



# Roman (Destined Paranormals #7)

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** An overly protective alpha tiger. A sweet fae omega. Will Roman's natural instincts to protect be too much for Beau?

Roman Nelson's life has been anything but relaxing. After spending a little over two decades raising his younger twin brothers and protecting them from the shifter that killed their parents, he finally found help from the newly formed paranormal council. Accepting the job offer provided not only security but also a new life for the three of them. Now that his brothers have both found their fated mates, he's left to figure out what to do with his newfound free time without imposing too much on his brothers and their small families.

Beauregard Thorne jumped at the chance to leave the fae realm with his alpha brother. With no other family left, his brother is all he has, and the thought of being left behind wasn't exactly desirable. Although he's enjoying his time in the shifter realm, he's finding himself without a whole lot to do. When the council's bakery suddenly needs a new proprietor, he gives it a chance with his brother's encouragement.

A chance meeting at the grand reopening forever changes Roman's and Beau's lives. But will they be able to figure out how to mesh their lives together without losing their newly found paths?

Roman is the seventh book in the Destined Paranormals series. It is a full-length novel that focuses on fated mates and how they mesh their lives together. This is an mpreg story, and there will be a baby or possibly two. If you're looking for a sweet, fluffy fated mates story, you've found it.

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# Page 1

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## Chapter 1

### Roman

“Don’t forget, our last class is this Friday, and your final papers are due to me by next Wednesday. There are no exceptions to that as I have a deadline to the college to have final grades in a few days beyond that. Anything not in my inbox by midnight on Wednesday will receive zero credit.” I looked out at my students as I gave them my final spiel of the day, but I didn’t know if I was even making any sense to them. Staring back at me were a bunch of empty-looking gazes, and I already expected that at least several of them would be coming to me once they received their final grade of zero on their paper. What more could I do?

So much had changed since I had taught last, and things were even more different here with several of my students being paranormal. It was as if there was some certain level of expectation that I give them leniency because I, too, was paranormal. It didn’t work that way though.

When they continued to simply stare at me, I nodded at them. “You are free to go. I will see you all on Friday. I hope you have a good rest of your week.” Immediately, the class stood and started filing out as fast as they could.

To some extent, I could understand. They were so close to being finished with the semester. The weather was finally warming up, and other things were calling: kayaking in the lake, hiking in the national forest, summer vacations or jobs, sleeping in.

It so happened that this was my final class of the day, and I began cleaning up while they all scrambled out of the classroom. I was slipping my laptop into the messenger bag when I heard them approaching. By scent, it was Longwei and Sean, but I had to glance up to confirm my suspicions. As the unusual pair approached, I offered a smile.

It had to be difficult to grow up being the youngest children of two of the created ones. I wasn't exactly certain how many siblings Longwei had, but I knew it was quite a few less than Sean.

"Is there something I can do for the two of you?" I asked.

They glanced at one another before Longwei spoke up. "We had a question. It's more of an invite. There is a party of sorts next weekend. It's to celebrate not only the reopening of the bakery but also because we've finished our second year of college. Bàba wanted me to make sure you were invited. Especially since you no longer live on Treasure Ridge and might not necessarily get all of the news that's happening there."

I nodded slowly. "The bakery is having a reopening? Did it close for some reason?"

Longwei and Sean shared another look. "Have you not talked to either of your brothers or even Ramsey?"

I shook my head. "Should I? Ramsey and Phineas have been busy with Hazel. I talk to them occasionally, but for the most part, I try not to interfere. They know they can call me whenever they need me." It took a great deal for me to go from the only person, the only protector in their lives, to them both suddenly being mated and having very protective and possessive mates. But my brothers were both incredibly happy, and I was thrilled for both of them.

“Yeah, so Malorie turned out to be passing information about the council on to others on the dark web,” Longwei whispered. My eyebrows rose significantly because, well, when had that happened and why?

“Then, come to find out, she’s probably super bad and her mate ended up being one of the council’s most wanted. That wasn’t all of it though, and Elizabeth ended up helping her and Marco, which was a huge no-no according to my father,” Sean added in an equally low whisper. We all knew all of us could hear, and it kept anyone who shouldn’t from overhearing.

“When did this happen?”

“Very recently,” Longwei said. “The bakery has been shut for around a month, and it’s sorely missed. One of the new enforcers has a brother who has agreed to take over. He’s going to be helped by at least a couple others temporarily, but I guess he was an excellent pastry chef in their village.”

Village? Did he live in some backwards place? “I had not heard any of that,” I told them. “I imagine the bakery being closed has been a huge loss to the council. I know it was immensely popular when I lived on Treasure Ridge.” Shifters often had lots of sweet teeth. There were, of course, those that didn’t, but they were usually the exception.

“So next weekend? Can you come?” Sean asked. “We’re trying to make sure Beau has a huge turnout since he had to be convinced that he could and should do this. He’s here with his brother and was waiting tables in Timber Valley and absolutely miserable. But I’ve tasted some of his stuff, and it’s even better than Liz and James’s stuff.”

That was saying something because, as far as I knew, James and Elizabeth had always run a bakery of sorts. Even when they were still with their pride, they ran a

bakery. It was what they did.

“I’ll drop by,” I told them. I’ll reach out to Phineas and see if he wants me to stop by and see Hazel for a bit, or maybe even watch her, and that will allow him and Ramsey to have some time for just the two of them.” Both of my brothers had an open invitation if they ever needed me to watch any of their children. They didn’t really take me up on it too often. I’d watched Otis and Maddie for Philip and Knox more than I had Hazel for Phineas and Ramsey.

“You should come no matter what,” Longwei said. “There is going to be a lot going on. More than just the bakery reopening. It’s a celebration of sorts.”

I nodded. “I’ll be there. I was only saying I would see if they needed me as well.” It had been an adjustment for me, and I hoped I’d not failed miserably with them. I was happy for my brothers, but I’d realized that because of our circumstances, I’d lost a bit of myself along the way, and now I didn’t know exactly where I stood with them still.

Longwei and Sean nodded. “Good. We’ll see you there, then,” Longwei said before he and Sean shared a look, and then they both left. I had a feeling they were up to something, but I didn’t know what.

After the two left the classroom, I packed up my laptop and the other few items I had out. I needed to swing by my office before I would be able to go home for the evening. I was enjoying teaching again, but things had changed drastically since I’d been in a classroom last. Sure, I’d been able to teach some classes along the way when I was at various places with my brothers, but being back in the classroom full-time was quite a difference.

Everything was digital now. That wasn’t exactly new to me, but I hadn’t expected it to be that way with us being in the classroom. Yet, here I was. Getting ready to go to

my tiny office and sit for the required hours' time for "office hours." Only, I wouldn't have students actually show up. No, they all attended virtually. That wasn't something I expected. Online office hours, emails and message boards, online assignments, tests, papers, inboxes for assignments. Just about every aspect of my job, except actually teaching now, was online. Why was I even here, then? Why not just teach from the comfort of my own home?

I slung my bag over my shoulder and left the classroom while shaking my head at my own thoughts. Was I actually contemplating whether or not I would continue after this semester. It wasn't that I didn't enjoy it. I did. But was it still what I wished to do? If I was being honest with myself—I didn't know.

I had enjoyed my time at the council's store, but Monroe was running that now, and he was doing a fantastic job. It was actually better suited for him and his little family. I was thrilled for him and Oscar, and although I didn't want to go back to running the council's store, I often found myself wondering if teaching was still what my heart desired.

I unlocked my office door and slid the keys back into my pocket. After turning on the light, I looked around the small office and shook my head. It wasn't much larger than some bathrooms in places. Maybe eight feet by eight feet? Not that I needed a lot of space. But there wasn't room for much. There was a desk and a pair of bookshelves. They were still empty, and that gave me pause. Why? It was true that I no longer had any of my things that I had collected decades ago. For so long, I'd spent life living with only enough that could fit into two duffle bags: one for me and one for the twins.

I set my bag down on the desk and sat down. I leaned forward, my hands going to my temples. I couldn't help it: my thoughts turned to our parents. Would they be proud of all that we'd accomplished? The twins were both daddies. They would have made our parents grandparents. I had no doubt that they would have been thrilled with the prospect of becoming grandparents. They both loved children so much and had been

incredibly sad when they couldn't seem to get pregnant again after me. Not until the twins, that was.

My thoughts turned to Phineas and Philip. I'd messed up with them more times than I could ever count. Despite that though, they still seemed to love me. I knew I was overbearing and overly protective with them, but when you spent over two decades constantly running from some deranged shifter who wanted to steal your brothers because he wanted them to replace your dead mother, it was difficult not to be overprotective.

I rubbed my temples and then my forehead before I sat back in my chair and took another look around the room. This used to be me. Twenty-five years ago, I'd had this. I was an up-and-coming professor at my university, and I was happy. I was dating casually, and I was happy. I shook my head. I wasn't now. This was...an existence. I actually loved teaching, but this wasn't what I wanted. Not anymore.

That didn't change the fact that I still had an office hour to get through before I could leave for the day. Not that I expected anyone to show up. Certainly not in person. Online was possible but not likely. No, my students seemed to be emailers who sent frantic messages at two in the morning, right before an assignment was due.

I pulled out my laptop, and after opening the message board, as well as my email program, I waited. And waited. I sat there for the next fifty-three minutes without a single message or email. I wasn't surprised by this even a little.

I knew that the barrage of messages would start next Wednesday, several days after our final in-person class and after the final paper was due. I already had the reply typed out and saved. It was going to be the same to every one of them. There was absolutely nothing I could do. I had to have time to get the papers graded and their scores inputted into the system for the college. No paper meant a zero for that assignment, and since this final paper was a big portion of their grade, it could have a

significant impact on their academic standing.

Since my office hour was finished, I packed up and left. There was truly no reason to stay, and I was more than ready to be home. I locked the office door behind me, and once I left the building and stepped out into the sunlight, my tiger chuffed in my mind. It had been too long since I'd let him out to have a good run. Perhaps this weekend would be the perfect opportunity to go up to Treasure Ridge and let him out for a bit.

I had stayed in the house down from the council for a bit, but eventually, I left when the omegas who had been staying with me no longer felt as if they needed me there for protection. It wasn't a sad day for me when I moved out. Not really. I had only been there in that house because the council had provided it for me and my brothers. They both lived with their mates now, and since I no longer worked for the council, I felt uncomfortable continuing to live there.

Now, I had my own little place on the outskirts of Timber Valley, and although it wasn't much larger than some of the tiny apartments I'd lived in with the twins, it was home. I stopped beside my SUV and shook my head. It wasn't home. Knox's place was home for him and Philip. Ramsey and Phineas had a home in mated enforcer housing. I had a house I rented from Alpha Forest for a tiny fee, but I wouldn't call it home.

I needed a vacation. Maybe that's what would fix me. I shook my head again as I slid into the SUV. I knew that there was probably no fixing me. Not that anything was wrong. I just...had to figure out what to do with myself now that the only purpose I'd had for so long was no longer needed. My entire life had been about the twins and making sure they were taken care of and protected. I no longer needed to do that, so now what?

Teaching obviously wasn't what I thought it would be. That could be in part the



college, but also that life had changed since I'd taught last. I had changed.

I had just started the SUV when my phone vibrated where I'd placed it in the center console. When I picked it up, I smiled at the name. Knox. I liked my brother's vampire mate. He was completely smitten with Philip and adored my brother and their twins. I might have been a bit standoffish in the beginning, but that was only because it was difficult to come to terms with someone else protecting my brother. But I couldn't have picked a better mate for Philip. I read the message and smiled.

Knox: Come to supper! I know you're not doing anything because you never do. Don't try to say you are busy. It's been almost a month since you've seen us, and I won't take no for an answer. Steaks and all the things on the grill. Supper is at 6:00. See you then.

I chuckled, but it suddenly turned to sadness. Had it really been that long since I'd seen them? Why had I not realized that? It wasn't as if I was too busy. I sighed at myself before I started typing.

Me: I'll be there. Sorry it's been so long. I guess I hadn't realized. I'll be over around 6:00.

I hit the green Up arrow and watched as the message was sent. Then I went and looked at my last message with Phineas. I'd at least talked to him two weeks ago, but it looked like it had been even longer since I'd been up to see him and Ramsey and little Hazel. What was wrong with me? Why had I pulled away from my brothers so much? Sure, I didn't want to interfere, but I was probably taking things a bit too far in the opposite direction.

Me: Hey Phineas. Sorry it's been so long. Do you want to get together this weekend sometime? I'm sorry I've not reached out in a while. I have no excuse except I don't want to overstep. Just let me know either way. Love and miss you and Hazel.

I couldn't help it. I didn't exactly love Ramsey. He wasn't a bad mate to my brother, but I didn't love him. I liked him, and I knew my brother would always be safe with Ramsey around. But nope, there was certainly no love between either of us. I chuckled. I put the phone back in my center console before I pulled my seat belt on and then started the SUV. It was getting warm in here, and it was past time I went home.

My phone vibrated as I pulled out of the parking space. A quick touch of the screen told me it was Phineas replying to me. I was incredibly spoiled because the SUV would read the message to me. When I touched my brother's name, the robotic voice sounded in the speakers.

"Sure! I know you are busy with your classes, but we're going to be at Knox and Philip's tonight. Are you not coming?"

Well, that would cover seeing both brothers and my nieces and nephew this weekend. I couldn't help but smile as I pulled out of the parking lot and onto the street. I had to work on making it up to them. I would start by taking my brothers their favorite desserts. With the council's bakery not an option, I needed to make a quick stop at the bakery here in Timber Valley before I headed to Knox and Philip's. I changed direction at the next stoplight. I had things to do, and my tiger chuffed, seeming happy at the prospect of seeing my family.

## Page 2

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### Chapter 2

Beau

“ M mm. You’re going to be amazing at this,” Evan said as he shoved another cupcake in his mouth. I didn’t know how he was able to get the entire thing, and the frosting, in his mouth without getting the blue topping everywhere, but he managed somehow.

“Thanks,” I told him. I grabbed the towel and wrapped it around my left hand before I undid it and then repeated the gesture. I was trying to calm myself, but it wasn’t working. Evan seemed to catch on though, and when he reached out and placed his hand on top of mine, I finally relaxed.

“You don’t have to do this, you know. The council will eventually find someone else to run the bakery. I only suggested that you do it because you love to bake and are so good at it. Even if you use magic to create some things, I don’t think the council will care.”

I shook my head. “You know I can bake everything from scratch.”

“Yes, but you don’t have to. You have the ability to make everything with magic. Did you use magic for anything in these cupcakes?”

I sighed. He knew I did. “Yes, and you know it. I did measure and add all of the ingredients, but I used magic to mix and measure out all of the batter. It was just easier.”

Evan shook his head at me. “Don’t be upset about using magic. We have it, we should use it. Why not? The warlocks use their magic on assignments. It’s why we were asked to join the council: because they needed more that had magic.”

“Has the assignment thing been fixed? Do they know what you’re going to be doing? And are you getting along okay with your teammates now?”

Evan swiped another cupcake. “Yes, yes, and yes. Vaughn was a little standoffish at first, but he’s started opening up. I noticed the other gargoyles in the council are a bit like Vaughn, so I think it might just be a gargoyle thing. Anyway, yes, we know what we’re going to be doing assignment-wise. Benjamin and his team are off on assignment next week, and we’ll be going out soon, but not with Frederick since his mate just had a baby. Well, One, since he’s a warlock.” Evan shook his head. “I don’t know why they can’t call them mates as well, but it is what it is.”

I smiled. Because they didn’t want to call them the same thing as everyone else, I guess. I actually didn’t know if that was the reason or not, but I knew they called their mates their One. I’d read everything I could about how things were in this realm. It was all still new to me, but I was thankful that I’d had the opportunity to come with Evan when he’d been chosen to join the council. I could have been left behind, but I was lucky that the fates that brought us here offered for me to come as well.

It was just me and Evan and had been for some time now, since I was in my early teenage years. Our parents went to visit another village one day and never returned. To this day, we still don’t know what happened to them. They had been searched for, but not only had they never arrived at the other village, but they were nowhere to be found anywhere in a nearby radius. That had been eight years ago, and it had been just me and Evan since.

Did I miss my parents? Somewhat, but I didn’t remember them all that well anymore. Evan had been great to me, and he’d done everything for me that I needed. He’d

finished raising me and had given me so much love that I never felt like I was missing out. We talked about our parents often at first, but over the years, that had slowly become less and less. There was only so much you could remember about a couple that had only been around in your life for a little over a decade.

“Are you all right?”

I blinked and then focused on Evan. “Yeah, I guess. I was thinking about everything,” I told him as I looked around the kitchen. I was in the house that Evan had been given when he joined the enforcers. It was so much larger than the little cottage we had lived in in our village. And it was great because Lukan lived on the other side of us on one side while Felix lived on the other.

“I know I’m pushing you, and maybe that’s wrong of me. Maybe I should just let you do your own thing and not push for you to be the one that opens the bakery.”

I shook my head. “No, I need a job. I’m not complaining, but I really do need to do something because you’re gone on and off, and I get bored.” I shrugged before continuing. “I can hang out with some of the other fae enforcers, but they do their own thing for the most part. They don’t really include me most of the time, which is understandable.” I saw Evan’s face change and immediately shook my head at him while holding my hands out. “It’s all right. They don’t have to include me. I’m not an enforcer, and I’m not mate to any of them. That’s why it’s a good thing you’re encouraging me. I need to be pushed.” I did. I knew it just as much as Evan did.

“I just want you to have an opportunity to do something that I know you love. You used to love working in the village’s bakery.” Evan glanced down at the counter before he looked back at me. “For a bit, I thought you were going to stay in our village and not come with me.”

My eyebrows lifted in surprise. “What? Why? You are everything, Evan, and I wasn’t

even considering staying behind once I was offered to come. Why would I stay? There is nobody left in our village for me.” Most likely, I would never find my mate unless I managed to go traveling at some point. I already knew that none of the current enforcers or other employees at the council were my mate. That was frustrating, but there wasn’t anything I could do to change it.

“You left something you loved.”

I didn’t know why, but I just started laughing. It went on and on until I had tears running down my face. When I finally was able to stop, I swiped at my eyes and cheeks before looking at my brother. Was he serious?

“Ev, I am going to be doing the same thing here now. How is it any different? It’s just somewhere else. Obviously, the fates knew I would have this opportunity.” Why had I resisted? Maybe it was just that it was a lot all at once? I didn’t know for sure, but when I thought about it, even thinking about not taking this opportunity and running with it was dumb. “I’m going to do this, Evan. I need to. It’s going to be wonderful for me,” I told him.

Evan smiled at me. “Good. I’m happy to hear it.” Evan reached for another cupcake, and it disappeared in seconds. I smiled while shaking my head at him. That was at least the fourth one, and I was certain he was going to end up with an upset stomach if he didn’t eat something substantial soon.

I turned around and went back to the list in my notebook. I was trying to finalize what would be offered each day of the week. Since I didn’t have much help, only two other omegas who were mated to someone on the mountain, but I’d not been told whom, I was going to be working a lot of hours. The council had offered me Mondays or Wednesdays off, and I was still deciding which I would prefer. I knew that even with the use of magic, I would need to have a day off. My body would need time to rest, and I would need time to do other things.

“What’s that?” Evan asked as he leaned over my shoulder.

“Basically, it’s a menu. I know I need to offer certain things every day.” I pointed to the plate of cupcakes that Evan had been eating. “Cupcakes and cookies, obviously. But what else should I offer daily? I’m not sure what all they like here? I’ve realized that some of the things we ate in our village aren’t things they have here.”

“True. Have you asked what they had before?” Evan picked up the notebook. “This is a lot, Ev. Are you sure that even with magic, you can handle all of this every day?”

“Is it too much?” I leaned closer to look at the notebook. “We did something similar to this in the bakery in our village.”

Evan shook his head and then sighed. “Sure. But there were four of you. Four of you with magic that could do all of this. This is a lot of magic for you to be using every day. And even if you only use magic to do half of these, it’s still a lot since you would have to make the other half like someone without magic.” Evan gave me a serious look. “You said you were going to have two others to help but don’t know who they are. Do they have magic?”

I shrugged. We all knew there were warlocks and other fae on the mountain, but yeah. I didn’t know who would be helping me. “I have no idea,” I replied. “I’m not even sure if they know how to bake.”

Evan took several deep breaths before he set the notebook down. “Well, I still say you should do it, but definitely cut the daily amount down by at least two-thirds.” I wanted to argue, but Evan knew it was coming and stopped me with a hand on my mouth. “Wait,” he said, raising an eyebrow at me. “Just until you know what it’s going to be like. From what I’ve seen of the enforcers, they like things they can take with them. Cookies, small hand pies, rolls, things of that nature.”

I nodded. "I can do that."

"Full cakes, full-sized pies, loaves of bread, things like that are what the mated enforcers are going to take home. Maybe have the ones that are going to be helping, have them work on those? I wouldn't think you would need as many of those first thing in the morning."

I nodded. I reached for the notebook, and after turning to a new page, I started taking notes. Evan had good ideas, and I wanted to make sure I didn't miss anything. "What else?" I asked once I had that jotted down.

Evan started laughing. "I'm not sure," he said after he sobered up. "Maybe I should get you in with the council, and you can ask them what all is expected of you. I can't believe they didn't say anything."

I nodded slowly, my mind going back to the very brief meeting I'd had with someone named Alistair. He was a warlock, and I knew he was very important to the council, but I didn't think he was one of the created ones or anything.

"Umm...maybe they did?" I said, remembering a folder he had given me. "Be right back." I thought I might have put it in my bedroom. I'd not really thought much about doing the organizing side of things. Baking? Absolutely. But I'd never really actually run a bakery before. I could bake and decorate and make things look pretty and delicious, but the other side had been something others had done in the bakery.

I found the folder on my bedside table and hurried back to the kitchen. Evan was sitting on a stool now, and when I held out the folder, he glared.

"What's this?"

"I was given it by Alistair when I had the meeting about the bakery."



Evan sighed before he took it. He quickly scanned through the papers before he looked up at me and shook his head. “Did you read this at all?”

My mouth dropped open, hurt at his words. “Yes, I did. But that was a couple of weeks ago, and I was more thinking about what I would make. Or even if I actually wanted to do it.”

Evan nodded at me. “Do you remember what all is in it?”

I shrugged. “Sort of. I know the pay, hours, general idea is in there.”

More nodding. “How about we go over it after supper? I was thinking about throwing a pan of enchiladas together, and we could eat those with some rice?”

I couldn’t stop myself from grinning. I had never had an enchilada until coming to Treasure Ridge, but I had found that they were quickly one of my favorites. But my absolute favorite was all of the different types of apples they had here. In our realm, there were apples, sure, but there was only one type. Here though? So many, and they tasted quite different.

“I wouldn’t say no to enchiladas. I’m surprised you didn’t eat at the council building though.” I’d been so wrapped up in baking that I’d lost track of time.

Evan’s brow scrunched. “Since when do I have the evening meal at the council? We eat together.”

I shook my head. “You don’t have to.” I went to the cupboard and pulled down a pair of plates. “I was thinking that maybe I would be able to find my own place once I get a few pay cycles. What do you think?”

“Why would you do that? You live here.”

I sighed and set the plates down on the counter with Evan. “Yes, but if I moved out, you wouldn’t feel like you couldn’t be with the other enforcers. You could hang out with them, go out, have fun. Instead, you come home and spend evenings here. I feel bad, Ev. You should be out having fun, enjoying life. You never got to do any of that because of what happened with our parents.” I would forever be grateful for what Evan had done for me. He hadn’t had to. There were several couples in our village who would have gladly taken me in and raised me with their own children so Evan wouldn’t have to. He himself had only been nineteen when they went missing.

“Nope, we’re not doing this now. If you want to move out, we can discuss it later, but we’re not having this conversation tonight. We’re going to eat enchiladas and rice, and we are going to talk about everything that’s in the folder that Alistair gave you. Beyond that, it’s going to have to wait.”

Evan grabbed the top plate from the short stack, and as he slid it across the counter, it was suddenly filled with a pair of rolled enchiladas, and the other half of the plate was filled with fluffy red rice. I took the food as he moved it toward me, offered a smile, and then went to the small table where we usually ate our meals.

Evan joined shortly after, and the sudden appearance of drinking glasses filled with bubbly liquid had me wiggling in my seat. I loved the clear lemon-lime-flavored soda. That was yet another thing that we did not have in the fae realm.

“All right. Let’s go over everything and see what all is expected of both you and the council and how they’re going to be involved.”

“I know I was questioning things earlier, but I really do think I was brought here to do this.”

“I think you should as well. So we’ll see what they expect from you, and we’ll discuss how you should go about asking for more help because I really don’t know

that three of you is going to be enough.”

I shrugged. There had only been four of us in our village, but I was beginning to think that the bakery there operated on a smaller scale than what was expected here. I guess time would tell for certain. Right now, I was going to enjoy my delicious supper that Evan had provided for us.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 11:06 am*

### Chapter 3

#### Roman

I was nervous. I shouldn't be, but here I was, sitting at the end of the road that would take me to Knox and Philip's house. I was sixty-eight years old, and I had spent two decades raising and protecting my twin brothers, yet now I was hiding at the end of the road in my vehicle because the thought of seeing them was a bit unnerving.

There truly was no reason for my unease. Knox had been quite welcoming, but I had sadly pulled away from both of my brothers. Partly because I did not wish to interfere in their new lives but mostly because I was trying to be a good brother. I knew that I had been overly protective, and both of my brothers had expressed frustration with me on more than one occasion. They did not need me any longer, and I was trying my best to let them live their lives without me interfering.

Where did that leave me? Alone, but I had taken steps to make sure that I started living my life again. Well, I had thought I had. I was employed at the local college, but it wasn't really what I'd expected.

Knowing that if I didn't show up soon, I put my vehicle in drive and continued down the road until I reached a familiar driveway. I turned in, and when I noticed not only Knox's truck but a large black SUV that I knew Ramsey drove, I realized I was the last one to arrive. A quick glance at my dash told me I wasn't late. Maybe Ramsey and Phineas had simply been here for some time? The twins, despite being mated, were still incredibly close, and I knew that it had been an adjustment for them when Knox brought Philip down off the mountain.

I parked my own SUV and then reached for the bakery box. Philip must have been waiting for me to arrive because I didn't even make it halfway to the door before he came running out toward me. I moved the box to one hand and then held out my arm for my little brother. He made a squeaking sound before he slammed into me. I wrapped my arm around him and gave him a tight hug.

"I've missed you," he told me. "Don't spend so much time away from stopping by to say hi."

"I have missed you as well. Phineas too. And also the babies. How have you been?"

"We're all good. I think the bigger question is, how have you been? It's not like you to just disappear like you did."

He wasn't wrong. I had been such a constant in both of their lives for so long I was certain that my sudden disappearance was noticed. "I've been busy," I told him. That wasn't completely untrue, but we both knew that wasn't completely the reason why I had stepped back so much.

"I'm not going to push," Philip said as he looked up at me. "You have your reasons, and whatever they are, they are yours." Philip offered a smile before he took a step back and then nodded toward the house. "Why don't we go in? Knox has been marinating steaks all day, and I know Phineas is just as excited to see you as I am. There is so much to get caught up on, and we want to hear all about how teaching has been going for you."

"Teaching is not new," I told him as we started walking toward the door. "This is my second semester with the college, and we have talked about this already."

"Yes, but we all thought that something else must have been going on with as busy as you have been lately."

I slowly shook my head and gave Philip a sad smile. How did I tell my brother that I had purposely pulled away from both of them?

“What?” Philip asked with concern written all over his face.

I shook my head again. “It’s nothing important. How are the twins?” I asked, hoping to change the subject. It might have worked because Philip’s face suddenly lit up.

“They are growing like weeds. All of them. I know you asked about Otis and Madelyn, but Hazel is growing as well. They’re all walking and talking gibberish, and they have their own language, and we don’t understand it, but they love each other, and it’s amazing to see.”

My heart suddenly ached. I had missed all of that, and there truly was no reason for it aside from my own foolishness. I looked down at my brother, and before he could reach for the door, I stopped him with a gentle hand on his shoulder.

“I will be better about spending time with all of you. The last thing I want to do is overstep, but I can see and admit that I have taken things too far in the opposite direction. For that, I apologize.”

“There’s no need to apologize, Roman. We know how busy you have been. We also know that the entire family dynamic has changed, and because of that, we can’t expect you to always be there for us like you were before.”

“This is a me issue, Philip. I am incredibly happy for you and Phineas. Don’t ever think that I’m not. But there has been some struggle on my side with suddenly no longer needing to be on alert all the time.” I shook my head. “That doesn’t mean that I don’t love the two of you still. I do, very much. And I adore my nieces and nephew. I need to get over my issues and be there for the two of you. That’s what family is for. I know that our parents would be disappointed in me with how I have been acting

for the past several months. The reason our dad called me home was because he knew I would protect the two of you at all costs.” I shrugged. “Now that’s Knox and Ramsey’s jobs, and I had to adjust to that.”

“I’m sorry, Roman. We never met for you to feel like you had no place in our lives anymore.”

“I don’t,” I told him. “I just didn’t want to upset your mates more than I already had when they first scented the two of you. I’ll be better at being involved with the little ones. I know just how much help can mean.” I’d often longed for even a half hour to take a hot shower, but I’d never gotten it.

“We’ll talk more later. Knox is wondering where we are because he knows I came rushing out here to greet you.” Philip pushed the door open. “He also said the steaks are ready.”

With that, Philip disappeared into the house. I followed him in, giving my eyes a moment to adjust to the darker interior. It wasn’t that it was dark, just that the sun outside was still quite bright.

“Did you get new furniture?” I asked as we walked farther into the house.

“No. We did have to rearrange things, though, because of the twins.” Philip looked left, then right before he turned completely around and glanced up at me. “Maybe? I think Knox might have added a few more pieces since you were here last, but we haven’t gotten rid of anything.”

I nodded slowly. “The place looks good. I guess it’s been too long since I’ve been here last.”

“Yes, it has.”

I looked up at the sound of Knox's voice. He was carrying a plate of food in one hand and had a toddler on his hip on the other side. Philip rushed over to him and took who I realized was Madelyn.

Phineas came in, followed by Ramsey. Phineas was holding his daughter, Hazel, and that meant Ramsey had Otis, Philip and Knox's son. I smiled at Phineas, who walked right over and stood in front of me. I held out my arm and pulled him close for a hug.

"It's good to see you again," I whispered to him.

Phineas pulled away, looking up at me with a sad smile that mirrored Philip's from earlier. "It's good to see you too. I'm glad you finally agreed to come for a family dinner."

I looked around at the others in shock. Family dinner? I gazed at Philip first, but he was busy fussing over placing the babies in high chairs. Ramsey was glaring at me over Philip's head, but Knox offered a friend smile. "We can talk later," Knox said. He turned and disappeared into the kitchen.

I glanced down at Phineas and tried to smile. "I'm sorry. I guess I didn't realize you were having family dinners. I've been busy, and I didn't want to interrupt your time with your mates." I said it loud enough so it could be heard by the others in the room though. Ramsey continued to glare at me, and now that his arms were empty, he stood there with his arms crossed in front of him. Knox sat another plate down on the table and a bowl from the other hand and then whacked Ramsey with the back of his hand.

