.

And then we were back home.

Chapter Eleven

Remi

My brain felt like it buzzed from the inside. As if my head was vibrating, but not in an uncomfortable way, more like a brain massage, whatever that meant. It was sort of... pleasant.

“You’re home!” A lady gushed happily somewhere close to me. I had no clue where I was, but I felt my body become more alert by the second. I tried to move my body, or even just open my eyes, but I felt too weak to do anything.

“Bring him outside!” A man ordered and then we moved. I could smell it was Juno holding me, which helped my rising panic. It truly wasn’t pleasant being awake but unable to see or move.

“Why?” That was Nix’s voice, which meant he was near, and the thought calmed me further. I trusted them both. My whole life had been upended when I saw Juno only a few days ago, but I trusted my own instincts and they trusted them, so.

“I knew he had magic,” a man said. I remembered the voice now. It was Juno’s dad.

“Lay him here, boys,” a woman said kindly and then I felt soft grass under me. The smells were comforting here, like freshly mowed grass and lavender.

“He’s glowing,” Juno whispered with a sort of awe in his tone. Just hearing his voice had my heart beating faster. Needing him close. Wanting him closer.

“Magic.” Multiple people said in unison, their voices filled with emotion. The good kind.

I felt my body warm up from the inside and just when I thought I couldn’t take the heat anymore, the warmth faded, like it left my body and seeped out of me. I opened my eyes and saw Juno, Nix, and five others, all staring with wide eyes. Some even had tears trailing down their cheeks.

“Did I die?” I asked Juno. No one seemed inclined to offer me any information, so I better start asking around myself.

“No,” he chuckled softly. “You just got your magic.”

“Huh,” I replied lamely. “Cool.” What does one say in this sort of situation? Also, who were those people watching us? And why were some of them crying?

Juno offered me his hand and I took it, pleased to touch my mate and letting him help me stand. “I want to introduce you to my dad,” he said, gesturing to one of the criers.

“Oh,” I stuck my hand out and waited for his father to shake it. He shook his head and I was then engulfed in a hug with Juno and his dad.

“Dad, no tears,” Juno said, but his choked-up voice told me he was crying too.

I had one hundred percent died, and somehow revived myself. I had no other explanation for all these tears.

“Welcome to the family, Remi,” Juno’s dad said, finally letting us go and looking over us both fondly. It felt weird, but also amazing to be welcomed so easily into Juno’s family.

“Thank you,” I replied, feeling my eyes start to water. Maybe it was the air here? Tear inducing air? Was that a thing?

“Can I return?” Nix asked Juno, looking uncomfortable.

Juno rushed to his side. “You feel different coming back?”

“I feel horrible. Itchy and yeah, like I’m not supposed to be here.” Nix’s words didn’t make sense to me, but Juno seemed to understand him perfectly.

“Go home, Nix. I appreciate your help here, but you’re needed elsewhere.” Nix smiled at him and after a quick hug, he ran through an opening in the wall, like a black hole but with smoke and a blue color instead of blackness. He yelled out a “Byyyyye!” and then he was gone. The rulers didn’t seem to mind his quick exit, so I figured I shouldn’t question what’d happened either.

“He got a mate too?” Juno’s dad asked.

“We think so, they haven’t met yet, but he’s just as drawn to their world as I am,” Juno explained.

“What’s your name?” I asked Juno’s dad, knowing I interrupted them, but my mind needed a name other than Juno’s dad.

He grinned. “I’m Alec, but please call me Dad.”

“Okay,” I grinned back. Then the others introduced themselves as the rulers of their world. Henriette was my favorite, she was gushing and seemed genuinely excited to learn more about my world. It wasn’t that different to be honest. It looked the same. The only difference was the magic part. Magic that I apparently had now, too.

I was still reeling over that last part. I only had books and movies from my own world as a reference when it came to magic, but now I had it myself, and yet I still had no idea what true magic was. What could I even do now? Create food out of thin air? Fly? I really hoped I could fly!

“How long should we stay for?” Juno asked the rulers. “We still have school we need to attend.”

“We know, but with his magic being all new to him, maybe two days and then we’ll see?” Trise answered, looking at the other rulers for their opinion. They nodded in agreement.

“Okay,” Juno shrugged. “We’ll be back here tomorrow, the rest of the day we won’t be disturbed.” It was a warning mostly aimed at his father, who chuckled warmly as we waved our goodbyes.

“They won’t be mad we’ve left?” I asked once we were far enough away from them, walking out of the huge property and onto a somewhat busy street.

“Nah, they know new mates need time alone.” I blushed, realizing we would be together from now on. Or at least I hoped we would.

“Where are we going?” I looked back at what had to be either a palace or a castle. I had no idea what the difference between the two were, but it was a big building with several towers connected to it.

“To my house,” Juno replied, then quickly corrected himself. “Our house.”

“You, I mean, we have a house?”

“We do, and I think we should keep it, even if we move permanently to your world,”

he said casually, like we truly were connected now.

“You’d want that?” I asked, surprised. It was one of the few things I worried about, not that I’d had long to worry about our future, everything including Juno had happened so quickly. I didn’t care about my parents; I could do with being worlds apart from them for a while. But leaving the world I’d always known felt weird. But I guessed just being with Juno mattered the most.

“I honestly don’t care where we live,” Juno shrugged and took my hand in his as we walked down a paved street. “I just need to live with you, then I’m happy.”

He was perfect. “I feel the same way. Maybe we can have a place in both worlds?” There was just the issue with money and jobs, but we’d figure that out eventually.

“We can see with time where we both prefer to live, but for now you need to learn your magic. You already gave the earth some of your magic when we brought you here. Like newborn babies do when they have enough to give.”

“Really?” Maybe that was what I’d felt before I could open my eyes.

“It was the only reason we travelled to your world. Our magic is dying out and fewer babies have enough magic to share so our world isn’t sustainable anymore. We didn’t know mates were possible until I found you. And now that you have magic, and what looked like a lot, we finally have a chance of helping our world again.”

“That’s a lot,” I admitted, feeling tired and honestly a bit overwhelmed. I was in another world. Holy... that thought hadn’t even occurred to me before now, not truly. I was walking on pavement that wasn’t from my world. I’d travelled through a portal. I had magic.

I...

“I need to sit down,” I slumped down and ignored the curious glances from the people around us. They were dressed differently, more boring and plain, but otherwise they looked the same as humans did.

Juno didn't seem to mind that I needed a breather. Sitting down next to me, he offered me his hand again and I took it, grateful to be touching him again.

“How long until we're home?” I asked, loving how saying home meant wherever Juno lived.

“Only three minutes,” he assured me. That had me gathering the strength to stand again. Three minutes until I was finally alone with Juno. I quickened my pace and let Juno lead me home.

“And this is our room,” Juno said, opening the bedroom door. It was tidy and clean, a big bed with soft blue colors on the bedding. It looked like a fancy hotel room.

“Is it rude that I'm surprised by the cleanliness?” I teased.

“I cleaned before I left. I was very optimistic about not returning that day,” he grinned.

“So, finding a mate truly wasn't on your mind?” I smiled innocently. It was a rush to be looked at with pure devotion, something Juno always did.

He shook his head. “Our portal makers were too busy trying to find a world similar to ours. Survival was our main concern and since your world is a mirror world to ours, it was mostly about finding the small differences so we could adapt to your world if ours got uninhabitable.”

Huh. “Is it not safe here?”

“Oh, it’s safe right now. I would never put you in any danger, Remi. I hope you know that.”

I did. I couldn’t say that though, too busy blushing and having trouble meeting his eyes. I nodded, hoping that would be answer enough.

I felt him move closer as I determinately stared at the floor, still not brave enough to face him with red cheeks. A soft touch on my chin had my face moving towards his. He kissed me. It was careful. Tender. Slow. Grabbing his shirt, I allowed myself to get lost in the feel of his lips. My mate’s lips. I still had many questions, but they could wait. My body needed Juno.

Juno’s phone made a bell sound, breaking the moment between us. He held his wrist out and looked at a wristband of sorts, not a watch, it was bigger than that. Then a young woman’s face appeared in the air above it.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 8:03 am

Chapter Twelve

Juno

“Hi, Juno!” Charlotta greeted cheerily. “I’m so happy to see Remi is okay! Did you get home safe?” I’d missed seeing her face, it wasn’t the same when we had a team call, this was just us, and Remi too, but much more private than the recent calls between us.

“We did,” I smiled, pleased that she cared, she always had, but it was still nice. “You did call at a rather bad time though,” I began hoping she would catch on.

“Oh! Sorry! But that was actually why I called.”

I looked at Remi, then back at her. “Why?”

“I researched as you asked and um... I’ll just send you the link.”

“Okay?”

“Okay! Have fun!” She ended the call with a sweet little wave to us both and before I could question her weirdness, I got the link.

“That was my friend Charlotta,” I explained, clicking on the link. There were a lot of naked people. “What’s porn?” I asked aloud, scrolling down the site. A choked sound behind me had me looking at Remi who blushed even more.

“Did Charlotta say anything embarrassing?” I didn’t think she did, but Remi was different, maybe he felt embarrassed that she knew he’d fainted?

“Um, no,” he coughed lightly. “It’s just, um, that site,” he pointed to my slate. “We won’t, um, be needing that.”

“Oh, okay,” I replied, closing it down. “I hadn’t found the educational part yet anyway, just a lot of naked people.”

Remi made the choking sound again, so I kissed him, hoping that would help his unease. It did. He melted against me, his taller frame slumping down so we were at the same height. I backed him further into the room and pushed him down on the bed, leaning over his beautiful body.

“Please tell me I can have all of you now?” I begged, kissing down his neck as I waited for his permission. He had a green hoodie on, which meant he had to sit up for me to remove it.

“You can,” he replied, helping me rid him of his clothes. I’d “stolen” one of his hoodies, it had a light grayish-blue color. It was a little too big for me, but when we packed, I knew I needed to wear something less constrictive than my preferred leather jacket.

Remi pulled the hoodie off me and then attacked my pants. He had already stripped down to his boxers, his stunning body on full display in front of me. I’d waited on this day since I learned I would get my own mate one day. It was mostly the knowledge of getting my person that excited me. Not knowing what lust and attraction felt like, much less romantic love, made it hard to imagine how I would feel towards Remi. He was my everything.

“How, um,” Remi looked unsure as all our clothes, except our boxers were now off.

“How do you want to do this?”

I frowned. “What do you mean?”

He waved a finger between us. “With us.” He was blushing again and now I could see the color was running down to his chest too. I really liked him blushing.

“I’m afraid I still don’t understand, Remi. Do you not know how to mate?” We were taught in school, but maybe they weren’t? It seemed rather rude to just trust people to know how to do things when they were old enough.

“I um, I think it’s the same for us as it is for you. I was asking about positions, Juno.” He seemed more comfortable now.

“Ah, I know normally you try both to see what you prefer,” I didn’t care who did what, it didn’t matter much to me. I just wanted Remi.

“You truly don’t care?” he tilted his head, looking confused.

“I just want you, Remi. Do you have a preference?” He looked shy again, so I caressed his cheek gently, forcing him to look at me.

“I um, I would prefer if you fucked me,” he looked at me as he said the words, those perfect words.

“I would love that.” I kissed him softly, getting myself mentally ready to claim my mate. I would be inside of him soon. I couldn’t think too hard on that part, or I would explode with want. I wanted this to last but just his words and my imagination weren’t helping with that.

