



Rogue's Crisis (A Monstrous World: The Next Generation #2)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Rogue is a rule follower through and through.

Working as a bounty hunter for the paranormal council is the perfect job for this Seelie fae, especially considering she can sense mistruths. Things get muddy when what the council believes doesn't line up with what she sees with her own two eyes.

Everything points to her suspects being innocent, while one of her coworkers begins to look guilty. Things compound when she realizes her targets are her mates. Not to mention the connection she feels to her boss at the bail bondsman's office.

Torn in two directions, Rogue is in crisis.

Does she follow her heart? Or honor her commitment to the paranormal council? And what happens when fate intervenes, attempting to drag her in a completely different direction

Total Pages (Source): 36

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Chapter One

Rogue

I love my job.

I love my job.

I love my job.

Normally .

It keeps me busy and active.

I've always felt a strong need for justice.

My sister, Gemma, loves to tell me it's because I'm a rigid rule follower, and that might be true. I'll comply with a law I don't necessarily agree with just because it seems like that's the right thing to do.

For being half of a set of quadruplets, Gemma and I couldn't be more unlike if we tried, but we both work for Owen as supernatural bounty hunters. Our friend Ember rounds out our group, and the three of us make up the only all-female team.

Most of our assignments come from the North American Paranormal Council, but we also get regular assignments from time to time.

Tonight's case is something big that came down from the council regarding a suspect they want brought in.

After the weirdness I ran into at the bar this evening, I'm pretty sure my boss is keeping something big to himself. I realize I'm not entitled to know everything, but if it's something that could put me or my team in danger, then yeah, I think it's time he shares with the class.

I grimace, shaking my head.

That makes him sound a little like the teacher, and I'm the student. That image isn't one I want in my head, especially considering he already treats me like a child. Okay, maybe not a fledgling, but he definitely coddles and lectures me more than anyone else on his payroll.

The uncomfortable chair I'm perched on doesn't help my stellar disposition. At the moment, I've had it up to my eyeballs with everyone and everything.

All I know is, Owen put us on a dangerous case, and if he has more details, I need them.

Owen's office door flies open, and my eyes narrow when Delta saunters out. She's beautiful and stacked with curves. She runs one of the other teams, and she's a witch. I have no idea what variety. She's never felt compelled to share that information, but my magic can sense that she's powerful.

She spots me and gives a cursory smile, but it's not especially warm.

I nod and wait until she's past my chair to shove myself up until I'm standing.

Owen spots me, and his forehead wrinkles as his lips turn down.

That's rude .

I don't hesitate to walk by him and into his office.

Although my first instinct is to take a seat in one of the chairs in front of his desk, I'd rather have this conversation on equal footing. I would say eye to eye, but he's a bear shifter. I'm five-eleven, and he still towers over me.

"How can I help you?" he asks, closing the door with a loud thunk. "It's after midnight, and it's been a long day." As his heavy footfalls approach from behind, I spin to face him.

Owen isn't slender.

In fact, he's a beast.

It's not just the half a foot in height that he has on me, but the broad shoulders and strong arms, even his muscular chest.

It all works for him.

His brown curls fall over his forehead as he brings a hand up, scratching at his furry jaw. Seriously, the man can grow a beard like nobody's business. It's thick and full and fits his face to perfection.

"Rogue?" he growls in his low, gravelly tone.

"I had a vision."

"Okay." He tilts his head as he studies my face. "And?"

I cross my arms over my chest.

Sometimes when he looks at me, it feels like he can see too much, and I don't mean physically. He's so freaking intense, something that never fails to throw me off-kilter.

"You're keeping something from us." My lips push together as I try to remember the speech I practiced while I was waiting. "What the hell is going on, Owen?"

When he takes a miniscule step back, my eyes widen.

I've never seen him retreat from anything, and my stomach tightens.

Body language doesn't lie, but people do. Unluckily for me, I can always tell. It's the part of my magic that I dislike the most. Everyone lies, even about little things, and it sucks knowing when someone isn't being truthful.

"I gave you all the information I had," he says, staring straight into my eyes.

That wasn't a lie.

I still can't help but feel like something is up, though.

His brow furrows, and he asks, "What did you see?"

"That's the problem." My shoulders bounce as I shrug.

"I'm not sure. Ethan Sanders was meeting with someone, but everything about the person he was with was indistinguishable.

It was a man. I'm confident enough about that, but his face, his voice, clothing, everything—it was all a blur. I've never seen anything like it."

“Christ.” His hand runs over his face, showing off the tattoo on the top of his hand. It continues up under his shirt sleeve, weaving around the top and bottom of his forearm. “Okay, enough is enough. I’m throwing this one back to the council. The three of you are off the case.”

“What?” I hiss, taking a step forward. “No way. You can’t do that!”

“Last I checked, I’m your boss.” His jaw tenses, and his eyebrows rise. “I can pull you off any case, at any time, especially if I believe your safety could be in jeopardy.”

“There’s something bigger at play here. Something you’re not sharing.” My head shakes as my anger rises. “Why even bother putting us on this assignment if you weren’t going to level with us?”

The veins on his forehead pulse, and I take a step back. That doesn’t seem to help, because his normally chocolate brown eyes begin to glow a brilliant yellowy-orange color that indicates his bear is close to the surface.

“The paranormal council sent down both jobs in one day. The Market Heist Crew, which I put everyone else on, and The Plague Doctor.” Owen’s jaw clenches. “I assigned that one to you, Gemma, and Ember because of the Ethan Sanders connection.”

I already know all of this, unless he thought it was some big secret that he specifically gave us Ethan Sanders because he’s a suspected wolf shifter.

Female wolves are rare, meaning he might come to us if he scents Ember. She’s a female alpha wolf and gorgeous . She has lured in more than a few perps for us just because they wanted to try their luck with the pretty she-wolf.

“We’re making progress,” I say, staring directly into Owen’s eyes. They’re brown again, meaning he must be calming down. “Sanders mentioned The North American Pack. He said he needed to speak to the alpha or an alpha on pack lands. Some of it was distorted because of the other person speaking.”

“Perfect,” Owen says, nodding. “I’ll have another team do reconnaissance. You’ve done your job. I’ll still pay you for this case.”

“What?” I scoff. “You said being paid was contingent on bringing in information about The Doctor. At the very least, you wanted Sanders brought in for questioning.”

Owen’s eyes narrow. “I said I would pay you. What more do you want from me?”

My heart races.

I would love for him to treat me like an adult for a change.

Owen is friends with one of my fathers.

My mom has four mates.

My biological dad is Silence, but Atlas is just as much a father to me.

Atlas and Owen go way back—it’s how Gemma and I ended up being hired.

The problem is that he treats me more like an annoying little sister than a trusted employee, which kills me. Especially because he’s ridiculously attractive, and my magic is fascinated by him.

There’s no reason I should be so drawn to him, but I am, and it makes everything worse. After a year and a half of working together, it still feels like he doesn’t trust

me, and it hurts my feelings.

I'm not a defenseless child.

I inherited my father's soothsayer magic and mind control gifts, and I got bits and pieces of my mother's magic, which terrifies literally everyone but her and my dads.

I don't make it known because of that, but I do have access to it if I need it.

And that's not even taking into account the years of self-defense training that my fathers made my sister and me complete.

The thing about Owen is, my magic is convinced there's more to him than meets the eye.

He's definitely a bear shifter.

I've seen his eyes and hands transform, but something deep inside me says there's some unknown part to his recipe.

Not that it matters. He would never confide his secrets to me. He views me as a responsibility.

He gave me a job, because of his connection to my father, but he views me as little more than a nuisance.

"I asked you a question," he growls, taking a step forward. "What more do you want from me, Rogue? I'll find you another assignment as soon as I can. It's not like you're hard up for money..."

Anger vibrates through my body, and my hands start to glow a light teal from my

magic.

It betrays my emotions, and I hate it. There's no way to pretend like he doesn't affect me when my magic tips my hand at every turn.

"I'd like it if you treated me like any other capable employee on your payroll," I snap, spinning around and stomping toward the door.

At moments like these, I'd give anything to be able to siphon like my sister. Part of Gemma's powers as a nightmare demon allow her to think of a location in our realm and land there at will.

It's a much more effective way of informing someone that the conversation is over.

Snatching the door handle, I pull it open.

"I'm not dropping the case." My head shakes, and I glance over my shoulder. "I found the information on Sanders, and I damn well intend to follow up on it."

Exhaling heavily, I take measured steps and tug the door closed behind me as quietly as possible.

Owen's muffled cursing fills the air, and for whatever reason, it feels like a victory. He may be able to get under my skin, but I'm able to return the favor.

A slow smile crosses my face as I stride off to find my sister.

She's around here somewhere.

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Chapter Two

Rogue

“ U h-oh,” Gemma says, appearing in a cloud of shadows as I step out the back door of the building. “You’re looking a little like the top of your head might pop off.”

I snort and tuck my hair behind my ear. “No, but I swear, that man drives me crazy in a way no one else can.”

“What’s the verdict?” Gemma asks, gathering her long black hair and tying it into a bun using the length.

“I’m sure you can guess.” My lips blow together as my shoulders bounce. “He told me nothing new, tried to pull us off the case, then insultingly offered to pay us, even though the job requirements haven’t been met.”

My sister snorts. “The two of you better figure your shit out before one of you flips and tries to murder the other. Although, hate sex could be hot.” I scoff, but she grabs my hand, and I already know to brace because she’s about to siphon.

“I would be willing to find a new job just so you could experience that once.” She laughs.

“Stay open to the possibility. That’s all I’m saying. ”

Ember has known Velyn was her mate for as long as I can remember. When you see

the two of them together, it's impossible to miss. Some stuff went down with their families when they were teenagers, and as a result, they still haven't bonded.

Although, they are dating now—I think. Maybe they're just hooking up and having hate sex of their own.

Who knows?

That's not my business.

Ember couldn't meet us at the human bar last night to search for Ethan Sanders, because she was on her first real date with Velyn. No matter how much she tries to fight the connection, they're going to end up together.

They're fated mates.

There's no way they'll be able to hold out for much longer.

Not having her with us last night wasn't a problem since Sanders didn't show, but I've replayed the snippet of a memory I got from the table in the bar so many times I've memorized it.

Ember has ignored three of my texts, and if she doesn't get back to me soon, I'm not above having Gemma siphon us to Velyn's house.

We need to make a plan for tonight. If Sanders doesn't show up at the bar, we may need to poke around pack lands.

I wouldn't want to do that without Ember, but I also understand how hard it is on her wolf.

It's a complicated mess. If Gemma and I go without her, it would either piss her off or hurt her feelings. Neither option sounds like something I want to do.

My meeting with Owen replays over and over in my mind as I wait for Ember to get back to me. It's almost three in the afternoon, but I'm guessing she and Velyn had a late night.

What I wouldn't give to find a man who looks at me with even half the soft affection Velyn wears on his face when he stares at Ember.

That, or the pure sexual heat.

The cranky bear shifter could give that type of feral look, but Owen will never see me that way.

Who knows why my brain is dead set on tormenting me with possibilities that will never happen, but it does seem determined to do exactly that.

Sitting around while waiting for Ember to call is starting to drive me crazy. If I don't do something, I'm going to go insane.

Rolling off my bed, I snag my phone and go searching for Gemma.

The house we live in was gifted to us by our parents when we turned eighteen. Okay, technically the renters moved out of the house my mom lived in when she met my dads, and after much begging and pleading, our parents agreed to let us move in.

My family pack still lives in the house we grew up in, but it was cramped with our five younger siblings and Gemma, Fox, Talon, and I living there too.

This place is just a short drive across town, and one of Mom's best friends lives with

her mates right next door, which is probably the only reason our parents agreed to let us move out.

Although being one of a set of quads is fun, it's also tough at times. There's almost always someone around to hang out with, but it's hard to build autonomy when everyone still refers to us as the quads.

Gemma is stretched out on the long end of the sectional when I make it into the living room. She glances up, and I toss my phone at her since it's making my skin itch. It's not so bad when it's in my pocket, but when it touches my skin, it becomes annoying.

"We need to call Ember and make a plan for tonight." I drop onto the end cushion, since it's the one farthest from the television.

There is no electricity in Faere, the fae realm. However, it's everywhere here. Though most fae are allergic to electricity, my allergy is more severe than most.

While lights don't bother me too badly, anything with radio waves is severe. I still watch TV when I'm bored, but I stay as far away from the screen as possible.

"Didn't Owen bench us until he assigns a new target?" Gemma asks, unlocking my phone.

"I'm not ready to concede defeat." Shrugging, I pull my thumb nail to my mouth to chew at it. "I have a feeling about this one, Gem. It's important. We can't give up."

"Just wait, Owen might toss you over his knee yet." She chuckles. "You're lucky I love you. I have a feeling this case is going to become even more of a pain in the ass before it's over."

She might be right about that.

After a quick conversation with Ember, she agrees to meet us at the human club where Sanders is known to frequent.

I take a shower and prepare to gear up.

Growing up in the human realm, I've learned to adapt to many customs that go against my instincts.

One of those is denim.

The material is constricting and uncomfortable.

Cotton or silk dresses are my preference, but if we need to head to The North American Pack Lands to search for Sanders, I'll want the extra coverage.

Settling for a black T-shirt and dark jeans, I pull on my combat boots. They're heavy and clunky, and they'll obscure my connection to the earth.

When I was little, I never wore shoes, which my brothers picked on me about mercilessly. However, these boots are perfect for when I want to wear extra holsters. Two mini daggers slide into each boot. They have circular finger hole grips for when I need to snag one with a single finger.

Most of my gifts are mental, thanks to my magic, but my dads taught all of us how to defend ourselves physically. I'm never going to have the raw strength of my brother Talon, or his biological father Atlas, but I'm excellent with blades.

The chest harness I strap myself into next was a gift from Atlas. He's the one who taught me the majority of my skills with mini blades, but I use them as a last line of defense. I'd much rather incapacitate someone mentally than do physical harm.

Once I'm done, I snag my jacket and pull it on.

The energy in the room sizzles like it always does when Gemma appears in front of my bedroom door. "Ready to head out?"

"Yeah," I agree, giving myself a once-over in the mirror.

This is about as good as it's going to get.

We make it to the human club and land in a bathroom stall. Siphoning always ends up being super glamorous when there's the risk of humans seeing.

Who wouldn't want to land next to a toilet?

I pull the handle and stumble out of the stall, frowning at myself in the mirror.

"Why does siphoning always make me look like I got zapped with electricity?" I ask, smoothing down my hair that now sticks out in forty different directions.

"Who knows?" Gemma laughs. "Maybe we pass through a ton, and you're allergic to it, so it turns you into a staticky mess?"

That could be it.

My phone rings, and I pull it out of my bag, check who's calling, and toss it to Gemma.

It's Delta, and while I would love to ignore her for the snotty look she shot my way outside of Owen's office, I'm still not irresponsible enough to actually disregard a coworker's call.

Gemma answers and, based on her facial expressions, it's clear I'm not going to like whatever she has to say.

Sometimes I envy that Gemma doesn't carry a phone.

It means she never has to talk to people she doesn't want to.

If something important comes up, she just siphons over and speaks to the person directly.

She disconnects and tosses the device back to me. "Delta's team has information on where to find one of the Market Heist Crew. She's asking for backup."

"Ember is supposed to be meeting us here." I frown. "I'll have to call and warn her."

"If it doesn't pan out, we might be able to beat her back here." My sister shrugs. "Are you making the call or am I?"

"I've got this one," I say, grimacing.

We both know Delta isn't going to let Ember participate in one of her take downs.

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Chapter Three

Rogue

“This was a complete waste of our time,” I hiss, jabbing a finger at Delta.

After she dragged us hours away to a town I’ve never been to before, this entire endeavor was for nothing. It’s clear Delta knows as much, and I’d like some answers.

She stands by, watching her team, who are busy packing up the SUV they came in. Only one or two are familiar, and I find it strange that she swaps out who she works with so often.

Ember, Gemma, and I are always together for cases, but it’s not unusual for Delta to have new teammates with her, depending on the job.

I nod at my sister.

Gemma grabs Delta, dragging her away from her team. “We’d like some answers.”

The witch glares, narrowing her eyes. “The information was good. There’s every possibility they made us.”

Gemma slowly teases a shadow toward the combative witch. It’s so transparent, anyone who wasn’t paying close attention would miss it. It brushes against the back of Delta’s ankle, and Gemma’s head tilts.

She's able to pick up someone's deepest, darkest fears with a simple brush of a shadow over their skin.

She can use that knowledge to torment and amplify their suffering, to induce nightmares, or even lock someone in a mental prison of her making.

While it's all rather grim, she has to nourish her magic, otherwise it's like if I don't eat for days.

It wouldn't kill me, but I would grow weaker over time.

"Why did you really drag us away from Haven?" Gemma asks in a no-nonsense tone.

My sister is easily amused and playful by nature. Her personality is pretty much in direct opposition to her magic, which is a lot like her biological father, Malice.

"I had a lead," Delta bites out, spinning until she faces Gemma. "How dare you try to use your magic on me!"

"It's always best if you're honest. Things go more smoothly that way. I'm the last person you want to distrust you," Gemma says, shrugging. "You're trying to shield something from me."

Delta scoffs. "Tell your sister to talk to the boss. You really think the two of you would be my first choice for backup?"

My teeth grind as I pick up on what she's insinuating. Owen wasn't messing around when he said he was going to pull us off The Plague Doctor's case. Now he's trying to find bullshit excuses to keep us busy elsewhere.

"Delta, you ready?" Agnes calls from near the vehicle they rode in. She's one of the

core members of Delta's team, at least one of the few I'm used to seeing on a regular basis.

The witch in question nods and calls out, "I'm coming." She jogs off while my head pounds.

My stomach starts to churn as my chest gets so tight it's difficult to breathe.

"That's not the vision face." Gemma siphons to stand directly in front of me and offers her forearms for support. "Is it? What's wrong?"

As I shake my head, the feelings intensify, though I'm not pulled into a vision. All the symptoms of what I experience before one are here, but nothing manifests.

"Something is wrong, but I don't know what," I whisper, still feeling like I might vomit.

The overwhelming urge to return to the human club to check on Ember hits me out of nowhere, but it's strong. I've learned it's best not to ignore those gut feelings. Even if I can't catch a snapshot of what's happening, I'm afraid it's not good.

Gemma siphons us back to the club we were originally supposed to meet Ember at to search for Ethan Sanders.

I'm still so unsettled that it's a good thing we land in the women's bathroom. Twisting, I barely make it to the toilet in time to lose my dinner.

"Okay, you do that. I'm going to check around for Ember." Gemma pats my back and disappears.

I can't see her, but I can sense the change in the energy that occurs when she siphons.

My hand falls against the wall as I continue to heave.

I've been siphoning with Gemma since I was a toddler. It never makes me physically ill like this, but visions do, and combined with the unwell feeling I've had since the parking lot, it's all too much.

Once I'm finally done being sick, I pull open the stall door and stagger out to rinse my mouth. I'm just finishing cleaning up when Gemma appears behind me.

"She's not here. Her car isn't in the parking lot." Her head shakes. "Do you think we should call Owen and ask for backup?"

After the shit he just pulled?

"Hell no."

No way.

He wants us off this case. Asking for help would be a great excuse for him to assign another team to "assist us."

Pulling out my phone, I try Ember multiple times.

My anxiety ratchets higher with each unanswered call.

Anxious thoughts spin through my mind, and my hands shake.

Did I make a mistake when I let her in on what Ethan Sanders said in my vision? Possibly, but keeping things from a teammate is never the right call.

I thought Gemma and I would be here with her if she got any bright ideas about

sniffing around The North American Pack Lands.

“Can you siphon to Haven and check her house?” I ask Gemma. “Veryn’s house too. Maybe she went home?”

“Yeah, that sounds exactly like something Ember would do.” Gemma snorts. “Don’t leave this bathroom. I’ll be back in two minutes.”

Though I nod, I doubt she sees it, because she’s already in the process of turning to smoke. My hands itch from holding my phone for so long, so I give up on Ember and call the one person I can count on to back us up.

I’m pretty sure Veryn is at work, but he answers on the third ring.

“Rogue?” he growls. “What’s wrong?” He has every right to be concerned. Everyone knows I only call if I have no other choice. “Rogue?”

God, he sounds super pissed. He’s going to be really angry when I admit I have an idea where Ember is.

“Gemma and I were supposed to meet Ember at a human club for our case, but we got called away to help another team.” I swallow thickly. “I told her to take the night off, but she was already almost here. Gemma and I finished up and came to check on her... She’s nowhere to be found.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” the dragon snarls. “Get to the point.”

“I have a bad feeling, and my gut says I know where she is...”

Veryn is probably going to rampage his way through the shifter settlement if Ember doesn’t answer one of our calls before he arrives. I tried to calm him down by

assuring him that Gemma and I would head to pack lands as soon as she gets back to the club, but it didn't help at all.

I promised Gemma I would wait in the bathroom, and I'm going to have to break my word.

We need more information.

I'm still wobbly as I stumble down the hallway and onto the packed dance floor.

If I can get a vision of what happened, maybe that will help confirm if Ember truly went to investigate the North American Pack. If not, maybe I can ascertain that, too, because if she's not there, we don't want to waste time checking in the wrong place.

Edging around the bar, I keep close to the wall to avoid all the bodies and to help keep myself upright. The itchy pulse of electricity under my skin is a symptom of an oncoming vision, but I've never had it last so long without slipping into a memory or glimpse of the future.

As I slide my hand over the hideous wooden paneling, my entire body jolts.

The edges of my vision distort, and even the scent changes slightly. It no longer smells like stale beer and sweat. Okay, it definitely still does, but I also pick up hints of a delicious manly cologne. It's one of those expensive ones with hints of bergamot and citrus.

Low murmuring comes from somewhere on my right, and my head whips in that direction to see what's happening.

That was an awful plan.

My stomach rolls violently, and I clench my eyes closed for a second while I attempt to recalibrate my senses.

By the time I open them, everything is clearer, and I no longer feel like I'm viewing the scene through water.

Ember sits on a barstool, reaching into her pocket for something. There's a man with pointy ears seated next to her. He has his hair in two braids that mesh into a bun at the crown of his head and dual rings in one nostril. He grabs Ember's hand as she moves to stand.

Oh, fuck.

Did Ember get kidnapped all because Gemma and I weren't here when we said we would be?

She climbs back onto her stool, staring at the man. They lean closer together while they speak, and the hair on the back of my neck stands up.

How the hell does she know him?

We tend to know the same people.

This is so bad.

If I pull my hand off the wall, I might never be able to find my way back into the memory, but if I don't try to get closer, I'll never be able to hear what they're discussing.

The man has to be elven or fae, based on the pointy ears alone, and I don't like the way Ember seems almost...entranced by him.

My hand turns ice cold, and a violent shiver racks its way down my spine.

My gaze flies to the wall, but I stagger back when I spot the man directly in front of me. His back rests against the wall as he watches the bar exactly where Ember and the stranger are sitting.

He's leaning with his feet crossed in front of him and his shoulders against the paneling of the wall, but even in his scrunched position, it's clear he's extremely tall. His long arms hang at his sides, and my gaze travels down to his fingers.

He's also a supernatural in a human bar.

There's no doubt in my mind.

Humans don't have runes and sigils lining every inch of visible skin, like this guy has from his fingers, up his arms, and even the sides of his neck are covered. Not that I can see much with that shaggy black curly hair that hangs nearly to his shoulders.

His jaw falls, and a light scoffing sound fills the air.

I swivel my head, following his line of sight.

The man Ember is talking to stands, running his fingers over her wrist, but I can't see exactly what's happening, because he blocks most of my view.

"I didn't see that coming," the man leaning against the wall says.

I turn back to study him.

Initially, I couldn't decide if he was in the memory or just a bystander in the bar. I've had weird instances where I could see people in my visions who were actually

spillover from the real world.

It's confusing.

I don't know how else to explain it, but they would be visible with me in the vision or memory, and yet they never left the plane I was on when I slipped into the vision.

However, it's clear that's not what's happening here. He was here when Ember spoke to that other man.

I glance back at Ember, but she's alone and staring at the spot the man she was with was in. Her eyes are huge, and though she seems confused, she's unharmed.

I'm also confused.

Who is he?

What happened to her after she left the bar?

Why isn't she here now?

Did she leave to search after him?

My vision goes hazy, and my stomach churns. I close my eyes, breathing through the discomfort.

That doesn't help, so I pull my free hand to my stomach.

Several long seconds pass, and I expect to be free of the memory, but that same cool shiver runs down my spine as I open my eyes.

The man who was leaning against the wall now stands facing me.

His hand is in the same place as mine on the paneling, and it's like he's a mirage.

Where his arm passes through mine, it's nearly transparent.

It almost looks like our fingers are interlocked, and all the air seems to evaporate from my lungs.

My eyes fly up to meet his.

His head tilts, and I swear it feels like he can sense me. If he's part of this memory, there's no way that should be possible.

My fingers go from ice cold to sizzling, and I gasp but don't pull my hand away. If I do, I'll lose this replay of events forever, and I still have no idea what's going on.

The man's shaggy black hair falls around his face as he licks his lips. The heat in my hand amps up to almost a burning under my skin, and my gaze moves to see if I'm actually on fire.

The man's hand shimmers as it moves through mine, and I can already tell before I glance around the room that the vision is gone.

As it turns out, the man is, too, meaning he was definitely here at the same time Ember was.

It wasn't a particularly helpful memory, but I know Ember met with someone.

Now to get myself back to the bathroom in case I hurl. I'd also love to avoid a lecture from my sister, if possible.

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Chapter Four

Rogue

Gemma collects me from the bar, and we land on the outskirts of the shifter town that belongs to the North American Pack. I wobble around, clutching my overly sensitive stomach. It's been out of whack all night, which isn't unusual after a powerful vision.

I'm still baffled how that man seemed to sense me. I don't have the first clue what kind of supernatural he is, but he would have to be something powerful to sense me in a vision.

He would also have to have some form of precognition for that to even be possible.

I think.

Honestly, I don't have any idea how that would work, and it makes my skin prickle with unease.

"Damn, you look worse than normal," Gemma says, frowning as she reaches out to steady my arms.

"I still haven't recovered from that last vision."

"In that case, I'm not taking you with me as I do reconnaissance." Her long dark hair falls over her face as she glances around. "You stay here. It'll only take me a few

minutes.”

I nod and lean against the wall of the building we landed next to. “Sounds like a plan. You remember what Sanders looks like?”

“Yeah, Rogue.” She looks at me funny. “Skinny, messy blond hair, big-ass glasses. I’ve got it. I’ll also see if I can locate Ember.”

I frown. “I didn’t mean that how it sounded. Of course Ember is the priority. I’m just saying that if you spot him, we should try to bring him in. After we’ve ensured Ember is okay, of course.”

“I knew what you meant,” she lies, disappearing in a cloud of dark shadows.

This is why people think I’m cold and calculating.

I hate it.

I care about Ember.

We need to be sure she’s okay, and that’s the priority, but my brain has always been wired in a weird way.

I’m drawn to complete our jobs or to follow the law exactly how it stands. Others aren’t so rigid, and it makes me come off as unlikeable and, even worse, uncaring.

The slamming of a door catches my attention.

That was nearby.

Maybe even the exact building I’ve been leaning against.

I slowly edge around to the side of the house, keeping my back close to the wall as I move.

The low sounds of someone muttering gets louder as I approach the front of the building.

The voice appears to be male, and though it's almost familiar, I can't place where I know it from.

Peeking around what I assume is the front of the building, my jaw falls.

There's a sidewalk that ends in a small porch of what I now suspect might be a home, but it's who stands on the steps leading to the porch that makes my heart thump.

Ethan Sanders!

Our target in the case Owen assigned to Ember, Gemma, and me is only feet away.

In the vision I had the other night in the bar, I saw him speaking to someone I couldn't make out, but I heard him say he planned to come to pack lands.

And now here he is.

His whitish-blond curly hair falls over his forehead as he adjusts his huge black-frame glasses.

Sanders is at least six-foot-two or six-three, and he has an extremely slender build. He's cute in a nerdy way that doesn't scream dangerous, but you never can tell from appearance alone.

I'll need to apprehend him, eventually, but locating Ember and ensuring she's all

right is a more pressing concern.

Sliding around the edge of the building, I do my best to feign confusion and amp up the fact I'm not a threat.

I flutter my lashes and pull a hand to my chest. "Sorry to bother you, but I lost my friend somewhere around here..."

"Seriously?" His eyes widen, and he rocks back on his heels. "Another one?" There's a lilt to his words that I think speaks to a British accent, but I could be wrong.

"She's about my height, maybe an inch shorter. Long blonde hair, blue eyes, and she's an alpha," I say, still trying to decipher what he meant by another one.

"Yeah, your friend is fine. Or she will be. Having all of you invade pack lands..." That's definitely an English accent he's rocking, although it almost seems older or more ancient.

"You're only going to make things harder on her.

She needs to heal and take control of the pack on her own.

Shifters are incredibly secular. They won't tolerate an unknown fae any better than they'll handle a dragon. "

"Veryn is here?" I sputter, blinking repeatedly. "Heal from what?"

"He's with the alpha. He already sent away his family, and I don't want to be rude, but you should give him a call..."

" He rubs the back of his neck. "Preferably once you're off pack lands.

How did you get in, anyway? No one is supposed to be coming or going until the new alpha is announced to the pack. ”

He hasn't spoken a single lie, and my thoughts spin in circles as I try to decipher what he was alluding to.

When it clicks, my mouth goes dry. “Are you saying Ember is now Prime Alpha?”

“Yes.” Sanders nods, making his whitish-blond hair fall over his forehead. “She was injured during the challenge. She needs the opportunity to rest and recover.”

Gemma appears in a cloud of smoky shadows, and I was so distracted that I didn't even pick up on the buzz that normally forms on my skin when she appears. “You found Sanders.”

Shit.

There goes my cover.

“If you take us to Ember and cooperate with our investigation into The Doctor, we might not even need to take you into custody,” I tell him, offering a tight smile.

He's probably going to end up in the paranormal council's custody, but it was just true enough that I'm allowed to say it.

His eyes widen, and he frowns, glancing between the two of us.

He's going to run.

They always run .

I'm not surprised when he does an about-face and takes off.

Gemma chuckles. "You are terrible at trying to set suspects at ease."

"I'm not the one who scared him off. That was all you," I hiss. "We have bigger problems. He said Ember fought the alpha and won."

"Damn."

"Yeah," I agree. "And Velyn is around here somewhere."

"Damn," she says again, wrapping her shadows around me. "Try not to puke this time."

I frown.

That would be preferable to me too.

The shit hits the fan as we land near a small house.

Sanders and the man I saw talking to Ember at the bar in my vision stand around, speaking to one another.

Velyn, Ember's mate, stands a few feet away.

Siphoning hits me just as hard as it has all night, but I do my best to follow along with the conversation that ensues.

The man from my vision is Lorcan. He's apparently one of Ember's mates. The fact that Velyn seems accepting of him makes me suspicious, but I'm more focused on Sanders.

I mean, Cohen.

Whoever the hell he is .

The paranormal council gave us bad information, and Ethan Sanders is Cohen's alias.

Or one of his former aliases.

There's far too much chaos happening when I already feel pukey.

Veryn assures us Ember is okay, but my gaze keeps migrating back to Cohen. Something about him is niggling at my senses, and I don't know what my magic is trying to tell me.

Veryn and Gemma argue about heading to Ember's to pick up clothing and supplies for her. They also need to ensure her family doesn't storm pack lands. Now that she's alpha, she has to be the one to defend her position, or the wolves will never trust her.

Cohen watches me as he speaks to the druid—Lorcan. Even the thought of him being Ember's mate is insanity, and I'm not sure I believe it.

Druids are incredibly powerful.

Could he be using magic to lull Veryn and Ember into believing they are fated?

No.

That doesn't make sense.

My magic detected no lies when he referred to her as his mate.

Tonight flipped upside down so quickly, it's almost hard to process.

My magic buzzes, pulling me toward my suspect.

Something isn't adding up.

The file said Cohen was a shifter, but my insides tingle, trying to draw me toward him, and my magic doesn't seem to view him as a threat.

It tugs so violently that I stumble in his direction.

That is extremely disorienting .

My magic isn't usually so insistent.

To cover for the fact I have zero control over my body, I say, "I need you to answer a few?—"

I don't even get to finish my sentence as I'm pulled into the vision.

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Chapter Five

Cohen

The beautiful fae stumbles as she comes to a stop in front of me. I'm not sure if I grab for her or she reaches for me, but my magic sizzles as our skin connects.

When my eyes meet hers, they're glossy and vacant.

I blink and the world around us morphs.

Lorcan, the dragon, and the female nightmare disappear.

We're no longer outside Anders's home on pack lands. The female who Velyn called Rogue stares at me with wide eyes as I pin her to the wall in the familiar house.

My hand comes to rest over her mouth, and my body flattens against hers as the group of three men search the room.

My magic is shielding us from view, but I don't know who those three are or why we're hiding. It's a bizarre sensation to understand bits and pieces while having no idea of the overall context of what's happening.

I can hear Rogue's voice speaking in the real world as she says, "Not a shifter at all."

My back is to the men we're hiding from, so I have no idea what they're up to.

Rogue's huge gray eyes stare into mine, and the moment feels especially intimate. There's a strange aching in my chest that urges me to pull my hand away and replace it with my lips.

My heart races, thumping so loudly I can hear my pulse in my ears as I do exactly that. I'm six-three, but Rogue is tall, like all fae, and I only have to bend a bit to brush my lips over hers as I remove my hand from the equation.

She hungrily kisses me back, shoving her tongue into my mouth. Keeping quiet is complicated because it's a perfect kiss. Slow and sensual and building in its intensity. My body reacts like I'm actually in the moment, pinning her to the wall with my lips pressed to hers.

Visions are complicated magic I've never experienced before now.

I can't understand how I can hear the running commentary in the real world from Gemma and Lorcan, but also be actively participating in the soul-consuming kiss.

Rogue pulls away in real life and the vision fades. She stumbles backward, looking like she's about to fall.

I reach for her once more, and this time we're pulled into a kaleidoscope of events never lasting longer than a brief flicker.

The three men who were after us in the earlier vision stand around a desk, talking to a woman I've never seen before.

In a blink, the image morphs, and the three men sit in a rundown living room. The man with reddish-blond hair says, "He's weakest while we control his phylactery. If we don't end him before he locates it ? —"

Rogue stands face-to-face with Calyx in the same bar where I met with my old friend a few nights ago. They stare at each other in what almost seems like awe.

There are quick flashes of Rogue arguing with a huge man I've never seen, but by sight alone, I assume he's some type of shifter. He makes a grab for her arm, but the scene changes again.

Rogue's voice once again echoes in the real world. "Oh, shit."

Calyx and I sit side by side on the couch in an unfamiliar house. He bumps my shoulder with his, saying something that makes me bark a laugh.

Last time, I was in my body for the vision, but this time, I can see myself from the outside and it's extremely unsettling.

Or I think it is until the scene changes once more, and an even more grisly image takes shape.

It's only a flicker, but my heart drops.

Calyx lies on the wooden flooring of a house I don't recognize with a massive wound in his chest and his head separated from his body.

The lifeless look in his eyes will haunt me for a long time.

The vision fades, and I stare at Rogue in abject horror.

"Wait, is that going to happen or has it already?" I choke out.

Calyx is immortal, but certain conditions need to be met for him to resurrect.

“I think that was the future,” she says. “Sometimes it’s hard to tell, but...” Her face twists into a frown. “You need to take me to him. Now.”

“Whoa, take who, where?” Gemma asks as she moves closer to her sister.

I’m still so out of it that all I can do is to stare at Rogue in awe. She’s an extremely powerful seer.

“Rogue?” Gemma probes.

Rogue’s head shakes, and she turns to face the nightmare, breaking the spell between us. “The plan hasn’t changed. Okay, just a tiny bit. You take Velyn to grab some of Ember’s things and to help settle her family’s frayed nerves. I have a lead I need to follow.”

“I can siphon Velyn to Haven and back in fifteen minutes.” Gemma frowns. “We should stick together.”

“You weren’t in my vision,” Rogue says, her eyes flying back to mine. “Also, the warlock and I have a few things to discuss.”

“It’s going to take a lot longer than fifteen minutes to talk Ember’s fathers out of coming here,” Velyn says calmly.

“I hate it when you do this weird seer shit.” Gemma’s shadows spill out around her, darting toward Rogue. She tugs her sister to her, and they embrace.

My chest rises and falls in rapid pants.

Holy fucking shit.

That vision was a lot to take in.

My mind replays the pieces I can remember, but it circles back to two events—the kiss Rogue and I shared and Calyx’s lifeless body.

“You’ll call me if you need me?” Lorcan asks, startling me out of my thoughts.

I nod.

He also has the gift of prophecy, but his gifts prevent him from seeing anything too closely related to his own timeline.

Christ.

What mess have we gotten ourselves into this time?

“Did we, uh...” I swipe a hand over my face and focus back on the road. I learned to drive on the other side of the pond, and being in the opposite lane is always a bit of a harrowing adventure. “Did we see the same visions?”

“I can only assume so,” Rogue says, crossing her arms over her chest. She’s already got one leg linked over the other. Her body language couldn’t be any more closed off.