"Stop. We're going to be nice," Knox told him. The gargoyle looked over at Knox, and after the two stared at one another for a moment, Ramsey finally uncrossed his arms and nodded.



I offered an apologetic smile to Phineas. “I’m sorry, Phineas. I have a lot to make up for because apparently, I’ve messed up, just as I have been doing for the last decade or so.” I reached out and gently patted my brother on the shoulder before I walked around him, taking my box of treats to the table and placing it among the various other plates and bowls.

“I was beginning to wonder if you were going to put the donuts out for everyone or continue holding them all evening,” Philip said.

I smiled at him before I glanced around the room. “I’m happy to have them here, although not something I made myself, obviously. I couldn’t come empty-handed, and I know how much you and Phineas love donuts.”

“The bakery reopening cannot happen fast enough,” Phineas said as he moved to my side. Just moments ago, he was upset, and rightly so. But now, he offered a huge smile as he reached into the box and pulled out a powdered donut. “Please tell me it’s raspberry-filled.”

I shrugged. “I think so, but I haven’t tested any of them. They said they were raspberry-filled.”

Philip leaned over and grabbed a maple iced donut. “Oh yeah. Maple and bacon.” He took a bite and moaned. Knox sighed and shook his head when I looked at my brother-in-law.

“Sorry,” I told him.

“Don’t be. We stop in and get donuts every Saturday morning.”

“What?” Phineas said. “You’ve been holding out on me? Why haven’t you been sharing them? It wouldn’t be much for you to bring some up when you come up to

Treasure Ridge for our Saturday meals.”

“We’ve tried. They don’t last long enough to make it to the evening,” Knox said. Philip turned around, and although I could no longer see my brother’s face, I had no doubt that he was glaring at his mate.

“You’re coming up for the bakery thing next weekend, right?” Phineas asked.

“That was the plan, yes.”

Knox touched my shoulder, and I moved to sit in the chair he directed me toward.

“I really can’t wait for the bakery to reopen,” Phineas said. “Philip is lucky that he lives down here. There’s nothing for us on Treasure Ridge.”

“Sweetheart, I would have gotten you donuts anytime you wanted them. All you had to do was say something,” Ramsey told Phineas as he cupped my brother’s face. He leaned down and kissed him on the forehead before he stood back up.

“It’s not the end of the world if I don’t have donuts.” Phineas sat down in the chair Ramsey had pulled out for him. “I just like them.”

I looked down and bit my lips to keep from smiling. I knew for a fact that both of my brothers had a fondness for donuts. It was why I’d brought them with me.

“These are good,” Philip said around a bite of donut. “Not as good as the ones you used to get us from the council bakery, but they’re really not bad.”

I nodded slowly. “I’m not sure what happened with the council’s bakery, but I’m sorry it closed. It hasn’t been shut down long, has it?”

“Almost two months, actually,” Ramsey said. “The couple and their daughter who were running it ran into some issues. The council thought it would be better that they move on.”

I knew instantly that there was more to that story than he was saying. Most likely, he simply couldn’t tell us what exactly had happened.

“That’s not the full story, but Ramsey won’t say. All I know is I wasn’t allowed to leave the mountain for a few weeks, and Knox brought Philip and their twins up to us every weekend for family dinners.”

I glanced between Knox and Ramsey and realized that they had done what they needed to in order to keep my brothers safe. I appreciated that, but I was also a bit hurt because I’d not been clued in that there was something going on. I wasn’t an enforcer though, and I no longer worked for the council directly.

I cleared my throat. “Everything is all right now though?”

Ramsey stared directly at me. “It is, yes. The council has hired one of the new enforcer’s brothers to run the bakery. He’s going to be getting some help from a few others, from what we’ve all heard, but there is going to be a party of sorts to celebrate it reopening. A lot of the enforcers like their sweets, and they’ve been without for some time.” Ramsey chuckled. “That, and they are trying to make the guy feel welcome.”

“It’s a big deal to suddenly move from one realm to another,” Phineas told his mate as he looked over at him. Hazel made a noise, drawing all of our attention. She was glaring at her fathers, who weren’t paying attention to her. Knox came to the rescue, though, and placed a large spoonful of diced fruit on the tray of her high chair. Next came small bites of steak and, of course, a cup of milk.

She dove right into her meal, grabbing bite-sized pieces of food and then shoving it into her mouth. Knox added some small bites of salad, which was her next choice. It was good to see that she was eating a variety of foods.

“Would you like steak or chicken?” Knox asked me as I continued to watch my niece eat as if she’d not been fed in a while. I knew differently, but that was simply how shifter children were. I glanced around, noticing that nobody else had been served yet.

“Whatever is left is fine with me,” I told him. “Please see to Philip and Phineas first,” I added.

“They’re both having chicken,” Knox said as he used the tongs to place a pair of chicken breasts on each of their plates. “Did you prefer steak or chicken? Ramsey wants a steak, and I have more than enough for you to have either.”

I glanced around and wondered when things had become so formal and awkward between all of us.

“Truly, whatever you have,” I told him. “I appreciate the invite.” I handed my plate over, and Knox took a large steak and placed it on it. “Thank you.” I took the bowl of salad that Phineas was holding out toward me and offered my brother a smile.

Once we all had plates piled high with food and all of the babies were happily eating their small bites, things seemed to finally relax between all of us. Of course, Ramsey continued to send me glares every so often, but I knew that was in part simply who he was. But also, he wasn’t a fan of me. He and Phineas had scented each other first, and it had been a bit difficult for me to accept that one of my little brothers had found their mate and would be starting an entire new life with someone. He absolutely adored my brother and their daughter though, and that was all I could ever ask for either of my brothers.

“So...” Phineas said suddenly. “How’s teaching going? Are you enjoying it?”

I looked at my brother like he was asking me a forbidden question. He wasn’t, but I simply didn’t know exactly how to answer him.

“It’s...different,” I said. That was true. It was indeed different. “I’ve actually told myself I was going to take the weekend to decide if I was going to continue teaching or not. I’m not sure it’s a right fit for me any longer.”

The room went silent except for the babies talking while they ate their meals.

“Maybe it’s not that it’s not the right fit, but perhaps it’s the location,” Knox suggested. That earned him a glare from Philip. “What?” Knox said as he looked over at his beloved. “I wasn’t suggesting he move away. But he wouldn’t be the first to not feel the most comfortable at that particular college. I was only suggesting that it might be more enjoyable for him if he was teaching somewhere else.”

I nodded slowly. “I’ve considered it. I’m trying to keep an open mind about all of it.” I glanced around the table and tried not to lock eyes with my brothers for too long. “I’ve given it two semesters, and although that’s not really a long time, it’s been enough to let me know that things have changed drastically since I taught last.”

I had considered teaching elsewhere. Had even thought about moving away in order to do it. In the end, I’d always come back to the fact that I knew I would miss my brothers and niblings too much if I left. I couldn’t do it.

“Are you really thinking about teaching somewhere else?” Philip, who was sitting directly beside me, asked quietly.

“I have thought about it and have even looked into it a little. If I did, it would be completely remote. I’m not planning on moving, except perhaps to a bigger place.”

Immediately, Philip's shoulders slumped, and I realized he was actually concerned I might move away. In thinking about it, what did I expect? I'd not spent a whole lot of time with them in too long. I needed to do better and make sure I kept a relationship with them.

### Chapter 4

#### Beau

I was trying my best to be positive, but there was so much going on. I had gone through several trial runs in the past week, and I was almost certain I was ready for what was about to happen, but were you ever truly prepared for something as life-changing as a grand reopening? The answer was no. There was nothing I could do that would actually prepare me for what I was about to experience.

Konrad had been an absolute savior. The dragon omega was the sweetest, and he was a complete wizard in the kitchen. I had learned that he was mated to Aleric, and together, they had claimed this mountain a long time ago with Ferdinand and Egon. Aleric was the head enforcer for the council, which apparently was a very important position. I had no doubt, but the way Konrad had described it, Aleric was in more of an administrative role rather than someone who went out on field assignments like my brother.

Along with Konrad, I had Elias's help. He, too, was a dragon shifter and had been good friends with Konrad for most of their lives. Sadly, they wouldn't be able to stay and help permanently. That was all right, though, because I was going to be getting permanent help in a week. I was a bit surprised by that, but that was what I'd been told by Alistair. Whatever that was, I wasn't going to say no.

"You are going to be amazing."

I turned at the sound of Konrad's voice and smiled. "It's not just me though. You and

Elias have helped so much.” Konrad rolled his eyes while shaking his head.

“All we do is run everything out to the display cases. You’ve done all of the work and are offering more than what the previous proprietors did.” Konrad moved a step closer. “And I really do want to ask for the recipe for those filled puff things.”

I smiled. Konrad and Elias had taken goodies home all week, and after Konrad had taken home the almond paste–filled puff pastries, he’d come back the next day and asked if they were going to be on the menu frequently. I chuckled. It came out later that Aleric had eaten all but two, and that was only because Konrad had somehow managed to get them away from him and shove them into his mouth before his mate could eat them all.

“If they are immensely popular, things will be on the daily menu. Most other things will be available on a rotating menu. But I can always whip up a batch for you to take home.”

Evan could sort of cook, but he absolutely could not bake. Not beyond basic biscuits. But me? I could bake just about anything I wanted. Maybe it was because I’d not had those things after our parents went missing. I’d ended up spending a lot of time hanging out at our village’s bakery, and eventually, they offered to give me a job. I jumped at the offer, and I’d had a love of baking ever since.

That had been just shy of a decade ago and an entire realm away. Did I miss it? Sometimes. But if our parents were still alive, at this point, I was upset with them. Well, unless they were forced to be away from us. But deep down, Evan and I agreed: something had happened, and they were no longer alive.

“You just got sad. I didn’t mean to pressure you about the puffs. Aleric will survive without them.”



I snorted. “That isn’t what I was upset about. I was actually thinking about my parents and wondering if they would be happy for me and Evan.” I smiled. “That and the fact that my brother can barely cook and absolutely cannot bake a thing beyond biscuits.”

Konrad tried to hide his smile but failed.

“It’s all right. You can laugh. He seriously cannot bake. We didn’t starve, and he can cook basic things. But beyond that, no.” I sighed. “I can’t be upset. He stepped up and took over raising me when he didn’t have to. Evan was too busy trying to take care of a growing teenager when he himself was still one. We had support from others in the village, but it wasn’t the same as our parents.”

Konrad offered a sad smile. Over the past week, I’d shared my life story with him and Elias. It wasn’t that I was ashamed of my past. Evan and I weren’t the first to lose our parents and sadly wouldn’t be the last. Unfortunately, it happened.

“I am sorry you and your brother had to go through that.” Konrad placed his hand on my shoulder. “It is good that the two of you had each other.”

“I agree.” I remembered Konrad’s own sad story about how he lost not only his parents and brothers but his entire village.

“It’s time,” Elias said as he came rushing into the back room. “It’s time,” he repeated with a little squeak in his voice. I couldn’t help but start laughing. Thankfully, it wasn’t incredibly early today for our relaunch. No, that would come tomorrow morning.

Konrad started to walk toward the front of the bakery, and I stopped him with a touch on the shoulder. When he looked back at me, I held out my hand with a large bakery box in it. “Set these somewhere for you to take home,” I told him. I knew that with

the excitement the council had been getting for us, we would most likely be busy, and I would most likely forget about Konrad's almond paste puffs later.

"Are these..." his eyes rounded as he took a deep breath.

"I wanted to make sure you had them. I don't know how the day is going to go, and if we're busy later, I don't want you to leave without them."

"Thank you." Konrad gave me a beaming smile. "You didn't have to, but I really appreciate it. I'll settle up for them later."

I shook my head. "No charge. Seriously. They aren't even on the menu today. If your mate comes by, give them to him."

Konrad's eyes widened. "Why would I do that? If I gave them to him, they would be gone before I could even get home, and I'd not get any again."

"All right. Well, put them off to the side for you for later." It was odd. Konrad was over three centuries older than I was, and so was Elias. Yet they were here to help. It just felt...weird. But I was so thankful for Konrad and Elias. They both helped out in various places when needed, but for the most part, they both spent most of their time taking care of their grandbabies.

When I stepped out of the back room, to say I was overwhelmed would be an understatement. We were only going to be open for two hours today, from four to six, and then there would be a council cookout. The council was celebrating something, and Evan had told me it had to do with the really big assignment they had when they were going to and from Italy a lot. He didn't tell me much more than that, but there was a big family fun day and cookout planned, so here we were.

But as for me, today was a trail run, and tomorrow would be full-on, opening at seven

in the morning. Thankfully, I would only have to be here until six in the evening. Yes, it would be long hours, but I was lucky in that I could use magic and didn't need to come in hours before we opened in order to start the day's baking. Nor would I need to stay for hours after closing in order to clean up. It was a win-win, really.

There was already a line that was solid from the door to the cabinets. Elias and Konrad were both busy helping customers, and immediately, I joined them. I pasted on the biggest smile I could and hoped that everyone here found something they wanted and they would be repeat customers.

We passed out puffs, cookies, cupcakes, full-sized cakes, breads—you name it, we sold it. I wasn't sure how long it had been since we'd had that solid line of customers before I managed to move close to Konrad to whisper to him, "There aren't this many people on this mountain, are there?"

Konrad smiled. If I didn't know the dragon omega's age, I would swear he was in his early thirties at the latest.

"No. But the council has invited the pack, den, and pride that are just off of the mountain around the lake as well. The family fun day is for all of the paranormals in the area. There will be a large run later for those that feel like shifting and going for a run through the trees if they so wish. It's going to be a huge thing."

"There he is," a familiar voice said. I turned at the sound of my brother's voice and smiled.

"I was wondering when you were going to get here." I held my arms out at my sides. "What do you think?"

"I believe that your place is a hit," Evan said. He tilted his head to the side before he moved down to the far side of one of the cabinets. I followed, wondering what it was

that he needed.

“Is something wrong?”

“No. I just wanted to tell you how proud I am. I know you worked hard on all of this, and granted, a lot of magic was used, but you still put in the effort to plan it all.”

“Thanks, Ev. I’ve been terrified about what was going to happen. My biggest worry was that everyone was going to hate all of my things.”

Evan shook his head. Something caught my eye, and when I looked toward my left, I saw a group walk in that absolutely had to be a pair of twin dragon brothers.

“Who’s that?” I asked, curious about the brothers who were both holding babies.

“Where?” Evan asked. “Everest there?”

“Everest?”

“Yeah, the sandy-blond wolf shifter? He’s an enforcer.”

I shook my head. “No. The tall twins? Are they dragons?” I asked just as one turned his head and looked directly at me.

“Oh. No, they’re gargoyles. The one with the taller blond is Raiden, and the one with the tiny blond with him is Ramsey.”

“Gargoyles?” I’d not ever met gargoyles that I knew of.

“Yep.” Evan leaned to his right and then left before he shook his head and looked back at me. “I was looking for the rest of their family, but I guess they’re either not

here or are outside.”

“There’s more?” I asked, surprised.

“Yeah. There’s a lot of families that are all involved with the council in some way.” Evan chuckled. “You work for their bakery, and I’m an enforcer. Same thing.”

I nodded slowly. “Yeah, I guess so.” I glanced over at Konrad and Elias and realized that I’d basically abandoned them. “I need to get back to helping. Is there something you wanted?”

Evan shook his head. “No. If I really want something, I can always ask for it later,” he told me. “But I have a container of cupcakes and another of cookies at home. I think it’s safe to say that I’m covered for now.” Evan gave me another smile. “I’ll be back at six when you close up. We can go to the cookout if you want. The council is going all out. It’s not just burgers and hot dogs. We’re talking complete spread with briskets, steaks, burgers, dogs, all of it. All of the sides too.”

I moaned internally. I’d not eaten much lunch because I’d been a bit too nervous. But at the mention of all of the food, I was suddenly ready for it to be closing time so I could have some of that delicious-sounding food.

“See you soon,” I told Evan. He waved as he walked away from the counter. I rejoined Konrad and Elias, jumping in to help. “Sorry,” I told them.

“Don’t be,” Elias said. “It’s expected that your brother come in and see how things are going for you. He’s showing you support, which is amazing.”

I nodded. It was. Evan had always been supportive of anything I had ever wanted to do. I looked up just in time to see one of the gargoyle twins that I’d been asking Evan about approach the counter. He was the one that had the shorter blond with him. The

blond was now holding an adorable little girl. I couldn't stop my smile if I tried.

"Hello, cutie," I said as I reached out and waved to the toddler. "Can she have a treat?" I asked who I was certain were her daddies.

"She can, but she will make a mess," the short omega holding her said.

"Oh, I have the perfect thing for that."

I turned and found Elias already holding up the chocolate chip cookie. One-half of it was dipped in chocolate, and we'd been gifting them to the kids all day.

"How are you doing, Phineas?" Elias asked.

"I'm good. Tired lately, and I can't figure out why."

He took the cookie from me, and his daughter squealed in delight as it was handed to her.

"Can I get the two of you anything?"

"Is it possible to get a few of these brownies here, as well as some of these...are they donuts?"

I smiled up at the gargoyle. "You can. Is there anything else?"

"Not for us," he said before he turned around. "Raider? Is there anything you and Alexander want?"

The other blond man popped forward in the crowd and looked at the cabinet. "Ooh." He gasped. "Are those beignets?"

I smiled. “Yes. Did you want some of those?”

“Yes. As many as I can.” He looked over at who was obviously his brothers-in-law and opened his mouth. “We need to let Matteo know. He and Justin will need to know that there are beignets here.”

I offered a smile as I pulled out the tray of pastries and started putting them in the box. “I think they were here earlier? Short vampire with curly hair? They had a pair of little ones. A girl and a boy?”

“That was them,” the man told me. Then he looked over at the shorter blond. “I can’t believe they didn’t let me know there were beignets here.”

“Are there any cupcakes?” another voice asked. I started to feel tingles in my body as I finished filling the box with the beignets, and when I looked up to hand the box across the counter, I found myself staring at a tall man with somewhat messy sandy-blond hair and blue eyes. He offered a smile before he turned his head toward the toddler he was holding.

“Roman wants cupcakes,” Raiden said. “Do you have any left?”

I looked back up at the gargoyle and nodded. “Yeah, they’re...” I glanced down at the cabinet that Elias was standing in front of.

“I sold the last six we had about two minutes ago,” Elias told me.

“There’s some more in the back. I’ll go get them.” I quickly rushed away and noticed that the tingling in my body started to soften as I left the front. There was no way. Not today. Not now. How was that even possible? I was twenty-two. Evan was twenty-seven. He should find his mate first. Besides, I didn’t have time for a mate. And there were so many people in the bakery I’d never be able to figure out who it

was.

I grabbed the new tray of cupcakes, these ones with rainbow swirl frosting, and took them back to the front. I slid the tray into the cabinet and then looked back up at the gargoyle. More people had joined their group, and I had to blink a few times. There were two sets of twins? Really?

“Do you have any maple donuts?” the new twin asked. I nodded slowly.

“Yes,” I said. I glanced around and found who I thought was Roman, who had asked for cupcakes. “How many cupcakes did you want?”

“Four? Is that too many?”

I shook my head. He came closer, and the tingles in my body started up again. I tried to look around him because I knew he wasn’t my mate. He obviously already had one—he was holding a toddler.

“Anything else?” I asked as I put four cupcakes in a box. Elias handed me a box, and I looked at him in question.

“They’re Philip’s donuts.”

I nodded. “Can the little ones have treats?” I asked them.

“They can,” the short blond said. I didn’t know who he was exactly, but I turned around and grabbed three more cookies and handed them over after passing the boxes off to one of the gargoyles.

“Can we get another cookie? Knox is outside with Madelyn because she was fussy.”



“Of course.” I turned and grabbed another cookie. I handed it across the counter, and after it was passed off to someone else, I tried to offer a smile. My body was vibrating now, and that meant my mate was somewhere nearby, but I didn’t know where. There were at least twenty people waiting near the cabinets, and I wanted to cry because I absolutely did not have time to search for my mate at the moment.

“Is there anything else?” I asked.

Several glances were exchanged, and I smiled at them. “Konrad will check you out down that end,” I told them.

The group moved away from the front of the cabinets, and I had assumed that my mate would move closer, but the vibrations coursing through my body didn’t increase; they started to soften again. That was odd.

I looked back at the group that was now chatting with Konrad, and I found blue eyes staring intently at me. That was so incredibly odd.

“Can I get some of those cookies you were passing out?”

It took a moment for me to break the penetrating stare of those blue eyes, but when I looked at the customer that was across from me, I smiled. “Hey, Lukan. Those are for the little ones, sorry. They all get a special treat today.”

“Seriously, Beau? That’s just not right.”

I chuckled before shrugging. “Kids only,” I told him.

Lukan sighed. “Fine. What do you have that’s chocolate? Lots of chocolate.”

I chuckled again as I reached into the cabinet for the double fudge brownies. They

were the most chocolate thing we had on the menu today.

“Beau?” I turned my head and looked at Konrad. “Are you going to the cookout?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Evan is going to meet me outside when we close up, and we’re going to go check it out.”

“We’ve already secured an area for all of us,” Lukan added. I smiled at the fae enforcer.

“Is that needed?” I asked him.

Lukan shrugged. “Not sure, but we claimed a spot. Lots of people are. We picked one that was away from the bouncy houses and slides.”

I frowned. Why would they do that? Both of those sounded like lots of fun.

“Konrad will check you out if there’s nothing else.”

Lukan took his brownies and started eating one before he even made it to Konrad. I shook my head at the enforcer before looking out toward the still-long line. It wasn’t looking like we were going to be able to close up at six like we were supposed to. I had to wonder: would it always be this busy?

I noticed the tingling in my body had softened even more. What did that mean? Had my mate been here and left and I’d not even gotten the chance to meet him? I sighed. Oh well. I’d get to meet him when the time was right, and obviously, now wasn’t the correct time.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 11:06 am*

### Chapter 5

#### Roman

I had worked with fae before in the council's store. There were several here on Treasure Ridge and others down off the mountain. I knew that despite the fact the one behind the counter looked barely legal, he was most likely in his twenties at the minimum. He had to be because otherwise, the council wouldn't have him working at the bakery. No, he was the one that was going to be running the bakery, I told myself.

The real issue was that my tiger was upset because we were leaving our mate behind without so much as talking to him. My mate. I thought about the beautiful fae who was passing out baked goods. He absolutely wasn't expected, but I wasn't going to be upset about finding my mate. I had hoped I would one day find my mate, but I never thought he would be here in Montana. And thanks to Konrad, I knew his name was Beau.

"Are you all right? You've gone quiet on us."

I looked over at Ramsey. "I'm fine. Thinking about some things."

Ramsey raised an eyebrow at me as he shifted Hazel from his left side to his right. "Thinking about? Maybe that little fae that was behind the counter?"

I sent him a look. I wasn't sure he had heard me when I asked Konrad about Beau. I glanced around and realized that we had fallen behind the rest of our family. I took a step closer to Ramsey, and after looking around again to make sure nobody else was

nearby, I whispered to him because I knew for a fact he had excellent hearing.

“I’m almost positive he’s my mate.”

Ramsey’s eyebrows rose. “Seriously?”

I nodded. “I know it’s not Konrad or Elias. That left Beau. My tiger was definitely scenting our mate, and I walked around the front of the display cabinets to see if it was someone else, but when he reached across the counter to hand Otis his cookie, I picked up on his scent then. Beau is my mate.”

Ramsey smiled. “Well, congratulations. What are you going to do about it though? The council just got someone to reopen the bakery. If he’s your mate, that means he’ll end up quitting, and then the council will be without a bakery again.”

I shook my head. “I would never ask that he stop working at the bakery. I don’t even know if he wants a mate, let alone would want me for a mate.”

Ramsey gave me a look. “Why wouldn’t he? I don’t know about everyone, but most paranormals want their mates, Roman. Why would you think he wouldn’t?”

I shrugged. “I know nothing about him, actually.”

“I can’t help you, sorry. Today was the first day I’d ever seen him. I would think he lives somewhere close, but since he’s fae, he has magic and can get up on the mountain easy enough.”

I nodded. “I asked Konrad about him since I didn’t know who he was. He called out to him, and he mentioned that he and someone named Evan were going to be at the cookout.”

Ramsey smiled. “Well, that gives me a whole lot of information that I can help with.”

I had no idea how, but I wasn’t going to not take any and all help I could get. “How so?”

“Evan is one of the newer fae enforcers. He’s on Frederick’s team. I couldn’t tell you exactly which house is his, but I know that he has a younger brother that came with him.” Ramsey’s scent suddenly changed. “You will have to ask them, but I know that Evan raised his brother for part of his life.”

That surprised me, and I stopped. It took a moment, but Ramsey realized, and he, too, stopped. When he turned, he offered a concerned look.

“Are you sure?”

Ramsey nodded. “Evan has talked about his younger brother a few times, but for the most part, the fae enforcers all stick together, and I don’t know too much about their personal situation. They’re all on different teams, but when it comes to being in other places like the dining hall or the training room, they tend to stick together.”

I nodded at Ramsey. “Thanks for letting me know. If I get the opportunity, I’ll be sure to ask him about it.”

Ramsey shook his head. “When, not if. I don’t believe that your mate would be sent here and then you weren’t given the opportunity to have a life with him. That’s not how things work, and we both know it.”

I shrugged.

“Are you two coming?”

We both looked at Philip, who was standing next to Knox. Otis was still eating his cookie, and Madelyn had stopped fussing once she had been given her own treat. Phineas was gone, and I assumed he was with Raiden and Alexander.

“Where’s Phineas?” I asked Ramsey.

“He and Alexander wandered off to talk about something. Raiden was right behind them, so I’m not worried.”

I nodded. Not only were we on Treasure Ridge, which was completely safe, but we all knew that Raiden would never let anything happen to Phineas, just as Ramsey wouldn’t allow anything to happen to Alexander.

We started walking again, and Ramsey quickly whispered to me, “Are we keeping this to ourselves for now?”

Should I? I didn’t know what was the best thing to do. I raised a shoulder. “Maybe for a few more hours. I hope to at least talk to him at the cookout if at all possible. If he tells me to kick rocks, I’ll let my brothers know that I met my mate, but things aren’t going to progress quickly.”

Ramsey nodded. “All right. Just so you know, your brothers are going to completely flip when they learn that their older brother finally has his own mate.” Ramsey chuckled. “And I’d venture to say that yours is right around the same age as they are.”

No. He wasn’t that young, was he? I reached out and touched Ramsey’s arm, stopping him again. He turned and looked at me, but we had reached the others at this point.

“What’s wrong?” Philip asked.

It took a moment of me and Ramsey staring at each other before Philip stepped between the two of us. He pushed against my chest, and I looked down at my brother.

“Don’t. I have no idea what is going on, but you and Ramsey need to get over your dislike for each other,” Philip told me. I scrunched my brow, wondering what he was talking about.

“That’s not...no,” I said. “Ramsey and I were talking about something, and he said something that surprised me.” I sighed and looked around for the others. “Let’s find Phineas, and then we can talk. There’s something that I need to tell you all.”

Philip’s shoulders dropped. “It’s about time. We’ve been waiting for you to share with us what’s going on.”

Philip stepped out from between us, and I started to say something until Ramsey shook his head at me.

“No?” I mouthed without making a sound. He subtly shook his head. Philip walked off again, rejoining Knox. They started walking, and I gave Ramsey a covert look, but it was no good—he wasn’t looking my way.

It didn’t take long for us to find Phineas, Alexander, and Raiden. They were sitting on an oversized blanket under a tree. We joined them, and then Philip cleared his throat and looked at me expectantly.

“What?”

“You said you were going to tell us what’s been wrong with you.”

I shook my head.

“That’s not what he said, Philip,” Ramsey told him. “He said he had something to discuss.” Ramsey looked at me and nodded encouragingly.

I sighed. “Nothing has really been going on with me,” I started. “At least nothing beyond what I mentioned at the family dinner.”

“Which you missed this week’s,” Philip said, his eyebrows scrunched.

“Sorry,” I told him. “But I did let you know that I was going to be busy because of the end of the semester.”

Philip narrowed his eyes. “You’ll be at the next one though, right?”

I glanced at Ramsey for help. He chuckled and gestured for Phineas to come sit next to him. When my brother tried though, Ramsey pulled him onto his lap. I smiled.

“Seriously?” Philip asked. I looked up at my brother, confused. “You’re going to just go back to ignoring us?”

I shook my head. “No. If you would let me talk, I would tell you what I wanted to discuss.” It was my turn to glare, and when I did, I not only glared at Philip but sent Knox a bit of a look as well. He couldn’t control his mate, but I was hopeful that he could at least assist a little.

Philip looked as if he were going to say something again, but when Knox touched his shoulder, my brother finally closed his mouth and waited.

“I’ve been struggling with the decision as to whether or not I would continue teaching,” I said. “I had thought my decision was made, but then I met my mate,” I continued.



There were exactly two seconds of silence before the expected chaos started.

“What?”

“When?”

“Where are they?”

I chuckled and shook my head. “It’s very new, as in today new,” I told my brothers. I understood their excitement for me, but I needed them to let me talk.

“Today?” Phineas said. “And you’re here? Why?”

“Because I just met my mate, and I’ve not really had much of a chance to discuss things. I don’t even know if he wants to talk to me.”

“He?” Philip asked. “So your mate is a he?”

I nodded.

“Huh,” Phineas said. “Did you not want to bring him?”

I sighed. “I just met him, like I said. The plan was to look for him later and see how things go.”

“He’s here?” Phineas asked.

“He is on Treasure Ridge, yes.”

Philip’s eyes widened. “Is he another alpha? Are you going to be mated to an enforcer?”

I chuckled and shook my head. “No and no, and that’s all I’m going to say for the time being. I haven’t even had an opportunity to talk to him much.” Not at all, really. They didn’t need to know that yet. All that I knew was he was supposed to be here later, and I had every intention of at least introducing myself and seeing if he wanted to go out on a date.

Suddenly, there was a new fear. Did I remember how to date? I’d not been on one in...twenty-four years. I’d finally ended my very long, dry spell after Philip mated with Knox and neither of the twins were living with me any longer. But then I’d suddenly found myself living with rescued omegas, and my opportunity to get away at night was no longer there. After I moved off Treasure Ridge, I’d simply not had the time or really the desire to search for someone.

“When do we get to meet him?” Philip asked.

I chuckled. “I’m not sure. Can I get to know him even a little before I bring him around?”

“You should—” Knox cut Philip off with a hand over his mouth. I looked at my brother’s mate and raised an eyebrow.

“You don’t want to know,” Knox said. “We wish you luck, and please let us know if you need anything at any point.”

“Thanks,” I told him.

“If he’s not an enforcer, but he was here...” Phineas said. He looked up at Ramsey, who was doing his best to not only distract his mate but entertain Hazel. “Do you know who his mate is? The two of you were quite talkative on the way here, it seemed.”

“And how would you know?” Ramsey said. “You were busy with Alexander.” Ramsey leaned in close. “Did you two figure out why you’re out of energy all of the time?” Ramsey looked up and stared at his brother-in-law. “He’s all right, isn’t he?”