He pushed me away softly, “I have a question.” I nodded, always ready to answer

whatever questions he had for me. “I thought kissing mated us? I got magic from it. So why is it required we have sex then? Not that I mind that part, just curious.”

I shook my head. “You unlocked your own magic, now we need to combine our magic, sharing it between us, making it ours . We’ll be stronger and offer this world some of our magic to help sustain it. After we’ve mated, we’ll go outside and lay down on the ground, letting the earth take what it needs from us.” It was a cool sort of ritual, we got magic from our world, and gave some back, but whenever matings happened, we got magic ourselves, making the world stronger, brighter, because of it.

He just blinked at me. “Cool. Can we please start touching now? I’ve never been harder.” I grinned. He was getting more comfortable around me. I truly enjoyed seeing more of his personality come out.

“I would’ve claimed you as mine as soon as I saw you, remember?” I teased him as I resumed kissing his neck.

“I had to run,” he rasped, stretching his neck so I’d have more access. “I had Hayley.”

That put a stop to the kissing. “You can’t talk about her just before our mating, Remi.” I knew he didn’t mean anything by it but telling me about a person he’d been with still felt like a blow. Especially now when we were about to join our magic and bodies, I didn’t want anything or anyone else between us.

I sat up, not feeling the mood anymore, hating that the thought of his ex-girlfriend had ruined this for me. “I need some fresh air,” I said, leaving Remi confused on our bed. I walked out to my garden, allowing the sun to warm my nearly naked body as I sat on the grass, letting nature calm my thoughts. Maybe I was overreacting, but since being with someone other than your mate wasn’t normal here, the thought took some adjusting. I’d never heard about anyone else touching someone that wasn’t their mate. They didn’t get anything out of it, and neither did the other person. Just thinking that

someone had touched my Remi, and he'd touched them too... It did something to my chest that made it nearly impossible to breathe.

Chapter Thirteen

Remi

I had definitely ruined the moment. I'd loved Hayley, but it was never romantic love. I thought Juno understood that. When I saw him for the first time, I'd run because I didn't want to be a cheater. If I'd known being with Hayley was basically cheating on Juno, I would've never been with her. I would've waited forever for Juno. I would've happily waited for him. But there was no way I could have known that. That there was even a thing such as mates and then someone from an entirely different world too.

I walked around his house, our house, trying to find him. The only indication that he was outside was the slightly open door that led to the garden. I hadn't seen it yet, but it looked closed in with trees surrounding it. Here people had more room between houses, making it more private and quieter. I found that I preferred this world's way of housing people. Maybe they had busy cities like my world had, but here where Juno lived, it was perfect.

I silently opened the door and joined him on the grass. He had his eyes closed and I could tell he was crying softly. I'd done that. Ruined our moment together and made my mate cry. I had to see it from his perspective. I'd cheated on him and then brought her up just before we mated. He'd never been with anyone else, waiting for me. His mate. This was basically like a marriage for Juno, and I'd brought up Hayley, simply because I wanted to assure Juno why I'd run, hoping he would understand. But how could he? It wasn't normal here; he'd said so himself. Everyone waited to find their mates, happy with themselves and their friends until the day came where they found

their person. I wished I could've done the same. I would've, had I known.

"I'm sorry," I said, breaking the silence. "I keep forgetting about our differences and hurting you. I never want to be the reason you cry, Juno." He'd cried just a few hours ago from happiness with his dad. This wasn't happiness, though, and I had caused it.

"I know," Juno replied, his voice breaking a little. "I'm really trying to be understanding of your world and not be angry at you, Remi. But why did you have to bring her up?"

Why indeed. "I guess I want to punish myself for it." That was the only reason I could think of. "I think some part of me knew it was wrong to be with Hayley, but I wanted to fit in, to please my parents, to show them that I could find a partner. And Hayley was my closest friend. I love her. It was never romantic love, but I thought it could turn into that. It didn't. I understand why now, but then I thought my unease with the situation was because something was wrong with me. I felt wrong. I wished I'd just followed my heart and stayed true to myself. That having friends and going to school was enough for me. But I stupidly let my parents influence my life." Letting my mom guilt me into asking Hayley to prom and then calling Hayley my girlfriend when we weren't even dating had made Hayley ask me if I wanted to date and I'd thought why not? She was a person I loved and we had fun together.

He looked at me with a pained smile. "I'm dealing with the same mess of emotions and feelings as you are. Our bodies need balance and it will only get worse until we mate, but I won't mate with Hayley's name between us. I'd rather be a mess than allow her into our mating." I nodded, understanding him completely. "I don't blame you for having had love in your life. This isn't something you did knowingly and I know this is something I just have to deal with." He laughed then, "I can't even blame her for loving you. Not loving you is simply impossible. And I know you love her too, not the same kind of love, but still love."

He shook his head with a wistful smile, like he was working through everything while battling the heightened feelings simultaneously. I took his hand in mine, grateful he wasn't blaming me but just needed to work through it. We would work through it. Together.

"I'm glad you had her friendship. Had it not been for her you might've turned out differently, and the person I've been blessed with is perfect."

Damn these feelings were hitting hard. A tear escaped my left eye as I clutched his hand tighter in mine, not quite able to respond to those kind words.

"We'll mate another time," I agreed with a watery smile as more tears joined the first one. "We can spend the day getting to know one another instead?" I hoped he wasn't going to push me away again. That would kill me.

"I would love that," Juno said as he stood up and offered me his hand. I took it, placing a soft kiss on his cheek. He wiped my tears away and led me back inside.

"So, this is normal here?" I asked, looking at the TV. Juno had put on a reality show where they would play hide and seek on a world wide scale, using their magic to hide and find one another. The winner won something, not sure what yet, and it was oddly entertaining. I still hadn't figured out my own magic, promising Juno's dad and the rulers I would wait so I didn't mess anything up. Juno thought reality TV would be a great way to show me the different ways our magic worked. So far, I'd learned that we couldn't magically make something appear, but we could use glamour to make it seem like something was there, when in fact, it wasn't. Using fireballs and other cool stuff wasn't a thing either. Sadly. We could do many things, but making stuff appear wasn't included in that.

"You don't have this sort of entertainment?" he asked, rubbing my feet. We lay on the couch, me with my feet in his lap as we got to know one another better. I was

being tortured by his firm touch, knowing we'd soon mate. Every time my mind wandered to that, I felt flushed and itchy, like only Juno could scratch the itch my body felt. His hands on me kept igniting whatever we'd started, never allowing my body to calm completely.

"No magic, but we do have reality TV and fake magic shows and movies," I replied, trying to stifle the moan that almost escaped me. His hands were fucking magical.

"Fake?"

"Yeah, like fantasy, with dragons and elves, and all sorts of magical beings," I replied, thinking if dragons actually did exist in another world somewhere.

"We have that too. Just with different magic than ours," Juno said. I liked how similar our worlds were, it made it easier to connect like this. He put a little more pressure on my foot, making me moan out loud this time.

Juno faltered a bit after my escaped moan, so I quickly asked, "What about romance?" I had to ask that, too curious not to.

"We have some shows with mates finding each other and how their lives turn around. It's mostly reality, though. I like seeing people fall in love with their mates, but I much prefer action and adventure."

"I get that. I love romance because I wanted to feel what they felt, you know? Seeing them explore their feelings made me a part of it, and even though I now know why I couldn't feel the same, it still helped me be a part of how my world worked. I thought I was ace, which can mean different things, but from my perspective it meant I wasn't sexually attracted to anyone, but I didn't have romantic feelings towards others either, which some ace people have." It was so confusing trying to figure out your sexuality when it was different for everyone. Saying I was ace was just easier to explain to

Hayley why I wasn't interested in having sex with her after our first few times. She'd been understanding at first, but as time passed, I could tell she needed more intimacy than I could offer. Thinking back, it was actually a mystery how we'd stayed together for a year.

"I hate that you felt so lonely in your world." He stopped massaging my feet and moved to snuggle into me instead. "I hadn't thought about how being my mate affected you."

I ran my fingers through his hair, grateful we had this moment together. Being near him felt so comforting and easy. "I still don't get why I was picked to be yours. What if you'd never visited my world? And why do I even have magic to begin with?"

Juno was silent for a bit, then he looked up from my chest. "I believe the rulers have some theories they'll share with us tomorrow. But for now, I don't know. I just know you're mine."

I hugged him tighter against me. This was still so weird. Were my parents magical too? They seemed to truly love one another so they could be mates, but it still didn't make sense in my mind. Neither did the fact that I was conceived using donor sperm. My stomach grumbled, reminding me I hadn't eaten since I was at work.

"Oh!" Juno jumped away from me, like I was hurting him with my angry stomach. "I'll feed you!" He rushed from the room, leaving me too stunned to go after him. Thinking about work and how I likely wouldn't return to it, made me text Earl. He needed to know I wasn't coming back, he deserved a heads-up, even though I felt horrible doing it over text. I would make it a priority to see him when we returned. After the text was sent and it said delivered, I realized it would have to be some kind of magic juju that made me able to use my phone in another world. I would have to ask Juno about that.

“Any allergies?” he called from the kitchen.

I smiled and stood, following his voice, joining him as he opened cabinets in search of food. “Damn,” he muttered, opening his fridge and freezer. “We have nothing to eat.”

“Can’t we order food?” I really hoped food deliveries were a thing here, since it would be torture living without it. I couldn’t cook, since Dad preferred to have his kitchen to himself most of the time, and I never considered learning since we had free food from the cafeteria.

“We do,” he assured me, opening up his slate. “Pizza?” I nodded eagerly as my stomach did another angry growl. “Toppings?” he asked, scrolling on his slate. It was so cool. When he’d shown it to me, I’d been filled with ideas I wished I could’ve written down, but Juno assured me I would get my own slate soon.

“Ham and pineapple,” I replied, envying his slate as he placed our order.

“That’s not a thing here,” he chuckled, showing me the options.

“Well, it should be,” I pouted and looked over my options. “I’ll just have the cheese and pepperoni one, oh and add chicken and garlic too.”

Juno ordered one with pepperoni and cheese, assuring me theirs were similar to the ones I was used to back home.

“It’ll be ten minutes,” Juno said, taking my hand in his and leading me back to the living room. “I want to snuggle until then.” He was too adorable. The way he so easily spoke his wants was admirable. I hoped to be as confident as him, or close to, some day. Maybe I could be like that with him, if I let myself trust he’d never judge me for it. I’d never thought about how much I held myself back, a normal response

since people often rejected me or didn't care enough. Like with my ideas. Would Juno think them a waste of time too?

We snuggled up again and resumed watching the reality show, watching as one of the women made herself invisible and climbed out of a window to escape a building. It was way more exciting than I'd thought it would be, and before we knew it, the doorbell rang.

Juno ran over and opened the door to a robot. An actual robot. It had wheels and arms and with said arms it gave Juno our food, then set off again, driving down the street like a scooter.

"That's so cool!" I exclaimed, standing up, looking at its retreating form. "I wish we had that."

Juno laughed lightly and waited for me to see my fill before closing the door. "They're made from magic and metal. Don't ask me how, I've never been able to grasp the workings, though Nix loves it and could easily teach you."

