



# Omega Haunting (Starscale Mates #8)

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** Alpha dragon, Marsin Starscale, might be losing his mind. As his family hustles around preparing for a double wedding he's hearing voices that ultimately lead him on a wild goose chase to prove to himself once and for all whether or not he's crazy. Mostly, he learns some times, love makes you crazy.

Omega wolf, Astral Warden, pines for his true-mate while working at his family's magical business. When an older pack mate offers him a chance to 'talk to' his true-mate, he takes the bait, unsure if it will work or why the older wolf even wants to share this secret with him.

When magic and science comes together will it be enough to keep these newly met true-mates together, sane, and alive for their happily ever after?

**Total Pages (Source):** 19

# Page 1

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Astral

Earthside, Appalachian Wolf Pack Territory

“And that’s how I can put you in contact with your true-mate,” Dern nodded and leaned back in his beat up lawn chair.

Meeting behind his house around his dirty firepit wasn’t the ideal place to conduct business but it was the only place the old hound would talk about anything serious. Whenever asked he’d mutter something about the crystals buried under it but never give that much of a committed answer. We all let him get on with being one of our oldest pack mates in the neighborhood in peace unless he asked for something.

“And this actually works?” I cocked my eyebrow at the old wolf shifter fortune teller.

I’d done my fair share of magic in my thirty years, but my nose wasn’t broken. Everything coming out of Dren’s mouth smelled like a scam. He was looking for moonshine or money. I didn’t have a lot of the latter on hand, but my family made more of the first than the average household. It wasn’t uncommon for neighbors, pack members, and travelers to show up at our front door and try to barter. Usually, we sent them packing. The moonshine wasn’t exactly for drinking. Its primary purpose was magic. There wasn’t a lot that moonshine couldn’t do with the right add-ins and intentions. It was only a decade ago that my family opened an official business selling the jarred spells, ‘spell in a shot glass’, and of course our Warden’s Secret Warding Spray. The latter was a Warden family secret passed down through the generations for as long as anyone could remember. There were other goods we made upon request but those were our bestsellers. I was as magical as the rest of them, but

I'd still put money on the warding spray mostly working because it burnt the nose hairs off any would-be intruder.

"I wouldn't say it did if it didn't," Dren rolled his eyes. "Besides, you came to me not the other way around, Ast."

"If you had this the whole time, why are you only whipping it out now?" I arched a brow and leaned back in my seat.

"This isn't the first time. I just don't mention it often because I believe meeting your true-mate causes more trouble than it's worth most of the time," Dern said, narrowing his eyes on me.

Everyone knew Dern had been a true-mate widower for at least the last five decades. I didn't remember him as anything except a widower. Apparently, his alpha had been a huge guy with wings. The exact beast he shifted into was debated but Dern wasn't about to spill the beans.

His explanation was only half true. I only came to him because he told Morgi who lived on the street between that he had information on my true-mate. Dern never took to liking the title of seer, preferring fortune teller, but he saw as well as any seer from the more prestigious packs and places. He didn't talk a lot about how his messages came to him but the old hound was usually on the nose about what he saw. Only, this sounded like a scam. Smelled like one too. Dern didn't exactly smell like a lie, but he smelled unhappy about what he was doing. Unhappy enough that he put my inner beast on edge. My wolf paced his inner sanctum sniffing the air as if he could out the problem before it grew too large.

"I only do this when it's gonna benefit me or someone really needs my help. You don't need my help but in the long run I need this to happen. I apologize now before the horse shit hits the fan. You'll have a great time I'm sure, but it never starts out

great, Astral. Remember that. I'm not even gonna charge you because this one is for Ormund. You haven't met him. Probably never will seeing his door's come and gone and you're blind as the rest of these mangy hounds but it's for him.

"Your alpha?" I cocked my brow.

"Yes," Dern sighed. "My mate. The one and only."

His grey eyes unfocused just over my shoulder as if he stared into the past.

"How will this help him?" I asked, finally sitting down in the lawn chair next to him.

"I can't tell you yet. Eventually everyone will know. All I need you to do for me is not fuck up meeting your true-mate."

"I'll try my best," I said, but was already mentally writing an email to the local clinic to drop in and check on Dern. Maybe he was finally losing whatever was left of his mind. He spent more time alone than any one wolf I knew and that couldn't be good for him at his age.

"So, here we go again. You're going to go over to Morgi's and pick up two apples. One for the spell and one for me to eat because age can ask favors of youth. Then you're going to go home and I'm going to do some magic. Then I'll show you tomorrow how it works."

"Are you sure you just don't want a couple of apples, Dern?" I asked, trying not to sound like a condescending smart ass.

"If I didn't need your help, I'd whack you right on the nose. You're not young enough to act like a pup anymore, Ast. You're gonna have to man up and quick. Being a true-mate isn't an easy job. Even if yours is half – no – dare I say a tenth as

good as Ormund, it's not going to be easy. Those sorts of relationships take a lot of work and you young puppers don't want to put that in but you play your cards right and I think you'll be sittin' as nice as peach pie by the end of this. You won't have to worry about me anymore either."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Never you mind what's that supposed to mean," he growled. "You leave that to me and Ormund. You just bring me the apples and then come back here tomorrow night after the moon comes up."

"We'll see where this goes," I nodded.

"Oh, I know where it might go. Your alpha probably won't be sending me a thank you card any time soon either. Bigger headache for him than you. At least you'll know there's magic under your paws. He won't have that luxury."

He turned his head away from me and grumbled something about scaley bellies that I ignored. I waited a few minutes before leaving but Dern continued his muttered conversation with the empty air. On my way down to Morgi's, I swung by the Peach Creek Clinic and let the lady behind the desk know they may want to send a doctor out to check on Dern soon. He probably wouldn't thank me later but sometimes you had to follow your gut.

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That night I lay awake for a long time. Of course I hadn't only taken Dern apples. I stopped in at Munchie's Diner and picked him up a few burgers and some fries too. The Appalachian Wolf Pack hadn't been fully incorporated into itself long enough to cover all our bases if you asked me. If we had, Dern would already have a nurse or some sort of aid that came in a few times a week to check in on him.

“I don’t think he’s full of shit,” my wolf sounded off inside my thoughts.

“He’s not,” I sighed back at my inner beast. “Old man believes what he’s saying but that doesn’t mean it’s true. How does he expect to turn an apple into something that will contact my true-mate?”

“How do you turn moonshine into a ward that will blast the balls off a fucker if applied correctly?” the furry guy shot back at me.

“Elbow grease and magic,” I sighed.

“Elbow grease and magic,” he agreed.

Eventually I fell asleep and dreamt that Dern and Morgi were both pelting me with apples carved into earpieces that so many folks use for their phones these days. They had barrel upon barrel of them and kept tossing them at my head shouting about how my true-mate would be here to save me any minute now. I hoped wherever he was my alpha wasn’t privy to the insanity my pack drove me towards sometimes. I loved them – they were more than family, they were pack – but sometimes I wondered how much of their crazy rubbed off on me.

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When I sent a message to my family’s group chat that I wouldn’t be at work that night I was greeted with the exact response I expected. The moon was hanging out her full, pregnant belly for everyone to see and I was off to play nurse-maid to an old hound. The full moon was our busiest night of the year. We shut down shop to the public and got a lot of our warding magic out of the way for the next lunar cycle. I loved working on the full moon but sometimes a wolf has to be selfish. Sometimes he has to chase the wild goose to find out if it’s really going to lay the golden egg. Tonight was that night for me.

I was the youngest of six siblings. All of my older brothers had already met their true-mates and my parents were talking about having another set of kids. I grew up surrounded by a lot of broken homes. So the fact they were still together and liked each other enough to want to do life ‘all over again’ felt like magic on its own. Of course, they were true-mates. Everyone, except Dern, said that made life easier. Despite what the widower said, I decided to believe that meeting my other half would make my life easier. My parents were happy. My siblings and their mates seemed happy. The few of my friends who had already found their other halves were happy. It was only Dern claiming that whoever I’d chosen in the Other World would cause me a headache. I wondered for a moment if it was easier for him to remember Ormund as a headache now that he’d been gone so long. I couldn’t imagine finding my other half only to lose them later. That was life though. Everything and everyone came in cycles. Here today and gone tomorrow.

I stopped outside Dern’s front gate and shook away my musings. I only half-believed that he’d be able to put me in touch with my alpha. The other half of me firmly believed either he’d finally gone senile on us or that this was a desperate cry for company. If it was the latter, I’d figure out a way to include him in more things. No one should sit alone and rot unless that’s what they wanted.

A hinge on the screen door squeaked, startling me back to the present. The time for musing was over and whatever was going down was happening soon.

“You gonna stand out there all dang night or are you gonna get your tail in here so I can tell you how this works?” Dern called out.

An owl hooted as if we’d interrupted his nighttime meditations and took off from a nearby tree.

“Hoot-hoot to you too,” Dern growled and motioned for me to come in.

He beckoned with the impatience of a wolf waving in a pup as a storm swept into our mountains. I took one more deep breath before stepping inside his yard. I made sure to close the gate back up because my whole life my sire said good gates made good neighbors. Good fences and respect for them kept territory disputes to a minimum. Times were better now but both of my parents and their ancestors grew up when fighting over who owned a dandelion to toss into a pot was a big deal.

As I walked up Dern's porch steps, I said a silent prayer for those who'd come before me and hoped that the first stop in the afterlife was a feast. Dern sighed and furrowed his brow. He'd picked up something over the pack link but didn't mention it straight away. First, he led me inside the home he once shared with Ormund. I followed him over the hardwood floors of the living room into the kitchen where he already had coffee and the fixins on the table.

"Help yourself and just so you know, I have proof that no one good goes hungry in the afterlife. I've never bothered to ask the assholes."

"Good to know," I said, waiting for him to sit down before choosing a chair across the table from him.

We made up our coffee in silence and Dern picked up his mug with both hands. For a moment, I tried to unwind time and see him as a young fortune teller. I wasn't sure if he was born here or moved here later on. Even during the days when our pack didn't have much we shared what we could. Well, most of us did anyway.

"I wasn't," he shook his head. "Ormund either. Though, you're going to find out home is a lot more than where your placenta hits the dirt. It's a lot more than ---" Dern sighed. "It's a lot more than a lot of things."

"Can I ask you something?" I sat my mug down.



“I’m not senile, if that’s what you want to know,” he chuckled.

“Good to know but no, I wanted to ask if you know who my mate is? If you do why go through so much trouble and so many apples?”

“I do,” he sat his mug down too and leaned back in his chair. “But telling you’d cause more harm than good, I think. Not because I think you’d be trouble or he’d be trouble but because there are some things. There are always things of course. First, you’d think I was crazy – maybe.” Dern shrugged. “I think this way works better for everyone. The only thing is, he’s going to have to figure out a lot on his own. Well, not exactly on his own. The apple only works in one direction. He’ll hear you but he won’t be able to speak back.”

“Will he even understand me?” I asked.

“Probably,” Dern shrugged. “I’ve seen enough to believe he will. It’ll take a while for him to figure it out, though.”

“Because alphas are hardheaded?” I laughed.

“No, because hearing voices that no one else can usually means you’re fucking nutty, pup,” Dern sighed and pointed to the apple sitting next to the coffee pot. “It’s ready for you. In fact, he’s probably hearing us now. Maybe. It’s hit or miss what he’ll hear.”

“Do you know his name?” I asked, leaning forward hoping for at least one little bread crumb.

“I do,” he nodded. “I wouldn’t do this if I didn’t. Anyone could show up and claim to be your mate. Then bad shit would happen. We don’t like liars, and we don’t like alphas who....” Dern shook his head and glanced over my shoulder. Then the old

wolf sighed again and shook his head. “I’ll tell you next full moon if he hasn’t figured it out.”

“Is he from around here?”

Dern laughed and shook his head.

“Why’s that so funny?”

“One day, you’ll know it all, pup. Have fun with the apple and keep it after you meet him. You’ll never know when life will keep you apart.”

I opened my mouth and shut it again, wanting to ask what had kept Dern apart from his mate, but the question was too personal to ask.

“Does it need to charge or anything?” I asked.

“As long as you’re both alive, it’ll work. Won’t rot or anything,” Dern explained. “Now, finish your coffee and get back home to work. I know none of the Wardens are happy that I pupnapped you on their busiest night of the month.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:01 am*

Marsin

One Week Before the Double Wedding

computer log entries

Friday 23 – year of the orange star scale

I'm pretty sure I'm losing my mind or at the very least my brain cells are scrambled.

I'm also pretty sure I should've told a healer by now.

Any healer.

Maybe just anyone.

But the wedding is too close for that.

Elio is so caught up in preparing for the trip to attend his stepchildren's double wedding that I don't want to ruin his good time. I'm looking forward to seeing Fred's old club too. I want to see where my in-laws have come from. Only, I'm not sure that a wedding or a nightclub is the place where I should be. Should those hearing disembodied voices go to large multi-family events? I'm not so sure where we belong. I'm certain I haven't heard of anyone else hearing voices like this. And no for the love of the ancestors and the builders of Starscale 1 it's not some voice from the flight link! This is what I tried for weeks to convince myself of now.

Saturday 24 – year of the orange star scale

Up until now I've avoided speaking too much about the voice. I keep saying voices but I should correct myself for future endeavors. It's one disembodied voice. Either that or someone is hiding in the walls. Sometimes, just sometimes I think it's more than one, though. Maybe it is. I've even invited Elio and Fred over for dinner. Neither of them heard anything. Neither of them felt anything off. That's almost enough to rule out magic. I know all too well how powerful magic can be. That's how we summoned Fred here wasn't it? Elio and I working together to cast scrolls through doors all over Earthside.

Sunday 25 – year of the orange star scale

I only slept 2 hours last night.

I kept thinking about the scrolls and the new doors that connect our Starscale worlds to the Other World network. Is this some rebound effect of such magic? Am I hearing some distant flight member? I almost believe that. Almost. Except the voice grows more animated each time. It's like the guy is getting impatient with whoever he's talking to. The words true-mate comes up over and over again. It's garbled as if he's talking from really far away. Okay, to be fair, he probably is. I've scanned our system again. There have been no breeches in security but also no record of such things happening. Of course, these events might have transpired before and the unfortunate souls driven to madness didn't have the nerve to bring it up to anyone else. I wouldn't blame them one bit.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:01 am*

Astral

Three weeks after Dern cast the spell

It was just after midnight. My family was still gathered in the main living room watching some scary movie or another and what was I doing? I was upstairs staring at a fucking apple. True to Dern's word, it hadn't rotted yet. It hadn't even paled or lost its ripe sheen. It was still perfect.

"A perfect headache," my wolf said, and I laughed despite the frustration churning inside me.

Dern had warned me that meeting my alpha would be a headache. Today was a special sort of headache. I'd had the fast-acting heat shot and managed to bust my ass tripping over some of the toys my nieces and nephews left outside in the yard. My ass was not having a good day. I almost wished I had just let my heat play out. At least then I'd have a good excuse to lock myself away and not socialize. This fucking apple and the alpha who may or may not be on the other side of it was all I could think about. Had been all I could think about since I first brought the damn thing home. More and more it started to feel like a lie. Maybe I crossed Dern or his mate in a past life and this was his way of getting revenge. Maybe he just needed a good laugh at my expense.

The apple in question sat between me and the mirror. If I was going to scry, I might as well get it over with. The room was already dark, and my heart rate was as calm as it was going to get. Dern had remained tight-lipped about who I was talking to. So, it was time to prod the universe myself.

“Ancestors of fur and teeth,” I called out in a whisper as I lit the first candle. My reflection stared back at me. Blue eyes, thick brows, and dark hair. I had a dimple in my chin and my carrier swore we all had roman noses. Whatever the hell that meant. My sire didn’t agree. So maybe it didn’t matter anyway.

“Ancestors of claws and spirit,” I whispered lighting the second candle.

“I invite you to my feast,” I lit the third candle and motioned at the plate of ham and cheese sandwiches setting on the table nearby. “I invite you to partake of the world of the living and assist me this night. I call forth only those willing to leave their rest to assist those of us still bound by the flesh. I ask that you show me what Dern won’t say. I ask that you show me something – anything – about the man on the other side of this apple.”

The candles flickered and a chair near the table scuttled back. A sigh played through the room but I kept my eyes glued to the mirror. As a kid, I tried to see the ancestors thinking they were transparent like spirits in cartoons. They were not. At least not to me. I didn’t have the ‘dead sight,’ but I knew enough to know someone was there with me. Someone who smelled like pack and like family. Someone who really liked ham and cheese sandwiches too.

The candle flames flickered again, and I let out a long breath as my reflection disappeared from the mirror. All reflections faded from the mirror as if someone sucked all the light out of it. It was as dark as the womb. I fought off the urge to reach out and see if it was there at all. A second later a baby blue star filled the mirror. It had ridges along its surface as if someone glued tiny scales to it. I jotted down what I saw as the star spun in circles, twisting this way and that. Three little lights appeared above the star and the first one pulsed leaving the other two stationery.

“Do we know his name?” I whispered.

The chair behind me creaked and I held my breath. Nothing changed for a second and I feared I'd pushed my ancestor too far.

"Martian," someone whispered in my ear.

"Huh?" I said, turning my head.

"Martian," the same old man whispered again. "Or Marstian. Something like that anyway."

"Is Dern full of shit?"

"Dessert?" the whisper inquired.

I didn't keep a lot of junk food in my room because I knew all too well that I could wolf down a whole cake by myself, but I did have a candy bar in my desk drawer. I grabbed it, unwrapped it, and laid it on the now empty plate that held ham and cheese sandwiches not long before. I held my breath hoping I hadn't taken too long. Sometimes the spirits were impatient and would scuttle off if you took longer than they liked to get something done. The chair squeaked and I let out a sigh of relief before sitting back down.

"No. Not full of shit. Wants something. Not from you but something. Not from Martian either. Will probably get it. Things are complicated."

"Is there any way for me to get in touch with this guy for real? Is he my true-mate?"

"Slow down. More?"

The plate was empty again. Sighing, I looked around the room and spotted the bag of chips I snatched from the kitchen earlier after I busted my ass. I popped them open

and poured them onto the plate. Had I known the ancestors who would show up would be starving I'd have planned better. Usually, one plate of sandwiches was enough.

“Bottomless pit of a wolf,” my inner beast sounded off in my thoughts.

The furry guy wasn't wrong, but I'd have fed him every last scrap of food inside the house if he could give me enough information to find my mate even if his name made him sound like a damn alien.

“Martian is far,” the spirit sighed. “Really far. One must travel. You? Him? Someone.”

“Travel to where?” I asked, quickly as the chips disappeared by the handfuls.

“To where the shiny one and the bratty one are to be married,” the spirit whispered.

“Huh? Who are they? Names would be helpful, ancestor,” I said but was alone in the room again.

The candle flames died and the mirror was just a mirror again and that asshole had eaten the apple. My heart dropped into my stomach. When had he snatched it up? Why had he snatched it up? He was hungry but did he have to eat the only connection I had to my true-mate? The asshole hadn't given me much to go on. Martian. Marstian.

I searched the name over and over in every pack database I could assess. Of course it wasn't there because no one fucking named their kid some other version of alien.