“He’s fine,” Alexander said. “Let us know if you need us to keep Hazel for you soon. She and Rowan can have a long sleepover.”

Phineas immediately looked down at his hands, which were in his lap. Hazel had crawled off and was sitting in the middle of the blanket with her cousins. It took a moment for Ramsey to pick up on whatever it was that was happening.

“You’re not pregnant,” Ramsey said quietly. “You’ve not had a heat—” Ramsey’s eyes flew up to meet Alexander’s. “He’s going to have a heat?”

“Most likely. It makes sense since Hazel is eighteen months,” Alexander said.

I saw the look on Ramsey’s face and felt for Phineas. Raiden and Alexander would only ever have Rowan because Alexander had had such a difficult delivery. Ramsey had been terrified that Phineas would become pregnant with a gargoyle baby, and he would possibly lose his baby and mate at the same time. I understood. I, of course, didn’t want to think about the possibility of losing one of the twins.

“We can watch Hazel if the two of you want to go and talk about things,” I told the pair. Ramsey and I might not care much for each other, but we both loved Phineas and Hazel, and neither of us wanted anything to happen to either.

“Would you mind?” Ramsey asked.

“Of course not,” I told him. “She’s busy playing with her cousins.” Ramsey didn’t wait for anyone to say anything else. He simply stood up, taking Phineas with him. They walked off, and I could tell that Ramsey was not comfortable at all. I looked to

his twin, wondering if he had any suggestions.

“I get it,” Philip said before I could. “But is Ramsey just going to force Phineas to not have any other children? Ever?” Philip reached out. “I understand why. What happened with you, Alexander, was terrible.”

It was Alexander who spoke up, not Raiden. “It was also not the norm. Ramsey is understandably cautious. But Phineas said neither of them were really tracking his heats and when they should be expected. I think that perhaps it’s simply that he was caught off guard and he needs some time alone with his mate to discuss things.”

Philip seemed to digest those words before he nodded. We sat there for a little while longer, and when the noise around us seemed to increase, I realized what time it was.

“Are you all good with watching the little ones?” I asked as I stood up. I needed to go searching to see if I could find Beau anywhere. It was after six, and that meant he should be here somewhere. Didn’t it?

“If we weren’t, does that mean you would stay?” Philip asked.

I shook my head before I took a few steps away. Once I was on the mission to find my mate, my tiger finally started to relax, but I knew that would be short-lived if I wasn’t able to at least see Beau again. I had no idea if he would even recognize what we were to one another, but I was going to at least try to talk to him.

Not knowing exactly who Evan was, what he looked like, or any of the other fae enforcers, it took a while to locate them. Normally, my tiger would have been able to track Beau through scent, except that I’d not gotten close enough to him earlier. But there was no doubt that the group that was joking around and having a good time was who I was searching for. I didn’t see Beau there with them though, and that had me scanning the surrounding area. I spotted him walking with a slightly taller version of

him and had to assume that was his brother, Evan.

They hadn't seen me, but I wasn't going to let that keep me from my mate. With purpose, I closed the distance between us and intersected them before they could reach the rest of the fae enforcers.

I slowed my pace once I was a few feet from them, making sure not to come across as too aggressive. But I was an alpha tiger shifter who was on a mission to intercept his omega mate. Despite the fact that we were now in the twenty-first century, I couldn't change who I was nor who he was to me.

Evan noticed me about two seconds before Beau did, and when my eyes locked with those warm brown ones, I smiled. I was almost sixty-nine years old and didn't expect to feel like a teenage shifter with his first crush. But that's exactly how I felt. My smile faded when Evan stepped in front of Beau and then pulled him behind him. I couldn't stop the glare I sent the enforcer, even if I wanted to. He'd effectively put himself between me and my mate, even if he didn't understand what we were to one another yet.

"Excuse us," Evan said as he tried to walk around me.

"I wished to speak to Beau," I said, reaching out slightly. At the sound of his name, that adorable head popped out from behind his brother.

"No," Evan said. He turned slightly, and after grabbing Beau's upper arm, he started to walk off.

"Hey, wait, Ev," Beau said as he tugged back.

"No, Beau. We're not going to do these games. You are not a plaything for the locals." Evan sent me a glare, which only pissed off my tiger. I was about to growl at

the enforcer when unexpected help arrived in the form of my brother-in-law.

“Evan, you might want to let him talk to his mate,” Ramsey said from behind me. Had he and Phineas finished their talk? Where was my brother?

Just as I turned to look at Ramsey, I heard a squeak from Evan and Beau’s direction, and I knew for a fact that sound hadn’t come from the enforcer. The question was—was it a good squeak or one of distress?

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 11:06 am*

### Chapter 6

Beau

Did the sexy alpha just say what I thought he said? He had certainly caught my attention earlier, but he had a toddler on his hip, and together, they definitely gave off similar auras. I had taken that to mean he wasn't who my body had been reacting to and not my mate because he already had one. How else did you get a baby that had a familiar aura to yours? I might have been a virgin, but I certainly knew how things worked and how babies came about.

But the fact that Evan was being a butt about things didn't help. Why would he say no? Did he know something about the alpha that I didn't? Actually, if he knew anything about the alpha, that was more than what I did.

When the really tall alpha who had been with the sexy one earlier mentioned mates, I couldn't keep from squeaking. Could it be? I took a chance and peered around Evan and found myself staring at intense blue eyes. I sighed and then bit my lower lip to keep from making another noise.

"Ramsey," Evan said. "What are you talking about?"

"Give them a chance," Ramsey said. "He might not have been my favorite person when I first met Phineas, but Roman is an upstanding alpha, and your brother will most certainly be safe with him."

"No," Evan said again, and this time, I noticed he crossed his arms across his chest. I

moved out from behind my brother now that he'd let go of my arm and I could step away. I glared at Evan, but he didn't seem as if he was going to back down or change his stance.

"What? Why?" I asked.

Evan finally looked at me. "Because. You just started your dream. Why would you want to give it up? Why would you run off with the first alpha that shows interest?"

I raised my eyebrows at my brother before I shook my head. "What makes you think that nobody has shown interest?"

"Evan," Ramsey said as he stepped forward. "Just so you are aware, you cannot interfere in their mating. Even though you are his older brother, you have no say since Beau is over the age of consent."

I could tell that Evan was going to argue, but whoever Ramsey was, he seemed to have some sort of authority over my brother. Another enforcer, maybe?

"Ev?" I said, hoping to get my brother's attention. When he finally looked at me, I tried to reason with him. "Why? Why don't you want me to have my mate?"

"You don't even know he's your mate, Beau. He's just some alpha claiming that. How do you know?"

I glared. "Maybe because he's near and my body is reacting to him."

"Can I say something?" my gorgeous alpha said as he held out his hands.

We all looked at my mate. Ramsey had called him Roman. Such a wonderful name.



“I understand. Trust me when I say that I understand more than anyone the role of protective older brother.”

Ramsey snorted. “He really does. You will eventually learn the story, but he’s being completely truthful.” Ramsey looked at Evan. “I think what’s best for these two is to give them some time to be alone and get to know one another.” Ramsey shrugged. “What better place to do that than at a council get-together? They are completely surrounded by others, and if Beau should feel the need, he can call out, and any number of others can come to his aid.”

I shared a look with Roman. I didn’t think I would need to call out for help, but I was going to agree to anything I needed to in order to be able to talk to the alpha for at least a little bit. I had questions, and I really wanted to know for certain if he was my mate. If so, was the baby his? Maybe it was a sibling and he was raising it like Evan had me? I needed answers!

“I’ll be fine, Ev,” I said as I took a step away from my brother.

“You just found something that you’ve been looking for, Beau. Why would you want to give it all up to start raising babies with someone?”

I was through being nice. “Just because I might have found my mate, and of course I will eventually have babies with him, doesn’t mean I’m giving up the bakery to have babies. I can work while pregnant, and I can take the baby to the bakery with me.”

“There is a free childcare center directly behind the council’s store and bakery,” Ramsey interjected.

There was? How had I not realized that? I, of course, knew about the council store and had walked past the two buildings that were behind the store and bakery several times when on my way to the bakery. I hadn’t ever paid either building too much

attention, though, because I had no business there.

“Is that really what you want?” Evan asked again. “To give it all up? Because that’s what you’re going to end up doing.”

I sighed and shook my head. “I’m sorry, Ev. You are asking me to give up my mate, and I don’t understand why. It’s not something I’m willing to do, nor should I be asked to.” I took another step away from my brother and closer to the alpha who would eventually be my future. As I did, the tingling in my body increased, telling me I was making the right choice.

My eyes were locked with those beautiful blue ones, and when I reached out for his hand that was hanging at his side, Roman slowly took mine. The zap that went through my body upon contact told me everything I needed to know. Roman was most definitely my mate. I smiled up at him, and when he returned the expression, I felt my cheeks heat.

“I promise to be a complete gentleman. I would very much like to ask if you would join me for the evening meal? I wish to learn all I can about you,” Roman said. He gave my hand a gentle squeeze, which caused another burst of energy to pulse through my arm and, in turn, into my body. I didn’t think he knew exactly what he was doing to me, and I wondered if it would ever stop. Would my body always react to him like this?

“I’d love to join you,” I said without any hesitation. “I think there is a lot for us to talk about.” I needed to know what he would want from me—from his mate. Would he expect me to give up everything and stay home? Would he be supportive of my recent adventure? I’d literally just started it, and the thought of giving it up already was upsetting.

But what was up with my brother? He’d always been so supportive, and now this. He

was being anything but supportive.

“We can watch from afar,” I heard a familiar voice say. When I turned, I was met with the smiling faces of Konrad and Elias. They had been joined by their own mates and were standing not far away. “We won’t interrupt, but we can keep an eye on things. Not that we need to,” Konrad said. “Roman is an incredible person and alpha. He’s done more for his brothers and some of the rescued omegas than you know,” Konrad said as he looked directly at Evan.

I threw a smile in Konrad’s direction and made a mental note to be sure to ask him all about Roman if I didn’t learn everything today. What had he done for his brothers? Who were his brothers, and how many did he have? And the omegas? What was going on with that?

“Care to go get plates? The line seems to be forming already.”

A quick glance up at Roman showed he was gesturing toward the massive table of food. It was so much longer than I expected and seemed to keep going. Roman was most certainly correct: the line was already forming.

“Oh,” I said absently. “I guess we should get in line?” I met Roman’s gaze again. “Do you have somewhere to sit?”

Roman appeared to start to nod but quickly shook his head. “I did. I was going to sit with my family, but that wouldn’t exactly be the best place for us to get to know one another.”

I started to look around, but my attention was drawn to Evan. He appeared to be deep in conversation with not only Konrad’s mate but the tall gargoyle from earlier.

“Umm...who is that to you?” I asked, indicating the gargoyle.

“Ramsey?”

Ramsey! That was his name. I nodded.

“He’s my brother-in-law. I’ll tell you all about my family during the meal if you’d like. You need to know, and some of what you hear might make you have reservations, and I wouldn’t blame you even a little.”

What was it that he needed to share with me?

“Not to interrupt, but there are several blankets over that way,” Konrad said as he pointed toward the side of the building. “We have claimed one, as have others, but there are many left that are still unclaimed.”

“Thank you,” Roman said before he glanced down at me. “Shall we?” He gestured again to the line of food, and my stomach chose that moment to tell everyone nearby that it had been too long since I’d last eaten. It had been mid-morning because we’d become so busy that we’d barely had time to sneak away to use the bathroom.

“Yes. I’m quite hungry after the day I’ve had.”

“I wish to hear all about it.”

I smiled at him as we walked toward the forming line. We didn’t say much while we made our selections, and by the time my plate was piled with food, I’d only made it halfway down the line. That was frustrating because I’d not yet made it to the fruit or the desserts. You would think with me making desserts all day, I wouldn’t enjoy them as much as I did, but you would be wrong. I loved the sweet treat at the end of a meal.

Being fae and having magic, I wasn’t about to go without some of my favorites when

I could use magic to help. With a bit of magical thought, my plate was floating beside me while I magicked another and then started filling it with various fruits and puddings. When I came to something that I was unsure of, I looked back at Roman for an answer.

“What is this jiggly stuff?” I pointed to the rainbow cubes of an unknown substance.

“Gelatin. It’s fruit flavored. My nephew and nieces love it.” Roman looked at me for a moment before shaking his head. “I’m not sure how to better describe it. If you don’t like it, you don’t have to eat it, obviously.”

I nodded before I scooped some onto my plate before moving along. Whatever gelatin was, we did not have it in our realm. I was going to give it a try though. It jiggled as I continued down the line of food, and once I was finally finished filling both of my plates, I found Roman waiting for me. He glanced between me and the plates, one still floating, before he chuckled.

“Shall we?”

“Yes.”

Roman threw several glances my way as we walked across the lawn and toward the line of spaced-out blankets. I spotted Konrad, who was sitting with a young man and a pair of toddlers. Those must be his grandchildren he had talked about so much. He waved, and I did what I could to let him know I had seen him.

Roman stopped at a nearby blanket before looking at me expectantly. “Will this do?”

“Absolutely.” I sat down, and as the floating plate glided down beside me, Roman shook his head. “What?”

“That will take some getting used to. I’ve worked with fae before, but the fact that my mate ended up being fae, that was completely unexpected.”

“In a good way or bad?” I knew some people here weren’t fond of us. It was true, we could easily become bored, and a bored fae was often a mischievous one—myself included.

“Certainly not bad.” Roman pointed at the plate that was beside me. “That is just something new for me. I have two brothers, and one is mated to Ramsey, who is a gargoyle, and the other is mated to Knox, who is a vampire.”

I couldn’t help it—my eyebrows rose at the mention of vampire. We were taught in school that vampires were not good for fae as they often became obsessed with our blood. I didn’t know how much of that was true, but I hadn’t ever let it cause me any fear.

“And they were who you were with earlier?”

Roman nodded. “Yes.” He glanced away for a moment before looking directly at me. “Our parents were killed when the twins were days old. It’s a tragic story, but one that you must know before anything will be able to happen between the two of us.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that. About your parents, I mean.” I glanced around. The blankets were spaced out, but as paranormals, hearing from afar was a thing. “Perhaps you can tell me about it? At another time?” I didn’t know if Roman wished to discuss things of that nature during our first meeting. This certainly wasn’t how I ever dreamed my first date would be with my mate, but here we were.

“Perhaps next time? I wish for you to know all about my family, but it might not be the best story for our first time spent together.”

I grinned. “Understood.”

“Care to tell me a bit about yourself? Have you always wanted to run a bakery? Do you have siblings other than your brother? Do you like it here? Miss home?”

It was my turn to chuckle. “Run a bakery? Not necessarily. I don’t mind though, and it’s not exactly new. I worked in our village’s bakery before coming here.” I thought back to the order of questions. “As far as we know, Evan and I are the only two of us. Our parents went missing when I was fourteen. They were supposed to be visiting a neighboring village, but they never arrived. They were searched for, but we do not know what became of them. We can only assume they passed.” It was possible that they were still alive out there somewhere, but wouldn’t they have come back to us by now? I had to believe that, yes, they would. “I like it here, and no, I do not miss the fae realm. It’s nice. Different. But there is so much more here.” I suddenly became excited. “Do you like television? Evan got us one, and there’s this show—I love it. There’s so many different shows and movies on it.”

Roman chuckled. “I have watched television before, yes. I even own one, although it’s rather small. Most of my time is spent grading papers or creating study plans.”

“Grading papers.” I thought about that. “You’re a teacher?”

Roman nodded. “I teach at the local college down off of the mountain. History. It was something that I loved to teach before I took a break to raise my brothers.”

I thought about that for a moment. “So, you raised them? Like Evan raised me.” I shook my head. “No, you said they were only days old when your parents died. Evan was lucky because I was already able to basically take care of myself. That must have been difficult for you.” I had no doubt that Roman would at one point share with me what happened, but it was incredibly sad. His brothers never knew their parents. “You’re their dad more than their brother.” Evan would always be my brother

because we'd been raised as siblings. But Roman was the only parent his brothers had ever known.

"In a way, yes. But to them, I'm their brother. When they were younger, they did see me as their dad and even called me dad. When they were old enough to understand, I explained everything to them."

"Are you close?" I asked. "Evan and I are. Well, we were. I'm not sure what's going on with him today. I never expected him to act how he did just a bit ago." We were going to have a long talk when I got home. I knew, without a doubt, that Roman was my mate. But that didn't mean I had plans to go home with him this evening. Would I make the sexy alpha wait long? Most likely not. I was eager to know all about the pleasures that could be found between mates, and I had a feeling that Roman would certainly be able to fulfill all of my fantasies.

"We...it can be a bit complicated. I was overly protective because I had to be," Roman said. "The circumstances of me ending up with them did not allow for anything else. That was difficult to give up when they found their mates." Roman nodded. "I can understand Evan and where he's coming from. It can be difficult to go from protector and provider to just brother."

I took a moment to think about Roman's words. They made sense. Was that what was going on with Evan? Was he suddenly faced with the fact that I would now have a mate to take care of me, wondering how he would fit into my life going forward?

"I'm not going to want to not have a relationship with my brother," I said.

"I would never ask that of you." Roman shook his head. "Just last week, I was trying to figure out how to rebuild mine with my brothers." Roman smiled. "They have weekly family dinners, and I'd love it if you would join us."



I smiled. “I’d like that. Do you think your brothers will like me?” There were going to be a lot of changes coming soon, and I was beginning to worry about some of them. Would his brothers accept me? Would I get along with them? Would they feel as if I were taking their brother away from them?

“I’m sure they will.” Roman made a face, but I quickly realized why. “I can’t be certain, but I’d venture to say that you are close to their age. The twins are twenty-four.”

That sunk in for a moment. “Actually, I’m only twenty-two. Is that an issue for you? How old are you?”

Roman winced. “Sixty-eight. Is that too old?”

I shrugged. “Do we get much choice? We’ve been chosen for each other.”

“Yes, but if my age is going to be an issue, perhaps we could figure something else out. Maybe someone at the council could talk to one of the fates, and new mates can be chosen.”

That actually hurt. “Do you not want me?” I asked as I set my plate down. We’d yet to start eating, and although I had been incredibly hungry, the thought of my mate not wanting me because of something I had no control over hurt to the point of upsetting my stomach.

Roman reached for my knee and touched it gently. “Don’t ever think that I don’t because nothing could be further from the truth. I very much want you, Beau.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 11:06 am*

### Chapter 7

#### Roman

I 'd been through a lot in what I would consider a still-short life. But trying to force my tiger to leave our mate on Treasure Ridge was by far the most difficult. I learned a little about Beau but still wanted to know more. I had time, of course, but telling that to my tiger was impossible. Which was why I was currently in Ramsey and Phineas's spare bedroom. My tiger absolutely refused to let me leave the mountain.

Was I closer to my mate? Somewhat. He was in the single enforcer housing somewhere with his brother. I was trying my best to at least relax because I knew that sleep was absolutely out of the question.

A quiet knock on the bedroom door pulled me from my thoughts. "It's open," I called out quietly. It could have been Ramsey or Phineas, and either would have been able to hear me. When I saw my brother's form appear in shadow, I sat up. "Hey, Phineas. Is everything all right?" I asked, reaching for the light that was on the nightstand.

"Yes. I wanted to check on you. How are you doing?" Phineas asked as he came into the room and crawled onto the bed, getting himself situated at the foot of it.

"I'm doing about as well as can be expected. How about you? Everything going all right for you?"

Phineas sighed. "Yes. I..." Phineas stopped for a moment before continuing. "I'm going to be going into heat soon. Ramsey wasn't exactly thrilled because of what

happened with Raiden and Alexander. It was the same thing before, when I was pregnant with Hazel. But his brother came to talk to him earlier while you were out running.”

That was why I’d scented him around the area. “Are the two of you not planning on having more children? I had thought you wanted several.”

“I do, but my mate doesn’t. It’s a situation where we have to compromise. I mean, I understand his reasons for being cautious.”

“I thought that what happened to Alexander wasn’t all that common?” I should know more about gargoyle pregnancies, or the pregnancies of gargoyle mates since my brother was mated to one.

“Yes, but that doesn’t stop Ramsey from being worried. I do understand why, though, because there isn’t a gargoyle mate on this mountain that hasn’t had a difficult pregnancy. Even alpha mate Mael has had at least one challenging pregnancy.”

“Do you need me to take Hazel? I shouldn’t even be here if you’re going to go into heat,” I said as I moved to the edge of the bed to get up. I hadn’t even thought to ask them about what was going on earlier. It wasn’t really my place to butt into their relationship. I’d offer advice if asked, but I was doing my best to give them space. Perhaps too much space.

Phineas smiled at me while shaking his head. “No, Raiden and Alexander are going to take her. They offered, as did Knox and Philip, but with Raiden being right next door, it just makes more sense for them to watch her. Well, Alexander, since he spends so much time with her already.”

“Is he not working? I was under the impression that he’s running the clinic in Timber Valley.”

Phineas shrugged. "I think he works when needed, but he doesn't go to work every day. If I remember correctly, he's planning on going back full-time once Rowan is in school. He has a few more years though, and I'm not completely certain about that."

It made sense in some ways. Many shifter couples had one parent stay home with the children while they were young. They couldn't go to human schools or hospitals, and they often lived with their pride, pack, den, or similar, and that was just how things were. But I was honestly a bit surprised that it was Alexander that was staying home. He had spent so long going to medical school. But then again, he was quite a bit older than I was, so it was possible he was ready for a change.

"Well, if you need anything in the next couple of weeks, let me know. I understand that you are going to not really be able to reach out, but I'll check in and make sure you are doing all right."

"That's why I wanted to talk to you," Phineas said. "If I go into heat as quick as I think I will, I won't be around to congratulate you. And then you and Beau are probably going to be doing the same things." Phineas looked down at his lap, wringing his hands together. He was nervous about something, and I hated that I didn't know my brother well enough any longer to know what about.

"I'm not sure Beau will be ready to be claimed in such a short amount of time." I was willing to claim him tonight if that was what he wanted, but when he left with his brother, I knew it wasn't time. Actually, I had picked up on the fact that he was going to take a while to come to terms with everything when we were enjoying our meal together.

"I have no doubt he will come around. I'm not sure if you saw us or not, but Ramsey brought me over to peek at the two of you, and the way he was looking at you..." Phineas sighed. "I'm sure it's much like how I look at Ramsey. You could ask him tomorrow, and I'm sure he'd say yes."

I chuckled. "I appreciate your encouragement, but we are going to take things at a slower pace. He's just opened the bakery, and I'm going to do everything I can to support him in that. It was something that he brought up." I wasn't sure if it was because of what his brother had said or if it was also very much in the forefront of his thoughts. Either way, I was going to wait and take things at his pace.

Phineas snorted. "You say that now, but wait. He's going to change his mind about taking things slow. Have no doubts. But I just wanted to tell you congratulations. I didn't intend to keep you up."

I shook my head. "You aren't. I'm trying to convince my tiger it is not a good idea to go running around the mountaintop and searching for him." I was actually just about to give up and do exactly that before Phineas knocked on the door.

"Well, maybe you should. That's what I did when I went looking for Ramsey. I just followed my nose, and when I found the place that scented like him most, I curled up on his little back porch and waited. Probably not the best thing to do, but it was what my fox felt needed to be done at that time." Phineas slid off the bed. "I hope things work out for you and Beau, Roman. And that you don't have to wait too long for your mate. You, more than anyone, deserve someone to call your own and who can finally give you your own children."

I slowly shook my head. "I don't need to have children, Phineas. They aren't a make-or-break thing for me." Did I want them? Yes, but if they weren't what Beau desired the most, that would be fine with me. We'd talked about families briefly, but we needed to have a more private setting to discuss everything that really needed to be said.

"You are an amazing father, Roman. It would be sad to not see you with children of your own. You were so wonderful to me and Philip. I know we didn't necessarily believe so at the time, but we did know that you loved us, and you were doing what

was needed to keep us all safe.”

There were so many mistakes along the way, and I didn’t have the heart to tell the twins that I had almost failed on more than one occasion. I had done my best, but even I had slipped up at times. Ramsey’s sudden appearance in the doorway kept me from saying anything more.

“There you are,” he said as he took a step into the room. “Is everything all right?”

“It is,” I answered before my brother. “He was offering an early congrats on my hopefully impending mating.” I shook my head. “Although I’m not sure I’ll be mated by the time I see the pair of you again.” I stood and held out my arms for Phineas. He closed the distance between us, and I wrapped him up in a hug. He was tiny in my arms, but he and Philip had always been. “I love you, Phineas. Nothing will ever change that,” I whispered to him. “Now, go back to your mate and enjoy your time with him.” I looked up at Ramsey as I let my brother go. “Thank you for everything. But I’m going to drop my clothing on your back deck and go for another run. I won’t be back this evening,” I told him.

“There is no need for you to stay away,” Ramsey told me.

I shook my head. “There is. My tiger will not settle, and I know it’s because Beau isn’t here with me. It’s too soon for that though, and I’m going to settle my other half by exploring the area a little. It’s been a while since I’ve been up here for a good run—earlier wasn’t nearly long enough. I’ll be sure to grab my clothing in the morning though.” I glanced between the two. “I wish you both the best in the upcoming weeks. I know that no matter what happens, the family will be here for the two of you.”

Of course I didn’t wish for anything to happen to my brother. Either of them, for that matter. Phineas was young though, and despite his small size, he was strong. If he

were to end up experiencing a difficult pregnancy, I would do anything I could to help him. We all would.

“You don’t have leave,” Ramsey said.

“I don’t feel pressured to do so. But you must remember what it was like in the beginning before you claimed Phineas. I was horrible to the two of you and made you wait. I do not deserve the kindness the two of you are offering now but appreciate it. I must go though.” I tried to convey to Ramsey that my tiger wasn’t really giving me much of an option at this point. It had been easier before Phineas came to talk, but now I knew there would be no way to keep him from having his way. He wanted to at least scout out where our mate was and ensure he was safe. I had no doubt that was the case, but my tiger wasn’t exactly being rational at the moment.

“I can perhaps help some,” Ramsey said. “I do not know which exact house number, but I know that Evan and Beau live in the middle row that faces the council building.”

I smiled at my brother-in-law. “Thank you. That will certainly make things a bit easier. I have no plans to knock on the door, but the hope is that if I’m a bit closer to him, my tiger will settle enough to rest.”

I could curl up and sleep anywhere on the mountain. It wasn’t as if a white tiger would be mistaken for being an out-of-place native species to the area. Not only that, but many of the enforcers knew my scent from the days of me running the council’s store.

Ramsey pulled Phineas from the room, and after I heard their footsteps fade away into their own room down the hallway, I turned back to the bed. I wasn’t sure if Phineas would want me to strip and change it or not, so I pulled the covers up and made the bed.

Within minutes, I had let myself out of his back door and stripped off my clothing. Once it was folded and placed on one of the lounge chairs on the back deck, I knelt down and smiled as my tiger chuffed in my mind. It only took moments for him to come out, and when my enhanced human eyesight sharpened even more in the darkness, I scanned the immediate area before shaking out my coat.

With ease, I padded down off the back deck and onto the soft grass. It felt damp beneath the pads of my feet, telling me that we'd hit dew point already. It wasn't as if that was an issue for me. My tiger had no issues with any type of terrain that I'd ever encountered before.

Knowing the general direction I needed to go, I headed toward the council building. The mountaintop had changed quite a bit since my brothers and I had first moved here. There were not only more buildings around the council building itself, but there were many more houses. Some were in neighborhoods, some in single rows, some scattered in various places on the mountaintop.

The single enforcer housing had also been added to, despite many of the once-single enforcers now living in mated housing. I chuckled in my mind. It seemed as if the enforcers, and the council in general, were on the fates' radar when it came to being matched with mates. I had always assumed I wasn't going to be so fortunate since I wasn't an enforcer. Apparently, I had been wrong.

It only took minutes for me to travel from Ramsey's house to the council building. Once there, I ventured behind to where the single enforcers lived. What was my intention? Nothing too specific, except to maybe see if I could scent my mate around one of the units more than others. Sure, he and his brother had come through here hours ago, but so had many others. I might be able to locate him, but if not, my tiger was already calmer just being closer to where Beau was.

Was this going to be an issue for me? Possibly. Like any other alpha, until I'd



claimed Beau, I was going to be a bit territorial about my mate. Actually, that wasn't completely true. I was going to be possessive our entire lives. It was just how we were. I had been so harsh with Ramsey in the beginning, and it took a lot of self-reflecting to be able to step back and let him and Phineas have the mating they deserved. And now? He had been nothing but helpful when it came to me having any chance with Beau.

I made it to the center building, and immediately, a familiar scent that I hoped to have next to me for centuries to come jumped out at me. I froze and looked around, wondering if Beau had been by here recently. Why was his scent so prominent?

"You're close, but he's not there," a voice said from a distance. I didn't need them to speak loudly in order for me to hear them though.

I turned, looking toward the sound, and found a completely different fae standing against the building. This one, I had only seen from a distance earlier.

"I'm Lukan," he told me. It wasn't as if I could talk to him in my current form though. "Beau lives there with his brother." He pointed at the building he was leaning against but over to his right. "Two doors over. But he's not there. He and Evan were having an argument earlier, and Beau left." Lukan pointed behind him. "He's in my spare bedroom, sleeping."

That absolutely wasn't what I wanted to hear. The flash of anger was instant, and a bit unexpected at the level I was experiencing. I wanted nothing more than to rush into the house that Lukan had indicated and tear into Evan for making my mate upset. At the same time, I needed to comfort my mate.

"Don't worry, big guy."

I looked back at Lukan and realized I'd been growling while staring at the house

Beau lived in.

“The other guys are having a sit-down with Evan. We all love Beau like he was our little brother, and the fact that he’s been gifted a mate is amazing. Evan is struggling with the fact that his brother won’t have only him in his life anymore.”

I sat down and stared. I was incredibly torn.

“We’ll take care of Beau. But if you want to talk to him, you might need to make sure you’re in your other form. I don’t know that he speaks tiger. You know?”

I harrumphed at Lukan. He wasn’t wrong. I couldn’t communicate with Beau until we’d claimed one another.

“I’m going to get back inside. If you want to talk to him, do come back as your other half. And although I wouldn’t complain about seeing you naked, I don’t think Beau would like it very much, so make sure you’re dressed too, all right?”

I made another noise at Lukan before he chuckled before he disappeared inside the house he’d been standing outside of. How was it that I’d just had a conversation with the fae without ever saying a word? I sat there for a moment longer before I managed to turn and leave. I could do nothing for my mate in my current form, and that meant I would have to go back to Ramsey’s and get dressed. But Lukan had said that Beau was sleeping. With that last thought in mind, I retraced my steps and went around to the back of the house. Once I found the correct back porch, I curled up and prepared for the rest of the night. It wasn’t as if it was cold out. Even if it was, my tiger form could handle it.

I heard several voices a bit later and had to assume it was the others as they left the house that Beau shared with his brother. I didn’t stir from my spot where I was curled up and watching over the back door of Lukan’s place. Not that there was any threat.

I somehow dozed off at some point, though, because I was awoken by a push on my head. When I looked up, I found familiar blue eyes staring at me.