I was all for forgetting the pizza and claiming Juno right there on the floor. "I can make robots with magic?" I whispered, afraid to get my hopes up.

"Sure, and many other things too. We have several institutions that teach us how to use magic to make stuff work like that. Often those people end up creating different things we soon won't be able to live without. Like the delivery robot. It's designed to find its own way using GPS and then it'll return once the delivery is done."

My knees felt weak. I would be able to work, actually work, doing what I loved? Tears trailed down my face as I sat back down on the couch, too overwhelmed by emotions again.

Juno sat the pizza down on the side table and grabbed my face with both hands, looking pained. “You don’t like robots?”

I shook my head. “I love them.” How could I explain what I was feeling? How life-altering this was for me. It was one thing finding Juno, my mate. Another thing was to learn I had a calling that was normal here, that I could do the thing I loved and be paid for it.

“My love,” Juno spoke softly, still looking a tad worried. His hands were warm on my face as he looked at me with those beautiful blue eyes. My love.

“I want to learn it,” I finally said, letting Juno in further. “I want to make stuff with magic and materials, stuff to help people’s day to day lives. It’s all I ever wanted.”

“Then we’ll live here and make sure you get the education for it.” I didn’t know if it was the heightened emotions or something in the air, but right then I knew one thing. I loved Juno.

“Thank you,” I whispered, placing my own hands on top of his that were still on my face. Then I kissed him. Forgetting about the pizza, I let myself fall deeper in love with my mate. My wonderful mate who would do anything to make me happy, and who obviously loved me too.

“Pizza,” Juno breathed against my lips. “I won’t let you starve, my love.” There was that endearment again. I swooned inside.

“Fine, but afterwards we’re going to bed,” I stated boldly, loving how his eyes gleamed when I said it.

He grinned. “Deal.”

Chapter Fourteen

Juno

We saw the rest of the episode while scarfing down our pizza, dividing it up between us so we had half of each, sharing our food like true mates did. Something so insignificant felt like a huge milestone for me. Sharing a meal with my mate. In our home. It felt perfect. Like we hadn't just met a few days ago, and even though all mates felt that way when they met, it was still weird experiencing it myself.

"I love this soda flavor," Remi said, looking at the bottle. "Why can I read this?"

I looked at the bottle. "You have magic now, you understand our language too, so you can read it. You didn't realize after watching several episodes of the show?" He was too cute.

He frowned when it dawned on him. "But I didn't do anything?"

I shrugged. "You're mated to me, so I believe your magic did it when we kissed. Usually, you would use your magic to learn a language, but you'd be doing it knowingly. So that's my only guess."

"Huh, so, I would be able to learn all languages from my world using magic?"

"Yes, but your magic needs to recharge so you wouldn't be able to do it all in one day. It takes a lot to learn another language and since you're new to having magic, we should wait a bit with that." I had my suspicion that Remi was somehow tied to my

world too, not that I would discuss that with him just yet. I had a feeling though that the rulers had their own theories down. Knowing our language, and speaking it unknowingly seemed like further proof he was either from here or related to someone from my world. Although how someone could've made a portal before Astro was somewhat concerning.

Remi nodded, putting the bottle back on the table. "Do you want to shower together?" My brain froze. He wanted to bathe with me? I would finally see my mate completely naked? I swallowed and nodded, silently following him down the hallway. Remi had a smirk on his face, clearly aware of what he was doing to me. I loved that I was affecting him too. We'd been in our boxers since our first attempt at mating, having used blankets to fight off the cold air around us. But now there would be nothing between us.

"This is amazing," Remi said, entering the big bathroom. He'd used the small one when he had to pee earlier. This one was with a shower and a tub. A rather big bathroom, but I loved having baths.

Stepping around him I turned on the shower, allowing the water to heat up. Being eager and honestly dying to get naked with my mate, I hurried out of my boxers and waited for Remi to do the same. His eyes tracked every part of my body until they landed on my dick. His breathing changed, affecting my breathing in return as I grew harder under his heated gaze.

"My love," I begged, wanting to see him too. Dying to see him bared before me. He stepped out of them quickly and then we just stood there, admiring each other as our dicks grew to full hardness. As the room filled with steam, our breathing changed, charging the room with our need for one another.

I didn't know who moved first, but I was pushed into the shower, pressed against the tiles as Remi's hot body moved against mine. His lips claimed mine while his hands

cradled my head and I cupped his ass, pushing his erection against mine. Moaning into the kiss as he thrust into me, our stomachs rubbed together so our dicks got some friction.

“More,” I begged, not knowing what or how Remi would offer it, but he slid down my body and took my dick into his mouth, sucking and licking it like he knew exactly what he was doing, even if he’d only been with a woman before. I refused to let the thought of Hayley ruin the moment, so I simply enjoyed his mouth on me, snaking my hand into his hair as I held on for dear life as he sucked me like his life depended on it. Swirling his tongue around the cockhead, he then licked down the vein while he caressed my balls. It was all perfect. He was perfect. I felt my climax nearing. “I’m close,” I warned, not knowing what Remi preferred in this situation.

He hummed around me, making me groan as the vibrations from his throat hit. I came moaning his name as I filled his mouth with my release. Slumping further against the tiles I allowed Remi to support my weight as a blissful daze clouded over me. “Was it okay?” he rasped, his throat likely sore after that workout.

“Okay? It was mind-blowing,” I praised him, willing my body to function so I could return the favor. I kneeled but Remi chuckled and pulled me up again, pecking a kiss on my lips.

“Already taken care of, baby.” He grinned, kissing me harder this time, invading my mouth with his tongue while my legs went weak again. I got lost in his touch. In his love. I was his baby .

I trailed my hands down his body, eager to touch every part of him. Finally reaching his dick I was confused when it was only half hard. “Are you not into kissing?” I asked, breaking away enough to see his eyes. “We can stop.”

Remi looked confused. “Why wouldn’t I be into it?” I pointed down hoping that

would be answer enough. “Oh,” he laughed, a husky laughter that did things to me. “I came while sucking you off.”

“What?”

He smiled, pecking my lips. “I told you I took care of it.”

“I didn’t know what you meant by it,” I admitted, feeling like I could conquer the world right now.

“I was so into it that I couldn’t stop touching myself,” he whispered into my ear, proving I now had a kink for dirty talk. My damn legs would need to wake up soon. I kept feeling them weaken.

“Oh,” I replied, feeling a blush forming.

“And when I tasted you, all I could think about was how much I looked forward to you filling my ass up too.” I groaned, feeling my dick getting hard again. “You want to fuck me?” he asked with a smirk. I nodded, turning off the water and following him over to the towels. We didn’t look at each other as we got dry, both of us clearly knowing it would set us off again, and this time we needed to fully mate. My poor body couldn’t take any more.

“So,” I began, feeling nervous now that we were about to mate for real. I wanted to be good for Remi, wanted our mating to be perfect.

Remi looked nervous too, and that helped a bit. We were in this together. He was my person and I was his. “I hope you have lube, otherwise this will have to wait a little longer,” he joked, trying to ease the awkwardness that filled the room.

I smiled and grabbed the lube from my nightstand. Removing my towel, I sat down

on the bed and waited for him to join me. He seemed to relax now that I was exposed to him, making me the vulnerable one until he removed his own towel.

He moved and stopped between my legs. Holding eye contact he released the towel and straddled my lap. I couldn't look away from his green eyes. They held so much emotion in them. I felt they said more than words ever could.

I'm scared.

I'm excited.

I'm nervous.

I'm happy.

I'm yours.

I love you.

Every emotion I saw reflected in his vulnerable eyes, I mimicked. The love part was natural. He was the only one I would ever love like this. Knowing him better now than I had at our first meeting, I could honestly say I loved him. My Remi. My mate.

He moved then, thrusting his hard dick against mine. I closed my eyes, tilting my head back and just enjoyed every amazing sensation Remi made me feel. My hands held his hips, moving him against me harder, faster. I needed him.

Pushing him off my lap and onto the bed, I leaned over him, moving him further up the bed as I reached for the lube. I couldn't wait any longer, and neither could he. Holding his legs open for me, he gave me a nod and a smile, baring his hole, waiting for me to work him open.

I was frozen in place. He was completely on display for me. Only me. His body was the most alluring thing I'd ever seen as he waited to be claimed. I was the luckiest man alive. Remi would be the second luckiest man; I would make sure of that. He would never be without love. Without support. I would be everything he needed. And when one of us passed from old age, I would follow him then too, never letting him escape me. He was mine forever and even after that.

"Baby, please." Remi's begging voice dragged me back to the present. I reluctantly removed my gaze from his hole. The part of him I would soon enter. Something Remi had saved just for me.

"I love you," I said, wanting him to know that before we mated. He needed to hear the words he likely already saw written in my eyes. I never wanted him to doubt I'd loved him even before we shared our magic.

He blinked, his eyes a bit glassy. "I love you too." I felt his words settle over me, erasing my nervousness. I was doing this with my mate. Who loved me. I wouldn't mess anything up. I couldn't, and that realization helped immensely.

I poured some lube on my fingers, circling one finger around his hole, letting his reactions to it guide me. He moaned as I pressed softly against his rim, not entering yet, just playing around to get him used to being touched somewhere new. I had to admit I liked touching him too. While the need to fuck him was there, I found myself enjoying my hands on him too much to stop. His breathing was affected as I continued to tease his opening, and I savored the soft moans that escaped him. He had his eyes closed, writhing on the bed as I looked at every reaction his body made, allowing me to enjoy his body without him noticing just how much I was appreciating the sight of him.

"How long do you plan on torturing me?" Remi's raspy voice startled me. I hadn't even noticed he was staring at me. I breached him, feeling like that was my best

option. I didn't feel like explaining just how gorgeous he was at that moment, knowing he needed action rather than words. His dick was red and leaking, clearly in need of release soon and here I was having the time of my life playing with his body as if I was learning to play a new instrument. "Much better," he praised me as I filled him up with one finger, then added another.

"Let me know if it hurts," I whispered, not wanting to ruin the moment but needing it to be said. I would never cause him pain if I could help it.

"More," he said, gesturing vaguely with his hand as if asking me to hurry up. I chuckled and added a third finger, knowing he was stretched enough for it to only sting a little now. I had planned for this mating to be without magic for the most part, since Remi still didn't have full control over his. I'd felt it made it fairer somehow. But now, I couldn't stop myself. Reaching out with my magic I sought his emotions out and let them guide me, trusting them to allow me to bring my mate the pleasure he deserved.

"Oh, fuck!" Remi exclaimed, taking my free hand in his. "Whatever you're doing it fucking works."

Grinning, I let my magic meet his, letting him feel my happiness and need for him. His eyes opened and sought out mine. I saw the same need reflected in his green ones, and I knew now was the time. I removed my fingers, hearing a whimper escape him from the loss. Quickly, I coated my cock in lube and, grabbing his thighs, I positioned myself against his entrance.

"Ready?" I asked, knowing he was, but needing a second to calm myself.

"God, yes!" Remi exclaimed, pushing down, forcing me to breach him, clearly done with waiting any longer.

Chapter Fifteen

Remi

Juno's dick was in my ass.

I had a dick in my ass.

Holy...

"Don't stop!" I hissed, knowing he was worried about hurting me. How could I explain to him that all I felt was this swirling pleasure in my body and every time he stopped, I felt murderous from having the pleasure taken away, even if momentarily.