“Why is the paranormal council after you?”

“I have no idea. They must be after Calyx, and I got caught in the crossfire.”

“Calyx, that’s the man from the vision?”

“Right,” I murmur. “I’m sure he already knows, but I plan to warn him. Don’t take this the wrong way, but he won’t let you apprehend him. It’s not that I don’t think you’re capable?—”

She lets out something like a snort.

“I’m more than capable, but I saw something in that vision...” Her eyes dart away from me, and she looks out the passenger window. “More like someone.”

“You recognized someone?” I probe.

I cut my eyes to the side just in time to see her nod.

“Yeah, but something was off,” she says softly. “I get the feeling she’s not playing for the right team.”

I stay quiet, hoping to entice more from her, but it doesn’t come.

Rogue said she’s not playing for the right team , and I only saw one woman in that vision besides Rogue. That means she knows the woman who was speaking to three men who were chasing us.

Too bad I don’t have the first clue what any of it means.

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Chapter Six

Rogue

Delta .

I don't know what that witch is up to, but it's clearly no good. Unless she thinks I'm colluding with the enemy, and that's why those men she was talking to were chasing me and Cohen.

Visions are frustrating, especially when they offer no context.

I don't even know what's happening or why my magic feels so strongly that I can trust Cohen. It's also infatuated with the idea of seeing Calyx again. My insides light up at the thought, and it's strange. I'm still not sure why my magic was insistent that I not bring Gemma along with me.

Maybe it's not my magic acting erratically.

What if I'm the one who's out of control?

Am I giving Delta a reason to be suspicious of me?

If I was on the outside looking in, I might be mistrustful of myself.

"Where are we headed?" I need something else to focus on.

Finding Calyx is priority number one, and I'm hoping Cohen will give me specifics on where his friend is hiding.

"That's complicated," Cohen says, keeping both hands on the wheel. "Calyx has multiple safe houses, and he swaps through them on a regular basis. He never warns us when he collects a new one to add to the rotation. He'll eventually come for me, but?—"

"Can't you just call him?" I twist to study his face. Being able to sense the truth is convenient at times like these, but I know how it goes. Some individuals are sneaky enough to twist the truth until only a sliver remains. Or they avoid topics they won't be able to lie about.

"If he had a phone, I would be happy to. Calyx is old school," Cohen says, flipping on his blinker. The man practically comes to a complete stop before turning onto the side street.

"That wasn't a four-way stop. We didn't have a stop sign at all."

"Yes, well, I'm still getting the hang of driving in America. Would you like to take the wheel?" His British accent seems especially thick as he speaks, and I'm a little too fond of the lyrical tone of his words.

I do drive. It's just not my favorite activity. It feels unnatural to be in control of a large metal box. I've often wished fae had wings, so I wouldn't need to bother with vehicles at all.

Gemma's ability to siphon has spoiled me. It occasionally makes me ill, but it also has instantaneous results.

"No, thank you," I say primly. "I'll trust you since I don't know where we're going."

Trust him?

Really, Rogue?

The car lights shine on a dilapidated house that makes my skin crawl. There are going to be spiders and mice in there, I can feel it.

“This is your friend’s safe house?” I ask, unclipping my seat belt.

“One of a few.” Cohen shuts off the vehicle and prepares to climb out. “Don’t worry. It’s in much better condition on the inside.”

I fight back a scoff and follow him from the car. “What exactly is your friend? And what is a phylactery?”

“That’s something you should ask Calyx,” he says, stomping through the overgrown grass. When he hits a small gravel-lined path that leads to the ancient-looking porch, I stop in my tracks.

Am I spelled or something?

Did a vampire compel me to act completely out of character?

Why am I even here?

In my vision, it sounded a lot like Delta was involved in whatever the Market Heist Crew is up to. I only caught snippets of her conversation, but the men she was with weren’t members of her team. At least, not ones that work at Owen’s.

I’ve been cautious of her for a while, but I haven’t been able to put my finger on exactly why. She doesn’t like Ember, and that alone was enough of a reason for me to

dislike her, but I've recently started questioning her professional tactics.

Although, I'm also wondering why proving my suspicions are true is important enough that I let myself be brought to the middle of nowhere with a stranger.

A stranger the paranormal council considers a threat. Or, at least, they consider Calyx to be dangerous.

Cohen ended up guilty by association.

Maybe.

He protected me in my vision. Pushing me to the wall, he blocked my body with his.

That seemed to indicate some level of familiarity.

Add on the kiss, and I'm so confused. Maybe it was a spur-of-the-moment decision, or it could be that he saw it in the vision and felt the need to complete the loop of fate.

What's that called?

A self-fulfilling prophecy.

Cohen spins around, snatching my hand as his head swivels.

"Come on. Something feels off. My magic doesn't like it." He drags me toward the house and up the stairs, sliding his free hand over the door lock.

Smoky-white magic spills from his skin, and the lock disengages. The hinges creak as the door pops open, and a musty smell hits my nose, making it wrinkle.

I thought he said it was nicer on the inside?

This place looks like a scene from a horror movie.

The walls are wood and falling apart from decay and disrepair. There's a thick layer of dust on everything, and if not for Cohen's magic, it would be completely dark.

Huh, I wonder if Calyx has a sensitivity to electricity the same way I do?

Mine is pretty bad, but I would still never want to live without power.

The benefits far outweigh the cons.

"Wouldn't you be able to tell if he was here?" I ask, tugging my hand away.

Cohen shakes his head as he continues down the long hallway. "Not just yet."

I'm not sure what else to do, so I follow him. He reaches the end of the corridor and makes a left while I catch sight of my reflection in the glass double doors that must lead to a back deck. They're yellow with age, and pollen and dust stick to the glass.

Vines line the outside, giving windows of visibility in the glass while most is covered with their growth. It wouldn't even be possible to open those with how thick the vegetation is.

Cohen and I clearly have different definitions of it's nicer inside.

Exhaling heavily, I follow him into the room on the left. It's in no better condition, trash and broken furniture littering the floor. The once regal paintings are chipped and peeling, with the frames hanging askew.

Cohen glances around and curses. “Okay, not this one. Only three more to go.”

My eyes narrow.

Is he dragging me around on a wild goose chase?

Too much is happening all at once, and it’s hard to keep up.

Ember is fated to Lorcan.

Lorcan is close with Cohen and Calyx.

I’d like to believe that means Cohen is trustworthy, but I know how the world works. No one wants to get tangled up with the paranormal council, and most supernaturals do everything they can to stay out of the council’s sights.

All of this could be an elaborate setup to allow Calyx an opportunity to get away.

The next house we pull up to doesn’t look any better than the first. I’m almost convinced this is a game to him. Something to distract me while his friend makes his escape, but my magic is content. That wouldn’t be the case if someone was trying to be sneaky.

It pulses when something is off, almost like an extra sense, and it’s calm and docile at the moment.

Cohen leads us into the slightly smaller, also rundown house. The air smells heavily of decay, and although I’ve never experienced allergies a day in my life, I still have a bout of sneezing.

My head aches as my eyes water. “How could anyone live in this? I’ve been here for

two minutes, and I've somehow developed allergies."

The warlock turns toward me, frowning. "Shit, I forgot about that." He steps forward, his magic spilling from his skin.

My heart races, and I try to back away, but my butt bumps the wall. My magic doesn't fly out in an attempt to save me, so whatever he's doing must not be a threat.

His cold hands come to rest on my cheeks, and he offers a soft smile. "This should help." He runs his thumbs under my eyes and whispers something. I think he says, "See things as they are, not how they appear to be."

"Do you need to recite an incantation for your magic to work?" I ask, but in the blink of an eye, the rundown house is no more. There's even electricity provided by low-hanging chandeliers.

My jaw falls.

The walls are no longer rotting and decayed. Even the foul smell is gone. The temperature rises to what would be comfortable indoors, and my confusion reaches an all-time high.

"No," Cohen says, tucking my hair behind my ear before pulling both his hands away. "It's a habit I picked up from my gran."

I nod, studying his icy blue eyes. He's incredibly handsome in an unassuming way. Most supernaturals are attractive, so that's nothing new, but there's something calming and gentle about his personality as a whole.

Or maybe he's very good at faking.

“How old are you?” I ask to fill the silence.

His lips tip up, and an almost cocky energy takes over his face. “How old do you think I am?”

I shrug. “A few years older than me?”

Cohen chuckles. “A little over five hundred. Math isn’t my forte, but I know I’m considerably older than you. Truthfully, I’m probably closer to five hundred and twenty by now.”

My eyes widen, and a shiver runs down my spine.

Witches and warlocks don’t have extended lifespans... Not unless they do dark magic that keeps their appearance youthful.

“It’s not what you think,” Cohen says quickly.

He doesn’t get to explain further as the sound of stomping feet approaching makes both of our heads swivel.

It’s the men from my vision—the ones who were with Delta. They slam in the front door and head down the hallway toward us.

Cohen hisses out a heavy breath and snags my hand, tugging me down the hallway. His magic swirls around us, and it must be concealing us from view. He pulls me into a spacious living room and cages me in as my back slams against the wall.

I’m not expecting the move, and a squeak escapes my lips.

Cohen wraps his hand around my mouth, flattening against me as the three men flood

into the room.

He's in a freaking sweater vest with a white-collared shirt popping out at the lapels and wrists.

Combined with the huge black-frame glasses, he seems studious or maybe a little nerdy.

My heart still races as his lithely muscled form pushes against mine.

He smells delicious in a way that's difficult to explain. It's light, almost like coconut and cream? Dammit, he smells like the vanilla coconut yogurt I eat every morning for breakfast. That must be why my mouth waters and he seems so familiar.

His blue eyes sparkle, and he dips his head, pulling his hand away. There's no reason I stretch to push my lips to his, but I still do. My magic thumps through my system, giving me a false sense of euphoria as Cohen's soft lips brush mine.

I'm shocked to realize I'm the one who shoves my tongue into his mouth, but he takes over, commanding the kiss. His fingers dig into my hip, and it's a good thing the wall and Cohen are responsible for keeping me upright, because my knees tremble almost violently.

Having four overprotective fathers and two brothers the exact same age I am has not done wonders for my dating life or romantic prospects. I can only hope I'm not embarrassing myself or showing my lack of experience.

"He's not fucking here," one of the men growls.

"Neither are the warlock and the fae," another replies.

“Do you think the lich portaled them out?” the third suggests.

“Not a clue, but it’s a possibility,” the first says. “Come on. There’s no use wasting time. Let’s regroup and see what the boss wants us to do.”

At some point while the men were talking, Cohen stopped kissing me. His cheek rests against mine, his glasses pushing into my nose. It’s a minor inconvenience at the least, and what I really wish is that he would kiss me again.

Commotion fills the air as the men leave, and my heart races.

What in the world have I gotten myself into?

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Chapter Seven

Rogue

At least we know the men are no longer following us. Unfortunately, two more safe houses produce no results. It's frustrating, and I'm tired.

I glance at the clock on the dash of Cohen's car. It's just after three in the morning, but I'm more rundown than normal. Although I'm accustomed to working until the sun comes up, the visions and all the siphoning I did with Gemma to start the night hit me harder than I was expecting.

"Calyx will pop in to check on me," Cohen says, pulling out of the driveway of the last house we visited. "Or he'll track down Lorcan and Anders, and they'll tell him to find me."

We've chatted on and off while searching, and I appreciate him filling me in.

It's just hard to believe Ember has multiple mates.

Ember and Velyn have been end-game goals for as long as I can remember.

It's a well-known fact that they're fated to be together, and I can't imagine what a shock it was to Velyn for him to learn he would have to share his mate.

Then again, there have been whispers for years of omegas coming back to the monster community, and I've seen it firsthand in Haven. With Ember's mom being

an omega, it's not impossible to imagine that she took after Emerson, but Ember's wolf is an alpha.

It's a known fact.

It's confusing when I think about it for too long, but Cohen seems to believe Ember's wolf is an alpha. It's just her human side that is an omega. I honestly can't imagine how complicated that would be to deal with. Each designation comes with its own personality traits—strengths and weaknesses.

"D-Did you want me to drop you off at your house?" Cohen asks, dragging me out of my thoughts. "Or are we headed somewhere else?"

My forehead wrinkles.

Normally, I have Gemma and Ember to bounce ideas off of.

Ember has always been more of the unofficial leader of our group. Only, she has her own shit to deal with at the moment. She just became prime alpha of the biggest pack in North America, meaning she won't be coming back to work at Owen's anytime soon.

If ever .

I could talk to Gemma, and I will as soon as I see her... It's complicated.

I love my sister.

She's amazing and supportive. And I still feel like everyone either does one of two things—they lump us together as one entity or they compare our gifts.

I'd also really like to figure this out on my own. If I can break this case, maybe Owen will start treating me like an actual employee.

"Would you mind taking me to the office?" I twist to face Cohen. "My job, I mean."

"Are you going to turn me in?" he asks, cutting his eyes to the side.

Shit.

I bet it does look like that.

"I wasn't planning on it, but I understand why you would be uncomfortable."

"What percentage of fae are you, Rogue?"

"My mother and father are both fae. My mother is Unseelie, and my father is Seelie."
I leave out that my mother is one of the heirs to the Throne of Faere.

My father was the Spring Prince before he stepped down, handing the throne to his younger brother.

"Which parent would you say you take after?" he asks with a lilt to his tone that I think speaks to humor.

"I'm a soothsayer like my father." I grimace, realizing I just told him all he needs to know. All Seelie fae are unable to lie, and to have my father's magic means I also inherited his inability to lie. I have a smidgen of my mother's magic, too, but I don't share that with the world.

"And you have no intention of turning me into the council?" Cohen asks flat out.

“Not tonight, anyway,” I say coolly.

“Fair enough, but I’d like to hear more about your assignment on the drive.” He turns on his blinker, glances both ways, and pulls out onto the highway.

I don’t know him well enough to make the assumption, but he seems levelheaded. Even his energy seems to calm mine, or maybe his magic soothes my own.

“Owen—my boss—works with the paranormal council. He takes contracts for suspects they want brought in,” I say, trying to determine how much is safe to share.

“A case came down for the Market Heist Crew. They’re robbing human establishments on the edges of sanctuary towns, and they seem to be hunkered down near Haven. ”

“I see,” Cohen says simply.

I swivel my head, waiting for him to go on, but he doesn’t.

“The same night, my boss gave Ember, Gemma, and me your friend’s file.” I study his profile, waiting for a physical reaction. None comes, and for some reason, I go on. “The Plague Doctor, seriously? What kind of nickname is that?”

“It’s not a chosen name,” Cohen says. “I can assure you of that. Calyx hates it. It was his profession at one time, and it just so happened to be when he first found his way onto the council’s radar. Although, that was hundreds of years ago.”

“It felt implied they were connected in some way. The Plague Doctor and the Market Heist Crew. I mean, that’s how I took it.”

“Calyx would have no reason to rob human establishments,” Cohen says. “When you

live for as long as he has, you amass ridiculous amounts of wealth. It's impossible not to."

"And he just bounces around dilapidated mansions for fun?" I ask, trying to hold back a laugh.

"This is going to sound rude, but please don't take it that way." He gives a tight smile before refocusing on the road. "You saw what Calyx wanted you and everyone else who stumbles across his hideouts to see."

I settle back against the seat, crossing my arms over my chest. That does make sense, and it's a little intimidating to realize he has so much power that my magic never realized the glamor until Cohen gave me access to what was really there...

If Calyx is that powerful, what would he have to gain from robbing human businesses?

Nothing is adding up.

Cohen pulls into the parking lot for Owen's and glances around as he puts the vehicle in park. He doesn't seem overly concerned, which could speak to his confidence in his own power, or it could be that he trusts in my inability to lie.

Not that I intend to turn him in, but he should know better than to rely on the second. At any point, I could simply change my mind.

He glances over, nodding to my pocket. "How about we exchange phone numbers in case we get separated?"

"Planning to ditch me?" I ask, because it's a legitimate option.

He shoves his thick black glasses back up his nose. “No, but if we do have to go our separate ways, it would make sense to have a backup plan to reconvene.”

I nod and pull my phone out.

We swap information, and I shove the device back into my pocket.

Swiveling my head until I can study Cohen once more, I try to parcel out what to say. “I’m not going to rat you out. I think there’s something bigger going on here.”

Cohen nods. “There often is.” He raises a pale hand, tucking my hair behind my ear. “The thing about power is, it garners enemies you may not even know you have. Calyx is...” He frowns, and his shoulders bounce. “He can be hard to deal with, but he’s loyal to a fault?—”

The world tilts, and my eyes widen.

Light, glowing magic fills the car, but it’s not coming from Cohen. He barely has time to grip my shoulder before everything changes.

It takes way too long to realize I’m falling through a portal, which just so happens to be even more disorientating than siphoning.

Siphoning occurs when a being like a demon or a djinn travels through a realm at will. It’s very much like turning to smoke in one spot and appearing in another.

Portals are different. They can be used to travel between realms. My mother can open a portal in the human realm and step through it, only to land in Faere.

Other beings are able to use portals to move through fixed locations in one realm, but I’ve never had someone open a portal and pull other people through it.

Not unless the person who opened the portal was with us here.

Then they could theoretically grab us and pull us through, but it's clear Cohen didn't open the portal and I certainly didn't, either.

I didn't even know it was possible for someone to do this.

There's really only one explanation.

Calyx.

Cohen wraps his arms around me while we're spiraling through the ether, and he's the only thing that keeps me upright once we land.

We wobble, and Cohen's hands tighten on my hips.

"I had a feeling that if I called for you, you'd bring a lovely surprise." The voice is low and gravelly.

My head whips to the side.

Shaggy black hair dances in the wind as the portal folds in on itself, disappearing from view.

The man is covered in those dark runes that I attempted to study at the human bar.

There's no doubt in my mind.

This has to be Calyx.

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Chapter Eight

Calyx

My hands clasp in front of me as I wait for Cohen to make his appearance.

My night was going fine, but it took a turn toward strange. After more than a millennium of life in some form, I've seen nearly everything there is to see. Nothing holds that exciting zing anymore. Not when I've done everything there is to do.

In all honesty, I'm fairly sure there's nothing for my kind after this existence. I'm too much of a coward to find out, and in some centuries, that's all that's kept me hanging on to the boring monotony of life.

Well, that and the thought of leaving my friends unprotected.

Cohen appears from nothing, and to my delight, he has the pretty fae wrapped up in his arms.

A slow smile crosses my face as he holds her to his chest with a hand on her ass and the other on her lower back.

I always knew he could do it if given the chance. I've never seen him woo a woman, but he's got that sheltered, gentle energy that ladies can't help but be attracted to.

Cohen is always a gentleman. I can't wait to experience the joy of watching him court a woman. Is that still what the kids are calling it these days?

Anyway, I think he and Rogue will make a fine couple. If she's my mate, she'll have to accept my thrall as part of our bonding.

Speaking of the lovely fae, she's looking a bit green.

I step forward, intending to help if she's about to be sick. My magic is jarring for those who aren't expecting it.

Her bright gray eyes meet mine, and my magic pulses with a yearning I've never experienced. It aches to cradle her in its touch, which is bizarre but not unwelcome. It's as enamored as I am, which makes me practically giddy.

"I had a feeling that if I called for you, you'd bring a lovely surprise," I say to Cohen.

The pretty fae's head swivels, and she's just as stunning as she was in the bar earlier. All I intended to do was to watch over Lorcan. He's been playing a bit of a dangerous game with the council's lackeys, but I stumbled upon something so much more interesting.

Someone, if you want to be exact.

"My apologies. I prefer to offer a warning before portaling, but our circumstances didn't allow for that this time," I say to hopefully break the ice. "The three of us need to have a chat, and I had to be sure the two of you weren't followed."

"Where are we?" Rogue asks, blinking repeatedly. "What happened?"

Her eyes sparkle in the low moonlight, and I lick my lips.

Gods, she is gorgeous.

“You arrived safely, and the three of us are overdue for a conversation,” I say, clapping and rubbing my hands together.

“Come along. The sithen will offer more comfort than being out here in the elements.” I gesture toward the newly formed home and head off before they can pepper me with questions I don’t have answers for.

“I’ve never been here, either, so I have no idea,” Cohen whispers from behind me as I lead my guests inside the mansion.

Okay, it’s currently a baby manor, but with time and nurturing, it will grow.

It’s a bit like a garden.

It only needs a little love and attention to blossom to its full capacity.

“What the hell was that?” Rogue croaks.

I spin around, my head tilting. “What do you mean?”

“I stepped over the threshold, and it zapped me.” The pretty fae points, rolling her bright gray eyes. “I’ve never felt anything like that. It was almost like the shock you get?—”

“That would be the house welcoming you.” I gesture over my shoulder to the living room. “Why don’t we have a seat?”

“Yeah, of course, that makes perfect sense. It was the house welcoming me with a couple hundred volts of electricity.” Rogue scoffs.

I grin, shaking my head.

Of course she's feisty.

The universe would offer me no less in a mate.

Turning around, I shuffle into the living room and glance at the furniture and wall hangings.

When I entered earlier, it was bare.

It changed to accommodate my preferences, but I'm interested to see what happens now that the lady of the house is present.

I take a seat on the leather club chair, and Cohen and Rogue settle on the leather couch. My ass barely has a chance to attempt to form a groove before the chair melts from under me.

Luckily my magic comes to my aid, preventing me from landing against the wooden flooring.

The entire ambiance of the room changes as the house morphs to adjust to Rogue's preferences.

Gone is the dark-brown leather furniture that suited my tastes. In its place is a lovely charcoal-gray fabric sectional with a lounger on each end. Apparently my chair interfered with her design choices.

Using my magic, I guide myself to the new matching club chair and settle against the plush, oversized cushion.

"What just happened?" Rogue glances between Cohen and me with a look of utter confusion plastered to her face.

Cohen isn't in any better shape. His mouth opens and closes a bit like a fish out of water.

I chuckle. "That would be the sithen adjusting to account for your preferences."

"The sithen?" Rogue repeats the word like she's never heard it before.

"Yes," I agree, nodding. "A fairy mound? Occasionally they've been known to transform into dwellings, such as the one we find ourselves in at the moment."

"This is a fairy mound?" Cohen asks, tilting his head as he appraises the room. He loves anything unique or unknown, and I'm sure it will spark a hyperfixation as he learns all there is to be known about sithens.

"This is a physical manifestation of the energy that connects the human and the fae realm," I clarify. "A portal, of sorts. Others might call it a way station, but only the keeper of the mound can determine who is or isn't worthy of passing through the veil."

"And that's you?" my sweet fae asks. The wrinkling of her pert nose might indicate she's having a hard time believing anything would deem me to be an accurate judge of character.

"I'm afraid not, princess." I smirk, nodding toward her. "My ancestors may have roots in Faere, but my connection to it has worn so thin..." My head shakes. "No, the house doesn't view me as its protector."

"I'm so confused," Rogue says, falling back against the couch cushions. "I'm just here to find out why the paranormal council wants you brought in."

I chuckle as Cohen reaches over, offering her thigh a gentle pat. See, he's got a

natural charm without even trying. It's in his nature to comfort those around him, and I believe he'll be a decent buffer between Rogue and me until she can grow comfortable with me.

"It could be a wide variety of reasons," I say to get myself back on track. "I've been called upon over the centuries to fix any number of the council's mistakes."

Although that is slightly misleading.

I have a feeling I know what the issue is, but I do have a flare for dramatics. Revealing pieces of the puzzle as we go will keep up her interest. If I play my cards right, it will also give me a little extra time to woo my mate.

"That wasn't the feeling I got when I was assigned your case," the fae princess says, giving me a pointed look.

"Yes, well, something very dear to me was stolen during our voyage to America," I say, in turn looking at Cohen. He knows what was taken and how valuable it is.

In the wrong hands, my phylactery can wreak havoc. It only imparts a sliver of my magic on whoever physically controls the jar, but even that is enough to cause turmoil. Not to mention the whole if someone kills me, I resurrect nearby my phylactery thing.

As my body reforms, it's the most vulnerable I ever am.

If someone were to destroy my phylactery and my new vessel before my consciousness reanimated the body, I'd be cooked.

Essentially, I would cease to exist.

Or perhaps even more terrifying a thought, I could be a spectre. Forced to roam the human realm with no physical form. No, none of that sounds appealing in the least.

Especially when the universe has finally decided to grace me with a gift in the form of my other half.

“I heard the men who were following us call you a lich.” Rogue licks her pretty pink lips, and my cock takes notice. “That’s one species I’m completely unfamiliar with.”

Cohen chokes on his own spit.

A dangerous smile crosses my face. “Is that right?”

“Are you going to impart some details on your species?” the fae asks with a huff.

“Or should I do a quick internet search? I know a reaper I could call.” She grins right back, and it’s an equally cutting smile.

“He’s ancient. Wraith has a wealth of information about every kind of supernatural there is. ”

“Name dropping knowing a reaper.” I can’t help the chuckle that escapes my lips. “Do I frighten you, princess?”

“I would like to know why you keep calling me that,” she grinds out, ignoring my question.

Ahh, that would be because my vision of her in the bar was very enlightening.

It deemed it necessary to show me her full lineage, all the way back to her roots in Faere.

I know all about how Rogue's mother was supposed to rule Faere, only the throne passed to her younger sister.

Rogue's father is a prince who ruled over Spring Court for a time before handing things off to his younger brother.

Leaning forward in my chair, I stretch an arm out and extend my tattooed hand. "If you interlock your fingers with mine, I'll be happy to show you what I saw during our vision at the bar."

"You have the power to recall visions?" Rogue asks, untangling her crossed arms. "I still don't understand how you saw me. I was there several hours after you—" Her words cut off as I push our palms together, weaving my fingers between hers.

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Chapter Nine

Rogue

I saw nothing at the bar, outside of Ember and Lorcan. Well, I saw Calyx, too, but I didn't see any additional visions when we touched. I only saw the memory of Ember's meeting with her new mate.

Calyx's skin is cold against mine as he links our fingers.

Sure enough, I'm pulled into a kaleidoscope of images never lasting longer than a second.

There are flashes of me with my family when I was a multitude of different ages.

Images of my father and mother in Faere come next.

These play out for longer periods of time, and an awareness of what I'm seeing seems to flood my consciousness as I watch history transpire.

Sometimes I get flickers of knowing what's occurring during a vision, but never anything like the all-encompassing understanding I gain of my mother's and father's history in Faere.

It's all things I've heard before, but relearning them in the vision or memory leads me to believe Calyx was also given all the complexities of my family's history.

Well, I guess that explains why he calls me princess.

The past morphs into what I can only assume is the future as an intimate scene plays out.

Cohen lies on top of me in a bed with fluffy pillows and a plush comforter wrapped around his hips. I can't see any of his parts with the material of the blanket covering his ass, but I'm outside of myself, watching as he moves.

It's very clear what's happening, and I'm not sure how I feel about it. He and I just met, but we are visibly having sex in the vision Calyx shares with me.

My mouth falls, and my breasts jiggle with each snap of Cohen's hips. He groans, and the version of me in the vision sobs.

It's always disorienting to view a vision through someone else's eyes or as an outside party, but seeing the way my fingers dig into Cohen's shoulders as he dips his mouth to mine is so intimate, it sends a shiver down my spine.

The image changes again, and this time I stare up at Calyx as he steps into a portal, dragging me with him. It's just the two of us, and my whole body stiffens as his features melt and change until I'm looking at a completely different version of the lich.

This is his monster —the thought rings in my mind.

It's easy to tell it's Calyx, but a bluish tint graces his skin—in the places he still has it—it's alarming.

All of his tattoos stay in the same places and his hair remains as it was, but his face becomes a skeleton with only several muscles or tendons keeping it together.

Seeing his eyeballs float in the black abyss of his eye sockets is a different kind of frightening.

I struggle, trying to back away from him, but his hand tightens on my lower back.

He chuckles darkly. “Now you know what a lich looks like.”

Back in the real world, Calyx breaks contact.

My jaw falls as my hand lands in my lap with a thunk . “Holy shit.”

“Does my true appearance frighten you?” Calyx asks, sounding amused.

“I’ve seen worse,” I say, forcing steel into my tone. “What I need is information about what was stolen from you.”

“My phylactery,” Calyx says, stretching back against chair he’s perched on.

“That would be the vessel that holds my heart.” He rolls his bright gray eyes.

“I suppose some would call it my soul, but I view it as the basis of my magic. I’m unable to portal my phylactery.

Who knows why? It would make life so much easier if moving and storing it through a portal was possible, but it’s just not. ”

“Someone stole your magic?” I ask, blinking repeatedly. “What kind of magic does a lich possess?”

“Someone stole a sliver of my magic,” Calyx corrects. “At one point, I was very much like you.” His shoulder rises as he shrugs. “I started as a high fae with oracle

abilities.”

“You were a soothsayer?” Rogue’s eyes widen, and she carefully studies my features.

“A few thousand years ago, long before even your mother’s mother’s reign.” His messy black hair falls around his face as he nods. “Yes, but Unseelie. I abandoned my connection to Faere once in the human realm.”

“Your ears are round.” I tilt my head and lean to the side, trying to make sure I didn’t miss a set of pointy ears.

“They are,” he agrees. “This is far from the first vessel I’ve built for myself. If you’d like me to retain the pointed ears, I can make a mental note of that for next time I resurrect.”

“I don’t know what any of that means.” My heart thunders as my magic yearns to burst from my skin to brush over the tips of his ears.

It’s never been as insistent about wanting to be close to another person as it has been since meeting Cohen and Calyx.

It’s unsettling.

Normally I count on it to be on the same page as me.

When Cohen sighs from next to me, I turn his way. “Think of a vampire. They have the ability to heal their body from nearly any injury, no matter how grave. A lich is similar, but if their physical form becomes damaged past the point of no return, their magic will simply rebuild a new vessel.”

“A brand-new body?” I ask, trying to recall if I’ve ever heard of a creature who could

do that.

“Exactly,” Calyx says. “As long as my phylactery remains safe, I will re-form close to it, which is why it’s imperative that I locate it.

If something or someone wished to eradicate me completely, they would first need to destroy the jar containing my soul and then damage this physical form beyond repair.
”

“So someone stole your special soul jar to control a tiny piece of your magic?” I ask to ensure I’m following along. “And if they destroy your jar, it’s the first step to killing you?”

Calyx booms a laugh. “Are you plotting ways to get rid of me already, darling?”

“Christ,” Cohen mutters.

“As long as one or the other remains unharmed, I would be fine. It’s a pain in the ass to go through the steps necessary to create a new phylactery, but if the jar itself was damaged, my essence would return to me.

In order for someone to wipe me out, this body would need to be destroyed completely before I had the chance to absorb my remaining magic.

It would have to be a very quick process.

” Calyx shrugs. “And yes, that’s my best guess.

Someone wanted to control my magic, and they concocted a plan to make that happen.

Very few people would even know what they were looking at if they stumbled across it, but that's not what happened.

Whoever took it knew what they were after.

It was stolen from the boat we used to get to America. ”

Cohen takes over explaining how Anders's sister's mate was murdered. It prompted Anders to come support his sister and nephew as they grieved, which also brings up Aimes—the awful alpha Ember fought and won against earlier tonight.

My skull throbs as I try to comprehend how much has changed in the last twenty-four hours.

“Lorcan, Calyx, and I made the decision to come with Anders,” Cohen says, turning toward me. “Are you okay? You look exhausted. Would you like me to find you something to eat or drink?”

A grateful smile crosses my face. He's very sweet, and we haven't even had the chance to address the quick kiss that took place earlier. Every time his magic touches me, it feels familiar on a soul-deep level.

Could that be what prompted him to kiss me in the second abandoned house?

It's possible.

My magic is as enamored with him as his seems to be with me.

“I'm okay,” I assure him. “What I really need is to get to the bottom of this.”

And to fall into a coma and sleep for about twelve hours once I do, but I keep that

part to myself.

“It’s very simple, really.” Calyx raises a black brow.

“Lorcan and I are aware of the council’s interest—although we have differing opinions on what prompted said interest.” He looks at Cohen.

“While you’ve been watching over Anders, he and I have been searching for clues on where my phylactery is being kept.

I did wonder why he was so obsessed with playing games with the pretty agent tasked with bringing me in.

Knowing she’s his mate adds an additional layer of clarity to things.

” He chuckles almost fondly. “But that’s neither here nor there.

I believe whoever is behind the Market Heist Crew is also behind the theft of my phylactery.

It also explains why the council is after me when I’ve done nothing. ”

Cohen nods, shoving up his glasses. “Your magic residue would be all over the crimes, especially if they’re using your power to reanimate vessels to do their bidding.”

“Reanimate?” I whisper.

“Lich are powerful necromancers,” Cohen says, nodding at Calyx. “There are something like five or six left in the world.”

Wow.

I had no idea.

“How about a small presentation?” Calyx’s eyes glow.

“A presentation isn’t necessary,” I say, shoving myself off the couch.

I’m not sure where I plan to go, since I’m not capable of portaling myself out of here, but I have no interest in coming face-to-face with a zombie.

Cohen hits his feet next to me, but I whirl around as the front door opens deeper in the house.

It’s almost comically loud with how quiet this place is.

The clicking of nails on the wooden flooring of the hallway makes goose bumps rise on my skin.

There are a lot of things I conjure in my mind as possibilities for what could be coming down that hallway.

Not one of them is a brilliant white tiger.

My jaw falls, and I stumble back a step as its eyes meet mine. It looks like a living, breathing creature, but something in its milky white stare makes it easy to believe Calyx’s magic is flowing through its veins.

“That’s Ash.” Cohen’s hands land on my hips, and he gets close to my ear from behind. “She’s not a threat to you.”

“She could do some real damage if she wanted to, but Cohen is correct.” When Calyx leans back in his chair, the massive animal bounds into his lap like a house cat.

“Contrary to popular belief, white tigers are not albino, and they are not their own species. They come from a double recessive trait, and for many centuries, they were inbred to continue what was seen as a desirable appearance for personal collections.” The lich chuckles as the giant cat bumps her head against his.

He finally gives in and offers scratches as her tongue flicks out, lapping at his cheek.

“Ash was kept in extremely unfortunate conditions until I slaughtered her previous owners, rescuing her in the process. She was little more than a cub. She spent her entire life at my side until she was murdered trying to protect me.”

“You keep a zombie cat as a pet?” I choke out.

“Absolutely not,” Calyx says, sounding indignant.

“She’s a revenant. Fully capable of having her own thoughts and feelings.

My magic simply reanimated her, and through it she continues to live—albeit in short bursts.

Keeping her with me at all times would drain my magic much too quickly, but this is a happy medium for all of us. ”

Okay, so, that might be the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard. Especially with the fond way the tiger laps at Calyx’s cheek. She obviously trusts him completely because he wasn’t lying when he said she had her own thoughts and feelings. My magic would have sensed it if he was being deceptive.

“Down, you furry beast.” Calyx chuckles, patting Ash’s head.

The tiger’s claws click as they meet the wooden flooring once more.

The lich hits his feet next to the regal animal while I’m still frozen in shock.

“I need to introduce you to someone. Although, I’m sure you’ve already sensed the connection, as you did with Cohen. ”

Cohen’s hand tightens on my lower back.

“Ash, meet Rogue,” Calyx says, grinning a little too widely. “Mate, meet Ash. As I mentioned, she’s fueled by my magic. You have no reason to be afraid.”

Did he just say mate?

And why does my magic fly from my skin, aching to greet the revenant?

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Chapter Ten

Cohen

“I ’m sorry,” Rogue squeaks. “Did you say mate ?”

Calyx has the tact of a wrecking ball.

I really should have seen this coming.

“Yes, darling.” Calyx nods as Ash prowls closer, giving Rogue a cursory sniff.

Rogue’s magic spills from her skin and dances over Ash’s fur.

That tiger is a sucker for scratches. I’m not sure Rogue even instructed her magic to act, based on the look of betrayal that she shoots at her hands.

“See, even your magic recognizes mine. It wants to play .” He purposely makes the word sound sexual, and I sigh.

Rogue’s hand shakes as she reaches down, brushing it over Ash’s fur.

I’m just behind her, and the overwhelming need to comfort her washes over me from nowhere. Sliding my fingers down her arm, I join her in petting the tiger.

“I knew she would recognize you,” Calyx says, sounding especially pleased. “Cohen only met her as the revenant version of herself that you see now, but Ash immediately

acknowledged our connection.”

Rogue’s head twists, and she glances at me over her shoulder. “Wait, are you two mates as well?”

“I like the as well. It implies you’ve already accepted our connection.” Calyx laughs. “But no, Cohen is my thrall.”

I grimace like I do every time I hear the word. It has negative connotations, mostly related to vampires and their human blood bags. The donor gets a hit of euphoria every time the vampire feeds, and it can lead to ugly addictions if both parties aren’t careful and watchful.

My situation with Calyx is very different, but it’s also what a lich calls someone tethered to them via their magic.

I’m not a revenant, solely because Lorcan was able to administer CPR and resuscitate me prior to the spell being finalized.

“I drowned,” I tell Rogue with a shrug. “Calyx was in the process of tethering my soul to his to bring me back when Lorcan resuscitated me.”

We met Anders the same way.

I spotted him off the bow of the boat we were on, and Lorcan and I saved him.

The memories of my own drowning—albeit much more severe than Anders’s—were still fresh.

We became fast friends, and Calyx and Lorcan welcomed him into the fold.