“I figured I’d find ye here. Edison wants to talk to ye, so ye best be comin’ along with me.”

I absolutely would not argue with the created warlock’s mate at any time, so I stood and stretched. I heard chuckling off in the distance and realized that Wallace hadn’t waited for me. It wasn’t as if I would have an issue with catching up with the other tiger shifter. It was time to see what Master Edison needed.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 11:06 am*

### Chapter 8

Beau

“ You seem very upset this morning,” Konrad said. “I would think you would be over the moon after finding your mate. Roman is such a gentleman. You will find life with him quite fulfilling, I’m certain.”

I stopped what I was doing and looked down at the worktable that I was standing in front of before I burst into tears again. I’d fought with Evan yesterday evening, something we rarely ever did, and now I had the choice of choosing my brother or my mate. How did one choose between those two?

Arms wrapped around me, and I felt myself being moved to the other side of the room. I sat, blindly trusting Konrad that I would land in a chair. The sudden feeling of soft tissues in my hand had me bringing it to my face instinctively. I wiped at my eyes and nose and somehow managed to look up into bright blue eyes that were filled with concern.

“What’s all of this? You have your mate. Why are you crying so?”

It took some effort to finally get myself calmed down enough to talk. “Evan and I fought,” I got out first. “He says Roman will make me give up everything to take care of his babies.” I started crying in earnest again. I wanted my brother in my life, but I wanted my mate more. He was my mate. I heard Konrad say something but didn’t understand because I was crying too much. He disappeared for most likely not long, and then he was back.

“Aleric is coming, and he has someone that I’m sure you need to see.” Konrad reached out and wiped at my face, and I realized he had a damp cloth. I looked up and tried to calm myself, but it was no good. “There, there. It’s going to be all right. I don’t know what happened between you and Evan, but I know Roman, and that man would never ask that you give up everything to raise his babies. He dropped everything to raise his twin brothers. The last thing he would ever do would ask you to give up something for babies.” Konrad sighed as he wiped at my face again.

“I have to choose,” I told him, my voice coming out in a whisper.

“No you don’t. You can have it all. That’s the beauty of life here. There’s no need for choices. Well, beyond when the two of you get around to doing the deed and exchanging bites. But that’s not what we’re talking about at this very moment. No, we’re discussing the fact that you think your brother would ever make you choose.”

I looked at Konrad and nodded before I wiped my face and then blew my nose. “That’s what we were fighting about last evening. He told me if I chose Roman, that he was going to forget I was his brother. That I’d have to give up all of my dreams after he worked so hard to get us a better life. Which is true. He worked a lot in our village to give us a good life. And he pleaded with the fates to take not only him but me as well. Which they didn’t have to.”

Konrad shook his head. “You were supposed to be here all along. You were brought with your brother because Roman was here waiting for you.”

The door out front chimed, indicating that someone had come in. That was a bit of a surprise because we weren’t open yet. We were still baking the day’s goodies.

“Don’t worry. That’s just Aleric. I unlocked the door, and he will relock it once he’s inside.”

“Who is he bringing?” I asked. If I had waited only a few seconds longer, I would have known that he was bringing Evan. I absolutely did not want to see my brother though. I couldn’t help it—I burst into tears again, and without a thought, I used magic and popped myself back into Lukan’s spare bedroom. It wasn’t the most mature thing, but I absolutely did not wish to be berated by my brother again. It was too soon, and I just wasn’t ready to deal with having to choose between my brother and my mate.

I had nowhere to go. Not really. I lived with Evan, because Evan was all I had, and he had been given a place to live. Sure, Lukan would let me stay with him for as long as I needed; he’d already said as much. But I didn’t have anywhere to call my own. I never had. And now? Well, if I were to accept Roman as my mate, I would be moving into his place. Again, not my own. Which I understood was part of Evan’s issue. But wasn’t it like that for all omegas? Well, most? Didn’t most rely on their mates, their alphas, to take care of and provide for them?

Knocking sounded from downstairs. More like pounding, actually. But it stopped just as quickly as it had started. I didn’t think anything of it until I heard footsteps pounding up the stairs. Before I could react, Evan came into the room.

“Don’t,” he said before I even stood from where I’d been sitting on the bed. “I’m not here to argue. I want to talk to you and apologize.”

That had me stopping. “For what?”

“Being unfair, mostly. I’ve put you in an impossible and unfair position. I have no right to ask that of you. That was wrong, and I’m sorry.”

I sat there, staring at my brother. There were so many emotions going through me at the moment, but the one that stood out the most was anger. How dare he?

“I appreciate your apology, but I don’t feel as if I can talk to you at the moment, Evan. You...what you did and said was unkind, and I’m not ready to talk to you.”

“Beau. Come on. I’m sorry.”

I nodded. “I get that. But just because you’re sorry doesn’t mean I’m ready to forgive. I will. We both know I will. But I’m not ready yet, Ev.” I stood, and after running my hands down the front of my jeans, I took a deep breath. “Now, I really need to get back to work. Thanks for the apology.” With those last words, I popped myself back to the bakery. I found Konrad and Aleric standing in the kitchen, talking. At my appearance, Konrad immediately rushed to me and wrapped me in a tight hug. If I had to pick an omega father for myself, I would have wanted one like him. He was amazing, and his sons were both incredibly lucky to have such a loving omega dad.

“We’re sorry,” Konrad said.

I pulled out of the hug a bit before shaking my head. “There’s no need,” I said. I tried to look over Konrad’s shoulder, but he was taller than I was, and I couldn’t meet Aleric’s eyes. Instead, I leaned around to make sure the alpha dragon knew I was including him. “I appreciate what you did and Evan apologizing, but I’m not ready to forgive him just yet. I’ve told him as much, but I need to leave it at that for the time being. If I were to talk to my brother right now, I would say something I would regret later.”

I nodded again and glanced around. There was a lot to do before we opened, and although I hadn’t planned on it, this morning was going to require a lot more magic than I had wanted to use. After my upsetting night, and now this morning, I didn’t quite trust myself completely with all of the magic I was about to expend, but it must be done.

“What can we do to help?” Aleric asked.

I slowly looked over the disarray that was the kitchen's current status. "Well, if you truly wish to help, you can start taking trays out and placing them in the display cabinets." I looked over at Konrad. "Is Elias going to be in this morning?"

Konrad shook his head. "He's going to be gone for several weeks. I thought I shared that news with you?" Konrad glanced at Aleric. "He and Claude are grandfathers again. They've gone to spend time with their family's newest little addition."

"Oh. That's such wonderful news." It truly was. "If you talk to him before I do, please tell him to pass on my congratulations." Babies were always a reason to celebrate in our village. Which was why I didn't quite understand Evan's harsh comments about me and Roman eventually having babies of our own.

"We will," Konrad said. "Did you want me to put these in the oven?"

I blinked a few times before I focused on the worktable he was standing in front of. Aleric came back into the kitchen and grabbed another set of trays that were already loaded before he disappeared back out front.

"No." I took a deep breath. Maybe go out front for a sec? I don't want you to get caught in any possible mishaps."

Konrad's eyes widened. "Is your magic not working?"

I shrugged. "It seems to be, but I'm upset and tired, and emotions play a big part in our magic. It should be fine; I just want to be certain."

Konrad nodded before he left the kitchen area. I took several deep breaths with my eyes closed before opening them and focusing on everything I needed to do. I gestured to the room with first my left arm, then the right, and let out the breath I'd been holding when the day's goodies were suddenly occupying every available



surface. I couldn't help but let out a little happy dance before I remembered that Konrad and Aleric were waiting for me in the outer room.

"It's safe to come in," I called out. They were dragons, and I knew they would no doubt hear me. The door pushed open, and first Konrad's and then Aleric's heads peeked in. "It's safe." I glanced at my work. "And it looks like the day's baking is finished." I guess on some level, I didn't want to have to come back to prepping things because there were pastries and breads that I hadn't intended on making until later in the day. Oh well. It wasn't as if anything would go bad throughout the day.

"Should I continue filling the cases?" Aleric asked.

"Would you mind? Konrad knows where everything goes. I'll get things staged on the racks for later in the day."

"There's a line forming out front already," Konrad told me.

I stopped my forward momentum. "Already?" A glance at the clock on the wall told me that we were supposed to be open in under five minutes. "Oh, wow. All right. We'll get everything put out and go ahead and let them in. I don't want to keep anyone waiting. Especially not if they have to get to work."

Those ended up being the wrong words to say because as soon as the doors were unlocked and opened, there was a steady stream of customers all morning. Aleric left as soon as he finished helping to fill the cases with all of this morning's choices.

Konrad started serving customers, and I pasted a smile on my face while I took over the cash register and rang them out. The pastry request cup filled up as the day went on. It wasn't until there was a bit of a lull around midday that Konrad and I were able to take a moment to slow down.

“You need to eat,” Konrad said.

“So do you,” I told him. The bakery had a few people sitting at the small tables, enjoying their purchases, but for the moment, there weren’t any new customers waiting to be served. “This isn’t a one-person job. There is no way I’ll be able to do this alone. It’s not even a two-person job. How did the previous proprietors run it with only three of them?”

“You will have help. Aleric mentioned how the council is working on sending some this way to see if they are a good match. As for the family that used to run this place, they worked immensely long hours, and they didn’t offer nearly as many selections.” Konrad indicated the glass cases that were half-full. “Also, this is new again after being closed for a bit. The freshness will wear off in a few weeks, and things will slow down.”

The door chimed, and I sighed. There would be no lunch break for us just yet. I smiled as a young man came in toward us.

“Hello, Sean. Are you enjoying your summer break?” Konrad asked.

“I am,” he said as he looked down at the case and then up at me. “I’m here to see about a position. I attend college down off of the mountain, but I’m off for the summer. This fall, I won’t be able to work mornings, but all of my classes I’m enrolled in are finished by one.”

I glanced at Konrad, who nodded at me. Oh, this was a me thing. I was the one who would have final say. That was still something I was going to have to get used to.

“That’s, uh...I’m not sure what to say,” I said as I looked at Konrad for help.

The dragon shifter chuckled at me. “You ask what hours he’s interested in, what

days, and when can he start.”

I nodded absently and looked back at Sean. He couldn’t have been more than twenty. Not that I was much older.

“Yes. All of that. I’m not the best at this. I’m obviously in over my head, and I really don’t know what I’m doing when it comes to hiring others.”

“I can work any hours this summer. Come August, it would have to be afternoons and evenings.”

I nodded. That sounded good. The door chimed again, and I felt the breath leave my lungs.

“Hi, Professor Nelson.”

I looked between Sean and Roman and realized that Sean knew my mate.

“Sean. Where is your sidekick?”

Sean sighed. “Longwei went to Russia, I think. Maybe? I don’t know. He’s going to be gone for at least a month, and my dads wouldn’t let me go with, so I’m stuck here trying to find something to keep me busy this summer.”

I stared at Roman while he stared back. Sean hadn’t yet realized that Roman’s attention had left him the moment the question had been asked.

“Do you know Sean?” I asked. “He’s one of my new helpers, and he’s going to start tomorrow,” I said.

“He is?” Roman asked and then looked back at Sean. “That’s good. Sean is a good

kid. He could have put a little more effort into his final paper in history, but he still did well enough.”

Sean’s cheeks turned red. Konrad snorted.

“Sean, come on back, and I’ll show you around. Roman is here to see Beau.”

There was some movement and then hushed words before Konrad and Sean disappeared into the back. Roman gave me a sinful smile, which caused weird things to happen to my body.

“Did you want something?” I asked.

Roman stared at me, his eyes suddenly darkening. “Absolutely,” he whispered before he leaned closer. “But I don’t think the others in here really want to know what exactly it is that I want.” Roman’s eyes traveled downward before moving back up. “But I’m sure you can figure out what I’m here for.”

It was suddenly very hot in here. I felt my cheeks burning, and I had to take a step back. Roman stood up and smiled at me.

“Have dinner with me? I’ll be a perfect gentleman.”

I nodded slowly. I wanted dinner. I wanted breakfast too, but if Roman was going to be a gentleman, I figured I wouldn’t be having breakfast with him just yet.

“Umm...yeah. Dinner will work. Did you...where...”

Roman chuckled. “I’ll pick you up here once you’re finished. Does that work for you? Or I could pick you up at your brother’s place? Or are you still staying with Lukan?”

I blinked at him. “How did you know I was staying with Lukan?”

“I talked to him last night. He was outside while I was out for a bit of exercise.”

I nodded slowly. I didn’t know what that meant exactly, but it didn’t matter. “Here’s good,” I told him. I didn’t want to go home just yet. If I did, Evan would want to talk, and although I’d calmed quite a bit, I wasn’t ready to have that conversation with him yet. And if I went back to Lukan’s, well, he would have a bunch of questions. Or maybe some advice that I really didn’t want to hear yet.

“Six?” Roman asked. “That’s when you close?”

I nodded but then shook my head. “Yes. I think so.” The hours were still being worked out since there was nobody to help beyond Konrad.

“Five will work, Roman,” Konrad said. I turned to look at the dragon shifter, who was standing in the doorway with Sean. “Four would be better since he’s had a rough night, but that’s something he can share with you later.”

Roman nodded. “Yes, I heard about it last evening and a bit more this morning.”

I looked back at Roman and wondered where he’d heard about my night. Lukan, right. I needed to go yell at him, apparently.

“What time would you like me to pick you up?” Roman asked.

“Umm...” I looked at Konrad for help.

“Four,” Konrad said. We’ll probably be out of goodies by then anyway. The enforcers are most likely eating lunch now, but give it an hour at the most, and we’ll be slammed again.”

I looked back at Roman.

“Four it is, then. I’ll see you then.”

Roman winked before he turned and left. I could only stand there and watch as my mate left. The tingling in my body subsided, but the heat didn’t. I took several deep breaths, trying to get myself under control. Konrad was a shifter. As was Sean. They would be able to scent my arousal, and it wasn’t as if I was ashamed of it. I simply didn’t wish to spend the next few hours horny for my mate.

“That was...just weird,” Sean said as he came up to the counter with Konrad. “I get it. He’s your mate.” Sean tilted his head to the side. “Konrad told me. But he’s always just been Professor Nelson to me. And before he was Professor Nelson, he was the guy who ran the council’s store.” Sean shook his head.

I looked at Konrad in question. “I’ll share it all this afternoon. I told Sean to be here at six tomorrow. We’ll see how things go then though.”

I could only nod because at the moment, my mind was full of thoughts of Roman and the fact that I was going to have dinner with him this evening. Just the two of us. There would be no watchful eyes around to keep anything from happening. Well, except for the fact that Roman had said he would be a gentleman. I had no doubt he would. But that didn’t mean there was no possibility of me experiencing my first kiss, did it?

### Chapter 9

#### Roman

I was certain that I could find something to do for the next few hours. After my unexpected conversation with Master Edison this morning and subsequent relocating to a new house, there were certainly things to be done. I understood Master Edison's reasoning for suggesting the new house. I was about to have a mate and eventually children, hopefully.

The house was in council housing, only it wasn't on Treasure Ridge. The council had "leased" some land from Alpha Forest's pack, and they had built a rather nice neighborhood that was completely paranormally occupied. Beau and I would fit in perfectly. If only he agreed, that was.

After the interaction I'd just had with him though, I had a feeling that there wouldn't be any issues with him eventually agreeing. He was certainly interested in what we could have together. But I needed to know more about what had happened yesterday. Why was my mate in Lukan's after arguing with his brother? And what all had Evan said to my mate?

Master Edison had assured me that everything with regards to Evan would be cleared up. I didn't know exactly what all that entailed, but I knew I wanted to be there for Beau in any way needed. And that meant asking him to dinner and getting to have a private conversation with him.

Sure, we'd talked about things yesterday at the council's get-together, but it was

anything but private. With a plan in place, I once more forced my tiger to walk away from our mate. I tried my best to reassure him that we would be seeing Beau soon enough, in just a few hours, actually, but we needed to get to the store in order to prepare for tonight's date.

I had absolutely no idea what all Beau liked and didn't like, but I was going to hope for the best with something as simple as spaghetti. He wasn't a shifter, and although I'd noticed he ate quite a bit yesterday, he hadn't eaten nearly as much as either of my brothers did. What I had noticed was that he seemed to be more inclined to eat the various salads and especially the fruit, so I needed to make sure I had something to go with the spaghetti.

With that thought, I walked the short distance from the bakery to the transport building and soon enough found myself down off Treasure Ridge and in my SUV, on my way to the store. As I drove through Timber Valley, my mind couldn't keep from wandering back to Beau. Master Edison had shared a little with me this morning, and although I had known of my mate for only just a day, already I was incredibly proud of everything he had already accomplished.

"The council wants to be self-sustaining here. This isn't anything you haven't already heard."

"No."

"Beau is here because Thomas and Canyon brought him with his brother who volunteered to come and join the council as an enforcer. It makes sense now why."

I smiled at Master Edison. Yes, it did.

"What will become of the bakery if Beau doesn't continue running it?" I shook my head when Master Edison raised an eyebrow at me. "I would never ask him to give it



up. I was simply inquiring. I know very little about making pastries and baked goods. But I could help him run the bakery if he wanted.”

“That will be between you and Beau. For now, Konrad will help with making sure the menus he’s selected are kept up with. The two of you will have your time as newly found mates. But if Beau decides he no longer wishes to run the bakery, the council will make it a more automated place until something more permanent can be secured.”

Last week, I was certain I was going to give up teaching at the local college. Now, I wasn’t so sure. Although Master Edison had offered a position with the council, I wasn’t interested in becoming an enforcer, nor did I wish to step on Monroe’s toes. He’d stepped in and had taken over running the council’s store like a pro.

I would need employment to support Beau. Yes, I had funds, but nothing like either of my brother’s mates. Not that it was a competition. But I was going to have to have a discussion with Beau, and soon, because I needed to let the college know if I was going to return this fall or not.

I pulled into the grocery store’s lot, and after I found a spot, I slid from the vehicle with a purpose: shop to hopefully impress my mate. I could cook. But my brothers and I were shifters, and we were absolutely always up for a steak. But I already recognized that with my mate being fae, I would need to expand my menu to include much more.

I grabbed a cart and immediately headed for the produce section. Once I had the fixings for a nice salad, I added some fruit to make a fruit salad for dessert. I had noticed that Beau seemed especially fond of fruit, and there were a lot of fruit-based pastries in the bakery.

I couldn’t keep from smiling. I had a mate, and my tiger was chuffing in my mind

about the fact that we were currently selecting things to provide for him. Sure, I'd raised my brothers and had provided for them. This was different.

After fruits were selected, I went to the meat counter and then the pasta aisle. I was going to cheat and use jarred sauce, but I was pressed for time. I only had a few hours to get everything together for Beau, and although I would love to make him a from-scratch meal, it simply wasn't in the cards tonight. Perhaps for our next date.

"Excuse me."

I looked next to me and had to look down quite a way to meet the smiling eyes of the older lady.

"Can I help you?"

"I hope so. I can't reach the pasta there," she said, pointing to the shelf that was head level for her. "I know it's back there, but I can't reach it. Would you be a dear and get it for me, please?"

I smiled as I reached to the back of the shelf and pulled the boxes forward. "These ones?"

"Yes, dear." I handed her a box as she was reaching for it. When she continued to reach, I handed over a second one. "Thank you so much," she told me.

"You're welcome."

She placed them in her cart and then walked away. I grabbed a couple of packages of spaghetti noodles and then reached for the sauce. Minutes later, I was checked out and took my bags to the SUV. I would, of course, need to do a much larger grocery run, but the hope was that Beau would be with me, and we would be filling our new

pantry together. I thought about the pantry in the new house.

“The cabin you were renting from Forest was fine for just you,” Master Edison told me. “You’re going to have a family soon enough, and that means you need to live in something larger than a two-room cabin.”

I followed Master Edison through the massive house. It was larger than any place I’d ever lived, even when I had the twins.

“Four bedrooms, three bathrooms, and an office downstairs,” Master Edison continued. “For those late-night grading sessions.”

I could only nod. “I guess my decision about if I’m going to continue teaching or not has been decided.”

Master Edison stopped as he was walking toward a short hallway that I assumed led to the downstairs office he’d just mentioned.

“You aren’t planning on continuing to teach?”

I shrugged. “It’s all right. I didn’t exactly enjoy my first year teaching here. It might be the students, or maybe it’s the changes. Either way, it’s not a terrible job. I was going to consider other options. Then I met Beau, and now I’ll continue teaching since I’m going to need to support not only him but any children we might have in the future.”

Master Edison stared at me for a moment before he gave a subtle nod and then continued down the hallway.

“I’ve taken the liberty of providing some furniture. All of your things from your cabin will be brought over later if you agree to this place.”

I looked around the office and couldn't help but laugh and shake my head.

"Is my taste in office furniture comical?"

I shook my head. "No, Master Edison. I just found it funny that this home office is larger than my office at the local college. It's a glorified closet without a window even."

Master Edison scowled. "Next door," he said, pointing out the window, which was on the side of the house, "is Calum and Asher. Calum is a fox alpha, and Asher is fae like Beau. Once you and Beau are settled and things have done what things do, go talk to Calum. He's head of his department at the university. Perhaps he has room for you in his department. I know he teaches online more than in person, and it's possible he can offer something more fulfilling for you."

"I'll be sure to do that. Thank you." I looked around the office and shook my head. It was difficult to think of this place as being mine. Well, mine and Beau's. "This place is perfectly fine. More than, actually. I hope that Beau likes it."

"I'm sure he will. It is a good neighborhood to live in, and although I don't recommend you shift and go for a run down here, Beau will be able to get you up to the mountaintop easily enough."

I found myself smiling at the memories from the morning. Never would I have envisioned just how much my brothers' and my lives would change when I answered the ad looking for a shopkeeper for the council. It had been a huge chance I'd taken, but at that point, I was exhausted and needed something, anything that could help me protect the twins. Did I expect my brothers would find their mates? No. Me either. But here we were.

It didn't take long to get to the new neighborhood, and when I turned onto the road, I

was met by another vehicle. They waved as they left the neighborhood, which was something new for me. I had no idea who they were, but hopefully, I would soon enough.

When I pulled into the driveway of my new place, I pushed the button, and the garage opened. Another new thing. I'd been "with" the council for some time, and I was still getting used to what I considered the luxuries that were basically normal for most associated with the council. I carefully pulled into the garage, and after I removed the bags from the cargo area, I pushed the button to close the liftgate.

I managed to remember to push the button on the wall to close the garage door on my way in, and when I set the bags on the center island in the kitchen, I realized something was off about the place. It only took a glance toward the back room to understand that my things from the tiny cabin had been moved here. Master Edison had said he would have my things brought over, and sure enough, they were here.

I chuckled at the sparseness of them in the much larger room. Beau and I would need to do some shopping in order to fill the rest of the house with things. That would all wait though. He was going to be busy with his bakery, and I was going to have to figure out how I could best support him while trying not to lose my own mind with the frustration of teaching at the local college.

If I were able to secure a position at the university, that would be so much better. They had good reviews, both from faculty as well as students. Teaching at the collegiate level had always been my dream, and I had loved it when I first taught. Then life happened, and I had to resign from my position. I wouldn't go back and change anything though. My brothers were more important, and I didn't regret giving it up in order to protect them.

Now, I had to think about Beau. It was going to be a heavy conversation for what I was considering a second date, but it was important and needed to be discussed

before we took our relationship anywhere.

With that thought in mind, I unpacked the groceries and got started on making the fruit salad once certain things were placed in the refrigerator. It didn't take too long to complete the task, and once that was in the fridge, I glanced at the clock and decided against making meatballs. A simple meat sauce would have to do tonight, but I promised myself I would make him meatballs soon. Well, unless he absolutely hated spaghetti.

It had often been a go-to for us when the twins were younger. We didn't have a large food budget when running from place to place, and spaghetti was an inexpensive meal. We didn't have a whole lot of money, period. I took a deep breath and looked around the house. It wasn't mine. I was only here because the council was allowing me to live here. I would have loved to be able to provide such a place for the twins when they were younger. It simply wasn't possible. We never knew when we would have to leave in the middle of the night and not know where we were going or how long we would need to be on the move.

There were still times that I woke up in a panic, even after not having to worry about anyone trying to get to the twins for the past few years. I shook my head, not wanting to get lost in those thoughts again. I quickly cleaned up the mess I'd made, and after everything was as ready for this evening as it was going to get, I went to explore my new home until it was time to go pick up my mate and bring him here.

The house was so much bigger than I needed. But I had to remember that it wasn't going to be just me for too much longer. Beau was going to be in my life, and the two of us would be starting a family. I tried to picture him and what he would look like with a cute baby bump. Would he enjoy being pregnant? Did he want more than one baby? Did I?

I somehow found my way to the main bedroom and stopped in the doorway. That

definitely wasn't my bed. I wasn't going to complain because it was larger and quite a bit nicer than what I had in the tiny cabin I'd been calling home for the past several months. There was a piece of paper lying on the side of the bed, and when I picked it up, I couldn't stop myself from smiling.

Roman,

It was a bit presumptuous of me to assume you would wish for a larger bed, but I took the chance and this is a gift to you and Beau. The bed that was in the cabin is in one of the other bedrooms. In case you have forgotten the web address for the council's furniture store, I've emailed it to you. Be sure to utilize it with Beau.

Good luck in your mating. If either you or Beau have questions about anything, do not hesitate to reach out. We will all be here for the two of you. If you have specific questions, Wallace is open to answering any, as is Emir.

Do not worry if things end up not going as planned or intended. The bakery will be covered. Your focus is to be on strengthening your relationship and bond with Beau.

Congratulations, Roman. You certainly deserve the happiness that a mate will bring you.

Master Edison

I looked at the room, and although I saw some of my things here and there on the surfaces, the room still looked barely decorated. The addition of Beau's things would help, but unless he had a lot of things to bring with him, we were definitely going to need to do some shopping.

I wasn't too worried about that at the moment though. I needed to shower and then go to pick up my mate for our date. When I had told Beau I would be a perfect

gentleman, I meant it. That didn't mean that I wouldn't flirt with my little fae mate, nor did it mean that I wouldn't hope for at least some cuddles or kissing. But that was all going to be up to Beau. I might be the alpha in the relationship, but he was the one who controlled how far and fast it progressed. My only hope at the moment was that he didn't make me wait too terribly long. My tiger was already pushing me, and although it wasn't an issue yet, I didn't know how long I had before he decided to take matters into his own hands, as it were. For now, it was time to take a long, hot shower and find a bit of relief.



### Chapter 10

Beau

Once we came here, something I learned was that most people didn't realize that fae were incredibly sexual beings. Despite that, we usually weren't sexually active until we found our mate. Which was confusing to others since we had such high sex drives.

And mine seemed to be kicking into overdrive now that I was going to have a date with Roman this evening. Well, in just a bit, actually. He was due at any point, and my nerves were starting to get to me. If it weren't for Konrad and his calming nature, I didn't think I would have made it this long as it were.

"Relax," Konrad told me again. It was a word I'd heard over and over for the past hour at least.

"I'm trying. I really am. But I'm super nervous," I told the dragon shifter. "Do you think he'll kiss me? I mean, I know about sex and how it works. But I haven't...you know. We just don't."

Konrad offered a kind smile. "If you want, I'm certain Roman would be up for claiming you tonight."

My eyes widened. He didn't mean that, did he? "Do you really think so? I want that, but I also don't want to have to give up all of this," I said as I looked at the bakery. "I really like having something to do here."

Konrad shook his head. “Roman won’t ask that of you. Besides, even once the babies start coming, you can either bring them here with you, or you can drop them off at the daycare behind the bakery. There are options, Beau. The council is all about having positions for omegas, as well as alphas. And just because you are an omega, that doesn’t mean you have to give up your own dreams in order to have a family.”

“Did you?”

Konrad chuckled. “Times were immensely different when I had our boys. And as bleak as it sounds, there were only just a few of us here on the mountain. We didn’t have jobs. We all worked together in order to survive. Things changed drastically when Elias and Claude showed up. Life became so much easier with a warlock around.”

I had more questions, but the door chimed, and then a very handsome Roman came through it. How was it that the alpha appeared to be even sexier than the last time I saw him? And that was only a few hours ago.

“Hi,” I said while smiling at him.

“Hello,” he replied with an equally big smile. “Are you ready to go? If not, I can come back in a bit.”

I shook my head. “No, I’m ready.” A quick glance to Konrad had me feeling even more reassured. He nodded encouragingly. “Thank you, Konrad.”

“Of course. Enjoy yourselves,” he told us as I walked out from behind the counter and stood next to Roman.

He was quite a bit taller than I was, and I was all right with that. I smiled up at my mate, and when he returned it, I felt my heart flutter. How was that even possible? I

didn't know what was happening to me exactly, but I wasn't going to complain about it in any way.

"Do you like spaghetti?" Roman asked suddenly.

I nodded. "We've had it several times since we've been here." It looked like Roman was suddenly relieved.

"Shall we?"

I could only grin up at my mate. When he took a step away, then held out his hand, I reached for it. His hand dwarfed mine, and immediately, my mind went to other places. Where else was he going to be a lot larger than me? Eventually, I would find out, but when? I glanced back at Konrad as I walked out the door and found the dragon omega giving me a thumbs-up. I didn't know what to make of the gesture, exactly, so I smiled at him before he disappeared as I stepped through the door.

"I had no idea if you even knew what spaghetti was or if you liked it. But I didn't have a whole lot of ideas for quick meals to make for you."

"I like all kinds of things, and spaghetti is something that even Evan will ask for. We didn't have it in our realm though, but I'm honestly not sure why. We had almost all of the things that are in it."

"Can I ask about that over dinner? If you don't wish to talk about your realm, I understand."

"Oh no. I don't mind talking about it. I wasn't unhappy there or anything. Even after our parents went missing, I didn't have a terrible life." That sounded worse than it was, but I couldn't find fault in my life. Sure, I missed my parents, and life was sad for a bit after they went missing. But Evan and I weren't, and we had to continue on.

There was no other choice because neither one of us would give up simply because our parents went missing.

“I never wish to cause you pain. I’m interested in learning about your world, but only what you wish to share.”

I shrugged. “I’m pretty much an open book. There really isn’t much to tell. My parents went missing when I was fourteen. Evan was nineteen then, and I was really lucky that he was in our village instead of out trying to find his mate. I think the reason they left was because they knew Evan was there to watch after me.”

“I’m sorry that happened to them.”

I shrugged again. “I appreciate that. There is nothing to be done to change the circumstances though.”

We were at the transport building, and Roman opened the door for me. “Have you been down off of the mountain yet?” he asked. “How long have you been here? I don’t think I asked.”

I thought about everything we talked about yesterday, and I didn’t remember us talking about much beyond very basic things. “Yes, I’ve been off of the mountain a few times. For the most part, I’ve mostly been here on Treasure Ridge though. Everything I need is here, so there’s not much of a reason to leave.” I stepped into the small building and waited for Roman to join me. “I’ve not been here too long. Not even a year yet. How about you? You don’t sound like you’re from around here? I’ve heard others that are from this area, and your voice sounds different.”

Roman chuckled. “No, I’m not from here. I was born in Georgia, which is in the southeast. I’ve been here for a few years, but I’ve spent the past twenty years moving around a lot with my brothers.”