Marsin

### THE WEDDING

Going to a whole new world might've been more exciting if I wasn't dead on my talons. I followed the group like a semi-zombie the morning of the wedding. We wound our way through Other World paths that later I'd want to map out but, in the moment, it was just more dirt under my feet. Sequin, Xav, Daliah, and Rosemary had spent the whole week at in the GGB territory putting the final touches on the lavish affair and I was determined to at least appear as if I were enjoying them. Elio kept giving me the side eye, though. So I was probably failing spectacularly.

The club was larger than I expected it to be. I knew in theory that it functioned as a hotel sometimes, but I imagined it to be a cozy little place despite all of my brother-in-law's stories. It wasn't. It was big and bright and decorated as if the Moonscale Flight was hosting a family reunion. Photos of the happy couples were plastered everywhere, and a seat up front was saved with Lotus Cromwell's photo on it.

"I wonder how Nelum feels about that?" my dragon chimed off in my thoughts, but I didn't have the energy to answer him.

We were there before most of the guests but once others started to pour in, the wedding was full of smiling faces, most who I didn't know. Everyone knew Fred and my brother, Elio. From dragons to rabbits the whole venue was packed with more kinds of shifters than I ever imagined existed. Was this what the Starscale Worlds would look like in a few generations? How would we ever accommodate what everyone needed? There were a few babies now who weren't dragons, and the

councils were already trying to anticipate what they might need in the future. I pushed the thoughts away and pulled myself back to the present moment. A rabbit shifter who was probably barely legal by the smell of him was introducing himself and asking if my date was with me. Long grey ears set perched on the top of his head that made my dragon itchy to pounce. Definitely wasn't interested in dating someone who made me want to eat them from the top down.

"I'm Marsin and I'm just here for my niece and nephew," I said as politely as I could manage as I shook his hand.

"Hope you enjoy the city. Glitter Bomb isn't the only club around, you know," Phantom said, bowing his head and disappearing back into his friend group. He wasn't bad to look at but waking up next to a tiny rabbit come morning wasn't on my agenda. Besides, I had software codes older than he was and they updated themselves pretty regularly.

I stuck close to Elio as often as I could after that and was happy to play gopher for whatever the kids needed behind the scenes. I didn't know the area well but navigated the spiraling layout of the club like I danced there every night thanks to the Starscale Dragon Flight link. My dragon remained suspiciously quiet as if he eavesdropped for the voice to come back. It hadn't said a peep since we crossed through the Other World Gateway. Had the voice lost track of me? Was that even possible? Had I overlooked some bug in the house and the voice wasn't coming from inside my brain at all?

"You can sit down now," Elio whispered in my ear. "It's almost time to start."

"I'd like to stay with you," I said, gripping his arm.

"Are you okay?" Elio asked, switching to the family link as Minter squirmed around in his arms going on and on about being the ring bearer for both of his older siblings.

“People keep asking if I have a date or a mate. They keep looking at me and I’m tired and I’m---”

“Oh, enjoy it,” Elio laughed, relief flooding his features. “You’ve been so stressed out recently. I don’t know what you’re working on but whatever it is you should really take a break. Even the kids are starting to notice it’s taking its toll on you.”

“I’ll tell you everything after we get the kids off on their honeymoons, okay?” I tried to reassure him.

“I hope it’s just too much work. If you’re having some scandalous love affair, I don’t know what we’ll do. We’re already watching Daliah and Sequin’s kids.”

“I’ll be fine. Go be the happy dad of the people getting married,” I said because I couldn’t call him the carrier of the brides or grooms.

“You have fun. Getting laid isn’t a crime here either,” he said, kissed my cheek, and disappeared before I could protest.

I sat down in the front row reserved for relatives of Daliah and Sequin. There were even more faces I didn’t recognize but at least most of them smelled like Fred. The ones on the far left were Feral and Ty. They ran the shifter group of the GGB and currently owned Glitter Bomb. Elio had gotten to know them quite well when his family visited so that Nelum could wrap up his life as Lotus Cromwell. I glanced around for Nelum but he wasn’t around either. He was in the back with the rest of the family who was part of the bridal party. Daliah had practically shimmied the poor guy into a dress for the occasion.

I blinked, almost dozing off, and homed in on someone talking behind me. It was the rabbit who asked if I had a date talking to someone else. I wasn’t close enough to smell what sort of shifter he was, but it didn’t matter. Anything to focus on to keep

my scaley ass awake would do.

“He bought the car when he went to visit his boyfriend – the one he met online. He’s part of the Appalachian Wolf Pack.”

Appalachian?

Appalachian!

The voice had said that word more than once!

“Anyway, he met this guy....”

I turned to ask him if anyone from the Appalachian Wolf Pack was here but a high-pitched squeal cut through the room and everyone shut up because the guy with a microphone told everyone to sit down and get ready for the happy couples to make their grand entrances.

“Focus. Just a little bit is all we need. Don’t fall asleep. Elio will never forgive you,” my dragon rattled off into my thoughts.

An unfamiliar song played and I picked up from Fred and the others on the flight link that it was some old Moonscale Wedding March. It wasn’t a bad tune but fortunately for me it also wasn’t music to sleep to.

I made it through the ceremony without nodding off. Fred walked both of his children down the aisle one after another. Rosemary’s parents walked her down the aisle too in a deep mauve dress. Her mate and soon-to-be wife, Daliah wore white. The gown looked more like she was about to be crowned queen than pronounced married. It had tiny little stones sewed into so that she shimmered as she walked down the aisle. Sequin and his mate, Xav, were done up in blue and silver robes. We had similar

outfits for special occasions back home but these were Moonscale designs through and through with their tiny crescents along the hems, collars, and cuffs.

“I don’t want this if we ever find our mate,” my dragon cut into my thoughts as Daliah began proclaiming her everlasting love to Rosemary. “I don’t want any party at all. I think I want to kidnap my mate onto the top of a mountain or something. This is---”

I let him ramble on but turned my attention back to the vows because I was sure Elio would want to discuss them later. While I was comfortable working for the flight behind the scenes and enabling things to run smoothly I wasn’t much of a public speaker. I’d never admit it aloud, but I agreed with my inner beast. This would be too much for me but if it was what my other half wanted, I’d figure out how to do it.

As soon as Xav opened his mouth the whole club turned icy. I half expected that it was some showy off magical thing about him since his magical status was out of the bag but instead an icy patch of air drifted out from the back of the room where someone sat with all the babies. Sequin laughed and Xav paused in his vows, chuckling, to sprint down the aisle and snatch their baby, Glacier, up. He held him to his chest for the rest of the ceremony and I had to admit it, with the baby there with them, it was sort of perfect.

It was the sort of perfection that lingered into the reception where Glacier stayed right on Xav’s chest as he and Sequin shared their first dance as a married couple. My tired brain ached watching Xav lead Sequin around the dance floor. So much of my life had been dedicated to finding Elio’s mates and I didn’t begrudge my brother one second of his happiness. Everyone deserved to find their true-mate. Everyone deserved a chance to live their best life with the person or people they chose. Only now I wanted my chance.

Perhaps it was the wedding that left me staring into the void of my life. I didn’t spend

much time contemplating when, where, or how I'd meet my true-mate in my day-to-day life. Only watching the couples spin around on the dancefloor celebrating what fate had brought together left me wishing my life was a bit fuller. I'd feel better after some sleep. Teddy and a few of the others were leaving as soon as dinner was over, and I contemplated going back with them. I hadn't given a definitive answer on how long I'd stay on Earthside and was grateful that I hadn't committed to any amount of time beyond the wedding.

Dinner didn't give me the second wind I hoped it would. I was seated between Teddy and Sunny. Daliah insisted that the duo not be seated together as she couldn't count on them not to crack jokes the whole time. My being sat in between them didn't slow them down the way she hoped it would. Though, I did manage to sneak in a few Earthside related questions.

"What's the Appalachian Wolf Pack?" I asked.

"It's a pack across the continent sort of," Sunny said. "Stateside geography always breaks my brain. It's not here. There was a pack of wolves who are still up and coming. Nowhere near the size of the Hemlock Wolf Pack."

"Not across the continent. They're closer than that. Like next doorish?" Teddy added.

"How far of a flight is that?" I asked, unsure of what I might do with the information.

"Not far if you're flying yourself," Teddy shrugged. "Most people go there for fertility treatment, I think. I don't know what else is there."

"Fertility treatments, a lot of magic, and some wolves with really big attitudes. I think the Seer of the Hemlock Wolf Pack is married to one," Sunny said. "I should know more since I'm related to them but Ross has always scared me. I'd much prefer Liam deliver seer-related news."

“Definitely,” Teddy chuckled and launched into telling a story about Ross that I was too tired to follow.

Before dessert, I ducked outside for some fresh air and rolled a smoke. I didn’t smoke often but from time to time the boost of energy was nice. I made my way around the back of the building and pulled out my ‘Earthside’ phone. It took a few tries but it was easy enough to figure out that I could be to the Appalachian Wolf Pack Territory before dark if I left now. Was I leaving now? I was too tired to think much beyond getting there but first I wanted to finish my cigarette. There was something comforting about the purple smoke wafting from its cherry. So I kept scrolling while I smoked because more likely than not nothing would come out of this trip and I’d need something to show Elio for all my trouble. Despite my earlier promises I wasn’t sure I wanted to tell him about the voice until I knew where it came from.

I scrolled through some stores sites and patted my pocket to make sure I had the weird paper that they used for currency here. Whoever invented their system had something loose inside their heads.

“Yeah, they did. They weren’t shifters. You flesh bags need us to keep from losing your minds,” my dragon chimed in. “Let’s go to the moonshine place. We can buy some as gifts for the folks back home and we can drink until we unhear the voice.”

Warden’s Moonshine sounded like as good of a plan as any other. So when my cigarette was finished I set my GPS there and started walking. Somewhere along the way I found a field big enough to shift in and after strapping the phone to my wrist I did. The strap held up so that it was still around my foreleg when I shifted.

“Disembodied voice here I come!” my dragon roared as he took off into the air.

### Astral

Three days without my apple left me pissy. I'd grown attached to the potential of telling my true-mate everything about myself and trying to lead him here. What the hell had my life come to? My family started to notice my bad mood and it was hard to explain to any of them what was going on. I hadn't told them about the apple. I hadn't told them anything about what happened on my trip to see Dern that full moon night. The truth was most of the time everyone was so caught up in their own lives, problems, and plans that as long as you showed up for work and didn't bite anyone or start howling at the shadows most people wouldn't question what was going on in your life – good or bad. Sometimes that gave me the freedom to do whatever I wanted and other times, times like this, it left me without anyone to talk to about it. There was no way I was admitting to anyone that I spent weeks talking to an apple and then summoned up an ancestor whose hungry ass gobbled it up. I was turning into one of those desperate omegas who would do anything to know even a little more about their true-mate. So far I knew he lived far away and his name sounded like Martian.

My wolf whined inside his inner sanctum and I let out a long, slow breath. For a long moment, we ached together. Why did everyone else under the sun and moon get to meet their other half? Why did I have to spend long hours pining and talking to a damn apple instead of wrapped up in the arms of someone who would laugh about this craziness with me?

The first rays of morning sunlight peeked around the edges of my blinds. There were still a few days before the next full moon. Had I really spent nearly a whole moon cycle talking to Dern's apple before it was eaten? Pathetic. Pathetic. Pathetic. I



wanted to bang my head on the wall or to dig a hole so deep into the earth that I could plant myself to grow some damn common sense.

“Astral. Aaasssstraanaal,” Dern said my name over the pack link.

I blinked. He’d gone more or less mum’s the word on me since handing over the enchanted apple. Even when I told him about what my ancestor told me he shrugged it off. Dern had always been like that, though. He only spoke on his terms and about what he wanted to talk about.

“Yeah?” I sighed back at him, trying to blink away the sleep from my eyes.

“There is a dragon asleep near where y’all keep your stills,” Dern said. “I almost called your parents but figured he’s already drawing a crowd. Better to let you know first.”

“What?” I sat up and rubbed my eyes. “Is this a dream? This sounds like something my fucked-up brain would do to me.”

“Astral, you spent weeks talking through an apple. Now a dragon is asleep not far from where you live. I know there is some reading between the lines to do but if I make it any clearer birds are gonna die flying into the dang point,” Dern growled over the pack link.

Sighing, I swung my legs out of bed and rubbed my face. It wasn’t uncommon for folks to camp out on the back forty of our property. Usually, we let them be for a few nights if they didn’t plunder our stuff and were just passing through. Not every shifter liked or could afford a hotel.

“Is he shifted, Dern?” I asked, picking up my clothes off the floor from the night before.

“Not those. Wear something nice or at least clean,” Dern chided me.

“Stop spying on me over the pack link.”

“I don’t say this often. So, listen up, pupper. This is one time you want to listen to your elder. Get dressed in something clean and come on out. I’m almost there too.”

“What are you gonna do about it?”

“Your dirty clothes or the dragon out in the field?” Dern shot the question back at me as I grabbed clean jeans and a black t-shirt from my closet and ducked into the bathroom to brush my teeth.

“Both,” I rolled my eyes.

“Nothing. I’m just here to see something unfold. This is only the first part of what I need to happen. This starts up a lot of stuff but not everything. Like I said, I only do that damn spell when it benefits me or Ormund. I’m a selfish old hound.”

“Uh...” I said over the pack link and blinked at my reflection.

“Do you mean to tell me my true-mate is squatting behind our houses?” I asked him

“Stop talking like that. You make it sound like he’s out there taking a dump. He’s out cold. Drunk maybe but probably not. It takes a lot of liquor – even moonshine – to get a dragon drunk. He’s probably exhausted from flying through space or how the heck ever he got here.”

I didn’t bother making my way through the house. Once I pulled on the clean shirt over my head – still smelling like lavender from the wash – I ducked out my bedroom window. As soon as I pushed it open, I heard the murmur of the crowd Dern had

warned me about. My heart skipped a beat. Was the dragon actually my mate? Was the man I'd spend the rest of my life with really asleep a few minutes run from here?

My wolf's tail wagged and I didn't have the heart to tell him to calm down. This might be a false alarm. Sure, we didn't get a lot of dragons squatting back there but there was a first time for everything. Still, I sprinted barefoot along the familiar path to the stills. My wolf brushed his furry head against my ribs, threatening to shift if I didn't get a move on.

"What's going on out here?" I called out to the crowd.

I sniffed the air but beyond my pack mates I couldn't smell much. The wind wasn't blowing in my favor and the burning scent of moonshine covered a multitude of sins and savors.

"You got a lizard problem," Morgi called back to me, tucking his thick thumbs into his beltloops. "A big one."

He laughed at his own joke and everyone else rolled their eyes. The urge to race at full speed toward the dragon ate away at me from the inside out but I kept a steady pace not wanting to embarrass myself in front of two handfuls of pack members if this was a false alarm on Dern's part.

Speaking of Dern, he stood just outside the group with his hands on his hips. He looked bored of all the gossiping going on and I didn't blame him. Part of me wanted to bark up a storm until everyone got off the damn property. That part of me wanted to shift and run headlong into their knees for daring to stand that close to our true-mate.

I opened my mouth to say we didn't know that yet just as the wind shifted in our favor. I stopped dead in my tracks despite my wolf gnawing at my ribs. His scent

filled my head – metal, fire, and something sweeter. Cake? Buttercream? Had he robbed a bakery before crashing out here? That would explain how he slept with so many strange wolves gossiping around him.

My wolf bit me again but I wasn't budging yet. The dragon – my dragon – was huge. The crest of his back easily overshadowed all the nearby houses and his wings, though, tucked in tight to his sides, would probably be long enough to knock over several if he weren't careful. An itch spread over part of my chest as I took in his dark blue scales. He was fucking gorgeous and bigger than any dragon I'd ever seen in person.

"I bet he's bigger than Clarence Moonscale," my wolf whimpered, still gnawing on my ribs.

"Y'all go on!" My sire's voice cut through the chaos of the gossip. "Y'all go on and get off my territory! If there's a dragon here, he's ours! Go on!" She shouted again. This morning she had her hair tied up in a high ponytail and her lip was curled up in a snarl. She'd given up early mornings for late night magic before I was ever born. Late night magic was more profitable and probably a bit more fun too.

A few of the looky-loos grumbled but they all turned to leave with the exception of Dern.

"Dern, what are you doing?" My sire asked him. "I know you've got something to do with this. Are you who he's been talking to all the time? You got my son walking around and talking to the air. Wolves around here are going to start thinking he's bananas. He's nuttier than a squirrel after harvest!"

"You're gonna thank me, Warden," Dern rolled his eyes.

"Baby, what is going on out here?" Mom turned to me.

“He’s---” I stumbled over my words but started toward where the two of them stood near my alpha.

“He’s what, baby?” she asked.

“He’s mine,” I said, losing the fight to keep the howl out of my voice.

As my howl cut through our personal territory, one of my dragon’s huge eyes opened. It shined amber with specks of teal in the early morning sunshine. His mouth opened ever so slightly revealing a bubblegum pink tongue. I stared into his huge amber eye as he breathed in my scent. Would he recognize me too?

“Duh!” my wolf rolled his eyes. “The whole true-mates thing goes both ways!”

“Hey now! It doesn’t matter if you’re my son-in-law or not! If you knock over a building, you’re in for it. Your scaley behind will be paying to fix it and doing the labor!” Mom said.

“Ma!” I groaned. “He just woke up! Leave him alone!”

“I’ll leave him alone when he’s not one good stretch away from ruining a family business!”

“Ma! Leave him alone!”

Dern turned away but the old hound was chuckling. My sire would have a go at anyone who got in her way and she was more protective over our magic and our business than she was over me and my siblings.

“Good morning,” a new voice said and when I glanced back over at my dragon, he wasn’t a dragon at all anymore. Where the huge blue-scaled dragon had laid now sat

a man in a mussed up tux and a crooked tie. I smiled despite my tingling nerves and my sire's attitude.

"Now I'll leave him alone! Breakfast will be done soon, you two," she said turning back towards the main house. "Come on, Dern. Come and eat and leave the kids alone."

"You better listen. She bites," I whispered.

"Heard that, Ast! Don't go being all smart because you found your mate or I won't save you any bacon!" she threatened but it was all bluff. My sire prided herself on keeping her whole family fed and then some. Our family's days of being concerned with which side of a fence wild food grew on were over.

Neither me nor my dragon said anything until after they were both out of earshot.

"Good thing Dern never says no to food," I said, hoping to break the ice. "And don't worry about Ma. She'll save us a plate. Are you okay? Did you get tired and just crash out or --- You didn't run away from your own wedding, did you? I have to ask. The tux is really nice, and you smell like cake and..."

He raked his eyes over me and a chill shimmied down my spine. In human form, his eyes were the perfect shade of dark brown, and I wanted to fall into them. I wanted to fall into him and never resurface.

He pushed himself up with a grunt and ran his fingers through his messy hair. Then he detached his phone from his wrist and shoved it into his pocket.

"I have one question before I answer any of those," he said, his hands tucked in his pockets now.

“Okay,” I said, meeting his gaze.

He looked around like someone was spying on us from behind one of the nearby trees. Then he took several steps closer, and my knees wobbled. He put a gentle hand on my shoulder to steady me and smiled, despite his skeptical expression.

“I’m real,” I laughed. “This is all surreal but I’m real.”

He leaned in close. Our lips hovered just inches apart and everything inside me wanted to lean forward. My eyes started to drift closed but then my dragon spoke.

“Did you talk to me before? Like inside my head or something?” he asked.