He never actually died, so it was unnecessary for Calyx to link their life forces in the way he did for ours.

“There weren’t hospitals or medical treatments such as the ones available now,” Calyx says softly. “If I hadn’t finalized the spell, he would have died a painful death by, for a lack of a better term, dry drowning. It’s a truly excruciating experience, and with the amount of fluid in his lungs...”

“That’s how you’re so old,” Rogue says, nodding. “So the two of you are a package deal. Got it.”

“Four, actually.” Calyx smirks, and her head tilts to study his face.

“I’m a firm believer that pets are part of the family.

I have two. You’ve met Ash. We’ll save Dusk for another time.

He’s temperamental in new places, and I need to give him the opportunity to explore the property before springing a new mate on him. ”

Something between a snort and a scoff leaves Rogue’s lips.

“I’m sure you’re exhausted.” I slide a hand around her middle, pulling her back to my chest while I contemplate how to offset Calyx’s personal level of crazy. “It’s been a long day, and it must be closer to dawn than midnight. Would you like me to take you home?”

The floor rumbles under my feet, and I lose contact with Rogue as I’m thrown against the fireplace with no warning.

I groan and flail, trying to figure out what the hell just happened.

A fire poker is all I see when I right my glasses, and it's aiming straight at my forehead.

My magic flies out in an attempt to deflect the deadly object, but it's Calyx who appears in front of me. He raises a hand as his skin gains the bluish tint that signals he's using his magic. The smoky tendrils of his power wrap around the fire poker, and he tosses it to the ground telepathically.

"I understand your frustration," Calyx says, but I have no fucking clue who he's speaking to. "But I won't stand for anyone or anything harming my thrall." He spins around, offering me a hand.

When I take it, he pulls me up. "What the hell was that?"

Rogue appears next to me, and she stretches up to fix my glasses that are askew once more.

"The house views itself as Rogue's home." Calyx shrugs. "It was displeased with your offer to help her leave."

"What?" Rogue croaks.

"The sithen views you as its protector." Calyx turns to face her. "It will allow you to leave for short bursts of time, but the longer you're on the property, the more you'll strengthen its power, and it will, in turn, boost your magic."

"The house thinks it owns me because you've delusionally convinced yourself that you're my mate?" she asks, jabbing a finger at the lich's chest.

"No, princess." Calyx sighs. "We've been over this."

The sithen has nothing to do with me. I believe it called to me first, simply because I was receptive, but even the small amount of my power that it drained to create this is unsustainable.

The symbiotic relationship that it needs to thrive can't be formed with just anyone.

It needs access to your magic to grow into what it's destined to become... ”

“Cohen is right. It's been a long day.” Rogue sidesteps Calyx. “I need rest. Everything will make more sense in the morning.”

“Did you want me to—” I cut off when Rogue turns around, slapping a hand over my mouth.

“No, don't risk it. I'll stay here for tonight,” she says, projecting her voice like she wants to ensure the house hears. “But I have to work tomorrow, and there's no getting out of that. Hopefully the house will be content with me sleeping here for eight or so hours.”

A fire bursts into existence in the fireplace just behind me, and I squawk, jumping away before my clothing can catch fire.

I've never seen a sentient house before.

Knowledge is kinda my thing.

I love to learn and research all there is to know about something.

So, on one hand, I find this place fascinating.

On the other, it's kind of terrifying.

It's a bit more spiteful than I prefer my houses—or any place I intend to sleep, for that matter.

Some exploring garners three bedrooms on the second floor. One is much larger than the other two, with a four-poster-style queen bed and an attached bathroom.

Calyx dismissed Ash when he stepped in to save me with the fire poker, and he leans against the doorframe as Rogue peeks around the room.

“The armoire to your right should provide you with anything you ask of it. Just make sure to be specific when imagining a clothing article, or you might find yourself with a granny-style sleep dress like they wear in Faere.”

No matter the style, Rogue would be gorgeous in whatever she wore, but I can also understand that everyone has their own preferences.

“Thanks.” She pulls her phone from her pocket. “What I could really use would be a charger for this.”

The atmosphere in the room sizzles, and a phone charger forms on the end table next to the bed.

“Okay, that's weird as shit,” Rogue whispers. “But amazing. Thank you.” Her head shakes. “I just thanked the house. Wow. I really need a solid night of sleep.”

“We'll get out of your way.” I shove my hands into my pockets and stride toward the door. “I'll take the room right across the hall. Um, that's where I'll be if you need anything.”

“Thanks, Cohen,” she says from behind me. The sultry tone of her voice sends a shiver down my spine that settles right in my dick.

Christ.

I've gone over five-hundred years never feeling true attraction for another person.

What a hell of a time to discover I can feel sexual desire.

At some point, we should likely discuss that kiss, but for now, she needs to rest and recuperate.

And, hell, so do I.

It's been an incredibly long day.

Calyx moves to lean against the wall opposite Rogue's room, and the door closes behind me with a soft click.

"You know, I spent several hours earlier today lamenting the fact Anders and Lorcan will have new loyalties with their new packmates. We've been a unit for, what?

Two hundred years?" He grins, shoving off the wall.

"They'll be hunkering down with the pretty she-wolf as she announces to the world alpha-omega hybrids exist." He steps over, tossing an arm around my shoulder.

"But I believe the universe has exciting things planned for us as well."

I snort, shoving up my glasses.

Sleep is calling my name, but the first thing on my list will be learning more about sithens.

Calyx squeezes my shoulder. “You could have called for me if you needed me. There’s no point in waiting for me to summon you.” His bite on my throat radiates with warmth, proving our connection.

And his words are true.

I can summon him through the bondmark that links us together.

“You just wanted one-on-one time with our mate.” He laughs. “Not that I blame you. She is quite alluring.”

That she is, but she’s not my mate.

Technically speaking, she’s Calyx’s. And while I do feel a deep level of connection to her, I’m not sure she’s as sold on me. That could lead to disastrous consequences if she were to ask Calyx to release me.

If he undid our tether, I would simply cease to exist.

I know enough about how deep the bond is between soulmates, and fae are said to be even more territorial than shifters when it comes to their fated mates.

Rogue might prefer not to have to deal with her mate’s thrall at all, but I suppose that’s a worry for tomorrow.

I have bigger issues that need to be addressed—first being that Calyx was dead in the vision Rogue and I shared.

I frown, shaking my head. “I need to tell you about what I saw...”

Chapter Eleven

Rogue

The bed is beyond comfortable, but I struggle to fall asleep deeply. I didn't lie down until after four, and at some time mid-morning, the blinds in my bedroom open.

Light fills the room, waking me out of my slumber.

I pull a pillow over my face and do my best to fall back asleep, but the bed's firmness increases until I feel like I'm sleeping on bricks. This leads to a very cranky version of myself crawling from beneath the blanket.

I shower, dress with what's provided from the armoire, and check my phone.

Gemma texted from Velyn's phone only a few minutes ago. The trip to collect clothes and things from Ember's house must have taken much longer than she anticipated since it's just after ten a.m.

I'm not surprised, though.

Ember's family is insanely protective—maybe even more so than my family pack. However, Ember has to prove to the wolves that she can defend her claim on her own. If she doesn't, someone will challenge her.

I'm sure Velyn will get through to her family and make sure they understand the circumstances she's dealing with.

I text Gemma, letting her know I'm fine and still working the case, but leave out all the details about finding Calyx and the house.

I'm not surprised when my phone rings thirty seconds after I send the text, and I roll my shoulders back in preparation for the fight I know is coming.

She's going to want to siphon to me as soon as she's done with Veryn and Ember. It's not only my magic, but also something deep inside me that's uncomfortable with that thought.

Much like Ember has to prove her ability to rule the North American Pack, it feels a lot like this case is my chance to prove that I'm a capable adult.

I exhale heavily and answer the call.

By the time I've assured my sister I'm fine for the hundredth time, as well as fielded about a million questions about the, in her words, off the charts chemistry between me and a certain warlock, it's almost eleven.

I check my appearance one final time in the mirror over the vanity and take note of how rundown I'm feeling.

Usually I wake refreshed, no matter how many hours I sleep a night. I've always considered it a perk of my fae lineage, but there are dark circles under my eyes that seem to indicate I could have used a few more hours to rest.

Exiting the room, I aim for the stairs while contemplating if what Calyx said could be true.

Is the house feeding off my magic?

If so, could that be what has me feeling like a human after an alcohol bender? Even when I've had human beer or wine on occasion, it hasn't affected my system at all. Fae spring wine is much more potent and would impact my system more heavily, but I've always avoided it.

I prefer to be in control of myself and my faculties.

After one wrong turn, I find the kitchen, the smell of food cooking an excellent guide.

I come around the corner and stop dead in my tracks.

Cohen is at the stove, flipping something in a pan. He's only in low-slung sweatpants, and every move shows off his lithely muscled back. He even has those sexy dimples just above his ass.

I lean against the doorframe as he steps to the side and grabs a plate.

Replays of our amazing kiss flit through my mind, and I lick my lips as I recall the way he pressed me against the wall.

An uncalled for jolt of arousal rips through my system. My nipples tighten as my clit pulses, and my lower stomach throbs. It's so unexpected that I pull a hand to my pelvis, pushing back against the discomfort.

The stove being in use must have ratcheted up the temperature in the kitchen. Sweat beads on my forehead and between my breasts.

The overwhelming urge to tackle Cohen washes over me from nowhere, and my hand digs into the wood framing the doorway to keep myself from pouncing.

What the hell is going on?

I haven't the first idea, but I don't get to ponder it for very long.

The warlock senses my presence, and he spins around, offering a welcoming smile.

"Good morning," he says cheerily. "I made pancakes and hash browns. Do you eat meat? Most fae are vegetarians, at least from what I've heard.

"He doesn't have bulging muscles like a shifter would, but his chest and abs are as well-defined as his back, and my mouth waters with the urge to lick the curves of his abs and obliques. "Rogue?"

The spatula lands against the plate with a clack .

Cohen spins toward me and strides across the room, studying my face as he moves. "Your eyes are red. Are you feeling okay?"

It gets hard to breathe the closer he gets, and by the time he comes to a stop in front of me, my chest rises and falls with rapid pants.

He brushes the backs of his fingers over my cheek and tucks my hair behind my ear. "Did you not sleep well?"

I swallow thickly, mesmerized by his blue eyes. They're so expressive, and even his thick glasses can't distract from that. "I slept okay, but I woke up feeling worn down. Was what Calyx said about the house accurate? Could it be draining my magic?"

Cohen's hand moves to my forehead, and his brow furrows even more deeply.

"Even if it is, that should be a symbiotic relationship. It shouldn't have negative effects on your health.

That would only encourage you to distance yourself from it.

” He steps back, glancing over his shoulder at the stove.

“I need to turn down the burners, but give me a minute, and I’ll find Calyx.

He’s out allowing Dusk to scent the property.

” He moves closer once more and grabs my hands.

“Have a seat. I can get you some juice. Maybe you’re experiencing low blood sugar?
”

His concern makes me smile, even though the thought is illogical. I don’t suffer from the same ailments a human would, but knowing he cares makes my insides light up as he guides me to the table.

I’ve never had a man look after me before, but I think I like it.

The giant gray wolf that trots in after Calyx takes my breath away. Even more than with Ash, just looking at Dusk proves he’s something unnatural. His eyes are bright white, and there’s an intelligence behind them that would normally lead me to believe that he’s a shifter.

“Dusk is a dire wolf,” Calyx says, coming to a stop in front of the chair I’m sitting in.

Cohen beelines toward the stove while the wolf clacks across the tile floor, aiming for me. His upper lip pulls back as he licks his impressive teeth, and I scoot deeper into the chair like I can will it to make more space for me.

Calyx chuckles. “He’s powered by my magic. While he is a temperamental fuck, he’s

not going to hurt you. In fact, he's quite jealous Ash got the first introduction." His cool hands settle on my face, and he turns my gaze until my eyes meet his. "Now, tell me. What's bothering you?"

"I'm okay." I shrug. "I'm a little fatigued. My eyes burn, and I think I might be running a slight temperature. I've never been sick a day in my life. Does this have something to do with the house?"

Dusk sits next to my chair and places his massive head in my lap.

My magic pulses in delight, spilling from my skin to greet the dire wolf, but I can't look away from Calyx.

"I don't believe so." His gray eyes glowing, the lich leans closer as his nostrils flare.

"Hmm, you smell sweeter than I remember from last night, and your skin is warm to the touch. When is your quickening to be expected?" His messy black hair falls around his face as he stares up at me from where he's squatting.

My teeth dig into my lower lip as my head shakes.

That can't be it.

Fae have a period of hyper fertility, very much like when a shifter goes into heat. It's called the quickening, and it's a very intimate time in a female fae's life. We build safe places called nests and fill them with soft fabrics, pillows, and our chosen partners or mates.

Our bodies release a special type of pheromone that bonds us even more deeply to our partners.

The entire goal is to help aid in conception, and it doesn't start until the fae is between eighty and one hundred years old.

I'm nowhere close to that.

If the quickening doesn't end in conception, the fae experiences a week of bleeding similar to how human women have menstruation. During that time, the fae's partners will look after and care for her as she recuperates.

"How soon do you expect your quickening?" Calyx asks, studying me carefully.

"I don't know." I scoff. "Like another sixty or eighty years. I'm nowhere close to the age when it normally begins."

"Gods." Calyx's mouth opens and closes several times as his head tilts. "Right now, I am greatly questioning the universe's decision-making abilities."

"I'm of age." I frown, slap his hands away from my face, and cross my arms. "Time moves differently here than it does in Faere. I grew much more rapidly than fledglings do in the fae realm. My parents decided they would consider adulthood as the humans do for me and my siblings. I'm over eighteen.

"I leave out the part mentioning I've only been for a year and a half.

"Yes, well," Calyx says with a snort, "far be it from me to go against fate's wishes."

Cohen walks to the table with plates of food in each hand. He drops one next to me on the table and places the other down before stepping around Dusk. Pulling out the chair adjacent to mine, he takes a seat. "Do you know what it could be if it's not her quickening?"

The massive dire wolf lifts his head from my lap and sniffs at the food Cohen just put down.

Calyx pats my thigh and stands. “The sithen has a direct connection to the magic of Faere. We’re quite literally in the veil between realms here.

The house draws on the essence of the tree of souls in Faere to anchor it in the fae realm, and it will have some connection to whatever deep magic anchors the human realm.

” He shrugs, heading to the stove. “Don’t ask me what that magic source is.

I truly don’t know. The human realm is much more removed from its roots than the fae or demon realms.” He grabs a pancake and takes a bite.

“I’m guessing the one-two punch of meeting your fated mate and having a mainline connection to the power of Faere has jump-started your fae genetics. ”

My jaw falls.

I haven’t even let myself focus on the insanity he spewed last night, but I do feel some deep connection to both Calyx and Cohen.

The thought sparks an image of Owen, and my stomach twists in knots.

I’ve had kind of an unhealthy crush on him for as long as I can remember, and some piece of me always wondered if he could be my mate.

He’s treated me as nothing more than an employee.

He puts up with me because he’s friends with my dad, but my heart would never let

me give up hope that all of that might change one day.

And that line of thinking brings back the realization... I have a case to solve.

Calyx is still wanted by the paranormal council. His phylactery is still missing. And I still think Delta is a snake, who could have more to do with both than any of us know.

“I need to go to work,” I say, exhaling heavily. “I have to talk to my boss and see if I can gain extra information about why the council is after you.”

Cohen drops his fork and frowns. “That seems dangerous. You’re not feeling yourself, and we can’t go with you.”

“Well, I could,” Calyx says, accentuating the word. “Not in my current form, but I can locate a vessel with little trouble.”

“I have no idea what that means,” I mutter, though he likely already knows that.

“Necromancer, princess.” Calyx’s gray eyes sparkle mischievously as he points at his chest. “I can take over any form that I reanimate.”

I can feel my eyes bug. “I don’t think I’m ready to see all that, but I’ll be safe at Owen’s. I just have no idea how I’ll get there.”

Cohen puts his glass back on the table. “Don’t worry. We can help with that.”

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Chapter Twelve

Owen

My temples ache as I rest my head in my palms. This entire week has been one thing after another to the point my nerves are fried. My bear is always a pain in the ass, but he's been a petulant dick to the point I'm plotting ways to have him plucked out of my skull. Too bad it's an impossibility.

The magic that gave me eternal life did so at a cost. I may hide as a simple bear shifter, but my history is much more complicated than that.

A little over thirteen hundred years ago, I was simply a man.

A Viking warrior like all my people. Up until the witches found a way to meld us into even more formidable weapons.

Though it wasn't always the case, there's almost no connection between myself and my beast now.

I'm fully to blame for the disconnect. I've kept him locked away for so long that we essentially hate one another, but he's not a normal bear.

Berserkers were hunted nearly out of existence when our creators realized they couldn't control their creation.

For many hundreds of years, it was unsafe for me to shift.

When someone sees my bear, they can instantly tell he's not a normal beast. Enough centuries have passed that we're no longer actively hunted, but the trust between my animal and human sides long ago disintegrated.

If I were to let him out now, there's no guarantee he would ever return the reins, and he would immediately go after his mate. Which would, without a doubt, destroy an over twenty-year-long friendship.

The supernatural world is a clusterfuck. You end up with monsters with extended lifespans who all look give or take thirty, but I've got a whole lot more life experience than Rogue.

Every time I see her, my bear tries to take control, which leaves my nerves shot and my willpower paper-thin.

It's complicated.

We share one body.

Our thoughts and feelings often line up, but occasionally, we have differences of opinion on how to make our goals a reality.

I'm pretty sure we need to give that fae about another hundred years to grow and experience life. Maybe then it'll be socially acceptable to court a friend's daughter.

I swipe a hand over my face.

Yeah, I don't think that will ever be okay with Atlas. That half-giant, half-orc would probably try to rip my spine out.

The fact my office door flies open, and Rogue's scent floods my nose, speaks to how

much the universe hates me.

My bear immediately starts in. He sends his favorite memories of her shocked faces and others where she was annoyed at me.

He loves her.

To him, everything she does is perfect.

I'm the villain who keeps them apart.

"Rogue, what can I help you with this fine morning?" My words come out a low rumble.

She pushes the door closed behind her and strides over, taking a seat in one of the chairs across from my desk. "Have you heard from Ember?"

I sigh, stretching back in my chair in an attempt to get away from her potent sweet scent. "I have not."

Rogue frowns and several long beats pass before she nods like she's just decided something. "I doubt she's going to be back to work. Probably ever. Some shit went down last night..." Her lips blow together, and she shrugs. "Ember is now the prime alpha of the North American Pack."

My hands dig into the arms of my chair as I lean back even farther.

Damn.

That sucks for me, because she's a talented team leader, but good for her.

She's going to have a hell of a fight on her hands, proving she can keep control of such a large pack, but she's mated to a dragon. If shit hits the fan, Velyn will be there to back her up. He can put a few stubborn wolves in their place, and the others should fall in line relatively quickly.

My eyes meet Rogue's gray orbs, and I pause those thoughts as I take her in.

She looks... exhausted.

Perhaps she had a long night at Ember's side, but there are bags under her eyes, and even her skin looks a little sallow.

"Does that mean you and Gemma will be taking some time off as well?" I ask, trying to determine what this is about.

It dawns on me a half second too late that Rogue mentioned she saw in a vision that Ethan Sanders has some tie to the North American Pack.

The council believes he has knowledge of how to find The Doctor, and now I can't help but wonder if I walked Ember straight into a disaster of her own.

If they were following the Sanders lead, I assume they visited pack lands.

I just have no fucking clue how that ended with Ember taking the prime alpha role...

Rogue scoffs. "Why is Delta playing games? She called Gemma and me in last night on a supposed takedown for the Market Heist Crew, but her information was bogus."

My brow furrows as I study her beautiful face. She seems angry, which could be due to me attempting to remove her from the Plague Doctor case. Still, that doesn't explain why she's so frustrated about Delta.

“Everyone gets bad information from time to time,” I say slowly. “It happens?—”

The scoffing sound that leaves my mate’s lips tells me that it was the wrong thing to say.

My bear paces my mind, berating me for upsetting her.

“You always defend her,” she mutters, shaking her head. “I don’t know why I’m even here.”

Delta has worked for me for close to fifteen years. She’s an employee—nothing more. Very few contract workers stick around for as long as she has, but she’s still disposable muscle.

If Rogue truly despises her as much as it now seems, then it might be time to cut all ties with the witch. I’m sure one of my competitors will be happy to scoop up Delta and her team...

Maybe I could make a few calls and get the ball rolling on that.

It might make Rogue happy, and even the chance of that is enough for me to take the risk. It’ll be complicated losing Ember and Delta all at one time. Training new teams is always a pain in the ass, but I’ll make it work.

“I’m not defending anyone,” I say to clarify. “False leads happen, but if you don’t tell me what’s going on, then I’m just sitting here in the dark.”

“You have a file on my team, right?” She gives me an expectant look. “I’m guessing you have those on all of us. Can I see Delta’s?”

My metaphorical hackles rise.

“Yes.” I would really love to know what the fuck is going on. “If you tell me why you want to see it.”

Shoving my chair back, I stand and take the few steps to the filing cabinet where I keep the employee files.

Delta is the team lead, much like Ember has always taken point for their unit.

I grab the file, head back to my desk, and drop it in front of Rogue before flipping it open.

“Can you tell me what you’re looking for?”

” I ask, trying to keep my tone gentle. Normally there’s a fire in her eyes that I like to match, but something about her energy today tells me now isn’t the time to push.

“You’ve met them all. There are four on her core team, outside of Delta.

Everyone else she works with is paid directly through her, not my office. ”

Rogue flips through the papers, studying the pictures clipped to the top of the employee information sheets. She shakes her head and falls against the back of the chair. “That’s not them.”

Sliding around my desk, I come to a stop at her side and squat down. “Not who?”

She looks away and bites her lower lip.

Oh yeah, she’s keeping something from me.

Like you’ve given her any reason to trust you , my bear growls in my head.

He doesn't understand the tightrope I'm walking where Rogue is concerned.

To him, there's no good reason for us to keep our distance, and on one hand, I agree. She's an adult now, but the age difference is still staggering.

Who the fuck knows how the universe decided she would be my other half, but it did. And I'm not displeased with its choice.

We just need to give her a few more years to grow into her own. Then maybe I won't feel like a creepy old man for being so enamored by her.

My bear is more animalistic in nature. If it was up to him, he would have declared her his mate the day after she turned eighteen. He sees no point in waiting, and no amount of reasoning will reach him.

Rogue keeps her gaze averted, saying nothing.

It fucking kills me.

It feels like she should trust me implicitly, but she's not a shifter. She's never given any indication that she feels any connection to me. If she had, my bear would have jumped at the chance to declare our intent to court her in the old ways.

"Come on, little one. You've got to tell me something..." I tilt her chin until she's forced to look at me once more.

If she doesn't tell me something, my bear is going to freak the fuck out worse than he already is.

When the berserker takes over...carnage ensues.

And I enjoy living in Haven.

If he massacres his way through Delta's team, I would have to move, and chances are, Rogue wouldn't be keen on coming with me.

My alarm rises as my fingers heat, simply from touching her skin.

Fae don't suffer from illnesses like humans do.

"I saw a vision of Delta with three men." Rogue swallows thickly.

"They seemed friendly. I mean, they definitely knew each other. I saw those same three men when I was searching for The Doctor. They followed me. I knew they weren't part of her core team, but I guess I hoped I didn't know all of the members..."

Do you have names or information on the others she brings in when she needs extra help on a case? "

I hear her words, but my nostrils flare, picking up her pheromones. I freeze, locking my muscles tight in preparation for the fight that's coming.

My bear roars in my mind, instantly understanding what's happening.

She's in the early stages of going into heat .

Gods.

Fae experience something similar called the quickening, but my beast recognizes it for what it truly is—the most optimal time to breed her.

My bear slams his will into my mind, and my skin ripples as he tries to force me to

hand over control. He's been biding his time and saving up his energy for the moment he would give me a true fight.

I bring a hand to cover my mouth as my canines elongate.

"Go!" I growl. My eyes light orange, signaling the beginning of the change to berserker form. "You have to go." Jabbing my free hand at the door, I sling myself backward, landing on my ass as my hand transforms into the bear's claws. "Get as far away from me as you can."

"Owen, are you okay?" she asks with wide eyes.

"Run," I choke out. "And keep your distance until the quickening passes."

Fur sprouts on my arms, and my bear tries to slam me out of the driver's seat once again.

The edges of my vision go hazy as we mentally battle for control.

He wants to lock me away so I can't interfere, and he intends to claim our mate immediately.

He'll court her and ask forgiveness once she won't be able to escape.

"How did you know?" A frown mars her pretty face, but she doesn't move toward the door.

"Mate!" It comes out sounding more animal than man, and Rogue finally pushes herself to her feet.

"What did you just say?"

“You have to get out,” I hiss, pointing at the door once more. “I don’t know how much longer I’ll be able to hold him off.”

There are woods surrounding the back line of the property, but if someone sees me, I’m done for. At least, if they’re old enough to recognize a berserker.

The council will call for my extermination, no matter if I’ve been a trusted ally over the years.

Rogue stumbles toward the door, but the entire energy in the room changes, and Gemma siphons in. She takes one look at me, grimaces, and wraps her sister up in her arms.

They disappear in a blink, and my bear snarls his displeasure.

She might be safe from him for the moment, but now that he’s scented her upcoming heat...

He won’t be stopped until he claims his mate.

Chapter Thirteen

Rogue

“Y eah, okay, you’re ripe,” Gemma says as we land in my bedroom back at our house. “That was close.”

“What the hell just happened?” I groan, falling onto my mattress.

My mind races.

Owen called me his mate, and something deep inside me agreed.

It wasn’t even my magic.

It was my soul that was in agreement.

More than that, he looked like he was in agony. The thought makes my skin ache, pulsing with discomfort.

I need to be there, soothing his bear and reassuring him that I feel the connection too. I blurt out as much, rubbing my burning eyes.

“Fuck no,” Gemma says, shaking her head. “Not until he gets his animal under control.” She gives me a pointed look, planting her hands on her hips. “You have no idea what his bear was planning to do to you. It was brutal.”

My body lights up at the thought of what that would feel like, and a pulse throbs through my lower stomach.

“I’m okay with that,” I say, but it comes out slurred.

“Damn, you’re all fucked up.” Gemma sighs. “Okay, don’t move. I’m going to get Mom.”

“No!” I screech.

Only, she’s already gone.

Seriously?

Could my life get any more embarrassing?

Maybe I shouldn’t ask that.

The universe might take it as a challenge.

I love my sister.

It’s also practically impossible to kill a nightmare, so it’s easier to remind myself that I would miss her if she was gone.

Gemma snorts, clearly having read my thoughts.

My mother frowns, pushing her cool hand to my forehead. “You’re feverish.”

“Yeah, and Owen was about to go berserk to get to her,” Gem says with an obnoxious lilt to her tone.

My eyes narrow.

That was a weird way to put it, but I'll bet she does find this funny.

She can find humor in almost anything.

Just wait until it's her turn to suffer.

Anytime anyone shows interest in her or if she finds her mate, I'm going to make her life hell.

"He called her his mate," she tattles, beaming.

I frown even harder.

"Well, that's a conversation Owen and your fathers should have...

" Mom grimaces. "Preferably, after the fact and once your bonding is solidified. They'll be less likely to try to kill him if they know you'll feel it through the link.

They also understand the nature of matebonds.

It's not something either of you could have helped. "

I'm not sure she believes a word she just said. My magic found it to be an ambiguous statement that couldn't be judged as completely truthful or a lie, but I appreciate the effort.

"Speaking of mates," Gemma says. "What happened to the handsome warlock you left with last night? I truly thought there was some connection between the two of you. I mean, outside of him being our suspect."

“Cohen is innocent.” I groan, shoving away my mother’s hand.

Mom takes a seat next to me and gives an expectant look. “Canoodling with suspects now?”

Gemma snorts again.

She really is on my last damn nerve.

I sigh. “You know better than anyone that just because the paranormal council is interested in someone, it doesn’t mean they’re guilty.”

My mom is probably still on one of their watch lists or something from everything that happened back in the day when she left Faere.

“That’s true enough,” Mom concedes, patting my thigh. “I just worry about you girls.”

Thinking of Faere reminds me of the sithen.

Calyx and Cohen are probably still camped outside of Owen’s, losing their minds over where I disappeared to.

“Do you know what a sithen is?” I ask.

“I do.” My mother nods, making her long pinkish-blond hair fall around her face. She looks no older than me or Gemma, which would be weird for humans, but I’ve always considered it a gift.

I’ll never have to mourn her or my fathers. They won’t wither from old age or die. There are limitations to their immortality, but they’re safe enough.

“A sithen is an area where the veil between the human and fae realms is very thin. It’s said that anyone who wanders for long enough with a need to escape to another realm will eventually be drawn to one if their intentions are pure of heart.

” Her eyes narrow, and she studies me even more carefully. “Why?”

I swallow around the lump in my throat, looking between Gem and Mom. “I think I found one. Or it found me?” I tell them about the house and even briefly mention Cohen and Calyx. “I don’t know how to explain it, but the energy there is comforting. It feels almost familiar.”

“Ha! I knew there was something going on there.” Gemma grins. “You got that vision, and you and Cohen were all looking at each other with heart eyes.”

“That’s what you chose to focus on?” I ask, scoffing.

“Meena did warn us that your future was closely tied to the energy of Faere,” Mom says, frowning. “I have no aspirations for a family reunion with your aunt, but I’m only a phone call away.”

My jaw falls.

That’s the first I’m hearing about any visions Meena has had about my future, and also...

Isn’t she supposed to be...

I don’t know, mothering and protecting me?

What happened to the coddling from my childhood?

“You’re an adult,” Mom says, smiling softly.

Can she read my mind?

That’s just creepy.

“Parenting is a balancing act,” she says, shrugging. “I have no desire to stand in the way of either of your futures. We’ve raised you well, and you know we’re available if you need us, but now is your time to step into the world and make your way.”

“That was actually really sweet,” Gem says. “I think they just want to mate us off, so they can get back to having an empty nest.”

I snort. “We don’t even live there anymore. They also have years until the younger kids will be of age.”

“They have to start somewhere.” Gemma laughs. “Does that mean you think Atlas will let Owen live?”

My mother grimaces, and that probably says it all.

“They’re working toward the goal of accepting the two of you as adults.

All fathers have to come to terms with the fact their daughters will eventually find mates of their own.

” Mom pats my thigh. “I would love to hear more about Calyx and Cohen, but I’m afraid that if I’m away for much longer, your fathers will come searching.

Owen is a good man. If nothing else, they’ll find comfort in knowing he’ll protect you with his life. ”

She nods, agreeing with herself.

I think she might be delusional, but it does help put me at ease just a tiny bit.

“My quickenings resumed soon after I accepted my connection with Atlas,” Mom says, like it’s her personal mission in life to make me vomit.

I do everything in my power not to think about how we got five younger siblings.

“It’s very possible meeting your mates has triggered yours.

However, my magic is certain I can lessen the symptoms. Would you like that?

It might give you extra time before it hits fully. ”

My mouth goes dry.

This is so weird to talk about with my mother , but yeah, I want more time to come to terms with things before being forced into a heat.

“Please.” I smile tightly. “I can’t be stuck at home for a week or more. I still have to help Calyx locate his phylactery and figure out why Delta is acting so shady.”

Mom’s hands glow with her light pink magic, and she gets to work.

Gemma catches my eye. “I want to hear more about that once I get Mom back home.”

I nod, letting her know I’ll fill her in fully, but an even more terrifying thought crosses my mind.

Owen called me his mate.

Calyx is convinced of the same.

Not to mention Cohen.

I feel a connection to all three, but Owen is actively hunting Calyx and Cohen for the paranormal council.

What a shit show.

Gemma pops back in from returning Mom to her house, and I fill her in on everything.

“And you think, what? That Delta had something to do with Calyx’s phylactery going missing?”

” Gemma frowns, lying on her stomach next to me on my bed.

“I’m not saying it’s impossible, but if that’s the case, she’s excellent at shielding her mind or any thoughts or fears regarding what might happen if she gets caught. ”

“Maybe she’s not running things but is involved with whoever is?” I rub my forehead and shrug. “I don’t know, but Calyx isn’t behind the Market Heist Crew. If his magic is being funneled to fuel those crimes...”

A pit forms in my stomach at the thought.

The paranormal council is known for how lazy it can be when it comes down to it. If a case can be wrapped up neatly in a bow... They don’t necessarily care if the correct person is placed behind bars.

“Okay, well, don’t worry about that too much,” my sister says. “We won’t let that

happen. I'll do a little covert searching. See what I can find out if I spend a day or two following Delta when she doesn't realize she's being watched."

"Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Nah, I've got nothing better going on, and you deserve a chance to spend some time getting to know your mates."

I sigh. "Except Owen has no idea I found our suspects?—"

The energy in the room changes, and the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.

Gemma's eyes widen, and she makes a grab for me, like she's about to siphon us from the room.

However, Calyx steps through the portal that forms near the door to my bathroom, and I shake out of my sister's hold.

Cohen stumbles through a second later, shoving his huge glasses back up his nose.

"Princess, you just earned yourself a trip over my knee. Trying to escape me already?" Calyx laughs but freezes when he spots Gemma.

She disappears from the bed and reappears in front of the lich. "I'd be very careful about how you speak to my sister." The smoky tendrils of her magic spill from her skin and dart for Calyx.

Her head tilts as he locks his knees to keep from hitting the ground.

It's not a pleasant experience when she infiltrates someone's mind. Just like her biological father, Malice, she's able to induce realistic nightmares that produce a

visceral response.

“Hey, Gemma.” Cohen waves, skirting around Calyx as the lich trembles. He reaches the edge of the bed and leans over, brushing his hand over my forehead. “You’re much cooler. Are you feeling better?”

“Him, I like.” Gemma laughs. Nodding to Calyx, she goes on, “This one? The jury is still out.”

“Enough!” I lean forward, jabbing a finger at her. “Don’t hurt him.” I have to focus to keep my magic from attacking. That’s my sister, who I love dearly, but my instincts hate knowing she’s torturing Calyx.

She rolls her eyes. “It was fun while it lasted.”

Chapter Fourteen

Calyx

In all my long years, I've never seen a female nightmare.

Males of their kind are considered practically extinct, at least in the human realm.

Seeing a female with the level of power Gemma possesses is a shock.

It's simultaneously frightening, and I'm strangely relieved to know Rogue has such a powerful sister.

I'll need to brush up on my mental shields before meeting their father.

I have my own methods for fighting back, but that would be in poor taste when I wish to endear myself to my mate's family.

After clawing myself out of the mental prison Gemma created in less than two seconds flat, my mind helpfully replays the images of all the occasions I've failed over the years.

When I couldn't save Ash.

How I barely managed to save Cohen.

Knowing I couldn't bring Anders's sister's mate back... Not in any true capacity. Not

in any way that would give Sofia or Kent any type of actual peace.

All my failures laid bare.

And the nightmare studied each. Although, whatever else she discovered while poking around my brain seems to have quelled her concerns. Or perhaps Gemma simply acquiesced to her sister's demands that she leave me be.

I've been on edge since watching the berserker bound from the back door of Owen's.

Cohen might have been shocked to realize they still exist, but I know humanity.

Those who are hunted...hide.

They bide their time until the focus shifts to whatever is meant to be eradicated next.

I'd just love more information on who the berserker is and why he fled so swiftly.

At least part of that reason was likely to avoid detection, since his shift was imminent, but those questions will have to wait.

I focus on Rogue as I take a seat on the mattress near her feet. "Are you okay, darling?"

She nods. "My mother was here. You just missed her."

I bite my tongue to keep from asking if she's as delightful as Gemma.

The nightmare in question snorts, like she senses my thoughts.

"Anyway, I'm going to see if I can pop around and find Delta.

” She looks at me, which makes me frown.

I’m not interested in accompanying her. I have a mate to look after.

All else can wait until Rogue is feeling like herself again.

“I can’t siphon to places that I can’t conceptualize.

I would appreciate it if you could portal us to the sithen.

” Her dark eyebrows rise. “It’s the only way you’ll be rid of me.

I need to know I can find my sister if she needs me. ”

I nod. “That sounds reasonable.”

The trip to bring Gemma to the sithen is quick, and she siphons us back. It’s always a disorienting experience, but I put on a brave face for my mate.

She’s been fine with Cohen in my three-minute absence. He’s ultimately a caregiver before all else.

Gemma disappears in a cloud of smoky black shadows, and I turn back to Rogue.

“Ready to head home, princess?”

She frowns. “This is my bedroom. In my house .”

Cohen’s gaze darts around, like he’s verifying nothing is going to attack him for Rogue’s declaration, and I chuckle.

Sure, I have a lot of plates balanced in the air—the most pressing being my missing phylactery—but those two are adorable, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for the three of us.

It's been many years since any one location felt like home, but watching Rogue pack her belongings leads me to believe she has some emotional attachment to the house she's leaving.

"I'm only leaving because my brothers will cause hell if they realize my quickening is going to start." Rogue tosses the strap of a duffel bag over her arm, but I use my magic to levitate it over to me.

"Understandable. Are they younger or older brothers?" I ask, forming a portal that will lead to the sithen.