Roman reached for the phone that was on the table, but I stopped him by holding out my other hand. “If you trust me, I can get us down off of the mountain. You want to go into the cabin that’s down at the bottom?”

Roman nodded. “You can do that? Are you sure?”

“I am. I’ve been there more than once, so I know where to take us. If you feel more comfortable about it though, I can understand that. You don’t really know me, nor of my abilities when it comes to using my magic.”

Roman’s hand that had been reaching for the phone moved to my cup my face. “I completely trust you, Beau. Our relationship is going to struggle if I don’t. I do, so I’m not worried about you using magic to get us down off of the mountain. And yes, to the cabin that is just off of the mountain. I’m parked there.”

I nodded. I could do this. I was actually quite good with my magical abilities, but now I was nervous. This was my mate, and of course, I wanted to not mess things up. I looked up at Roman and thought about where we needed to go, and since he was not only holding my right hand but touching my cheek, I had more than enough contact with him to get us both down in the cabin below the mountain.

The room changed, and Roman’s eyes grew a little before they returned to normal.

“You aren’t hurt, are you?”

“No.” Roman dropped his hand from my cheek and turned his head. “Is it always going to feel like that with you?”

I bit my lip and tried not to laugh.

“That came out a bit wrong, I think. But with the hellhounds, you come out on the

other side like you've been punched. With warlocks, it makes my stomach do flip-flops. With you though, it just felt like a bit of a tingling sensation."

I smiled. "Well, it might not feel like that with other fae, but I think maybe it's because you're my mate. It is my understanding that we are very much like the warlocks of this realm. In fact, we were once here. I only know what we're taught, but I can't say exactly why it all feels different. We're different species though, so maybe that's it?"

Roman just grinned. "Possibly. Are you ready to see the house?"

It was my eyes that grew this time. "We're going to your place?"

I could tell that Roman seemed a bit flustered at my comment. "I guess I didn't specify, and I should have. I do apologize. I had intended on taking you to the house for our meal so we could talk uninterrupted. But I'd not call it my place. Ours. Master Edison showed it to me this morning." Roman sighed. "That's a somewhat long story and one best shared once we're comfortable for a bit."

Ours? "You want me to live there with you?" I closed my eyes and shook my head the moment the question was out of my mouth. "Of course you do. We're mates, and mates live together. That was a dumb question."

"No, it wasn't. Just one not fully thought out. Not dumb though. How about I tell you a bit more about the house once we're on our way there? It's not far from here, actually."

"Sure. You said Master Edison showed it to you this morning? So you live there?"

We started toward the door, and once more, Roman opened it for me. "I wouldn't say I live there, but I do? I've been there long enough to unpack the things needed for our

meal tonight and to have a shower and get changed. That's it. Master Edison packed up all of my stuff from the cabin I was living in."

Roman stopped next to a blue vehicle, and when he opened the door, I grinned at him as I climbed up into it. He closed the door, and I thought about what he'd just shared. He'd just moved? Today? We had a house? How was any of this possible? Once Roman was in the vehicle, I looked over at him, eager to ask him so many questions.

"What? You look like you're about to explode."

I smiled. "Did you need to move? I mean, that seems like a lot of trouble to go through just because you found your mate."

Roman chuckled. "Yes, I did," he told me as he started the vehicle. "I'll show you the tiny little cabin I was renting from the pack alpha. It was just two rooms, basically. Three if you count the bathroom as a room. Sure, there would have been enough room for the two of us. But funny thing about mates: they rarely remain just two for long."

I felt my face flush at what he was saying. He was talking about babies. Just two for long. He wasn't wrong though. In our village, if and when you met your mate, there were no questions, no issues at all. You claimed each other, and that was that. A fertile period came shortly after and then a baby four months later. That was how we did things.

"You want kids?" I asked. "I mean, you already raised your brothers. Are you wanting to do that again?" He would certainly be experienced and know what to do.

"I wouldn't say no to having children. Yes, I raised my brothers, but it's a bit different. They're my brothers, and although I love them as if they are my children, they're not. I made it a priority to share with them just how amazing our parents were

because they never got the opportunity to meet them.”

It was always sad. I was no stranger to death. My own parents, others in our village. Young, old, we’d lost many. Roman turned down a street that had houses on either side.

“What about you? Children? I know you just started the bakery. Are you wishing to hold off on starting a family? We’re supposed to be able to do that now. I’m not sure exactly how that works, so maybe it’s as simple as using protection during your fertile period. I didn’t think to ask Master Edison.” Roman pulled over to the side and pointed. “That’s the cabin that I lived in until this morning.”

I looked out the window before I turned back to look at Roman in surprise. “That place?”

He chuckled before he nodded. “I told you it was small. It would have been a bit cramped for the two of us, but I didn’t need much space. And I was used to living in small apartments with the twins.”

“It looks like our place in my village was bigger, and it was small.”

Roman laughed at that. I realized I was in trouble because his laughter did things to me. Fates, everything about the alpha did, but sadly, I didn’t really know how to do anything about it.

“That is why Master Edison had a conversation with me this morning. The neighborhood the house is in has nothing but other paranormals living in it. It’s gated, and there is plenty of room for a growing family. Or just the two of us if that’s what you wish. I won’t push for children. We have time, and it would make sense that you wanted to wait for a bit.”



I felt an ache in my chest at Roman's words. The thought of not being with him completely, of not giving him children, caused that ache, and I didn't like it.

"The house is bigger, then?"

Roman nodded. "Considerably. Four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a gorgeous kitchen to cook and bake in, a large room with a wall of windows that looked out back with a view of the national forest. I'm also told there are other fae that live in the neighborhood, but I've not met anyone there yet."

It sounded wonderful, and I couldn't wait to see it. "It's close by?"

"Somewhat. Did you wish to see it?"

"I do. Is that all right?"

"Of course. If it turns out that you don't care for it, I'm sure we can find somewhere else. I used to live up on Treasure Ridge when I was running the council's store. I left once Monroe took over."

"The fae alpha that runs the store?"

Roman nodded. "Yes. He's been here around six months. He brought his two youngest siblings with him. His mate is also raising his siblings, but they're teenagers, and after some struggles in the beginning, I've heard they're a great help with the younger kids."

I'd seen Monroe several times when I was at the council's store. Several times he'd had a baby with him. She was a cutie and always happy. Would I be able to do that? There was a big difference between working in a store and running a bakery. Would I be able to use so much magic to run the bakery while still having energy left for any

children Roman and I would have?

“You seem lost in thought. Are you having reservations?”

I slowly shook my head. “Not really, no. I was thinking about the few times I’ve seen Monroe at the store. More than once, he had a little girl with him. She couldn’t have been a year old yet.”

Roman nodded. “That was probably Ella. She is his and Oscar’s little girl. Monroe has a little sister, Maelie, but she’s a toddler, and I know that when Oscar isn’t watching her, they have her in the childcare center. Same for his little brother, Mason.”

“I understand you used to work with him, so my question is do you just remember people easily? I couldn’t tell you any of Monroe’s kids’ names. You just named three.”

Roman chuckled. “I’m good with names, yes. It helps when you have a classroom full of students and you need to call out one specific one. Add in that it’s not uncommon to have three or four classes a day, that can be quite a few students I need to remember who is who.”

Roman turned, then stopped. I looked ahead as he rolled down his window, and after he did something out the window, the gate in front of us slowly rolled open. You could see the houses through the fence, but it was a bit of a surprise to see such large houses. There were some that were bigger up on Treasure Ridge, and I quickly learned they belonged to the different created ones.

“This is where you live?” I asked as he pulled through the now open gate.

“Yes. You as well once you’re ready.”

I couldn't pull my eyes off Roman. He glanced at me as he turned the vehicle again. "Did I say something wrong?" The vehicle slowed even more, and then it moved into the house. I learned that this was a garage, and it was normal for vehicles to be kept inside them.

I shook my head. "No." There was nothing in the garage except the vehicle.

"No?" Roman asked before he turned off the vehicle. "That's good. I don't want to push too hard with you. I know your brother isn't exactly happy about me, and I'm sure I have that coming with how I was with the twins when they met their mates. But I also don't want you to ever think that I don't want you or us. I absolutely do."

I smiled. "Good. How about we go inside and do something about that, then?" I asked. Roman looked at me, and once again, I saw his eyes darken.

"You can't mean what you're implying. I'm trying to behave, Beau. I promised I would."

"I've never even been kissed, Roman, so I know nothing about seducing an alpha," I told him. "But that doesn't mean I don't want you. I do. In my village, we would have already been mated. We would have left together yesterday. That's just how it works. Which is why Evan reacting like he did upset me as much as it did. I don't want to wait, Roman. Will you claim me?" I was probably pushing things, and I absolutely didn't know what exactly I was asking for beyond sex and exchanging bites. But Roman did, didn't he? Would he turn me down? Would I be able to survive if he did?

### Chapter 11

#### Roman

At Beau's question, my tiger roared in my mind. Our mate wanted us. He was ready. The human side had to stop and question things though. Did he truly know what he was asking for? It couldn't be undone. Once we exchanged bites, we would forever be linked together.

Then he had to go and tell me just how innocent he was. Not that I hadn't suspected. Master Edison had said much the same thing this morning, and at Beau's words, my body went through a range of emotions: nervousness, elation, and, of course, immense desire. My mate was completely untouched. I would be the only one to ever know him in that way. It wasn't that I was so old-fashioned that I demanded my mate be innocent, but he was, and that did things to me that I wouldn't have expected.

"Did I say something wrong? I wasn't supposed to say that, was I?"

At the sound of Beau's voice, I finally snapped out of my thoughts. "No, you're fine. What you said didn't upset me; I'm just trying not to mess things up." I took a deep breath to not only calm myself but hopefully get my tiger to shut up. "I don't want to rush things between us." I looked at Beau, who appeared like he was about to cry. "I'm not saying I won't claim you. I will. I just want to make sure this is what you want. We can't undo it once we claim one another, and I don't want you to have any regrets." I didn't know how else to say it. I had a feeling he knew what he was asking but possibly wasn't considering exactly what it would mean.

“We can wait,” Beau said quietly.

I wanted to kick myself just then, and my tiger roared in my mind at me. “Let’s go inside, all right? I think this is something we should discuss in there and not in the garage.”

Beau nodded and started to reach for the door. I stopped him with a gentle hand on his other arm.

“I’ll be right around. Just give me a moment.” I didn’t wait for another response and slid from the vehicle before I rushed around it to open his door. When he gave me a smile, I felt a bit of relief, but it was short-lived. I could scent that Beau was no longer as happy as he’d been just a bit ago. He now scented a bit apprehensive, and I wasn’t sure if it was because of the possibility of what we might possibly be about to do or if he was concerned he’d upset me in some way. No matter my own feelings about it, I needed him to be reassured, so I led him from the garage and into the house, where I hoped to be able to convince him that I wasn’t going anywhere.

“Oh, wow,” Beau said as we entered the house and he got a look of the inside.

“It’s pretty great, isn’t it?” I asked as I gestured to the kitchen, which wasn’t far away. “I’ve been told I’m not a terrible cook. I’m really great at simple things, but if you want anything gourmet, we will need to go out and get it somewhere.”

“I don’t need anything fancy,” Beau said.

He might not need it, but I wanted to give him everything. I was already planning on taking him out for a nice meal sometime in the very near future; I just needed to find out what he liked most. My tiger’s need to spoil our mate was strong, and the hope was that Beau would let me pamper him as much as possible. “Do you have a favorite food? Something you would pick to eat over anything else?”

Beau smiled at me. “Apples. I absolutely love them. I think that’s why I have them in so many things at the bakery. Which isn’t right of me because I know not everyone likes apples.”

There were people that didn’t like apples? “I’m not sure how many dislike apples on Treasure Ridge. It was one of the most purchased fruits when I ran the store. We were always restocking them.” Beau’s eyes lit up. I gestured to the back room. “Can we talk? For just a bit? I want to discuss some things before I start supper.”

The happiness on Beau’s face disappeared. I absolutely didn’t want that, and I mentally kicked myself as Beau walked away from me. He was going exactly where I’d gestured, and I knew I needed to fix this without hesitation. It was easy enough to catch up with him—the house wasn’t that large. When he made it to the couch and turned, I was right there and cupped his cheeks. His mouth parted with a quiet squeak, but I wasn’t going to let that stop me. I stared into his eyes as I slowly lowered my face to within an inch of his.

“Don’t ever doubt that I want you, Beau,” I whispered to him. “I’ll claim you right now if that is your wish. But it cannot be undone, and my tiger isn’t going to allow you to not be with us all the time once he’s claimed you as ours.” Beau’s eyes looked unfocused just before he closed them, and I felt him gently push his face upward toward me. I took that as permission and closed the distance between us.

When my lips finally touched Beau’s, I felt a tingle on my lips that slowly moved through me. I had never felt anything like it before and had to wonder if it was Beau or my imagination. Either way, I kept the kiss soft and short, not wanting to push too much too fast. When I applied just a bit of pressure, Beau gasped, and I slowly reached out with my tongue and touched his upper lip. At that, he moaned and seemed to melt into me. I moved my hands from his face to his shoulders and then around his back to hold him to me. But that was where both my hands and the kiss stopped. I pulled back, smiling when Beau’s face reached for mine.

“Now that you’ve had your first kiss, I hope it wasn’t a disappointment. I do plan on doing much more soon and often.”

Beau blinked at me and then smiled. His eyes had darkened, and his cheeks were flushed, and he looked absolutely delectable. “Yes,” he said, his words barely a whisper. He cleared his throat and nodded. “Yes. I want more. All of it.” His words were surer and louder this time.

“I have no issue with that. But you need to understand what it means.”

Beau nodded. “It means that I get to live here with you in this beautiful house and that we’re going to have a baby, and I’m not sure what will happen about that with my job, but we can figure it out later. I want all of that, Roman. I didn’t come here to find my mate, but I’m happy I have.”

“And what of your brother? If he has issues with us, with what fate decides to gift us, where will you be?”

Beau tilted his head to the side. “I don’t understand what Evan has to do with us.”

“You were crying at someone named Lukan’s last night because you were arguing with your brother because of me. I’m not sure if that is because you found your mate or if it’s because of another reason. Either way, I don’t want any issues with you and your brother because of me. I was overly harsh with my brothers and their mates when they first scented them. It was difficult for me to let go and realize I wasn’t the only one that would be protecting them from then on out.”

Beau shook his head. “I’m good with Evan. He and I had a talk. He apologized, and although I haven’t fully forgiven him yet, I have accepted his apology, and he’s happy for me. For us. There will be no issues with Evan. He’s going to do his thing, and I’m going to do mine.”

I wanted nothing more than to sweep him up into my arms and take him to what would be our bedroom and break the bed in properly. I argued with myself as to why I shouldn't and realized that there was no reason to. Beau had said he wanted that—us. He was willing to be claimed here and now, so why was I arguing with myself? I shook my head before I did exactly what I, no, we both wanted. I bent down and easily swept Beau up into my arms. He made an adorable squeak, and I chuckled.

“I promise I won't drop you,” I told him as he wrapped his arms around my neck and held on tightly.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I'm taking you to our bedroom. You said you wanted me to claim you, and I don't plan on doing it in the den. The couch is comfortable, but we have a brand-new bed that was gifted to us and I can think of no other way to break in.” I smiled down at Beau.

“Really? You're going to claim me?”

“You stated that was what you wanted, and I see no reason to wait. My tiger is pushing me hard to not let you out of our sight until I at least claim you. I'm not teaching for the summer, so I have time to spend with you. Do you have any objections?”

Beau's eyes widened impossibly big before he shook his head. I'd reached the top of the stairs and nodded at him with a smile before I hurried down the hallway. Once at our bedroom door, I turned sideways and carefully maneuvered through before I walked toward the bed. Once there, I carefully set Beau down on it and took a step back.



I reached for my shirt and quickly pulled it off over my head. That and my shoes were as far as I was planning on going until I had Beau naked and I'd spent some time exploring his body and showing him just how much pleasure I could bring him. Well, that was the plan. It seemed like Beau had other ideas because by the time I had my shirt off, he was tossing his to the foot of the bed. I took a step back before I wagged a finger at him while shaking my head.

"Not that I'm upset you are as eager as you seem to be, but I very much wanted to be the person to undress you." I made sure I looked up and down Beau's slim torso, and he noticed that I did. When I made it to the waistband of his pants, I couldn't help but see that the front of them seemed to be fuller than they were earlier. Definitely eager, and I wanted a taste. I growled as I moved closer, and Beau made another squeak as I gently pushed him onto his back.

"You aren't...it won't hurt, will it?"

I froze. "What do you mean?"

"Umm...you just growled, and, well, it didn't sound like you. Your tiger won't hurt me, right?"

I shook my head. "My tiger would die for you, Beau," I told him. "I've heard that the initial piercing when being bitten can sting and sometimes hurt. But that quickly changes, and it becomes the complete opposite, and it will bring immense pleasure." I held myself steady as I waited for his next comments.

"I'm sorry," he said, surprising me.

"What for?"

"I've never done any of this before. And I know sex can hurt too, but when you

growled, I guess my mind kind of blanked out, and I was only thinking about your tiger biting me.”

I sat up until I was kneeling on the bed beside my mate. “Would you feel better if you met him first? He very much wants to meet you, and I know he’s going to rub on you and mark you in his own way, but he doesn’t want to hurt you, nor does he want to bite you. It’s just me, but still him.” I furrowed my brow a bit. “I’m not really explaining that all that well.”

“No, you are. I get it. But I want to wait, I think. I want to meet him, but I also want to be able to talk to you while you’re in your other form. We will be able to do that, right?”

I smiled down at my mate as I leaned back down to where I was hovering over him once more. “We absolutely will.” There were some couples that struggled to form that connection, but I had no doubts that Beau and I would be able to figure it out.

“Can we try again?” Beau asked as he held his arms up toward me.

In response, I smiled as I moved to where I was lying beside him. “We absolutely can,” I said as I trailed a finger down the center of his chest. I leaned in and kissed his shoulder. “If I do anything that upsets you or makes you uncomfortable, speak up. The absolute last thing I want is for you to not enjoy some aspect of our claiming one another.”

“Okay,” Beau said quietly.

I heard his breath hitch as my finger wandered from his stomach to his nipple. The bud hardened, and Beau inhaled deeply while my finger gently circled around it. I could scent his increasing arousal, and when I leaned down and licked over the same nipple, Beau let out a noise that had me smiling.

I licked over it twice more before I closed my lips around it and sucked gently. Beau's fingers threaded into my hair and held on as he made a gasping sound and then a loud moan. His body spasmed beside me, and then I scented something I hadn't expected. At least not yet. I smiled around his nipple before I pushed up and looked down at my mate. Damn, he was sexy as hell in the aftermath of his orgasm.

Beau's cheeks were flushed, and his eyes closed tightly. He was absolutely gorgeous, and I couldn't help but want a taste of his lips. He was my mate, and I wasn't going to let the situation keep me from getting that taste, so I leaned in and pressed my lips to his. He kissed me back for all of a second before he gasped and turned his head to the side. He made a noise that I didn't care for, and then words I never wanted to hear from him again came from him.

"I'm sorry."

I leaned down and kissed his shoulder where it met his neck. Exactly where I intended to put my claiming bite. "For what?" I asked against his warm skin. "For enjoying yourself? Don't ever apologize for that when you're with me. That is the entire point of us being together. For you to get as much enjoyment as possible."

Beau turned his head away. "But I...it was too soon. Too early."

I chuckled. "Only if you feel that way. I have plans to make you come multiple times before I finally claim you. That was just the first one. How many more do you think I can get from you before we claim one another?" That had Beau looking back at me. I smiled at him from where I was gently kissing his shoulder. "It's going to be fun learning just where else on your body is a hot spot like that." It would too. I was looking forward to exploring his body and finding out just where else could make him come with something as simple as kisses and sucking.

"You're not mad?"

I pushed up onto my elbow and looked down at my mate. “Not even a little. I love that you are excited and I can give you pleasure like that. I want to always bring you happiness and pleasure. That’s how alphas are wired. We want to protect, to provide. Be it pleasure, comfort, safety, reassurance, all of it. That is all I wish for you, Beau.” He had to be getting a bit uncomfortable at this point, so I pushed up from where I was lying beside him and reached for the waistband of his jeans. “We also want to care for our mates. And you must be getting uncomfortable with what is in your pants at this point.”

I had his pants open in a moment, and when I encountered a pair of dark blue briefs, I smiled. There was an obvious wet spot on the front; some had managed to leak out above the waistband of his briefs. I couldn’t help it: I needed a taste. I leaned down without a thought, other than to taste my mate in that way. When my tongue lapped up the white fluid on Beau’s lower stomach, he gasped. Immediately after, his fingers threaded into my hair and tugged. I looked up his torso at him and raised an eyebrow in question.

“You...are you sure? I would never expect that from you.”

I sighed and sat up. “I can see we’ll need to have a complete conversation about sexual pleasure and how I want to give you all that I can, in any and every way possible.”

“But you’re the alpha. I don’t expect you to do that to me. I’m supposed to do that to you.”

I shook my head. “I would never ask or expect you to do anything to me that I myself wasn’t willing to provide to you in return. I very much look forward to sucking and tasting you, in all areas. If you have been taught that alphas don’t do these things to and for their omegas, I’m sorry you were told such things.”

Beau's eyes widened even more. "You honestly want to do those things to me?"

I chuckled as I reached out and swiped a finger through what was left of the mess that was on Beau's lower stomach. I brought it to my mouth and sucked my fingers. The taste had me closing my eyes, and I honestly couldn't wait to suck him to completion. When I opened my eyes, I had to blink a few times because my tiger very much wanted to take over and have me pounce on our mate and hurry up and claim him. "I very much desire to do those things to you. Always. But only if you are comfortable with me doing so. I understand you are new to all of this, but I hope we can explore things together."

Beau pushed up onto his elbows and looked at me. "I want you to do everything to me." He bit his lower lip, and it was the sexiest thing I'd seen in a very long time. "I liked you licking me, and my cock felt ready to explode again at just the thought of you licking me there." Beau took a deep breath, and I could see just how nervous he was. I wanted nothing more than to wrap him up in my arms and reassure him in every way possible. "Will you teach me how to do it to you? I want to try."

"Oh, sweetness. I will happily let you do anything to me you wish. And if you have any questions, don't ever feel ashamed to ask. I only want you to be comfortable as well as confident in all things we do together. We will both be learning over the next several weeks, but I am certain that we will know exactly what the other needs and desires in no time." It would help once we claimed one another. He would be able to access my thoughts and I his. That was something I very much was looking forward to.

"Can we start over? I want to do all of these things with you, but I think I've pretty much killed the mood with all of my questions."

I smiled at Beau. "We absolutely can start over. How about we take a bath? It's a great way to relax, and we can get you cleaned up. Not only that, but it will give me

an excuse to rub hands all over your soapy body.”

Beau’s eyebrows rose. “That sounds...yes, please.”

I smiled at my mate before I rolled off the bed. When I reached for him, sliding my arms under his legs and his upper back, Beau didn’t squeak this time. He giggled, and it was an absolutely wonderful sound. One I hoped to hear again and again in our lifetime together. But first, I wanted to make him moan as I filled him with my aching cock. I knew I’d never get tired of hearing Beau moan as he came because of the pleasure I was giving him. I was already counting all of the ways I was going to do so—starting with soaping him up in the tub.

## Page 12

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### Chapter 12

Beau

I felt like the biggest idiot. I was happy that Roman couldn't yet hear my thoughts. I didn't want him to know just how much I wanted to kick myself. Instead of being carried to the bathroom with a cold, wet mess in my underwear, I could have been having sex for the first time ever. But nope, I had to go and get embarrassed because I came from Roman sucking on my nipple. Who did that? Apparently, I did, and it was so embarrassing.

Roman had been amazing and so understanding though, which I was incredibly thankful for. Now we were going to take a bath together, and that thought actually was much more appealing than I would have ever thought. The fact that the super-sexy alpha that had been chosen to be mine wanted to get naked with me...there were no negatives to that as far as I could see.

"I believe that one of the perks of having the created warlock in charge of housing for many of the paranormals in the area is massive tubs and showers," Roman said as he set me down on my feet just in front of the tub. "We will have to wait a bit for the tub to fill though."

I gestured to the tub, smiling when Roman's eyebrows rose.

"Or, you could do your thing and we instantly have a tub full of steaming water."

I smiled at Roman before I shrugged. "It's a perk."

Roman grinned back at me before he knelt beside me. He reached for the waistband of my pants before I could protest. In one quick swoop, he had my pants and briefs down and pooling around my ankles and feet.

“Step out.”

I could do nothing but what he asked. I was left with my socks on my feet, and I had to remember that I’d kicked off my shoes earlier before I removed my shirt.

“Lift,” he said as I felt his fingers in the top of my sock. Roman repeated the action for my other sock when I raised my foot off the floor, leaving me standing there naked in front of him. The urge to cover myself was strong, but Roman moaned before he moved in, and I felt his tongue on my cock. It quickly sprang back to full life.

“Roman,” I said quietly. I was trying not to moan or thrust my hips, but both were difficult to avoid. Roman continued to suck on my length, and all too soon, I felt my balls tingling. “Roman,” I said again, this time with a bit more force. I felt as if I needed to warn him that I was about to come again, which was wonderful but still embarrassing. When Roman added more pressure instead of pulling off, I pushed on his forehead in hopes of getting him to stop. He looked up at me, his mouth still sucking on my cock, and I tried to warn him, but it was too much in that moment, and I felt my body overload with pleasure once again.

Roman moaned as I filled his mouth with my release. Somehow, his suction increased, and my body became a bundle of unset frosting, and I felt myself slipping to the floor. Only, I didn’t go anywhere, and I realized that was because Roman’s hands were holding tightly to my backside. It felt amazing, but it was just too much, and I pushed harder against his head when everything became too sensitive.

“Roman, please. It’s too much.”



Roman finally pulled off, and after he gave the head of my dick one last kiss, he looked up at me with a huge smile on his face. "I only wanted to give you pleasure, not cause you to be uncomfortable."

I nodded at him. "I very much enjoyed. But it was too sensitive at the end."

Roman nodded back before he stood, his hands sliding from my bum to my waist. "I apologize. I was enjoying your pleasure."

I had to look up quite a bit at Roman with him standing, and it was not lost on me in that moment just how many size differences there were between us when I felt something rub against my lower stomach. Roman was still fully dressed, but when I glanced down and saw the bulge in his pants, I winced at how uncomfortable it had to be in his jeans.

"Doesn't that hurt?" I asked as I reached out and gently rubbed my fingers over the bulge. Roman dropped his head back and moaned.

"Not exactly, but that felt amazing. Do it again." Roman placed his hand over mine and applied pressure. He moved our hands up and down several times before he dropped his hand and looked at me. "Gah, what I want to explore with you."

"You'll have to teach me how to pleasure you. I've not done anything before with anyone. We usually don't."

Roman grinned. "It's going to be a complete pleasure. Right now though, I want you to get into the tub while I finish undressing. I'll join you, and after we relax a bit, we'll see where things go."

I nodded. There was nothing else I could think of doing, other than listening to my mate. He wanted me in the tub, I was going to get into the bath. I carefully stepped

into the tub and sat down, sighing as the hot water surrounded my body. It wasn't that I'd had an overly strenuous day, but it had been long. I'd already been up for close to twelve hours and most of it standing on my feet. The hot water was soothing, and I sighed again.

That didn't mean I wasn't covertly sneaking glances at my mate while he undressed the rest of the way. I couldn't help but gasp when he pushed his jeans down his narrow hips and his cock sprang out. It bounced a few times now that it was free from the tight confines of his jeans, and I started to wonder if things were going to "work" anatomically. When I met Roman's gaze, he smirked while shaking his head.

"It's written all over your face. Yes, it will fit. No, it shouldn't be too painful. Maybe a slight burn, but your body was made to receive an alpha. You have slick. It's going to work just as it should."

My mouth dropped open. Was I truly that easy to read? "How did..."

Roman smiled. "Like I said, it's written on your face. Scoot forward a bit."

It took my brain a moment to catch up and translate what he'd said last. I finally moved to the middle of the tub and realized just how massive it was. My feet were touching the other end of the tub, but my knees weren't bent so much that my legs were above the water level. Of course, the tub was deep as well as long, but it was obvious that it was designed with large alphas in mind.

The water level rose as Roman stepped in behind me and then even more as he sat down. I bit my lower lip as his legs slid to either side of me. When his hands moved down my sides to where my hips were and tugged, I bit my lower lip as I was pulled back against his very hard chest—and other parts.

"Sorry if that's uncomfortable," he whispered next to my temple. "It'll eventually go

down.”

I somehow doubted that. I’d come twice now, and mine was still hard. Was that a mate thing? Would I always be walking around with a hard dick now? “It’s okay. Umm...did you want me to take care of it for you?”

Roman chuckled behind me. “I’m sure you will many times tonight, but right now, I’m wanting to focus on you and not only relaxing you but bringing you pleasure.”

I craned my neck so I could turn to meet Roman’s eyes. “You’ve already done that. Twice. Shouldn’t it be your turn now?”

“It brings me immense joy to see to your pleasure.”

“But what about me?” I asked. “Can’t I have a chance to learn how to do the same for you? What if I discover I am the same? I haven’t had the opportunity yet though, and I would very much like to do the same for you.”

Roman’s arms tightened around mine as he pulled me back to him. “Soon. Can we wait on that until after we’ve claimed one another? It isn’t that I don’t wish for you to do all those things to me. I absolutely do. But I’ll be honest here and say that I really want to wait until I’m inside you to come because my tiger is pushing me immensely to claim you, and I’m not sure he wouldn’t win if you were to either stroke me or suck me.”

Oh. I hadn’t thought about that. But why would I? I knew the basics of how sex worked, but that was the extent of it. I had no real experience with anything we’d already done. It had been amazing, and if this was all we ever had or did, I would forever be a happy fae.

“I understand,” I said quietly. I moved toward the side so I could look up at Roman

again. “But I will get to do it someday?”

Roman smiled down at me before he kissed my nose. “Someday very soon.”

That worked for me. If Roman said I’d be able to return the pleasure for him, then I believed him. Roman started rubbing his hands up and down my torso, the effect on me almost immediate. I closed my eyes and sighed, but the sigh quickly turned to a moan when Roman’s hands slid beneath the water and wrapped around my cock.

“Roman,” I moaned out.

“Yes?”

I really needed to work on my stamina because three gentle strokes up and down my length had my balls tingling again. I reached out and placed my hand on his wrist, squeezing it in hopes of getting him to stop.

“Can we wait?” I managed to get out.

The hand instantly stilled but didn’t let go. “What do you mean?”

“I know you want to make me relaxed and all, and I already am. But I’m afraid if you keep causing me to come, I’ll be too exhausted to do any actual claiming when we finally get around to it.”

Roman chuckled. “Very well. I’ll just wash you and then take you to bed. How does that sound?”

Perfect. That was exactly what I wanted. I nodded. “Yes. That. Can we do that?” I asked. “I’m sorry if I’m not wanting all that you envisioned. I just...well, I’ve already come twice, and it’s been a long day, and I’m afraid that if I come too many more

times, I'm going to be too tired to actually claim you."