“Oh! Yes! That! Dern enchanted this apple, and it let me talk to you until I summoned an ancestor who ate it!” I explained.

“An apple let you talk to me?” he arched a dark brow as his hand moved from my shoulder to the curve of my hip.

“Yeah,” I nodded, swallowing hard.

I wasn’t a virgin. I wasn’t a stranger to one whiff of someone being enough to make me want something more but this dragon needed to stop worrying about Dern’s magic and rip my clothes off already. I was slick and hard and ready to pounce him and show him how it was done.

“Thank the ancestors,” he sighed. “I thought I was losing my mind. I came here because someone at my niece and nephew’s wedding mentioned the Appalachian Wolf Pack. Appalachian was one of the few words I was able to make out clearly. I thought I was a goner.”

“I didn’t mean to make you think you were crazy,” I said, and my heart sank into my belly. “I thought I could get you here.”

“This is karma,” he chuckled. “Did you hear about what we did to Fred?”

“Fred? Fred who?” I asked.

“Fred Moonscale. My brother is one of his true-mates and we sent all these scrolls through the doors and....” My dragon lost it and started laughing.

“I did hear about that,” I nodded, grinning as his other hand found the other side of my hips.

“We drove him crazy. He nearly killed Elio when they first met because he thought it was some dark magic. This was karma.”

“No, this was Dern. He claims he’s a grouchy old hound, but I think he has a secret squishy side,” I grinned. “At least a secret romantic side. He never took a chosen mate after his true-mate moved on.”

I met my dragon’s gaze, and he didn’t look away. Standing this close, it was hard to ignore just how tall he was. He towered over me by at least two feet. Feeling brave and desperate to touch him, I rested my hands on his chest. My own still itched. A chigger or a mosquito must’ve gotten me good. Only right now I didn’t care. We had potions that would clear whatever bite right up. My dragon didn’t look away from me. It was as if he stared straight into my soul and that’s all I needed.

“It’s probably your scale,” he whispered as if he was afraid to be too loud this close to me.

“I’m a wolf,” I chuckled.



“Oh. Earthside and all of that.”

“Huh?” I blinked up at him. “I know the true-mate response kills brain cells but I think you left out some words.”

“You’re from Earthside. You don’t know how the flight stuff works. The Starscale flight stuff. As soon as a dragon meets their mate, they’re pulled onto the flight link. It’s really elaborate or at least that’s what the Moonscales I’ve met so far have told me. Part of being pulled onto the flight link is getting your star scale on your chest.

He let go of one of my hips and undid his tie, followed by a few buttons of his white shirt. He pulled it to one side to reveal a baby blue scale on his chest. I almost licked it. I wanted to trace its edges with my tongue until the taste of him burnt itself into my very cells.

“You can do that later. I don’t think you want to do it while your mom watches out the window,” he said, jerking his head slightly toward the main house.

Of course she was spying. Ignoring her, I peeked down my own shirt to find a furry grey wolf colored star. My dragon’s free hand slid under my shirt and up my stomach and chest until his fingers found it. He massaged his digits into the fur and my knees wobbled again until I leaned forward resting against him with his arm trapped between us.

“If every touch feels like that, I know why everyone ends up so fucking pregnant so fast,” I swore under my breath.

His hand slid from my hip to my ass and pulled me right up against him. He was hard too and big. Maybe my mind played tricks on me, but he was bigger than anyone else I brushed up against.

“Maybe. I’m average back home,” he shrugged.

“Huh?” I blinked up at him.

“The flight link enables me to hear some of your thoughts already but only the ones you think really loudly,” he grinned at me. “Let’s start over. Mostly because your mother is watching so intently. I’m Marsin Starscale.”

“I’m Astral,” I said, leaning hard against him. “I’d shake your hand but we’re already past that I think. You should know. My ancestor thought your name was Martian.”

“I’ve been called worse,” he smirked and finally kissed me.

Every cell in my body lit up and my magic pulsed through my veins, vibrating me from the inside out. It traced over scales that weren’t currently visible and memorized him one bit at a time. My wolf headbutted gently against my ribs, wanting to reach the dragon inside Marsin but he’d have to wait his turn. I’d waited a lifetime for this one kiss. A lifetime of watching everyone I knew find their mate. Until I was left behind but now I had my person too. So I kissed him hard, rising up on my toes. I considered jumping up and wrapping myself around him but my sire was probably still watching. Sure, she and everyone else knew what true-mates did but that didn’t mean I wanted to get to the heavy petting and the grinding with my family so close by.

“I can take you anywhere. Distance doesn’t matter. Not with wings and doors,” Marsin broke the kiss to say. “Would be easier if I had my system but I’m sure I can code something on my phone to make travel easier too and...”

I kissed him again. I wanted to know everything about him but his offer to whisk me away gave me goosebumps. I’d love to drop in somewhere exotic or maybe somewhere cooler than the muggy foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

“Anywhere,” he said again.

“Do you travel a lot?”

“I barely leave 1 but I’d go anywhere for you.”

“1?” I asked.

“1,” Marsin nodded. “We have three worlds back home and to keep it simple they’re named and numbered in the order we built them. I live on 1. Most of the Moonys who showed up live on 1 because of me and my brother.”

“I have five siblings and most of them have more than five kids.”

“Elio and his mates are working on it. Though, Fred came with almost five to start with,” Marsin laughed. “Do you know how relieved I am to know I’m not losing my mind?”

I kissed him again because that was all the answer I needed to give. Later, I’d apologize profusely for ever making him feel that way but I’d gladly lose my mind if it meant being with him. I’d talk to every apple in the whole territory if it meant staying this close to him.

Yep. The true-mate response magic had its claws in me. The choices I made lifetimes ago were catching up with me in the best possible ways even if the furry scale on my chest was burning hot. I was free falling and some primal part of me trusted that Marsin would catch me before I splattered against the ground.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:01 am*

Marsin

Astral's family was chaos. I'd grown accustomed to a certain level of noise and activity since Fred's arrival. He brought the whole crew with him and then along came Minter. While I didn't live with them, we visited each other often and I made room in my life for the noise that came along with Minter and then their next hatchlings too.

The kitchen of Astral's family home was full to the brim with hatchlings (puplings?) of various ages. Full enough that if they all didn't smell related I'd ask if they were running a daycare or if one of the kids had hosted a sleep over the night before.

"They're a lot," Astral whispered, smelling apologetic about his family.

"They're fine," I shook my head. "Kids make noise. Kids make messes. They run around and do all the stuff."

"All the stuff," Astral laughed and the sound wrapped around me like a warm blanket. I almost kissed him again but a small boy ran by and nearly ran headfirst into him. I scooped Astral up and spun out of the way.

"All the stuff," I nodded.

As much as she had watched out the window I expected his sire to interrogate me. Fred and the other Moonys often talked about how some parents reacted to their children dating or meeting their true-mates but she and her mate had already disappeared from the kitchen. I glanced around as Astral made our plates. We were

the only adults around.

“The kids hang out in here until it’s time for school or daycare. Pups eat a lot in our family. It’s all that magic pumping through our veins.”

“The moonshine!” I said and almost slapped the table as the memory from the night before came back to me. “That’s how I found you. I hadn’t told Elio or anyone else about the voice and needed a reason to come here.”

“It’s a little early in the day to start drinking the stuff but you can try some tonight if you’re up for it,” Astral offered. “Tastes horrible but gets most people drunk quickly enough. We mostly use it for magic.”

Astral swore under his breath as he set our plates out on the table.

“What’s wrong?” I glanced at the food. “Is it cold?”

“Hot food never gets cold in this house. My parents would sooner cut off their own tails than serve a guest cold food. I was supposed to swing by Morgi’s today and put up more deer wards.”

“Deer wards?” I arched a brow as my mate handed me a fork.

“Yeah. He has a bit of an orchard. The deer eat his stuff if there’s nothing to keep them out. We put wards up that keep them away without hurting them. The deer are food too but future food. If Morgi ate every deer that annoyed him he’d be as big as a house and the rest of us would go hungry.”

“What is this white sauce on everything?” I whispered.

“Oh! Gravy,” Astral laughed. “Mom makes it up really good. It’s an Appalachian

specialty. That's deer gravy too."

I tried it and it wasn't bad. It was creamier than I expected and saturated with deer fat, but we had our own gravy recipes back on 1. We just didn't cover most of our breakfast with it. Though, by the end of the meal I'd grown fond of it.

"I'll see if someone else can take Morgi's wards today. He prefers when I do it, but he can deal," Astral said as he rinsed our plates at the sink.

"I'll go with you if you need to go to work. I understand that currency is a major part of life on your planet. Currency is used for everything and not merely measuring how much food to produce for any given year," I said.

"You guys don't have money?" Astral blinked at me. "How do you get anything?"

"Points or barter but even if you're out of points you eat. It's a measurement for the councils," I shrugged.

"Morgi pays for the year upfront. Mostly in barter because food in the fridge is worth a lot more than money in the bank. I'm torn, though. I don't want anyone else messing with my magical setup, but I don't want to go," he sighed, drying the dishes and putting them away.

Slowly one by one and then in pairs and small groups the children had disappeared from the kitchen to be dispatched to wherever their young lives were directed.

"Do you not like Morgi?" I asked.

A sudden need to protect Astral from anyone who might annoy him filled the atoms between my scales. The magic tugged and pulled on me until I found myself standing with him in front of the sink.

“Morgi and I are close. Well, as close as I am to anyone outside my family. I don’t dislike him. I just like you more than him which sounds outrageous when I say it aloud. We just met.”

“This time,” I pointed out. “We’ve known each other before and I’d love to know how those lives played out. How did you go from being a dragon to being a wolf? Perhaps there were more furry shifters in our flight than the councils and leaders want us to know. I know some flight members remained behind because their mates couldn’t handle flying through space.”

“Maybe you were a wolf in one lifetime,” Astral smirked.

I clenched my jaw. This wolf was going to be the death of me. Alone in the kitchen with him, I was already hard again. My dick throbbed for attention. Lifting him up and carrying him out of the kitchen would’ve been easy. Too easy. I could take him to one of the many caves in the surrounding area and make love to him again and again until neither of us could cum anymore. I could coax the pleasure out of his lean, muscular body until he couldn’t stop writhing and had an egg....

“That’s exactly why I don’t want to go to Morgi’s,” Astral whispered, snapping my attention back to the present but the fantasy still lingered in the back of my mind.

I glanced down. My mate was hard too, and I knew if I took a deep breath, I’d smell how slick he was. Astral ran his hands up and down my arms before finally entwining his fingers with mine. I tried to imagine standing like this with him for the first time in the Other World and smiled despite how many brain cells we both lost since meeting an hour ago. Brain cells usually returned to their full functioning by the time newly met mates had been together for a few years. We were all made of magic after all.

“What about your family? Your flight? Are they worried?” Astral asked.

I cocked my head to the side homing in on my brother over the flight link. He and his family were still on Earthside helping clean up after the wedding. For a microsecond I felt guilty but that's why we're a flight. Not everyone could function at one hundred percent all the time. Sometimes you had to drop out of being a functional member of society so that you could function even better later.

"Have fun. I wish you would've told us you were leaving but I get it. I mean, I dragged Fred across the universe just to have him by my side. Let us know if you need anything and I mean ANYTHING," Elio sounded off in my thoughts over the family link.

"Thanks, Elio. I can't wait for you all to meet him. Only, I can wait because even sharing him with his own family and pack is torture."

"That gets easier. Mostly easier anyway," Elio chuckled.

"They're okay," I told Astral a second later. "I think our flight link reaches further than some links here. Our scientists and psychologists believe that's because the ancestors had to hone the skill while they were traveling through space. Being able to communicate over long distances accurately allowed them to scout larger swatches of space at once without losing each other in the dark, cold void."

"I've always said I'm more of a magic than science guy, but I think I could listen to you talk about anything for the rest of my life," Astral said, locking his gaze to mine.

"Magic and science are lovers. One doesn't function without the other," I said and cupped his chin because I couldn't resist touching more of him. Then, remembering that most furry shifters loved to scent mark, I ran my fingers over his cheek and he nuzzled into my hand. Phantom fur brushed against my skin and my dragon sat up. He wouldn't officially meet Astral's wolf in the place our inner sanctums merged into one until after our claiming vows but that didn't stop him from pining away.



“Sorry to interrupt,” Dern said, walking into the kitchen.

Astral startled away from me like we were teenagers caught in some forbidden embrace, but Dern pretended not to notice.

“I was on my way out and wanted to let you guys know that if you stopped by I’d lend you some of Ormund’s old clothes. I don’t think anyone else around here has anything that will fit you and I don’t think you want to spend the rest of your time here running around in a suit.”

“Was Ormund a dragon too?” I asked, taking Astral’s hand in mine.

Dern chuckled and glanced to the empty space on his left. Was that where Ormund would’ve walked by his side if he was still on this side of the door of life and death?

“My Ormund’s a lot of things but he’s not a dragon,” Dern said. “His clothes should fit you, though. He had a lot of torso like you do.”

“Thanks, I think.”

“It’s not a bad thing. More torso meant more happy trail,” Dern shrugged and Astral made a face.

“You wouldn’t be making that face if you saw him,” Dern laughed. “Stop by when you get a chance. If I don’t see you by the morning, I’ll try to drag some over here. That is unless you’re going somewhere else.”

“We haven’t decided yet,” Astral said. “We haven’t decided much yet. Have you seen something else we should know about?”

“I’m always seeing. That’s what fortune tellers do,” he shrugged. “Nothing

important, though. Not today anyway. I'll see you guys in a bit."

Astral and Dern said their goodbyes, but I didn't say anything else until he was long gone. I watched him out of the kitchen window for as long as I could. Something was strange about him. Something was off. All seers were a bit eccentric. Everyone who worked at the Star Room was a bit off too but he was off in a different way.

"He's a widower but no one knows how his mate died. When I was a kid there was a rumor that he murdered Ormund. They were true-mates, though. So we know that didn't happen. I think it's mostly he knows too much about the world from experience and bullshit."

"Picking up things over the flight link already?" I asked, squeezing Astral's hand.

"Nope. Reading your expression. Plus, everyone thinks Dern's a little strange," he shrugged. "Though, I summon ancestors, talk to apples, and use moonshine like some people use sage in their magic. I don't think I have much room to speak. I think we'll stop by Morgi's if you don't mind. We should probably drop in on Dern later and pick up those clothes. I know how to sew clothes in a pinch but right now I'd probably sew myself to the machine. I'm having trouble finding two unoccupied brain cells to rub together."

"Will I be a distraction?" I asked him.

"Yes, but there's nothing we can do about that. If I can't do the wards, Morgi will have to either wait until things below the belt calm down or settle for someone else in my family putting them up."

"What if I went to Dern's to grab the clothes and you went to work? I could meet you at Morgi's."

“You’re not going to do anything weird to Dern, right?” he narrowed his eyes on me. “I know he’s strange and that leads people to act weird around him but he’s not a bad wolf. He’s annoying sometimes and being old makes him think he knows everything but he’s a good guy. He helped bring us together.”

“I wouldn’t harm your pack,” I said. “I do want to speak to him a bit more. I have a feeling.” I rubbed over the star-shaped scale on my chest. “I’m not psychic or anything but I’d like to speak to him more.”

“He could use more friends,” Astral said, letting out a long sigh of relief.

It wasn’t the whole truth. Something was off about Dern, and I didn’t want my mate hanging around him until I figured out what it was. If that made me a cave-dragon, then I was a cave-dragon. That was something I could live with but I’d never be able to live with myself if I let it go and something happened to Astral.

“I’ll put their addresses into your phone so that you can find your way around,” Astral offered.

“No need. I can use the flight link and that means I know how to get around as well as you do. Can I take your short cuts or would I get shot for it?”

“Eh, the word’s gotten around about our true-mate response by now,” Astral said, flashing me a sheepish smile that made me want to hold onto his hand forever. “So you should be good. If anyone gives you trouble just remind them that you’re with a Warden now and I’ll hex their balls to get sucked up inside them anytime they see anyone naked. I’m not playing around with your safety.”

I kissed him again, because how could I not?

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Dern must've expected that we'd show up earlier than he made it sound like back in the kitchen. He sat on his porch with a travel sized suitcase next to his chair. Somewhere nearby a fire burnt, and glimpses of a fire pit played through my memory. Only they weren't my memories but Astral's.

Two empty chairs sat on either side of Dern. The one on his left rocked in the breeze as if some ghostly inhabitant lounged next to him.

"Stop thinking like that," my dragon cut into my thoughts. "Just because someone helped you meet your true-mate doesn't mean they're packing big magic. The true-mate magic is everywhere and it wants to help mates find each other. Something's off about him but I don't know that it's dead people. Besides, our Astral keeps talking about summoning ancestors and there's nothing wrong with him."

"Thought you'd show up alone," Dern said in lieu of a greeting. "Everyone usually does. You can sit there." The old wolf pointed a wrinkled hand at the chair that didn't rock.

I made myself comfortable and for a long moment neither of us spoke. I wasn't sure what I wanted to ask Dern and maybe I should just thank him and move on with my life but unless I whisked Astral away from his family their friendship wasn't going anywhere.

"Not everyone can sense it," Dern said.

"Sense what?" I asked.

"That I've done magic that would make most people's skin crawl. I won't explain myself. I won't lay it all out. Not now. Not yet. Some day I will and it will be on my terms. All I can say is that it's been some years and it's never been against this pack. You've met your omega now. You'd do anything to keep him safe, right?"

“Yeah, of course,” I nodded, my brows knitting together.

“That wasn’t a threat. It was a genuine question. Astral deserves an alpha who will. It also means you know where I’m coming from. If a threat was bigger and physically stronger than you and the only way you could save him was to do dark magic, you’d do it too. Almost anyone would. I’d do it again too if it meant I was back with Ormund again. I’d do anything to be back with him.”

“I’m sorry that you two are separated,” I said, skirting around the subject of dark magic. Everyone had their own definition of what qualified as dark and I didn’t want to know what the old wolf had been forced to do.

“Me too. It’s not forever, though. It’s not for long. Time is relative, I guess. The suitcase is all packed up for you. I’ve seen a couple futures for you two. Your matingmoon anyway. Going away is more romantic but sticking around here pays off more in the end. Besides, if you like breakfast gravy as much as you do in my visions, you’ll like it if you stick around. She cooks it with almost every meal.”

“It must be hard seeing so much all the time.”

“Not really,” Dern shook his head. “I only pay attention if it helps me. I told your omega the same thing about the spell I cast on the apple and I meant it. I don’t think he believed me. I think he will before everything’s said and done. You two being together is good for me.”

“Do you think we’re going to have your Ormund as our son or something?” I asked, trying not to sound as bemused as I was.

“I love dragons. You’re always looking for the logical answers. Trying to parse out the puzzles. No, my Ormund will not be your child or descendant as far as I know but it’s good for me that you two are together. Keep wondering about me. It’s fun, isn’t

it? Just know, I'll never hurt anyone unless they stand between me and Ormund."

"Good to know," I nodded but didn't find any reassurance in his words.

"Okay. The old wolf is up to something, and that chair is definitely rocking faster than before," my dragon chimed into my thoughts.

We'd have to talk this out later, but I didn't want to spend anymore time away from Astral than I absolutely had to. Besides, with me by his side no dark magic wolf would ever hurt him.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:01 am*

Astral

Morgi was as surprised to see me as I was to be walking into his orchard alone on the same day I met my true-mate. His eyebrows rose high on his tall forehead in question.