He smiled. "Oh, baby, you truly are perfect for me." Then he began to move. And God did he move. The visual of Juno rocking his hips, capturing his lips with his teeth in concentration and then the soft grunts that escaped him as he played my body like the magical being that he was.

I was only feeling pleasure in that moment. Thoughts weren't present, only the feel of Juno's hard cock pumping in and out of my ass, lighting up parts of my body I hadn't felt before. Was it magic? Maybe. But I had a strong suspicion it was all Juno.

The moonlight shone inside our bedroom, hitting Juno from behind making him appear like a sex god between my legs. This image would forever stay in my mind. My beautiful mate, illuminated by the moon from another world. Our new world.

What would my future have been like had I not met Juno? It would've been lonely, but would I ever know what I was missing out on? I wouldn't know what being alive felt like. I hadn't known. Not until Juno. Not until my world was opened to magic and love. True love.

A tear escaped my eye as I blinked, trying to savor Juno's mesmerizing moves as he connected us. Juno's thumb came down on my chin, wiping away the tear. He knew I wasn't hurting, the soft smile he gave me as he slowed his pace said as much. He likely felt what I did. Grateful. Happy. Alive .

"Are you ready?" he asked, his tone filled with warmth.

"Ready?" I asked, feeling confused. Weren't we doing it right?

"For our magic to unite," he explained, still fucking into me slowly, thankfully not stopping the pleasure like before.

"What should I do?"

His smile widened with fondness. "Place your hand on my heart, baby." I did as he asked and he mirrored it, placing one hand over my heart. "Close your eyes and push with your will every ounce of magic inside you into me." I closed my eyes and frowned. It sounded easy enough but willing something I couldn't grasp felt weird. How would I know I did it right?

A soft gasp escaped me when I felt my entire body light up with a pleasure so immense, I felt like I was floating. Juno groaned, likely feeling it too. I still had no idea if I'd done it or not, but right now I didn't even care. The overwhelming sensation came in waves, moving us closer somehow, then fusing us together, as we became one.

Suddenly a bright light came from within us both, lighting up the whole room in a glowing shine of our magic. Then it burst like an explosion of colors, and we came as the climax reached its peak and the colors faded, leaving us with only the moonlight and our gasping breaths.

“That was...” Juno began.

“Life changing,” I finished.

“Life changing,” he agreed. Then we looked at each other and laughed. We were mated. The happiness we both shared was the best feeling in both our worlds.

“I don’t want to,” I said, staring at my phone as it vibrated on the table.

“You need to talk to your parents sooner or later,” Juno reminded me kindly. We fell asleep last night holding on to one another, not caring about the mess between us. We’d paid for that in the morning, and while taking a long bath together had helped, we wouldn’t be making the same mistake again in the future.

I sighed and accepted the call. “Hi, mom,” I greeted, faking a cheerful tone. I already knew what she wanted. Juno had explained that Nix had somehow made my phone work in this world. When he’d located my phone so Juno could find me, he’d infused it (Juno couldn’t explain how) with magic, making it work in both worlds.

“You better have an explanation for hanging up on me, young man!” She greeted me. “Your dad was appalled by your behavior. We get that being dumped can sour one’s mood, but there’s no reason to disrespect your mother.” Juno was glaring daggers at my phone, clearly overhearing everything my mom was shouting at the other end.

“I simply had to return to my classes and since you were determined to ignore whatever I said, it seemed easier to hang up,” I explained calmly. It was easier being

honest now that I had Juno. Before I would back off, afraid to lose the only people who cared about me. Maybe that was part of the reason I'd stayed with Hayley for so long. However weak that made me, I hated feeling unloved. Unwanted.

"What has gotten into you?" she demanded, ignoring the part where I told her she'd ignored me. It would've been funny if it wasn't proof of just how little she cared about me.

"I'm choosing happiness, Mom. And I no longer care if my happiness hurts yours. My happiness is finally my own."

Juno sent me a proud grin and promptly stole my phone and hung up on my mom. "I feared she would go on for hours and we have to meet the rulers in thirty minutes."

I laughed. "You can hang up on her anytime you want, baby." He beamed back, taking my hand in his as we got ready to leave. I was a little nervous but it was mostly because we would get some answers, I wasn't sure I wanted to hear. Like how I had magic. I just had a feeling something or someone had done something I wouldn't like hearing about.

"Nervous?" Juno asked when we were a few minutes away from the rulers' property. I squeezed his hand, grateful to have him with me for this.

"Yes," I admitted, knowing he likely knew that already. Since we'd mated last night, we'd had this sort of understanding of each other's emotions. Like a knowing, sort of. It was handy. I felt Juno's trepidation and excitement, he wanted answers but feared them too. His dad hadn't told us anything else, just called and woke us up to inform us of the time we were expected.

"I fear it's graver than we thought." Juno eyed the entrance which held several cars. They looked like the cars from my world, just slightly different.

“What makes you say that?” I asked, feeling like this was the point of no return. I knew that I would walk out of there different, somehow. I just knew.

Juno didn’t answer. He held my hand tighter and walked us through the entrance, then led me down a hall to where several voices could be heard. A gathering of people was waiting in a huge room at the end of the hallway, and of course that was when I realized what Juno had meant.

Around thirty people filled the room, and you could just feel the nervous energy in the air. I had no idea who everyone was, just the rulers, Nix, and Charlotta. Yesterday, when we left, it was supposed to just be us. Whatever they’d found out in the meantime couldn’t be good.

Henriette clapped her hands and everyone quieted immediately. The other rulers stood beside her, looking serious, nothing like the teary eyed and happy rulers I’d met yesterday. I was the one to squeeze Juno’s hand this time. I could feel we both needed the comfort.

“We have some bad news to share with you all. As you can see several of you have already found your mates,” Henriette gestured to a few of us. I had no idea who were from my world, and thus didn’t know how many had found their mates. “Nolen’s mate, Derek,” she continued and I gaped and looked over at Juno, who didn’t seem surprised at all by it. I knew Nolen had helped us yesterday. Could it be my roommate Derek? Henriette continued, “He showed clear signs of distress, only Nolen can calm him. We found this highly worrisome and had him brought here immediately.” She looked at the other rulers with some kind of pity and regret.

Alec stepped forward, “Derek and Nolen are resting until Derek feels better, which is why Nolen isn’t here with us. His mate needs him. We, um, we searched Derek with our magic when he came, with his consent, of course. He’s the son of one of ours.”

There were gasps around the room, but I didn't understand why that was a huge surprise. I tried to subtly look at Juno who frowned in confusion.

"I thought we were the first ones through?" A guy said. First ones through?

"We thought so too," Trise answered solemnly. "However, Derek's DNA showed us someone had already opened a portal to their world before us. Who, we're yet to find out. But we will. Derek has no memory of it and told us his parents used a sperm donor to conceive him. We are actively searching for the donor by hacking their web, or whatever it's called."

"Um," I said, suddenly gaining everyone's attention. "I thought sperm donations were anonymous?" My donor had been.

"It is, but they keep information on everyone in their system. Only the company can access the information, which means we can find it too," Henriette replied with a soft smile.

"So, everyone's mates were conceived with donated sperm?" A girl asked from the back.

"We believe so," Alec answered. "Is there a mate present who's not?" No one raised their hand or said anything. "This reinforces our theory that whoever the donor was donated a lot of sperm. We still don't know why. Or if he kept watch over any of you as you grew up. He did, with Derek, sadly."

I felt sick. I'd judged Derek for his weird ways and hearing how they spoke of him, it was clear he'd gone through something horrible. I wanted to know what, but at the same time I wanted to stay in the dark. I felt grateful I hadn't been through whatever he had and then immediately felt horrible for having that thought.

Juno tugged me in front of him, which was so cute, but also slightly awkward with me being taller than him. I leaned back against him and found comfort in his arms wrapped around my waist, hoping this would end soon.

Henriette spoke up again, “we can’t teach you magic at the moment, trusting your mates to guide you while we figure the rest out. But we suggest you return to your world while we work. Keep learning and enjoy your mates. To those of you who haven’t found your mates, if you find the world alluring it could mean your mates are there too. We’ll allow you to travel around there freely. We will inform you when we have more information. Stay safe everyone.”

Alec rushed over to us as soon as Henriette stepped back. “I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you this myself.”

Juno shook his head. “We know you didn’t have the time. But, Dad, is it really wise to return?”

“We believe whoever did it is either dead or living here. Making a portal like that takes a lot of magic and we both know how much magic is transferred from parent to child. He likely doesn’t have any magic left.” Alec seemed confident we should return, and I needed to figure out with Juno if we were going to leave my world for good.

“When are we allowed to return here?” I asked.

“Give us a week, then we’ll have everyone back to discuss our findings,” he replied, grabbing both our shoulders and squeezing them. “In the meantime, you can show Juno around and have some fun. We don’t care if you attend school or not if you aren’t planning on staying in that world, but I’ll leave that decision to you.”

I liked the fact that he wasn’t pushing us to stay and live here, even though that was

what I was leaning towards. I had a possibility for my literal dream education and job here. No way would I stay in a magicless world.

“Teach Remi what you can of magic, just don’t test it out around people,” Juno’s dad teased before hugging us both. “And please message me once in a while.”

“We will,” Juno promised for both of us.

Chapter Sixteen

Juno

We were both silent as we passed through the portal. Whatever the rulers would find couldn't be good. Remi's emotions were all over the place and I couldn't quite grasp what he was feeling. I just hoped my presence was soothing enough for him as he worked through everything.

Remi's father was a man from my world, making him a part of two worlds. Would he ever feel at home in one of them? I hoped so. It sounded like Derek was the only one that had suffered from being in their world, and I really hoped he would be okay.

"Do you mind staying with me in my dorm?" Remi asked as we made our way through the forest. Remi had no idea where we were so I was guiding us.

"If you think for one second that I'm sleeping somewhere without you, I'm going to slap your butt," I muttered. Like I would even be able to sleep without him in my arms now. He smiled fondly at me but didn't reply. He didn't need to. I could feel his happiness engulf me from the inside.

"We need to figure out how to spend our week," he said after a few minutes of silence. "I don't want to live here, so maybe we can pull me out of school and just... have fun together." I liked that idea.

"You sure you want us to live in my world?" I had to ask even though I was happy he was willing to move.

He nodded. "I feel I belong there, you know? Besides, it has opportunities for us that my world doesn't."

"But if we can't heal my world with magic, it might not be a place we can stay forever," I reminded him, even though it already looked brighter after the arrival of our new mates, though I doubted a few people could make enough of a difference.

"We'll deal with that when the time comes." He sounded so... at ease with everything. I knew he wasn't, but it was comforting knowing we had a plan for this week and for our future together.

Deciding to change the subject to something lighter I asked, "what are we doing today then?" My question helped and Remi brightened instantly.

"I was thinking about pizza for lunch."

"Pizza?" I was confused, his emotions showed happiness and excitement. Pizza was amazing, but this seemed like something else, maybe he had a surprise for me. I hoped so. I loved surprises.

"Yes, pizza. I know just the place."

My mate was torturing me.

"Come on. Just a little taste!" Remi was laughing as he guided the pizza with ham and pineapple towards my face. He loved every minute and I couldn't even be mad about it. I took a huge bite just to surprise him. The sweetness of the pineapple hit and as I chewed it mixed with the saltiness of the ham.