Roman chuckled again before he kissed the side of my head. "My intent was not to exhaust you. But I didn't take into consideration that your day started early."

I moved forward a bit so I could turn some and look at Roman. "I'm sure yours did as well. I didn't sleep well last night, and I'm not saying you didn't, but I wouldn't be surprised if your night was different than mine." I took a deep breath. "I'm not trying to rush you, and I hope you don't feel as if I am pushing too hard. I just want you to claim me. I'm a bit nervous because I've never had sex, and I'm afraid I'm going to be terrible at it."

Roman reached out and touched my lips, stopping the words flowing from my mouth. "My night was spent sleeping on the back patio area of Lukan's house once I met him, and he told me that you were staying with him. Although, I wouldn't really call it sleeping. I, too, had a difficult night. And I am completely on board with claiming each other immediately. I only wanted to be the gentleman you deserve. Trust me, there is very much a side of me that wants to already be buried deep inside of you."

"Then why aren't we doing that? I don't really know much about seduction. Konrad tried to give me some pointers earlier, but we didn't really have a lot of downtime."

Roman's smile grew. "That right there is more than enough for me," he told me. "You will find that you don't have to do anything. You are my mate. I will always desire you, and if you want to be intimate with me, all you have to do is say so. No need for seduction or any type of grand gesture. Just let me know, and I'll be there to provide whatever it is you need or desire."

I wasn't sure it was really that simple or that it was fair to Roman. He deserved a mate who could put in some effort. I would certainly do whatever I could to learn how to seduce my mate. He deserved a partner that was more than just a lump when it

came to things such as sexual pleasure.

“Good,” I said in response to Roman’s declaration. I stood, more than ready to get things moving along. “Then we shall go to the bedroom and claim each other.” I started to step out of the tub, but Roman wrapped a hand around my thigh, and I quickly realized just how large his hands were in comparison to my thighs.

“Who says we need to go to the bedroom?” Roman asked. He reached up and tugged on my hand, and I carefully sat back down, this time straddling his legs.

“Oh.”

Roman grinned. “Oh yes.” He leaned in and kissed my neck. “Unless you wish to be claimed on the bed. But there are so many other places to have sex, and since we’re already here...”

Roman nipped at my neck, and I couldn’t hold the moan in. His teeth definitely felt sharper than they had before, and when he placed his teeth against my neck and held them there, they definitely were sharper than before. I smiled as Roman moaned against my neck. His teeth were gone in seconds though, but I understood: it wasn’t time for biting just yet.

His lips moved up my neck to my chin and then pressed against mine. Immediately, I leaned closer, hoping to be an equal participant in this. Mine pressed to his, moving with them, and then his tongue reached out to touch mine. I felt a tingle go through my body that originated from where his tongue was touching mine.

Roman pulled my body closer to his, and the size difference between us was drastically obvious, but in that moment, I couldn’t really care all that much. My body was slippery, and it glided against his with ease. Roman’s hands slid from my hips to my backside and then a bit further, all while his tongue continued to play with mine. I

was so lost in the sensations that I didn't even realize that he'd managed to slide a finger into me until he touched some magical spot inside and my body exploded. I moaned into his mouth as my balls pulled tight, and then my cock started spurting between us.

Roman groaned before he quickly pulled his mouth from mine. His finger continued to gently rub over that spot inside me though, and although his finger felt amazing, my body needed more.

"Roman," I pleaded with him.

"Just a bit more," he said. I didn't know what he meant at the moment, but seconds later, I understood. I suddenly felt fuller, and although it didn't hurt, it was definitely noticeable. "You're so slick, Beau," Roman said as he met my gaze. "But you need to be stretched a bit before we can go further."

I could only nod. He was the experienced one here, and although I wasn't, what Roman was saying made sense. I felt his fingers moving in and out of me for a bit before they were slowly pulled from my body. I felt myself being lifted, and when I was nose-to-nose with Roman, he leaned forward and pressed a quick kiss to my lips.

"I need you to relax for me," he said after the kiss.

"I don't think I can get more relaxed after three orgasms, Roman."

He kissed me again, once more keeping it just a quick touching of our lips. "You say that now, but this will be different," he whispered against my lips. I was going to ask what he meant when I felt sudden pressure against my hole. Oh.

Roman's lips pressed against mine again, this time his tongue reaching out and swiping against the seam of my lips. It caused tingles to chase through my body, and

it didn't take long for me to realize why Roman did it. I gasped when I felt him slowly slide into me, and when the thicker part of his cockhead rubbed over that spot inside, I gasped and pulled my mouth away from his.

"Relax," he whispered. "It will feel amazing in just a bit."

I shook my head. "It doesn't feel bad now." That was true. It burned a little. I was stretched full, but Roman was being incredibly gentle with me.

Roman kissed my shoulder but didn't stop there. He started moving soft kisses across my shoulder, then up my neck, and I moaned as I moved my neck to the side to give him more room. There was a quiet growl, his fingers tightened on my ass, and then those sharp teeth were back at the area where my neck met my shoulder. It was sexy, and I never wanted it to end. The teeth disappeared, and when Roman kissed my cheek, I tried to turn into the kiss. Instead, I squeaked when he moved my body closer to his. It turned to a gargled moan when he let me go, and I fell back onto his cock.

"Oh," I groaned out.

Roman repeated the movements, and in just minutes, my cock, which had softened considerably after my third orgasm, hardened again. I didn't know how it was possible, but I didn't care. I caught on to the repetitive movements Roman was using, and I braced my hands on his shoulders and started rocking my hips. When I did, it was Roman who let out a loud groan, and I smiled. I'd done something that he liked. That made me feel empowered, and I did it again and again, adding in a bit of a roll. Roman growled, this time louder, his eyes dark and his canines poking out of his mouth.

I gasped at the sight, and I wasn't sure what came over me, but I leaned in and licked across his lips, making sure I flicked my tongue against one of his canines. Roman's growl increased, and then his hands grabbed my ass, and I was suddenly held in



place. I was about to protest until his hips snapped up into me. I moaned again, and when he did it a second time, I let my head drop back and simply held on to his shoulders as he snapped his hips, thrusting his cock up into me over and over.

Roman's tiger was definitely tired of waiting, and just when I didn't think I could handle much more, I felt his cock get bigger. Was that possible? How? Roman made a noise that I couldn't quite describe, and then I felt an obvious bump when he thrust up into me again. Roman pulled out, then did it again, and this time, he grunted, then growled as he pushed into me and held. Roman's hands somehow tightened on me even more, and then I felt a flood of heat inside me.

One of Roman's hands left my ass, grabbed the back of my hair, and pulled my head upward and to the side. Before I could even register what had already happened, Roman's teeth sunk into my shoulder where it met my neck, and the instant flash of pain was gone before I could even register it. I moaned as my own cock somehow started spurting between us. It was amazing and overstimulating all at the same time.

I suddenly felt Roman's tongue licking on my neck, and I sighed as my body finally gave out. It was simply too much for me. It had been incredible, but my body lost all energy, and I slumped against my mate.

My head was moved again, this time tucked against Roman's neck. "Bite me," Roman said. I sighed in response and kissed his neck. "Please, Beau. Please claim me back."

I suddenly realized that my own claiming teeth had at some point come out, and I opened my mouth, and right where Roman had bitten me, I did the same on his own shoulder. My mouth flooded with his blood, and that was all I needed. I opened my mouth, pulling my teeth from his shoulder. I tried to lick up the mess, but I couldn't. My body gave out, and I simply gave in to the overwhelming need for sleep.

### Chapter 13

#### Roman

I had never expected to be gifted a mate, let alone one who was as giving and open as Beau. My sweet, precious mate. He barely knew me, yet here we were. I chuckled as I wrapped my arms around his slender body a little tighter. I honestly hadn't intended to claim him in the bathtub, but it seemed as if it were the perfect place in the heat of the moment. A quick glance at the floor said otherwise. I kissed the top of Beau's head as he lay passed out in my arms. I would worry about the mess on the floor later. At the moment, there was nothing I could do about it since I was knotted to Beau.

That was a new experience for me and one that I very much enjoyed. But did he? It seemed as if he had, but one never really knew. I had a pretty good idea that claiming one another would be an intense experience for him, and I'd done my best to make sure he thoroughly enjoyed himself before, but had I gone overboard? Had it been too much?

Almost immediately after Beau had bitten me, he'd passed out. Perhaps it had been a bit too much. I felt somewhat bad now, but my only thought had been to give him as much pleasure as I could. But looking back, maybe I should have been a bit more reserved since it was his first time. I grinned and snuggled to him tighter.

I wasn't sure how long my knot would last but figured it would be a bit longer since we were claiming each other. Until it deflated enough that I could pull from Beau's body without causing him any pain, I could do nothing except hold him safely in my arms. That wasn't anything to complain about.

I scooped up a handful of water and let it run down Beau's back. I figured that the least I could do would be to clean him a bit. But in reality, without a soapy cloth, I couldn't actually clean him. I was more than happy to hold him while letting my thoughts wander.

I'd felt our bond slip into place after Beau had claimed me back. But with him passed out in my arms, I'd not really been able to receive anything back from him when I reached out to him. That was understandable, but the fact that I'd felt it gave me hope that we wouldn't experience any issues when it came to developing a strong connection.

I wasn't sure how long we were in the tub and was a bit surprised that the water hadn't started to cool, but it was as if Beau and my knot were in sync because shortly after it released from Beau, he moaned against my chest before he pushed away enough to look up at me.

"Welcome back, sweetness."

Beau gave me a sleepy smile. "Was I out long?"

"I don't have any real way of knowing. There's not a clock in here, but my knot just went down and released, so I'd say not terribly long." I leaned forward enough to kiss him. "I hope I didn't overwhelm you too much."

Beau smiled again. "Oh no. It was wonderful. You were wonderful." Beau smiled but ducked his head. "I'm sorry I was a bit out of it."

I returned the smile as I reached out and placed a finger under his chin so he would meet my gaze. "You were wonderful. I was actually just thinking about how I might have overdone it a bit and it was too much for you. I just wanted you to have an amazing time."

Beau snorted. “If you couldn’t tell, I definitely had that.” Beau took a deep breath, and when he let it out, it wasn’t quite steady, which put me on edge. “Will it always be that intense?”

I thought for a moment, unsure how exactly to answer. “Well, we’ll only ever claim each other for the first time just that once. If you’re asking about sex in general, I’m afraid I don’t have an answer for you beyond that.”

“We’re mates though, so it will be more than just sex, right?”

I smiled as I reached up and ran my fingers through his damp hair. “Yes. I’ve been told that what we experience together with our mates is more than what others experience with those who aren’t their mates. Why do you ask?”

“It was amazing, but I feel bad that I passed out. I would love it if we could do that again, only I stay awake.”

I couldn’t keep from chuckling. “I’ll see what I can do about not overwhelming you so much next time.”

Beau’s smile was beautiful. “When will that be?”

My earlier chuckle turned to complete laughter. “Whenever you wish,” I told him after a moment. “Although, I do recommend that we get cleaned up and I feed you first. Keeping up your energy is important, especially when you’re expending so much during certain activities.”

Beau gave me a grin that I knew would always have an effect on me and would get him whatever it was he desired.

“I should get off of you, then,” Beau said, but when he tried to stand, he gasped and

quickly fell back against me. He looked at me with wide eyes. “My legs are asleep.”

I chuckled at our predicament. “Well, I can wash you here, or I can carry you over to the shower and set you on the bench that is in there.”

“There’s a bench?” Beau asked, quickly craning his neck to turn around and check out the shower. “I can’t see,” he said, sounding disappointed. “I can’t believe I didn’t notice the shower earlier.”

I wrapped my hands around Beau, grabbing ahold of his ass, and carefully stood. It wasn’t nearly as easy as one would think, but I managed to get to my feet even with Beau flailing around a bit. “Shall we shower?”

“I…” Beau sighed. “I was going to say I could walk, but the tingling in my legs tells me otherwise.”

I smiled at him. “Yes. I feel it too, but I know that what I’m feeling is nothing when compared to what you are. Give it a bit, and your legs should be feeling so much better soon enough.”

I carefully made my way between the tub and the walk-in shower, where I set Beau down on the bench. I wasn’t exactly sure what it was for, other than shower sex, but it certainly was handy at the moment. Once Beau was sitting on the bench, I turned on the water, hoping it didn’t take long for it to heat up.

“I’ll be right back,” I told him. “I need to go drain the tub and throw some towels on the floor to clean up the water that splashed out earlier.”

Beau stopped me with a hand on my hip. “I’ll do that,” he said before he waved his hand in that direction.

“You don’t have to.” I tried to stop him. I didn’t know exactly how his magic worked yet or if using so much of it would tire him more.

“Already done,” Beau said. “I’m told that our magic works much like the warlocks of your realm here. And yes, using too much of it will tire me, but cleaning up the floor, draining the tub, and making the shower hot isn’t enough to do that.”

I looked at Beau, amused. “So you can hear my thoughts?” I asked, hoping that he truly could.

Beau nodded. “I’m not sure how to respond though. Do I just think something?”

“In a way, yes. You need to think about sharing it with me. Sort of like you’re having a conversation with me in your head.”

“I’m not sure what to say to you,” Beau told me through our bond.

I grinned. “Well, that works. But it will come in handy when we can’t be together and you want to talk to me.” I knelt down in front of him and started rubbing his legs. “Did you get the feeling back in them yet?”

“I think so,” Beau said. “Why wouldn’t we be together?”

“When we both have to go back to work,” I told him. “You’re still planning on running the bakery, are you not?”

“Oh. Yeah.” Beau looked down at where my hands were resting on his thighs. “You mentioned teaching?”

I stood and carefully pulled him up to his feet. The water might be steaming, but Beau had goose bumps on his skin, and neither myself nor my tiger liked that. “We

need to get you under the water. You're cold."

"Only a little. The steam was starting to warm me up, which is what I think caused the chill."

I pulled Beau into the stream of water, and when he shivered, I wrapped my arms around him. One of the good things about being a shifter was that I always ran warm. I felt Beau sigh and relax after a few moments of us standing under the hot spray of water.

"Are you warm now?" I asked after I took a step back.

"Yes." Beau looked around the shower. "This is a seriously nice shower," he said. "Not that the ones in Even's place are bad. They're not. But this one seems...fancy."

I chuckled. It was certainly quite nice. I'd noticed that earlier when I was unpacking some of the essentials. "It's certainly nice. I didn't think to stop at your place to grab your stuff, but you're welcome to use my soaps and shampoos."

Beau grinned up at me. "Thanks." He leaned his head back, wetting his hair before he reached for the bottle of shampoo. When Beau moved out of the spray, I took his place. We spent the rest of the shower exchanging smiles, and when I winked down at Beau, his cheeks turned pink, and I wondered if he would always react like that with me.

When Beau tried to wash himself, I took the cloth from him and got to my knees in front of him. "You don't have to wash me."

"I don't, but I want to. Unless it makes you uncomfortable, I would very much like to take care of you."

Beau offered another smile, this one shy, with a gentle nod. It was incredibly tempting to explore his body more thoroughly than I had earlier and break in the bench against the far end of the shower, but Beau's growling stomach had me making the shower essential, and I quickly washed Beau and then myself while he rinsed off. Once the suds were washed from my own body, I turned off the water and then led Beau out of the shower. Thankfully, I'd thought to put several towels in the cabinet earlier when I was unpacking a few bathroom things.

"Gray?" Beau asked, looking at the towel.

"You are welcome to change any and everything in the house. I have gray towels simply because there were enough of them when I was at the store to purchase things when I moved off of Treasure Ridge. I left a lot of the household items there because the omegas that were living with me were still there in the house." Beau gave me a look, and immediately, I knew what it meant, even without having to probe into his thoughts. "The council has been rescuing omegas that have been trafficked."

"That's where they were kidnapped and sold into sex slavery?"

I nodded. "Yes. It's not pretty, and sadly, some of them were sold by their own family. But the council knew I was a protector, even though I'm not an enforcer. For whatever reason, they asked if I would be willing to watch over a few of the omegas. I had no issue with it since first Phineas had left and then Philip. They were working in the council's store with me already, so it wasn't difficult to walk them home with me after we closed the store." I gave Beau a serious look. "There was never anything between me and any of them."

"All right. Not that I can say anything. It's understandable that you would have had sexual partners in the past."

I nodded slowly. "I have. Not nearly as many as some, but I spent twenty years doing



everything I could to protect my brothers from a deranged shifter who was first obsessed with our mother and then them when he realized he had killed her.”

“That’s so terrible.” Beau’s entire mood shifted.

“I didn’t tell you that to upset you. I only wished to reassure you that nothing happened between me and any of the omegas I was trusted to watch after.” That was why I had been entrusted to their care. Because the council knew I wouldn’t try anything with any of them. Not that the enforcers would. That’s why they had passed through the extensive screening process the council had for their elite.

“I understand that, but I still feel terrible about your parents. Mine were from two different villages and not the one we lived in. Neither Evan nor I even know who their families are or if we have any other family still. Well, other than each other.”

I couldn’t understand how two people could do that. Then again, I knew nothing of their family dynamics. Perhaps their families weren’t nice. It happened more often than one would think.

“You and Evan have family here now. And it’s a bit bigger than you would think because although I’m technically not related to Alexander and Raiden, they joined the family through Phineas. And Alexander has a cousin who basically raised him from a teenager and up. So add in Everett and Jennings and their kids, and then throw in Jennings’s brother, who is one of Alpha Maynard’s many, many children, and it’s a whole lot, and you just never know who all will be at family functions.” Beau’s widening eyes had me smiling. I nodded at him. “Yeah, it can be a lot. But they’re great, and for the most part, it’s just my brothers and their mates. Sometimes Raiden and Alexander are at family dinners with their little one, but not always.”

“That’s...I guess I can’t say it’s too much because all of the fae enforcers kind of banded together, and it’s not unusual for them to have pizza nights where they spend

time yelling at the television while they're playing some silly game on the console." Beau rolled his eyes. "I get it; they have their thing, and I have mine. There's this television series that is probably too sappy for them, so I watch it when they're all at work. Otherwise, I've not had much to do while they all got to go to work every day. There's only so much walking around the council building, the store, and bakery before you become bored."

That I understood and could relate to completely. I reached for Beau's towel and started rubbing it on his shoulders and then down his arms.

"Your stomach has growled twice more now. I should get you dry and fed. Are you still up for spaghetti? If not, we can run into town and have a meal, but it will take longer."

Beau smirked. "If you want spaghetti, we'll have spaghetti. But you have to remember that your mate is fae. I have magic, Roman. If you want a steak dinner, which I've seen so many shifters eat more often than not, then I'll magick you a steak dinner."

That was...something I hadn't thought about before. "Although that sounds wonderful, I would very much like to cook for you. Unless, of course, you don't actually wish to have spaghetti. I will try to make more elaborate meals in the future. I didn't allow myself enough time this evening."

Beau shook his head. "Spaghetti is fine. Steak is good as well. Or fried chicken?" Beau's eyes widened. "There's this place in Timber Valley that the guys go to, and sometimes I get to tag along, and it has the best fried chicken. We have chickens in our realm, and we've been known to bread and fry the parts. But it's different."

I chuckled. I knew the place he was talking about. I finished drying Beau and wrapped the towel around him. "You know you can have fried chicken anytime you

wish, right? You just offered to use magic to cook me a steak. Why can't you get your chicken?"

Beau seemed confused. "I guess I'd not thought about that. I usually just cook for me and Evan since he's working. Or he'll bring me supper home if he's eating at the council with the others."

I got it. Evan was an enforcer, and Beau wasn't. But it seemed like Beau hadn't had the best time of things here so far.

"We'll have whatever it is that you desire," I told him. After all, my most pressing need at the moment was to feed my mate. "I don't have any clothing here that will fit you, but if you would like a clean set of clothes, I have some sweatpants that have a drawstring in the waist." The thought of Beau in my clothes made my tiger happy. I think it was simply a mate thing because more than once, I'd seen Phineas wearing a shirt that was certainly not his but Ramsey's.

"I can clean my clothes," Beau said. "Or even better, I can use magic and get some of my things from Lukan's." Beau glanced away before meeting my gaze. When he did, his cheeks were deep red. "That is, if you wanted me to stay? I had assumed, but maybe I shouldn't have."

I reached for my mate, and when he took the few steps that separated us, I quickly wrapped him into my embrace. "I will always want you with me. We're mated, and even if we weren't, I would still welcome you to stay here with me. This is our home. It was gifted to us for as long as we wish to stay here. When and if the time comes and we wish to move elsewhere, we can. But yes, I absolutely do want you here with me. Always."

Beau smiled up at me, and I couldn't help myself. I needed to kiss him. I kept it quick and gentle, though, because I needed to feed my mate more. It had been a long day

for him already, and then we'd expended a bit of energy. If the night went how I anticipated, we'd be getting plenty of exercise, and that required food. I smiled down at Beau as I stepped away.

"You really want me here?"

I sighed. "We'll talk more during our meal, but yes. Why wouldn't I? You're my mate. I've claimed you. That's how mates work. Do mates not live together in your realm?"

"Yes, but...I'm not sure why I'm being like this. I guess because things are different here than they are in our realm."

"Do you not live in single enforcer housing with your brother? And are there not mated enforcer houses not far from the council building?"

The O that formed on Beau's mouth was adorable and had my mind going places it didn't need to be going at the moment.

"Exactly. Now, let's eat. There's a whole lot to discuss over the next few hours. I'm not sure how quickly fae go into heat, or is it that you have a fertile period? Either way, we need to discuss certain things before that happens." I was no expert on things, but from past experiences, I fully expected Beau to get thrown into heat or whatever sometime in the next day or two at the most. It was going to be interesting because I absolutely was not prepared to take care of my new mate during a heat just yet. There would be a quick trip to the store for supplies a little later, but first, other things needed to be discussed.

### Chapter 14

#### Beau

I felt absolutely...terrible. I tried to think back to what we ate that would make me feel like I'd gone several rounds with the enforcers when they were training in their self-defense classes. Would food do that? Why did every inch of my body hurt? I tried to roll over, but there was a massive wall of warmth beside me, and it felt like there was a heavy weight across my side and wrapped around my stomach. Roman. I tried to smile, but I just didn't have the energy to. How was that even possible?

It didn't matter that Roman's arm was holding me prisoner—I needed to pee. I tried to roll over again, hoping to be able to move, but the man's arm was locked into place. That wasn't good.

"Roman?" I said, my voice not sounding like my own. That didn't matter, though, because Roman instantly sat up.

"What?" he asked. "Beau? You're awake." Roman was suddenly hovering over me, looking quite disheveled and a bit panicked? Did he always look like that after a night's sleep?

"Yes, but I feel terrible, and I really need to pee," I told him, my voice still incredibly scratchy and not my own. I tried to move again, but it was really no use: I was too weak. "Help? Please? What's wrong with me?"

Roman's eyes widened seconds before he disappeared. He somehow jumped up and

was standing beside me in seconds. I didn't even have the chance to protest, not that I would have, when he slid his arms under my back and legs and effortlessly scooped me up into his arms. We were in the bathroom shortly after, where Roman carefully set me on the toilet. That was something I was incredibly thankful for. I wasn't sure I would be able to stand. I didn't need to, though, because my mate was amazing, and he somehow already knew that.

"Why does my voice sound funny? And why do I feel like I've been pummeled? Not that I've ever been hit because I haven't. But I think this is exactly what I would feel like if I had." Roman knelt in front of me, and I tried to notice things about him. He looked...unkept. "What happened? Why do you look like you have seen better days?" Immediately, I realized what I'd said and winced. "Sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me. I think you're sexy all the time, but you look different."

Roman chuckled. "You honestly don't remember anything about the last week?"

I tried to think about the last week. "It was a lot of trial and error. I spent a lot of time thinking about the menu at the bakery. I tried a lot of recipes, but some didn't work out because they needed things from my realm. Did you know your apples here are different than ours?"

Roman smiled. "Beau, sweetness. You've been in heat for the past seven days," Roman told me. "You and I claimed each other last Sunday. We've been mated a week and a day now. Your voice probably sounds scratchy because you need to drink something. That and you've done a whole lot of moaning and screaming over the past several days."

My eyes widened. I'd done what? "I'm sorry. Did you say we've been mated for a week?"

Roman nodded before he stood up. He crossed the room to the tub and turned on the

water. “Do you remember anything about the evening that we claimed one another?” he asked as he bent down and turned on the water for the tub.

I thought about his question and nodded but realized that with his back to me, he couldn’t see. “Yes,” I whispered. “We went downstairs after our shower and had dinner. Then we went to the couch and were talking about babies and how we both wanted them. That...we then...” I remember sitting on Roman’s lap on the couch, my back to his front, and it had been incredible. It was the perfect position because when his knot expanded inside me, he was able to move us to our sides. We drifted off to sleep, and Roman had to have taken us upstairs at some point after that. But that was all that I remembered.

I looked up at Roman as he came back to me. When he knelt down again, I became concerned about the look on his face. “That is all that you remember?”

I shrugged. “I’m sorry, but yes.”

Roman nodded slowly before he stood. “Are you finished?”

I wondered if he was irritated with me. “I am. Are you mad?”

“Not at all. I’m a bit concerned, but I’ll not worry about it too much.” Roman bent down and scooped me up once again as if I didn’t weigh anything. I guess compared to him, I didn’t. And he was an alpha and quite a bit stronger than I was. He carried me across the bathroom and placed me in the tub. He held on to me as I sat down, and I couldn’t keep my disappointment off my face when he obviously wasn’t going to be joining me. “Do not give me that look,” Roman said.

“What look?”

“The sad look. I very much plan on joining you in the tub. But at the moment, I’m

going to run downstairs and get something for you to drink. And probably a small snack. You need to recover from the past week, and getting something more than a few bites of fruit and energy drinks in you will be a good start.”

I nodded. He wasn’t wrong. I wasn’t sure what happened though. I’d had fertile periods before, but they had never been so intense that I couldn’t remember a thing, nor had they lasted more than a couple of days.

“I would love some water, if you don’t mind,” I told Roman.

“I’ll bring water. But I’m going to bring you some juice as well. Is there anything specific that you would like?” I shook my head. I wasn’t overly picky. But I was trying to figure out what happened. “All right. I’ll be back in just a few minutes. If the water fills before I get back, are you all right to turn it off?”

I nodded. He picked up a blue bottle, opened it, and poured it into the water. Immediately, the tub became fragrant, but I couldn’t tell you what the scent was. Roman kissed the top of my head, then stood and left, leaving me with my wandering thoughts. What had happened? It was apparent that I’d had a fertile period. The discomfort I was feeling was obviously because I’d spent my fertile period with an alpha. It had been intense, but I didn’t remember anything about it, and that confused me more than anything.

I looked around the bathroom and noticed small things, items that hadn’t been here before. Thinking back to the last time I remembered being in here, it looked as if Roman had just moved in. That was because he had. He’d told me that he’d just been offered this house that very day. He’d unpacked a few things, but all of the bottles and soaps around the edge of the tub hadn’t been here when we claimed each other. Had he added them while I was having my fertile period? He must have. Where else would they have come from?



I was quite lost in my own thoughts, and it wasn't until I heard Roman coming back into the bathroom that I realized that the water level was quite high. I reached over and turned the faucet off, wondering if I should drain some of the water. Probably since Roman had said he intended to join me. I wasn't sure about using magic, so I pushed the stopper and immediately was met with the gurgling sound of the water draining out of the tub.

"Is something wrong?" Roman asked as he came back into the bathroom.

"I don't know. Probably."

Immediately, Roman seemed to be on alert and rushed over to the tub. He placed a tray on the end where there was a shelf area and reached for me. "What's wrong? What do I need to do to help? Should I call a doctor?"

I felt terrible, not only physically but also for worrying Roman like I had. "It's not that. But maybe we should call a doctor. I'm not sure though." I sighed. "I was so lost in my thoughts, trying to remember anything, and I let the water get too full."

Roman visibly relaxed. "If that's the extent of the issue that is most pressing, that's an easy enough fix, and I hear that you're already working on it." Roman moved me back to where I was leaning against the end of the tub before he stepped in and slowly sat down. The water level didn't overflow, but it was probably higher than we needed. Roman reached for a glass, holding it out to me. "Here's some water. But I brought some juice as well. We have apple and orange juice. You said you liked apples, so that's what I brought. There's toast as well, but you said your throat feels scratchy. If the fluids don't help with that, there's fruit and yogurt here for you. Both should be easier to swallow."

I could only stare at Roman, who was looking at me with concern. "Thank you," I managed to whisper to him before taking the glass. I realized it was actually plastic

but looked like glass. Probably best for in the tub. Roman reached over and closed the drain while I took my first sip. It was cool and felt amazing on my tongue, and even better as I swallowed it down. I took several more sips, and in no time, it was gone. I handed it back to Roman, who was smiling at me.

“Want to try some yogurt? You really liked it over the past week,” Roman asked as he held out a bowl with a spoon in it.

“I do like yogurt.” I especially liked the peach flavor, but I wasn’t going to complain about anything at the moment.

Roman nodded, then held out the spoon. When I noticed the peach color, I was hopeful. When the first spoonful hit my tongue, I moaned around the peachiness of it. How did he know? It only took me a moment to realize that we were mated and we had a bond. Roman was able to access my thoughts, and most likely, he’d peeked in and searched in order to find out what I liked and didn’t. But I remembered that when we were having our meal that night, steak and spaghetti for Roman and just spaghetti for me, there wasn’t a whole lot in the refrigerator. I definitely didn’t remember seeing any yogurt. Or juice.

“Should I ask where the yogurt and juice came from? I don’t remember it being there before.”

“You can certainly ask.” Roman held out another spoonful of yogurt, and I was thankful that he was willing to feed me. I was starting to feel a bit more energized, but I still felt like my entire body weighed a ton. “I woke up on the couch with you that first night, and at first, I didn’t know what had woken me. Then you moaned. You were burning up, and it didn’t take a whole lot to figure out what was happening. I sent off a text to my brother-in-law Knox. He lives down here off of the mountain with Philip and their twins. Almost immediately, he replied and let me know he would bring supplies in the morning once the store opened.”

I nodded slowly. That was so kind of him. I wasn't sure if I'd met Knox or not. There had been a whole lot of people in the past days, but I had no doubt that I would be meeting him soon enough.

"The yogurt is good," I said.

"Did you want more?"

"In a bit." I sighed as I leaned back and closed my eyes. "I'm not sure what happened." I took a moment to gather my thoughts, but it was no use. There was simply nothing there. I opened my eyes and looked directly at Roman. "I've never had a fertile period that lasted more than three days, and I have always remembered them. The fact that this one was like it was, I'm concerned."

Roman nodded slowly. "I'll call Dr. King later on once we get you cleaned up and situated somewhere. It's most likely that you're feeling as you are because of the intensity of the past week."

"Do you think that's necessary?" I asked. I didn't want to put the doctor out just because I felt like I'd been run over by a very large truck.

"Dr. King works for the council. He's the doctor who runs the omega clinic. Unless you want to see Alexander for medical care, which is actually a possibility if that's what you want, then I should call the doctor to have him give you a checkup. Dr. King is a warlock. Alexander is a wolf shifter, and although he doesn't work full-time while Rowan is so young, he does still work every so often."