"Older by minutes." Rogue smiles tiredly. "Gemma, Fox, Talon, and I were born from a clutch of eggs my mother carried for my father. One baby for each member of my mother's pack. Oh, and I have five younger siblings too."

I chuckle, barely holding back a comment about knowing what her family pack does to pass the time.

I'm fairly certain my kind is infertile, but I'm unsure if that extends to Cohen as my thrall. Perhaps that's something we should warn her of.

Rogue is young. She might want offspring one day, and I doubt I'll be able to provide that. Although, I wouldn't be opposed to using a sperm donor if it came down to it.

Children are grotesque little creatures, but I regularly deal with the dead.

I'm sure I could keep pace with one or two.

Adding up Rogue's siblings leaves me flummoxed.

Who would willingly fill their house with nine children?

Gods, that's four times more than what I think I could handle with my sanity intact.

However, I'm adaptable.

I'd be willing to see how it goes if it keeps my mate happy.

The sithen pulses as Rogue reenters the space.

Its contentment is almost palpable, and the little fae immediately allows Cohen to help her back into the bed she slept in last night.

There's no way to be certain, but I believe the house may be lulling Rogue in hopes she'll sleep and it can feed from her magic.

It sounds much more aggressive than what's actually transpiring—if that's even the case.

Once the sithen is at full capacity, Rogue will be able to funnel unimaginable levels of power directly from the heart of Faere with the house and property as the conduit.

In order for that to be possible, the sithen must first garner enough energy to get up and running.

What we've seen up to this point is a mere sliver of what it's capable of.

"Would you like me to grab you a drink?" Cohen asks, pulling up the blanket and tucking it around her sides. "The house provided a variety of food. I could make you

a salad or something? There are plenty of vegetarian options.”

“I’m okay,” she says, smiling at him. “Just beat. Anyone want to take a nap with me?”

Hmm.

I have many questions about what occurred at her job, but those will keep.

Cohen slides around the bed with comical haste and prepares to crawl in facing her.

He haphazardly kicks off his shoes and slides a hand down his front, using his magic to transform into a pair of pajama pants and a plain T-shirt.

He launches himself under the covers, like he’s terrified that if he waits too long, she’ll rescind the offer.

“Neat trick,” the sleepy fae mumbles, scooting close to his front. “I can do that, too, but I forget a lot and end up doing it the old-fashioned way.”

I have many faults, but jealousy is not one of them, yet I still feel a prickle of discomfort for how at ease Rogue seems with my thrall.

Cohen and I don’t have a sexual relationship, but we are life partners.

Our bond assures that, and my magic is very territorial over him.

Not to mention, I’m protective of him because he’s a beacon of light in an otherwise grim world.

I’m more than happy to share him with her, but she won’t steal my best damn friend.

I'd also like it if she would offer me some of those soft smiles.

The fae in question glances over her shoulder at me. "Are you coming?"

A dangerous chuckle escapes my lips, and I barely hold back the comment I'm tempted to make.

"Of course, princess. We don't want your ass to be cold."

Sleep isn't required for my system to function, but I sure fall asleep plastered to Rogue's backside.

I wake up in the same spot, never having moved.

Rogue and Cohen are still knocked out with their faces close together, but the fae princess jolts in her sleep.

Awareness clicks slowly.

It could be a nightmare or a reaction to her upcoming quickening. Only, she's cool to the touch as I brush my fingers down her arm.

"You okay?" I murmur, keeping my tone low in an attempt to not frighten her. My hand slides around her middle as my lips brush her cheek. "Darling?"

I'm unprepared for her to gasp and toss her head back and directly into my chin.

That's not the shocking part.

She rolls to face me, and her eyes are milky white. I've never seen anything like it. Normally when someone has a vision, they get a faraway look, but she looks like

something I've seen in a horror movie.

In a blink, her eyes change to normal, and she jolts when she spots me.

"What's wrong?" I ask, pushing her sweaty hair back from her face.

"Ember..." Her eyes clench shut. "Fuck, we have to hurry, or your friend is going to die. I've seen it. We can save him, but we have to go now."

"Lorcan or Anders?" I ask as my heart rate picks up.

Lorcan is essentially immortal.

Anders...not so much.

"The druid," she says, still sounding dazed. "He was gravely injured. Or he's about to be." She pulls a pale hand to her face. "Is it dark? It was dark in my vision, and it feels urgent that we go now."

Cohen's eyes meet mine over Rogue's shoulder, his confusion evident.

I glance past him and eye the window.

It does appear to be dark.

When we fell asleep, it was early afternoon. Perhaps the house lulled us into a slumber to feed off the excess energy from all three of us. Cohen might not have the level of power that I possess, but he's a gifted warlock.

"Why are you not moving?" Rogue huffs, throwing off the blanket and climbing down the bed.

At some point, either she or Cohen used their magic to change her into a sexy pair of sleep shorts that barely covers the bottom of her ass and a tank top.

As soon as her feet are on the floor, she slides a hand down her front.

Her magic forms a pair of jeans, a tank top, and a coat.

I can't see her feet from this angle, but I'm sure she manifested boots and weapons as well.

“Your friend is dying! Or about to be! Why am I the only one moving?”

“Lorcan is incredibly hard to kill.” I still use my magic to float out of the bed as Cohen scrambles off the other side.

It's true. I'm not too concerned for my oldest friend, mostly because I know he's exceptionally good at keeping himself alive.

Also, it would take something extremely powerful to injure him to the point I would be concerned that he wouldn't make it.

That thought leads me down a path of worrying about Rogue.

I'm immortal, and not just the anti-aging kind that most shifters are.

I'm truly undying, even if I occasionally need to reform a new body for myself.

Cohen is protected because of our connection, but if something is out there that could take Lorcan down...

I don't want my mate anywhere near it. “You've been rundown, princess.

Why don't you stay here and rest while Cohen and I investigate?

"I swipe a hand down my front, manifesting comfortable clothing.

"Not a chance," Rogue hisses, stomping to my side. "My best friend is out there losing her shit and possibly on the verge of losing her mate. Get moving. Open a portal."

I open my mouth to counteroffer, but Rogue grabs my hands, and I'm pulled into her vision.

Rogue stands in a small clearing.

Woods line the right side, and a small stream takes up the left, but it's in the distance. All I can see initially is Rogue and her surroundings.

That morphs as I spin around.

The sound of snarling, fighting wolves fills the air, but my jaw falls when I spot Lorcan with a spear through his chest.

The fact he hasn't ripped it free to join in the melee sends alarm pulsing through my system.

My eyes widen as I spot the full moon in the sky.

Gods.

Lorcan is weakest in the days leading up to the full moon.

Tonight is the night before the full moon...meaning he's legitimately the weakest

he'll ever be.

On every full moon, he completes the replenishing ceremony, sacrificing his blood to Mother Nature and the earth. They, in turn, judge his sacrifice and if they deem it worthy—which they always have—they replenish his life force and his magic.

If he's unable to complete the ritual, he would normally be able to try again the next month, and while he may be weaker over those weeks...he would survive. I've never seen Lorcan face such a grievous injury within a literal day of when he's supposed to complete the ritual.

I'd like to believe the universe would keep him alive to allow him to make the sacrifice tomorrow night, but I'm not in the business of hoping and praying.

I rip my hands from Rogue's and begin to form a portal to pack lands.

That stream was familiar. I believe it's the one Lorcan follows to get to the small waterfall that he's so fond of.

I know that sappy bastard well, and I'm sure he brought his mate there for a romantic date under the stars.

If only he was smart enough to wait until his magic was at full capacity.

It's no matter.

Cohen can see to Lorcan while I address whatever beings clearly want to die tonight.

The portal forms, and Rogue moves to jump through, but I grab her arm.

"You may come with us, but stay close to me, princess." I study her face and don't

release her until she nods her agreement. “And as soon as we’re done, we’re coming back to the sithen so you can rest. Agreed?”

Rogue doesn’t look back as she jumps through the glowing circle that should lead us straight into a battle on pack lands.

“Yes, Daddy.” Her voice echoes around the room long after she’s gone.

Gods.

That word slipping from her lips sends a jolt straight to my cock.

Fucking Lorcan.

Cockblocking dick just had to go and get himself almost murdered.

Cohen follows Rogue through the portal, and I roll my shoulders back and jump through too.

Chapter Fifteen

Rogue

A nother vision hits me as I land in the same clearing that I saw in my dream, or the earlier vision. It's of a collection of shifted wolves, and I ramble out the details as chaos ensues.

Calyx and Cohen fall to their knees to help their injured friend.

I lean over, heaving in the grass as my skull pulses with pressure. Two visions and portaling is apparently the maximum my system can handle. It takes every ounce of stubbornness that my parents have ever called me out on having to keep myself upright as the world spins.

Violent, angry sounds fill the air, and I pull my hands to cover my ears. Every gnash of teeth sends a shiver down my spine that echoes in my nerve endings.

The heavy footfalls of feet approaching makes my head whip up.

Ember looks like hell, and my chest gets tight. Her wolf is fully in charge and her yellowy-amber eyes light the ground in front of her as she snarls, limping closer.

"I suggest you do something about that, or I'll have to use my magic to knock her out," Calyx says, sounding strained.

My forehead wrinkles as I try to determine if he wants me to use my magic to restrain

Ember's wolf. If I did, I don't think she would ever forgive me. Her yearning to be with her mate is almost palpable.

I still feel like I might be sick, and my vision is fuzzy around the edges, but I roll my shoulders back and step into Ember's path.

"You can't hurt them." I keep my tone as firm and no-nonsense as I can muster when I'm on the verge of passing out. "They're working to save your mate. If you kill them, you kill any chance of saving the druid."

Ember's wolf growls and bounds around me. She reaches Lorcan's side and snarls.

"Don't," Calyx says simply.

The dark, smoky shadows of his magic intertwine with Cohen's much lighter magic, but based on the volume of each, it seems like the warlock's power is the one doing most of the heavy lifting.

Ember's wolf whines, tilting her head down until she can sniff Lorcan. Whatever she scents seems to steal all her fire, and she collapses to the ground, inching closer on her belly.

"We're doing everything we can." Cohen shakes away his magic and places his hands over Lorcan's chest once more. "Don't cry."

My mind can't even fathom the agony Ember must be experiencing. She and Lorcan just met, but they've bonded—and only hours ago. My vision shared glimpses of their intimate moments in the grotto under the waterfall.

I'm not sure she could ever recover from a loss like that.

No.

I won't let myself even go there.

Failure isn't an option.

If things don't take a turn in the next few minutes, I'll call my mother. Her magic exists outside of the laws of nature. She's always reticent to use it, but she will for something so important.

I approach slowly to avoid triggering a reaction from Ember's wolf. The last thing she needs is someone trying to sneak up on her after such a recent battle. She could mistake me for an enemy and attack.

Her head raises, and once it's clear she doesn't object to my presence, I take a seat at her side.

The fighting continues, and a short while later, Velyn approaches.

I scoot back to give him room next to Ember and try to find a way to ask Calyx what's happening without Ember hearing.

Velyn slides up next to his mate, running a hand through her bloody fur. "Is he..." He glances between Cohen and Calyx.

"Well, he's not currently alive," Calyx says, shaking out his glowing hands. "But he's not past the point of no return. I believe Mother Nature will accept his sacrifice. I haven't given up hope, and you shouldn't, either."

Cohen nods and shoves up his glasses as he falls to sit on his rear end. "It will take several hours for him to rise if it's anything like a normal full moon."

This is something the druid experiences regularly?

Gods.

I can't imagine how Ember will ever tolerate that.

I'm just about to ask if I should call my mother when Ember's wolf cedes control back.

Ember's injured leg stays out an unnatural angle, and she hisses, trying to find her balance as she kneels next to Lorcan completely nude. "I can't feel this every full moon."

"It won't be anything as traumatic as this." Calyx frowns, shaking his head. "Normally, his spirit doesn't separate from his body. Cohen and I tethered it to you." He nods at Ember. "You should be feeling some relief from the agony of the broken matebond?"

Ember's hand flies to her chest, and she rubs over her heart. "I think that's why my wolf allowed me to take back over."

"Excellent," Calyx says, clapping. "Now, if we could find you some clothing, the Seelie princess and I can begin to work on your wounds." He laughs. "I may even be able to make it home before sunrise."

"I don't have healing magic." I frown, shaking my head. "We need??—"

I don't even get to finish my sentence of a healer, because Calyx cuts me off.

"You need no one but me, princess." Calyx stares straight into my eyes, but he slides a hand down Ember's front without touching her skin. "Your magic is based in life,

while mine thrives on death. I will guide your magic if you lend it to me.”

My mouth goes dry as his bright gray eyes stare into mine. The idea of melding our magic feels especially intimate, but I can’t allow Ember to suffer needlessly.

I swallow thickly and nod. “I’ll do what I can.”

It’s more than intimate to feel Calyx’s magic coaxing mine. I’ve never felt anything like it, and I can’t tell if I love or hate it. It’s like some piece of him settles directly into my chest, teasing and guiding the essence of my magic.

I endure it, though.

And with an audience, no less.

It’s a huge relief when Lorcan awakens and it’s clear he’ll make it. When Calyx moves to pull the daggers from his friend’s extremities, Cohen slides up behind me, resting his chin on my shoulder.

“Are you okay?” the warlock asks in a tender tone.

“I’m fine,” I assure him.

Everything moves quickly after that. Calyx and I take Ember and Lorcan to the house she’s staying at on pack lands. Afterward, we stop by the clearing to collect Cohen, and Calyx portals us back to the sithen.

This time, we land in the living room, and I toss myself down onto the couch. It molds to my backside, and I snuggle in as adrenaline wrecks my system.

Calyx perches on the end of the club chair he sat in for our first conversation in this

room, while Cohen takes the seat at my side.

“Without that vision, Lorcan might not have made it,” Cohen says, tucking an errant strand of hair behind my left ear. He looks so sincere that it makes my chest tight while my stomach flutters.

“I’d like to believe Mother Nature would have accepted his sacrifice with or without the spelled daggers, but I agree.” Calyx smiles and shallow indents appear in his scruff. “Our old friend owes you his gratitude for an impeccable save.”

I’m a little too distracted by the fact the lich has dimples to formulate a reply.

Cohen wraps his hand in mine. “We slept most of the day, but if you’re tired, I can run you a hot bath. Or are you hungry? I was going to cook this afternoon?—”

“I’m okay,” I finally manage to say.

I’m still not functioning at one hundred percent after the visions. On top of that, I can still feel residual pulses in my chest that are distinctly Calyx-like. It’s jarring and comforting all at once, and I’m not sure how to process that.

Calyx chuckles, and it almost feels like he knows what I’m thinking. “None of us have eaten. Why don’t you fix us something? I’m happy to keep Rogue company.”

Ash trots along at Calyx’s side as we meander around the back of the house.

I haven’t seen this area of the property, but it’s beautiful. There’s a fountain in the middle of several large shrubs, and past that is a gravel-lined path that leads toward the woods.

There’s no water in the fountain as Calyx guides me past it, and it looks old, like it’s

fallen into disrepair. It makes me sad, but I barely get to focus on that as a cool breeze cuts through the air and a shiver runs down my spine.

“Was the house here when you found the sithen?” I look up at Calyx, studying the intricate runes and sigils lining the skin of his neck.

He hums. “It was not. The foundation appeared as I was contemplating what I would fashion. I prefer to build my own safe houses. Once one has served its purpose, my magic simply releases the energy, allowing it to melt back into the ether. The land returns to what it was like before I started.”

“That is actually really amazing,” I say before I can stop myself.

“Ahh, it’s nothing compared to your gifts.

” The lich wraps an arm around my lower back.

“The universe considers you pure enough to gauge the intent of others.” He chuckles.

“That could never be me. I tend to see the worst in humanity, but it will allow me the shrewdness necessary to protect you if anyone should mean you harm.”

I stop dead in my tracks, shaking my head. “No, I’m not. My sister loves to tell me I’m rigid. Probably judgmental too.”

“Might that be because she views you as following the rules?” Calyx quirks an eyebrow. “Which, by my estimation, will be an asset in someone who must determine whether to allow a being safe passage through the sithen.”

“I don’t know what that means.” I guess I have some idea of what he’s hinting at.

I can make assumptions, but I'd like him to be very clear, so there are no misunderstandings.

"The sithen exists in the veil where the fae and human realms meet." Calyx applies pressure to my lower back, guiding me to keep moving. "Not all beings have access to portal magic, and even less have the ability to siphon."

"So they seek out a sithen?" I ask, vaguely remembering what my mother said. "Actually, my mom mentioned that if someone were to wander for long enough with pure intentions, they could find themselves in a sithen."

"There you have it," Calyx says, patting my hip.

"They'll find their way to you, and it's your choice if you allow them safe passage to the realm they seek.

The sithen is still forming, but I believe it's waiting for your input.

Some keepers of the mound choose to fashion it after a station.

You could make a platform with a waiting area, or you could ask the sithen to create tiny cottages around the property.

That way, those who have been traveling for days or weeks would have a place to rest before continuing on with their journey.

It's ultimately up to you. Your imagination is the limit. "

"How will I know if someone is worthy of passing to another realm?" I ask, looking at Calyx. "What if they're only seeking asylum somewhere else because they're wanted for a crime?"

Calyx shrugs. “What if that crime was justified? A mother slaughters her husband because he physically abuses her or their child...” He teases his hand over my hip. “Does she deserve to rot in prison? Or do the ends justify the means?”

My heart races as my head shakes. “There’s no way I’m qualified to make those kinds of calls.”

“Ahh, well, we know the universe or powers that be disagree.” He hums. “And I can think of no one else better suited for the job. Your gifts as a soothsayer make you more qualified than most. You also have the ability to suss out a lie. That’s not even touching what magic you inherited from your mother. ”

I go rigid at his words.

My mother’s magic is a closely guarded secret, but it gives me a power boost whenever I need it. Although, I’ve avoided verifying if I inherited her ability to resurrect people.

“As the sithen’s power grows, so will its ability to function,” the lich says calmly.

“You’ll need to decide upon a method before travelers start to pop up.

If you go with a platform method, you could simply send them across and down the other side if you choose to allow them passage.

If they don’t meet the criteria, you could wave them back the way they came, returning them to their home realm. ”

I’m so torn.

I never accepted this job that Calyx seems to think I’m meant for. At the same time, a

piece of my soul feels safe and comfortable here at the sithen. Having a direct connection to the magic of Faere soothes the parts of myself that have yearned to relocate to the fae realm.

My family would be horrified to know it's something I've even considered, but it's hard living in a realm that wasn't designed for me. My sensitivity to electricity and radio waves has forced me to get comfortable being uncomfortable.

I always feel like I'm running at seventy percent...

I'm not sure I could tolerate being away from my family, especially Gemma, which is why I've never put any real plans into motion, but it's a deep, dark secret I've harbored.

Even though I'm rundown from my approaching quickening, for the first time ever, my magic feels like it's coursing through my veins at one hundred percent strength.

Perhaps some negatives will pop up over time, but for now, I'm willing to see what life would be like as the keeper of the mound.

"Give it some thought, princess. This place will be a physical manifestation of whatever you'd like to make it," Calyx says, squeezing my hip.

Shit .

That's terrifying and amazing, all rolled up into one.

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Chapter Sixteen

Cohen

The three of us eat together, and Calyx excuses himself to check in with his contacts. With him not having a phone, he's a little fanatical about not missing appointments.

Before he heads out the door, he snags my arm and whispers close to my ear. "Try to gain some information about the berserker. If he's her boss, that's one thing, but I'm sensing something more. Something she's maybe afraid to tell us..."

"I-I'll do my best," I assure him.

"Good, and spend some time pampering our mate. There's a lovely tub in her bathroom. Perhaps you could offer to scrub her back?"

I blink at the radiating light of one of his portals being opened, and when I open my eyes, he's gone.

I take the initiative to run Rogue a bath, but I don't invite myself in. We've barely had any one-on-one time, and it is tempting to take that step, but building trust takes time.

I lounge on the edge of her bed, wondering if I should see myself from the room before she exits the bath.

Probably.

As I prepare to shove myself off the mattress, the blanket unrolls from under me with force.

The next thing I know, it's pulled up to my neck, and I'm trapped.

There's a chance I could use my magic to combat the house, but that would probably only piss it off.

My clothing melts away and my shoes disappear.

Although it's hard to be sure, it feels like I'm left only in a pair of thin sleep pants and my glasses.

"Okay, point taken," I mutter, struggling to get comfortable with how tightly it's tucked around me.

"And what point would that be?" Rogue asks, stepping out of the bathroom. A cloud of billowy steam cascades around her lithe shoulders, and she smiles. "The only thing I found when stepping out of the tub was a towel and this." She gestures to the light pink, silky nightie that she's clad in.

"I seem to be trapped under the blanket." I swallow thickly and force my eyes up to hers.

Gods.

The nightgown is incredible, but there's not a lot of it. It's a spaghetti-strap style, and with Rogue being tall for a woman, it barely falls a few inches down her thighs.

"Ahh, I see." She walks to the far side of the bed and easily pulls back the blanket before sliding in.

As soon as she touches it, the compression releases.

“It seems the house wants us snuggled in bed together.” Rolling onto her side, she scoots closer and holds her head up with her palm.

The bedside lamps cut off in unison, and we both jolt. “That is strange.”

“It is, but the bed does seem to have released me.” I clear my throat, shoving up my glasses. “I can go...”

“You could,” she concedes. “Or you could stay. This house is lovely. Truly, it’s incredible.

I’m used to having a television to pass the time, but the radio waves and electricity can also zap my magic.

I still don’t understand what fuels the lights or the refrigerator or stove, but it’s nice not feeling so fatigued.

” She laughs, and her eyes sparkle in the low light provided by the bathroom door that she left open.

“Wait, you were around long before the invention of the television. Probably the radio and telephones, now that I think about it. What did you do to pass the time?”

My heart thunders.

She’s stunning.

I’m not used to having anyone focused on me. When Calyx and Lorcan are around, they capture everyone’s attention. Anders and I have always been able to blend into

the background.

“B-Books,” I finally choke out at her expectant look. “I like books.”

My eyes clench closed, and my face heats.

For the love of God. You’re hopeless, man. Seriously?

“Books are good. I enjoy a good read,” the fae princess says, scooting closer.

I’m on my back with my face tilted toward hers. My eyes pop open as her soft hand brushes over my chest. She gets so close that I pull my arm from under the comforter and toss it over the pillow to give her space.

“Television and phones were great inventions, but they created more disconnect between humanity,” I say, sharing my opinion on the matter.

“A few hundred years ago, you interacted with those who lived in your same geographical region. You’d cook together, play games, sit and chat after a meal.

Working outside was more common, as families grew their own food and tended their own livestock.

It wasn’t better. I guess it was just different. ”

“It sounds so foreign.” Rogue scoots until her face rests on my bare chest. “My mother said similar things about Faere. It’s hard to imagine, though.”

I nod and wrap my arm around her back. “I’ll bet.

It’s all you’ve known, so it’s hard to fathom anything else.

We never got the chance to talk about it, not really...

"I frown, trying to find a gentle way to ask about what happened when she stopped by her job earlier.

"What caused you to leave Owen's in such a rush?"

"I didn't get any further insight into what's up with Delta, but I'm not sure that's what you meant." She sighs, and her warm breath fans over my skin. It takes everything in me not to shiver in response.

The peek of her skin and curves that I got before she climbed into bed replays in my mind, and my cock thinks it would be a lovely time to act up.

Perhaps having her delicate scent so close also has a visceral effect on my system, because all I can seem to focus on is the way her lips felt pressed against mine as she kissed me back in the abandoned house.

"Something else happened, and I will talk about it. I haven't really had time to process it yet, but I think you and Calyx should both be present when I go over it."

"Did someone hurt you?" I ask, my hand tightening on her shoulder.

"No." She laughs. "God, Cohen, you're very sweet. And protective. I bet you've melted a lot of hearts in your day."

I barely hold back a scoff. "Hardly."

Rogue glances up at me, and it seems like she's trying to determine if I'm lying. Her soothsayer abilities should assure her I'm not.

I'm unsure what's happening at first, but she shimmies even farther on top of me and settles her hands on my shoulders.

My hand moves from her back to cradle her skull, and she lowers her pretty pink lips to mine. It's a tentative kiss without any tongue, yet it still steals all the breath from my lungs.

As her soft fingers clutch my jaw, she huffs against my lips. I can't be sure, but I think she wants me to deepen the kiss, so I do. My tongue brushes her lower lip, and she opens.

Neither of us seems to know what to do, but it doesn't take away from my enjoyment.

Rogue grinds over my shaft, and it thickens against my lower stomach as she moves.

Gods.

I'm so ill-equipped for this.

She'd be in much better hands if Calyx were here. My cock aches as her tongue teases around mine. My other hand flattens on her lower back and the silky material of her nightgown slides over my skin.

Her scent is everywhere.

Delicate and enticing all at once.

Whatever she's wearing under the nightie doesn't seem to offer her pussy much protection from my cock. It strains against the material of my sleep pants, rubbing her sex with every swivel of her hips.

Frantic kisses give way to a slow and sensual meeting of our mouths. I nip at her lower lip, and Rogue sobs.

“Please, I need more.” She breaks our connection and nods, resting her forehead on mine.

There’s basically no way that I don’t embarrass myself here.

“You want to come?” My glasses fog, pushing into my nose uncomfortably due to the position. I ignore the small discomfort and blow a breath of magic to remove the condensation.

“Yeah,” she whispers breathily as her hand trails down my side. “I’m so hot and achy. It came out of nowhere, but I want you.” She bumps my head to the side and grazes her sharp canines down my throat. “My head is all messed up. It’s screaming at me to bite you...”

Her lower lips perfectly frame my shaft on the next grind of her hips, and I groan. She’s more than welcome to sink her teeth in whenever she’d like. I just need to make sure she’s coherent enough to understand it would form a bond.

I’m not sure if she’s being influenced by her upcoming quickening cycle, so it might be better to distract her with orgasms. Tightening my hold on her lower back, I roll us and pin her under me.

My glasses slide down my nose, but I mentally recite the spell to keep them in place until I remove them.

Rogue wraps her legs around mine, trapping me in as I kneel between her thighs. Her cheeks are pink, and her eyes are hooded and glassy. She studies my chest, pulling a hand between us to trace my abs.

I'm skinny as fuck, and I rarely work out, but my body has stayed frozen as it was the day Calyx tied me to him. Hundreds of years ago, I was also skinny but defined from the physical labor it took to exist back then.

"God, you're sexy," Rogue whispers, teasing her fingers over the indent above my hip. She follows it until she runs into the material of my pants, and I groan when she sneaks below the waistband.

The house stole my damn boxer briefs when it changed me out of my clothes, and that's such a random thought, it nearly short-circuits my brain.

No, that's definitely the way Rogue works her fingertips down my pelvis, brushing through my pubic hair, and stopping at the base of my shaft.

She wraps her hand around my length, jerking as much as she can within the confines of the material.

And I'm frozen.

All I can process is her grip around my cock. The way her chest heaves with every shallow breath. How she swipes her tongue over her lower lip as her brow furrows.

She tugs me closer, using my dick as leverage, and I fall on top of her.

I barely get a hand on the mattress to hold myself up before the naughty fae captures my lips. Her pheromones are everywhere, and while they might not affect my system as heavily as if I was a shifter, I still have the irrational urge to breed her.

Quickenings are supposed to be the fae equivalent of a heat, so that makes sense on some biological level, but I've never experienced anything like it.

Moving my free hand from her hip to her breast, I squeeze. She whimpers against my lips, tightening her hold on my cock.

My focus on kissing her falters as she grabs my hand from her chest and relocates it between us. The backs of my fingers brush her sex, and even the material of her panties seems damp.

It would be extremely convenient if just thinking of him could summon Calyx, because I haven't the first bloody clue what I'm supposed to be doing.

Books have not prepared me for the reality of having a needy fae trapped under me.

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Chapter Seventeen

Rogue

My patience is paper-thin as I guide Cohen's hand to my pussy. Normally I find his timidity to be endearing, but that halted when my brain started feeling like it might fry inside my skull.

A bit of focused intent does away with our clothing. Feeling his heavy shaft fall against my thigh makes me moan, and the warlock finally finds his courage, brushing his fingers over my clit.

Blissful pressure and friction...only for it to be stolen away again.

I shake my head, which breaks our kiss, but I fix that.

"Like this," I murmur, and a tendril of my magic wraps around his hand, guiding his fingers.

As Cohen's chest brushes mine, my nipples tighten, aching with every caress. His glasses bump my cheek as he takes over the kiss.

I sensed no lie when he implied he hasn't been with many women, and the cautious way he touches me only reinforces that belief.

"Gods, Rogue," he groans, teasing lower until he can test my opening. "You're dripping."

“Yeah,” I agree as my chest heaves. “I have a contraceptive spell.” My teeth dig into my lower lip, and my cheeks heat. “So we’re good there.”

Why do I have to be so awkward?

Can’t he just take the lead and fuck my brains out?

Is that too much to ask?

Does he even like me enough to be sexually attracted to me?

His hard dick seems to point to yes , but that could just be a biological reaction.

“If you didn’t, I would have handled that for you,” he murmurs, nipping at my lower lip. “I, um, don’t really have any experience with this, so maybe you want to take the lead?”

My hold tightens on his cock, and I run my thumb along the underside as my fingers brush the top of his shaft.

“I don’t either,” I admit. “But I want you inside me.”

“Can’t do that just yet,” he says, his palm grinding over my clit at the same time he teases my opening with a finger.

He pushes his mouth to mine, and the kiss is a solid distraction to keep from begging him to fuck me.

He works his thick digit inside my core, and my inner walls mold to him as he moves.

“More,” I beg, nodding. “More of that.”

Cohen grins into our kiss and complies by adding another finger. He's gentle at first, but the louder I get, the more he stretches them. Using my feet on the backs of his thighs, I rock to meet him and force his palm over my swollen nub.

I focus on the soft brush of his tongue and how full I feel, but it's not enough. It takes a few moments to remember this isn't just about me, but I get myself together, haphazardly jerking him against my thigh. His length pulses in my grip, and he gasps against my lips.

The overwhelming urge to toss him down and ride his cock washes over me from nowhere. Even the mental image makes me shiver, but I hold myself back, solely because I wouldn't know what I was doing.

Using my magic, I tug on his hand, pulling it free of my aching core.

"What's wrong?" he asks, pulling back to study my face. "Did I do something you don't like?"

"No." I spread my legs even wider and move his shaft until his tip bumps my lower lips. "It's just not enough."

"I don't think I've done enough to get you ready?—"

"You have." I nod, jerking him against my clit. "I'm good. Female fae don't have a hymen. That's a human feature."

Cohen's eyes widen, but I wrap my free hand around his neck and pull his mouth to mine. He kisses me fiercely, and I note he seems to enjoy it when I circle his crown with my fingers.

I dig my feet into the backs of his thighs until he notches at my opening. He doesn't

seem tentative anymore. Not with the way he guides the kiss, holding me in place with a hand on the top of my head and his other on my hip.

He barely thrusts, but it feels incredible. He's hard, and the stretch is delicious rather than painful.

I'm fond of the way his hard body presses into mine as he cages me in. Slow, measured strokes give way to deep rhythmic thrusts and embarrassing sounds spill from my lips. Luckily, Cohen muffles them with sensual kisses that make my core ache with a needy feeling I don't know how to describe.

My body sizzles with heat, burning from the inside out. I relocate my hands to the top of his ass, digging in as he moves.

"Holy shit, sweetheart," Cohen groans, picking up his pace.

Every snap of his hips makes my tits jiggle, and replays of the vision Calyx showed me file through my mind.

Fate is so weird.

I can never tell if the vision influences the path, essentially leading us here. Or if this would have happened without the vision.

Either way, I'm not complaining.

Cohen's pelvis bumps my clit as he moves, and my pleasure builds ridiculously fast. I barely have the chance to grind to meet him before I'm tumbling over the edge into the most powerful orgasm I've ever experienced. His shaft swells, and he moans against my lips.

My core locks down, milking every drop of cum he spills. I struggle to catch my breath as Cohen's glasses dig into my cheek, but I'm more focused on the look on his face. He's red faced, with his chest heaving, and it feels pretty monumental.

He brings a hand to my jaw, caressing my skin. The entire moment feels intimate in a way I'm not used to, but I was one hundred percent the aggressor in this situation.

"Would you look at that," Calyx murmurs, appearing at the side of the bed.

There's no lingering light from a portal, so maybe he landed in the living room and walked up on his own.

He climbs onto the mattress, on top of the comforter, and stretches out beside us.

"My two favorite people, all tangled up together."

My jaw falls.

I'm naked, and Cohen is still inside me.

Calyx's hand snakes between Cohen and me, and he tilts my face toward his. "You two smell like you had a fantastic time in my absence."

My face is already hot, but my cheeks burn like they've caught fire.

Wait, Calyx thinks he's my mate...

He mentioned Cohen would be included because of their connection, but was I supposed to wait for Calyx?

No.

I believe he should know better.

The fae have a matriarchal society, with the female choosing her mates and selecting who will be a part of her family pack. Where I grew up in Haven, the same rules apply.

“No, none of whatever you’re thinking,” Calyx coos, capturing my mouth with his. It’s a quick but sensual kiss that’s made even more intense by the fact Cohen is still on top of me. The lich pulls back, murmuring, “I did find out a few things about your coworker. The witch. Delta, is it?”

I nod, remembering I still need to tell them about Owen.

Calyx chuckles. “Well, once the two of you clean up, we can have a chat.”

Cohen shoves Calyx back and offers me a tender kiss that makes me ache to trap him in place so he can never get away. Unfortunately, the kiss ends all too soon, and I sob when Cohen climbs off me.

I barely get to focus on that because the lich once again leans over my top half.

“Mmm, Rogue, darling, you’ve got a fantastic set of tits...” And then he’s kissing me all over again, and my thoughts move to the fastest way to get him inside of me.

Holy shit.

I’ve never been this sex obsessed before. The quickening is no joke, but it’s kind of nice having a legitimate reason to need sex, cuddles, and pampering.

“I should run you another hot bath. It’ll help keep you from having any discomfort,” Cohen says, taking a seat at my side on the bed. He grabs my hand, linking our

fingers, and my heart melts. He might be the sweetest man I've ever met.

We both cleaned up a bit and dressed, but it's the middle of the night. It would be nice to snuggle between the two of them and sleep the rest of the night away.

"I'm not human," I tell him, leaning closer to his side. "My natural healing has already squashed any discomfort."

Calyx laughs. "Overly confident about your abilities, old chap?" He says it all, mimicking Cohen's British accent.

A strangled choking sound leaves Cohen, but he doesn't call me out for being a virgin.

I actually hate that word. My mom said virginity isn't even a concept in Faere, at least not in the way humans treat the concept for females.

In Faere, it's custom for fae to wait to find their fated mate or mates, but if the female has her quickening prior to meeting her fated partners, it's expected that she would take chosen lovers to add to her family pack.

If she chose to use someone for the heat only, that might be seen as irresponsible, but as long as no fledglings came from the union, no one would say a word to either party.

"I'm fine," I assure Cohen, squeezing his fingers. "What I really need to do is tell the two of you about what happened when I went in to Owen's."

Calyx sits across from Cohen and me with his head closer to the foot of the bed. He's stretched back, keeping himself up with his elbows, and his dark hair falls over his forehead as he nods. "Don't keep us in suspense."

“I asked to see the files of Delta’s team.

Owen let me look at them, and the men who followed me and Cohen when we were trying to find you...

” I shrug. “They’re not part of her apprehension team.

I know most of them, but I wanted to make sure I wasn’t missing anyone.

I should have asked to see a list of her informants or maybe the files about the Market Heist Crew first... ”

I’m still beating myself up pretty hard about not starting with those files to begin with.

There’s no way I’m meant to run solo investigations.

I’ve messed up at every turn.

“Why did your sister feel the need to remove you from the office?” Calyx asks.
“Were you in danger?”

I shake my head, and my hold on Cohen’s fingers tightens.

“My boss is a shifter...” I freeze, trying to find a way to say what I need to say.

Nothing great comes to mind, so I just blurt out the truth without even trying to sugarcoat it.

“He scented me and called me his mate. Then he started to transform in his office. It looked like he had an all-out battle with his bear.”

“Do you feel a connection to him?” Cohen asks, teasing his thumb over my inner wrist.

“Yes? No?” My shoulders bounce, and I pull my free hand to my face. “I don’t know.”

Calyx chuckles. “Since you can’t lie, we know that’s the truth, but it sounds complicated.”

“He’s literally the person who tasked my team with bringing the two of you in to be handed over to the paranormal council,” I say, whooshing out the words with one long breath.

Cohen sighs.

Calyx just keeps laughing, like he finds my concern truly amusing. “That might make introductions interesting, but perhaps if he has all the details about the situation, his opinion will change, similarly to how yours has evolved.”

“Maybe, but I kinda doubt it,” I admit. “Owen might be the one person more obsessed with following the law than I am.”

“Are you having a crisis over whether to hand me over to the council?” Calyx asks.

I shake my head.

Granted, I did for a couple of hours, but my magic believes they’ve been truthful, and that’s good enough for me.

I refocus on Calyx. “You said you found something? Or learned something from your contacts?”