"I like it!" I exclaimed and took the piece from his hand. "We need to introduce this to our world when we return." He was staring wide eyed at me, but then a smile

formed.

“You are truly perfect, huh?” he grinned and I felt his love for me as it brightened his insides, filling us both with the feeling of true happiness and belonging.

“Remi!” A girl that had just entered rushed over and hugged him. I didn’t like anyone touching him, but I could power through it, knowing we wouldn’t live here. “Is this the guy?” I raised an eyebrow, looking at Remi for him to clarify. Did he tell this girl we were mates? I could feel he was worried, but I couldn’t tell why.

“This is Juno, my boyfriend,” he explained with a smile. I guess getting introduced as his mate would be too weird here. I would prefer it, being his friend sounded so insignificant. But I trusted him to know what to do here.

“Oh.” She grinned. “The one that finally got you to realize you’re gay.”

“What?” Remi exclaimed before I could. I would need to ask what being gay meant later.

She rolled her eyes. “Come on, Remi. You told me you were ace but it’s clear you were just gay. And that’s okay,” she quickly added. “But you don’t have to lie anymore, it’s fine.”

“Lie?” I was the one asking now. Was this Hayley?

“He dated me for a year and was certain he was asexual. But he never once looked at me like he’s looking at you.” So, this was Hayley. She seemed sad, but hid it under a kind smile as she looked at us together. “I’m really happy you can experience real love, Remi.” Okay, I couldn’t be mad at her now. She seemed like a good person and Remi only spoke highly of her.

I could sense Remi's feelings of guilt, relief and surprisingly, love. He truly loved her; it was just the same kind of love I felt for Nix and Charlotta.

"Thank you," Remi said, standing up and hugging her. He whispered something to her and she nodded, hugging him even tighter before they stepped back and she waved us goodbye and got her order to go.

When we were alone again, I waited for Remi to say something, fearing I would ruin the moment unintentionally.

"So," he began. "That was Hayley." I couldn't help but laugh. He was so adorable. "Don't laugh at me!" He tried to sound firm but laughed himself. "I'm actually glad I got to see her before I leave for good."

"You know we can return and visit, right?"

"I know, but I don't want to risk not being able to return. I also doubt the portal people will be able to open and close the portal at our whim."

"You're right about that. They keep it open because we're all here visiting, but as soon as we're done, they'll close it again and only open it if necessary."

"See?" He gestured like that was his whole point. "I guess that means I'll need to see my parents one last time, too." His mood soured and I knew now might be a good time to understand his strained relationship with his parents.

"Why do you hate seeing them? Besides the awful phone call, of course."

He sighed. "I guess they just never accepted me for who I am. I tried to become the son they wanted, but that just ended with me despising myself and them, so I stopped, and that's when our relationship took a turn for the worse. They'd gotten used to me

being perfect and then suddenly I was “acting out” as they called it. I actually doubt they even love me; it seems more like a control thing than love.” I didn’t know what to say to that, feeling his emotions run wild with sorrow and some guilt too.

“Maybe you need to ask them,” I said gently. “Otherwise, you’ll spend the rest of our life wishing you had.”

“You’re right.” He exhaled as if just admitting that was a relief in itself. “We just need to grab something first.”

“If it’s your laptop and journal, they’re already at our house back home,” I replied, standing up with him.

He looked surprised. “Really? How?”

“I packed a bag with your stuff before we left,” I explained, grabbing his hand and walking out of the restaurant. “I hope it was okay. I had no idea when we would return and Derek said your journal meant a lot to you.” I had given the bag to one of the employees that met us at the portal. They had sent a robot to our house with it while I focused on Remi and getting him to wake up.

“He said that?” he sounded oddly touched by that.

“Yes. And your laptop was more of a familiar item, so I grabbed that too.”

“I love you.” He grinned and laced our fingers together as we walked towards campus. Remi wanted to make it easier on the school and drop out rather than never returning. I found it endearing that he cared so much for others and didn’t just say fuck it. We did only have a week of fun planned, but Remi figured we could stay at a hotel instead of his dorm room, allowing us more privacy away from his friends. Sid and a few of the others from my team would collect Derek’s stuff, so we weren’t

worried about someone new messing with his things.

“I love you too,” I replied. “Are you sure you don’t want more time with your friends? We have the rest of our lives together, but you only have this one week left here.”

“I do want to say goodbye to Jason. He’s been a true friend and I don’t want him to worry about me when I leave. And my old boss Earl, he deserves to see me off too.” I nodded, happy that he had one friend other than Hayley he cared about.

“Let’s find Jason before we meet up with your parents,” I suggested.

“Can we wait until tomorrow to visit my parents? I just want to say goodbye to Jason and Earl, then find a nice hotel.” I would never say no to him.

“Of course, baby. Let’s find them and then the rest of the day is spent in bed with room service.” We shared a knowing grin and went inside.

Chapter Seventeen

Remi

It was way easier than I thought to drop out, and with Juno's slate I could pay off every debt I had without worry. Not that I actually cared that much, but I also wanted to be a decent human and do things right.

Earl had been pleased to see me, and after telling him I was leaving the country, he beamed with excitement and hoped we would be happy wherever we ended up. He'd been a good boss, and I did feel guilty over quitting so abruptly, but he had news himself. Darcy's bakery and his coffee shop would become one shop next year, making it the best place to grab both coffee and cakes in the mornings and afternoons. He still hadn't said if Darcy and him were a thing or not, but it proved they were at least friends.

Juno and I sat outside my favorite café and waited for Jason to arrive. I'd texted him if he could meet up and luckily, he could. We weren't hungry, but figured some dessert was due.

"What about we get a slice of cake each and share it?" Juno said, looking over the menu. We were struggling with deciding what to get and since we both wanted something sweet and something savory it was hard to pick just one.

"Deal." I grinned, leaning over the table to kiss him.

"Oh my," Jason's scandalized voice was filled with humor as he sat down and joined

us. “Is whatever you’re having on the menu?” he asked, grinning when it caused Juno to blush.

“Sorry to disappoint,” I replied, grinning too. “Jason, this is Juno, my boyfriend. And this is Jason, my friend.”

They shook hands and after ordering, Juno’s blush had faded away. “I wanted to see you before I left,” I said, keeping up with the story me and Juno had come up with.

“You’re leaving?” he sounded upset about that, which made me feel guilty for not wanting to visit again. But friends grew apart all the time. He would be fine without me here.

“We are,” I replied, taking Juno’s hand in mine. “We both got accepted to join a special research project in Klumven. We won’t be able to use the internet while there and we’re planning on staying a few years.” It was the easiest story we could make up. Klumven was a deserted country with lots of rural ground where people lived off the grid, making it perfect for our cover.

“Shit, man. I’m really gonna miss you.” I could feel how sincere he was, which only added to the guilt.

“I wished there was a way we could keep in contact, but I need to do this for me.”

“I get that,” he smiled. “I would gladly spend years in the wilderness if I could catch a hottie like yours.” He winked, causing Juno to blush again. I loved it when his cheeks got all pink and adorable.

“I promise to text or call you if I ever get the chance,” I said, meaning every word. Maybe we would visit in a couple of years, and if we did Jason would be the first to know.

“I appreciate that,” Jason smiled. “Hey, did you hear about Hayley and Wren?”

I shook my head. The last thing I heard was that they were seeing each other and then I saw them looking very much in love on my way to find Juno.

“Apparently, and this is just rumors, but she’s told Wren that you claimed to be asexual, but she now knows you are just gay, and that was why you didn’t work out. He’d been surprised and said he had no idea and when she told him you likely wanted it to be a secret, he got weirdly defensive over it, stating he didn’t like that she was telling your personal stuff to others if you’d shared it with her in private. She was telling it at a party with at least eight people listening in.” I felt rather hurt by it. I might be leaving in a week, but it still felt personal that all these people now knew, even if I sort of understood why she needed to clarify that it had nothing to do with her that we broke up. “She and Wren haven’t been seen together since.”

We’d just seen her a few hours ago, and she’d seemed fine. When I’d explained what being gay meant to Juno, he’d gotten upset with how she’d stated my sexuality, even if something like that didn’t exist in his world. I truly loved that man.

If Wren and Hayley didn’t work out, I hoped she would soon find someone else. She wasn’t perfect and I’d felt hurt every time my ideas had been made into jokes for her and my parents, but she still didn’t deserve to be without love in her life. I couldn’t be her perfect partner, and I knew she hadn’t been happy with me, but someone else could maybe get her full support if she felt loved enough.

“I hope they can work it out,” I replied, shrugging. “I get why she needed to tell Wren. Maybe she feared he wouldn’t be into her too, like a fear I’d caused her for future partners unknowingly.” I looked down at my lap feeling somewhat guilty.

“Hey,” Jason said, causing me to look at his serious expression. “She’s her own person. If she told him because she was drunk that’s still not okay. She could’ve told

him in private.” I had to agree, but I found myself wanting to clarify one thing to Jason before I left, mostly for my sake.

“I thought I was ace until I met Juno,” I admitted. “I don’t feel right labeling myself as ace anymore, it feels like I’m not respecting those who are ace if I did that.”

“Man, you can label yourself whatever you want to. No one can claim to know how you feel inside. So, you find Juno attractive? Good for you. That doesn’t mean you can’t still be asexual.” I loved how confident Jason was about sexuality, but then again, he’d come out as soon as he saw the exchange student, who I still didn’t know the name of.

“Thank you,” I said, grateful we had this time to say goodbye.

Our cakes came out then and we chatted about school and what Jason was up to. It felt nice being able to say goodbye like this.

I was lounging on the hotel bed while Juno flipped through the channels, desperate to find some reality TV while we were still in this world.

“Most of it is based on either rich people or young people who get drunk and party a lot.” I laughed at Juno’s frown. How had I never realized that?

“You’re right. Maybe we can watch a fantasy movie with magic instead?” We found an old favorite of mine and snuggled up together on the bed. I’d been practicing my magic with Juno for a few hours when we’d gotten the privacy of the hotel room, and now I was feeling a little bold.

We lay with our clothes on, but since we’d focused on training glamour since Juno found that to be the most important skill while we were here, I decided to test something out. I imagined myself completely naked except a black see-through

jockstrap, then I used my magic to make the illusion appear on my body. I dared a peek at myself and grinned when I saw it had worked. I looked damn good in it too.

A rush of excitement came from Juno and I had to bite my lip as he gaped, looking down my body.

“Baby,” he whispered, sitting up to really get a good look. “Where can we buy those?”

I laughed. “We can go shopping if you want.”

“I want.” He wasn’t taking his eyes off me and I felt so powerful in that moment. We were definitely going shopping. If sexy lingerie wasn’t normal in Juno’s world, we needed to make it normal. I wanted to see him wear sexy stuff too.

“I wish I could touch the fabric,” he pouted and touched my covered dick. All he could feel were my jeans.

“Just the fabric?” I teased, watching his eyes narrow into slits.

“You wanna be teased too?” I didn’t get to reply before Juno wore the exact same outfit as me, just a tad more see-through. Fucking tease .

“God, I love you,” I said, tackling him onto the bed.

We were laughing, kissing and trying to remove each other’s clothes. The glamour was removed to make it easier, not exactly a fun challenge removing clothes you couldn’t see.

“What do you want to do to me?” Juno wiggled his eyebrows suggestively as we got rid of our boxers.