I had seen Dr. King around a time or two. He'd been coming out of the clinic that was behind the council building. I was sure I'd met Alexander, but again, there were so many new names and faces, and right now, my brain seemed to be mush.

“I honestly don’t have a preference for who I see.” I sighed and looked down at the water. “I spent a fertile period with my mate, so I have a feeling that I’m going to be needing the services of a doctor for other reasons.”

Roman touched my chin. “If you’re pregnant or not remains to be revealed. But it’s the fact that you cannot remember anything from the past week, and you have stated that your fertile periods only lasted a few days at most, that has me concerned.”

I nodded. “I understand.” I thought about my body, and despite my efforts to sense a little one growing inside me, I couldn’t. “I can’t sense a baby. Maybe it’s too soon? Or maybe I didn’t catch.”

“That’s why the call to Dr. King is important.” I nodded in agreement. “Good. For now though, would you eat a bit more? Or at least drink the juice? Water is good for you too, but it doesn’t provide any sort of calories or energy.”

I smiled at Roman. “I’d very much like the yogurt. I think I can hold it now though. That way, you can eat too.” I glanced at the tray. “You did bring enough for you as well, right? Or at least something to get you started?”

“I’ll eat the toast if you’re not going to.”

I nodded. “And the fruit? Tiger shifters eat fruit, right?”

Roman chuckled. “Yes. I’m fond of salads on occasion as well. Are they the first thing I go for when at a large gathering like the council’s barbecue? No. But I do eat them. I can eat the fruit as well if it makes you happy.”

I smiled while nodding. Roman handed me the yogurt, and while I slowly ate it, he managed to eat the toast and fruit and drank something that I had to assume was coffee. I was a tea drinker, but Evan had fully embraced coffee since coming here,

and although it didn't bother me, it just wasn't nearly as enjoyable to me.

Once I'd finished my yogurt, Roman handed me the cup of apple juice, and after I managed to get half of it down, I was honestly starting to feel better. Still weak, but with Roman's help, we managed to get to the shower, where he gently cleaned me from head to toe, then himself while I sat on the bench. I'd grown up with Evan, who was an alpha, but he was my brother, and obviously the intimacy between me and Roman and the way he was caring for me was something I would never have expected from my brother. But in those moments, I completely lost my heart to the tiger shifter that had been gifted to me as my mate.

"Are you up for something more to eat?" Roman asked after he'd gotten us dressed and he'd situated me on the couch.

I nodded. "Anything not crunchy. My throat is still a little sore, and I'm not sure why."

When Roman's cheeks turned pink, I was surprised. "Yes, that." Roman sat beside me and took my hands. He leaned in and kissed me on the forehead before he sat up and took a deep breath. "So I'll share a memory with you," Roman said before he did just that.

I saw myself moaning and writhing on the bed. Roman had just come back into the room, and when he set something down on the bedside table, I reached for him and sucked his cock into my mouth. I watched, from Roman's point of view, as I sucked his cock down to the base, over and over. Roman moaned, and it seemed as if he tried to pull away, but it was no use: I was an obviously determined omega who wanted to suck his alpha's cock.

I watched for several minutes while Roman's cock moved in and out of my mouth, going deep into my throat. Roman managed to pull out enough that his knot hadn't

expanded inside my mouth, and we both moaned while he filled my mouth with his cum, and my overly stimulated and fertile-period-enthralled body came all over myself, completely untouched.

“Oh,” I said when the memory ended.

“I did try to stop you, but you were determined. And that wasn’t the first time.”

I grinned at Roman. I wasn’t sure how it was even possible after everything I’d been through recently, but I was half-turned-on. I glanced down at Roman’s pants, and my smile grew. He was too.

“Can I do that again? Later? I’d very much like to give it a try while I can remember everything. You seemed to enjoy it during the memory.”

Roman cleared his throat. “I would very much like that. But only if your throat is feeling better. I did enjoy it. But despite that, it’s not worth hurting you. Only if your energy has returned and your throat is completely healed.”

I reached for Roman, touching his upper thigh. I wasn’t quite brave enough to go further, at least not yet, but it was enough for me for now. My hand there had an effect on my mate, and that’s all I really needed to feel reassured. “I would very much like to bring you pleasure like that again, Roman,” I told him. I moved and climbed onto his lap, straddling his legs with my hands on his shoulders. I felt so brave as I leaned in and kissed his lips. Both of us tasted of the minty toothpaste we’d used before coming downstairs, and I didn’t even want to think of how horrid my breath had been before. After I played with Roman’s tongue with mine a few times, I pulled away, smiling at the look I’d put on the sexy alpha’s face.

Roman blinked a few times before he smiled at me. “You have brought me so much pleasure already. But I stand by my words from just moments ago. I will gladly let

you suck on me whenever you wish, but only as long as it doesn't hurt you. I'm not nearly as large as other alphas in the dick department, but I'm big enough."

I smirked. "I don't think I complained about your size." I pushed my lower body into Roman's and marveled at the hardness that matched mine. How was that possible? I had just had a fertile period, and in all honesty, I was tired and a little hungry. Yet my body was most definitely ready to go another round with my mate. How? "Roman?" I said as I rolled my hips into his again.

He grabbed my hips, holding me tightly to him. "Later," he whispered. "If you need release, I'll quite happily suck you off, but right now, I don't want to do more. I want you to recover a bit more first."

I thought about it for a moment before I whimpered. "Please?"

Roman groaned. "You do that so well," he said. I didn't know what he meant, but I quickly found myself on my back on the couch, and the front of the sweatpants I'd been wearing were pulled down. Roman sucked my cock down to the base, and with a free hand, he gently rolled my balls in his hand.

I moaned as he expertly sucked and played with my balls, and then a finger applied a bit of gentle pressure just behind them. It took less than a minute for my balls to tingle, and then I shouted as I filled Roman's mouth with cum. He moaned, sucked a bit harder, but it was enough to cause another wave of pleasure to go through me, and I continued to come into my alpha's mouth.

Without any prompting, Roman pulled off before it became too intense, and I lay on the couch, completely blissed-out. The only thing that would make the moment completely perfect to me would be for him to come in my mouth in return. Roman groaned, and seconds later, he was off the couch but then was kneeling next to it. He pulled the front of his own sweat down, and out fell his engorged cock.

“Just the head. If you try to go deeper, I’ll stop, and you won’t get your perfect moment.”

I gasped. How? Then it hit me: I’d projected those thoughts to him. I turned my head and quickly opened my mouth, accepting the head of Roman’s cock into my mouth. It was hot and tasted amazing with the precum smeared all over it. I moaned around it, and when I opened my eyes, Roman’s hand moved up and down the length. That was one of the sexiest things I’d ever seen, and wanting to help, I placed my hand on top of Roman’s. He moved his, placing his on top of mine, and applied a gentle amount of pressure.

Roman’s breathing became ragged, and his noises went from gasps to quiet moans and then a final louder one right before he grunted. The head of his cock swelled while I felt the thickening at the base, and when I gave it a gentle squeeze, Roman groaned loudly seconds before he filled my mouth with hot cum. I moaned around the head, swallowing as quickly as I could, but it was no use. About half spilled out of my mouth, but I honestly didn’t care. This was by far one of the hottest things I’d ever experienced.

I squeezed Roman’s knot again, getting rewarded with another spurt of his release before he moved his hips back and pulled my new favorite treat from my mouth. I looked up at Roman. He looked how I was sure I did, and I could only smile at him. I was about to thank my mate for giving me the perfect moment, but he interrupted my thoughts.

“Fuck,” Roman said seconds before he leaned down and covered my mouth with his. His tongue pushed in, and we both moaned at the same time. Yep, by far the hottest experience of my life. I’d been too nervous when we were claiming one another, but I was more than ready to do that again. Maybe later. Right now, I was busy trying to keep up with Roman’s demanding tongue.



### Chapter 15

#### Roman

I took full responsibility for the discomfort that Beau was currently experiencing. We had been mated for three weeks now, and although we seemed to have settled into life together without too much issue, there was a bit of a new situation: Beau was pregnant, and he had morning sickness. Only, it wasn't "morning" sickness. It was all-day sickness, and my precious little mate wasn't happy about that in the least.

"How can someone throw up so much? And why? Does this mean I'll get sick again next time we have a baby?"

I looked down at Beau with wide eyes. He looked so pale and tired. I felt terrible because I'd caused this. I was the alpha, and I'd knotted and impregnated him. "How can you even be thinking about having more babies? Why would you? You're so incredibly sick." I was becoming worried, actually.

I'd called Dr. King right after we'd mated, and he'd come out the day after and was able to relieve any concerns we had at that moment about Beau not being able to remember anything with regards to his fertile period. Some omegas were like that; it just depended. And it would be possible that going forward, Beau would remember everything. That was a bit of a relief for me, but I still felt terrible about how everything had happened for my mate.

Dr. King also was able to confirm at that point that Beau was carrying our first child. Just one. We were going to be welcoming a new addition to our family in early fall.

That was how I knew that Beau was experiencing pregnancy sickness. I had always known that it didn't necessarily keep to being just morning sickness but tended to be more prevalent in the morning hours. That much was true for Beau as well. If he didn't get a snack first thing upon waking, he would be sick. Sadly, it seemed to be the case throughout the day as well.

"What can I get for you?" I asked as I ran my fingers through Beau's hair. He was currently lying on the couch after his most recent trip to the bathroom. "Maybe a trip to the doctor for tea? The twins drank a tea when they were pregnant."

Beau nodded seconds before he tried to sit up. I wasn't sure if he simply wanted up or he needed up, but I helped him upright and sat there waiting. I was prepared to rush him to the bathroom again if needed, but he seemed content to simply sit there.

"When do we get the tea? We had a tea in our realm for all things. The one for pregnancy sickness would be wonderful right about now."

My eyebrows rose. "As far as I know, it is the tea from your realm. It's been brought here for some time now, but I do not know all of the specifics. I know that between the council and the fates, a deal has been arranged, and the tea, your tea, has been brought to our world in order to help the pregnant omegas. You've been ill for several days now, and I hate seeing you like this."

Beau offered a tired smile. That was another thing. His energy never seemed to return after his fertile period. Was that always going to be the case? I remembered my brothers while they were pregnant, and although both had their energy zapped from them for different reasons, they seemed to have bounced back a little quicker than my own mate had.

"Our tea would be lovely. How and where do we get it? You mentioned the council and the doctor?"

I nodded. “Let me call Dr. King’s office and see if he’s available. If not, I can reach out to possibly Alexander. He might have some since he works in the clinic in Timber Valley once or twice a week. Or maybe Knox has some left over from when Philip was pregnant with their twins.”

I leaned in and kissed Beau’s cheek quickly before I stood and went to locate my phone. I was fairly certain that I’d left it in the kitchen when I had been getting Beau some water, but my thoughts had been more focused on my mate than my phone.

It was easy enough to find: it was beside the refrigerator. I rolled my eyes at myself because I should have put it in my pocket, but for whatever reason, I’d set it down instead. No matter. The important thing was that I’d found it, and I could get in contact with someone about getting Beau tea.

I found the number to the clinic and hoped for the best when I touched the contact. It rang a few times before the call was answered.

“Dr. King’s office. This is Todd speaking. How may I help you today.”

I smiled. I’d met Todd when he’d first been rescued. He’d come quite a way since, but he still seemed a bit...lost at times. “Hi, Todd. This is Roman Nelson. I needed to see about getting some tea for my mate. He’s ill, and not just in the mornings.”

There was some noise that sounded like things being moved around, and then it sounded like the phone was actually dropped. I pulled the phone away from my ear at the noise, but when there was a muffled voice on the other end, I put it back up to my ear. There were more muffled sounds, and then a new voice came through the line.

“Roman? It’s Dr. King.”

My smile grew. “Hello, Dr. King. I didn’t think to ask you before when you checked

up on Beau, but we're in need of the tea that you have for the omegas. He's started getting sick several times a day, and he's mentioned his realm had a tea. I know it's the same tea, and I need to know what steps I have to take in order to get it for him."

Dr. King's chuckle came through the line. "I do apologize. I am not meaning to make light of Beau's condition. I did leave some tea samples when I was there to check up on him. Did you not find them in the packet?"

I moved away from where I was leaning against the counter beside the fridge. "Is it with the book?"

"Yes. Did you not read the book or look in the box that I left with it?"

I winced. "I did not, no. We've been a bit occupied, and Beau has just recently started to feel poorly."

"There are two samples of tea in the box. One will make him sleepy; the other will simply help with the pregnancy sickness. Not only will it calm his stomach, but it also seems to help with energy levels, although I am afraid that nothing is perfect, and it's likely he will still have lower energy levels during this first part of his pregnancy."

I found the book, and yes, there was a box that looked much like a lunch-type box beside it. Inside, I found two sections, both clearly labeled. "Do you think I should give him the tea that makes him sleep? He's already tired though, so I don't think he needs help with that."

"With Beau being fae, if the tea being from his realm, I would try the other tea first. The one that causes them to sleep is something that seems to help most with shifter omegas and carriers that have severe sickness. It might be that we discovered that Beau needs the other one, but for now, try the other."

I nodded. “I can do that.” I looked around and realized I didn’t have a kettle. “Hot water, a packet of tea, and do I need to add anything?”

“That is up to Beau. Ask him how he drinks his tea. Adding honey or sugar hasn’t seemed to alter the effectiveness of it, as far as we’ve been able to tell. I have time tomorrow afternoon, around one, to come down and see Beau. Does that work for you?”

“Yes. We have no plans. Especially not with him feeling like he does.”

“Sounds like a good plan. If the tea doesn’t help him, try the other one. It can take a few cups of it to fully take effect though.”

“I’ll make him a tea now,” I told the doctor. “Is there anything else I can do for him that will help him feel better?”

“If you’re not already, offer small snacks. Usually crackers, breads, things of that nature. One omega’s go-to meal for pregnancy sickness is oatmeal. It can sit incredibly heavy in the stomach though, which is not what we’re hoping for at the moment. It will be trial and error until Beau finds out what works for him.”

“Thank you, Dr. King. I really appreciate your help as well as your willingness to come to us tomorrow. I know it’s short notice.”

“It is all part of the job. I’ll see you tomorrow. Call back if Beau becomes worse despite the tea. He should feel at least somewhat better with either of them.”

“I’ll be sure to do that. Thank you again.”

The call ended, and I set my phone down beside the box. I didn’t have a tea kettle and would need to get one. What I did have was a coffee maker that could make hot

coffee in minutes. That would have to do for now. I grabbed a mug, placed one of the tea bags in the bottom of it, and placed it under the coffee maker. A few buttons later, the coffee maker started brewing hot water instead of coffee.

“Beau?” I called out as I walked to the back den.

“Yeah?”

“How do you take your tea?” I asked. He was leaning back on the couch, his eyes closed. “Dr. King actually left some here for you a couple of weeks ago when he was here. I just didn’t realize the book and box that he left on the end of the counter.”

“Just tea. Nothing else is needed in it. I like it warm, but not too hot.”

Well, shit. I rushed back to the kitchen, wondering if I was too late. The coffee maker was streaming out hot water, and there wasn’t much I could do. I let it finish, and once it had, I took the mug and carefully dumped out about half of the water. I’d let that steep for a few minutes before I added some cold water. That would make it warm, right?

I had no clue, but I would figure it out. For now, the hope was to get something going that would calm Beau’s stomach.

“Sweetness? Did you wish to try some crackers? Toast? Fruit?”

“Applesauce? Do we still have some of that? The kind with cinnamon in it?”

I smiled as I opened the fridge to check. It looked as if we had enough for two more servings, so I pulled it out to pour Beau a small bowl of it.

“We have some. Anything else? You sure you don’t want some crackers? Scones?”

There's a few of them left here on the counter."

"Just the applesauce, please."

The urge to argue was there, but I didn't. I wouldn't. Beau knew what was best for his stomach at the moment, and if he wanted only tea and applesauce, that was what I was going to get for him.

I grabbed a spoon, pushed the tea bag down a few times, and watched as the water darkened. I had never been a tea drinker, and I didn't really know the specifics of making a perfect cup of tea, but I was going to learn.

I dunked the tea bag a few more times, deemed it acceptable, and then pulled it out, dropping it in the sink for the time being. I added some water to the cup, stirred it, and hoped for the best. I'd ask Beau what his method was for making tea, but right now, I was doing my best to take care of my pregnant mate.

I grabbed the applesauce bowl and quickly made my way back to my mate. He was how I'd left him just moments ago, but his eyes opened, and he turned his head slightly my way as I approached. The tired smile spoke volumes.

"I'm so sorry, sweetness. I didn't know that Dr. King had left tea. I remember him talking about the book, but I had no idea he'd left a box with tea tins in it. This is supposed to be the tea from your realm. It's not the one that will make you sleepy though. If you need that, we'll make it later."

Beau held out his hands, and I carefully passed the mug to him. "I don't think I need something that will help me sleep. I seem to be doing enough of that on my own."

Beau carefully took a sip of the tea while I sat in front of him on the coffee table. He made a face, and I winced.

“Bad? I tried. I’m not a tea drinker, and I don’t have a kettle. I’ll put in an order for one though.”

“It’s a little cool.”

I made another face. “Sorry. I dumped out some of the hot water, and after it sat for a few minutes, I added cold water. I am sorry, Beau. I can go make you another cup if you’d like.”

“It’s fine. It could have steeped a bit longer, but maybe that was because you added too much cold water?” Beau took another sip, and when he made a face, I reached for the mug and took it from him. I placed it on the coffee table beside me and handed him the applesauce.

“Hold this,” I told him. He took the bowl, bringing it close to his chest. I stood and easily swept him up into my arms. “I’ll sit you on the kitchen island, and you can help me brew you the perfect cup of tea.”

“I’m sorry to be trouble.”

I looked at my mate and kissed his temple. “You will never be trouble. I just suck at making tea because it’s not my thing. I know how to make tea, but it’s not something I ever do, and I know little about how long, how hot, things of that nature. As you know, I drink scalding hot coffee.” Beau shook his head. When I carefully set him on the island, he crossed his legs and stared at me. He was at an almost perfect height now, and I took advantage and leaned in to give him another kiss. “Now, tell me how to make your tea.”

“Did you use your coffee maker?”

I nodded.



“That explains the lingering coffee flavor. How about you put a mug in the microwave. Just don’t tell anyone else that I’m having you heat my tea in the microwave.”

“I would never.”

I grabbed another mug, added water, and after placing it in the microwave for ninety seconds, I turned back to find Beau taking a spoonful of applesauce.

“You know, normally I’d just use magic, but it’s not really working at the moment.”

“Still?” I asked.

“Yeah. It’s a bit concerning, but I should have expected it could be a possibility.” Beau sighed. “I’ve already abandoned the bakery just days after opening it, and now if I can’t use my magic to make some of the goodies, I don’t see why the council would keep me at all.”

The microwave ding sidetracked me. I retrieved the mug, placed another tea bag in it, and placed it beside Beau. I then took the applesauce from him and placed it on the other side of him before I positioned my hands on either side of his legs and leaned in, kissing him once more.

“Explain to me why it is that you think the council will get rid of you? Master Edison already said that the bakery would be waiting for you if that was what you desired. Have you changed your mind about things?” If he had, that was fine with me.

“No. I still want to work at the bakery. I just...I can’t make all of the things I had on the menu without the use of magic. There were too many things. And I’ll have to go in at something like three in the morning to start everything.” Beau looked as if he were about to cry, so I pulled him into a hug and simply held him.

“If you have to have fewer items, then you do. The council will understand. And I might not be an amazing baker, but I’m here to help you in any way I can. I’m not doing anything until August or September, so until then, I’ll help in any way you need.” I held Beau for several minutes before he moved out of my embrace. I was going to question him until he swiped at his eyes.

“I can’t, Roman.”

My heart felt a sudden pang unlike I’d ever experienced before. “You can’t what?”

“Not tell you. You’re so amazing and wonderful and just...more than I think I deserve. I was supposed to be the person running the bakery, and then you showed up, and I chose you instead of the bakery, and it’s just like Evan warned. He said I would have to give everything up if I chose you, and I don’t care anymore. I want you.” Beau swiped at his eyes again before he glanced off to the side. “I want you, and this house, and our baby. More babies. I want all of that. I had thought that I wanted the bakery, but that was before you. Before I fell in love with you.”

The ache in my heart suddenly lifted. I pulled Beau close and just held him. “I love you too. I know it’s fast, and some will never be able to understand just how intense our feelings are or how quickly they develop, but they’re there, and they’re real,” I said as I held him. “I love you, Beau, and if you truly don’t wish to run the bakery, then you do not have to. But if you’re simply exhausted and overly worried right now, I understand, and we’ll figure it out.”

I kissed Beau, which only seemed to make him cry a bit harder. Not exactly how I envisioned our first declarations of love going, but then again, I’d never expected to be mated to a cute little fae either. Beau kissed me back before he pulled away. He smiled at me before he wiped his eyes and then his nose. I grabbed him a paper towel, and when he covered his face with it, I wrapped my arms around his waist and held him.

“We’ll figure it out. I promise. I’ve been through a whole lot in my lifetime, and this is no different. It’s simply an obstacle that we’ll tackle and come up with a plan to work through it.”

Beau blew his nose, then wrapped his arms around my chest and held on. “I’m so glad you love me too. I don’t know if I could handle you not with everything else that seems to be going on right now.”

My poor mate. He was obviously overwhelmed. But a whole lot had happened in just a few short weeks, and it was completely understandable. I kissed the top of his head once more before I moved to step back. Beau appeared a bit more relaxed but still as if he were ready to fall over if the wind blew him just right.

“Drink some tea, and hopefully, it’ll calm your stomach enough that you can relax. You’re overly tired,” I told him as I ran my fingers through his disheveled hair. Beau nodded before he picked up the mug. He pulled out the floating tea bag and placed it on the wadded paper towel. I took both and tossed them into the trash while Beau took a drink of tea. His moan told me that it was either exactly what he needed or infinitely better than what I’d made for him. Most likely both.

I had a few ideas where the bakery was concerned because I knew that deep down, Beau wanted to run the bakery. It was important to him to feel as if he were doing something. Once I got my mate settled, hopefully, I’d be able to make some calls and see if I could not only get my mate some reassurance but some help too.

### Chapter 16

#### Beau

I wasn't quite sure why I was so apprehensive, but I was. I shouldn't be: I knew how to run the bakery, and it was mine to do so. But I felt as if it wasn't really mine. Not anymore. I'd been away far longer than I had actually been in the bakery. But with Roman's support, I was up before the sun, and we were going up to Treasure Ridge.

We'd been mated for just over a month now, and although it had been the longest I'd ever gone without seeing my brother, I'd talked to him on the phone twice in the past week. But I think the prospect of Evan dropping by later was even more nerve-racking than the fact that I was going to try and use magic to make the goodies this morning.

My magic, come to find out after another appointment with Dr. King, would return to its normal wonderful self shortly after I had our little one. Until then, expect less-than-perfect magic. It was something that some fae experienced, but not all. I happened to be one of the lucky ones, apparently.

But all of that aside, I was trying to get motivated to go to work. I had more of my things, something that I was thankful for Lukan arranging for me. Evan...he wasn't exactly upset, but he wasn't thrilled for me. Roman kept telling me it would take time, but he would come around. I hoped so. He would then remind me that he was in Evan's position not long ago, and although he hadn't tried to forbid his brothers from claiming their mates, it did take him time to get used to them no longer being his responsibility. Evan was very much in a similar position. He'd raised me, had been

more than just my brother since I was fourteen.

“Are you ready?” Roman asked as he came into the bathroom and stood behind me. “You’re nervous, I understand, but they’re going to be thrilled to have you back.” Roman wrapped his arms around my shoulders and hugged me from behind. I placed my hands on his forearms and closed my eyes, just enjoying the embrace. That was something that I absolutely loved about my mate: he was very affectionate and open about showing it. He loved to touch me, even if it was just his hand resting on my shoulder or back while we were sitting at the table eating. I hoped he would be just as open with his affection now that we were going to start venturing out, but if he was more reserved, I would try to be understanding.

“I’m as ready as I’m going to be. Although, I will say that I’ve become a bit lazy this past month with not having to get up this early.” I stared at Roman in the mirror, his eyes hypnotizing me with their intensity.

“You’re going to be amazing. And I’ll be there helping all day. I have nothing else going on, so there is no reason for me to not be. Unless you would rather I go do something else. I’m not wanting you to feel as if I’m suffocating you.”

I shook my head. “I don’t feel that way. I think, at least at first, it will probably be best for both of us if you come with me. You only have another month until you have to go to your new job.”

Roman snorted. “Sweetness, it’s in the downstairs office. I only have to go onto campus twice a month for in-person office hours. It’s not going to be difficult or taxing. And it will be super helpful for us when the baby comes. He can stay here with me while you’re at work since my days will be less hectic.”

I grinned. That was all true. And I was happy for Roman. He’d applied to the larger state university and had quickly been hired. He was going to be teaching online only,

at least for this upcoming fall semester, and yes, he would have to go into the office twice a month, but that wasn't anything we couldn't handle. I would either not go into work those days, or we could put our little one in the childcare center behind the bakery. It was all going to work out. Now, I just needed to get my nerves under control.

"If you're still unsure about going back to work, we can let them know you're not ready just yet," Roman told me.

It would be so easy to say yes, but I wasn't going to do that. Konrad had been amazing and wonderful, but he wasn't my full-time employee. He was only temporary, and he was only there to help until I got things settled and into routine. And poor Sean. I'd hired him, and then I disappeared. Sure, he knew what happened and was a shifter himself, so he understood. But I felt as if I'd just abandoned him before he could even start. What kind of person did that make me?

"Your thoughts are wandering, and not in a good way," Roman said. I started back at him and sighed.

"You're right. They are. I'm ready to go to work. I wish I could just poof us there, but I don't trust my magic enough to even try."

Roman offered a smile. "I don't mind driving us to the cabin. There will be more 'traffic' going up to the mountaintop this time of the morning than I think you realize. There are several employees for the council that don't live on Treasure Ridge, and they have to get up there somehow. It's just what it is."

"But it's five in the morning. The council doesn't start this early."

Roman shook his head. "No, but the cafeteria staff have to prepare for breakfast, just as you would. Monroe will be at the store shortly because he has to accept the

delivery of things. That stuff has to be delivered somehow. The mountain is already busy with activity.”

I nodded slowly. I’d not realized that things were already happening. All this time, I was just happily sleeping my mornings away while others were already up and at it. “I’m ready.” I smiled before I turned in Roman’s embrace and hugged him back. “I’m not going to get any more ready than I already am, and I think if I keep delaying, it will only be more difficult to go back.”

“Most likely. If you’re sure you’re ready,” Roman said.

I nodded against his chest. This was one of my favorite places to be: snuggled against him. He smelled amazing, and I felt so safe in his arms. Roman kissed the top of my head before he rubbed up and down my back a few times, and then he dropped his arms. I looked up at him, and when he took a step away, I followed. We were going to do this. I was going back to the bakery, and I was going to do what I’d said I wanted. I was going to run the bakery despite being pregnant and not having full use of my magic. I didn’t know how we would have everything we needed, but I would figure something out. For the next couple of months, the menu would most likely need to be adjusted, but that wasn’t something that hadn’t already been done with me gone.

Never before would I have considered myself a “homebody,” but that’s exactly what I’d become in the past month. This was the first time Roman and I had left our house, and it felt odd. I wouldn’t say this had necessarily been the plan, but it was simply how things had worked out.

“Do you think that later I can meet your tiger?” I asked as Roman pulled out of the garage. He glanced over at me, his eyebrows high on his forehead. “We’re going to be up on Treasure Ridge, and it’s safe for you to shift up there. I know it is because I’ve seen dragons flying overhead.”

It took Roman only a few seconds before he started laughing. After he got himself under control, he offered me a smile. “You can absolutely meet my tiger. He very much wants to meet you, and although he’s been anxious about it, he’s been somewhat understanding about everything.” Roman slowed at the gate that was at the entrance to our neighborhood, and when it opened, he pulled through and then turned onto the empty road. “I apologize for not suggesting that we go to the mountain before now so you could meet him or even shifting in the house so you could. It wasn’t intentional.”

“We’ve been a bit busy,” I told him. The tea had been amazing, but I already knew it would be, and we’d gone back to doing exactly what newly mated couples did. And often. But we did manage to spend time out of the bedroom, and not always knotted together, learning even more about each other.

“True. But I should have offered, and I am sorry for not doing so. I would very much like for you to meet my tiger. We can also stop by and see your brother if you’d like. I know he’s been messaging you, and things seem to be doing better between the two of you.”

I smiled, although I wasn’t sure how well Roman could see it. True, he was a shifter, and he had better vision and hearing than a human, but I wasn’t sure just how much better. “I’m sure Evan will be by the bakery at some point today,” I said. “He’d mentioned that he would come by if I wanted and if he could get away.” I sighed. “I told him I’d love to see him, and I think that might be part of my nerves that are bothering me so much.”

Roman reached over and took my hand. He gave it a gentle squeeze—offering support. He didn’t release it though. Instead, he brought our joined hands to the middle console and rested them there. I smiled to myself as he drove us through the dark streets toward the cabin that served as the transport building at the base of the mountain.



It seemed as if in no time, we were there, and Roman pulled into a spot that wasn't far from the entrance we would use. It knew that the cabin belonged to Konrad's family and had been there for a very long time. They used to use it as a cover for getting supplies up to the mountain, and now the council used it to get people on and off the mountain.

"Are you ready?" Roman asked after he shut off the vehicle.

"As much as I'm going to be. I feel bad that I can't use my magic like I'm intended, and although I will be another pair of hands to help bake everything, I still feel as if I'm failing them."

Roman tugged on my hand that he was still holding, and when I leaned closer, he kissed my forehead. "I don't think you are giving yourself enough credit. Things changed. It happens. But I also think you are going to be surprised by the changes that have happened in the last month. Stay there," Roman said before I could get a word in. He let go of my hand and was out of the vehicle before I could even think. He had rounded the front and had my door open before I could even think to protest. I smiled at Roman as he helped me down out of the SUV.

Roman held my hand as we walked into the cabin. "Will you teach me to drive?" I asked as we entered the cabin. Too late, I realized there were actually several others in what I'd call the transport room. "Oh," I said to nobody in particular. "Hi," I said to the others. Roman chuckled.

"I'll absolutely teach you to drive," he told me as he placed a hand on my lower back and ushered me over to the rest of the group. "We can start whenever it is you feel as if you are up for it."

I looked up at Roman and gave him a smile. Instinctively, I moved a bit closer, not sure why though. I wasn't normally shy or hesitant, but I usually had magical abilities

and could easily defend myself.

“Do I need a permit?” I asked. “Maybe I should study?”

Roman, as well as several others, chuckled. “Well, the sheriff and the entire sheriff’s department are shifters or other paranormals. But if you want to get a permit, that’s not an issue for me. We’ll get you a book to study.”