“I did, though I haven’t had the chance to investigate fully.” Calyx grins. “Cohen’s magic can make us invisible to the naked eye. It’s a convenient party trick, but even more valuable when doing recon. Are the two of you up for being my partners in crime?”

My teeth dig into my lower lip.

In for a penny, right?

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Chapter Eighteen

Calyx

I 'm at a loss as to how the berserker found me to begin with, but he tracked me from the warehouse where Delta's team stores their gear to the witch's home.

I portaled out before he could confront me. After Rogue's truth bomb regarding who is he is to her, that was an excellent choice on my part.

Infighting will gain us nothing.

There are perks to having lived for millennium. Having bickering mates who refuse to get along would do nothing but rip Rogue in two different directions.

It would cause her turmoil, making it much easier to play nice... At least, until he makes his alliance known. If he opts to align himself with the wrong side, I will have no trouble educating him on the downsides of making an adversary out of me.

My portal lands us perfectly in the middle of Delta's home, but I knew it would. I've already had a cursory glance around, ensuring it was as safe as possible before making the decision to bring Rogue and Cohen along.

When I first popped in, I had no way of knowing if her protection spells would be limited to the doors and windows, or if she had an all-encompassing mechanism that would alert her to my arrival. My magic sensed nothing, and I stuck around for some time, waiting to see if she would appear.

According to my source, she likes to frequent a particular human dive bar over an hour away. Once her vehicle leaves the parking lot, my revenants will alert me.

I dart a quick look at Cohen, and he nods, letting me know his spell held during our trip through the portal.

“All right, let’s get to work,” I murmur, keeping my voice barely above a whisper.

We’ve already discussed our target locations.

Rogue and Cohen will stick together while checking the witch’s office. I will peek around her bedroom and finish in the kitchen if there’s time.

I’ve got several revenants watching the exterior of the home, and they will also alert me if we need to make a swift exit. The witch may have driven to the bar, but she might know someone who siphons or has the ability to portal.

The difficult part is not even knowing what we hope to find.

“Anything?” I ask as Cohen and Rogue make their way into the kitchen.

“No visions,” Rogue says, shaking her head. “And I poked around, making sure to touch everything.”

“I did pull two receipts from the trash next to her desk.” Cohen drops them onto the counter. “One for Leon’s bar. The other is for a coffee shop just outside the far side of Haven’s ward.”

I grab the one for the coffee shop, checking over the total and the address. It’s likely for one person’s coffee since it’s less than five dollars.

Haven is in the middle of nowhere, with a fifteen- to twenty-minute drive in any direction to get to a human town once you leave the ward.

The exception to that is a small set of businesses around a major intersection about five minutes west of Haven's ward.

There's a gas station, a coffee shop, a diner, a small strip of businesses, and not much else.

"Someone should take a picture of those in case they can be helpful." I toss the receipt next to the other. "It sounds like we'll need to make a trip to the bar. It's quite late, but Delta should still be there if my sources are correct."

Cohen pulls his phone from his pocket, taking the pictures and quickly shoving the device away again.

Rogue turns to Cohen, placing her hand on his arm. "Are you sure your magic will be able to hold with so many people?"

I chuckle, sliding around the counter and behind her. My hands land on her hips, giving her a tender squeeze.

She's allowed to be fond of Cohen. Seeing the way she cares for him is actually a relief.

I'm not sure I could be with anyone—even my fated mate—if they weren't accepting of our connection. But that doesn't mean I'll happily watch as I'm left behind.

"Remember how I fueled and guided your magic when we healed Ember's injuries?" I ask, leaning my chin over her shoulder. "I'm like a battery. Well, as long as I have a willing conduit to funnel that energy through."

Cohen sighs.

I stretch over, patting his shoulder. “Cohen is a gifted warlock. He guides the spell, and as a result of our connection, he’s able to pull magic from my well to ensure he can hold the incantation for longer periods of time.”

“That is convenient.” Rogue hums. “So I know they won’t be able to see us, but could they hear us if we’re not careful?”

“I’ll handle a sound-dampening spell,” Cohen says. “It’ll muffle our voices, but it’s probably best to whisper.”

“And I will ensure they can’t scent you. We know witches have a sense of smell that’s on par with humans. However, it will be safer to assume there could be other supernatural creatures there as well.” I kiss Rogue’s temple and step back to prepare the portal.

The portal puts us out in the forest just behind the bar.

I technically didn’t travel to it, but rather to my revenant.

Once Rogue and Cohen are standing sure-footed, without wobbling, I bend, allowing the chipmunk to run up my arm.

She’s sure the witch hasn’t left, and she passes that information on telepathically. The chipmunk’s mate has been watching the front exit, and he would have relayed the information if Delta had exited via that door.

Running my fingers between the revenant’s ears, I whisper a quick thank you and pull my magic back. She simply melts to ash, blowing away on the wind, but both she and her mate are together and at peace.

And I'll call for them again.

I always do.

Getting into the building while being invisible is tricky. It would either require slipping in while someone was entering or exiting or creating another portal.

After a quick discussion, we conclude the portal is the safest option. Landing in the men's room, we immediately funnel out. Luckily, no one is around or watching to question the door opening and closing on its own.

The three of us continue down the hallway, with Cohen in front and me in the rear. I have to hold back a chuckle when I spot Rogue tiptoeing like she doesn't want to alert anyone with her footsteps.

Gods.

She's adorable.

Cohen stops at the end of the corridor, and Rogue steps around him. She gasps, pointing across the bar.

I slide up behind her and guide her arm down.

My nose twitches.

It was a good call to block our scents.

I'm surprised she isn't holed up in a nest with how potent her pheromones are. Then again, I'm the one who forced her from the sithen.

I'd like to believe that I didn't push for us to investigate tonight out of jealousy over finding her all wrapped up with Cohen when I returned earlier.

Although, if I said the words, I'm not sure they would be true, which bothers me on some deep level. If I spoke and it was a lie, Rogue would be able to sense it. That means I need to get my shit together. The last thing I want to do is to lose trust with my fated mate.

"What is it?" I murmur close to the shell of her ear. It's very difficult not to nip at her skin with how enticing her scent is. "You can speak—just keep it to a whisper."

"Delta is dancing with one of the men who followed me and Cohen. The other two are at the bar." She leans against my chest, and it soothes me greatly to see she's growing more comfortable with me.

"How about that?" I say, keeping my voice low. "This isn't a wasted trip, after all. Cohen, why don't you supervise the ones at the bar? Rogue and I will see if we can listen in on what's being said between the dancing couple."

"I'm not a dancer," Rogue whispers, stretching up on her tiptoes to get close to my ear. "I don't think I've ever danced with anyone."

I slide my fingers into her hair and brush my thumb over her cheek. "Luckily, I'm an excellent dancer. I could twirl Cohen around this dance floor, and no one would be the wiser."

Rogue's big gray eyes sparkle as she licks her pretty pink lips.

Planting my free hand on her lower back, I lift her and pull her close to my chest. Her feet end up on top of my boots, and I love that she's tall enough to keep our faces reasonably close together as we sway.

Part of what makes it possible is that she gained a few inches from standing on my feet, but she's as regal as all fae females.

I move closer to Delta, keeping two or three feet of space between us. She and her dancing partner have been speaking in hushed whispers, and they continue, none the wiser to our presence. There are some benefits to being the most powerful being in the room.

Only, they're not talking about anything of interest, and I'm bored.

Well, having Rogue's soft body plastered to mine is a nice distraction, but I'd really like to gain possession of my phylactery.

That way, our only focus will be the sithen and soothing Rogue's nerves enough that she accepts her future position.

It might be a bit self-serving, but I haven't been able to settle in one place for longer than a few weeks in hundreds of years.

My power brings adversaries I've never even heard of, and with the sithen existing between realms, it will give us a safe, impenetrable home base.

Its magic is literally set up to create a safe haven, and I can't help but think the universe is finally offering me an olive branch.

I don't use my power in horrible ways like so many of my kind are drawn to do.

I deserve a little good in my never-ending existence.

"This is tedious." I nod to Delta. "How about you lend me a bit of your truth-seeking magic, princess? Maybe we can speed up this process."

Rogue's nose wrinkles. "I don't have the first clue how to do that."

I smirk, wiggling my eyebrows. "Just open yourself up to me, and I'll do the rest."

"Have at it, but I don't think my magic works that way," she whispers.

Lowering my mouth to hers, I capture her lips. The adorable little gasp she lets out as I fuck my tongue into her mouth might be my undoing. It only takes a few seconds of contact, and she releases her mental shields.

Hmm.

I wonder if she even knows that she has them. My sweet fae princess is so uptight, I don't think she understands even a sliver of what she's magically capable of. But perhaps there's a good reason she keeps such a tight hold on herself.

There's some dark and enticing magic flowing through her system, but I avoid that and seek out the abilities she inherited from her father.

I'm forced to pull back from our kiss to blow the magic at Delta and her dancing partner. As soon as that's done, I return to tongue-fucking my mate.

Rogue mewls into the kiss, melting against my front. I've lived multiple lifetimes and never been this content. My hindbrain starts planning how to make a portal to get us the hell out of here.

"You have to be smarter," Delta whispers, her tone playful and at odds with her words. "The real payoff will come when we sell the relic. Making a little money here or there isn't an issue, but we'd all be in deep shit if I hadn't talked Owen into giving my team the case."

My mate gasps, and I do my best to muffle it with my lips. I'm not sure when I closed them, but my eyes pop open to better appraise the situation playing out next to us.

Delta must mean the meager earnings they're making from the Market Heist Crew robberies.

She's not wrong . A fully functional phylactery could fetch millions on the black market.

If she can find a buyer stupid enough to take the risks involved trying to keep a lich from their most prized possession.

"You sure are taking your sweet time to find a buyer," the man says, keeping his voice low.

Delta bristles. "This isn't the kind of piece that can go to just anyone. They'll need to have a magically reinforced safe room to store it, as well as spells in place to counter anyone attempting to steal it back."

"Oh yeah, because you've got it locked down like that now." The man chuckles, and the witch's eyes narrow.

"We have exactly one benefit on our side, and that is that no one knows we have it," Delta hisses, glancing around frantically.

"Eventually the piece will sell, and everyone who has shown interest in it will be a suspect. You're all fools if you think the lich won't slaughter his way through every possible buyer until he locates his jar. "

I frown.

That makes me sound considerably more vicious than I usually am.

These are special circumstances.

My literal soul is being held prisoner because that witch wants to make a quick buck.

“Once he’s killed and tortured the buyer for information, he’ll follow the trail back to us.

We need to be long gone by the time that happens.

” Delta pats the man’s chest placatingly.

“The type of collectors interested in the piece are one thing, but we can only sell to someone we know will be able to defend it, at least long enough for us to disappear.”

I do love it when the enemy is dumb enough to spill all their secrets in a public place.

Cohen catches my gaze over Rogue’s shoulder, and he points at the nonexistent watch on his wrist to indicate the limits of his spell have been reached.

That’s fine, though.

We gained more information than even I fathomed.

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Chapter Nineteen

Rogue

This time we don't portal like we did to get in. Several employees head out the side exit for a smoke break, and they're so focused on getting their cigarettes lit that they don't even notice how long it takes for the door to close behind them.

Calyx guides me toward the woods with a hand on my lower back, and Cohen sticks close to my side.

I jolt when Cohen's cool skin brushes mine, but I don't pull away as he interlocks our fingers.

Offering him a soft smile, I squeeze his hand to let him know I welcome the contact... I just wasn't expecting it.

I'm growing addicted to the affection they both seem to so freely offer. I've never been the sole focus of one person, let alone two, and it's a nice change of pace to pining over a man who doesn't even know I exist.

Except , Owen called me his mate.

And every fiber of my being sensed the truth in his words.

Rationally speaking, I can understand why he would hold himself back, but it still hurts to think about.

Mates are supposed to yearn to be in each other's company. At the same time, I've seen what an age difference can do when mates aren't at the same stage of life.

Veryn spent the better part of three years avoiding Ember because of their parents' decree. Having them in close proximity would have been dangerous, because nature doesn't abide by the same laws humans and most supernatural creatures follow.

It's confusing and messy.

At least with Veryn and Ember, it was always plain to see how much it killed him to be away from her. He stalked her around town for years.

Owen never gave me a single indication that he felt any connection with me.

Maybe it only clicked once he scented my quickening?

No, I'm pretty sure that's not how it works.

We reach the tree line, and Calyx pulls his hand from my back. "This should only take a moment," he says, stepping to the side.

Cohen uses his hold on my hand to pull me to face him and wraps his other hand around my lower back.

"Are you doing okay? Your energy kind of changed while we were walking. I just wanted to check in to make sure everything is good between me and you." His blue eyes search my face, and I stretch up my hands to resettlement his glasses on his nose.

We're really going to need to get him a better fitting pair.

He's so damn sweet.

I rise onto my toes and kiss his cheek. “Everything is perfect between us.”

“Portal is ready to go...” Calyx chuckles. “Now, actually.”

The air changes like it always does when Gemma siphons in or out of a room, but the portal is behind me, so all I can see is the soft white glow.

Something catches my attention from deep in the woods, and I peek around Cohen’s arm to check out what it is.

Bright orange eyes unlike anything I’ve ever seen shine back at me.

A shiver runs down my spine.

My mind files through which shifters have orange eyes, and while I can think of several with amber, the color I’m seeing isn’t that.

This is almost an electric orange. Owen’s eyes always flash a light orange when his bear is near the surface, but they went full bright orange in his office when he called me his mate.

They didn’t glow electric orange , though.

Still, it’s the closest color I’ve seen compared to this.

A ferocious roar fills the air, making my knees rattle.

I stumble to the side, trying to get a better look. My magic isn’t reacting to the threat, and that alone makes me curious.

I don’t have much time to contemplate what could be happening as Cohen tugs on my

hand. His other arm wraps around my middle, then we're pulled into the portal and everything else disappears.

We land at the sithen, but outside of the house. I'm not sure if Calyx planned that, and I don't get to ask. Both men step to my side, almost as if they're checking me over for injuries, but I'm fine.

What I'm not expecting is a giant, orange-glowing bear to dive through the portal right as it begins to close. That's dangerous on a level that's difficult to comprehend. Someone could be cut literally in half if they timed it wrong.

Cohen and Calyx spin to address the threat as the bear snarls, but all I can focus on is how magnificent Owen looks in shifted form.

He's massive .

And not a normal bear.

Not at all.

Both shoulders have huge plates that remind me of what sticks out on the side of an armadillo.

That doesn't even do them justice. Comparing him to some type of extinct dinosaur might be more accurate.

They're rigid and bone-like. He has brown fur and a slightly lighter shade on his neck and abdomen as he stands on his back feet and bellows a warning.

Well, he's not glowing orange anymore, but I'm not sure if that's a good or bad sign.

“Oh, fuck me,” Cohen hisses.

I would laugh, but this does seem rather serious...

Owen’s paws are bigger than my head.

“Nice of you to join us.” Calyx strides to stand between me and Owen. “Now is as good of a time as any for Rogue’s mates to get acquainted with one another.”

Owen leaps forward, swiping at Calyx’s chest, and I shriek.

My hands fly out, and I will my magic to pull the lich out of harm’s way, but he moves himself before I have the chance.

“Well,” Calyx says, shoving his messy black hair away from his face, “I suppose we’re not there yet.”

“Whoa, hey! No more of that!” I weave around him and point at Owen’s bear. “Why don’t you change back so we can have a conversation with Owen?”

I’ve never seen a bear look so flummoxed. It shouldn’t be as cute as it is, and I find myself slowly edging closer.

Glancing over my shoulder, I focus on Calyx and Cohen. “Could you guys wait inside? I don’t think he’s going to relax if you’re here.”

“Is that a good idea?” Cohen asks, jumping when Owen roars.

“The sithen never would have allowed him access if he meant her harm.” Calyx winks, spins around, and guides Cohen toward where I assume the house is located.

The fountain is behind me, and I know the house was back that same way, but I'm a little jealous, seeing how at ease he is here. The sithen is supposed to be my creation, and he's way more in tune with it than I am.

I should probably work on that once things settle down.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Cohen hisses, glancing over his shoulder at me, and, presumably, Owen.

"I trust our mate to be able to protect herself." Calyx shrugs and continues pushing the warlock along.

"If he's also her mate, he physically won't be able to harm her.

The sithen would never allow that, anyway.

You saw how violent it became when you offered to...

"He trails off like maybe he realized it wasn't a good idea to bring up the fire poker incident.

I focus back on Owen's bear, who's still standing on his hind legs.

"You can't be a normal bear. I mean, you've got to be several feet larger than a polar bear.

Wow..." I continue rambling as I approach, and the beast doesn't make any sudden movements.

"You know, Owen assigned my team a big case. I got a break on it tonight, but I won't be able to tell him if you don't let me talk to him. "

Once I'm within reach, the bear stretches a paw out and pulls me closer. He's as gentle as something his size is capable of, and the sharp tips of his claws still dig into my lower back.

My hands land on his stomach, sinking into his fur. It's both soft and crunchy, which is a weird combination. "Hi, um, I guess I should say nice to meet you."

The bear's head lowers, and his warm breath fans over my face and neck. What I'm not prepared for is him to take off with me in his grasp. I end up half tucked under him as he runs a little like a gorilla, or I guess a giant bear, with a meal in one massive paw.

I'm very tall, but somehow my feet land against what I assume are the tops of his ankles. And as long as I apply pressure, I don't end up dragging the ground.

He's actually rather tender as he bounds through the forest.

It's hard to find something to hold on to since it seems inappropriate to use his fur, and he's far too broad chested for me to get a good grip on his sides.

"I'm not sure where we're going, but I doubt this is going to work out the way you think it is," I tell him, trying to focus my magic.

My father has the ability to soothe monsters in beast form. I've never had to use the skill, but theoretically, I should be able to.

Closing my eyes, I let go of the anxiety that he's going to run us headfirst into a tree, instead concentrating on soothing, peaceful energy.

My right hand digs into the fur right over where I assume his heart would be, and I do my best to project my thoughts.

I assure him that everything is fine, and he can relax because we're both safe.

It doesn't have the intended effect, but I am able to sense his confusion. I believe he wants to take me back to the forest near Owen's house—possibly even find a cave to stash me in.

The process continues for quite some time, to the point I start to get annoyed.

Almost like he senses my frustration, the bear comes to a stop.

When he carefully places me on the ground, I glance around.

Our surroundings look very similar to the place we started from, something I'll heckle Owen about later.

The sithen really isn't about letting me leave, so I wasn't too worried.

I'm more enamored by Owen's bright orange eyes as he hovers over me. His paw rests between my back and the ground, and he's gentle enough that it doesn't dig into my skin.

"Are you ready to give Owen back yet so we can have a conversation?" I ask, moving to brush my hands over the bear's furry face. "Actually, you know what? Can he hear me, by chance?"

A cold, dry nose bumps my cheek as the bear sniffs my hair. I'm not sure why I was expecting an answer, but Ember's wolf can answer simple yes or no questions by shaking or nodding her head when she wants to.

Perhaps Owen and his bear are too disconnected for Owen to be able to communicate with me?

I guess it's possible.

Ember has mentioned it's a rare occasion that her wolf can push her out completely. Normally they coexist together, no matter the form, but Ember shifts regularly. I've never once seen Owen in animal form, nor heard of anyone else who has.

That can't be healthy for either one of them. Looking at him, it's easy to see he's not a normal bear, but I don't have the first clue what species he could be.

I freeze when the bear sticks his snout in my neck and inhales deeply. There's no way he won't be able to scent Calyx from the dancing we did in the bar...and come to think of it, I'm positive I still smell strongly of Cohen.

"Just in case Owen can hear me, I'm going to tell you about my case." I pat the bear's thick jowls. "Delta is definitely up to some shadiness. After what I learned tonight, I feel confident saying she is behind the Market Heist Crew..."

I go on for so long that I explain fully about how I met Cohen, went searching for Calyx, found the sithen, and eventually circle back to what a sketchy witch Delta is.

Owen's bear watches me with a careful intelligence that leads me to believe he can understand every word I've said.

He seems enamored with listening to me speak, and it's a heady experience...so I just keep talking.

I tell him what a sithen is—in case he doesn't know—and embarrassingly cover the conversation with my mother to make sure he understands that at least she is supportive of our relationship.

At some point, Owen's bear lowers over me, trapping me to the ground while not

crushing me with his weight. It's weirdly romantic, despite being pinned to the grass.

Huh, I might actually like the bear better than the man. At least he seems one hundred percent interested in me.

Chapter Twenty

Owen

My bear is going to squish Rogue if he doesn't get his shit together. He begins lapping at her cheek with his coarse tongue, and I once again try to slam him from the driver's seat.

He's too powerful.

It does nothing.

That motherfucker has been biding his time, and he has no interest in handing back the reins.

I try to impress upon him how important it is that I have a conversation with Rogue, but he doesn't care. He's going to show her how much he loves her, and until she understands that, he intends to keep me out of the equation completely.

"Okay, that's weird. No licking inside my ear," Rogue says, laughing as she shoves away his giant, blocky face. My bear chuffs, nuzzling his snout to her cheek. "You're super scary looking, but like a cuddly golden retriever. I could get used to this."

My bear preens.

He has no trouble letting me know how much he dislikes me, and he's smug as fuck that he's rebuilding the relationship I destroyed.

“Okay, but seriously, I’ve had a long night.

How do you feel about heading inside?” She scratches the underside of his jaw and playfully pats the side of his head.

“I’m not sleeping out here. There are bugs, and I’ve had kind of a never-ending day.

I saved Ember’s mate, went to investigate Delta, and we still have to talk about what we found.

” She sighs. “I need you to try to get along with Calyx and Cohen. They aren’t the enemy, no matter what the paranormal council says.

More than that, I won’t choose between you.

I feel a deep connection to all three of you. ”

My berserker grunts his displeasure.

“You can pout all you’d like, but it’s not going to change the truth of the matter,” Rogue says, using her elbows and feet to propel herself across the ground as she shimmies from under his massive form.

“Now, are you coming inside, or do you plan to trot around the property, huffing and puffing until daybreak?”

He chuffs and follows behind her.

In beast form, I’m fucking massive.

Or we are.

Whatever.

It's been centuries since I considered us one being, but this fucker literally can't fit through the door. His haunches get stuck. Rather than handing back control and allowing the shift, he opts to lie down in the doorway.

Rogue turns around and barks a laugh, pulling her hand to cover her face as she chuckles. She continues for quite some time and finally glances around. "Okay, this is a strange request, but my guest is unable to make it inside."

My bear's lip curls, and he growls his displeasure at being called a guest.

"Keep pouting." She shrugs. "Until Owen is able to tell me where we stand, it feels inappropriate to call you my mate." She looks at the walls and the ceiling before continuing.

"You'll have to let me know if you have a term or name you prefer me to use when addressing you, but for lack of a better word..."

House, could you please accommodate..." She freezes, glancing at me. "My bear."

A snort comes from behind her as the lich approaches, and I once again struggle against my beast for control.

Rogue glances over her shoulder to greet him.

My bear growls a low, menacing sound.

Rogue spins back to us, jabbing a finger at his snout. "Don't do that. Otherwise, I'll make you sleep in the forest."

She really is getting far too much enjoyment out of this. She should be careful before she earns herself a trip over my knee.

The doorway of the house morphs, and suddenly there's more space for my berserker to fit. He trots inside, and Rogue runs a hand down his side as he passes.

"Allow me to lead the way," Calyx says, spinning and heading down the hallway. He must feel completely confident in his magic. There's no other reason he would turn his back on a predator.

Rogue picks up her stride to keep pace at my side—his side?

Whatever.

"Just try to get along, please ?" The pleading tone she conveys the last word with tugs at my heart.

Gods.

I've made a real fucking mess of things.

My bear lies on the wooden flooring in front of the fireplace as Rogue and the other two talk about what they learned at the bar.

The warlock—Cohen—continually glances over at us. I can't tell if he's terrified of my bear—he should be—or if he's afraid of fireplaces. It would be a strange phobia, but that's the least of my worries.

Rogue smelled strongly of him in the clearing, and she's obviously at ease with him, despite only knowing him for a matter of days. She chooses to sit at his side on the couch, and she doesn't pull her hand away when he links their fingers.

My bear and I argue over whose fault it is that she's so comfortable with him and not us until I stop following the conversation completely. He's probably not wrong—I am at fault—but that doesn't make the moral dilemma of her age magically disappear.

The lich must be older than I am, and he doesn't seem bothered or deterred by the extreme age gap. It has to be because they just met. It's an entirely different situation having known her family for years.

The universe doesn't make mistakes when it comes to mates . My bear projects the thought into my mind.

And he's not wrong.

Who am I to fight fate?

"It would be convenient if Owen could give us any tips on locations Delta is known to frequent," the lich says, like we're much more familiar than we truly are.

My bear grunts and closes his eyes.

Delta is an employee.

I don't keep tabs on any of my employees, outside of Rogue and occasionally Gemma and Ember. And that's only because they work directly with my mate.

Mostly, though, my stalking is contained to ensuring Rogue is safe and not going to get herself into any trouble.

A soft hand runs over my bear's head, and his nostrils flare as he breathes in Rogue's sweet scent. It's not as potent as it was in my office, which is probably the only thing

that saves him from acting like a fool.

“Can you give us any information on Delta?” she asks, taking a seat at his side. She leans against his front haunch, ignoring how uncomfortable his shoulder plate must be and scratching behind his ear.

He projects his thoughts to her, explaining Delta is an employee. She’s not even what we would consider a friend, and we have no knowledge of her personal life.

Rogue jolts. “Whoa, okay, that was crazy. I thought mates had to be bonded to communicate telepathically.”

“Berserkers could telepathically converse with their coven, so it would make sense that he can also communicate with you if you’re his mate,” the warlock says.

My bear growls at the word if .

Rogue sighs. “He doesn’t like you questioning our connection.”

“I meant no harm,” Cohen says. “I was only clarifying that it makes sense to me that he would be able to communicate with his mate before a claiming bite solidifies the connection. At least, while he’s in beast form.”

“Indeed,” the lich agrees. “Well, if he’s unwilling to cede control back to the man, I suppose that marks the limit of what we can discover tonight.”

Rogue mentioned being tired. You should allow her to get some rest , I tell my bear.

My mate jumps and pulls her hand from the bear’s giant, blocky head.

I believe she may have picked up on me communicating with him. I bet that would be

strange for someone unused to sharing their mind with another being.

“Yeah, it’s time for bed,” Rogue says, shoving herself to her feet. “You’re more than welcome to sleep here or in the forest if you would be more comfortable outside. Although, I imagine it must be close to when the sun will come up. I’m going to relocate to my bedroom.”

My bear isn’t being left behind.

He stands, shaking out his fur. His intention is clear—at least to me. He plans to follow her to her room and sleep where he can watch over her.

Let’s hope she finds it as romantic as he thinks she will. My money is on her kicking us out of the house completely, but she does seem fond of him.

We spend the night in beast form on the floor of Rogue’s bedroom.

She stumbles over his massive head in an attempt to get to the bathroom but laughs and apologizes without berating him. Hmm, perhaps the key to never fighting is to weather any storm in bear form.

That way, she’ll be less angry with me.

Chapter Twenty-One

Rogue

Owen's bear is in the same spot when I exit the bathroom after my shower.

The room seemed bigger when we walked in last night, and seeing it in full daylight, I'm sure it is.

Having a house that can adjust size based on my needs is the most incredible thing I've ever heard of.

I'm vaguely concerned about what happens when travelers start showing up to gain passage to other realms, but I haven't run into that yet.

I suppose I'll deal with it as it comes.

The door pops open and Calyx sticks his head inside. He spreads his fingers over his handsome face, and it's clear he's peeking through them. "Decent, princess? Should I avoid looking? Oh, there you are and already dressed for the day. How fortuitous."

I laugh, shaking my head. "Sorry to disappoint, but the house left me an outfit on the bathroom counter." I run my hands down the soft dress. "It's really on point with which fabrics I would pick for myself."

Calyx barges into the room, crossing it in several large steps. He ignores Owen and pulls me to him with a hand on my ass. "You look beautiful." He brushes his lips

over mine. “I can’t wait to continue what we started last night. Unfortunately, Cohen and I are going to be away for several hours.”

“Searching for your phylactery?” I ask.

I much prefer having all four of us here at the sithen. It feels safe from the paranormal council and anyone else who would mean us harm.

“I know your sister plans to keep tabs on Delta, but we now have three additional subjects to gain information on.” Calyx nuzzles his cheek to mine, his stubble scratching over my skin. His scent hits my nose, and it takes everything in me not to beg him not to leave the safety of the sithen.

Shaking off those thoughts isn’t easy, but I believe my upcoming quickening is affecting me more deeply than I would like. Fae don’t leave their nests in the days before the quickening hits. They want their partners there, too, to ensure they’re safe.

“I was just about to try to sweet-talk Owen into letting me check Delta’s past cases,” I say, squeezing Calyx before stepping back. “I’d like to see if we can prove any connection between her and other missing relics or antiques.”

“That’s a solid idea,” Calyx agrees, rubbing his hands together. “Do you have plans for how you’ll get to the office if the stubborn bear does agree to hand over control?”

I frown, shaking my head.

I hadn’t thought about that at all, and I regret not having the ability to siphon or portal.

Calyx chuckles. “Well, then, allow me to teach you a fun trick.”

Calyx leads us out the back door and toward the fountain. My jaw falls when I see it's grown double in size and has several flowing water features.

Cohen keeps pace at my side, and Owen's bear follows us.

Cohen's anxiety about having the massive beast watching every move we make might be to blame for why he doesn't hold my hand, but he does brush the backs of his fingers against mine as we move.

The white gravel that lines the path to the fountain also looks refreshed, as does the paint on the water features, and there are now benches lining the sides.

"The sithen is expanding," Cohen says, smiling. "According to what I read, it should continue building strength the longer you reside here."

"That's amazing," I say, grabbing his hand and giving it a squeeze.

We've barely gotten any time alone together, and I ache to melt into his chest and maybe to prod him a little about where his head is at with us.

Cohen tugs me to him, giving me a quick hug. "If he doesn't change back, are you planning to go to the office on your own?"

I shrug. "I'm really hoping to reach him. It'll be a lot more helpful if he's there to tell me exactly where to look."

It's strange that Gemma hasn't popped up, but I guess it's technically only been around twenty-four hours since I've seen her. Maybe a little less, based on when we chatted in my room after she brought our mom over.

It fries my brain to comprehend how much has happened in such a condensed amount

of time.

“Now, for our lesson.” Calyx comes to stand next to me and Cohen. “But first, a hug.” He wraps himself around my back, and I end up in the middle of a Calyx and Cohen sandwich that makes me wish there weren’t other things we have to focus on today.

The lich kisses the side of my head, and a freaking whimper escapes my lips. It’s a little embarrassing how desperate I am for all their tender touches, but I hope they never stop being so generous with their affection.

If that makes me needy...I can accept it.

When Owen’s bear lets out a displeased chuff, my heart aches. I don’t want to make his bear suffer, but I’m not going to censor myself with my other mates just to make him happy.

Owen and his berserker need to determine whether they want to be part of my pack. If not, I can’t force them to change their minds.

Dammit.

Owen and I need to have an important conversation, and I have a feeling that will only happen without an audience. Owen has always been a loner, and I worry how he’ll adapt to pack life.

Calyx steps back, and I release my hold on Cohen.

“Okay, how do I get to the human realm when I can’t portal or siphon?” I ask, spinning to focus on Calyx.

The lich chuckles. “You ask the sithen to create a portal for you.” His hands fly out to his sides as he gestures around. “We’re in the space between realms. Ask the sithen for safe passage to your destination, and it will provide it.”

I frown.

Maybe I didn’t play pretend enough as a child, because that seems hard for me to believe.

“Am I just supposed to verbally ask it?” I rub my temple and tuck my hair behind my ear as it whips in the wind. “And once I’m in the human realm, am I stuck until I can get you to portal us back or ask Gemma to siphon me here?”

“Give the sithen more credit.” Calyx grins. “Much like travelers will find their way here from a multitude of different locations, you can leave the same way. And find your way back in that same manner. I recommend creating a path similar to the one you’ve built here with the gravel?—”

“I didn’t pick that,” I squeak.

Calyx hums. “At least subconsciously, you did. Ask the sithen to give you a path and focus on your desired location. It will handle the rest.”

“And if I think of the sithen in the human realm...” I gesture around with my hands. “What? A path will open that leads me back here?”

“Exactly,” Calyx agrees. “When I first stumbled upon the sithen, it was a cobblestone path that led to a small bridge over a bubbling brook. Once I passed over the bridge, I could sense the change in the air.” He shrugs. “And here we are in the veil.”

That is incredible.

The magic of the universe blows me away at times.

“Okay,” I say, smiling. “I’ll give it a shot, but if you make it back here, and I never do... You should probably pop into Owen’s office to make sure I didn’t mess anything up.”

The lich smirks and pulls me into his arms. “That I can do, princess.”

He pushes his lips to mine for a sensual kiss that makes my knees weak, but it’s over all too soon.

I really wish we didn’t have actual responsibilities. Snuggling around the sithen sounds much more appealing than a day of investigating Delta.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Rogue

Calyx and Cohen leave through their own portal. At least I have Cohen's phone number if there's an emergency. If I need them, I'll be able to call.

It's annoying at times that Gemma doesn't have a phone. I never realized how inconvenient it was when we were spending ninety percent of our time together, but it would be nice to be able to call her right now to check in.

That's part of growing up, I suppose.

Siblings branch out and build their own families.

It's time for me to focus on fixing my problems.

Planting my hands on my hips, I close my eyes and focus on the energy of the sithen.

"I would appreciate any help you can give me in finding a path to Owen's office.

The bail bonds office, it's where I work.

" I grimace, remembering how the house reacted with Cohen.

"Not that I'll be going back. Once I solve the case of Calyx's missing phylactery and make Delta pay, I plan to be here.

I just have to wrap that up first, so Calyx and Cohen will be safe. ”

I sigh, shaking my head.

I sound like a fool, and Owen is over there in bear form, listening to every word I say.

“I appreciate it,” I say, opening my eyes. My jaw falls as I spot the cobblestone path that now leads toward the woods. “Holy shit. I mean, thank you. That’s amazing.”

It’s kinda creepy knowing the sithen is always listening, but hopefully we can come to some type of agreement where it respects my privacy. At least, when I’m in the bathroom or my bedroom.

I shake my head.

That line of thinking will drive me crazy if I let it. It’s almost too bizarre to focus on, and I need to get moving.

Owen’s bear might be more stubborn than the man himself. He’s grunted and huffed, but not much else for the last five minutes, even as I’ve tried to rationalize with him about how much it would help to have Owen the man present.

“Okay, fine, then,” I say, finally reaching the end of my rope. “I don’t know how long that path will stay open, and I don’t want to risk missing it. If you’d like to join me, you better make the call pretty quickly.”

Owen’s bear looks entirely too cute as his head tilts.

And I’m still not risking losing my window to study Delta’s past cases.

I sigh, spin around, and head toward the newly formed path. My shoes clack against

the bricks, but I stop dead in my tracks when the sound of bones cracking fills the air.

“Rogue, wait.” The voice is deep and scratchy, still more beast than man.

I turn to face him, and my eyes bug. “You’re naked.”

Pulling a hand up, I cover my face but make sure I can see the ground as I walk closer.

From the quick peek I got, I know a few things, like he has more chest hair than I thought I would be attracted to, but somehow it works on his muscular frame.

There are dark runes under his clavicles that run down each side and possibly even lower.

I can’t check without looking like a creep.

“I can magic you some clothes,” I say, awkwardly clearing my throat. “Or you could go inside and ask the house.”

Owen chuckles. “I’ll take whatever you can whip up.”

I keep my fingers over my eyes and bring my other hand up. My magic doesn’t need to make contact with the skin to work, but I misjudge the distance between us and end up thumping him in the chest.

“Shit, sorry,” I whisper as my hand tingles. My magic flows from my skin, and I focus on procuring him something he would normally wear. Once a few seconds pass, I pull my fingers away from my eyes to check.

Yep.

It worked.

No massive dick on display now.

Nope, none.

Just Owen in his normal attire of a plain white T-shirt, dark jeans, and boots.

My mouth goes dry studying the way the material stretches over his strong chest.

How am I ever supposed to look him in the eye again knowing that he has a thick happy trail of golden brown hair that leads down to a thick?—

Owen steps forward, pulling me into his arms.

I freeze.

Tell me he was not picking up on my inappropriate thoughts.

Exactly how telepathic are berserkers?

He only has that ability in shifted form...

Right?

“Shit,” he growls, and the word seems to vibrate through my entire body. “I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.” He pats my back and releases me.

“You didn’t.” My eyes fly up to meet his. “We have a lot to talk about, but we need to go. I don’t want to miss the portal.”

He nods, swiping his light brown hair back from his forehead. “Lead the way.”

The trip from the sithen to the human realm is uneventful.

It’s so bizarre and honestly kind of underwhelming.

We walk along the cobblestone path, over the small bridge Calyx mentioned, through the forest for a bit, and eventually the path spits us out at the tree line just behind Owen’s.

“Do you think the business is in shambles?” I ask, bumping my arm against Owen’s. “You’ve been away for an entire twenty-four hours.” I laugh. “Ember, Gemma, and I have a running joke that we don’t think you ever actually leave.”