Everything.

Except.

“I was actually wondering if you wouldn’t mind fucking me again?” I didn’t want to bring up my past experiences but I didn’t know how else I was going to tell him how much I preferred not doing the fucking.

“I would love to.” He grinned, pushing me down and leaning over me, he started trailing kisses down my neck, towards my nipples, and then down, down.

“Fuck,” I moaned when his lips found my dick. It was sloppy, awkward, and oh so perfect .

I would tell him after that I preferred if he topped. Maybe I would change my mind someday, but if he was okay with doing the fucking, I would be very pleased.

“Oh!” I exclaimed, bucking my hips. That I had not expected.

“You don’t like it?” Juno asked worriedly.

“I love it,” I admitted, falling back on the bed and spreading my legs even further, urging him to keep going. Another lick to my rim and I was getting goosebumps. This time Juno seemed more confident as he licked around my entrance, and just as I was getting used to the caress of his tongue, he pushed inside.

I would’ve lifted off the bed if he hadn’t held me down with his hand, keeping me in place while he ate me out.

“I’m gonna come if you don’t stop,” I warned, knowing I was dangerously close. He looked at me, a satisfied gleam in his eyes as he kept licking, not tearing his eyes

away from mine. I wasn't able to look away as I came with only his tongue inside of me. My dick was confused as it came untouched, painting my belly with my release. I was soaring, falling back on the pillows without realizing it. Would everything with Juno always be mind-blowingly good? God, I hoped so.

"Hey, handsome." Juno grinned, self-satisfied and smug as he leaned over my wrung-out body. "Do you mind if I add to your painting?"

I shook my head, not knowing what he meant but also not going to deny him anything. He straddled my lap, gazing down at my body as he took himself in hand and started stroking his cock. I couldn't look away. He was beautiful, pleasuring himself on top of my satiated body, looking at me like I was the sexiest thing in our worlds. I felt so treasured in that moment. I wanted to be the one giving him pleasure, to reciprocate, but he was too stunning to disturb. The way his muscles moved, the way he played with his tip.

"I can't believe you're mine," I said, awe filling my voice as I stroked his thighs, needing to touch him.

"Always yours," he replied, almost breathless. Then he came with a groan, painting my belly as promised. I'd never felt more claimed than in that moment. I was painted with a combination of his pleasure and mine. I'd never felt more beautiful.

Chapter Eighteen

Juno

An annoyingly shrill sound woke me up. I had Remi's arms around me, his warm body a comfort as I remembered we were in a hotel room.

"Ergh," Remi grumbled, trying to bury his head in my neck and escape the sound. It stopped and we both breathed a sigh of relief, snuggling further into one another, desperate for more sleep after the night of fun we'd had.

The shrilling noise started again. We groaned and sat up, reluctantly releasing one another as we found the culprit. Remi's phone was beaming with light in the somewhat darkened room. He reached for it with tired eyes and sighed once it was in his hand. Holding it up to his ear he answered. "Good morning, Mom."

She wasn't winning any points in my book for waking us up and stealing my Remi time from me. But I could deal.

Soon he would be all mine.

"How did you hear about that?" Remi asked her, looking adorably confused. "Oh, that's right, I paid those off." I leaned in closer so I could overhear the rest, making it obvious that was what I was doing. Remi smiled and put it on speaker.

"You paid off all your student debt? You aren't finished with your school yet! Besides, how did you even get the money? We were paying for it." His mom sounded

more put off about the fact he'd obviously dropped out, than the fact he had that kind of money laying around unbeknownst to her. At least she wasn't after his money.

"I wanted to pay it off myself," he replied calmly. "I dropped out yesterday and didn't want to leave you and Dad with my debt."

There was silence. "You... dropped out? Why?!" she demanded. "You can't just do that!"

"Well... I did , so yeah, I can do that." I loved Sassy Remi. I pecked a kiss on his shoulder, not able to stop myself from showing him just how much I adored him.

"You're coming home for lunch today, then your father and I will have to knock some sense into that thick head of yours." She sounded almost calm, but also threatening. I hoped she wasn't actually going to hit him. I would defend his honor if I had to, but hitting an old lady wasn't something I wanted on my conscience.

"I'll be there," he agreed easily. "I'm bringing my boyfriend with me. See you soon." He didn't wait for her to reply to that, just hung up and shut off his phone.

"Are you sure you're ready?" I had to ask. We could stay here a few years so he could at least try to work it out with his parents, but I had a feeling that things were worse between them than I'd first thought. Remi was a sweet guy; he wouldn't leave them unless he truly felt they weren't worth his love and time.

"I need to just rip the bandage off. I won't regret not seeing them again, but I am regretting letting them control so much of my life. I could've been happier if I'd set some kind of boundaries with them, or cut them out of my life earlier. I didn't care about them paying for college. I didn't want to attend in the first place. I would've been happy with a low paying job, working on my ideas."

“Those things in your journal?” I asked. They were so cool. I wished I’d had more time to browse through them, but I’d only skimmed them when I’d packed his belongings, too curious to not know what was in them. Derek had said it was his most prized possession, so of course, I’d looked.

“You,” he stopped. “You’ve seen them?” He seemed nervous, almost afraid if I was reading him correctly.

“Yes, just a quick skim of the pages. It looks cool! I understand why you want to educate yourself into making them with magic. Our world needs more brilliant minds like yours, gifting us with inventions we didn’t know we needed until we get them.” His eyes turned glassy but his emotions were filled with relief, love, and a touch of confidence.

“You have no idea how much that means to me,” he whispered, smiling softly as he kissed me. It was a brief and tender kiss, telling me everything I needed to know. My Remi needed encouragement on his ideas and his work. I could do that easily. How fun would it be to talk about machines that could make waffles and ice-cream. I would be the honorary tester, of course, testing if it worked and tasted good. I couldn’t wait.

After having spent another hour in bed, just holding one another and enjoying each other’s presence, we decided a shower was needed. It was almost lunch time when we left our hotel room, not caring that we’d skipped breakfast. We took a cab over to his parents’ place, silently watching the scenery flash by as we neared their home.

Remi didn’t seem as nervous as his emotions told me he was. It was a little unnerving how well he could mask his true feelings. I wouldn’t allow that when we got home, I wanted him to show his true emotions and not care what others felt about it, although I suspected he wouldn’t need to wear his mask around anyone else.

We were in front of their house now. Remi looked to the side of the building—for what I had no idea, but I admired the pretty rose bushes lining the house on that side. I loved gardening and cooking, and now that I wouldn't have the same itching feeling to leave home, I could actually start my garden. I should plant some roses for Remi when we got home, I think he would like to have something pretty to look at outside in the summer. He could write down his ideas while lounging on a chair, with me bringing him cold drinks and snacks while his brilliant mind worked. I mentally sighed. I couldn't wait.

Remi looked at me with a genuine smile. "I love how I can feel your love for me. It's nice that I don't have to doubt you truly love me." Damn, his mind had gone to a dark place, likely wondering if his parents ever did love him. I couldn't really do anything to help their relationship. I could only be there for Remi as he said goodbye.

"You never have to doubt my love for you, baby," I assured him, lacing our fingers together as he guided us over towards the front door. He knocked and soon footsteps could be heard approaching us.

"Remember, I'm here," I whispered, giving his hand a soft squeeze, as I prepared myself for meeting my in-laws for the first and probably last time.

A woman, looking much younger than I had visualized in my mind, stood before us. She was clearly assessing me before she even greeted us.

"Hi, Mom," Remi said, forcing her to look away from me. I felt like I was being judged and found lacking, somehow. I could only imagine how growing up here had felt for Remi. Parents didn't have to use bodily harm to make a critical hit. Whatever her eyes shone with... yeah, that seemed just as bad and damaging as a beating.

"Hi, honey," she said, somewhat pleasantly. "And this is the boyfriend then?"

I decided to show my support towards Remi by extending my hand and introducing myself, saving him from having to do all the talking himself. He wasn't alone anymore. I was on his team. And from the pure relief I felt rushing through him, followed by love, so much love, he appreciated it.

"I'm Juno," I said, taking her hand and offering her a smile she didn't deserve.

"Nice to meet you, Juno," she replied kindly. "Come inside." She waved us in and we followed her into the living room where Remi's dad was lounging on the couch, not sparing us a glance until his wife made a coughing sound to get his attention.

He sat up straight and looked at us, acting surprised that we were already there. Like he hadn't noticed anything around him. "Oh," he said, standing up and offering me his hand. "I'm Remi's father, Vince."

I took his hand and like with his wife I offered him a polite smile. "Juno. Nice to meet you." I still held Remi's hand, not letting him go for one second until we were back in our hotel room. He tugged me along to the dining table, which was filled with sandwiches and some small treats. Even though we'd skipped breakfast, eating was the last thing I wanted to do.

"Sit down, boys," she ordered with a small smile. "I'll bring the drinks." Remi gave me a look that, mixed with his emotions, told me he was glad I was there, and there was probably also an apology there for me having to deal with them, but I dismissed it. I didn't need his apology for being there for him. That was my right and privilege as his mate. He couldn't get rid of me. Not ever.

Vince sat down and looked so uncomfortable, it was a little insulting, to be honest. Did he also find me lacking for his son? Or was his unease strictly because Remi had dropped out of college?

His mom came back carrying our drinks and sitting down like she was fully in control and just needed to get the words out and then Remi would follow through with her wishes. I knew it was a lot to get from just her posture and facial expression alone, but I was getting good at reading her already.

“So, Remi,” she said, taking a sandwich calmly. “What is wrong with college? Is it the classes?” she waved her hand like it wasn’t important anymore and continued. “You’ve obviously already transferred to another school so we might just focus on that, no need to waste time discussing a school you no longer attend.” She gave him a little smile at the end and I honestly couldn’t figure out why she wanted him to attend school so much? Was that normal here? Education was highly valued in my world, but so was following your passion, and since most could make a decent living doing whatever they wanted, there wasn’t this pressure that Remi’s parents forced upon my dear mate. I didn’t like it.

“I haven’t transferred,” Remi replied, still with his mask of confidence on. Only I could feel the anxiousness he felt inside.

She laughed. “Of course, you have. Is it because you don’t want us sniffing around your new school? Or perhaps you wanted away from Hayley and her new boyfriend?”

“Why does it matter so much to you that he attends college?” I asked, no longer able to remain quiet. It was eating me alive not knowing.

She looked taken a back. “Why does it matter that my son gets an education?”

“Yes. Why are you so against him making his own choices for his life?”

“Every good parent wants their children to get an education, and not many can. Remi should be grateful we can pay for him to have a nice future.”

“But what if a nice future for him doesn’t involve a degree or a fancy job? What if he wanted to work a low paying job and be happy with that?”

“Who would want that?!” she laughed, her tone laced with condescension.

“Me,” Remi replied. Her attention left me and zeroed in on her son instead. “When you coerced me into attending college all I wanted was an easy job where my mind could afford to wander, spending my time coming up with my ideas and then someday, I would make them a reality. How? I have no idea, but that was the life I wanted.”

“Those ideas again,” she complained and rubbed the bridge of her nose.

His dad’s voice finally joined in. “You said that was what you wanted then, but is it still what you want?”

She smacked his arm. “Don’t encourage him!”

“No,” Remi replied. His emotions showed me he was surprised by his dad’s question. “I no longer want that.”