“I don’t even know honestly,” I sighed and launched into an explanation of how I came to stand in his orchard while I really wanted to be with Marsin. I explained the story top to bottom and side to side as I made my rounds with the warding spray. The spray on its own could be used by anyone and worked fairly well but it was at its best when used by the person who brewed it up.

A six-point buck eyed us from the other side of the fence. The shitheads could jump most fences and did to get to where they wanted to be. Unlike home security wards this spell wouldn’t shock or bite the deer but literally formed a forcefield that they and their behooved brethren couldn’t pass through.

“And he thinks Dern is up to something?” Morgi asked, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“I think he’s just on edge. He’s on a strange world without any of his flight and here comes Dern with big magic and talk of all his selfishness. Dern wants everyone to think he’s dangerous but he’s not. Well, no more dangerous than my family. Probably makes him feel better as an old omega living alone. You know what they say – if you can’t kick their asses, you better make sure they believe you can.”

“Probably. So, what are you going to do? Is he going to stay here and be an alien or

are you going to go be an alien?" Morgi asked.

Good ole Morgi only knew how to cut straight to the heart of the matter. Of course, he'd skip the talking of the matingmoon and even miss the chance to make a dragon dick joke to find out how this would affect him. If I was off being an alien on a Starscale world someone else would have to do his wards.

"Believe it or not we haven't gotten that far into the conversations yet. You're lucky he needed clothes, or I'd have sent out Mom to do your wards."

"You're not that evil. That woman would be here all day talkin' my head off."

"Serve you right," I chuckled as we finished making our rounds of the wards.

I smelled Marsin before I saw him. His smell was warm, toasty, and made me crave marshmallows. The suitcase he carried looked like a child's toy in his big hand. He waved when he spotted us watching him.

"He's even bigger than before," Morgi said and swore under his breath. "You're going to have to climb that man like a damn tree."

"And I plan to. Many, many times," I nodded and waved back to my mate.

"This is Morgi. He owns the orchard here," I introduced them. "It was one of his apples I used to haunt you."

"How big are the houses where you come from? Can you fit through the doors here?" Morgi asked.

"Ignore him. He's taken one too many apples to the head," I said and elbowed Morgi. "He means well, though. I'm gonna sick Mom and Dern on him before I lock you up



in my bedroom.”

“Might serve him right,” Marsin grinned politely.

His scent was off. Dern must’ve said something to annoy him. Were all dragons easily annoyed? Did they mistrust everyone they didn’t know?

“You’ll have to forgive me,” Marsin said and before I could open my mouth to ask what he needed forgiveness for, he hefted me over his shoulder. “Morgi, I’m sure you have very good apples but I’m afraid I won’t be sampling them today. I’ve waited a long time for this day to come. I’ve played my part in society over and over and now it’s time for me to be a cave-dragon. I would appreciate it if you spread the word around that my mate won’t be available to work for some time and we’ll let everyone know when he is back on the job. Enjoy your apples.”

When Marsin spun around to leave, Morgi’s mouth was hanging open in shock. In school, we all had to take one form or another of Omega Studies and we were taught that everyone should ask for consent over and over. It was good in theory and between folks who weren’t true-mates it was good in practice. So most alphas around here wouldn’t dare to pull such a move so early in a relationship but Marsin wasn’t from around here. He might not have asked my consent to manhandle me but I wasn’t complaining.

Inside his inner sanctum, my wolf let out a yip and then a little howl as Marsin’s big hand found my ass and held on as he made his way back to the farm. I opened my mouth to explain how the housing situation worked but he headed straight for my side entrance. Of course he did. I was on his flight link now. Sooner or later, I needed to figure out how to use that.

“It’ll be easier after he fills us up,” my wolf said. “You’ll be glad I made you keep up with yoga in a few minutes. He’s huge. Huge and all ours.”

I blushed at my wolf's rambles, but Marsin didn't comment on it as he fished around my pockets for my keys. I let him pat me down a couple of times before I reached around to touch the smooth stone that protruded from the wall.

"No keys here. All by touch. I'll have to add you on to the entrance ward soon," I explained.

"How did that not come across the flight link?" Marsin asked, still holding onto my ass.

"Some things are protected until you're told about them. Not even draconic magic can bypass one of our wards."

"You have brain wards?" Marsin asked as the door swung open and he stepped inside.

"You could call them that. To be fair we toss around the word 'ward' like glitter at a nightclub, but other families would call them all something different. Our last name is Warden, so Mom gets a kick out of it, I think. Maybe it was my grandparents or hers. Someone got a kick out of it and our broad use of it stuck around."

The door shut behind us and Marsin double-checked that it was locked.

"Locks automatically," I assured him. "The only other way through this part of the house is to come from the main house. No one's coming in here right now. Except to check that the kitchen is stocked. I know they seem nosy but they'll leave us alone. At least, our parents forbade us to annoy our siblings when they first matingmooned down with their mates."

"Good to know," Marsin said and patted me on the ass.

My dick throbbed against his hard, muscular body and slickness gushed from me. Marsin's scent changed from curious to territorial as if someone might jump out of the shadows and steal me away from him. His feet traced the familiar to me path to my bedroom and I cringed at the memory of the clothes I left on the floor.

"Life isn't always tidy," Marsin shrugged the shoulder I wasn't slung over. "Don't worry about it. I plan to make a much bigger mess than that."

He stopped and stepped out of his dress shoes before opening the bedroom door. He pulled off my sneakers one at a time and dropped them down on the hardwood next to his own. Only the bedrooms were carpeted and we all tried to keep from wearing shoes inside them but like most folks we forgot more often than we cared to admit.

Marsin didn't turn the light on when we entered the room, but he did make sure the door shut tight behind us. He laid me down on the bed and made quick work of shrugging off his jacket and unraveling his tie. He draped both of them over the desk before turning his attention back to me.

I reached to pull my shirt up but Marsin shook his head and I froze. I thought we were headed in the claiming vow direction, but I must've been wrong.

"I'm going to undress you," he said, filling in the gap a second later. "I'm going to strip you down piece by piece and mark every inch of your body as mine, Astral. Mine and mine alone. I'm not sharing and I'm not taking any chances that anyone will ever hurt you. We didn't go through whatever between life mess to end up with you hurt or separated again."

His words were deep and throaty as if his dragon lent his vocal cords to his speech. I ran my hands over my chest and stomach marking a path where I wanted him to touch me. Goosebumps rose up on my flesh as Marsin crawled up onto the bed with me. He was still mostly dressed in his crumpled suit, but a sexier man had never

walked through my field of vision.

When he was over me, he claimed my lips in a long, slow kiss and his tongue prodded my lips apart to conquer my mouth. I melted into the bed as every inch of me burnt for him. I needed him to taste everything I was and touch me so that all the little fires burning across my body would settle down. Holding himself up on his palms, his tongue swirled around my mouth again and again until I lost track of what he might do next. I touched his face, playing with the five o'clock shadow on his cheeks and chin. He sucked my bottom lip into his mouth and a new zip of longing rolled over me.

My wolf whimpered inside his inner sanctum as another gush of slick pooled around my omegahole. The man hadn't even taken off my shirt and I was already coming undone. Was it heat? Marsin's lips froze on mine, and he felt my forehead with a big, gentle hand.

"Not heat. Perfect," he shook his head. "This is just us. What we waited for. What we are together."

He kissed me again, but his lips didn't linger on mine for long this time. They moved down to my chin, and he kissed his way down my throat until he found the collar of my t-shirt. He growled at its brazen attempt to keep his mouth off of me. He rose up on his knees and pushed my shirt up until my stomach, chest, and hard enough to cut through moonshine glass nipples were bared. His fingertips danced over my skin leaving behind a hot trail of desire everywhere he touched. I arched my back offering myself up to him, desperate for him to know I wanted him as much as he wanted me.

I raked my gaze down his broad, muscular body. My eyes caught on his crotch. His thick cock stretched out against the fabric of his suit pants. That couldn't be comfortable. I reached out to touch him and he caught my hand and then took the other as well. He pinned them above my head with one hand and kissed me again.

“Mine,” he whispered against my lips.

“Yours,” I nodded eager for more of him.

Still holding my hands above my head, Marsin kissed up and down my throat before trailing his tongue over the same path. On my shoulder, my claiming gland was full to the brim, burning with an aching need for his claiming bite but Marsin wasn't in any hurry to get to the destination. He let go of one of my arms and wiggled my shirt over it before catching the wrist again and giving the other side the same treatment.

“Would tying me up be easier?” I arched a brow at him when he met my gaze again. “It would keep both of your hands free.”

“I'm a hands-on sort of dragon. Maybe later on,” he shrugged and kissed me again.

The longer he held my hands above my head the more my fingers ached to touch him. Now that he had me fully bare chested, he kept them pinned down as he licked across my collarbones and back to the center. He licked his plump, kissable lips before turning his attention to one of my nipples. He licked over the hard, pink tip, swirling his tongue and sending little lightning bolts zooming through me. I arched my back again, begging for more of his attention even as his teeth grazed against my flesh.

He turned his attention to my other nipple, giving it the same treatment with his moist, nimble tongue before making good on his promise to kiss me everywhere. Marsin dragged his lips across my chest and down my belly as if each kiss marked me a little more as his. I sank into the covers, melted into the bed, and breathed in time with his mouth moving over me. I lost myself to his warm breath and his affections. My dick throbbed and more slickness pooled outside of my omegahole as Marsin kissed his way down to the hem of my jeans. He glanced up at me long enough to make sure I was still into it before he undid them one-handed, stretching to

still hold my arms in place.

He glanced over his shoulder at the tie on the desk and I smirked. Sooner or later, if he wanted to keep me in place so badly, tied up was the only way to go. He slid off the bed and snatched the tie up by the corner before straddling over me. I offered my hands up to him before he asked, and he grinned as he made a short job of tying my hands together. It didn't keep them in one place, but it kept me on the edge of the desire to run my hands all over him.

He kissed each of my fingers before pushing my arms back down on the bed above my head. He glanced around at all the pillows and tucked one under my head a second later. I laughed as his eyes scanned up and down my half-undressed body. Was he scanning what I felt over the flight link or was he merely checking me out?

The questions fled my brain as he tucked his thumbs into the waistband of my jeans and tugged them down. A second later, he slipped my socks off and then was back up at my hips, freeing my dick from the fabric prison of my boxer briefs. I let out a long, slow breath as the cool air played over my desire-heated flesh. Marsin nudged my knees apart and knelt between my legs. He ran his big, warm hands all over my chest and stomach again giving me goosebumps all over. Then he caressed my thighs as he stretched out on his belly. Once in a comfy position, he kissed them, while spreading them open until there was nowhere left for me to hide how slick I was. We should've grabbed a towel but keeping things tidy was the last thing on my mind when Marsin carried me into the room.

"I'll do the wash," Marsin grinned. "I'm proud of how messy I made you even before I took your pants off."

I blushed hard and moved my hands to cover my face but one stern look from Marsin stopped me in my tracks.

“That’s why those hands are tied up, mate,” he said, caressing my inner thighs. “No hiding from me. Mates have no secrets.”

“What are you going to do if I don’t keep them up there?” I said, bouncing my hands against the pillows. “Spank me?”

“Perhaps,” Marsin said before licking up my thigh. “Only when you don’t expect it, though. I find that anticipation is half the fun of such encounters. I’ve gotten carried away. You’re eager enough but we should have a safeword even with how loudly you think over the flight link.”

“Stoplights?” I offered up.

He cocked his head to the side as if talking to someone inside his head. I knew for sure it wasn’t me this time. Only it turned out it was. I was quickly learning that look. He was probing what he could of my memories and the Moonscales who were also on the flight link to find out what stoplights were.

“Red, yellow, green,” he nodded after he gathered up the information he was looking for.

“Red for stop. Yellow for slow down and green means keep giving it to me,” I smirked.

“Good to know.”

“Condoms are in the nightstand if you want them,” I added on before the tug and pull of the true-mate response fully eradicated my senses.

“Are you against children?” Marsin asked.

“Did you see the kitchen?” I shot the question back at him.

“That’s why I’m asking. Perhaps you think your pack or family has enough young people running around.”

“Never,” I laughed. “I don’t want six or eight at once but at some point, yeah, I’d like to start a family.”

“Six or eight at once?” he cocked his brow. “What are you wolves shooting out to conceive that many?”

“Magic,” I laughed. “Six or eight at once is very uncommon. Litters aren’t that uncommon. Two or three pups. Sometimes four or five. My parents had a set of twins, then triplets, and then me. They’re talking about more too.”

“Dragons have one or two eggs,” Marsin said and kissed my thigh again. “Condoms today?”

“Condoms? In the plural, huh?” I teased him.

“I come from a place where the good parts of life are indulged in. Besides, there are too many positions to just try out one a day with you,” he said and bit me.

I squeaked and a warm, crimson blush spread over my face as I imagined how many ways, he might bend me up into a pretzel. Marsin’s hands slid under my thighs and pushed them up until my knees bent and my feet left the bed. His mouth found the sensitive, textured skin of my scrotum and his warm breath playing against it made my wolf whimper. The sound crawled out of my throat, sounding more needy than I ever had before. In the past sex was always something I could take or leave. It was like using a back scratcher to scratch an itch. It made things easier, but I could do the same thing with my own two hands.



“Not while they’re tied up,” Marsin said against my skin, having picked up my thoughts over the flight link again.

“You’re gonna have to teach me how to use that damn thing,” I said, my words morphing into a whimper as he dragged his tongue over my balls.

“We’ll have our mating link open some time in the next few days.”

“Next few days?” I asked, swallowing hard.

“Things might stretch out that long. Why shouldn’t we take our time and enjoy each other?” he asked, not glancing up at me. His tongue teased over my scrotum again and I let out a long, slow breath as my brain processed the pleasure, trying to parse out each little sensation. They all tangled up together in a ball of ‘feels good’ that left me unable to speak for a second.

Marsin lifted his head and met my gaze as if he knew there was something I wanted to say.

“That’s easy for the man who isn’t tied up to say,” I spat out the words before his naughty tongue stole my ability to speak again.

“We can switch it up later. You’ll find that most Starscales aren’t prudes. I just decided to go first. I mean, I did carry you all the way back here,” he grinned. “My dragon was insistent upon it. Me too. You need to smell like me. You need to smell so much like me that when the world looks at you they know we’re a packaged deal – in love, in war, in everything the stars might toss our way. No one else can have you. I won’t give you up.”

“I guess dragons are as territorial as I’ve heard,” I chuckled.

“You don’t seem to mind,” he pointed out and kissed my inner thigh again and made his way down my ass cheek kissing and licking. “You’re so slick. So very fucking slick.”

I blushed. His mouth moving over me had left me slicker than I’d ever been before. I was a never ending tap of slick. It ran down my flesh onto the bedding but Marsin, true to his word, didn’t seem to mind the mess.

“It’s not a mess,” he shrugged. “It’s the proof of how much you’re enjoying yourself.” he said licking around my needy omegahole. I swallowed a howl and glanced at the door.

“Will someone hear us and take offense?” Marsin froze.

“Not take offense but....” I glanced at the door again.

“Is someone in the corridor?” he asked.

“Can you press the blue stone by the light switch, please? It’ll put up the sound shields. I don’t think I can keep quiet if you keep licking me.”

“And I plan to keep licking you for a long time,” he nodded before sliding off the bed and pressing the blue stone for me. Then he was back between my legs, lapping at the slickness escaping my body. He pressed his nimble tongue flat against my hole, licking it. If his hands weren’t holding my legs up, they’d have wrapped tight around his neck. We’d see about who was never letting go of who.

A second later, Marsin let go of my legs and when I didn’t move them, he did it for me. One then the other wrapped around him as his big hands cradled my ass. His tongue probed into me, teasing my nerve endings and making me grind down against his face. My dick throbbed and my balls grew heavy. I rocked my hips, thighs

tightening around him as one of his hands let go of my ass and wrapped around my dick. He held me tight in his big fist as his tongue continued to lap up my slickness, torturing me in the best possible way.

His face pressed against my flesh as his tongue went wild over my hole. My wrists pulled against the tie but whatever material it was made of wasn't giving up. I couldn't touch him. I couldn't run my fingers through his thick hair or push his face harder against my body. Still, I came with his fist squeezing me hard as if he meant to milk out every last drop of pleasure from my body. I came in warm sticky streams covering my chest and belly. As soon as my dick had finished emptying its pleasure his mouth was on my torso cleaning up the mess before he kissed me with the taste of my semen still on his tongue. Raising my arms, I extended them to wrap the loop they created around him. Now, he was captured too as our tongues danced together between our mouths. His suit hadn't only seen better days. I was pretty sure it was done for unless the dry cleaner a couple blocks over knew some magic spell to take out everything it must've soaked up during our foreplay.

"Don't worry about the suit. I don't like it. Don't like them in general but wanted to go to the wedding," he said in between kisses.

Marsin snaked out of my grasp, escaping the loop my tied together hands created. He stripped out of the suit and the rest of his clothes until he was as naked as I was.

"Hands okay? Still have circulation?" he leaned over and felt along my fingers and palms to ensure they were the proper temperature as I nodded. "Good. Shower time." He lifted me up over his shoulder again and carried me into the bathroom.

He turned on the water before my feet ever touched the floor. I glanced from my tied-up hands and back to him. I wasn't going to be any help unless he let me go.

"Not yet," he shook his head. "What's your stoplight?"

“A curious green,” I laughed. “I hope this tie is okay to get wet.”

“It’s dragon made. It’ll be fine. I could go swimming in that thing,” he said, sticking a hand under the water to test its temperature.

“So you’re gonna bathe me?” I arched a brow.

“You are mine,” he shrugged.

When the water was warm enough for Marsin’s liking, he held onto me as I stepped into the shower. It wasn’t like I walked around with my hands outreached for balance all the time but having them tied together set off the nagging, intrusive thought of what if I fell in the shower.

“I have you,” he said. “Still, you can sit if you want. Your shower looks like it was built for or by dragons.”

“What can I say? Business booms and I don’t want to clean up in a coffin. Also, it needed room for the bench and the fur scrubbers,” I nodded to the roller brushes along the lower walls. “Fur salons may have caught on in bigger cities but here, not so much. I think there’s one in the next town over, but I wouldn’t be caught dead there. I’d never hear the end of my joining the bougie wolves.”

“It’s bougie to be styled?” Marsin asked, surveying the shower.

“Too styled and you’re bougie,” I shrugged. “It’s Appalachia get used to it.”

Once he located my loofah and peach-scented bodywash Marsin washed me methodically, cleaning me gently. I relaxed into his touch, following his big fingers with my gaze. He drew tiny, soapy circles across my flesh cleaning me up bit by bit. Then I got the show of him washing himself. I couldn’t not follow his hands as they

dragged the soap across his body. I wanted to rinse him and follow those once soapy spirals with my tongue.

“Soon,” he teased. “Maybe sooner than later. The shower has trapped your scent in here. I can’t not breathe you in.”