Owen snorts, planting his hand on my hip as we walk across the field behind the building.

“It’s not far off, but I own a house. I just leave Jeff and Thomas in charge when I need a little time off.

Not that my bear had the foresight to call them.

” His fingers run over my side, and my pulse picks up to what feels like a dangerous level.

He clears his throat, squeezing my hip. “He didn’t mean to scare you.

I know you got jostled around when he took off with you in his arms. He was actually trying to bring you to my home. ”

“You don’t need to apologize for that.” My right hand falls to his, and I interlock my

fingers over his where it rests on my side. “I know how shifters are. I’ve seen Ember and Velyn dance around each other for years.” Frowning, I shake my head. “I almost don’t want to ask how long you’ve known.”

Owen stops and turns to face me. “Since the day we met.” His face contorts almost like he’s in physical pain. “Since way before it would have been right for me to tell you.”

“I’m an adult,” I tell him, and even I can hear the exasperation in my tone. “I have been for a year and a half.”

Owen’s eyes light bright orange, and his head shakes violently. His sharp nails dig into my side as his bear fights for control.

My magic spills from my skin with no instruction from me. Light teal wispy smoke circles him, and it clicks—it’s trying to soothe him to prevent his berserker from taking over.

“Your kind is as wanted by the paranormal council as Calyx is,” I whisper, placing my hand over his heart.

“You can’t change. It’s too risky. Whatever the two of you are fighting over, you need to save it until we’re back at the sithen.

” I had no idea what a berserker was until last night when Calyx and Cohen filled me in.

Owen’s features morph, and his already furry face transforms into more bear-like features and back again.

“Fucking stop showing your ass,” he growls.

“I’ll tell her. Fuck. Just stop.” He focuses on me, retracting his claws from my hip.

The sharp sting surprises me. I don’t bother checking to see if he drew blood through my dress, though.

It wasn’t intentional, and even if he did, my natural healing will handle it within seconds.

“My bear wanted to claim you the first day he scented you. He would have waited until you came of age to initiate a relationship, but he wanted to tell you that day.” His head shakes, and the fur that was forming on his cheeks and neck disappears.

“He wanted to tell everyone. To claim you as his, but I wouldn’t allow it. ”

My magic senses the truth in his words, and my stomach twists. Although it’s nice to hear him finally level with me for once, it’s not what I wanted to hear.

Not at all.

“You’re not even twenty.” Owen’s huge hand lands on my jaw, tilting my face up toward his. “Do you have any idea how many twenty-year periods I’ve lived? A fucking lot.”

My eyes search his.

I can feel the pain radiating from him, but I’m still annoyed.

“I really don’t like that you let me believe I was crazy. Do you think you’re the only one who felt the pull?” I ask, trying to keep from lashing out. “Because you’re not. Fae feel matebonds just like shifters. You had no right to take the choice out of my hands.”

He runs his thumb over my cheek, and I ache to nuzzle my face into his wrist. It's the connection, the pull fated mates feel to touch each other and be in close contact.

I'm still really frustrated with him, but the universe doesn't care, and it will continue to try to pull us together until we honor that connection with claiming bites.

"I'm sorry that I hurt you," he says, teasing his calloused fingers over my jaw.

"You never gave me any indication that you felt drawn to me, and I thought it was better to give you the chance to live a little more life before I addressed that conversation. That's not even getting into how messy things will be when Atlas finds out. "

I sigh.

He's not wrong there.

I just don't care.

My mom literally ran from her husbands—two of my dads—for twenty years. She knew she had two fated mates in Faere, but she fell in love with Atlas and Malice and claimed them as her own.

That was messy too.

They have no room to talk.

"Were you able to hear what I told your bear last night?" My hand still rests over his heart, and I brush my fingers over the soft material of his shirt.

"My mother said we should bond before letting anyone in on our connection. But the

bottom line is, I'm an adult.

No one is going to tell me who I can or can't be with.

"I shake my head, pulling my hand down.

"Not if they want to continue to be a part of my life." I step back and head for the back door of the building.

"If they don't want to be supportive of me building a life with my mate, then I'll just let them know Calyx is even older than you.

Trust me when I say he won't give a fuck what anyone has to say about it."

Owen huffs, and his heavy footfalls fill the air as he picks up his pace to catch up with me.

"It's not about what anyone thinks. No one's opinion matters more than you.

It's everything else. Morally speaking, it felt wrong to pursue you when just being with me could put you in danger from the council and anyone else who still hunts my kind."

I stop dead in my tracks and do an about-face. The magic I inherited from my mother flies to the surface, and I shove it down with all my might. My vision still takes on the smoky charcoal sheen that signals my eyes have changed to black.

"The council would have a few things to say about my magic too," I say, quirking an eyebrow. "You know what my mother can do. The council is after Calyx and Cohen too. I would say the universe knew exactly what it was doing when it fated me to the three of you."

Owen's eyes widen, but rather than retreating, like anyone who gets a look at my mother's magic does, he steps forward and tucks my hair behind my ear. "I had no idea you inherited your mother's magic."

"Well, now you do." I shrug, closing my eyes and willing them to change back to their natural light gray.

"I might not be ancient like you or Calyx, but whatever power flows through my blood is primordial. So, let's just stop questioning the age difference, okay?"

It's really starting to get under my skin. "

"I will do my best," Owen says, smiling softly as my eyes pop open.

Dammit.

It's really not fair that he's that hot.

Or maybe the universe knew exactly what I would want in a man. It's all a ploy to bring fated mates together. Whatever powers that be stack a mate with every desirable trait you could dream up and a few you wouldn't know to ask for, and bam...

Heart eyes and weak knees.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Owen

Rogue sits on the small couch in the corner of my office, eating her veggie burger and fries while she glances over Delta's past cases. She wasn't wrong when she joked that I rarely leave. I've spent many nights on that uncomfortable-ass sofa.

Days, too, for that matter.

In our line of work, we often work nights and sleep days. I have no idea how things will change now that she knows she's my mate. My bear will no longer tolerate the long hours. He'll demand we live together in one space, and the thought appeals to me too.

Simply smelling her scent has my cock acting like a fool. If I don't give myself some distance from her, I'm likely to do something stupid.

"I'm going to take a quick shower in the locker room." Clearing my throat, I gesture over my shoulder toward the door. "I smell like sweaty bear."

"Oh?" She laughs without looking up from the folder she's busy studying. "I didn't notice, but okay. I'll just be here."

Her lips push together, and she flips the page before grabbing her soda. My bear pushes me to sit at her side, so we can be as physically close as possible.

He also sends me a barrage of images of other things we could do across the surfaces in my office.

Exhaling heavily, I almost run to the door.

It's always been a challenge to be around her with how badly I yearn for her, but now that everything is out in the open, it's a whole new set of struggles.

I keep a locker full of clothes for the times I don't leave the office. I dress quickly after my shower and dry my hair with a towel, tossing it into the hamper on the way out.

There are a few people in the building, but this place is always more lively at night. Heading into my office, I close the door behind me and turn to face the room.

My jaw falls.

Rogue is in my giant coat. The soft dress she's wearing clings to it or vice versa, and she's bent over, digging in the bottom filing cabinet. The dress is pulled up in the back, showing me a perfect view of her ass and pussy from behind.

My bear slams his will into me, and my eyes glow as I struggle to shove him back down.

It doesn't help.

His claws burst from my hands and fur sprouts on my forearms.

"Fuck," I growl, shaking my head and trying to force him down.

He really has been biding his time and growing stronger.

It's impossible to fight him for complete control.

Before I even know what's happening, he's in control of my body.

He forces me across the room and my hands land on Rogue's hips.

"Were you cold? Or did you want to be surrounded by our scent?" My voice echoes with the extra bass and growl that proves just how in control he is of this interaction.

Rogue squeaks, dropping the file back into the drawer and standing.

My bear's claws dig into her stomach and hips as he holds her in place. He guides me to kick the filing cabinet closed and nuzzles my cheek to hers from behind. "If you wanted my scent, I would have been happy to offer it to you directly."

She spins around in my hold and jolts. "Oh, okay. You're furrier than normal.

" She loops her arms under his and pulls them up between us.

"You know there could be serious consequences if anyone else saw you like this. Why don't you let Owen take back over, and once we get back to the sithen, you can trade out? "

"You prefer him over me." The voice comes from my lips, but it's one hundred percent my berserker.

Rogue snorts. "Hardly." She stretches up on her tiptoes and pulls my face down by tugging on my beard.

Once my face is in reach, she kisses the apple of my cheek just above where my facial hair ends.

“The issue is that I’m afraid of the consequences if someone sees you.

That means we’ll have to be smart about when we spend time together.

Maybe we can make a schedule or come to some type of agreement? ”

My bear acts, pushing me to lift her.

Rogue doesn’t argue.

She wraps her legs around my ass and holds on as we head over so I can lock my office door.

My bear struggles for control as he walks us back to the couch, taking a seat. “No one will bother us now,” he says in my voice as he helps her get her legs situated. “Are you cold?”

Rogue shakes her head, making her light blonde hair fall around her face.

My bear brings my hands up to push it behind her ears, but his giant claws pose a problem.

At least shift our hands back to mine, or you’ll end up cutting her , I tell him, my patience wearing thin.

I fight for control, and he gives enough that his clawed paws transition back into my hands.

“Did you notice Delta likes to take cases involving missing artifacts?” Rogue asks, hovering over my lap on her knees.

“I didn’t, but I probably should have,” I admit. “Stop hovering,” my bear growls, shoving her down until her weight rests over my lap.

“I never gave it any thought until I started looking through her past cases,” Rogue says, wiggling to get comfortable.

It grinds my cock against my thigh, and I stifle a growl. “I don’t want to talk about Delta while my dick is hard.”

Rogue snorts and grinds over my lap like she wants to drive me insane. “Well, that’s reassuring. For the record, I don’t either.” She brings her hands to my face once more. “I didn’t mind the glowing eyes, but it’s nice to spend a little time with the human too.”

She licks her lips, and everything in me says she wants me to kiss her.

I want that too—more than anything—and I think she might need the reassurance that I desire her too. Not just my beast form.

My head dips, and I capture her lips.

She tastes like the remnants of her soda, but I’m more obsessed with the way her fingers dig into my beard as I nip at her lower lip. Gasping, she opens for me, and I don’t hesitate to take the opportunity to shove my tongue into her mouth.

My eyes pop open as her hands leave my face, but it doesn’t take long to realize she’s peeling herself out of my coat. She tosses it aside, using magic to float it...somewhere.

Now that I know she’s not trying to escape, I screw my eyes shut and focus on the way she desperately kisses me back.

My hand digs into her hip as the other weaves into her hair, cradling her skull. She whimpers and grinds over me, perfectly mimicking how she would ride me if I was inside her.

Fuck.

I ache for her in a way I've never experienced. It's probably dangerous being this close with how badly I yearn to make her mine.

Ours , my bear growls.

As Rogue's pheromones flood the air, the effect it has on my system is visceral. My cock jolts under her ass, and my knot aches. It's a physical feature all alpha shifters have, but I'm not sure if Rogue knows to expect it.

She groans, snaking a hand between us. "The cramps are back. That's not a good sign, especially if you intend to be all valiant and not?—"

A low growl rattles out of my chest.

I could blame the action on my bear, but I'm the one in control as I turn us, lying Rogue down on the couch.

I'm tall as fuck, which is inconvenient, so I keep a foot on the floor for leverage and let the other hang off the arm of the sofa as I settle between her thighs.

"Can you refresh the sound-blocking ward?"

"Oh, yeah, I can," she whispers, raising a hand. Her light, smoky-teal magic spills from her skin. Her fingers land on the back of my neck as she stares up at me, and she's so beautiful it takes my breath away.

I plant a hand by her head and lower until our lips almost touch. “Tell me what you need,” I murmur, brushing her hair away from her cheek. Alarm pulses in my chest as her skin heats mine, just from the simple contact.

Shifters call it going into heat for a reason , my bear growls in my mind. The longer you hesitate, the more she will suffer. Let me handle this.

“You,” Rogue chokes out. “I need you...”

My eyes light with my berserker, and her face glows orange.

You’re going to push her away if you’re not careful , I hiss at my bear. You’re too pushy.

At least she knows I’ll give her whatever she asks for . He scoffs, but I’m surprised that he hands control to me without any additional fight.

“I’ve got you,” I tell my mate, snagging her lower lip with my teeth. I tug on it gently as my free hand slides from her hip down to her thigh. Once I hit the bottom of her dress, I skim back up again, teasing her warm flesh.

When I dressed after my shower, I went for comfort.

I assumed sweats and a T-shirt would be fine for hanging around the office doing research, but the material doesn’t confine my cock at all.

It bumps around Rogue’s pelvis as we kiss, and I’m so lost to the feeling of her tongue teasing mine that I miss her hand snaking between us.

She cups my shaft over fabric, and I growl, brushing my fingers along her inner thigh as I work higher.

Although the scent of her pussy is heavy in the air just from the sensual kisses, I'm unprepared for how slick she is when I reach her sex. There's no way I've done enough to have her this aroused, but I can fix that.

I circle her clit with my thumb, and she curls off the sofa and toward me. It makes our teeth bump, but it doesn't take away from my enjoyment.

"I forgot I can do this," she says between kisses.

Cool air hits my skin as my clothing disappears. Rogue's follow a second later, and then her hand is wrapped around my bare cock. It takes everything in me to keep from bucking into her grip. Her skin heats mine and alarm pulses in my chest.

Right.

Quickenings are like heats.

They're a biological reaction, not just simple desire, which complicates things.

"I need you inside me," she begs, nodding frantically. It pulls her mouth from mine, and I take the opportunity to appraise her face. Her cheeks are pink, her hair is sweaty and stuck to her forehead, and she looks truly desperate.

"How about my fingers?" I ask, bumping my cheek against hers.

I nose her hair out of the way, suck on her neck, and rake my teeth over her sensitive skin.

She's not a shifter, but everything in me says it'll soothe the need she has to be bitten.

It's dangerous to be this close when my bear could fight me for control at any time.

Hopefully he understands how quickly he can destroy everything if he acts rashly.

“Your cock would be better,” she whispers, jerking me haphazardly. The uncoordinated movements still make my length jump in her palm.

God, how I ache to shove every thick inch inside her, but I’m not going there until I know she can handle it.

My fingers dip down, testing her opening. She’s so fucking wet that I growl against her throat.

My canines pulse, and my bear pushes me to thrust them into her soft skin. So much for hoping he would understand decorum.

I shake my head, physically forcing away his influence. It’s fucking complicated, considering on some level...he is me. Still, I’m rational enough to comprehend how rushing things will only hurt us long term.

Pushing my middle finger inside her, I freeze. Her inner walls cling to my thick digit, and I’m almost afraid to add more.

“I’m not human, Owen. Stop hesitating,” Rogue groans. “I swear, all you men are maddening.”

Her words remind me how she smelled of the warlock, and a dangerous snarl vibrates out of my chest.

“Don’t bait me, little one,” I grunt, adding a second finger.

Rogue writhes under me as I stretch my fingers, twisting and doing my best to get her body ready to accommodate me. All my bear can seem to focus on is besting

whatever performance the warlock put on.

Hell, I'm probably guilty too.

My berserker and I rarely agree on anything, but we need to satisfy her so thoroughly that she physically can't think of anyone else.

Rogue finally remembers she's holding my shaft, and she begins to steadily jerk me again. My tip leaks as she swirls her thumb around my crown.

I lick and suck on her lithe neck, grinding my palm over her clit until her legs start to tremble and a string of rambling begging spills from her lips.

The little fae freezes, her nails digging into the back of my neck almost painfully. Her inner walls lock down and she sobs, begging for my cock and my bite. She soaks my hand as she comes, and every breath I suck in seems to make my head foggier.

Fuck.

This might be a problem...

Chapter Twenty-Four

Rogue

Owen yanks his hand free of my pussy, pulling his fingers to his lips. Watching him lick and suck makes me ache to have him inside me.

I grab his shaft and relocate it to my core. His crown bumps my swollen nub, and I whimper, pushing him down to my opening.

“Please?” I choke out, nodding.

He swirls his tongue around his fingers and growls but doesn’t move. I hoped my quickening would chill for long enough that we could handle Delta, and for me to have the chance to ease him, Cohen, and Calyx into being a pack.

Biology doesn’t care. It has its own plans, much like fate. Maybe like me, too, considering I really want Owen to fuck me.

I wiggle my hips, scooting down the couch and forcing him inside me.

He yanks his hand from his mouth and studies my face. “Are you good?”

I huff. “I’d be better if you moved.”

Owen growls, shaking his head. “So much for taking things slow.”

“Slow is boring and overrated.” My hand digs into his skin just above his ass as he hovers over me. “Please? I need you.”

Owen lowers even farther until his chest rests on mine and pulls out before dipping back inside. Only, he doesn’t give me any more of his length.

The stretch is nice, but I need him pounding into me. Coming on his fingers should have helped to settle my body... That’s just not the case, though.

His beard scratches my cheek as he pushes his lips to mine, and I wrap my feet around his thighs to give myself leverage.

I’m obsessed with the way his muscles push against me as he pulls free of my core and dips back in.

Over.

And over.

And over again.

Until I’m desperate for friction on my clit, and hot and achy like I’m about to lose my mind if he doesn’t give me more.

My nails rake down his back as I take over, guiding the kiss.

It spurs Owen on, and soon he’s slamming into me with enough force to make me bounce around the couch. My tits throb with every jiggle, and now that he’s thrusting deep, his pelvis brushes my swollen clit.

I sob against his lips, nodding and begging for more.

Owen obliges, and it doesn't take long until I'm teetering at the edge. On one especially violent rut, something brushes my lower lips.

My eyes pop open as I realize... "You've got a knot."

"Sure do," he says, sounding smug. "I guess you never got a look at my cock, considering the angle, which is probably a good thing. But don't worry—the universe will ensure you're able to accommodate all of me."

Male fae don't have the appendage, but my system lights up. I like hearing him sound so confident that I'm his mate. He continues bucking into me, and my pleasure builds unbelievably fast.

The grind of his pelvis against my swollen nub sends me tumbling over the edge.

My entire body lights with pleasure as I lock down on his length.

Owen growls and kisses the hell out of me, but I'm too out of it to kiss him back.

Or do much of anything. His shaft grows thicker and harder, but he doesn't come.

Instead, he slides a hand between me and the couch.

The dominating way he pulls me up and repositions us both makes me shiver, especially considering he manages to keep his length buried inside me throughout the entire transition.

He sits on the middle cushion, helping me get my legs settled at his sides.

"This is a much better view." His eyes light with his bear's, and my head falls to the side, offering my throat.

“Nah, little one. You don’t need to offer me deference.

You’re my equal in every way.” His warm skin brushes mine as he cups my tits, running his calloused thumbs over my nipples.

It makes me ache with the need to come all over his cock again, and I find myself rocking over him.

Owen’s hand flattens on my lower back, and he guides me as he snakes the other into my hair and cradles my skull. “Ride me, sweet girl.” As his words vibrate through my skin, I do just that.

Not that I really have any idea what I’m doing, but I chase my pleasure selfishly, and Owen seems to enjoy the process. Rising and falling on my knees, I slam hard enough for his knot to slip inside me.

“Gods,” he growls, his hand locking down on my lower back. “Are you okay?”

I nod.

I have no idea what to do with myself, and I end up kind of melting into his chest as his knot swells and locks us together. It feels so incredible stretching my walls to capacity that I grind, rubbing my clit over his pelvis.

Owen lowers his head to mine as he guides me with his hand in my hair, and my insides get warm and fuzzy. The feeling of his beard brushing my skin. The way he commands the kiss while slowly leading me to ride him.

It’s a lot.

“You’re a goddamn dream,” he growls in between tender but sensual kisses. His knot

drags along my inner walls, which sends my arousal skyrocketing.

Without a doubt, I'm fuller than I've ever been, but he was right. It's not more than I can handle. My body pulses with heat, and Owen bucks up into me using his feet as leverage.

I don't have the coordination to keep kissing him when bliss sizzles through my nerve endings, and my face falls to rest in his throat.

"You keep clenching like that, and I'm fucking done for," he growls.

His words echo through my system and another powerful orgasm rips through my body, making me shiver and shake as I moan. It goes on for so long that I disconnect with reality.

Claim him, some dark part of the magic I inherited from my mother spurs me on. Before I can even think through my actions, I'm burying my fangs in the side of his neck, just under where his beard ends.

"Motherfucker," Owen snarls, thrusting as deep as he can get. His knot pulses, and his shaft jolts. "Well, fuck. I hope you're ready for my cum, because you're about to get it."

I lap at my bite, sucking down soft swallows of his blood that spill around the wound. Fire licks through my insides, making me groan.

My anxiety rises as I wait for Owen to accept our connection, but a half second later, the link snaps into place, permanently connecting our souls.

It's overwhelming being able to feel his pleasure and his desire for me.

There's a whole lot of yearning there that he's very good at masking, and it's humbling being able to feel his emotions.

I retract my teeth, licking over the bite to clean and seal it. I'm so out of it that I gasp when he uses his hand in my hair to pull my face from his neck.

He guides my throat in front of his mouth, but due to the height difference, it makes me rise on his length, which makes his knot drag along my pussy walls. He lowers his head and strikes.

It's not a gentle experience as his canines dig into my throat as deep as they can get.

My soul already accepted the link when I bit him, so this is just a formality to complete the circuit.

Owen's emotions become even easier to pick out, which I had no idea was possible. My eyes sting as he sends something like joy and contentment through the connection.

I was supposed to ask before biting him, and knowing he's not resentful is a huge gift. The connection can only be offered once, and if a mate denies it, it's extremely painful for both parties.

That's why we're taught to take our time and to only bite when we're sure.

Thank God, he didn't reject me.

Owen retracts his teeth, licking over the bite. "Once wasn't even close to enough," he growls, guiding me to grind over his knot.

No, it definitely wasn't.

“How fortuitous I decided to check in on you, rather than allowing your sister to siphon over,” Calyx says, chuckling as he steps from the portal.

I twist my head at the sound of his voice, and glowing white light frames his shoulders before the portal closes behind him. I’m still on Owen’s lap with his knot swollen inside me, and my face heats.

When Owen growls, I turn back to him, pushing my fingers to his lips.

“No.” I shake my head. “You can’t growl at my other mates, or we’re going to have problems.”

“No hard feelings,” Calyx says, clapping. “Although, I do wonder if the two of you managed to get anything done besides fucking.” His footfalls move closer, and the couch dips as he climbs onto the cushion next to us.

Owen locks his muscles tight, like he’s physically holding himself back from trying to remove Calyx’s head.

The lich pays him no mind. Instead, he tilts my face to his and captures my mouth in a tender kiss.

My life is so weird.

I’m naked.

Locked on Owen’s knot.

And Calyx is kissing me like it’s no big deal.

Maybe it’s not when you’ve lived multiple lifetimes, but I’m still getting used to

intimacy in any form. It's new and exciting and kind of intimidating.

"Ahh, you're not just stuffed full of a knot," Calyx says against my lips, "but bonded. Congratulations. I won't pretend I'm not dreadfully jealous—because I am—but I'm afraid if we take too much longer, your sister might ignore my warnings and siphon in.

Cohen is doing his best to keep her distracted, but I wouldn't restart the timer on that thing.

" His tone is light and airy, and I still worry if I've hurt his feelings.

Relationships are complicated, and this is my first attempt at one. I'm not even starting small with just one person. I'm trying to meld three completely different personalities into one family pack.

The word family sends me into a panic.

No way in hell can Gemma see me like this. I'll never hear the end of it. The heckling will go on indefinitely. Also, I would have to murder her if she saw Owen naked.

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Chapter Twenty-Five

Calyx

Rogue demands to be given three minutes to take a quick shower while the berserker refuses to do the same. She huffs but exits the room once she's magicked her clothes back on.

Once it's just Owen and me, I turn to the shifter. He pulls on sweatpants, completely ignoring my existence.

"Did you find anything helpful?" I ask, trying to break the ice.

"Delta really likes to take cases involving missing relics." The bear sighs and steps over, grabbing his shirt. "Which I should have picked up on years ago."

"Perhaps, but lamenting the past gets you nowhere," I say, shrugging.

I should know.

I spent nearly two hundred years in the deepest of all depressions when I couldn't save Ash.

That tiger was my best damn friend long before I stumbled across Lorcan.

Being unable to save her will always be one of my most humbling regrets.

From that lesson, I learned to be even more vicious in protection of those I love.

There's always some wisdom to be learned if you're open to what the universe is attempting to teach you.

"If that's the biggest thing you missed, I'd say you're doing quite well.

" I offer a tight smile as the berserker turns to face me.

He tosses himself down onto the couch and begins to lace his boots.

"You've clearly started to repair your relationship with your mate.

All in all, I would call today one in the win column. "

"I still don't know where we stand or if she's forgiven me." Owen sighs. "I planned to take my time to earn back her trust, but she bit me, and there was no way I was going to deny the connection."

I have a very good poker face after living for so long, but I didn't see that coming.

I assumed it was the berserker who struck first.

The bond is a onetime per person kind of deal; I don't blame him for accepting the connection.

Rogue really must not want to risk letting him get away.

"Just so you're aware," I tell him calmly. "I also have no intention of denying her. If she bites me, I'll gladly accept the bond."

The bear's head tilts, and his eyes glow bright orange as he growls.

"I thought it best to get that out in the open." I shrug. "I hold no ill will toward you for bonding Rogue, but I also won't force my own future to be delayed simply to keep you happy."

Owen sighs and shakes his head. "Understood."

Good.

Glad we could address that.

Now we just need the fae in question to finish with her quick cleanup so we can return to the sithen.

"I need to let Jeff and Thomas know that I'll be away again," Owen says, shoving himself up from the sofa. He strides by me without another word.

I suppose that was his attempt at letting me know he intends to tag along.

By the time we make it back to the house, Cohen has cooked us all a hearty dinner. I've been vegetarian, vegan, carnivorous, and everything in between over the years, yet I still find myself frowning at the concoction on Rogue's plate.

While Cohen whipped up thinly sliced steak in a Marsala sauce with mashed potatoes and broccoli for the rest of us, Rogue has a plate of veggies. Heaps of sweet peas, carrots, red and green peppers, green beans, and water chestnuts cover a bed of rice with some kind of sauce.

What I don't see is a solid protein source.

Hopefully there's something I'm missing. With her quickening approaching, we need to ensure she's eating regularly. Her system is set up to stockpile calories for the days she won't be interested in leaving the nest to eat...

Come to think of it, at some point, we should probably ask the sithen to get to work on building Rogue a nest.

"Okay, this is a little too domestic for me," Gemma says from her spot on the other side of the table. She's not eating, but I'm sure that's because her kind consumes nightmares rather than human food.

"Okay," Rogue says, jabbing her fork at her sister. "Then tell us what you found."

"Cohen and I learned two of the three men behind the heists are shifters," I tell the table to get the ball rolling. "They're not part of the North American Pack, at least not from what we could gather."

"She's got shifters doing her bidding?" Rogue asks with wide eyes.

"It was a good thing we took the extra step to block our scents in the bar," Cohen says, shoving a bite of potatoes into his mouth.

"Indeed," I agree. "The third is some type of magic user. Likely a warlock, which would make sense. It would take quite a lot of power to siphon off the excess magic spilling from my phylactery and put it to work."

Owen's head whips up, and he frowns. "What does that mean?"

He's tucked in close to Rogue's side, and if he moves their chairs any closer together, he'll be sitting in her lap.

I nearly snort at the thought.

I need anything possible to focus on, or my jealous side threatens to make an appearance.

She's spent time intimately with Cohen and the bear.

And while I know I'm not owed anything, I would like the same time alone to attempt to win her affection.

If they're constantly stealing her away, I'm going to get moody.

No one wants to see a moody lich.

"The three men we saw at the bar are not the ones enacting the heists," I say to get back on track. "They're likely responsible for procuring the bodies to be reanimated by my magic, but the reason the culprits continually disappear is because they're revenants."

"What?" Owen chokes out.

"Zombie thieves." Gemma snorts. "No fucking way."

"My magic fuels them just long enough to enact whatever crime they're instructed to commit, and once that's complete..." I offer Owen a pointed look. "All the evidence disappears with them."

"Except for the traces of your magic, which the council has clearly come across," Cohen adds.

"That would be my best guess." I collect my knife and fork and prepare to cut a bite

of steak.

“It would wrap everything up in a nice little bow if the paranormal council were to take possession of me. I’d be unable to retrieve my phylactery, and Delta could make a clean escape with the astronomical amount of money she would gain from selling my vessel. ”

“What did you find from following her?” Rogue directs the question at her sister.

“You mean, other than the fact the lich was this close to fucking you on the dance floor at Leon’s?” Gemma holds up her fingers only a hairsbreadth apart. “Not much. She certainly wasn’t spewing any extra information like she did when Calyx spelled her.”

“You were there?” Rogue hisses.

“I straight up told you I was going to keep an eye on her.” Gemma shrugs, shoving her long, dark hair over her shoulder.

My eyes narrow.

She is indeed very powerful.

I never even sensed her.

Luckily she’s an ally, but I don’t like the precedent that sets.

“It’s only been a day. These things take time,” the nightmare says. “I doubt she’s checking in on the super secret relic she stole on the daily, but eventually, she will. I’ll steal it back, and once that’s no longer a concern, the rest of you can deal with her.”

Hmm.

That does sound lovely.

Here's hoping the universe allows things to run smoothly.

Gemma leaves to continue monitoring Delta, and Owen stays long enough for all four of us to finish eating before pulling Rogue into the living room for a conversation of their own.

I handle gathering the dishes and stack them in the sink. It might be lazy, but I politely ask the sithen to handle them, along with the pots and pans Cohen dirtied cooking the meal. If it doesn't, I'll address them before breakfast in the morning.

Cohen watches me from his place at the table. I give him a jaunty wave of my middle finger as I edge close to the wall with the doorway that leads to the living room.

Is it underhanded to attempt to listen in on what's happening?

Possibly.

But I need some time with my mate.

Is it too much to ask that the universe could allow me a bit of time with the woman I've waited millennia for?

I'm barely in place, leaning against the wall, before Rogue and Owen come around the corner.

She jolts, and I take the opportunity to plant my hands on her hips to pull her into my chest.

“Oh shit, you startled me,” she says with a laugh as she tilts her head up to meet my eyes. “Owen needs to head back to the office. Will the sithen offer him a portal the same way it did for me?”

I barely hold back the beaming smile that aches to cross my face. “I believe it will. It did for me as one of your mates, but I’m more than happy to make a portal if the berserker has business he needs to attend to.”

Rogue smiles and nods appreciatively before turning to him. “You can always call me if you need help getting back.”

“I can give you my number too,” Cohen says helpfully.

What a perfect turn of events.

Perhaps the universe doesn’t hate me.

The sun setting over the horizon makes for a beautiful backdrop as I lead Rogue down the gravel-lined path toward the fountain.

We’re technically not in the human realm, but the atmosphere of the sithen seems to have synced with it.

Perhaps because that’s the realm Rogue is most comfortable with. Or that’s my best guess.

She frowns as we come to the new pathway I found this afternoon when Cohen and I returned. It guides us off to the left, running parallel with the tree line.

“Okay, am I going crazy?” Rogue asks. “This wasn’t here before, right?”

“It was not.” My hand tightens on her hip as I lead her toward the three small cottages.

“I believe we’ll have travelers soon. That, or the sithen was simply strong enough to expand, so it chose to do so.

” We crest the first hill, and the buildings come into view in the small valley before the next.

“What do you think? Your imagination formed them...”

She gasps, tilting her head. “No way! What are those, even?”

“They’re essentially tiny homes. Mini apartments? Whatever you’d like to call them, but they’re to give your guests somewhere to wait until you’re ready to see them.” I grin down at the awe on her face and pat her hip. “Would you like to see what you built?”

“Yeah. I mean, it’ll be as much of a surprise to me as it is to you.” She laughs, skipping out of my hold and down the hill.

Gods.

She’s fucking beautiful.

And she somehow manages to make me feel excited to live again.

That, in and of itself, is a gift.

All three cottages have the same design, at least from the exterior.

Rogue approaches the one in the middle, stepping up onto the small, covered wooden porch. There are two Adirondack chairs on either side of the door and not much else, but it will be more than welcoming for any weary travelers.

The door pops open as she tries the handle. Stepping inside, she twirls in a little circle.

I follow her in, more focused on how amazed she looks than the actual decor, but it's homey.

There's a full-size bed that takes up most of the right wall.

Straight ahead is a love seat and coffee table, and to the left is a small kitchen.

There's a two-person table, several cabinets, and a mini fridge.

The space would be cramped for more than two people, but I have faith the sithen would adjust things if necessary.

Rogue surprises me by face-planting into my chest. She wraps her arms around my lower back and cuddles close to my shirt. "This is amazing. Are you sure you didn't have anything to do with it?"

"I can't take any of the credit, I'm afraid." I bend, nuzzling my cheek to the top of her head. "That's all you, princess."

My sweet fae rises on her tiptoes, and the look on her face says it all. She desperately wants me to kiss her.

I want that just as much, and obliging is no hardship.

Rogue and I meander back toward the fountain hand in hand.

Ash trots along at Rogue's side, continually bumping her hand until she gives up, scratching the oversized feline as we walk in companionable silence.

I'm surprised when Ash takes off.

Normally she likes to stick close to me, but as soon as the loud splash fills the air, I know what happened.

Rogue laughs. "Oh Gods, is she swimming in the fountain?"

"That's my best guess," I say as we crest the hill.

Only, Ash is not in the fountain, but the newly formed swimming pool. It must have just appeared because it wasn't here when we originally passed by.

Rogue bounces on her toes. "You know, the one thing I miss from living with my parents is the pool."

I chuckle, shaking my head. "I was going to suggest a warm bath before bed, but how do you feel about a dip in the hot tub?"

I would suggest the pool, but knowing Ash, her hair will be everywhere. Also, it's still a bit cool for a spring night. The small hot tub has steam rising from it, while the pool does not. That leads me to believe the pool isn't heated.

"I could go for a swim," Rogue says in a breathy whisper. "Do you want to magic up suits for us? Or should I?"

Laughing, I pull her to my chest. "Oh, princess, I have a much better idea."

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Chapter Twenty-Six

Rogue

Calyx is covered in runes. His lithe muscles move and flex as he guides me into the steamy water behind him. The waves lap at my ankles and eventually my shins as I follow him down the steps.

Don't check out his ass.

Don't check out his ass.

Shit.

He has a really nice backside.

Those sexy little indents above it might be the death of me. Luckily, they distort as he sinks down in the hot tub. He pulls me with him via a hand stretched behind him.

The night sky makes for a beautiful backdrop now that it's fully dark, but I'm confused about the stars.

Is that something the sithen added to make me more comfortable?

Or does the veil have stars of its own?

Calyx drops my hand and spins around in the water, plucking me from the bottom

step. He floats in the water and wraps my legs around his back.

Ash's splashes fill the air as she bounces around in the pool.

Knowing how much Calyx loves Ash and Dusk is one of the traits that put me at ease with him the fastest. That, and the way he's fiercely protective of Cohen.

Seeing the way he stood up to the house that first night when it attacked my warlock made it clear how fearless Calyx is when it comes to those he cares about.

He's incredibly attractive, which could be intimidating if I let my mind focus on it for too long.

He's also my mate, and that innate yearning will affect him too.

It's a heady feeling to know the universe will have stacked me with traits he finds attractive in the same way it filled him with things I'm drawn to.

Calyx's hand flattens on my lower back as he brings the other to brush my hair back from my face. "Are you growing more comfortable with your connection to the sithen?"

"I am. It's not even something I really focus on." I laugh, and my fingers dig into the tops of his shoulders. "Well, unless I need to ask the house to morph to accommodate Owen's giant bear."

"That's good. The connection is supposed to be seamless, from what I've heard." He smiles softly. "And speaking of the berserker, he's now officially your bonded mate. Any thoughts on that?"

I study his handsome face. "It was quick, but I didn't bond with Owen to hurt you."

“Don’t fret, darling,” he murmurs, lowering us even farther into the steamy water. “The thought never even crossed my mind.” His fingers weave through my hair, and he cradles my skull. “Was that a lie?”

I shake my head.

He was being truthful.

Sometimes my magic is a gift. At least as many times in my life, it’s felt like a curse. Most people forget I’m a walking lie detector, and I’m obsessed with the fact Calyx seems to be aware of it at all times.

Nothing makes me lose faith in someone faster than being lied to.

Honestly, I’ve spent years wishing I didn’t inherit my father’s magic, but there’s a purpose for it here at the sithen, and that gives me comfort.

Knowing I’ll be able to do good with the magic I’ve grown to resent helps make all the misery worth it somehow.

I don’t know.

Maybe that’s weird.

It’s hard to explain, but I like the idea that I have purpose.

“Dreadfully jealous,” Calyx says, drawing my attention. “Did I mention that part?” His lips tip up as he brings his mouth close to mine. “Can you sense the truth in my words when I tell you how badly I ache to make you mine?” His hand tightens on my lower back, pulling me flush with his front.

At the same time, something hard bumps my bottom.

That would be his dick.

And, oh yeah, I can sense the truth in his words.

It sends a shiver down my spine.