“Thank god,” his mom sighed.

“I’m moving to Klumven. With Juno. I won’t be able to reach you over the phone or have internet access. I’m leaving and I’m not returning here.”

They gaped at him. “You’re leaving the country to live in Klumven?” his mom asked, likely thinking she’d heard wrong.

“Yes, with Juno.” He was calm and spoke perfectly, not a single hint that he was unravelling inside with unease, that was only for me to know.

“Is this a self-discovery journey?” his dad asked, not sounding disappointed but more intrigued.

“What would he need to discover, Vince?!” his mom hissed. Then her attention returned to Remi, a stern look on her face, “you can’t leave. We need you here.”

“Why?” both Remi and I asked in unison.

“We just do!”

“Well, I’m still leaving.”

I got a sense of fear and worry from Remi, telling me this wasn’t normal behavior from them. I needed to say something. “My father wants us to visit him tomorrow, so we aren’t leaving today. You’re welcome to join us. That way you have a little more time together.” I hadn’t thought much about what I would say to get them to let us leave, but I didn’t feel safe here anymore, and I definitely didn’t want to use my magic on them.

“No one is leaving,” his mom hissed, grabbing a knife, and I knew I had to do it anyway. Letting my magic out, I made them slump down in their seats.

“We need to get out of here, it’ll only hold for about an hour,” I said, pulling Remi up with me. He didn’t say anything, but his emotions showed relief and still held a bit of fear. “We need to head to the portal and tell my dad, something is off here.”

We got a cab and had the driver drop us off near the forest. Once we were surrounded by trees, Remi finally spoke. “She was so...”

“Cold?” I supplied.

“Scared.”

“Oh,” that actually made sense, she was acting out of fright or need. She definitely didn’t want him to leave.

“Do you think someone is forcing them to keep me here?” Remi asked, his tone worried. I hated that he cared about his awful parents this much, although I had a feeling his father wasn’t as bad as his mother, but he was firmly on her team so I judged them both equally.

“I have a suspicion that something is off,” I replied. “Which is why we’re leaving. I need you to be safe.” I held out my slate and called my dad.

“Hey, son. How’s your week of exploring going?”

“Hi, Dad. Bad news. We’re thirty minutes from the portal, please meet us there.”

“Of course, I’m already here. Do you need the others?” I knew he meant the rulers.

“Yes, please.”

“See you soon,” he said, his voice worried.

Then we hung up.

Chapter Nineteen

Remi

“I’m so glad you got here safely,” Alec said, hugging us both the moment we stepped through the portal. “I was actually about to call you home myself.”

“Why?” Juno asked, stepping away from the hug.

“We found the man.” It was Henriette who replied, walking over to us with the rest of the rulers. We were in the portal room and it looked like it was only us and the rulers for now. The room was way bigger than I thought, being able to see its entirety now that it wasn’t filled with people.

“My bio dad?” I asked, just to be certain we were on the same page.

“Yes,” Alec replied. “We got permission from Derek to visit his memories, even those he’d repressed. We promised not to tell anyone what we saw, but we got his face and name easily.”

“So?” Juno asked hopefully.

“He’s been stripped of his magic, or what was left anyway,” Trise replied.

“He’s here?” I asked, feeling uncomfortable being close to the man I shared DNA with.

“He’s in our prison, not here,” Alec reassured me. “We’re having a meeting later today with everyone. We won’t tell you anything else until then.”

“We can wait,” we assured them, understanding they didn’t want to tell the story a hundred times but just once.

“What was your bad news?” Alec asked, likely remembering why we’d come home early.

Juno, being amazing, answered for us. “We went to say goodbye to Remi’s parents, but his mom got weirdly defensive over him leaving the country, to the point where I had to force them asleep.”

The rulers shared knowing looks. “We figured they wouldn’t be happy.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Later,” Alec assured me, holding my shoulder and giving me an understanding smile. “Rest until then. We’ve called the others and they’ll be here in five hours.”

We left their property and returned home. Walking in silence as I processed everything. My mom had grabbed a knife, did she plan on using it? Would she have locked me up in their house? Was someone after me? All these questions and no answers.

Once we were home, we went straight for the couch. “Want to watch some reality TV?” Juno asked, wanting me to think about something else. I loved him. I didn’t care if it was because he could sense my emotions, just that he cared enough about me to fix them.

“I would love to.” I snuggled into him and began flipping through the channels. It

would've been so much easier if the remote held a keyboard too, making typing easier. Maybe with magic it could be done like their slates. I began searching underneath the coffee table for some paper to write it down.

"You know," Juno began. "Wouldn't it be cool if you didn't have to pick one letter at a time. It would be much easier if you had keyboard attached instead of a remote control."

I thought I'd died.

"Yeah," I replied, smiling and tearing up a little. "Maybe I can make that for us some day."

"I hope you can." He smiled.

I finally had someone to share my passion with. It was the best gift ever.

Two hours later, we were still on the couch.

"That's not realistic at all!" Juno complained. We'd set it up so we could watch TV from my world, using magic, of course, and now we were watching Hallmark Christmas movies, because I needed cheering up, and this always worked.

"That's the point!" I defended with a laugh. "It's like magic in some ways. That's why people love these movies."

"But without mates they can't be certain they're forever. It makes no sense why they say it's happily ever after."

I loved how passionate he got. "I doubt it would be as fun if it was with mates. We already know we're mates, there's no drama, no what ifs," I countered.

“I bet people would still love it.” He pouted, crossing his arms and looking absolutely adorable.

“We can make our own reality TV show,” I teased. “We’ll call it Portal Matchmaking.” We laughed, then snuggled together until we had to leave.

The room was packed. I wasn’t normally claustrophobic, but I was feeling it here. Alec and the other rulers stood on some kind of platform, making them tall enough so everyone here could see and hear them.

“Welcome everyone,” Trise said, taking the lead. “We can finally answer every question but we ask that you wait until we’re done to ask your questions.” When no one spoke, just nodded in silent agreement, Alec stepped forward.

“We had, with Derek’s permission, a deep search through his memories. We figured early on that he’d likely dealt with your biological father in other ways than any of you, and we were right.” There was a soft murmur in the gathering, and Alec allowed it to pass before continuing. “We found the man testing him for magic, how we won’t tell, that’s for us, Derek, and Nolen to know, but we quickly located the man and arrested him.”

Henriette stepped forward then, “we searched his memories too, as soon as his magic was forcefully taken.” People bristled and even I felt unease over it. I would feel so empty without my magic now, I couldn’t even imagine how painful that would’ve been for the man. “We found some troubling things when we looked through all his memories. First off, he kept tabs on all of you as you grew up; he knew your parents. You weren’t normal donor children. He’d paid your parents to carry you and forced them to stay in the areas he chose. He had full control over your future, threatening your parents with his magic, letting them believe he was everywhere.”

Fuck. I could see how a man using magic would be scary as hell.

Alec took over again. “But it’s important to note that everyone that took the deal with him basically agreed to give birth to a child he could do whatever he wanted with. These people wanted money, not a child. He wanted you to grow up with good educations, making you important in this world, hoping you would have magic and eventually he, together with all of you under him, would take over that non-magical world and rule it.”

Henriette continued, “he just hadn’t thought about his magic running out. Fathering children and giving away what he had made it impossible for him to open the portal again. Which is why he stopped doing it. He was stuck here in our world. He’d paid for your parents’ houses and your educations, all of you had to attend the same college, making it easier for him to find you.”

I shivered. Was I attending a school filled with my half siblings? Thank God, Hayley hadn’t been one of them.

“We, um, we know he tried to impregnate women without it being a donor situation too. Those women he lost track of so there are more children out there who we won’t easily be able to find. But there is a boy, his first son, he would be around thirty-five now. He stayed with his mom for five years hoping the son would show his magic, but when he didn’t, he abandoned them. We have an idea of this boy’s, now man’s, appearance and the mother’s too, making it our highest priority to find them.”

I was speechless. My parents hadn’t actually wanted me, they were paid to do this man’s bidding. It made sense when I thought about it. My dad had likely felt less worried over time since the man couldn’t visit, but my mom had remained afraid. I found myself feeling sorry for them, not that they deserved that, I guess I was just a better person than they were.

“Questions?” Trise asked. “Yes?” she said, pointing to a girl.

“Where’s our biological father now?” she asked, sounding just as shaken as I was.

“He’s locked away in prison for the rest of his life,” Trise replied with a serious expression.

“Can this happen again in the future?” Someone asked from behind me.

“Sadly, it can. We can’t stop people from making portals if they know how, like this man did,” Alec replied. “We have made it illegal and everyone who doesn’t have a portal license risks losing their magic if they’re caught.” I almost laughed, portal license.

“Any other questions?” Henriette asked. They looked tired as they stood there, the rulers. They’d obviously been working day and night to catch this guy. “Very well. Magic training starts next week. If any of you have questions later on, you’re welcome to contact us. We would appreciate that you stay here for the next month so our portal makers can take a well-deserved break, and meanwhile you can get your magic under control.”

There were murmurs of agreement, and then we started trailing out of there, all in a daze it seemed.

Juno

It had been a week since the meeting and Remi was thriving here. He’d had his first magical lesson today, from someone other than me, and it had been a blast for him. He’d beamed with the others as they learned their new magic. I would never forget how his face had brightened with pure joy when he got it right. My perfect mate.

Derek and Remi had truly bonded this week, Nolen had called me and asked for Remi so we’d visited. Derek needed another friendly face, still getting used to things, not

that we knew what he'd been through exactly, but Nolen was highly protective over his mate, so I guessed Derek felt uneasy most of the time. Remi had taken it as some sort of challenge to be there for Derek. No matter how long it took him, he was determined to help Derek out, and now they laughed together as they used their magic to turn the ceiling lights into a disco show with different colors.

We got a few more answers from my dad about our world and the magic. They believed the man had stolen magic from our world and used that to continue having children. Normally you could only have a maximum of two, since you had to give away some of your own magic. Considering how lively our world was now, compared to before, it was likely the reason. How so few people could affect our world was a mystery, but if he'd stolen the magic, as they said, he could've spread it out to hundreds of children in Remi's world. I truly hoped that wasn't the case. The rulers knew how he'd stolen it, but kept it a secret among them so others wouldn't be able to do the same in the future. I completely respected that.

A new group of people, who all had a sense they might have a mate waiting on the other side, were being trained to enter the world next. I was lucky enough to help train them, no longer seeking out another world. Not since my whole world had become Remi.

Nix had found his mate and was dealing with that situation in Remi's old world. I missed my best friend, but I'd gotten closer to Nolen, which was nice. Charlotta had found her mate too, a beautiful black-haired girl named Ellie. Ellie had been accusing Charlotta of witchcraft at first, stating she wasn't into people so that had to be the case. They laughed about it now, happily mated and living in our world too. None of the mated pairs had wanted to stay in Remi's world, which sadly proved they hadn't felt at home there either.

I heard Remi's laughter and caught him pointing at me, his eyes filled with tears as he and Derek tried to stop laughing. I looked down at myself and found a glamour on

me. A black t-shirt with letters in bright pink. I read it upside down so it took me a few seconds. “Big Dick Energy” was written on it. I had no clue what that meant, but I took it as a compliment and winked at my gorgeous mate.