A second later, he grabbed the tie, and I was on my knees in front of him. It all happened so fast, I expected the marble to crash against my joints but it didn’t because Marsin held onto me until I balanced my weight. I was nose to dick with him now and couldn’t stop the smirk pulling at the corners of my mouth.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:01 am*

Marsin

He was so fucking beautiful on his knees, hands tied up, and his mouth mere inches away from my throbbing cock. I ran my fingers through his damp hair as the water rained down over us. The shower was equipped with several heads tossing out their water in all directions, including one directly on the ceiling. Seemed Astral loved being wet.

“Stop light?” I asked before my good intentions got away from me.

“Green. Fucking bright ass emerald-green,” he said, leaning forward and placing a hard kiss on the head of my dick. My fingers trembled as I entwined them in his thick hair. His lips were soft and warm, threatening to make me lose control. I wanted to slide my dick between those soft, giving lips and over his sassy tongue and find my pleasure deep inside his mouth. I almost nudged his head forward but hated when guys did that. Instead, I tilted his face up until our gazes met.

“You said you wanted a turn,” I said, holding my cock in my free hand. “It’s your turn now.”

Astral opened his mouth and offered up his tongue. I tapped the head of my cock against it – warm, wet, and inviting. A drop of precum dribbled onto his tongue as he closed his mouth around it. I tightened my grip on his hair to keep myself from losing too much control. I glanced down at his bound hands. He hadn’t complained about them and said he was green. I might free them later but for now they were fine as they were.

I let my eyes drift closed and gave in to his warm, soft mouth sliding down my shaft. Had anything ever felt this good before? Had anything else ever made me want to stop time? My hips ached to rock, to fuck his face and take full advantage of his glorious tongue pressing against my dick. I held back. I had to hold back. He was a wolf. He was an omega. He was mine to protect and keep safe. It wouldn't do for me to be the one to break him. So, I kept my hold on his hair but followed his movements, letting him set the pace until he pulled away.

"You can give me more," he said, his voice almost a frustrated whimper. "I'm not made of glass."

"Alright," I nodded and moved to cup his face. "You sure?"

"I trust you," he said, and those words burnt into my soul.

The magic of the true-mate response pushed me forward into his mouth, urged on by those three beautiful words. I wanted Astral to know he was always safe with me no matter what we were doing. He met my gaze as I fed my shaft into his gloriously soft mouth. His tongue pressed up against me, not even passive while I was in control.

"Tap me if it gets to be too much. Can you do that as you are?" I asked him before things moved too far along.

He nodded and touched his hands to my knees.

"Good boy," I said, testing out the words and what reaction they evoked from him.

He slid his mouth further down my shaft taking in as much of my dick as he could. This time I didn't close my eyes and let the pleasure take hold. I kept them open and on him, watching as my dick slid into his mouth over and over again spreading his warmth all over me. Astral's eyes drifted closed as he met my forward thrusts. I lost

myself inside his mouth – his smooth tongue pressed up against me giving more and more each time I slid over it until I couldn't hold back anymore. I thrust into his mouth again – hard this time and his eyes opened. I paused, waiting for his hands to find me.

“GREEN!” He thought-shouted over the flight link.

That's all I needed. I thrust into his mouth again, tapping the back of his throat. His eyes watered but he kept thinking green over and over as I took advantage of how willing he was to take my dick.

“Don't stop! Don't stop! Cum in my mouth!” he shouted over the flight link not caring who else might hear him.

And I didn't stop until I granted his loud wish. I thrust into his mouth again and again, reveling in the way his lips gripped me with each pass until I couldn't take it a moment longer. Until my balls drew up close to my body – heavy from how delicious his mouth was all wrapped around me. I let go of my control and roared as my warm, sticky streams unleashed themselves onto his tongue. Astral drank down my pleasure and his arms wrapped around me. He'd wiggled his hands free of the tie while he sucked me off. I laughed – the sound coming out more of a moan than a laugh. I pulled him up gently onto his feet and kissed him hard. He was so fucking perfect. He was so fucking delicious. We might never leave the shower again except for food. I could barricade us both inside the bathroom and live happily ever after. Besides, his shower was bigger than some closets I'd seen.

## Chapter Nine

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“Do we have to pick only one place to live? Maybe once these hypothetical kids are in school it would matter more so but I can’t commit to living full time somewhere I’ve never seen and I can’t ask you to give up everything either not for someone you’ve not even known a handful of hours. Maybe we live in both places?” My fingers trembled as I offered up the suggestion.

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"Did I bite you too hard?" Marsin asked as soon as the clear magical fluid ran dry.

"I wasn't expecting it to hurt so much," I laughed. "It's better now but for a second it was as if you were really trying to eat me."

"My dragon got a bit carried away but I couldn't stop and apologize because everything was already coming out of it and---" I kissed Marsin to stop his rambling. I was fine. A little bit of love pain never killed anyone. So what if my claiming bite that sat on my shoulder forever was a bit bigger or more pronounced than everyone else's? I was mated to a dragon, after all.

I rolled my hips reveling in contrasting pain and pleasure. My shoulder ached in the



best way and his dick brushing against all my happy spots. The look in his eyes told me he was close, but I wasn't ready for him to go yet. So, I leaned in close again, resting my weight against him and licked one of his nipples, redirecting his attention away from his dick throbbing inside of me.

I licked up his chest to his collarbone and then over to his claiming gland on his shoulder. I licked it, too. I kissed around its edges and over the taut skin. It jiggled under my tongue. My wolf wagged his tail as he lent me his canine tooth. He was impatient but not as much as the dragon who lived inside my mate. I bit down softly at first, and then harder to break through the taut skin. Marsin hissed and squeezed my ass as if trying to pass the sensation onto me. I kept my mouth open over his punctured claiming gland. His memories flooded into my mind's eye on a purple haze. Everything was a shade of purple as if someone let a small child play with the saturation on a television set. So much of his life seemed to be traveling from one place to another – walking or flying and a lot of working on computers – designing program after program and improving older ones that his flight used. And magic too. He and his brother seemed to almost invent their own form of it every time they needed something done. Marsin ran a lot of simulations on his computer, estimating and predicting how the results of their magic might turn out, but it was magic, nonetheless.

“Magic and science are lovers,” Marsin said again, this time through gritted teeth as I lapped at his shoulder while my hips still rolled over his dick.

“We are,” I teased.

“Okay, magic,” he said and squeezed my ass as the last of the clear magical fluid from his claiming gland slid down my throat.

I pushed myself upright, mentally feeling out the new link that was opened between Marsin and me. He let out a long, slow breath as if he too were now enraptured in the

magic flowing between us. His pleasure wrapped around me, doubling my own, and making my movements and his almost frantic. He held tight to my ass, helping me ride him, as his heels dug into the bed so that he thrust up to meet me. Everything inside both of us drew up tight. I was close. So fucking close. We were close.

We.

I never liked that word so much until it meant Marsin and me. Now ‘we’ was my second favorite new word. The first was his name of course.

“I’m close,” the words tumbled off my lips despite it being obvious over our newly open true-mate link.

Letting go of my ass with one hand, Marsin wrapped his big fist around my dick and stroked me in time with our hips moving. I saw stars and the room spun as orgasm shook me from the roots of my hair down to my toes. Everything inside me exploded – warm, slick, and devouring my thoughts one by one until nothing or no one except Marsin and I existed. He thrust up into me again and again as I writhed on top of him. His dick shook inside me and he thrust again – once, twice, three more times before the proof of his pleasure exploded in a shower of warm sticky streams inside me. I bit my lip and leaned down against him again. He kissed me hard as our hips rocked until not another drop of pleasure was left inside either of us.

## Page 9

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"Fuck!" I hissed as the pain faded.

His tongue drew tiny circles over my flesh, lapping up every last drop of the fluid from the claiming vows. For a second I wondered what they showed him but my past wasn't that complicated. There weren't any skeletons buried in my backyard. Maybe in my parents' but not in mine. A few secret magical recipes maybe.

"Did I bite you too hard?" Marsin asked as soon as the clear magical fluid ran dry.

"I wasn't expecting it to hurt so much," I laughed. "It's better now but for a second it was as if you were really trying to eat me."

"My dragon got a bit carried away but I couldn't stop and apologize because

everything was already coming out of it and---” I kissed Marsin to stop his rambling. I was fine. A little bit of love pain never killed anyone. So what if my claiming bite that sat on my shoulder forever was a bit bigger or more pronounced than everyone else’s? I was mated to a dragon, after all.

I rolled my hips reveling in contrasting pain and pleasure. My shoulder ached in the best way and his dick brushing against all my happy spots. The look in his eyes told me he was close, but I wasn’t ready for him to go yet. So, I leaned in close again, resting my weight against him and licked one of his nipples, redirecting his attention away from his dick throbbing inside of me.

I licked up his chest to his collarbone and then over to his claiming gland on his shoulder. I licked it, too. I kissed around its edges and over the taut skin. It jiggled under my tongue. My wolf wagged his tail as he lent me his canine tooth. He was impatient but not as much as the dragon who lived inside my mate. I bit down softly at first, and then harder to break through the taut skin. Marsin hissed and squeezed my ass as if trying to pass the sensation onto me. I kept my mouth open over his punctured claiming gland. His memories flooded into my mind’s eye on a purple haze. Everything was a shade of purple as if someone let a small child play with the saturation on a television set. So much of his life seemed to be traveling from one place to another – walking or flying and a lot of working on computers – designing program after program and improving older ones that his flight used. And magic too. He and his brother seemed to almost invent their own form of it every time they needed something done. Marsin ran a lot of simulations on his computer, estimating and predicting how the results of their magic might turn out, but it was magic, nonetheless.

“Magic and science are lovers,” Marsin said again, this time through gritted teeth as I lapped at his shoulder while my hips still rolled over his dick.

“We are,” I teased.

“Okay, magic,” he said and squeezed my ass as the last of the clear magical fluid from his claiming gland slid down my throat.

I pushed myself upright, mentally feeling out the new link that was opened between Marsin and me. He let out a long, slow breath as if he too were now enraptured in the magic flowing between us. His pleasure wrapped around me, doubling my own, and making my movements and his almost frantic. He held tight to my ass, helping me ride him, as his heels dug into the bed so that he thrust up to meet me. Everything inside both of us drew up tight. I was close. So fucking close. We were close.

We.

I never liked that word so much until it meant Marsin and me. Now ‘we’ was my second favorite new word. The first was his name of course.

“I’m close,” the words tumbled off my lips despite it being obvious over our newly open true-mate link.

Letting go of my ass with one hand, Marsin wrapped his big fist around my dick and stroked me in time with our hips moving. I saw stars and the room spun as orgasm shook me from the roots of my hair down to my toes. Everything inside me exploded – warm, slick, and devouring my thoughts one by one until nothing or no one except Marsin and I existed. He thrust up into me again and again as I writhed on top of him. His dick shook inside me and he thrust again – once, twice, three more times before the proof of his pleasure exploded in a shower of warm sticky streams inside me. I bit my lip and leaned down against him again. He kissed me hard as our hips rocked until not another drop of pleasure was left inside either of us.

Marsin

I didn't think about Dern much over the next month. Yes, a month. That was how long our matingmoon lasted. From the second we exchanged our claiming vows, Astral and I were inseparable. Instead of easing the pull and tug of the magic it was as if it grew more demanding than ever. Any time Astral wasn't within my reach there was a physical ache in the pit of my stomach. He experienced much the same thing, and we put it off as just another symptom of being true-mates. Besides, we'd spent too long apart already before we met in this lifetime. Our matingmoon was meant to be spent attached at the hip.

And that's how we stayed, falling into an easy rhythm of living together. There was a learning curve to living with a furry shifter. More than once I woke up with Astral howling over our mating link that I had trapped him in the middle of the night. In my sleep, I'd curl around him and my dragon would bring out his wings, trapping him in a cocoon until I woke up to set him free.

We cooked our meals together and shared in the chores. With only a few components from home, brought over by my brother, I was able to build a computer worthy of the name and kept up with the ongoing on Starscale 1. I taught Astral a few things here and there and I helped him carry stills around and prepare to cast his spells. Still, we were each other's favorite distractions. Sometimes in the middle of a task we had to stop to touch, kiss, or make love right there on the spot. There was no getting away from it – no denying that constant need for him. Sometimes the hunger for his body all but consumed me.

His family was good about keeping us in snacks and meal prep until we were ready to

venture out on our own. Once we did, I kept a hand or arm on Astral everywhere we went. I held him tight, sometimes leaving behind big fingerprints in his flesh. If he minded, he never spoke up. His energy never protested over our mating link either.

By the second week of our matingmoon, we started taking long walks in the woods together. Out there on our own, I'd stretch my wings anytime we found a clearing and more often than not, Astral would strip naked and shift into his grey wolf and race ahead, running up and down the path stretching his furry legs. His tail wagged high in the air, making it easy to keep an eye on him. And yes, we made love in the woods too. I had him there in the trees and in fields of wild flowers. We took turns worshiping each other's bodies and filled the woods with the sounds of our pleasure. Somewhere along the way in trying to find my mate and every other dragon's mate, I forgot what it was like to stop trying so hard and to just live my fucking life. I'd never felt more alive than I had out in the woods with Astral.

It was late in the evening and the earth was about to gobble up the sun again for the night. Astral and I walked back toward town hand in hand. His fit perfectly in mine as if we were made for each other.

"I told you it would take time!" Someone growled and swore under their breath.

Astral and I froze on the path, our heads turning in time together toward the thicket of branches blocking the speaker. The voice was almost familiar enough for me to identify---

"Dern?" Astral called out when no one answered the old wolf. "Dern? Buddy, you alright in there? Who are you with?"

Nothing. Silence rang out through the woods and Astral dropped my hand. I swore under my breath and snatched his up again before he was out of reach.

“Careful. We don’t know who he’s with,” I warned over our mating link.

“That’s exactly why we need to check on him!” Astral said. “Now, either come with me or let me go!”

I blinked at my snarling mate. He’d never protested me keeping him safe before. What had changed?

“For the love of squirrel nuts, Marsin,” Astral sighed over our mating link. “Nothing’s changed. You can keep me safe. You just have to come along with me. Keeping me safe isn’t keeping me from living. Besides, what sort of wolf would I be if I left an elderly pack member out in the elements all by himself?”

I bit my tongue and shut down my side of the mating link as I followed Astral off the path. It was better that my mate didn’t hear my thoughts about Dern. That wolf was nothing but trouble but there was no one to tell that to here. No one to tell that I thought the wolf still did dark magic and had somehow pulled Astral and I into his web when he cast that spell on the apple from Morgi’s.

“Dern?” Astral called out again.

“What?!” Dern snapped. “Who’s there? Ast? Is that you?”

“It’s me, Dern. What are you doing out here and who are you yelling at? What’s gonna take time?” Astral asked.

“Huh?” Dern blinked, stepping out from behind the foliage. He stretched his long arms high above his head and yawned. “I was just taking a nap. Got tired. Was I talking in my sleep?”

Dern looked older than before. Maybe Astral was right and he was more senile than

dangerous. It wasn't as if dragons hadn't been overprotective of their mates for all of recorded and oral history. Maybe my inner beast was overreacting.

"I am not. Do not let your guard down. That wolf is not to be trusted! I can feel it under my scales," my dragon roared inside my thoughts.

I glanced at Astral. He was helping Dern back onto the path and not eavesdropping on me and my inner beast. I walked on the other side of Dern all the way back to town and insisted on going inside with him when he helped Dern into bed. Something fishy was going on with that wolf. Only I wasn't sure how I was going to find out what it was before it was too late.

That night after dinner, Astral dozed off in my arms like he always did. Dern was the least of his worries. He made another call to the local pack clinic to let them know that someone should look in on the old wolf but he didn't feel the same sand paper against his flesh as I felt against my scales when it came to his pack mate.

"We could just eat him," my dragon mused. "Wait until he wanders off into the woods and just eat him. Everyone would think he did that thing where old furry shifters wander off into the woods alone to die."

I'm not gonna lie.

It was a tempting plan.

Only, Astral would find out eventually. I couldn't imagine living the rest of my life lying to my mate and everyone else I was close to. It was the easiest way but until Astral saw what I did, there was little I could do besides not leave him alone with the old wolf. Only that would probably be easier said than done now that our matingmoon was winding down.



Astral

I woke up in a cocoon of Marsin. It was like this every morning since we met. He wrapped around me and brought his wings out to hold me in. Most of the time it was one of my favorite places to be. Normally, it was endearing, but after his cave-alpha stunt in the woods yesterday it was annoying. My stomach flipflopped anticipating the fight when I brought it up later in the day. First thing in the morning was never a good time to fight.

“It doesn’t have to be a fight. I don’t think Marsin is the fighting type. Not with us anyway. He was spooked out in the woods. He didn’t grow up playing all throughout them like we did,” my wolf chimed into my thoughts as I tried to wiggle out of my Marsin cocoon.

“Morning,” my mate yawned and lifted his uppermost wing to free me.

My stomach flipflopped again. I didn’t want to be annoyed with him. I blinked back tears. Why was I crying? I hadn’t done anything wrong. We hadn’t even discussed it yet. I didn’t have long to ponder the question because my stomach lurched as if it planned to launch itself into outer space and visit Starscale 1 all on its own.

“Babe?” Marsin said, sitting up as I flung myself to my feet and sprinted to the bathroom.

He didn’t need to see me this way. No one needed to see me this way. So, I slammed the door shut behind me.

“Mate?” Marsin said, trying the knob, but it was locked by magic. I didn’t need to touch anything to make it move. Magic pounded through my cells and was always looking for a way out anyway.

“Astral?” Marsin tried again but I was in no condition to answer.

The stuffed pork chops from the night before must’ve not agreed with my stomach. That added to the fact I was almost certain my first fight with Marsin was coming up and the almost crying spell was easy enough to explain away.

“Is there anything I can do, mate?” he asked, his voice gentle.

Fuck him. I wanted to stay mad for a minute now. I was sick as hell and it had to happen right after he acted like I was a lost pup in the woods of my ancestors. Hell, it was our pack that discovered the first mothman shifter colony. Fuck him.

“Uhhh... Mate, I’m not sure what I did, but I’m sorry if I upset you. I’m more than happy to talk about it later but right now I’m more concerned about your current situation. Should I call the clinic? Your moms? Sprint out to the pharmacy and buy a test?”

“For what?” I snapped back at him over our mating link.

“A pregnancy test, mate,” he said gently and I dropped onto my knees.

My stomach was taking a microbreak but fuck me! He was probably right! What fucking timing nature had. Our first fight and Dern possibly losing his mind.

“What fight, mate?” Marsin asked. “I feel like you’re having an argument with me that I don’t know about.”

“You tried to stop me from helping Dern yesterday,” I sighed over our mating link and flushed the toilet.

“I would’ve checked on him for you. I wouldn’t have left him out there. Something is off with him. You’re right about that and we don’t know what. I will always want to keep you safe. I would have taken the risk and checked on him. It’s not a good excuse. I know it’s not but mate, there is a better than good chance that you’re pregnant or carrying an egg. I know carriers have gone to war and built whole worlds while carrying and growing their children but I like to think that our ancestors did all that work so that their descendants didn’t have to. I can’t say I knew you were pregnant yesterday but we’ve been trying to conceive for a month now.”

I let out a long, slow breath and leaned back against the bathtub. I closed the toilet seat and my eyes. He was right. It was a poor excuse. We didn’t have the slightest inkling I was pregnant the day before.

“I don’t want to fight through the door,” I managed to huff aloud.

“May I come in then, please?” Marsin asked.

“Can you get me some water first?” I asked him.