Cohen is more like me—a little socially inept, nerdy, and reserved.

Owen is growly and bossy and protective.

Calyx has this sensual, flirtatious, maybe even dangerous energy that is way out of my league, but Gods do I want him.

It feels a lot like he's the one of my mates who wants a partner in crime.

While Cohen and Owen would do their best to shelter and protect me, I think Calyx would be the most likely to allow me to fight by his side.

"I want you too." Using my feet on his ass as leverage, I stretch up until our faces are close together.

He doesn't make me spell out what I want. Nor does he wait for me to make the first move.

"I love knowing you can't lie." His hand tightens on my back, and he smirks as he lowers his mouth to mine.

Calyx's personality shines through in kisses. They're playful and enticing, making my body ache for more than a mere meeting of our mouths. As if he can sense my

need, Calyx releases my back, snaking his hand between us as he ravages my mouth.

The hot water laps at my skin, heating me from the inside out. Or maybe this is another wave of my approaching quickening.

Either way, I don't care.

I just want the opportunity to finally connect with my mate.

Calyx pulls his hand from my hair, swiping it through the air before returning to cradle my skull.

My skin hums with the pulse of his magic, and before I know what's happening, he stretches me out on a cool, flat surface. His magic formed a ramp for walking into the hot tub, but it allows my back to be partially submerged while my tits tingle in the cool night air.

"You're absolutely captivating." He follows me down, and his skin brushes mine. Ash must have climbed out of the pool because the sound of her shaking out her fur fills the air.

My fingers dig into the back of Calyx's neck, and I stretch up to meet him. "Kiss me."

"Such a bossy princess." He chuckles and slams his mouth to mine.

Calyx commands the sensual kiss in a way that makes my pussy throb . He's not playful any longer, and I moan against his lips as he holds himself up with one palm while sliding his other hand between us. He doesn't hesitate to shove two fingers inside me, and my shoulders bow toward him.

Calyx's magic spills from his skin into smoky dark shadows. They coil around my top half, lowering me into the water and holding me firmly in place. "You're wiggly all of a sudden. Don't worry. I'm more than capable of restraining you."

My system shouldn't light up at the dark promise in his words, but here we are. His shadowy magic teases my tits as he stretches his thick fingers, working them in and out of my dripping core.

His shaft lies heavy against my thigh, and I'd give just about anything to get him in my mouth. Sucking on his tongue will have to do.

Calyx releases the sexiest little moan and it vibrates against my lips, making my core tighten around his fingers.

"Tease my clit," I beg. "Please?"

"Mmm, yes, I can do that too," Calyx agrees. Whatever brushes over my swollen nub doesn't feel like fingers. I'm pretty sure he uses another strand of magic. "Fuck, princess, you're doing my head in. My cock is a sticky, leaking mess."

"Fuck me," I beg, nodding frantically.

The warm water ripples around me with the movement, and my tits ache.

"That is the endgame, but I don't see any point in rushing.

" He pecks a kiss on my lips, coils his magic even tighter to keep me in place, and licks and sucks his way down my body.

"There is something to be said for the destination, but the journey is just as important." Almost like he knows they need some attention, he stops and flicks his

tongue around each nipple before letting his magic take over once more.

My system heats to painful proportions, but Calyx lifts my lower half, resting my thighs on his elbows. Once my pussy is out of the water, the lich scrapes his teeth down my labia.

I sob, my hands flying to cradle his head as he moves to licking and sucking on my clit. Some insane part of me wants to know how the hell he got so skilled at pleasing a woman. The rest doesn't care, because...holy shit.

He is ridiculously talented with his tongue.

My body trembles as my pleasure builds, and the next thing I know, I'm tumbling into the most powerful orgasm I've ever experienced.

Embarrassing sounds spill from my lips, filling the night air as I explode. Calyx's hand flattens on my pelvis, and he continues to lick long after my system turns to feeling overstimulated.

"Ugh, too much," I groan, tugging his hair. "Let's switch."

The lich chuckles darkly, pulling free of my pussy. "While that is tempting, I have a better idea."

He moves to kneel, and his magic lifts me from the water, turning me over.

I gasp, tossing my hands out in front of me, but his magic helps me keep from face-planting into the water.

I end up on all fours, and Calyx's warm hands dance down my spine and over my hips. There's barely any time to wonder how I look from this angle. His crown

presses against my opening, then he's inside me.

My head falls forward, my hair dipping into the water as I sob. I can't seem to decide if that was painful or incredible.

It was amazing.

He feels divine, and I think I groan that.

"Thank you, darling," Calyx murmurs, wrapping his arm around my middle. He pulls me up until I'm vertical and begins bucking into me as he kisses over my shoulder. "You feel pretty fucking life-changing to me too."

My nipples bead in the cool night air, but fire licks through my system as he scrapes his teeth down the column of my neck.

I wail and finally start to bounce on my knees to meet the measured thrusts he gives me. He plants a hand on my sternum and loops the other around to work my clit.

"My, my, my, you do seem dead set on destroying my sanity. Aren't you, Rogue?" He groans, and a shiver runs down my spine. "If you keep clenching around me like that, this is going to be quite a dreadful performance."

His words light up my insides, and I grind harder over his swollen length. It doesn't take long before I'm teetering on the edge, and feeling his shaft grow longer and thicker sends me spiraling into another powerful orgasm.

Calyx keeps me from falling into the water and works up into me as I beg and moan, but based on how hard he stays, I don't think he came.

Once my orgasm begins to subside, he carries me into the water with him.

His magic guides me to wrap my legs back around his ass, and he moves to the edge of the hot tub.

“Hands on the edge, my love.”

I comply.

My tits now float high in the water, and every snap of his hips against my ass seems to wedge his crown closer to my intestines. His powerful strokes make my skin sizzle with need, and just as his shaft begins to swell again, he pulls free of my core.

I sob, shaking my head. “No, why?”

Calyx spins me toward him. “I’d like to watch your face the first time I come inside you.

” He grips my hips and helps me float over his lap.

Then he’s back inside me. He helps me work over him, and it’s even more intense being able to see the look on his face.

Not to mention, the sensations are entirely different in this position.

“I’ve waited a long fucking time for you, but having you here makes all that waiting worth it. ”

My heart pounds erratically, and I stretch up to kiss him. Before I can stop myself, my canines dig into his lower lip.

Calyx lets out some sound that I can’t quite decipher, but a half second later, his acceptance floods the bond. It’s overwhelming and perfect all at once.

I don't even get to lick over the bite to seal it.

Calyx fights me for control of the kiss as he lifts and drops me on his swollen cock.

The sharp, stinging pain in my lip is shocking but welcome.

It fully completes the conduit between us as he jerks inside me.

He retracts his teeth, licking the bite to seal it.

His euphoria spills through the bond, followed by an incredible rush of power that spills from him into me.

My eyes pop open, and Calyx is in full lich form, complete with the bluish skin and lack of eyelids or cheeks. It's crazy, but he's just as handsome to me as he always is.

And that's a good thing...considering he's mine for eternity.

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Chapter Twenty-Seven

Cohen

The sithen is kinda boring without anyone to keep me company. I keep my phone turned up just in case Owen calls, but sitting around twiddling my thumbs is going to drive me insane.

Rogue and I have barely gotten any alone time together since we were intimate. Not that I begrudge her spending time with her mates.

I suppose I'm just a little worried.

She and I aren't fated.

And now she has not only Calyx but the berserker too.

Feeling sorry for myself isn't going to help anything. I finish up the dishes and go searching to see if the sithen has a library.

I don't find a library, but the house guides me to an incredible nest. I put myself to bed last night reading about how nests are set up in Faere, and it seems the sithen wants me to begin preparing Rogue's.

The books I read said sometimes the fae themselves sets up the space, and other times their mate or mates prepare the nest as a courting gift. I'm not one hundred percent confident that she would want me messing with what's supposed to be her safe place,

but the house closes the door behind me...

And locks me in.

I sigh, swiping my hands off on my pants. I could either use my magic to try to get the door open, or I could use our connection to call for Calyx.

There's a third choice.

I get to work on setting up the space for Rogue.

If she doesn't like it, she can always ask the house to reset it.

The entire back wall is filled with a den-style nest. It has three steps to get up to the enclosed space.

Although it's currently open, there's also a large curtain that can be pulled to block off the fourth wall.

Most of the den is taken up by a massive sunken mattress. Bed pillows line the top, but the sides have throw pillows. One major thing is missing—bedding.

Fae like soft fabrics and options, especially during their quickening.

"I can't do much without supplies," I say, glancing around the room.

"I could use magic to procure a few things, but that would tap my energy—" Large cabinets line the wall to my right and several pop open as I inspect them.

The shelves are stacked with what look like sheets and a variety of blankets. "Okay, I'll do my best."

Here's hoping Rogue doesn't hate everything I select.

The pillow fights back as I shake it into the pillowcase.

I'm on my knees on the giant mattress, and all the bouncing around sends my glasses falling down my nose.

Huffing, I give them a shove back up and wiggle my arms until the pillow is encased. I toss it up by the top of the mattress, glancing around to determine what's next.

The energy in the room sizzles like it always does when Calyx portals in or out, and I twist to see what's happening.

Calyx steps through the portal with Rogue wrapped around his front. His dick is mostly wedged inside her, and I audibly swallow.

"Would you look at that? You don't have to burst into tears yet, princess. We found him." Calyx nuzzles his cheek to the side of her head and lifts her off his still-hard cock, placing her on her feet. "Go on, and tell him what you just told me."

My eyes widen as Rogue spins around.

Her hair, which is wet at the ends, falls over her face as she moves. "Take your clothes off."

Calyx snorts. "For the record, she had a much sweeter message for you, but her quickening seems to be turning her into a bossy princess."

Rogue sways her way toward the den, and she jabs a finger in my direction. "You do it, or I'll do it for you."

Okay, so, quickenings are kind of intense.

That's fine.

I'm here for whatever she needs.

My magic spills from my skin, and my clothing disintegrates. It reappears in a folded pile near the small tables near the head of the mattress, but I don't take my eyes off Rogue to ensure I'm correct.

I just know that's where it landed because that was my intent.

Rogue bounds up the stairs and stays on the carpet until she's adjacent to where I am on the mattress. I'm not expecting her to chuck herself at me, but my hands land on her hips as she tackles me to the mattress.

She comes to kneel over me, and her hair falls around my face as she repositions my glasses. "You're so handsome. God, Cohen. I missed you."

"Me too," I agree, brushing my hands over her warm skin. "Do you like the nest?"

I barely get the question out before Rogue pushes her lips to mine. Her slick pussy grinds over my dick, which perks up. She smells of Calyx and chlorine, mixed with her normal scent.

It's only once she's melted against me that Calyx releases the block in his mind. I gasp and Rogue hums, digging her fingers into my jaw as she continues kissing the hell out of me. It's a nice distraction from the fact they bonded.

My heart thunders.

They bonded, and she still sought me out.

Rogue wraps her free hand around my thickening length and jerks my crown against her clit. Something inside me snaps, and I roll us with no warning.

She grins up at me, working my tip through her lower lips. “That was hot. Kinda unexpected, but super sexy.”

“Would you look at that,” Calyx says, climbing onto the mattress at our side. “It’s nice seeing you take charge.”

I lift my hand and flip him off before pushing my lips to Rogue’s. She whimpers into the kiss, and it helps boost my confidence as I notch at her opening. I’m not the most adept at judging how others are feeling, but I’m sure she wants me as much as I want her.

She’s already so slick that sliding inside her is much less stressful than last time.

My glasses fall down my nose, and I focus my magic. A wispy string of white energy lifts them off my face, floating them to set them down on the carpet.

Once those are settled, I get back to kissing Rogue. The way her hands dig into my lower back and ass spurs me on as I pull out and thrust back into her tight core.

“Gods, Rogue,” I grunt against her lips. “You feel magical.”

“You do too,” she assures me. “Harder!”

“Quite a bossy little thing, indeed,” Calyx murmurs, sliding a hand between us to work her clit.

Dammit.

I knew I was supposed to be doing that, so I'm not sure how I forgot. Still, it's better to have Calyx here to help than to leave Rogue unsatisfied.

The tight clench of her inner walls is intense, and each snap of my hips makes her breasts bounce. It's highly erotic to feel them jiggling against my chest.

I'm so lost to the sensations that it takes several seconds to realize Rogue pushes against my shoulders.

Pulling back, I study her face.

She doesn't seem to be in any distress.

"I believe she would like to try riding you," Calyx says, nodding to the free area of the bed.

Removing myself from her pussy is the last thing I want, but I comply.

Rogue scrambles over me, her hands falling to my shoulders. She grinds over my cock and pushes her lips to mine.

Her skin is hot. That's how, even with my eyes closed and lost to the kiss, I know Calyx is the one who grabs my dick and moves it to her opening.

The naughty fae sinks down, and it takes my breath away, just like every time I slip inside her.

Calyx chuckles and gets back to teasing her clit as Rogue rocks on her knees. The position feels totally different, and not being in control means I have no way to stop

how quickly my pleasure builds.

I focus on returning her kiss and reach between us to flick her nipples one by one while my other hand tightens on her ass.

Shit.

I'm probably going to embarrass myself.

I'm doing the best I can here, but I'm just getting the hang of sex too.

Rogue whimpers, and Calyx's hand speeds up on her clit. Her inner walls clamp down, and my cock swells, even as I try to hold back. She moans against my lips, then her sharp teeth are buried in my bottom lip.

Shock radiates through my body.

She didn't need to bite me to add me to the bond. My link with Calyx already ensured that. My soul accepts the connection, and her emotions spill into me even more heavily.

Whoa.

I thought they were strong before, but it was nothing like this.

Rogue licks over the bite and pulls her teeth free of my lower lip, then freezes. As the dizzying wave of her pleasure washes over me, I groan, spilling deep inside her.

Calyx continues working her swollen nub, and his other hand lands on her hip, helping to guide her over me, even as my orgasm subsides.

Rogue trembles, and when my eyes pop open, she stares down at me with a soft smile. “You guys are an awesome team.”

Hell, I’ll take that as a win.

I smile back while Calyx chuckles.

“Oh, princess... You haven’t seen anything yet.”

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Owen

Running a business is a pain in the ass when I have a mate I'd rather be spending my time with. Thomas and Jeff have a new understanding of how little I want to have to run the day-to-day operations of the business, so hopefully, they're ready to step up.

Tonight wasn't a complete waste.

If nothing else, I know more about Delta's team after spending hours pouring over their files.

My gut says they're not in on the stolen relics. Not if she's got a separate team of two shifters and a warlock to do her bidding.

It offers her the perfect cover.

She's with her main team while any crimes are committed, then she makes sure the case is assigned to her and covers up any loose ends that might come back to bite her in the ass.

I don't make it back to the sithen until the wee hours of the morning.

The house helpfully guides me...somewhere. It's weird as hell seeing the light bulbs flash, considering there's no electricity here. Once I pass the flashing area, the lights behind me shut off. If I was more easily spooked, I'd be convinced the house is

leading me to my demise.

I end up in front of a door I've never seen before, and it pops open as I'm wondering if Rogue picked a new bedroom, or possibly the house is relegating me to sleep on my own tonight.

Shoving inside the room, I'm surprised to find a nest.

Too bad you prioritized work over spending time with your mate, or you could have spent the evening setting it up for her like an honorable mate should, my bear growls in my mind.

Gods.

He's such a petulant, whiny pain in the ass.

I didn't prioritize work over Rogue.

I went in solely to see what extra information I could glean about Delta and her team. Finding out which paranormal council investigator was assigned to the case was another driving force. Some of the council agents are like a dog with a bone, while others are content to simply have a case closed.

Unfortunately, I've had no previous interaction with Maxwell. I'm not sure the agent's species or gender. Maxwell could be a first or a last name.

My eyes widen as my night vision takes over in the pitch-black space.

Rogue is nude, lying on top of the warlock. The lich is stretched out next to them with an arm tossed over her back. They look quite cozy and comfortable... without me .

My berserker and I felt it when Calyx and Cohen joined the bond earlier. That might be why he no longer aches to rip the lich's head from his shoulders.

Now that a bond exists between Rogue and Calyx, we'll be unable to kill him. It would cause her emotional and physical distress.

No, it's much better to get along...which I must have come to terms with before even going into the office tonight, or I wouldn't have spent hours doing recon on Calyx's behalf.

My bear is obsessed with joining the pack cuddle pile, and I strip out of my clothes as I aim for the steps. It's been a long time since my coven was slaughtered. For hundreds of years, I've done my best to keep distance between myself and others.

The good thing about bonds is, they lessen the rivalry between partners. It's one kindness nature bestows on creatures that have to share a mate.

My bear's possessiveness has already tamed to manageable levels. I'm not sure how I'll cope with pack life as the man, but I'm sure going to fucking try to make it an easy transition.

My eyes pop open, and the first thing I comprehend is how warm Rogue's skin is against mine. Shifters run hotter than other species, but her body temperature must be higher than even my own. It's a side effect of her quickening, and it should lessen as long as her physical needs are met.

"Good morning," Rogue whispers, kissing her way down my chest. She's on all fours over me, wiggling her hips at the lich as he finger fucks her from behind.

How the hell did I sleep through the scent of her pussy? Now that I'm conscious, it's all I can pick up in the air.

“I’d say it’s a great morning all around,” Calyx says, winking at me over Rogue’s shoulder as the naughty little fae continues to lick lower. She fists my already hard cock and brings it to her lips as I’m still trying to determine if I’m actually awake.

Her warm, wet tongue circles my crown, and she hollows her cheeks while keeping eye contact.

Fuck.

If this is a dream, I don’t want to wake up.

Rogue stretches a hand up, raking her nails down my abs.

I growl and pull her hair away from her face, holding it on top of her head with my fingers weaved into it. She moans around my length, and a goddamn shiver runs down my spine.

The warlock was in the nest when I fell asleep, but I haven’t the first clue where he disappeared to. It’s probably better to start off group sex activities with just one other person, anyway.

Rogue gets really into sucking me off, and spit drips down the few inches of my shaft that she can’t get into her mouth. When my tip bumps the back of her throat, she chokes, and everything gets even slicker.

I’m fucked up because the sound of her gagging on my cock only makes me harder.

“Try swallowing next time, princess,” Calyx says, sounding way too jovial for this early in the morning. “You’ll both enjoy it more.” He slaps her ass, and Rogue moans, the sound vibrating down my length.

She grinds over my shins as she rocks on her knees, slamming her hips back to meet his hand. It truly is a glorious sight, watching her chase her pleasure.

She circles my knot, applying pressure, and it becomes difficult to hold back from filling her mouth with my cum.

Calyx laughs, tugging his hand from her sex.

Rogue's eyes widen, and she pulls off my length, opening her mouth, likely to complain.

She doesn't get the chance.

The lich lifts her with an arm wrapped around her middle and a hand on her hip.

I release her hair to ensure our limbs don't get tangled and study her beautiful face. Her cheeks are pink, and her hairline is sweaty, but she grins mischievously as she reaches between us.

My crown slides through her wetness, and she sinks down with no delay. She's on her knees, mostly vertical but slightly tilted toward me.

Calyx gives her a shove, putting her face close enough to mine that I can kiss her while she rides me.

In no fucking universe am I expecting the lich to slide his fingers around my dick and inside Rogue. She wails against my lips, and I growl a warning.

That motherfucker will not like what I do to him if he hurts her.

"As I said, it's about to be a great morning for all three of us." Calyx stretches his

fingers, and Rogue only moans louder for it.

I run my hand over her cheek, pecking her lips. “Are you okay?”

“I will be.” She nods, bumping her cheek against mine. “I want you both.”

“Speak up if it gets to be too much.” I suck on her bottom lip to distract her.

Maybe to distract myself too.

It’s weird as shit, feeling Calyx moving independently of how Rogue grinds over me.

She’s soaked, which makes this possible in the first place, but I have serious doubts that he’ll be able to fit inside her.

I cradle her skull, guiding her as we kiss while sneaking the other hand between us. I work her swollen nub while Calyx stretches his fingers, doing his best to prepare her.

Rogue forgets she’s kissing me as she comes. She gets so tight that I have to grit my teeth to hold on, but Calyx doesn’t give her any respite. Although she shivers and shakes against my chest, it’s feeling her euphoria in the bond that makes everything more intense.

She starts bouncing over my cock, and slick sounds fill the air.

Calyx chuckles. “Let’s see if we can make this work.

” He removes his hand from her pussy and lubes his shaft before crawling over my thighs.

He positions himself behind Rogue and bites his lip.

“Pussies are forgiving. I have faith we can make this a pleasurable experience.” His mouth never moves, though.

I blink in shock as I realize he used the bond to communicate that thought telepathically.

It’s been a long goddamn time since I’ve heard anyone but my bear in my mind. I’m so distracted that I miss him thrusting until he’s already got his tip inside her.

Rogue whimpers and freezes.

The pressure gets so extreme, it’s actually painful.

Calyx soothes his hand down her spine, sending comfort in the bond. “Want me to pull out, princess?”

“Fuck no. Move!” she commands.

“Well, if you insist,” he says playfully. Pulling back just a little, he dips deeper on his next stroke.

Her pheromones flood the air, and all I can do is experience the sensations as Calyx fucks her on my cock. It’s the weirdest shit I’ve ever felt, having his length gliding next to mine, but Rogue’s euphoria keeps me grounded in the moment.

“Fuck, I’m way too close,” I groan as she clenches around both of us.

“Yeah,” Calyx agrees. “Come on, darling. We need you to get there quickly.”

“I already am,” she sobs, and her bliss floods the connection.

Ahh, yes.

That would be why her inner walls suddenly started convulsing. It's been so long, I've practically forgotten what sex feels like.

My balls tighten, my knot tingling as my cock swells. It doesn't help that Calyx's does, too, and it gets hard for him to move.

I'm trapped to the mattress, so all I can do is growl as my cock jolts, emptying deep inside her. Rogue gets so loud, I'm sure Cohen will be able to hear her wherever he is in the house.

Calyx freezes, and being able to sense his orgasm in the bond is an entirely new level of strange...

But fuck it.

I'm bonded.

I better get used to the insanity, because this is my life now, and truly, I wouldn't want it any other way.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Rogue

We find Cohen in the kitchen with a full breakfast spread laid out on the table.

I ignore every bit of it and beeline for my warlock.

Waking up sandwiched between Calyx and Owen was nice, but I still missed Cohen.

It felt like he was supposed to be there, and seeing him now hits me harder than I'm expecting.

"Morning," I mumble, wrapping my arms around his lower back and burying my face in his shirt.

"Good morning, sleepyhead." He chuckles, kissing my forehead. "I almost put everything back in the fridge and the oven."

"Maybe this pack life thing isn't so bad," Owen says from behind me.

Based on the sounds alone, he's already digging into the breakfast.

"What time is it?" I didn't think we slept that late, but I am feeling rundown with the effects of the quickening.

It was a struggle to even pry myself from the nest. My instincts would have been

content forcing the three of them to stay trapped in there all day.

Unfortunately, we still have real-world problems to tackle.

“Hmm,” Cohen says, turning us. “The house says it’s almost three p.m. I woke up a little after one, but the food should be fresh since I gave it a while before I started cooking.”

“I appreciate it,” I tell him, rising on my tiptoes to give him a quick kiss. “But don’t feel obligated to take care of all of us. We can make a schedule or something. I’m actually an okay cook.”

My warlock shrugs. “I enjoy it. It’s one of my favorite ways to pass the time.”

Well, then, I wouldn’t want to take that away from him. Plus, I might have been slightly exaggerating my cooking abilities.

I can make some delicious tofu, but I doubt that would cut it, especially for Owen.

The four of us lounge around the living room, trying to make a plan for what we should do tonight, when Gemma pops in.

Her shadows swirling around her, she plants her hands on her hips. “I’ve bounced all around town, following Delta, and all you’ve been doing is cuddling on the couch?” She snorts, jabbing a finger in my direction. “Lazy asses.”

Siblings are the gift that just keeps giving.

“We were in the process of deciding who should split up where,” Owen says, running his hand down my hip.

“I can help with that,” Gemma says, focusing on Calyx. “You should come with me.”

“Why?” I ask, tilting my head.

“I followed Delta to a shitty little storage unit.” Gem shrugs. “Nothing too exciting, except that it’s warded to hell and back. I couldn’t get in, and I tried repeatedly .”

“I should come too, then,” Cohen says. “I can break wards. It takes some time, but if you can get me close to it, I can determine what we’re working with.”

Owen’s phone rings, and he sighs as he extracts himself from me and climbs off the sofa. “This is Owen...”

“Why don’t we all go?” I offer. “Maybe I can get a vision or something?”

“I can only siphon two of you.” Gemma shakes her head. “And that’s pushing what I’ll be able to handle.”

Owen strides back into the room, shoving his phone into his pocket. “I have to head to the office. I might have poked a bee’s nest when I started looking into Maxwell—the council agent assigned to Calyx’s case.”

“What does that mean?” I ask, a shiver of fear running down my spine.

“He’s in the office, asking for a project update,” Owen says, cursing under his breath as he glances at Calyx. “I don’t suppose you got names or any other info on the guys working for Delta? The shifters and warlock?”

“Dimitri is the guy that she’s fucking.” Gemma’s nose wrinkles. “Please don’t ask me how I know that.”

Calyx snorts. “I don’t have names, but we did follow them to their safe house. I can provide you with the address, and apparently, we have one name.”

“That will have to be good enough,” Owen says, sighing.

“Why don’t you go with Owen?” Gemma says to me. “I’ll take Cohen and Calyx to check out the storage unit, and everyone can regroup afterward?”

“I’m good with that.” Owen looks at me. “My only concern is, what happens if he asks you a direct question that would incriminate us?”

Sometimes the whole not being able to lie thing is a real pain in the ass.

I shrug. “If that happens, you better think on your feet and find a way to distract him.”

Maxwell is a sloth demon with long white hair, pale blue eyes, and a very round middle section. Apparently, it wasn’t Owen looking into him that summoned him, but the fact his superiors asked for an update on the case.

He glances over the files, that have very few actual updates, and frowns. “Essentially, you’re telling me you’ve gained no intelligence at all.”

“No,” Owen says, leaning against the edge of his desk. “Unfortunately, our investigation has taken a turn a little too close to home...” He continues on, explaining our suspicions about Delta.

“And you know that because of your soothsayer?” Maxwell asks, nodding at me. His creepy pale eyes study me a little too intently.

“I had several visions,” I say, clearing my throat. “And, yes, they brought some

things to light that made me suspicious.”

The sloth demon shrugs. “Fine, bring her in. I’ll handle the interrogation.”

“We don’t think that’s the best course of action,” Owen says firmly. “Delta is calculating enough to have an escape plan in place. As soon as she knows someone is on to her, she will bolt. So, unless you plan to take her into custody immediately, I believe the best course of action is to hold off.”

“If she confesses, I will be happy to arrest her,” Maxwell says.

“She won’t break,” I say before I can stop myself. “She doesn’t have a guilty conscience. Even when faced with hard proof, I don’t believe she’ll cave.”

“I agree.” Owen crosses his arms over his chest. “She’ll play nice in the interrogation, and as soon as she’s out of the building, she’ll run.

It’s not just this case on the line. It’s all the others before that she’s gotten away with.

Give us a few days to continue our investigation.

If we find nothing, you can call her in and see what you can learn. ”

The sloth demon has an excellent poker face.

I can’t tell which way he’s leaning.

At all.

He finally nods, and I feel like I can breathe again.

“Fine.” Maxwell shoves himself out of his chair. “Keep me updated.” He shuffles toward the door.

Owen’s eyes meet mine as the door closes, and he pulls up a hand, waving it around the room. When I tilt my head in confusion, he sends me something in the bond that makes me realize that he wants a sound barrier.

I focus my magic and nod when the spell is complete. “We’re good.”

“That went better than I was hoping.” He steps over, pulling me into his arms. An overwhelming feeling of safety hits me square in the chest as he holds me tight. “We’re not in the clear yet. We need to be extra vigilant for whatever comes next.”

Nodding against his T-shirt, I say, “Yeah, and pray the council doesn’t have any leaks or that Maxwell isn’t a chatty guy.”

Owen chuckles. “He doesn’t seem to have a whole lot of personality. I’d be surprised if anyone could stand chatting with him.”

“Can we leave and check in on the others?” I ask.

Dealing with Maxwell was a solid distraction, but worrying about what the others have found has been in the back of my mind the entire time.

“Let’s give Maxwell a few minutes to leave the building, then you’ve got it.” Owen kisses the top of my head. “Don’t stress, little one. We’re going to figure this out.”

That sounds lovely, and I want to have the same level of confidence that he has, but I’m still nervous. We need to hand over verifiable proof that Calyx isn’t behind the heists. Otherwise, we’ll always have to be wary of the paranormal council.

Chapter Thirty

Calyx

Gemma, Cohen, and I stand around the storage unit door. Despite Cohen's attempts to shield us, I'm not confident that it would hold if we breached the ward.

I'm physically unable to portal into the unit, and that alone tells me there's a solid chance my phylactery is on the other side of the ridiculous rolling door.

It's unsettling as fuck not to be able to sense it, but I'm honed in. I will find a way to gain access to it, even if drastic measures have to be taken.

Cohen stands in front of the unit with his hands extended while his magic examines the ward.

Gemma leans against the wall, seeming quite bored. Her familial connection to Rogue allows me to trust her as much as I'm capable of, but I would be speaking much more freely if she wasn't here. It's nothing personal; I'd just rather not give my mate's sister any ammunition to hate me.

My patience is officially gone.

I'm over being separated from my soul, and Delta is about to learn what happens when someone crosses me. All lich have a great capacity for darkness, but I've mostly curbed my urges over the many lifetimes I've been forced to endure.

I still remember how to rain down hell, though. And it might be time to remind the world exactly what I'm capable of when someone annoys me.

Gemma gets a strange look on her face and frowns. "I'll be back."

"That wasn't weird or anything," Cohen says, shoving up his glasses. I don't know why he doesn't just spell them in place, but it's not my face, so I don't heckle him about it.

"What's the verdict?" I nod at the ward.

Cohen sighs, pulling his hands down. "I think I can break it, but I need to do a little research. Once I have a game plan for how to tackle the different layers, it'll take some time to dismantle.

It'll take even longer if we want to demolish it without alerting Delta that her spells have been tampered with. "

I'm not surprised, but that wasn't what I was hoping to hear. "And if I boost your magic?"

"That's with your assistance," he says. "She's more powerful than she lets on. That, or her partner is."

Hmm.

If it comes down to it, I'll kill her. Her wards will fail within days, in that case.

The only thing that makes me hesitant to do so is that if she's not proven to be behind the heists, the paranormal council will continue to hunt me.

It would bother me none, but Rogue and Cohen are much softer.

I don't want them to have to put their lives on hold or to experience what it's like constantly being hunted.

"Shit, I was right," Gemma says, appearing in a smoky mass of shadows. "Delta and her warlock boyfriend are on the way."

"Okay, so, let's standby, wait for them to open the unit, and Calyx can kill them," Cohen says, shrugging.

"Or..." Gemma rolls her eyes. "You could let me take you back to the sithen. If they're about to use the phylactery to fuel another heist, this could be our chance to catch them red-handed."

"That is true. Or they could be about to attempt to sell my soul to the highest bidder," I say with a scoff.

It's hard not to be bitter, considering the circumstances.

"I'll watch them. If they try to leave with it, I'll simply siphon in, snatch it, and siphon back out again," Gemma says, grabbing Cohen's arm.

"Once it's no longer behind the ward, I'll be able to steal it before they can blink.

" She doesn't give me the opportunity to protest. Her hand meets my forearm, then we're spilling through the shadows.

We land in the living room of the sithen, and Gemma disappears before I can tell her what a poor choice I think this is.

Rogue and Owen are waiting for us, and they shove to their feet before I've even caught my bearings.

"What happened?" my mate asks, crossing the room and stopping at my side.

"I have to check a few things in my books." Cohen speaks before I have the chance.

"Okay, I'll come with you," Rogue says. "You can fill me in while Owen fills in Calyx and vice versa."

Cohen's eyes widen, but he shrugs. "I'm not opposed to having an extra set of eyes to help me look up the spells she used."

Rogue leans up, kissing my cheek and giving my back a pat before following Cohen out of the room.

Owen's gaze immediately zeroes in on me.

Well, this should be interesting.

A plan sizzles in the back of my mind, but I'm unsure how Rogue would tolerate it.

If I can get to my phylactery, there's no question I would be able to break through Delta's ward to get back out. Even if some alarm system were to be tripped, it wouldn't matter. I could end the witch and her partner with little difficulty.

Owen and I take turns explaining what happened while we were apart.

"If she's at the storage unit now, why don't I just call Maxwell and have him meet us there?" Owen suggests.

“Do you truly believe he would arrest Delta and let me walk away?” My eyebrows rise. “Because I wouldn’t put that much faith in anyone from the council.”

Owen doesn’t get the chance to answer. His phone rings, breaking the silence of the moment. He tugs it free of his pocket and frowns. “No fucking way. Speak of the devil—it’s Delta.” He answers and puts the call on speakerphone before I can ask. “This is Owen.”

“Boss? I’ve got a situation,” a female voice says over the line. “I just got a tip of where the Market Heist Crew is expected to strike, but I have a personal emergency that came up. I won’t be able to lead my team in the takedown.”

Owen’s head shakes, but he keeps cool, asking, “What can I do to help? Do you want me to send another team in your place?”

She sighs heavily, making a real show of it. “You’ll have to. As much as I wanted to be the one to take down those assholes, I know I won’t be able to make it in time.”

“Text me the details, and I’ll handle it,” Owen says, and they disconnect. The look on his face is grim. “Everything in me says she found a buyer. She’s trying to distract us with a final heist because she knows she won’t have access to your magic for much longer.”

I nod.

We can agree on that.

Gemma siphons back into the living room before I can even speak. “So, yeah, they’re definitely trying to sell your special soul jar.” She points at me. “But unless it’s tiny enough to fit in one of their pockets, she didn’t have it when she left.”

“Fucking hell,” Owen growls, typing away on his phone. “I’m sending a backup team and the council agent to the address Delta just gave me. It’s close to an hour and a half away, so at least we won’t have to worry about the council swarming the storage unit facility. What do we do now?”

I frown, but I’ve already made up my mind. There’s only one course of action we can take, and I’m pretty sure it’s going to royally piss off my mate.

“Now you rip out my heart and remove my head,” I say, focusing on the berserker. “It will take less than an hour for my body to regenerate next to my phylactery, but every minute counts...” I wave a hand, indicating that he should come closer. “That means we should get right to it.”

An hour is technically the fastest I’ve ever regenerated. Normally it’s closer to two full hours, but I’m trusting my energy to know how important this is. It better focus and speed up the process while we have the chance.

“I thought your heart was in the soul jar,” Gemma says, sounding suspicious.

“It is,” I assure her. “There’s a shell in its place that must be destroyed.

It’s one half of the process. Removing my head is the other...

” I give Owen a look to impart how time sensitive this matter is.

“If my head is not separated from my shoulders at the same time the shell in my chest is damaged beyond repair... My body will simply begin the slow process of healing itself. It has to be both, and it needs to be as close to simultaneous as possible.” I look at Gemma.

“Once I’m dead, take them to the storage unit.

I'll be able to break the ward from the inside out once I'm at full power.

I'm also counting on you to monitor Delta and her man friend.

We need enough time to allow my resurrection to complete, but don't allow them to go through with the sale. ”

“How am I supposed to pull that off?” she asks with wide eyes.

“If it comes down to it, siphon them to the storage unit, and I'll handle them.

” Owen finally steps closer, but he stares down at his hand almost like the appendage has betrayed him.

His eyes bounce up, meeting mine. “We have a problem. Our matebond with Rogue won't allow me to physically harm you. Not in any way that would count.”

“Shit,” I mutter, swiveling to face Gemma. “Sorry, nightmare. That means you're up.”

“You want me to kill you?” Gemma points at her chest, almost like she's asking if I'm speaking to her. “Hell no, my sister would never forgive me.”

“It's not a permanent death,” I assure her calmly. “I will regenerate with my phylactery, and we can finally be free of this entire mess.”

“Are you sure?” she asks.

“Positive.”

“You better be right, or my sister will never forgive me,” she grumbles, disappearing

and reappearing in front of me in a smoky mass of shadows.

Everything in me aches to dodge as her clawed hand flies at my chest, but I resist the urge. Pain ravages my system, and a half second later, everything goes black.

Chapter Thirty-One

Cohen

Rogue and I sense it the second Calyx is injured. We stumble down the stairs, keeping each other upright. The only things that give me hope are that I'm still alive and the bond isn't completely broken... It's definitely damaged, but not to the point it would be at if he was truly beyond repair.

Although I've already told Rogue as much, her anxiety and pain still radiate in what's left of the bond. It's to be expected, but I can't fathom what could have harmed Calyx here in the sithen.

Nothing makes any sense.

My chest throbs with a painful pulse, and I fall into the wall as Rogue and I come around the corner and into the living room.

"This isn't what it looks like," Gemma says, raising her bloody palms.

An awkward laugh bubbles out of my lips. "Really? Because it looks like you damaged Calyx's vessel enough that he'll regenerate next to his phylactery."

"Oh, okay, I guess it is what it looks like," the nightmare says with her head bobbing up and down.