Remi ran over to me, still laughing and looking so unbelievably beautiful I tried to take a mental image of it. “I can finally use glamour on others!” he exclaimed proudly. He was getting better at everything magic, but they also had to learn what was illegal or not, so not much time was spent actually learning it.

“I’m so proud of you,” I said, kissing his cheek and hugging him against me. “Ready to go home?”

“Always,” he replied, taking my hand in his and leading us home.

Epilogue

Juno

Five years later.

I was feeling like the proudest daddy in the world. Looking at my fully trained team, I couldn't help but feel prideful and satisfied. Satisfied because I knew I did an amazing job with them. Our world was almost fully back to normal, magic wise, but we still found some comfort in visiting other worlds and learning about them. I wasn't leaving anymore, but through my team I felt like I experienced it too. Now my latest team was heading out on their very first real adventure. If a tear escaped my eye, no one knew but me.

Nix came up and patted me on my shoulder. "We should get back home to our mates," he said, smiling proudly at the team as they left through the portal, this one reaching a whole new world.

"We should," I agreed, turning away from the portal and meeting his gaze head on. "Dinner at our place?"

He grinned, "deal." Nix and his mate had moved in next to me and Remi, and on our other side Nolen and Derek had built their own house, connecting us together. Our mates had all bonded over the situation with their father, finding comfort in each other. Remi and Nix's mate had gotten off to an awkward start, possibly because he was Remi's old professor! But now they were like family. We all were.

Waving goodbye to Nix outside his home, and heading the last few steps towards my own, I couldn't help but breathe in this feeling of contentment. Having Remi was like finding my other half.

"Are you coming in or?" I heard the amusement in Remi's tone as he opened our door and smirked at me. He had sold his newest idea to the biggest tech company in our world, and they had offered him a permanent position there. He finally got his dream job, spending his working hours coming up with ideas and working with his own team on how to make it a reality with magic and technology.

I was so damn proud of him.

"Coming." I grinned, closing the space between us and grabbing him into my arms. I loved my job, but being with Remi trumped all that.

"I invited the others for dinner tonight," he said, closing the door behind us. "I figured you wouldn't mind." Sometimes it scared me how alike we thought.

"I already talked to Nix about it," I replied, kissing him softly.

"Good. I guess that means Nix was there too?" Nix had his own team he trained, but since one of them got hurt during training earlier today, he'd been at the hospital helping out.

"He was. The boy is fine, but Nix wanted to wait until his parents got there." Some parents lived further away and since we started training them at the age of eighteen, many still lived with their parents. We knew once someone found their mate they wouldn't want to leave this world, so it was strictly unmated people we chose. We still had teams visiting Remi's old world. There was a new mate occasionally, and since their biological father had actually done some sperm donations too, we couldn't be certain when the sperm would run out. Nix's mate hadn't been a donor child but an unexpected pregnancy, from the woman's perspective at least. We knew by now

that there had been no accidents and that everything had been carefully planned and calculated by the man now in prison. So there would likely be more of those cases in the future.

I followed Remi into our living room, where we sat down and snuggled up together on the couch. This was our daily routine, pretending to watch TV while we talked about our day, before we would prepare dinner. It was perhaps a boring routine for some, but we loved our life exactly as it was.

“I’m working from home next week,” Remi said, his head resting on my chest as we watched our favorite reality show. “I need some inspiration for the next ideas to work on, so I might take some walks or something.”

“I’m off for a month if you want me to join you?” Sometimes Remi preferred to walk alone to truly clear his mind, and I respected that. I could easily find something else to occupy my time with before my next team started.

“I would like that.”

I smiled, brushing my fingers through his hair the way he loved it. “My dad wants to visit too.” We saw him once a week, so he wasn’t feeling neglected or anything. He had been somewhat disappointed that we weren’t going to have kids. We talked about it but it just wasn’t for us. Remi had voiced what I felt perfectly. That he’d been missing something for most of his life and now that he had found it, he couldn’t stand not being selfish with his time. I’d only felt that way since I’d turned eighteen, so I understood.

“He can come tonight too,” he reminded me. Our friends loved my dad. Nolen’s parents lived in another country, but Nix’s came over occasionally whenever my dad was here.

“I’ll text them,” he said, holding out his slate and typing out a message for both my

dad and Nix's parents, reading my mind instantly. We truly were in sync.

Remi's slate was one he'd designed himself. It was lighter and waterproof, plus he'd added a few features the other slates didn't have. I would get my own soon, Remi had assured me of that. I was so proud of him. My mate was this brilliant man that could come up with ideas so easily. I found it extremely sexy whenever he would talk my ear off about how his ideas would work and explain the process. He still seemed surprised whenever I asked additional questions. Knowing he hadn't had anyone to share his passion with before, I knew it would take time to erase the negativity, but I was determined to succeed eventually. I did, after all, have forever on my side.

We hadn't seen Remi's parents since I put them to sleep. Remi thought it would be punishment enough to leave them guessing and never knowing if his biological father was alive or not. They probably feared he would return and get mad at them for losing Remi, but we didn't care.

Remi had stalked Jason on his socials, making sure he was doing okay. He'd decided to message him, stating he still lived in Klumven, but could communicate with him once in a while. He just hoped Jason would never want to visit. They chatted once a month and I found that I liked Remi having a friend he could talk to back in his old world.

"He found his mate!" Remi's excitement stole all my attention, and I looked at the screen. "Portal Matchmaking" had its first season, filming actors to reenact how we'd found our mates in Remi's world. Some wanted to share their stories and others didn't. We'd decided not to do it, Nix, and Nolen too. But I had to admit it was fun to see how it had turned out for others, even if they were actors.

"She's running away too!" I laughed, knowing in this mated pair's case that he'd run after her. "Why didn't you chase me down and demand I love you?" I laughed even harder at Remi's pout.

“You weren’t ready for that,” I told him, not for the first time. We’d shared both our sides of things and how we’d both felt whenever we’d seen one another and even talking about Hayley was easy now. She’d been a big part of Remi’s journey of self-discovery, and even though she had made mistakes that had hurt his feelings, she was still just human with insecurities and emotions too.

“Oh, I completely forgot,” Remi said, no longer laughing with me but more serious as he got up from the couch. I made a whining sound, not liking he’d left me until he opened his pants. Then I was totally fine with being left behind now. “Look!” He proudly showed off the top of his underwear.

“Is that?” I asked, feeling myself grow hotter as he slowly slid down his pants a little more, revealing the lace panties we’d created together with a designer. It was a business we kept secret from our friends and family, since it was our thing, and we would begin our online store soon.

“This is the first pair, finally finished and ready for testing,” Remi said proudly, still not showing me the whole thing. I needed the whole thing. Now.

“Let me see!” I complained, reaching for his pants, feeling desperate.

“Nope,” he said, smirking knowingly at me. “That is for dessert once everyone leaves tonight.” My eyes widened.

“You’re going to make me wait until then?” I couldn’t believe my own ears. Had he always been this evil?

“I am,” he replied, zipping up his pants and moving towards the kitchen. “If you behave, I’ll even let you tie me up.”

I had a boner that wouldn’t quit and just as I thought about ways to change Remi’s mind, the doorbell alerted us that the others had arrived. I looked down and begged

my dick to stand down, promising it all the fun later.

Remi

I closed our front door and began to walk back to our kitchen. It wasn't as big of a mess like I'd feared. As much as I loved hosting, cleanup wasn't fun. We never allowed the others to help clean, it was our way of making sure they had fun while eating out and whenever they invited us over, we didn't have to clean either.

I was getting ready to tackle the dishes when Juno cleared his throat behind me. I had a smile on my face as I turned to face him. I knew what he wanted. Dessert. I gasped as I took in his near naked body. He had found the other pairs of lingerie. Fuck me . He had picked out the black jockstrap we'd glamourised back in my world, and they were even sexier now. I closed the space between us and kissed him, holding his body against my own as I trailed my hands down his perfect body. I would never get enough of him.

"Cleaning can wait," I rasped once we parted, then I tugged him back to our bedroom. I wanted dessert too.

I could feel Juno's arousal for me, mixed with giddiness and excitement. I loved how his feelings were so open to me. It was freeing never having to guess how much he loved and wanted me.

"I want you to ride me," he said, closing the door behind us. I was totally okay with riding him; I just needed him inside of me.

Juno was still the only one doing the fucking part. I had no desire to top, and I could feel Juno was fine being the only one that topped, not caring if he missed out on something by never bottoming. I knew he had a theory on why I didn't want to top him, and since Hayley wasn't a name we spoke when we were intimate, I never proved his theory right. I didn't want to top Juno because I'd topped Hayley and

somehow having done that with her would taint what we had together. I'd contemplated replacing my memories of topping her with new ones of me fucking Juno, but I actually liked bottoming. I felt cherished, looked after, and so pleased that I didn't have to do much other than enjoy it. But whenever I rode him, I was the one in charge. He might be the one doing the fucking, but in those moments, I was the one bringing out the moves, controlling the pace, and I loved that too.

I had another surprise for him, which I showed off as I bent down on the bed, shaking my hips a bit to present Juno with the plug I had in. Having family and friends over while wearing a plug? I do not recommend it. But the feeling of pure lust, passion, and excitement that radiated out of Juno made it worth it. We were more comfortable together now, than we'd been when we'd first mated, having found whatever worked for each of us. And I apparently had a kink for teasing.

Juno came up behind me, slapped my ass, forcing the plug to move. I yelped, then moaned in pleasure as Juno slapped me twice more. "I love your moans," Juno whispered into my ear, leaning over my body as his fingers worked the plug in and out of my hole.

"I'm ready," I said, knowing Juno loved edging me.

He laughed. "But I'm not. I need to watch your ass swallow this plug a few more times." Damn him.

When he was satisfied that I could take him easily, I stood and pushed him down, straddling his lap. "No more stalling," I warned, removing his sexy jockstrap so it rested just underneath his balls. I awkwardly wriggled out of mine, needing to be able to move unrestricted, then discarded the plug and sank down on his dick, letting him fill me up completely.

"I'll never tire of this," I admitted, closing my eyes as I started to move, rolling my hips as his hands tightened on my hips.

“Me neither,” he groaned, thrusting up, unable to help himself. “Do you want to feel me for days?”

“Please,” I replied, resting my hands on his chest as I began to move up and down, moving faster as he met me with his thrusts.

Juno took the lube and coated his hand with it before slicking up my dick. I moaned, loving the feel of his warm hands on me, the way he stroked me perfectly as we moved together. He looked so handsome as he lay there, covered in sweat and a creased brow as he worked hard to bring me pleasure.

He moved faster, so I did the same, the slapping of our skin and our ragged breathing the only thing filling our bedroom. “Fuck me, baby,” I said, knowing he knew what I needed.

He flipped us over so I lay on my back, then he grabbed my legs and pushed them over his shoulders. I moved my ass to meet his dick as he pushed inside of me, fucking into me, taking my breath away as he claimed me.

We gasped and came together, our magic enhancing our pleasure as we felt what the other did. It was something we’d learned two years ago and now we did it without thought whenever we were close to climaxing.

Juno placed my legs back on the bed and snuggled into my side, placing soft kisses on my chest, neck and then invaded my mouth. It was a slow kiss, filled with love, passion and tenderness. It was everything I needed.

“Want to watch some reality TV?” he asked, once we could breathe more easily again.

“Always,” I grinned.

The End