“Of course. Anything else. There are some gummies on top of the fridge. Mom put them in one of our snack baskets as a joke. So I stashed them up there...” I let my words trail off.

“It probably wasn’t a joke, huh?” Marsin asked, carefully.

“Probably not. I’ll talk to you in a minute, okay, alpha?”

“I’ll be right back,” Marsin said.

I didn't move until I heard his footfalls further away in the house. Once I was alone for a moment, I pushed myself upright, moving slow to test my stomach's equilibrium. Then I washed my face and gave the bathroom a quick wipe down before washing my hands and heading out into the bedroom.

Marsin waited patiently in the bedroom doorway with a bottle of water. He handed it off silently and flashed me a sheepish grin.

"Even if we're not done talking about what happened yesterday, you're allowed to be happy that I'm maybe-pregnant," I said, sinking onto the edge of the bed. "I'd be rather cross if you weren't excited about it."

"Are you excited about it?" Marsin asked.

"I am but that's all the more reason you have to get it through your head that I won't stop you from following me but I won't be some house omega. I won't be someone who sits back and sucks on his tail while you run into danger. That's not how we work here. I doubt it's how you work in outer space either. I can't imagine someone trying to boss around an omega dragon. I don't even think Clarence Moonscale has succeeded at that one and probably never will."

"I'm sorry," Marsin said, dropping to his knees in front of me. Even with me on the edge of the bed that put us almost eye-to-eye. "I wasn't thinking. Well, that's a lie. I was just thinking about someone hurting you. I never want to live in a world without you."

I rolled my eyes. Here we go. He was about to be an apologist for every cave-alpha in the universe.

"But I also don't want to live in a world where you're not happy," he said.

That I was not expecting.

“I don’t want to live in a world where you feel trapped or under anyone’s thumb. I’m not saying it won’t ever happen again. I’m not saying that I don’t have the urge to build a nest, put you in it, and keep you there, but I am saying I won’t let my dragon do that. I’m sorry Dern has so many issues, but something is off about that wolf. I can’t put my talon on what it is but promise me you’ll be careful around him.”

“Around Dern?” I arched a brow and took another sip of water.

“Around Dern,” Marsin nodded.

“You know without Dern we wouldn’t be sitting here maybe-pregnant, right?” I asked him.

“Correct but he says it himself. He only does magic he benefits from. Maybe I’m overprotective. Maybe I’m misreading Earthside sarcasm but if I am then we have nothing to lose, right? You can be careful around him and it’ll be easy, because he’s just an old wolf with some quirks, right?”

“I don’t like how you say that,” I said, setting down the bottle of water so I could cross my arms.

“You don’t have to. I’m not asking you to stay away from him or to figure out what’s up with him. Just to be careful.”

“I’m always careful, Marsin,” I sighed.

“Babe,” he said, drawing the word out and uncrossing my arms so he could hold my hands. “Please be careful. Please. Maybe my dragon is just a territorial asshole but Dern’s an omega. He doesn’t want in your pants or under your tail. So I don’t think

it's that. Can you promise me you'll be careful?"

"I promise but only because you look so grovelly on your knees. I like it."

"Is this a 'while you're down there' situation?" Marsin smirked and wiggled his eyebrows at me.

"No," I shook my head. "It's a 'did you forget the gummies situation'?"

Marsin pulled out the bottle from his pocket and dumped two into my hand. I ate them slowly, savoring the orange jelly flavor dissolving on my tongue. Marsin rubbed slow circles on my thighs and I let my eyes drift closed. Maybe that wasn't our first fight. It didn't feel like much of a fight at all.

"We don't have to fight over things. We're going to be together for a long time. If we get under each other's skin or hurt each other's feelings by accident we need to be able to talk about it."

"I was ready for every excuse in the book," I admitted.

"I have them but at the end of the day I was an asshole for putting my discomfort before your autonomy. Next time I'll just charge ahead or follow you in," he grinned.

"Don't forget I can't imagine a world without you either," I said and leaned my forehead against his. "And if I felt better I'd kiss you so hard that I glued you to this universe so you could never leave me."

"I think you need more science than magic for that one," he teased.

"Well, good thing I have you, huh?"

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*Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:01 am*

Marsin

Two hours later, I waited outside of the bathroom door for Astral to pee on a stick. It was sort of cute how shy he was about the whole situation. It wasn't like I hadn't seen it all before. I tapped my fingers against my thighs wishing I had thought to ask Elio to bring a sonic when he brought over the computer parts.

"If the baby isn't inside an egg a sonic might not work," my dragon reminded me.

"Then I'll have to invent one that does," I shrugged.

"Three minutes until the stars reveal our fate," Astral announced, opening the bathroom door.

"The stars?" I arched a brow. "Didn't know astrology or astronomy were your things."

"Not so much but the new test either shows a black window or a night sky. Night sky means I'm preggo," Astral shrugged.

He smelled as excited as I was. My dragon swayed inside his inner sanctum humming a lullaby we often hummed to Elio's kids.

"Astrology can be real, though. If you start from the right place and take it in general. The stars are alright for the fates of empires and planets. They don't care much about the fates of individuals, though," Astral rambled as the timer on his phone chipped away at the longest three minutes in recorded history.

“Good to know,” I nodded. “We read the stars a lot but we’re made of star dust. At least we are if some of our oldest lore is to be believed.”

“Do you believe it?”

“There was a guy – not a dragon just a guy – who fell in love with a star. They shared eons together. Happy eons but eventually the star burnt out like all stars do. So, the guy spent centuries going around and finding all the little bits of the star and when he found as much of it as he could he melded it to his skin. Having it there changed him. He breathed fire and eventually took a bigger, more metallic form that could survive how stars exploded. He carried his lover with him on his chest and each of their kids in turn did the same.”

“How did they have kids, though?”

“Probably before the explosion,” I shrugged.

“But did the star have... Ummm... Reproductive parts?” Astral arched a brow.

“Maybe but maybe they didn’t need them back then,” I shrugged again as the timer chimed.

I looked before Astral could and fire shot out of my nose. Excited fire. There in the window of the little plastic stick contraption was a starry night sky. We were gonna have a baby.

“You’re gonna have my baby,” I said, picking him and spinning around the bathroom.

He laughed and our lips brushed together for the briefest kiss.



“I’m having my baby,” he teased.

“Hmmm... and did you do that all by yourself?”

“What if we conceived while I was on top?” he arched a playful brow.

“My baby,” I teased him again.

“Mine,” he laughed.

“I was talking about you,” I stole a kiss before setting him back down on his own two feet.

We made love there in the bathroom against the wall with the light going on and off whenever one of us accidentally brushed against the button. We were gonna be daddies. We conquered magic and space to come together and in just over a month we conceived our first baby. As I buried myself inside of Astral again and again all I thought about was how much I loved him and how I’d do anything to keep him and our baby safe.

Astral

I've always heard that everyone dies famous in small communities. I was never sure whether it was supposed to be a threat or a reassurance. Ever since I met Marsin it felt sort of like a threat. While most of the pack did respect the time we sequestered our selves away for our matingmoon, I received a lot of texts and emails asking about him and the Starscales in general. Even a couple of magazines reached out wanting to interview him. The only one we ever agreed to was one started by someone in the GGB territory and aimed at omegas. Happy Omega Magazine. It was a short interview over the phone while we waited to see the doctor. Mostly the guy on the other end of the phone wanted to know how omegas were treated and how they fared in a system based on points and not money. In the end, he got the guy an interview with his uncle, Hush.

"The magazine will be good for them."

"Or our omegas will be a good influence on y'all," he teased.

"Cultural exchanges often benefit both parties," I said, putting on my best mockumentary voice.

"Astral, the doctor will see you now," a perky blonde with iced tips on his short, spiky hair called out. He was a few years behind me in school and I didn't remember his name until I saw the nametag that read: Seas.

"Aren't you a doctor yet?" I teased him, falling back on the old bad humor our pack was so well known for.

“Not yet. I take the boards next summer, though,” Seas shrugged. “Any symptoms?”

“Morning sickness. Positive star test.”

“He almost cried this morning too,” Marsin added on.

“That is private,” I snapped at him and regret filled up my belly before the last word was even out of my mouth. “Sorry, mate. I...”

“It’s okay. Pregnancy messes with your emotions. I don’t know that they can do anything about that but I think it’s important we tell them all of your symptoms.”

“I know but... It is private,” I sighed.

“How about I don’t ask any more questions and leave that to the doctor,” Nurse Seas said, showing us into Exam Room 3. “You’re right in here. You can go ahead and gown up if you want.”

“Gown up?” Marsin asked, shutting the door behind the nurse as if he suddenly decided he didn’t want Seas anywhere near me. “That doesn’t sound pleasant and if you don’t want to you don’t have to.”

“Sheesh, mate,” I sighed and rubbed the bridge of my nose.

“What did I do? If it’s about what I told him, I’m sorry. He did ask and I thought you forgot with everything going on...” Marsin said.

“It’s not that. I mean, I might’ve told the doctor anyway. Maybe. Gowning up is just switching into a hospital gown. It’s not the gown that’s unpleasant. I forgot about the well omega exam. It’s really for the baby.”

Marsin furrowed his brows together as if he'd never heard of such a barbaric thing. He tilted his head to the side as I turned my back and pulled my shirt off over my head.

"He's doing something on the flight link," my wolf chimed into my thoughts.

"We don't do those unless we suspect something is wrong. I know it's a bit different for us. Eggs and all. You don't have to do this if you don't want to," Marsin said. "They literally can't make you do anything and if they try, they'll have to deal with me."

"They'll nag but they won't make me do anything. I just want to make sure the baby's okay," I said. "It's not something I want to talk about or dwell on or..."

Marsin dropped down to his knees in front of me.

"This definitely isn't a 'while you're down there situation, mate,'" I laughed despite the nerves swishing around my belly.

"Shush for a moment, please and thank you," Marsin said and pressed his ear against my belly.

I did shut up because I wanted to hear what he heard. I homed in on our mating link and let the rest of the world fade away. I heard the faintest heartbeat. It sounded healthy to me but what did I know? I wasn't a doctor.

"The baby is not inside of an egg," Marsin announced. "You wouldn't hear a heartbeat quite like that if it was."

"Are you disappointed?" I asked, biting my lip.

“No. You’re a wolf and I love you. I just don’t know as much about non-egg pregnancies,” Marsin frowned. “It’s a gap in my knowledge that no amount of reading has filled.”

“I’ve seen plenty of them,” I said, popping up on the table. “So have my parents. We’ll be okay. If it’s the exam you’re worried about, don’t be. Believe me, you’ll be glad when it’s over and we know the baby is okay.”

“Only if you’re okay too,” Marsin said, taking my hand and entwining his fingers through mine.

“I will be. It’ll take more than a doctor making me flash him to tear me down,” I laughed. “Don’t you eat him while he’s trying to do the ultrasound either.”

“Why would I do that?” Marsin cocked a brow at me.

“Because you’re my mate and I’m pregnant and you’re already in a bad mood at him,” I grinned and squeezed his hand. “It’s more common than you think. Just remember Doctor Leem is a wolf, and you are a dragon. Remember you broke the truck scale at the junkyard when we tried to weigh you.”

“That was for your science,” he teased but he was right. It was my idea. Though the wolves who owned the junkyard seemed keen to find out how much he weighed in dragon form too. To be fair, Marsin did fix their scale and updated it in some high-tech ways that I didn’t understand and wasn’t sure the junkyard guys did either.

“I love you,” I said. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too, magic,” he said and kissed my forehead.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

“Come in!” I called out.

“Good afternoon, Astral. Little did I know many moons ago that the little wolf pup I saw on the screen would one day come in for me to look at his wolf pups,” Doctor Leem grinned. “Good, you gowned up. Young people these days don’t understand how important it is to ensure everything is okay.”

“They like to exercise their freewill,” Marsin said before I even had the chance to introduce him to the doctor.

“You must be Marsin. I’ve been doing what reading I could on your flight. There isn’t much out there about it. I’ve read everything Izora Moonscale published and put out for the public. It seems your flight often skips on some of the steps we take. I understand why that might be an adjustment for you but as wolf pups do not generally come with hard protective shells, we do our best to ensure they’re safely tucked away inside the uterus.”

“I understand that,” Marsin nodded. “The baby is a wolf pup. I listened.”

“You listened?” Doctor Leem asked, his voice lowering with skepticism.

I cringed. Marsin was usually a dragon of science, but he hated anything that wasn’t necessary. If an ear could do the job no fancy equipment was needed.

“Moonscale literature doesn’t cover how dragons hear not only through sound waves but also through space? It’s similar to the echolocation bats use but much more sophisticated.”

I frowned. Was this a science off or an alpha off?

“Neither,” Marsin said, picking up on my thoughts over our mating link. “As I told

my mate, I will respect his freewill and as long as your tests don't violate that I won't stand in your way, doctor."

I bit the inside of my cheek. Marsin was usually so levelheaded.

"What are you talking about?" my wolf laughed into my thoughts. "He's smart. Maybe even a bit of an intellectual but levelheaded isn't the word I'd use for him. He still thinks Dern is going to gobble us up with his tomato soup. He's territorial, bossy, and gonna eat the doctor. I think I'm falling in love all over again!"

"I am not eating the doctor, yet," Marsin's dragon joined the conversation. "If he goes against your wishes, I'll eat him. One bite. One big, stringy, probably horrible-tasting bite."

"I'm ready," I told the doctor and stretched out on the table.

He grabbed his machine from the table across the room and rejoined us. I held onto Marsin's hand for dear life because I believed his dragon would eat the doctor and I didn't want to go on the run because my mate committed murder in the misguided name of protecting me. I would, but that path would be a bitch during pregnancy.

As soon as my stomach was exposed, Marsin's grip on my hand tightened. I almost made a joke about how his over-protectiveness was all the test I needed but thought better of it. The doctor pushed a button on his handheld device and the monitor on the wall came on.

"That's where we'll see the baby," I said to Marsin, hoping to redirect him but he didn't take his eyes off Doctor Leem.

To his credit and years of experience, Doctor Leem didn't engage further with Marsin as he performed my ultrasound. In no time, our little jellybean was up on the screen.

Marsin's eyes gleamed wet but he still didn't look away from the doctor.

"You can look at the screen," I told him over our mating link. "It's not like he's going to eat me. He took all sorts of oaths not to do those things."

"I can see through you," he said. "I can see the baby and the doctor at the same time."

"Marsin, don't be that guy. Look at the screen. See your baby with your own eyes for the first time. We'll never get these moments back, mate."

Marsin glanced at the screen and then back to the doctor. Then he looked at the screen again. Really looked this time and his eyes misted over more. I gave his hand a reassuring squeeze. That jellybean would grow into the tiny wolf pup we'd love, raise, and protect. It was the tiny baby our love made and was so much more important than the doctor who was just doing his job to ensure our baby was healthy and that my body was healthy enough to continue growing a healthy wolf pup.



Marsin

Witnessing our jellybean pup on the ultrasound monitor didn't calm my inner beast's hyper vigilance. If anything, it doubled or tripled it. I took my parental leave starting as soon as we arrived home from the clinic because Astral and the baby were literally all I could think about. Day and night, all I wanted to do was be by Astral's side to love and protect him and our baby. Having parental leave as a flight birthright made that so much easier. Though, I still wanted to build a nest and keep my mate inside of it, I was able to offset that desire by following him everywhere. Any time he went to visit his family or out for work or to run an errand I went with him. We became that couple where you never saw one without the other.

Wolf pregnancies didn't last long, and healthy pregnancies followed predictable schedules. Dragon egg pregnancies did no such thing. So, in a way, having a timeline for what to expect made everything easier. As Doctor Leem assured us after the ultrasound and Astral's flash exam, our pup was healthy and should grow for somewhere around sixty-three to sixty-six days total. Though, that started from the day of conception and by the time we found out we were pregnant we were approximately twenty-four days into that. So, when Astral wasn't working we got ready for our pup. His family was a huge help – so many items appeared in the once empty bedroom turned nursery seemingly overnight. His parents and siblings gathered close whenever they could and for the first time in a long time my introverted dragon didn't mind the crowd. They were family now too after all.

Dern came by more than we liked. Astral reveled in the fortune teller's attention but it left me with a bad taste in my mouth. He brought all sorts of pies and cakes over and I made a point of either seeing Dern himself take a bite or taking a bite before my

mate did. The old wolf picked up on what I was doing and made exaggerated gestures of pretending to humor me.

It wasn't until Elio and Teddy came in for the baby shower that I felt sane again. Having my brother and nephew around made me feel a little less outnumbered by wolves. I loved Astral and his family. I even loved Morgi and some of the others I'd gotten to know but none of them looked at Dern the way my dragon did. Elio didn't sense a darkness but something about him made my brother uneasy too.

"I get it," Teddy said, while he helped me clean up the kitchen after the baby shower.

Elio was in the living room with Astral, helping him sort through all the gifts we received for the baby. The pack and the flight had both outdone themselves. Elio and Teddy came over weighted down with gifts not only from themselves, but from the crew of the Medwin 2, my parents, and others in the flight.

"About the old wolf?" I double-checked that Teddy and I were on the same page.

"Yeah, and I don't say that about a lot of people. Seers are everywhere. They're way more common than we think. Most either don't know they have the gift or don't talk about it. It could be that he sees dark stuff sometimes."

"And the whole dark magic admission?" I asked, taking a plate from him to dry it off.

"Have you seen how big you are compared to him? Sure, maybe he dabbled in it. If he hadn't done something dark, you'd have smelled the lie, most likely, but you're huge and covered in scales. He probably exaggerated. He will probably hurt Astral through no fault of his own."

I gritted my teeth.

“Because that’s what happens when we love people. Eventually, they either break our hearts with their actions or they die. With Dern’s age and the fact he’s a wolf using a cane openly, I’d say it’s the latter and that sucks. Not just because he’ll be gone but it’s not something you can protect him from. Take it from me. It doesn’t matter which way you slice the death cake, there is no softening the blow. It doesn’t matter how much you try to prepare for it or how many memories you try to squeeze in and sear into your brain. It sucks. It hurts and in some ways it never hurts less. So, I do think you’re right but not in the way you think.”

“Then why is my... Hang on,” I sighed. “Are you okay? I’m a jackass. I haven’t seen you since the wedding and before that you were hiding out in grief and... I’m bad at this. So you can save me any time you want to,” I said, a macabre chuckled crawling out of my throat.

“I am. I’ve accepted that it will always suck. Either my life will too or I’ll learn to live with the suck the best as I can. I got a tattoo. It’s on the inside of my left bicep,” he turned off the water and pulled his shirt off over his head. There it was in dark blue ink etched into his skin. A lotus resting on the smallest wave. “So, I’m okay or at least I’m trying to be. As for your dragon? I don’t know what’s crawled up his butt. If he doesn’t know, neither do I. Mine is pretty sure we’d feel better if we just never stopped eating – mostly brownies, chips, and hummus. We could live on it forever and as long as we ate we’d be okay.”

“That sounds like he wants to get fat or maybe caramelize his stomach,” I managed a laugh.

“Maybe,” Teddy shrugged, turning the water back on. “If you think it’s something else keep paying attention but remember when the old wolf goes, Astral will remember every interaction you had with him. So, if nothing else, kill him with kindness until you have proof that he’s up to something nefarious.”