"You killed my mate?" Rogue hisses. Her head swivels to Owen. "And you stood by

and watched it happen?”

“Hey!” Gemma jabs a finger at her sister. “He told me to.”

Owen nods. “He was very serious about getting the process of regeneration started quickly.”

“Calyx will be fine. He does this at least once every five years,” I tell Rogue, pulling her to my chest.

Shit.

I forgot she can sense mistruths.

“Okay, at least every ten or fifteen years.” I run my hand down her spine in an attempt to offer her comfort.

Her nose wrinkles as she peers up at me. “That was more accurate. You’re sure he’ll be fine?”

The ward makes me a little nervous. To my knowledge, he’s never regenerated through one, but I also know Calyx well enough to understand he doesn’t take needless risks.

That was before he had Rogue in his life. With her in the mix, he’s not going to take a chance on not being able to reanimate.

“Calyx has had a millennium to learn the limits of his magic. He’s not going to take any risks when you’re involved.” Well, if nothing else, I fully believe those words to be true.

We land outside the storage unit, and Gemma goes back for Owen. With as massive as that berserker is, I'm betting toting me and Rogue is on par with siphoning him.

Rogue leans into my chest for support, shaking her head. "Gods, Cohen, I'm so stressed."

"Don't worry." I soothe my hand up and down her spine. "We've got this."

"It would be easier to believe if my chest wasn't radiating with pain and emptiness where Calyx was," she whispers.

"Give it some time," I murmur, kissing her temple. "It won't take too much longer."

I just pray my words are true.

Gemma pops in with Owen. She frowns at her sister's back and gives a tight smile that only I catch. "I'm going to ensure Delta isn't able to complete the sale. I'll be back."

And with that, she disappears in a smoky mass of shadows.

Now all we can do is wait.

Time passes excruciatingly slowly.

When Calyx's physical body is damaged beyond repair, he simply resurrects next to his soul jar. If that process was to be interrupted, it would have catastrophic repercussions.

He's essentially immortal whenever his phylactery is in a safe place. However, while he reanimates, if someone were to manage to destroy his phylactery and his new

body, they would ensure he was never able to rise again.

Our job is to prevent anything from getting inside that storage unit while he's at his most vulnerable, but I've kept that to myself to avoid alarming Rogue any more than she already is.

The reason we couldn't do this weeks ago was because we didn't know if it was a trap. If Anders, Lorcan, or I had killed Calyx to start the regeneration process and someone was guarding his phylactery, waiting for exactly that to happen... It would have been game over for the lich.

Knowing Delta and her warlock aren't here is what allows taking this course of action to be relatively safe.

Rogue paces the hallway in front of the door that leads to Delta's storage unit, grumbling under her breath.

Owen leans against the wall with his brow furrowed and his concern for Rogue evident. When his phone rings loudly, he pulls it from his pocket, answering the call, and walking the opposite direction from Rogue.

My head swivels as I glance between them.

Rogue is a mess in the bond, but based on what she's projecting, I'm not sure approaching her would be the right call. She's furious—at Calyx and the situation. Not that I don't understand where she's coming from, but I don't want to accidentally end up on the wrong side of her ire.

Owen stomps back, shoving his phone into his back pocket.

“Well, it's not much, but I have some good news.

The two shifters Delta was using to keep eyes on the heist crew are in custody.

They were in the process of trying to collect the cash and jewels from the revenants when they were apprehended.

” His face twists into a frown once more as he studies Rogue.

“The only downside is, they know for a fact that it was a lich’s magic that reanimated the humans being forced to enact the heists.

All we can hope is that the shifters crack when they’re interrogated.

If they name Delta, that would be even better. ”

Rogue stomps closer, and I stumble back a step when I spot her eyes. They’re normally a brilliant gray, but a void-like black sheen has taken over even the whites of her eyes. Black smoky magic spills from her skin, which is bizarre because it usually has a pastel teal color.

“Are you okay?” I ask, clearing my throat.

She’s looking a little intimidating, but we’re bonded. Her magic would never be able to harm me.

“I’m tired of waiting.” Though the words come from Rogue’s mouth, they’re laced with her magic. Even the energy in the hallway has changed. It has almost a primordial feeling, which is kinda unsettling and also intriguing.

She steps to the door of the storage unit and raises her hands. I’ve never seen anything like it. Her magic pulls the energy that fuels the ward straight from the air. Delta’s magic is a transparent red, but as soon as it touches Rogue’s shadows, it

disintegrates.

Rogue is significantly more powerful than I realized.

A loud popping sound fills the air as the ward buckles completely.

She continues sucking up the leftover magic, and once none remains, she waves a hand. The storage unit door flies up as the lock cracks in half, falling to the ground with an awkward thud .

Calyx's new shell lies next to a metal set of shelves on the left wall of the storage unit. The right side of the room has a similar setup and quite the variety of relics.

His new body isn't fully formed, and it's a gruesome sight as veins and muscle coil around his bones. No wonder he's so serious about no one witnessing the process.

"Jesus," Owen mutters, following Rogue inside the room. "She's got a fuck of a lot more than Calyx's phylactery."

"We're going to speed this along," Rogue says in the same voice that isn't her own. She kneels at Calyx's side, raising her hands and levitating them a few feet above his still-forming body.

"Did you know she had that kind of magic?" I whisper to Owen.

He shakes his head, grimacing. "Not until she told me. That's the magic she inherited from Aline—her mother."

"It's something primordial," I whisper, hoping it doesn't offend the dark magic now pulsing through Rogue. "Like ancient."

“Yeah,” Owen agrees with wide eyes.

By the time I glance back at Calyx, his body is nearly completely formed.

My jaw falls.

I’ve never seen magic that could speed up his regeneration. Then again, I’m not sure I’ve felt power as ancient as whatever is wafting off Rogue. Most people lose their breath when they feel what Calyx’s power can do, and Rogue is more powerful than even the lich.

“All of that power in not even a twenty-year-old body...” I frown, pushing up my glasses. “That’s kind of terrifying.”

“Yep.” Owen nods dramatically, shoving his hands into his front pockets. “Just a little, but luckily, she’s our mate.”

“Yeah,” I agree. “And she is magnificent.”

“Thank you,” Rogue says in the voice that echoes with her power.

I am really grateful that she’s on our side.

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Chapter Thirty-Two

Owen

Calyx's special soul jar is so massive, I highly doubt one person would be able to carry it.

It pulses with its own energy, giving me something else to focus on while Rogue pours magic into the lich.

It's fucking weird watching muscle and tendons form, slithering their way across bone and existing tissue.

This shit is probably going to give me nightmares.

The gasping sound that fills the small storage unit causes my head to whip to the side. A man who looks very similar to Calyx sits straight up, and Rogue falls back on her ass, shaking out her hands. The smoky black magic begins to dissipate, the energy in the space lightening considerably.

Cohen juts forward, offering Rogue support. Normally, I'd be right there with him, but my mind seems to have short-circuited.

How the fuck is that even possible?

How can a soul transfer from one damaged body into an entirely new vessel?

How did a witch create me out of nothing? My bear's question radiates in my mind. You weren't born a shifter.

That's true enough, but I'm still baffled.

The man who must be Calyx glances around with wide gray eyes.

Although his profile is very similar to what it was before, he now sports a shock of white hair that falls just past his jaw in messy waves.

It's even lighter in color than Cohen's, and I absently note that his tattoos seem to have transferred to his new body as well.

"How the hell did you make it past the ward?" the lich asks, turning to Rogue.

"I couldn't wait any longer. The not knowing was driving me insane," she whispers, shaking her head.

"Her magic sucked up the ward like it was nothing," Cohen says. "Then she stepped in to help your regeneration along."

"Aww, princess, were you worried about me?" Calyx asks. His voice sounds the same as it did before, and I'm still a little freaked out by all of this.

I guess I shouldn't be.

The supernatural world is always kind of a mindfuck.

"Yeah, I was losing my shit." Rogue tackles Calyx, pushing a kiss to his lips.

I finally get myself together, striding over to offer Cohen a hand off the ground.

“We should get Calyx to portal his phylactery back to the sithen immediately. I’m going to need to call in Maxwell so he can inventory relics to see if any of the other items are things the council is interested in.

It might distract them if they find something new to focus on.”

“Calyx can’t portal his phylactery.” Cohen’s head shakes. “It doesn’t work. The universe doesn’t allow it.”

“How the hell are we supposed to get it to the sithen, then?” I ask.

The only way in or out is siphoning or portaling. That, or wandering in.

“I suppose I could attempt to siphon it.” Gemma appears in a mass of black shadows.

Delta and a man I’ve never seen before land against the floor with a heavy thunk. They’re barely moving...if you can call twitching moving.

“Don’t mind them,” the nightmare says, waving a hand through the air.

“They’re in a mental prison of their own creation.

Although, I’m not sure it’ll hold if I siphon away to a different realm.

” Rogue climbs to her feet and Calyx follows.

“Exactly how heavy is that thing? It looks like it might give me a hernia if I try to lift it.”

“You know, I’ve never actually weighed it.” Calyx walks over, lifting the four-foot-by-three-foot jar with ease. “I’d guess about a hundred and fifty pounds. Will you be

able to siphon me and it?”

“If the others stay behind, yeah, I can probably manage it,” Gemma says. “You three, keep an eye on those two. I don’t know if my nightmare will fade once I’m not here to reinforce it.”

“Got it,” I growl, moving toward the two bodies collapsed on the floor. There’s finally something I can do to be helpful.

Gemma steps up to Calyx’s side and plants a hand on his shoulder. “Let’s hope the universe understands you need some way to get that jar into the sithen.”

“If it doesn’t, maybe I can ask the sithen to make a portal?” Rogue suggests.

Only, it’s unnecessary.

Gemma and Calyx disappear with the phylactery.

“That was some pretty intense magic you pulled out earlier,” Cohen says, shoving his glasses up. He pokes himself in the nose and frowns.

“I think you mean impressive magic.” Rogue speaks, but her voice is once again lined with her power.

“Yeah, that’s what I meant.” Cohen’s head bobs up and down as he swallows thickly.

Her eyes transition to fully black once more, and waving a hand, she lifts the two passed-out bodies until they’re vertical. They hang suspended in the air by Rogue’s magic. Something tells me this would have gone better for them if they remained crumpled heaps on the floor.

Rogue's magic is in control as she approaches Delta and her cohort. She comes to a stop in front of the warlock and frowns as she levitates a hand in front of his chest. She doesn't make contact with the material of his T-shirt, but her head tilts.

There are several tense moments where I have no idea what is coming next, but Rogue finally sighs and steps back. She moves to Delta next, following the same pattern. This time, her entire body goes rigid, and she hisses, shaking her head as she retreats a step.

She flicks her fingers at the man, and he awakens as his feet hit the ground. It's impressive that he's even able to keep himself upright. That could be due to Rogue's magic still spilling around him, though.

"Leave," Rogue says, her voice lined in her magic.

"Disappear and never come within a thousand miles of Haven again. Actually, just avoid North America altogether. Otherwise, I might change my stance on offering you leniency. Forget everything you know about Delta and the relics you've been responsible for stealing. "

My eyes widen.

Is she actually powerful enough to erase his memories?

I mean, I watched her break that ward like it was nothing and speed up Calyx's reanimation, but...

Holy fucking shit.

And I would imagine she only inherited a portion of her mother, Aline's, magic. No wonder the fae courts were terrified of what her magic could do.

The warlock, whose name I don't remember, blinks rapidly as Rogue's shadows uncoil from around him.

"Go," she instructs once more.

He doesn't need to be told twice. He gains control of his faculties and bolts before I can even ask if she thinks that was a good plan.

Cohen voices the concern that echoes my thoughts.

"My magic can trace him if we ever need him for anything." Rogue raises a hand, focusing on Delta. "She's the true danger." She pulls her fingers toward her palm, and black veins appear over Delta's skin. "That vision just sealed her fate. She deserves no such pardon."

"What did you see?" I choke out.

"I'm not even speaking that set of events into the universe. It's too fond of manifesting things." Rogue's head shakes. "It doesn't matter, anyway. I won't allow any of it to come to fruition."

Rogue's magic flows through Delta's body like black veins, and the longer Rogue draws, the more desiccated Delta becomes.

Gemma and Calyx appear in a smoky mass of Gemma's shadows as pieces of Delta's arms and face crumble and fall away.

"She saw something in a vision," Cohen says, like that explains everything. "But don't ask what. She won't tell you."

Calyx approaches Rogue without an ounce of fear. When he gets close enough, he

wraps an arm around her lower back and rests his chin on her shoulder. “Luckily, we have a mate capable of protecting all of us. My phylactery is safe within the confines of the sithen.”

“Good, we’re about to be too,” Rogue says, pulling her hand to her face. She blows over her palm, and Delta melts into a pile of dust.

“Damn.” Gemma snorts, shaking her head. “I really didn’t think you had it in you, but I guess we found where you draw the line. Remind me to be nicer to your mates in the future.”

I scoff, bringing a hand up to swipe over my face. I’m so fucking ready for this day to be over.

My night is not over.

While the others head back to the sithen, I’m stuck waiting for Maxwell and explaining what went down.

Luckily, I’m not Rogue, meaning I can lie my ass off.

And I do.

I concoct a careful story about how I followed Delta to the storage unit. She picked a bad time to pop in because the lich had just reanimated next to his phylactery. Upon seeing the witch, he put a quick end to her and took off with his special soul jar.

“Not that I can blame him,” I say, continuing the string of unrepentant lying. “No one wants to be blamed for a rash of crimes they didn’t commit.”

Maxwell sighs, gesturing to the pile of Delta’s ashes. “I’ll get a team out here to

collect her remains and begin the process of inventorying the other relics.”

I nod, step over, and clap him on the back. “Hey, at least the case is solved.”

The sloth demon scoffs. “More like the beginning of a massive amount of paperwork that I want no part of.”

That sums up the paranormal council perfectly. They’re useless in most situations, but this time their apathy works in my favor, so I’ll take it.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Rogue

I 'm dead on my feet by the time we land in the sithen. Owen has to deal with Maxwell, and it feels like I should be with him in case something goes wrong.

Only, I'm a liability when subterfuge is in the mix. I wouldn't even be able to back up his version of events, and since Cohen and Calyx are still technically wanted by the council, it wouldn't have made sense for them to stay, either.

I've always avoided using the magic I inherited from my mother, but I don't regret putting it to good use. I'm just completely wiped out.

Calyx chuckles as we head toward the house. I weave like I'm drunk, bumping into both him and Cohen as I work on keeping myself upright. "All right, it looks like you might face-plant at any moment." He steps in front of me, patting his chest. "Climb me, princess."

Interlocking my hands around the back of his neck, I jump, tucking my legs around his backside. "The new hair is going to take some getting used to," I admit, burying my nose in his neck. "I'm honestly a little relieved that you didn't go for pointed ears."

"I can buy a box of hair dye if you'd like." He chuckles. "Or we can get your sister to murder me all over again until I get all of my physical attributes right."

I snort. “Don’t even joke about that.”

“Come on,” Cohen says around a yawn. “I could use a shower and a few solid hours of sleep.”

“Just make sure your phone ringer is turned up in case Owen calls.”

“It is,” he replies, tracking toward the house.

“And you”—I pat Calyx’s shoulder—“we’re going to need to get you a cell phone. I don’t like the idea of not being able to reach you.”

He laughs, and it’s almost a dangerous sound. “That assumes I ever intend to let you out of my sight. Where you are is where I plan to be from here on out.”

My stomach flutters. Being desired is clearly more addictive than any drug.

Owen crawls into bed a few hours later without calling for a portal, meaning the sithen must have handled transport for him. Or, I guess, Gemma could have. I’m not sure how long she intended to stay, but I know she planned to stick around...just in case she needed to siphon Owen out in a hurry.

I roll from spooning Cohen to snuggle up to my berserker. It’s a relief when he plants a hand on my backside and pulls me over onto his chest.

“All is good,” he murmurs, keeping his voice low. “I don’t think we have anything to worry about. Get some rest. We can go over all the details in the morning with the others.”

My face nuzzles around his warm skin, and I nod.

That sounds much better than getting into everything right this moment.

I wake up with my skin buzzing. It's not a wave of my approaching quickening, but something is definitely up. My body aches with the need to move, and as soon as I shove myself out of bed, I have the strong urge to explore the property.

I make it into the hallway but stop when I hear commotion behind me.

Cohen stumbles out the door, righting his glasses. His pajama pants hang low on his lithe hips, and the urge to pounce is strong. He's just so damn handsome all the time, but with his curls sticking up in a million directions, he's even more adorable than normal.

"What's wrong?" he asks, continuing toward me.

"I don't know. I don't think anything is wrong, but I feel strongly that I'm supposed to be doing something."

"Do you think it's possible the sithen has its first traveler waiting to be judged?" A shy smile tips at his lips, and his hands graze my hips, landing on my back. "If so, that's exciting, but I'd probably recommend magicking up some pants before you leave the house."

My gaze flies down, and I yelp.

Holy shit.

That would have been bad.

I turn over his words. Is it possible the sithen is letting me know it's time to step into my role?

Either way, I can't wait to find out.

My magic creates an outfit for each of us in no time flat. I wait for Cohen to call out the fact that I don't bother with shoes, but he doesn't say a word. I'm not sure why I feel so strongly about wanting to have an unobstructed connection to the earth, but I don't question it, either.

We're just heading out the front door when Calyx and Owen barrel down the stairs.

Those two are probably going to cramp my style. I don't know many people who wouldn't be terrified to come face-to-face with a lich and a berserker.

"Whoa," Cohen whispers, coming to a stop at my side. "Those are kids."

They sure are.

A woman, who I'm guessing must be their mother, sits on one of the benches surrounding the fountain while three children play in the grass. I'm terrible at guessing ages, but I'd say they have to be between four and ten—or the human equivalent of those ages.

They're busy kicking a ball back and forth. They must have brought that with them.

Or maybe the sithen provided it to keep them busy?

The littlest of the three spots us. Her eyes widen, and she darts over to her mother.

The woman stands, hefting her daughter into her arms and wrapping her around her chest. I offer what I hope comes off as a friendly smile as the other two children run to stand by the woman.

Cohen and I continue closer but stop several feet away to give her plenty of space.

“You’re our first guests.” I clasp my hands in front of me as giddy excitement radiates in my chest.

The sithen is ecstatic, and it wants to show off everything it can do and all the amenities.

However, the poor woman looks exhausted. All four of them are covered in dirt, with small rips in their attire.

They’re coming from Faere, based solely on the light linen fabrics and lack of shoes. Well, at least the children are barefoot. Mom’s skirt is too long for me to see what’s on her feet.

Gods.

It couldn’t have been a pleasant experience tracking through the forest with nothing to protect their feet.

“We met an old woman with white eyes,” the oldest boy says, clearing his throat as he pulls back his shoulders. “She showed us the path that led us here. She said we would be safe...”

His words are true, causing a shiver to run down my spine. I have no idea who he could be referencing, but that woman didn’t lead them astray. They will be protected under my watch, and with my mates at my back, whatever hunts them will greatly regret following them here.

Cohen steps inside the cabin on the left, showing the children the newly expanded amenities.

After our walk to the cabins, I've learned the woman is human and her name is Serenity. Her children are halflings, something that the fae love to look down on. That alone would be a solid reason to flee Faere, but something in my gut tells me there's more to it than that.

While Cohen keeps the little ones busy, I need to gain a better understanding of exactly what or who she's running from. At least thus far, my magic is convinced she's been truthful.

Unfortunately, there's been a lull in the conversation, and I'm not sure how to start it again without it coming off as an interrogation.

My hands fidget, and I link them together in front of my waist, pulling my shoulders back like I've seen my mother do. It always makes her seem poised and regal.

Owen stayed behind near the fountain to keep watch for whoever might be following the small family, but Calyx approaches with his arms loaded down with reusable shopping bags.

The woman backs away as he comes up the few stairs.

"This is my mate, Calyx." I smile, trying to find a way to put her at ease.

It doesn't seem to help.

Dammit.

Maybe I'm not the right person for this job. I'll never be warm and fuzzy. Even when I'm trying, I come off as cold and rigid.

"I popped into the house to retrieve a few things to make your stay more hospitable,"

Calyx says, keeping several feet of distance between him and Serenity.

“If you have any needs, the sithen should address them. But I imagine you’re tired and hungry, so I asked for a few of the comfort foods I remember from Faere.

There are towels, soap, shampoo, and conditioner.

For clothing, just verbalize your needs, and the sithen will provide you fresh options.

” He nods and heads inside the still-open door of the cabin.

“He stole my thunder,” I grumble, laughing and hoping it helps break the ice. “I take it you’re leaving Faere and attempting to get to the human realm. Is that right?”

She nods, swallowing thickly. “I’m not even sure if my family will let me come back home, but I have nowhere else to go.”

My chest gets tight.

That’s a terrifying prospect when she has three children.

“Don’t worry about that. You don’t need to rush to leave.

Certainly not before we know you have somewhere safe to land.

” I gesture toward the door. “This cabin is yours for now. You can take your time. Rest up. Give the children a chance to get a few nights’ sleep somewhere that’s completely safe.

” I point back to the hill that leads to the fountain.

“Do you expect someone might try to come after you?”

She grimaces, staggering back a step.

Dammit.

I’m going to have to get better at connecting with people.

And fast.

“You are safe here,” I blurt out. “We won’t let any harm come to you or the children.

I only ask because, if you think it’s a possibility, I will ask my mates to be hypervigilant.

Maybe I’ll have Calyx summon Dusk to roam the property.

” She blinks at me for so long, I go on.

“That part doesn’t matter. Keeping you safe is my responsibility.

The only thing you need to focus on is your children. ”

“Thank you,” she finally says.

I nod.

“Their father is dead,” Serenity says. “Taryn was a general in the Spring Court, but he was captured by the trolls and beheaded with an Iron Ice blade.”

Full-blooded fae are immortal. The undying kind that regenerates no matter how

severe the injury. The one exception to that is if we're harmed with Iron Ice.

Her chest shakes as she exhales, and her eyes glimmer with tears as she focuses back on me. "We weren't fated. His family petitioned King Reighton for custody..." She sobs. "Of my children after I lost the only man I've ever loved."

My jaw falls, and my eyes widen.

Oh, fuck me.

Reighton is my biological father's brother.

Silence was set to be the king of Spring Court, but when my mother fled Faere, he passed the throne to his younger brother, Reighton.

"Did he decree that your children should be taken from you?" I ask as pure horror pulses in my gut.

Her head shakes. "The king ruled in my favor, but Taryn's family has no intention of allowing me to keep them. If they kill me, the line of succession would immediately pass custody to Taryn's mother."

Damn.

Sometimes I forget Faere is a matriarchal society.

"Taryn's mother sent her other son to kill me and take my children."

"That's not going to happen." I step forward, pulling her into my arms before I can stop myself.

“Even once you leave here, I will make sure there is someone to watch over the four of you. Have you heard of sanctuary cities? They’re a concept here in the human realm.

Supernaturals live side by side with humans behind a sanctuary ward. ”

“No.” Serenity snuffles. “I grew up not knowing about the supernatural world. Not until I met Taryn.”

“Well, I grew up in one of those cities called Haven. It’s a very safe community, and it’s close by.

Once things settle down, you can make the choice if you’d like to try things out with your family or take a tour of Haven.

” I pat her shoulder a final time and step back.

“But all those details can wait. For now, I’m sure your adrenaline is about to crash. Eat something and get some rest.”

“Thank you.”

I swear I can feel her sincerity like a warmth in my chest.

I don’t have the first clue how the sithen or the universe chose me, but I intend to prove it chose well. I’ll guard the passages between realms, offering sanctuary to those who deserve it...

And anyone who threatens that?

Well, let’s just say, the magic I inherited from my mother is always ready and willing

to come out to play.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm

Calyx

Rogue was meant for great things, which I knew from the moment I laid eyes on her.

She's magnificent.

If the courts in Faere hadn't fucked with fate by ousting her mother, Rogue would have made a fine princess and eventually an honorable queen.

It's been a few days since she welcomed her first set of travelers, and I'm actually hoping the universe sends more her way before she has to part with Serenity and the children.

She's become quite the mother hen.

Truthfully, I believe it comforts some piece of her to know she can use her magic in honorable ways.

I doubt it's possible for the average person to understand how devastating it would be to sense every well-meaning lie. That doesn't even take into account the primordial magic she has coursing through her veins.

I've sensed her turmoil a few times as she's internally battled with her emotions.

She would like the children's uncle to show up, simply to have an excuse to do away with him.

That way, Serenity never has to worry about him catching up once she and the children are in the human realm.

They're as safe as they're going to get here, but once they leave the sithen, the ugly truth is that Taryn's brother could pay for a portal to the human realm to continue to hunt them.

Rogue feels obligated to cut that off before it can occur, but she also worries what that means for her soul.

She has nothing to worry about.

Her mother's magic hasn't turned her evil by using it. The fact she worries at all proves that. Those who have crossed to the dark side don't struggle with the moral repercussions of their actions.

My sweet fae has been up to something this afternoon. Exactly what is anyone's guess, since the sneaky little thing banished me and Cohen inside the house.

She kept my tiger, though.

I'm trying not to pout.

I can appreciate a solid surprise from time to time. Normally, I prefer to do the surprising, but I'm adaptable.

Cohen snorts when he spots me peeking out the living room window. "You're pouting."

"I am not," I lie.

“You totally are.”

Rogue approaches the small set of stairs that lead to the back door, and I jump away from the window before I’m busted.

“All right, princess, what sneakiness are you responsible for now?” I ask, wrapping my arm around Rogue’s lower back.

“Me?” She laughs, a light, airy sound filling the air as we head toward the fountain. “Maybe a little something.”

I chuckle.

It must be a pain in the ass to not be able to outright lie, but I find her honesty refreshing. “Color me intrigued.”

Cohen keeps pace at Rogue’s other side, and it feels like quite the domestic moment. The only thing missing is Owen, but last I saw, he was with Rogue, so he must be around here somewhere.

“I just hope you’re going to be happy. There’s every chance I should have double-checked to make sure it was okay before taking action...”

The massive pool comes into view, and Ash splashes around the steps in the shallow end. Owen stands close by with his arms crossed.

Gods.

I didn’t realize our matebond would allow Rogue to call for Dusk. He lies at the side of the pool, stretched out on his belly on the concrete, like he’s enjoying the cool surface. His head lifts as he spots us, and his eyes have me stumbling back a step.

Gone is the hazy white sheen from his gaze. Come to think of it, the missing patches of hair are gone too.

My jaw falls.

The drain I normally feel on my magic isn't present.

Ash bounds up the steps and shakes out her full coat, splattering Owen with water.

"I thought cats hated water," he grumbles.

Ash lopez toward the three of us, and Cohen sidesteps, knowing what's coming. He quickly moves to Rogue, pulling her away, too, just in time for Ash to tackle me.

My back lands against the soft grass, an oomph escaping my lips.

Ash bumps her cheek against mine and lavishes her scratchy tongue over my jaw. She chuffs, betraying her excitement at seeing me, and my hands fly to her massive head.

"Gods," I whisper as reality sinks in. I tilt my head to try to locate my mate. "What exactly have you done?"

Owen extends a hand, helping pull me to my feet. "If you're not happy, that's fine, but don't be a dick." He keeps his voice low, and I'm still sure Cohen and Rogue are able to overhear his words.

My chest gets tight as I spin to face Rogue. She has her hands interlocked and resting against her chest, like she's preparing for bad news.

"How?" I ask, striding over and lifting her. "How did you do it?"

She wraps her legs around my ass and shrugs. “I think I tied their energy source to the sithen rather than you. It has immeasurable power, like way more than you or I individually.”

“Do you know if they’ll age and die?” I ask, brushing her hair back from her face as I move to cradle her cheek.

“I don’t think so. I believe they’re essentially as they were.

They’re still revenants. They just use the sithen as their battery pack now.

Because it has so much energy to spare, it’s able to rejuvenate them past what you were able to accomplish.

” She studies my face. “Are you angry? I can’t decide what you’re feeling, and it’s really starting to freak me out.

I can ask my mother to help me reverse it. My magic just wouldn’t let it go.”

“No, Gods. Please don’t take it back.” My head shakes. “I’m... Thank you.” The tremble in my voice betrays my emotions. “It’s the most incredible gift I’ve ever been given. I believe I might be in shock.”

Ash bumps her head against my thigh in an attempt to comfort me, but I wrap my fingers around the back of Rogue’s head, pulling her face closer to mine.

“My magic is convinced that you’ll still be able to summon them—even outside of the sithen—but they would simply return here once your need for them was complete.

” She smiles brightly. “The sithen seems to have accepted them as its built-in protection, and it gives them a whole lot more space to roam?—”

I shove my mouth to hers, pouring every ounce of emotion that I can't seem to find the words to explain into the kiss and the bond.

Ash's death has weighed on me for centuries. Now she and Dusk can have another chance at life here at the sithen.

Cohen comes up behind Rogue just as I pull back from the kiss. He wraps his arms around her and his fingers dig into my back.

The very last thing I'm expecting is Owen to appear behind me. He bear-hugs me from behind, extending his hands around Rogue and me to pat Cohen's back.

"It feels like the family is all here," the berserker says, and my damn eyes get misty.

It sure fucking does.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm

Owen

Several More Weeks Later

I've really put my employees to the test since bonding Rogue.

Luckily, Thomas and Jeff have stepped up to the plate because my interest no longer resides in fourteen-hour days.

I worked nonstop in an attempt to pass the never-ending years, but each day is like a new adventure now.

I'm only keeping the place because we need some form of income.

Although the sithen provides nearly everything we need to live comfortably, there are still things we need human money for, like cell phones and the upkeep on vehicles.

I've spent the last several weeks avoiding Haven, and I was confident Cohen and Calyx could help Rogue introduce Serenity and her children to the sanctuary town without me.

However, I've put this off for long enough. I have to face Atlas and Rogue's other fathers eventually, and getting it over with will probably be cathartic.

I've spent all morning preparing what I'll say to Atlas as I'm dodging his punches, since there's a damn good chance of us running into them in Haven.

Rogue worked some magic and convinced the old wolf shifter who lives next door to her childhood home to take in Serenity and her kids while they get on their feet.

Mrs. Segar is older than dirt, but she's been widowed for so long that it was kind of a genius idea.

I'm sure she's lonely, and it just so happens that she's the only teacher in Haven.

Rogue also managed to talk Ember's little brothers into hiring Serenity at Venom, the nightclub portion of The Monster's Den. She'll be able to work while Mrs. Segar does lessons with the children.

I'll never fail to be impressed by how much Rogue has been able to put together in such a short time.

The kids stay with Mrs. Segar while we take Serenity over for a quick interview at Venom.

"It really is quite a lovely town," Cohen says, shoving up his glasses with one hand as he keeps the other wrapped around Rogue's lower back. "Everything is within walking distance, and it's nice that everyone can feel comfortable in their monster form."

The sweet fae pushes up on her tiptoes, pulling the warlock in for a tender kiss.

Haven is beautiful, but I prefer life at the sithen.

It allows me a completely safe place to let my berserker out.

Luckily, Rogue's nest is spacious enough to accommodate his giant ass, because he mostly asks to be allowed to sleep next to who he views as his sleuth, and the others

never complain.

We're finally beginning to rebuild trust after centuries of resenting each other.

He's as much on edge as I am, and I've had to remind him several times not to come to my aid if we do run into Atlas here in Haven.

Our kind will always be hunted by the paranormal council, and while I trust Atlas wouldn't hand me over, I don't have that same level of confidence with all the residents of Haven.

My anxiety about the entire situation is sky high, but if I don't seek out her family while we're here, I'll just be putting it off for another day.

"Do you feel that?" Calyx glances around. "The energy changed. It's not threatening...necessarily."

Rogue pulls back from her kiss with Cohen and sighs. "That just means my father or sister have decided to grace us with their presence." She steps away from the warlock and comes to my side, wrapping her arms around my middle.

Malice and Atlas appear a few feet away in a smoky cloud of shadows.

My face twists into a grimace as my stomach bubbles uncomfortably.

Atlas has been a great friend for a long time. I would never purposely choose to hurt him, but the universe made this call for me.

"You and I need to talk." I clear my throat and pry off Rogue's hold, pushing her behind me.

“Don’t act like you need to protect my daughter from me ,” Atlas growls.

“Let’s everyone just take a few calming breaths,” Malice says, rolling his eyes.

My head shakes. “I know you would never hurt Rogue. I just don’t want her accidentally getting in the way while you take a swing at me.” Rolling my neck from side to side, I square my shoulders. “One—that’s all you get for free.”

Atlas moves to stomp toward me, but Malice disappears and reappears in front of his packmate. The half-orc, half-giant towers over the nightmare, and Malice shows not an ounce of fear as he plants his palms on Atlas’s chest and shoves.

“You have the opportunity to either solidify your relationship with your daughter by showing you trust her judgment when choosing life partners,” Malice says. “Or to show your ass royally. Choose carefully.”

“I knew there was a reason you’ve been laughing and whispering with Aline for weeks,” Atlas growls, slapping away Malice’s hands. He points at me. “You should have had the respect to come talk to me, man to man.”

“There’s been a lot going on,” Rogue says, holding on to my hips as she peeks around me.

“We still can,” I tell Atlas, keeping eye contact. “Rogue is my mate, but I kept my distance to allow her time to experience life outside of a matebond.”

“He truly did have altruistic intentions,” Calyx says. “I, however, had no such qualms about claiming my fated mate. The universe intended her for the three of us. Because of that, and the fact you’re a literal fucking giant, I will not be allowing one free punch.”

Malice snorts, shaking his head. “At least we know Owen is honorable.”

“I won’t even take offense to that, since I agree.” Calyx grins a little ferally, but I appreciate his attempts to lighten the mood.

“Would you like to go somewhere and talk?” I ask Atlas.

“No.” He sighs. “I want you to step aside so I can hug my daughter. Then I’m going inside Venom to get very , very drunk.”

“Don’t worry.” Malice chuckles. “I’ll be happy to siphon you home if you can’t walk.”

It’s a little less than two weeks later when there’s a knock on my office door.

I call for whoever it is to come in, but there’s a chance the sound ward is still in place from when Rogue visited me at work last night.

Shoving myself out of my chair, I head to the door, ripping it open.

Atlas’s fist flies at my face, and I don’t even have time to decide if I’d like to dodge the hit. He connects with so much force that I go flying, landing on my ass like a starfish.

“Fucking hell,” I grumble as soon as my brain works again.

Atlas sighs, stomping over and extending a hand. “It had to be done.”

“Yeah.” I take his hand, and he pulls me up. “Are we good?”

His teeth gnash together, but he nods. “We’re good.”

Cohen

Two More Years Later

Rogue gets very broody like a mother hen whenever her quickening approaches.

She prefers to keep us close, rarely allowing any of us to leave the safety of the sithen.

It's an instinctual response, not something she can control, and it's a comforting reminder that she feels compelled to keep us safe, even if we're all capable in our own right.

Well, Calyx and Owen are.

I mostly just avoid situations where I know I'm in over my head.

Because her next quickening is right around the corner, I do my best to quickly tend my garden. We get occasional showers at the sithen, but never downpours, so I try to water my plants nightly.

I've got quite the vegetable garden in progress, and it provides a lot of what Rogue eats on a daily basis. Plus, I enjoy life at the sithen. It reminds me of how the world was before the modern age, and I'm soaking up the simpler lifestyle.

Just as I'm in the process of giving Ash her nightly spray down with the water hose, Rogue wraps her arms around me from behind.

I still have no idea if the sithen built itself a well, but I'm not complaining. Having flowing water at the twist of a spigot is convenient.

I chuckle, patting Rogue's hand. "Was I gone too long?"

"Nah, I just missed you. Owen and Calyx were arguing about which was the optimal way to cook the steaks, and I escaped before the smell took over." She laughs, nuzzling her cheek to my shoulder from behind. "Even when they use the grill, the scent seems to permeate the entire house."

I drop the hose, use my magic to turn off the spigot, and spin around, wrapping my arms around Rogue in return.

Dipping my head, I capture her lips in a quick but tender kiss.

"Would you like to take a walk around the property?" I ask as I pull back.

"How about a dip in the pool instead?" She laughs. "I have my magic running the nets through it now to catch all of Ash's fur."

"I can handle that," I agree, even though I much prefer the hot tub. But with her quickening approaching, it's better for me to be cold than for her to get overheated.

Rogue drags me toward the pool with her hand linked in mine. She grins at me over her shoulder, and my heart tries to take flight right out of my chest, just like it always does when she gives me that look.

We come to a stop on the deck that lines the pool, and she spins to face me, levitating her hand over my chest.

"We only have adults currently on the property, but you could also whip us up an invisibility spell," she says, smiling.

The sithen has expanded to the point we now have nine cabins. It's rare that more than three or four are occupied at the same time, but we have the space if we need it.

"I can do that."

Rogue's head tilts, and a heavy sigh escapes her hips. "Never mind, it appears we have new guests to welcome."

I chuckle, pulling her flush with my front. "Ahh, well, our dip will have to wait in that case." I plant a quick peck on her lips. "Let's go welcome the travelers."

Her bottom lip pokes out dramatically, but her excitement still fills the bond. No matter what she might say, her favorite days are when we get new guests.

My favorite days?

All the ones I get to spend by her side.