And so, I did exactly that. I made a point to invite Dern over as often as I could after our baby shower came and went. Much to our surprise when Elio went home, Teddy stayed behind. He was a Moony and an Earthsider so perhaps we shouldn't have been surprised. He owned a large share in his now deceased grandparents' company and was the only member of the Medwin 2 not to have found his mate yet. He rented out a room at a bed and breakfast a few miles away and often popped in whenever Dern was around. If not for the flight link, I'd have said he had a sixth sense.

"It's because he believes us," my dragon said, flying circles inside his inner sanctum. "He knows what we know."

"We don't know anything, though. He keeps doing it so that we don't eat Dern."

"I won't eat him until he gives me a reason to!" he snorted, filling his inner sanctum with smoke.

I let out a long, slow sigh as I crawled into bed with Astral. His belly was big enough with our pup now that he needed help in and out of the bed. He could no longer sleep on his back and I had to roll him back onto his side a few times a night.

"I'm glad you've become friends with Dern," he said as I stretched out beside him and rested a hand on the zenith of his belly.

We'd had him and Teddy over for dinner that evening. Dern had brought an apple pie and made a joke about it not being a one-way radio. It wasn't funny but I laughed anyway. The old wolf was poking at me on purpose, but I was determined not to get sidetracked. If I grew too caught up in nitpicking every petty thing he did, I might miss a clue to his big grand plan.

"He's not the worst person I've ever met," I said, careful to only tell the truth.

“But we don’t have to have him around so much, if you don’t want to. I like him. He’s a fun old guy but I miss our time. We’re always together. I know. I know. Except we’re not as together as we were.”

“What do you mean?” I arched a brow, rubbing slow circles on his belly.

“Together,” he smirked.

“Is Dern cramping your style?” I teased him.

“Either you really like having him around or I’m too pregnant to be sexy,” Astral frowned.

“You’re even sexier now,” I said and meant it. “You’re so full of life that you glow.”

“Then what’s up, mate?” Astral sighed.

“You like having him around. You wanted me to get on with him,” I said.

“Yes, but I didn’t think you’d adopt him. Though, he does seem to be doing better since he’s had more time around people. Maybe it’s just my hormones making me paranoid. I feel like I swallowed a world, and I still have another two weeks before the baby comes.”

“Tomorrow we get to see the baby again,” I reminded him.

He lit up and then met my gaze. Had I neglected him while trying to covertly figure out what Dern was up to? I didn’t think I had. I had spent every waking moment that I could with him. There wasn’t another person in the world I wanted to be around most of the time. Except maybe Teddy but that’s because I could vent about the old wolf to him, and he knew what it was like to have wings. Though, I’d always choose

Astral over Teddy.

“I’m just horny,” Astral laughed, picking up my guilt over our mating link. “It’s hard to make a move on you while Dern’s around.”

“Just say something over our link, mate,” I said, scooting closer to him. “I’ll carry him back to his house over my shoulder, if that’s the only way to get rid of him.”

“I’m tired too, though and swallowed a world and....”

“Too tired for me to get you off?” I inquired. “Penetration isn’t the be all end all.”

“I know but I...”

“No is no,” I shrugged and kissed his cheek.

“It’s not no. It’s I’m lazy.”

“I have two hands,” I smirked. “And when have I ever complained about doing the whole job?”

Astral chuckled and leaned up to kiss me.

“Green,” he whispered against my lips, beckoning back to when our sex life was active enough to need safewords. “So fucking green, Marsin.”

“Green it is,” I nodded. “I’m always green for you.”

He traced the star-shaped scale on my chest and my dick stood up in response to his soft fingers. I leaned over, deepening the kiss and slipping my hands down his soft cotton pajama pants. He was hard and slick. The smell of his tangy arousal filled the

room as soon as I touched him. His beautiful eyes drifted closed and as I stroked him slowly, taking my time and reveling in all the tiny sounds I evoked from him.

“You too,” he whimpered.

“Me too when I’m ready,” I said, tightening my grip on him.

“You too. I can smell how hard you are.”

“For you,” I whispered back and kissed his neck.

“I wanna watch you.”

“Alright. Should I turn the light back on?” I asked, running my thumb over the head of his dick.

“I can see in the dark,” he chuckled.

“Alright. Can you see from there? Is your belly in the way, mate?”

“I’m not that fat. At least I don’t think I’m that fat. Marsin! Don’t let me be that fat!”

“Shhhhh.... There’s nothing to stress out about. Sex is supposed to be fun.”

“It would be – it is. I’m just so fucking horny!” he growled.

“Do you want to try ---”

“Give it here,” he growled and grabbed my dick through my pants.

The air whooshed out of me and for a moment I saw glorious stars spinning in circles.

His warmth spread over me as his hand started to move.

“I really don’t mind doing---” I started but choked on the words when he gave me a squeeze.

“Plans change,” he whispered. “Now be a good boy and kiss me.”

“Yes, sir,” I laughed but the sound died in my throat when his thumb drew the lightest circle over the head of my dick.

Our lips met softly at first. Then harder as our tongues came together between our mouths. I stroked him, savoring the smooth curve of his shaft and his hand slipping down my pants. The brush of flesh against flesh made me moan into the kiss. We’d been together long enough to conceive a baby and almost long enough to bring that baby into the solid world and still the lightest touch from Astral was enough to make me come undone. It took so much bloody control to hold onto myself and not thrust up hard into his soft, tight fist.

“You don’t have to be a statue, Marsin. I’m pregnant, not made of glass,” Astral whispered. “Just a bit pregnant.”

“Really fucking pregnant and sexy,” I corrected him.

“Shush and be a good boy,” he cooed.

“That’s your thing tonight, huh?”

“I’m not hearing you complain,” he said, grazing his nails down my shaft.

“No,” my voice pitched up as pleasure raked against my insides. “Not complaints.”



“Didn’t think so,” he smirked and we kissed again.

I still didn’t let go of my control. Astral was strong for a wolf but he was also full of baby. I kissed him hard and rocked my hips, keeping time with our fists moving over each other. He rocked too, grunting with effort of hefting his weight.

“Do not ask if I need help,” Astral said through gritted teeth. “I am fine. I am having fun.”

“Are you?” I arched a brow.

“I am. Sometimes effort is fun,” he said.

“I don’t mind doing more of the wo---” I started to say again but he doubled his grip on my dick.

“Okay! Okay!” I sighed as he lightened his hold. “As long as you’re having fun.”

He was. The whole room smelled like us and the fun we were having. His wolf was wagging his tail ninety miles an hour inside the inner sanctum he shared with my dragon.

“You just like poking at me!”

“I do! It’s one of my favorite things to do!”

“You wait until this pup is out of my belly,” he said, letting go of my cock and trailing his nimble fingers down over my balls. “I’m going to get you for that.”

“Please do,” I smirked and stole a kiss.

His breath hitched and we both fell quiet as our joint pleasure wrapped around us. Our hips and fists moved in time with each other and we both snagged kisses when we could. Astral came first, a howl creeping out of his throat and filling my head as my dick exploded in warm sticky streams. Between us we'd made a mess of the bed and each other but the best fun and the best love was sometimes messy and I didn't mind cleaning it all up so that my mate could doze off, happy and satisfied.

Astral

I invited Teddy along to our ultrasound the next day. I'd been good about keeping my family out of the examination room because some things needed to be between me, Marsin, and the doctor but I figured having a friend around might make Marsin less tense about the whole situation. He claimed to like Doctor Leem just fine, but his dragon always muttered about wolf stew and launching him into the sun. The sun that was the wrong color but he always let that go because it was the sun my wolf and I were under.

My parents weren't thrilled that Teddy got to tag along while they only saw the sonograms afterwards, but Teddy wasn't going to fuss about me, tell me how to be pregnant, or tell the doctor how to do his job. Marsin did so much of that last one that I was sure Doctor Leem daydreamed about launching him back to Starscale 1.

"You're in a good mood today," Marsin pointed out as he helped me out of the car.

"Of course, I am," I chuckled.

"Yes, you are. I am too but I was talking to Teddy."

"Started chatting with someone new last night," he shrugged. "Not like that. He's a shaman out in Uncle Sky's territory. I know he can't reconnect me to Mum. She's back with Dad now, but it's nice to hear about the afterlife. At least the parts he knows about."

"Does Nelum know you still call him Mum?" Marsin asked.

“I don’t call him Mum. I’m not talking about Nelum. I’m talking about my mother. Theoretically, they’re the same person but in reality, you and I are more of the same person than Lotus and Nelum.”

“Uh.... Your sire doesn’t seem to think so,” Marsin said.

“Let’s not talk about this right now, okay? We could go round and round about it and there really isn’t an answer. It’s different for everyone.”

“I wonder who our baby was before,” I pondered, entwining my fingers through Marsin’s.

Nelum/Lotus was a complicated subject for Marsin because he was going to be on the side of his brother no matter what. For Elio, Nelum and Lotus were the same but different.

“Teddy hasn’t met his mate yet,” I reminded my alpha. “He doesn’t get it. I don’t think he can get it. Before meeting you, if I thought two people were the same in two different lives.... I don’t know. Thinking about it makes my head hurt but he doesn’t get it. If I lost you, I’d wait and whatever you the next life turned you into, you’d still be you for me. It’s not fair, though. Fred got his mate back, but Teddy still doesn’t have his mum. Remember that.”

The topic was dropped as we walked into the clinic. This time we didn’t wait at all and I wondered if the doctor just wanted Marsin in and out as quickly as possible.

“I see you brought two of them today,” Doctor Leem chuckled in lieu of hello when he walked into the room to find a dragon standing on either side of me. Teddy moved to stand against the wall as the doctor made his way to the examination table.

“That’s Teddy. He’s Fred Moonscale’s son,” I introduced him.

Doctor Leem opened his mouth and shut it again. Did he have beef with the Moonscales or just Fred?

“We met briefly,” Teddy said. “Doctor Leem went to medical school at Moonscale Academy. He was an intern while my mum was still alive.”

“Oh my god! You hooked up with my doctor?!” My mouth dropped open and the doctor blushed.

“That was a long time ago and before my mate,” Doctor Leem said.

“You could’ve denied it, dude,” Teddy laughed. “They would’ve assumed you worked on Mum’s case.”

“Pack link,” the doctor shrugged. “If it makes you uncomfortable, I can refer you to one of my colleagues.”

“No,” I leaned back. “But now Marsin really can’t eat you. He likes Teddy too much.”

“Well, not too much,” Teddy laughed.

“I’ve never slept with Teddy,” Marsin announced.

“I’d hope not. You’re his uncle,” I teased him and tapped my free hand on my belly.

“Let’s see my baby.”

“My baby,” Marsin teased.

A second later, the monitor was on, and our baby’s nose filled the screen. Our pup was all but developed enough to live in the solid world. There were ears where you’d

expect a human baby to have ears but also wolf ears perched on top of the head.

“He’s starting to shift,” Doctor Leem announced. “You might have an easier delivery if he decides to go through with it?”

“He?” Teddy asked, arching his neck for a better look at the monitor.

“He,” Doctor Leem nodded and a second later I spotted what the doctor had seen.

“Now we can start thinking about baby names,” Marsin said, ignoring the doctor for a change with his eyes glued to the monitor.

“I’ve been thinking about baby names,” I laughed. “I’ve been thinking about baby names since I was a kid playing house.”

“And what have you been thinking about?” Marsin asked.

“When we have a girl, she will be Crowalin. For a boy, I’ve always liked Ravlen or Ether. We can use them both eventually of course.”

“I like them,” Marsin nodded after a moment of thoughtful consideration.

“Me too,” Teddy said, reminding us that he was still there. “Should I see myself back to the bed and breakfast?”

“Anywhere you like but not our house,” Marsin teased him. “You’re too young to see what we’re gonna do when we get home.”

“Bet I’ve done it more than you,” Teddy teased him and gave me a one-armed hug goodbye once my shirt was back on.

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Later that night, I stared at the sonogram wondering if our little boy was a Raylin or an Ether. He might grow up to be neither and change his name to something dull like David or exotic like Pineapple. Still. We had to call him something. After a few late-night hours of deliberation, I decided on Raylin because it sounded the most like Marsin. I was about to wake him up to tell him that I finally decided when my wolf's ears perked up. Someone was outside. I sniffed the air, figuring it was one of my siblings or their kids going for a late-night hunt. Sometimes a wolf couldn't ignore the urge to take down a deer if their belly was grumbling loud enough.

"Not until the baby's born," someone whispered. "I need to be here until then."

"Dern," my wolf sighed into my thoughts. "Probably out there talking to himself again. If he keeps it up we're either going to have to hire him a live in carer or put him in that retirement home on the other side of town. He might even like it there."

I let out a long, slow breath as I swung my legs out of bed and managed to push myself upright without Marsin's help. The last thing I needed this close to delivering my pup was for my mate to get worked up about Dern just when they were starting to get along. Whatever was wrong with Dern didn't matter. He was pack and more than that, no matter what he'd done or didn't do in his past, he was the only reason Marsin and I were together now. I'd take a bullet for that old hound. Well, maybe not right now, but I'd definitely bite someone's gun hand off for him.

"I'm gonna do it," Dern sighed. "Ormund, I'm going to do it. I just—It will too work!"

"Dern?" I said, leaning out the back door, a little out of breath after puttering through the house. "Would you and Ormund like to come inside?"

“You can see this giant ass?” Dern called back, putting his hands on his hips.

“Uh.... Nope, but I believe you can.”

“You better believe it. I’ve had the sight since the day my eyes opened,” Dern sighed. “I don’t know how much you heard but it’s nothing bad, Ast, I promise. I know Marsin’s all worked up and---”

“I don’t think you’re gonna hurt anyone, Dern,” I waved for him to come inside. “Maybe yourself wandering around in the middle of the night but can we talk about that inside? My feet are killing me. Come on in. I’ll get you something to drink. Do you want a sandwich or something too?”

“Okay,” Dern nodded and came up the steps with a sigh. “You stay out here. I don’t need you waking up that damn dragon. No one needs that. You know how ornery they are when they haven’t slept and soon they’re not going to sleep at all when that pup comes and stuff. So you sit out here. Yes, I’ll bring you a sandwich or something but we still have all that stew you wanted me to cook at home. Damn it, Ormund. Just give me a minute. No, that dragon isn’t gonna eat me. Sheesh. You are on my nerves something fierce tonight! Fine! I’ll see you at home if the imps don’t kidnap me on the walk back.”

Dern flashed ‘Ormund’ a dirty look and shut the door behind him.

“Fucking alphas,” he rolled his eyes.

“That bad, huh?” I chuckled.

“He worries.”

“Dern, I’m worried too,” I admitted opening the fridge and pulling out the fresh



sliced deer Marsin had hunted the day before. “If he’s really there... Are you dying and not telling anyone?” I decided straight forward was the only way left for the conversation to go if I wanted to get to bed any time soon.

“No, pup, I’m not dying. Like I told you, I’ve seen him since the day he died. It’s complicated. I’ll tell you about it sometime. I’ll tell everyone when the time is right.”

“What does he want you to do?”

“A few things. It doesn’t really matter, though. I’ll get to it when I do. I’ll get to it before my door shows up anyway. I’m in no rush.”

“Dern,” I sighed. “I summon my ancestors, and I can’t see Ormund.”

“That’s because he’s not your ancestor. He’s my mate.”

“I know that. I’m just---”

“Hormones can do that to you.”

“Did you ever have a pup, Dern?” I asked, changing the subject as I made up a couple of quick sandwiches and grabbed apples from the bowl on the counter.

“I have twins. They’re all grown up and living off somewhere else now,” he said. “They’re good guys. Like I was saying, though, hormones make you worry about everything but you don’t have to worry about me. I’m old, but I’m not senile yet. I remember everything like it was yesterday.”

“What does Ormund want you to do?” I tried again, as I sat down at the table across from Dern.

I wiggled my toes and groaned internally. I'd have to wake up Marsin to rub my feet after Dern left for the night or I'd never get to sleep now.

"You should be restin' up before that pup gets here," Dern sighed. "You're gonna need all the rest you can get."

"Have you seen something else about me or Marsin, Dern?" I asked, my voice a little firmer.

"Nothing new," he shook his head and smelled like he was telling the truth.

"Why were you arguing outside of my house with your dead mate?" I asked the obvious question we both skirted around earlier.

"He was spying. He knows Marsin doesn't like me."

"Marsin likes you."

"No, he doesn't. He puts up with me because it makes you happy."

"Ormund wouldn't try to hurt Marsin, would he?" I asked, pushing aside my plate suddenly no longer hungry for my midnight snack.

"Ormund wouldn't hurt nobody. Not unless they were gonna come after me or the kids. He won't hurt Marsin, because your mate doesn't have the heart to break yours."

"He doesn't want to hurt you, Dern," I frowned at the old wolf. "You don't have to be afraid of anyone. You're pack and Marsin's pack too now. You can tell Ormund that. I think we've taken good care of you – as much as you'd let us take care of you – since he's been gone. He doesn't need to walk around with a chip on his shoulder

now.”

“It’s complicated, Ast. It really is. He has one more person he needs to help before we can rest and I don’t know how to get stuff done anymore. I’m tired and he’s gonna do what he’s gonna do. He won’t hurt you or Marsin, though.”

“Who do you think he’d hurt?” I leaned forward, my belly broiling with concern.

“Anyone who stands in his way of keeping a promise.”

“Dern, can I walk you home, buddy? When you finish with that sandwich?” Marsin asked from the doorway.

“No, it’s okay. Ormund’s still hanging around outside. He’ll walk me home.”

Marsin

Sticking to my plan, I decided to act as if an old wolf talking to a man not even witches could see was one hundred and fifty percent normal. I gave Astral a hug and a kiss on the forehead before carrying him back to bed. I was ready to feign sleep until I dozed back off but Astral decided that night was the night we needed to discuss Dern once and for all.

“He’s going downhill fast, I think,” he whispered from under the blankets. “Faster than I thought, at least. He thinks Ormund wants him to do something for him.”

“He’s a seer, though, right?” I asked, finding his hand and entwining our fingers.

“A fortune teller,” he nodded.

“Well, seers see, right? Maybe he is seeing him. I mean, sometimes spirits show up before doors. What I don’t like is whatever Ormund wants him to do seems to have something to do with us, Astral. That’s the worrisome part.”

“I don’t think he’s seeing him, though, alpha. That’s what worries me. I’d know what to do if he was actually seeing his dead mate. I could handle that. Magic goes a little wonky when people grow older. I don’t think his true-mate would show up and demand that he do something. Something about a promise. I couldn’t imagine doing that to you if I were dead and you were old.”

“You’re not Ormund and neither am I. I think he’s dying, mate. I heard you two talking about it tonight. He might not want to acknowledge it and there isn’t a door

following him around yet, but I think your friend isn't doing great."

Astral sniffled and I pulled him into my chest as much as his pregnant belly allowed. Why did I have to say it tonight? It could've waited for morning light.

"I don't know what to do," Astral said, his tears hitting my bare chest.

"No one can stop old age. No one can stop death, not forever anyway, mate," I whispered, kissing the top of his head. "All you can do is be there for him, but in a way that keeps you safe too. I know you're always careful but sometimes people don't see things if they really care about someone and Dern means a lot to you. A lot to us."

"We have to figure something out."

"I think short of moving him in here, we're doing our best and I don't think Dern would move in with us. He likes his house. He lived there with his mate, didn't he?"

"He did," Astral nodded.

"Hey! Did you ever decide what we're calling our pup?" I asked.

"Raylin because it sounds more like your name than Ether does," Astral sniffled again.

"I like it," I said and kissed his forehead before adding, "I like Ether too, though." Yeah, I wasn't about to make him think I didn't like the other name that would grace the birth certificate of one of our other future children. I wasn't poking that rabid dotter tonight.

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Come morning, I woke up wrapped around a very pregnant and a very furry wolf. I couldn't resist nuzzling into his soft grey fur. I ran my hand over his belly. His flesh jerked and he yawned. Somewhere inside of him our pup was waking up. I imagined a grey wolf pup laying next to him. A tiny miniature of my mate. Maybe with a few scales on his paws or ears. He'd have a star- shaped scale on his chest too. Perhaps it would even be furry like his carrier's.

When Astral didn't shift back into human form for breakfast, I didn't worry much. Sometimes dragon shifters did that too. The dragon would take over and you had to let them get on with it before they'd relinquish control and allow their human side to come back out. When he refused to shift back for lunch, worry nagged at the back of my mind.

"Don't make a big deal about it," my dragon warned inside my thoughts. "Maybe it's something wolves do to have their babies. Maybe this is natural, and we don't know about it yet. They all forget to tell us so much because it's stuff they already know."

I brought our plates to the bedroom and ate in the bed with my mate. Furry or not, he was my Astral and I wasn't leaving him alone. He lay on his side, panting and slowly wagging his tail.

"Are you close?" I asked when dinner time rolled around and he still hadn't shifted back.

"If I crawl under the bed, will you freak out?" he shot another question back at me.

"Not if you tell me. I mean, you can even explain it after you're under the bed. If you want to be there, I'll carry you under there myself. You've been so quiet today. I need you to tell me what to do for you because I'm starting to freak out a little. I almost went to get your Moms earlier."

“Don’t do that yet!” he panted over our mating link.

“Isn’t it too early for the baby?”

“It is but it’s not too early to den down. It’s sort of like nesting. I’m too fat to hunt. I don’t need you to do anything special. You’re doing everything already. You’re hunting and staying with me and not letting everyone else annoy me.”

“That’s what I do anyway,” I chuckled.

“I know. I’m lucky to have you. I’m lucky to have an alpha who cares so much. Not everyone gets someone like that. Not everyone gets to meet their true-mate. I think I want to go for a walk before we go under the bed.”

We walked around the neighborhood, drawing a few concerned looks from the neighbors and pack members but no one said anything. Though, if they were anything like the dragons back home, they knew not to poke pregnant carriers so close to their due dates.

Astral padded along, stopping to sniff things here and there. He chowed down on a few apples at Morgi’s orchard. Then he lounged in the shade of an apple tree. I stretched out next to him, running a hand over his big pregnant belly. He was a beautiful, soft to the touch, wolf. Earlier, he talked about how lucky he was, but I was the lucky one. Merely laying by his side in the shade made me the happiest dragon in town.

We dozed on and off hiding out from the afternoon sun under the tree. As the earth swallowed the heat-giving star, I carried Astral home. He didn’t even have to ask. This time I didn’t tuck him into bed. Instead, I tucked him in under the bed with all the pillows and blankets. Then, somehow against the odds, managed to wedge myself under there with him. We watched cat videos on my phone until we both dozed back

off.

That was our life for the next two weeks until our baby was born. Doctor Leem, Teddy, and Astral's immediate family came and went. Bringing us snacks and ensuring we didn't need anything else. We came out a few times, when the coast was clear, and showered. I took my time washing Astral's thick fur and using his favorite fur-friendly conditioners. I massaged his big, pregnant belly and his back. I even massaged his feet and between his toes before blow-drying him on the lowest setting and brushing him out.

"I could get used to this," he said over our mating link as I brushed down his side.

"I hope you do. If we're going to have a big family, you have a lot of this in your future. Next time, I might be doing it with one hand holding a pup."

"I can't wait to see you holding our pup," Astral yawned.



Astral

All our time spent stuck wedged together under the bed gave us plenty of time to discuss my birth plan. Unless there was a medical emergency, I was giving birth right where we were. I made Marsin take out the good pillows and bedding and come back with some older ones from the linen closet as soon as we began discussing the birth of Baby Raylin. Those had no sentimental value attached to them and could be replaced easily when we burnt them later.

As soon as my water broke, we'd call my parents. They would not come into our room unless I asked but instead would strengthen the wards and guard us. I wasn't sure who my instincts thought would eat our pup but any intruder was more likely to be eaten up by Marsin than to actually reach our pup. That factoid gave me more comfort than even my new favorite wraparound body pillow that Teddy brought over.

We would inform Doctor Leem that I had gone into labor so that he'd be on call in case something went wrong but he also wasn't allowed into the bedroom until I said so. My wolf daydreamed about eating anyone who crossed the threshold of the bedroom and had the audacity not to be Marsin. He was the only person who we could truly trust with our baby. He was the only one who could love Baby Raylin as much as I did. He was the only other person who would do anything to protect our pup.

Sometimes I pretended to be asleep so that Marsin could text the doctor when he thought I wasn't paying attention. It wasn't hard to know who he was texting by the scent he gave off. He was always slightly annoyed when he chatted with Doctor Leem but he did want to know everything the doctor was willing to tell him about

wolf birthing. I knew all the most important parts. I'd attended more than a few births in my life. Once the pup was out, you needed to ensure the poor baby was breathing and moving. You needed to wash him up and make sure no gunk was in his mouth or nose. Then you cuddled the hell out of him while he suckled. That was how you took care of a baby post birth. Then, of course, you did need a doctor, for the vaccinations but at least for a little while he'd carry the immunity he gained from my own vaccinations while he grew inside my womb.

As soon as my water broke all those plans went straight out of my head and I was never so grateful for anything as I was that I made my wishes and needs explicitly clear to Marsin in the week leading up to the big day. He locked the door and opened the window just long enough to stick his head out and howl to signal my parents what was what. His howl wasn't too wolfy, but it was passable and if anyone made fun of him for it, I'd fucking eat their faces off as soon as I finished giving birth to the watermelon trying to claw his way out of me. That's what I should've named him. Baby Watermelon Raylin.

Despite his shaky hands and his rush to get towels and hot water, Marsin took a second to laugh at my joke. That was the real test of a good mate. Could they laugh with you even when you were down to the wire? If fate didn't allow me to live out my life and to be an old wolf, grey and white in the muzzle, I hoped to die laughing with Marsin. It wouldn't make up for all the missed years but at least it would be a good last memory to carry into the Other World with me.

"Hey! No thinking about that! We're going to live to be so old that you're toothless from age and I lose all my scales!" Marsin said, sticking his head back under the bed. "Those are the rules."

"Green!" I whimpered over our mating link.

"Green for? Talking? Being a smart ass?"

“Yes! Green!”

“And we’re gonna have so many pups that you don’t even have time to think about any doors unless it’s the backdoor where all the paw prints are,” Marsin continued. “We’ll have so many kids that your parents will finally buy that land behind the farm they keep eyeing just so we have somewhere to keep them all.”

“I hope you’re planning on carrying some of these kids.”

“If I could carry your baby I would,” Marsin said, and I sniffed the air.

He wasn’t lying. It was easier to offer to do something that was impossible, but I let it go. Starscale Dragons were a different breed and for all I knew he’d actually do it given the chance to put his money where his mouth was. Either way, he spent the next six hours cooing to me, massaging my belly, and feeding me the tiniest star-shaped ice cubes. They were fucking adorable and do you know how cute something has to be for someone in labor to notice they’re fucking adorable? They were that damn cute. Then again, maybe that was all the love hormones hitting my brain at once.

Those six hours might as well have been six days, six weeks, or six years because it was only much later I was told how long I was in labor with Baby Raylin. Six freaking hours.

But those six freaking hours were worth it once my grey little wolf pup with scales around his eyes and nose was suckling at my belly. He was beautiful and he was ours. He smelled healthy and had all the parts that one expected to find on a wolf pup even if his little eyes weren’t open yet.

“He’s so fucking perfect,” Marsin cooed, running a single big finger down Baby Raylin’s back. “You did so well. You’re so strong.”

He was laying it on thick, but I didn't stop him. If there was anytime in life where developing a praise kink was appropriate it was during childbirth and squeezing out a baby watermelon. So he could just keep the complements coming and he did until we both dozed off with our baby. Marsin wrapped his big draconic wings around both of us, putting us in a cocoon together. This was the good life. This was the life I worked my ass off for. This was the reason I was so willing to talk to Dern's apple. Maybe I was a crazy wolf. Hell, maybe you had to be a crazy wolf to get fate's attention and find your mate. It all worked out in the end, though didn't it?

My thoughts had softened into a gooey, dreamlike state when someone banged on the door like they had the shits and we were tucked away inside the only bathroom in the house. Marsin chuckled at the joke but didn't register the knock.

"Alpha," I hissed over our mating link. "I think I need you to eat someone."

He started to sit up, but I knocked his head back down onto the pillow with my paw until he remembered we were under the bed.

THUD! THUD! Whack!

The door crashed open, and I heard my mother growl. Teddy cursed and wings swept through the air.

"What the fuck?" Marsin swung out from under the bed. "Stay here!"

Magic crackled through the air and moved so I laid on top of Baby Raylin. The door slammed shut and the metal scraped against metals as the screws wound back into their rightful homes inside the hinges. The whole damn room smelled like metal and an angry omega.

"Dern?" I yipped.

“Sorry, y’all, but this is the way it has to be. We’re going to wait things out.”

Marsin growled and his feet disappeared from view. Dern dodged and snarled, “Call off your attack lizard, pup! I have a gun and I’m not afraid to shoot him! I promised I wouldn’t hurt you, but I never made any such promise about him!”

My heart skipped a beat. The rest of the house was in chaos, but I couldn’t move. I couldn’t leave Baby Raylin alone and from my angle under the bed I couldn’t even reach Dern’s boot clad toes. No! No! NO! No! NO!

“What do you want?” I growled.

“I have to do this for Ormund. We’ll just wait it out. If Marsin here calms his scaley balls down we can talk! I’m not some crazy old hound! I’m not imagining things! Just because you’re a witch doesn’t mean you know everything there is to know! I won’t have my story told like that and we won’t let Ormund’s promise go unfulfilled!”

“You’re fucking crazy!” Marsin roared and I cringed.

“Please don’t get shot! Please don’t get shot! We just had a baby! Please don’t get shot!” I chanted over our mating link.

“No one’s gonna make up the fact you were crazy because you are crazy! You’re insane! Who barges into a room with a fucking newborn in their own damn pack, waving a gun around like a fucking madman!”

Could dragons get shot? Could bullets pass through scales? I wish I paid more attention in shifter biology in school.

“I am not crazy! Ormund is right here! He’s always been right here! He’s never left

me! That's what real love is! He's stayed with me because he's a real fucking alpha!"

"And what? I'm not? What would you have me do Dern? Pick you bone from bone and suck out the damn marrow?" Marsin growled back at him. "Would that have made you happy? Is that what a real alpha would've done to protect Astral?"

"He's senile, Marsin!" I growled over our mating link. "Calm him down! Don't rile him up! I don't need you getting shot and I don't need anyone tearing him limb from limb so goddamn close to my pup!"

Wood splintered and I growled again. It was the only thing I could do unless Dern crawled right under the bed with us.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:01 am*

Teddy

The whole house was a mess of chaos, but Marsin had Dern distracted. Even the strongest magic meant to keep everyone out couldn't hold forever if the caster couldn't focus. For a split second, I wished my brother Duke and his group were here. He'd have known exactly what to do. Wolf after wolf crashed into the bedroom door but it wasn't budging.

“ARE YOU ME OR NOT!?” my dragon roared into my thoughts rearing up the way he had when I almost strangled Selt.

I was a dragon. I was a Frost-damned Moonscale and there was a baby in trouble. My mamma would've bit my tail to see me standing there doing nothing.

“MOVE!” I roared and the wolves mostly scattered. Someone grabbed Astral's sire and pulled her out of the way. The same old rage tickled my fingertips and tightened my core. My wings came out of my back, adding bulk to my weight. The world was shit. Every world was shit. My carrier was dead. Nelum wasn't my mum. My family had become Starscales and I was homesick for a life that was long gone and my best friend had morphed into daddy-mode so hard that I might as well not have a best friend at all. I loved him, Laken, and their kids but oh my frost damned scales I was so tired of the bullshit! The universe wouldn't let me hold on to anything or anyone. Smoke shot out of my nose and one of the wolves coughed. I paid them no mind. I'd hope someone else would do this for Minter and my other baby siblings. Raylin didn't have an older sibling to bust things up. Elio wasn't here to do it for Marsin. That left me. It was always me but I had the rage to spare. It practically rained from my pores.

“It had to be this way!” Dern growled from the other side of the door. “It had to be this way so that Ormund can fulfill his promise. He’s slipping away! Not Ormund but Lotus’s bo---”

I slammed into the door, and it splintered into large chunks under the weight of its own magic.

“Fuck!” Dern turned and the gun went off. Something hit me hard, but it didn’t stop me. I didn’t bother glancing at Marsin or figuring out where Astral had hidden the pup. That wasn’t any of my business. This old wolf had done enough for one day. If he was this damn senile, they needed to put him in a home somewhere people could watch out for him. My hand found his throat as something else stung my arm. It stung right in the center of my new lotus tattoo but that didn’t stop me.

“DON’T KILL HIM!” Astral growled but it was all background noise.

His gun hit the floor and went off again, sending a bullet into the solid oak dresser sitting against the far wall. Marsin swore under his breath as Dern went limp. I tossed him onto the bed and turned toward the door to find Jacob Leem and the rest of the wolves watching me. Blood dribbled down my arm, warm, gooey, and bloody annoying.

“Is he alive?” Someone shouted from the back of the group.

Jacob scurried forward looking nothing like the guy I hooked up with all those years ago. It wouldn’t matter if he did. Nothing and no one was mine to keep. I let him get on with discovering that Dern was fine and well. It was easy to knock someone out without killing them. It was so fucking easy. I squeezed on the first bullet hole and the metal made a clink as it fell to the floor. The other one took a bit more prodding around and I had to slap Marsin’s hand away as he tried to help. It fell to the floor with the same clink. Smoke wafted from my nose again. I needed to get out of here.



The bedroom was no place for a smoking dragon. Baby Raylin was part draconic, but he was a wolf pup. Sure, I was only half too but I was older and since I produced smoke it didn't harm me. Still, the rage held onto me. Was this what Dad felt when he almost killed Elio when he thought he was impersonating Mum? Was this what Sequin felt when Daliah and Rosemary turned his whole house 'pussy pink'?

"You need a tetanus shot," Jacob Leem said, appearing next to me as if he was as much of an apparition as Dern claimed his dead mate was.

"You need a Frost-damned tetanus shot!" I said, squaring up.

"You gonna fight me, Teddy?" He squared his shoulders back at me. "I get it. Fuck or fight. It's still the same for you. You can try to fight me but I'll give your scaley ass a sedative."

"Give your prisoner a sedative," I said, narrowing my eyes on him.

"Already did. Do whatever you need to cool down but swing by the clinic tomorrow morning, okay? I don't want to fight you and fucking has been off the table for a long time."

"Did he tell you what he wanted?" I asked.

"Kept talking about his dead mate and a promise that he made. We'll know more when he wakes up. I'll find out more myself. You did a good job getting us in here. I wish you'd let me wash that out, though," he glanced at my arm.

"I got it. You do you, Jacob," I said and left before crueller words left my tongue. I didn't dislike Jacob but that was the thing about rage. It took a long time to settle down and if you didn't channel enough of it out it spiraled around and bounced off anyone you came close to. Not knowing what else to do and not about to tell my

immediate family that I was shot by a wolf I sent a quick email off to Mori Nightshade. He was the son of the leaders of the Nightshade Bears and inherited a lot of his carrier's magic even if he was a wolf like his half elf sire. Maybe they'd know something about convincing Dern that he wasn't really seeing Ormund and that his dead mate didn't want him shooting up houses over a promise he made.

Marsin

Part of me wanted to toss Astral over my shoulder and tuck Baby Raylin under my arm and not stop flying until I was back at my house. There I could lock them both in the nesting room and keep all madmen with guns away from them. Only that wasn't written in the stars. I knew it before I even brought up the subject of moving to Astral. Our pup was too young, and he wanted his family's support too much.

Teddy had been shot twice but by the time Baby Raylin was a week older his only complaint was that the second bullet nicked the line of his tattoo, and he'd have to wait a few months until the skin smoothed out before he could get it touched up. I spent most of that week under our bed with Astral and Baby Raylin. Part of me wanted to roar 'told you so' over and over but couldn't find any joy in it. I was too relieved that neither of them were hurt. Astral tried to apologize a couple of times but I wouldn't hear of it. Seeing the best in an elderly man who obviously needed help wasn't anything he needed to apologize for. Him being alive was enough for me. Winning the argument tasted bitter when the outcome was Dern was now in a care home for older wolves and not taking visitors.

Since he had no children living nearby and Astral wasn't ready to shift back into his human form, somehow Teddy and I had taken up the mantel of ensuring he had what he needed at the home. Doctor Leem said the old asshole perked up when he mentioned that Teddy's friend Sigmore Nightshade was coming to visit. That day he insisted on seeing me.

"What?" I asked, stalking into the room a nurse in banana yellow scrubs had pointed out to me.

“I need to see that spirit seer, okay?” Dern said as if he hadn’t waved a gun in my face and shot my nephew a week before. “I need him to hear my story. It’s important. It’s important for him. I know I say everything I do is selfish and it is. I’m a selfish, selfish wolf and I’ve never claimed to be anything else. I would’ve shot you. Not in the head or anything. Probably in the foot to make a point. I had to make the rest of them know I was serious. I had to do it to make everything else happen. I lied to Astral. I’m gonna go soon. You know that. Your friend I shot knows that too. Everyone does, huh? That’s why I’m here and not rotting behind bars but I can’t go off with Ormund until I finish some stuff up for him. He’s not making me do anything. I think he’s about ready to toss his hands up and tell me to come on home but I’m not ready to give up. I made him a promise.”

“I’ll see if he wants to talk to you.”

“Tell him about Ormund, okay? Tell him about Ormund and make sure he knows I’m not crazy. Tell him to invite Teddy along too. It’ll be fun.”

“I’m not so sure Teddy wants to see you,” I arched a brow at him.

“That’ll change before you know it. So much is gonna change and I’m the selfish wolf who’s going to hurry it along. Now, go on home to your mate and pup. You’re gonna have twenty more of them before the century is out. I’m sorry I had to drag you and Astral into this but I think a little bit of chaos is a fair trade for meeting Astral, huh?”

“I guess it’ll have to be,” I nodded. “You did make me think I was crazy, though.”

“It was just an omega haunting,” Dern laughed.

That was my cue to leave. I wasn’t sure what changes he thought he’d bring around next and I wasn’t sure I cared. All I wanted was to be back under the bed with my mate and our baby. He could keep his chaos and his magic to himself for the rest of

his life for all I cared.

READ ON to meet Teddy's true-mate, find out what the heck is going on with Dern, and what the next big series might hold for the Hemlock Mpreg Universe.

Hello and thank you for reading! Whether this is your first book in this universe, or you've been around since the beginning, thank you!