I nodded, but what I was about to say in reply was interrupted by the appearance of a warlock. He smiled at us, and there was no hesitation from the others; they simply moved closer together. Roman did the same with us by guiding me along with him, and then we were suddenly in a different room. Without a word, people started to file out, Roman and I among the first to do so. It felt different being back up on the mountain after being away for so long. I hadn’t been here too long, but already, it had started to feel like home.

I noticed that one of the young men who was in the transport building with us was walking in the same direction. I thought that maybe he was going to wander over to the store or even back to the childcare center, but I was surprised when he walked right behind us to the bakery. I looked back at him when I typed in my code for the door. He just grinned, which I found a bit unnerving.

“Umm...I don’t know who he is,” I told Roman through our bond as I opened the door. I didn’t exactly feel unsafe, but I didn’t quite know what to make of everything.

I had just stepped through the front door and was greeted by the amazing scents of all the things and Konrad’s smiling face.

“Beau! I was expecting Tate.”

“I’m right here,” said the quiet voice behind us.

I looked back at the blond and offered a smile. I was going to introduce myself, but I suddenly found myself wrapped up in Konrad's comforting embrace. It truly had to be an omega thing.

"I'm so happy you're back," Konrad said. He gave me a squeeze and then let go, his hands resting on my upper arms. His smile was beaming, and immediately, I felt at ease.

"I'm glad to be back. I'm sorry things sort of happened in a hurry."

Konrad's smile grew. "They tend to do that when it comes to alphas and their unclaimed mates," Konrad said. He looked up at Roman and then pulled my mate into a quick hug. "I'm so happy for you, Roman. You deserve all of the happiness you can get." Konrad sighed, then looked over at the blond who had followed us in. "This is Tate," Konrad said. "He's from the pride down off of the mountain. There are three others here as well. You met Sean already, and I'm positive you've met another who's been hired to help run the place."

I was smiling at Tate when what Konrad said registered, and it took a moment for my brain to catch up. "What do you mean?" I asked.

Konrad glanced between me and Roman before his gaze landed on me. "Nobody has talked to you?"

I shook my head. "No. Talked to me about what? Roman and I haven't heard from anyone other than Evan and his family."

"Beau!"

My eyes widened as I heard a familiar voice I never thought to hear again. I looked in the direction of the kitchen as a very familiar person came into view.

“Lewis?”

He squealed as he came rushing toward me. That was quickly squashed when Roman growled and effectively put himself between me and my lifelong friend from my village.

“Whoa. All right. No hugs allowed for my bestie,” Lewis said. “Got it.”

I grabbed Roman’s waist and looked up at my mate as I moved around him. I wanted him to know that I wasn’t upset in any way.

“Roman, this is Lewis. We grew up together in our village in the fae realm. He used to work at the bakery with me.” I smiled at my mate before I let go of his waist and moved to give Lewis a quick hug. He latched onto me, and we did a little dance before he let me go.

“I can’t believe you’re mated! And pregnant!” Lewis hopped a little while clapping his hands. “I get to be an honorary uncle, right? You know I don’t have siblings.”

I shook my head. “I have so many questions. But you should meet Roman,” I said, reaching back for my mate.

Lewis nodded. “Yeah, I think we already did that. So...” Lewis paused and looked around the bakery. “I’m here to help. I’m going to run the bakery with you. Isn’t that going to be amazing? Think about all the times we used to talk about doing our own bakery someday.”

I nodded slowly. We had. But that was before. “I’m still trying to get over the fact that you’re here. How?” I looked to Konrad.

“Thomas and Canyon decided that Lewis should come here.” Konrad winked, and my

eyes widened because it didn't take but a moment for me to understand what that meant.

"Yeah, I'm excited to meet my mate too, but I'm not holding my breath. I don't know when it'll happen, nor do I care. I just want to bake all the things. And you're here! I get my bestie back!"

I nodded slowly, but what I was about to say was interrupted by Tate. "What did you need me to do, Konrad?"

"Oh," I said, feeling terrible that I'd not been more talkative with him. "I'm sorry, Tate. I didn't mean to be rude," I said as I held out my hand. "I'm Beau. I work here too."

Tate snorted and shook his head. "No, you and Lewis run the place." Tate glanced up at Roman before he took my outstretched hand. "It's nice to meet you. Konrad has told me a bit about you." Tate looked back to Roman. "Congratulations on both your mating and the little one. Do you know when you're due?"

"Dr. King said to expect the baby the first week of October," Roman said. He continued to stare at the other feline shifter. I glanced between the two, a sudden sense of dread overcoming me. Roman picked up on it immediately, and when he looked at me, he shook his head.

"Tate, could you start filling the trays for the displays? Lewis has been busy already, and although Sean is busy back there, it's more than he'll be able to get finished alone," Konrad said.

Tate nodded and then quickly left. I looked back at Lewis. "I'm happy you're here. I guess that fixes the fact that I can't use my magic. How long have you been here?" I asked.

Lewis wrapped his arm around mine and started to pull me to the back. I glanced at Roman before I let myself be pulled from my mate. Sean coming from the back room with a tray filled with donuts broke our momentum. He smiled, then looked up, and his smile grew. “Hey, Professor Nelson. I didn’t expect to see you here.”

I needed to sit down. It was entirely too early for all of this activity. I looked at Lewis with a pleading face. “Would you mind getting me a tea? Do you have tea?” I asked and then thought better of it. “Of course you do. I need a tea, Lewis.”

Lewis’s eyes widened before he nodded and then held out his hands. In them was a mug of exactly what I needed. I took the mug, and at the first sip, I sighed and closed my eyes while letting Lewis lead me over to a chair. I was thrilled my childhood friend was here. But what had all of that been between Tate and Roman?

“Roman? Please tell me you and Tate don’t have a history,” I said through our bond. I sat in the chair that Lewis directed me to. As I did, I met Roman’s intense gaze. He shook his head.

“I have never seen Tate before today. I don’t know what all of that is, but I promise you, I’ve never had any sort of history with him. You already knew I’d taught Sean last semester at the local college.”

I took another sip of tea and nodded. That was all I needed. When I opened my eyes again, Lewis was standing next to me, holding out a plate. On it was a pair of apple cookies, and I couldn’t help but squeak in excitement. I looked up at my friend, who smiled down at me.

“You know...for the baby.”

I rolled my eyes but took the cookies. There was no way I was going to say no to them. Roman was suddenly in front of me, kneeling down so we were on the same

level. “Are you all right?”

I took a deep breath. “Yeah. It’s...a lot. And it’s been an odd morning.”

“I’m sorry, Beau. I thought someone from the council had reached out to you,” Konrad said. “I’m going to find out what happened.”

I looked up at the dragon omega and shook my head. “There’s no need. It’s all fine. I just...Lewis is the biggest surprise. I’m doing better, but I’m still a bit off because of the pregnancy.”

Konrad stared at me a moment before nodding. “If you need anything, just let me know. I’m happy you’re back,” he told me before he walked away. Seconds later, he was back, but he simply grabbed Lewis and pulled him to the back kitchen with him—leaving me alone with Roman.

“Are you certain you’re all right? We can go home if you aren’t ready to be back.”

I smiled at Roman. I would have cupped his face if I could, but one hand held my tea and the other the plate with the cookies. “I’m good. It was just a lot, and...” I glanced at the door. “I don’t know. The look Tate gave you threw me off. I believe you though.”

“I can find out what’s up with that. He’s a lion shifter, an omega, and it’s possible his feline was simply responding to mine since I growled at Lewis. I should probably apologize to your friend.”

I snorted. “Naw. No need. He’s like that though, so you’ll have to get used to him being bubbly.” I leaned in and kissed Roman because why not? He was my mate, and I could do that.

“If you say so. But at any time, if you need to leave, let me know, and we’ll go home.”

I nodded. I could do that. But I had a feeling that with Lewis here—something I honestly wasn’t upset about even a little—I wasn’t going to have a whole lot to do. I held my tea out to Roman, who took it, freeing up my hand so I could eat my cookies. It had been a while since I’d had any, and I was definitely looking forward to eating the treats.



### Chapter 17

#### Roman

“Y ou’re nervous.”

I looked over at Calum and nodded. “A little. I want to make a good impression, and honestly, my other side is a bit on edge since Beau is so far away from us,” I said quietly as we walked into the Humanities and Sciences building. He was the one who had put in the recommendation for me, something I was incredibly grateful for since he honestly hadn’t known me until Beau and I moved in next door to him and his own fae mate, Asher. Even then, he still didn’t know me. He was going on what Master Edison had told him, I was certain.

“It’ll be fine. And we only need to be here for the first-of-the-semester paperwork. It’ll be an hour tops, and then we’ll be on our way back to our mates,” Calum said.

I knew he wasn’t wrong. Beau and I had our bond, which was a huge relief because if I was being honest, I wouldn’t have been able to be here with Beau pregnant if we hadn’t been able to make that connection. Beau was perfectly safe and surrounded by friends at the bakery, and he was on Treasure Ridge. If the paranormal council wasn’t safe, I didn’t know where was.

“Do you like teaching here?” I asked.

“It’s different. I miss all of the digs I used to go on, but Asher and Isla are more than worth setting down roots. That and the fact that my parents and one of my brothers

are here, it makes it even more worth it.”

I stopped and stared at the fox alpha. “I probably should have been more neighborly and at least visited once to thank you for the recommendation. But I apparently am terrible at that. But I have to ask, who is your brother?” I was trying to think of all of the fox shifters that were around, and I couldn’t think of any that were old enough to be Calum’s sibling.

Calum offered a smile. “Benjamin. He works for the council as?—”

“An enforcer,” I said, interrupting. “Sorry. I feel like an ass because I never made the connection. That means your father is Rainier and...oh, that’s how.”

Calum laughed. “I am really surprised since both of your brothers are not tigers.”

I winced. “True. I have spent so much time stuck in such a small circle that I didn’t think outside of the fact that you are a fox and I was trying to think of other fox shifters,” I whispered. We were basically alone in the hallway, but I was still being cautious.

“I’m the only one that took after our omega dad. Pierre still lives in Europe, and I’m not sure we’ll ever get him out of there. Or out enough to meet his perfect someone.” Calum patted me on the shoulder, and I started walking with him again. “This floor is all of the offices. All of the classrooms are on the second floor.”

I looked back down the hallway and realized there were a lot of offices. “Are all of these offices for instructors? Or are there general admin offices as well?”

“Both,” Calum said. He gestured for me to go to the left, and it was obvious that the room he was directing us to was an administration office. The double windows on either side of the door gave everyone a clear view of what looked to be an office at a

high school. Calum opened the door, allowing me to enter first. I did, and it seemed as if all eyes were suddenly on me. Calum came in behind me and tilted his head toward the counter.

As we approached, an older woman, most likely in her sixties, if I were to guess, approached from the other side. “I know who you are, Dr. Ward, but I’m not sure about your companion here.”

“Gladys, it’s so good to see you again,” Calum said.

“Of course it is. But don’t think I’m going to let you leave without you showing me a picture of your precious baby girl.” Gladys smiled. “How are she and Asher doing?”

“Good. She’s keeping Asher busy, but that’s expected,” Calum said as he pulled out his phone. He opened up his photos app, and after he found a specific image, he turned it to show Gladys.

“Oh, look at her. She’s growing so fast.”

Calum smiled. He was an obviously proud alpha father, but Gladys wouldn’t know that. “She is. Asher has already started hinting at the fact he’d like to look into adopting another.”

I had to roll my lips inward a bit to keep from smiling at the lie that I knew Calum had just given. There would be no need for them to adopt as Asher would be able to give Calum babies just as Beau would me.

“Well, you best work on that and keep your hubby happy,” Gladys said. “Now, tell me who you have with you so I don’t have to make two trips. You know how much these old bones can ache at times.” Gladys looked over at me, then back at Calum. “That is, unless the two of you don’t know each other.”

Calum smiled. “We do, actually. This is Roman Nelson. He’s one of the new history professors.”

“Ah. Yes, we have all been curious about him.” Gladys stared at me for a long moment before she narrowed her eyes. “You look too young to have your PhD.” Gladys shook her head before pointing at Calum. “Then again, so does he. I don’t suppose either of you are willing to share your beauty secrets.”

“Umm...” I looked to Calum for guidance. I had no idea what to make of Gladys. She seemed nice enough, but perhaps a bit...nosey?

A throat clearing had Gladys rolling her eyes. “I’ll get your packets,” she said before she looked directly at me. “I have a few extra papers for you to sign,” she said before she turned and walked to the other side of the room. I glanced at Calum, who looked like he was trying not to laugh. I had no doubt he would fill me in once we were back in the hallway, but any chance of discussing anything in here went out the window at the appearance of a man who looked to be about Gladys’s age.

“Director May,” Calum said, immediately cluing me in as to who was standing in front of us. I tried to stand up a bit taller, but I was already standing at my full height.

“Dr. Ward, welcome back,” Director May said. He then focused on me. “It’s good to have you as a new addition, Dr. Nelson.” He paused for a moment before he huffed a bit and then nodded. “Montana is quite a distance from Georgia.”

I nodded. “It is indeed. Montana just happens to be where my brothers and I settled.”

Director May stared at me a moment before he nodded. “Well, welcome. We’re happy to have the position filled after it being empty for so long.”

“I’m happy that Calum suggested it.”

“Here you are,” Gladys said as she returned. She handed a large envelope to Calum, who took it and held it up in thanks.

“You said I needed to sign some papers?”

“Yes. There were a few that seemed to have been overlooked when you did your onboarding,” Gladys said.

I nodded. I wasn’t sure what all had been missed, but if there was more paperwork to be signed, then I’d practice my signature.

“Here,” Gladys said as she pulled out a page that had a bright pink tab stuck to the side of it. “And this one.” She pulled out more papers and finally found what she was looking for. “Here’s the third,” she told me as she pulled out a yellow form. “You didn’t fill out your spouse’s information for the medical insurance or the life insurance.”

“Oh, I’m not married,” I said without thinking. Immediately, I looked at Calum with wide eyes. Shit.

“Yeah, but you two are almost married. Your wedding is within the next month,” Calum said while looking at me intensely.

I looked back at Gladys. “If you plan on going through with it, then go ahead and add her.”

“Him,” I said. It was odd enough having to pretend that I was actually married to Beau, but there was no way I was going to pretend he wasn’t who he was.

“Him, then,” Gladys said. “Just put his information down, and I’ll get it filed.”

I nodded as I pulled out my pen. I quickly filled out the information, that was, until I came to Beau's SSN. "I do not know his social off of the top of my head. Can I bring this back?" I asked Gladys. She looked annoyed.

"I had to do the same thing," Calum said. "There's probably a million things we know about them, but when it comes to things like their socials, I still have to look Asher's up." I owed Calum such a huge thanks for all that he was doing for me.

Gladys looked like she was about to argue, but Director May stepped in. "Bringing it back next time you are on campus isn't going to be an issue. I believe the other two were just signatures on forms?" Director May said, looking at Gladys.

"Yes," she told him. She hastily pointed out where I needed to sign, and after a quick scan, I saw that they were indeed simple forms: one for my direct deposit and the other for my agreement to the code of conduct. Both seemed fairly straightforward, and I signed without any hesitation. I took the other form and held it. I was certain that there would be some sort of answer for Beau's information. My brothers and I had identification, so why wouldn't Beau?

"Is there anything else you need from me at the moment?" I asked.

"No. Your forms are in the packet. Yours has the key to your office as well. If you require any sort of supplies, they're in the supply room, which is over there," Gladys said as she pointed at a door off to her left. "Just log what it is you take so the system will update it and we don't suddenly find ourselves without pens or dry-erase markers."

"Of course," I said.

"I'll get someone to show you where your office is," Gladys said.

“No need,” Calum said, jumping back into the conversation. “I had planned on showing him around the campus a bit before we headed back home. Adding in a stop at his office won’t be an issue in the least.”

Gladys smiled a beaming grin at Calum. “Thank you, Dr. Ward. You’re making my job a bit easier.”

We finished up the paperwork, and after we both signed the form that we’d received our packets, we were finally on our way. Out the door we went, and when I tried to go right, Calum grabbed my arm and pulled me to the left.

“I’ll show you where my office is, and then we’ll find yours.”

“Yes. I...is she always like that?” I asked when we were several feet away from what I’d consider the main office of our building. “She was super friendly with you, but I’m not sure she even liked me.”

Calum snorted. “She was like that with me when I first started here. Give it a few months and she’ll be just as friendly with you. Especially if you show her a picture of your baby. She’s all about babies. She has something like a dozen grandchildren of her own.”

“That’s...you know, I would say that’s a lot, but thinking about some of the families on Treasure Ridge, it’s not that many.”

Calum chuckled. “No. But we have a different advantage over others.” Calum glanced over his shoulder as he approached a door, but I didn’t need to turn my head to know that someone was walking down the massive commons area. “This is my office,” he told me.

I rolled my eyes and pointed at the nameplate on the door. “I never would have

guessed that, Dr. Ward, if you hadn't said so."

"Shut up," Calum said as he gently shoved me. I was laughing when I entered the office but then quickly stopped. This place was so nice. It was easily the size of my home office, and I was actually surprised by how big it was. There was a wall of bookshelves filled with books as well as things that looked like artifacts.

"You did...are these real?" I asked as I moved over to what looked like a piece of pottery that was enclosed in a case.

"They're all real. Most are mine, but some are on loan from the university. Perk of being one of the lead professors in the archeology department."

"I'll bet." I picked up a book and immediately knew it was old. I looked over at Calum. "Why isn't this in a clamshell or something else?"

"Because it's mine, and although it's older than me, it normally doesn't ever move beyond when I packed and unpacked it. I had the help of my father, and he's quite particular when it comes to certain things. There is no need for anything beyond simply being careful with it."

I nodded. So Calum's warlock father had most likely done something to help protect the books. That was useful.

"So when do you think you'll go on another dig?" I asked, changing the subject. It was obvious that Calum loved the field side of his job. His office showcased that in abundance.

"Asher and I plan on going together once we're finished having children and they're a little older. We'll leave them with my parents at first, but later, we'll take them with us. It's something we both would love to have them experience."



I nodded. "I can understand that." I glanced around the office. "Just the stuff in here is impressive. I have nothing even close to this, but I certainly appreciate your collection."

"You'll get there," Calum said. "I've been doing it a few more years than you."

I shook my head. "You are in a completely different department from me. Archeology is not the same as history and philosophy. Sure, they're related, and there is certainly a good deal of history in your field, but you go into the field. I do not."

Calum laughed. "I'll have to work on you. I'll get you out on a dig yet."

I just shook my head. I could certainly see me and Calum becoming friends, and that was a bit foreign to me because I'd simply not been in one place long enough to have them, nor was I willing to risk the twins' lives. Add in that we both had fae mates, yeah, I could see our families spending time together.

"Come on. I'll show you your office, and then we'll head on back. There's a place we can grab a quick bite to eat before the drive back, and it'll be good for you to know where the best food places are."

I nodded. He wasn't wrong. I would be spending some time here every month. I was going to have to figure out how to get out of my in-person office hours once Beau gave birth. At least at first. With Phineas being pregnant again, I couldn't ask him or Phineas to help out. Knox and Philip had their hands full with their twins, and beyond that, we were really out of immediate family. Evan was an enforcer, and from what little I'd associated with him, he didn't appear to be too fond of me. Not that it mattered too much. I was in love with Beau, and if his brother didn't care for me, that didn't change the fact that Beau and I were mates. But what would I do when it came time for Beau to give birth? Sure, I was only required to be here one, maybe two days a month, but the thought of leaving my mate alone with our newborn right after he'd

given birth didn't sit right with me.

"You look as if you're warring with your own thoughts."

"A bit," I told him. We'd stopped in front of a new office, and I was surprised to see my name on the door: Dr. Roman Nelson—History & Philosophy. I reached out and touched the plate. It was a bit surreal, and if I was honest, I was gobsmacked that any of this was happening. I knew that without the help of Master Edison, and certainly Callum, I wouldn't be here, and I'd probably be miserably teaching at the local college.

"You all right?"

I nodded. "Yeah. It's just...surreal. I never thought I'd actually be in this position again. I was working on it when my father called all those years ago. I left everything to take the twins. I taught here and there online when I could, but for the most part, it was other jobs that I was able to do in between feedings and diaper changes. Things got a bit better when the twins were a bit older, but we moved so much I wasn't ever able to keep up with anything until we finally settled here."

It had been a complete fluke that I knew about the council to begin with. I had been searching for something completely different when I'd come across the posting that the council was looking to fill certain positions. Store manager wasn't exactly my area of expertise, but I could do it and did. It offered not only a stable income for a change but also somewhere secure for the twins. Never did I expect it would change our lives as much as it had.

"Do you want to see the inside?"

I nodded as I looked down at the envelope. I knew the key was inside, and when I tipped it upside down, it slid out and into Calum's hands. He handed me the key, and

after I took a deep breath, I opened the door.

Inside looked a lot like Calum's office when it came to furniture. There was a desk with a comfortable-looking chair, several bookshelves, a shorter table that sat under the window, but that was it. There were no books or artifacts, no personal touches. I would need to add those. I moved to the center of the room and shook my head. "My last office was a closet. I actually think it was literally a broom closet that they had converted. There was barely enough room for me to get to the side of my desk to get behind it to sit."

Calum winced. "Yeah, I couldn't have done that either." He looked around. "You'll need to get some things for your office, but what do you think?"

I could only shake my head. "I don't think I have enough stuff for in here, but I can probably get a plant or two."

Calum snorted, but it quickly turned to laughter. He patted me on the shoulder before he pulled toward the door. "I guess you and Beau need to check out the council's store and see what you can find."

"Probably."

I locked the door, and then we were on our way. I realized that my office was only three doors down from Calum's, which would explain why it hadn't taken long to get to it.

"Do you like sandwiches? Steak is a given, but I was thinking something a bit quicker for lunch."

I shook my head again. I had been doing that a lot lately. "I'm open to anything. Beau is at the bakery until five, so there's not a huge rush for me to get back to him. But I

understand you want to get back to Asher and Isla.”

“I do, but they’re with my dad. Isla is getting spoiled, and Asher is relaxing.”

That must be nice. “I’m really open to whatever. And if you want to hurry back to them, I’m good with finding something on my own.”

“Nope. We’re going out to lunch, and I know just the place.”

That settled that, and I was left to follow Calum out of the building and then back to the faculty parking lot. It had been an interesting day, and I had to wonder what else it had in store for me.

### Chapter 18

Beau

“ I can’t believe you’re not carrying twins,” Lewis said. We were in the bakery kitchen, working on refilling the trays for the display cases. It didn’t seem to matter how much we “baked”; we always ran out. I didn’t think shifter enforcers could have such sweet teeth, but apparently, they did. But at Lewis’s mention of my stomach, I smiled as I looked down at it. He wasn’t wrong. I didn’t have just a tiny bump; I looked ready to give birth. Well, in this shirt, at least. I needed to just give in and wear larger shirts.

I’d been concerned about how quickly I’d “popped,” but when I’d asked Dr. King about it, he’d reassured me it was simply because I was so slender before becoming pregnant that my baby didn’t have anywhere to grow but outward. Add in that I was mated to an alpha who was an entire foot taller than I was, yeah, we were probably going to have a larger baby. Especially since we were having a little tiger shifter.

I smiled as I rubbed my hand on my rounded stomach. I was definitely too pregnant to go out in town off the mountain, but it was completely safe for me to go anywhere while here on the mountain.

“Hey, Beau, your brother is here,” Sean said as he poked his head through the door. I couldn’t help but smile and hurry around the counter. Evan and I were good. We weren’t where we used to be, but we were getting there. We had talked a few times, and he’d apologized, again, about how he’d treated me when I’d found Roman.

I loved my brother, but I loved Roman and the baby I was carrying as well. I had struggled for a couple of weeks after Roman and I claimed each other, but eventually, I realized that if Evan couldn't accept the fact that I was mated and starting a family and still be able to run the bakery, then Evan would need to not be as involved in my life going forward. That had hurt, but thankfully, things hadn't come to that because Evan did accept the fact that I was mated, and he and I had talked at least once a week since.

I followed Sean through the door, and sure enough, there was Evan. When he saw me, his face lit up with a smile.

"Evan. I wasn't expecting to see you today, but I'm not going to complain." I rounded the counter and went to my brother's outstretched arms. He wrapped me up in a hug, and I closed my eyes. I'd been hugged by him so many times in my life, and it was comforting that he was still in my life. Especially since he was going to be an uncle soon.

"I had a bit of time this afternoon before I have to leave."

That completely ended the comforting feeling. "Leave?" I asked, looking up at him.

"Yeah. I'm an enforcer, Beau. I have assignments. My team is going out tomorrow."

Oh. I guess I hadn't realized that. It had been some time since he'd gone out on assignment. Or maybe it hadn't and I just didn't know? "Well, I hope you'll be safe."

Evan's smile widened. "You know I will. But that's not the only reason I'm here. I'm going to escort you over to the omega clinic. Roman messaged me, and he's running about five minutes behind. There was a water main breakdown in Timber Valley, and he had to be detoured. But it was quite a detour."

I narrowed my eyes at my brother. “Why are you telling me that instead of my mate?” I asked before immediately reaching out to Roman through our bond. “Roman? Are you all right?”

“I am, sweetness. But I’m still five solid minutes from the cabin. I didn’t want you to be late for our appointment, so I messaged your brother. I apologize for not reaching out to you directly. Evan is going to walk you over to the clinic.”

I sighed. “I am capable of walking over by myself. It’s not far. Or I could just wait here for you to arrive. It’s not like Dr. King will not see us if we’re late.”

“Please just let Evan walk you over? He hasn’t gotten to spend much time with you, and he is adjusting to things and how they are now as well.”

“Fine. Please be careful.”

“Always. I’ll see you in just a bit.”

I focused up at my brother and narrowed my eyes. “I’m not sure what’s going on, but seriously, five minutes late isn’t really something that he should be so worried about. But whatever.” I turned to Sean. “I’m headed out to my ultrasound.”

Sean offered a huge smile. “Exciting times.” He glanced at my brother. “But shouldn’t Roman be going with you?”

I nodded. “He’s on the way, apparently, but there was a detour or something. I’m not sure.” I didn’t think they were lying to me; it was just such an odd thing though. Why now? Of course, water main breaks could happen at any time, couldn’t they? I left with Evan, and once outside, I looked up at my brother. “Can you explain a little more what a water main break is?”

Evan smiled. "It's my understanding that the water in the buildings is delivered through underground pipes. The main is the big one that's out by the streets or under them." Evan shrugged. "They can break, and when they do, lots of water comes rushing out and floods the area. That's why the road that Roman was taking was closed."

I nodded, only somewhat understanding. "I guess they can't just use magic like we do, huh?"

Evan chuckled. "No." We walked a short distance, and when we made it to the store, I wondered if I would have met Roman sooner if he had still worked there.

"So where are you going? Can you say?"

"To Canada. We're going to be sorting out some issues with a pack up there. There has been more than one report about them. It's nothing too serious, just some issues with some in the alpha's circle." Evan shrugged. "I don't quite understand all of the dynamics of packs yet, but it'll be a good learning experience. I'm going more for the magical support. Although, Frederick is the lead, and he'll be with us, so I don't think he'll actually need me. We'll see though."

"That sounds...interesting," I said and chuckled. I didn't know what else to say, really. I knew even less, and although I trusted Evan would be safe, I still worried a bit about my brother.

"It sounds boring if you ask me. But I work for the council now, and it's something I have to learn all about. I don't mind, and my team has been amazing at helping me to learn all that I need to, but it can be a bit confusing since we didn't grow up with anything like this. What the packs have might not be the same in the covens. Or in the prides or dens. It's different for even different packs. So you never know what to expect."



“At least I’m just doing what I’ve always done. Although I didn’t really know all of the ins and outs of actually running a bakery from before. But Lewis and I have figured it out.”

“He’s quite the surprise,” Evan said. I nodded. I knew there was nothing between my brother and my friend and never would be, but I had to wonder if Evan wanted to find his mate. “And here we are,” Evan said. I looked up and realized we’d made it to the omega clinic. It wasn’t that it was such a far walk; I’d just not been paying attention.

“You know, I absolutely could have made this walk without being escorted. I’m not sure what you and Roman are up to, but I do appreciate that you let me know you are going to be out on assignment. Will you be gone long?” His previous assignments had only been about a week’s time. That didn’t mean that would still hold true.

“Should be only a week. It’s not a difficult assignment, and we’re not the only team going out. Atticus’s team, with the exception of Ramsey, is already out. You already know why Ramsey isn’t in the field at the moment.”

I did. Phineas was due any day now. He’d had a terrible pregnancy, but I’d heard that wasn’t uncommon when it came to gargoyle pregnancies. Roman had been in almost constant contact with Ramsey and had even come up to Treasure Ridge to visit a couple of times when Ramsey was “losing his mind,” as Roman had put it.

“I hope Phineas has their little gargoyle soon and that his delivery is so much easier than his pregnancy has been. I’ve sent him some of his favorites, frequently, and Roman has kept me up to date about everything that’s happening with them. I feel bad because he’s been pulled in two directions. He wants to be there to support his brother as much as possible, but he’s also been worried about me.”

Evan pulled me into a side hug. “You are such a good person, Beau. I’ve seen Ramsey walking around the council like he’s in another world, and maybe he is. I

don't have a mate, so I don't have a mate with a difficult pregnancy."

"I've heard that Alexander almost died during his pregnancy, or maybe it was when he was in labor. I can't remember a lot of things anymore, but I think it was labor. I've met Knox and Philip several times, and their twins are just the cutest. But Ramsey and Phineas haven't been to any family meals since Phineas got pregnant again."

"Hey now, when am I going to be invited to these family meals?"

I widened my eyes. "I've invited you, Evan. Every time I've offered, you always say that you don't want to impose on my time with my new mate."

Evan stared at me blankly. "Oh. I guess I didn't realize it was a family affair."

"Every Sunday. Obviously there are times that not everyone can make it, but Roman and I have all week to ourselves. On Sunday, we have family meals. On Saturday, we've started spending time with Calum and Asher. They actually live next door, and Calum helped Roman get the new position at the university. Asher is fae, just like we are. They have an adorable little girl."

Evan's jaw clenched as he looked away. I was going to say more when I heard Roman's voice. I looked in the direction Evan had and couldn't keep from smiling. There was my sexy alpha. It was Friday, and he'd had classes this morning, and it was obvious that he hadn't had time to change. I loved to see him in his slacks and button-down shirts as much as I did when he was in sweats and a T-shirt. They were all fun to get him out of, and I really needed to not let my mind go there. Now was not the time to think those kinds of thoughts.

Roman's smile grew as he approached, and after he leaned down and gave me a quick kiss, he winked before he looked over at Evan. "Thanks for walking him over."

Roman glanced back at me. “Did you already check in?”

I shook my head. “Nope. We’ve been talking.”

Roman gave me a look, and although I know he wasn’t actually mad at me, he was a bit irritated.

“Don’t be upset with him,” Evan said. “It’s my fault. I let Beau know I was leaving on assignment tomorrow, and we’ve been talking about that. Well, that and family meals.”

Roman nodded at my brother. “You should join us sometime. I understand you’re busy, though, and have a good group to spend time with up here.”

I hadn’t known if Evan was spending meals with the other fae enforcers or not, but I knew we used to, so it wasn’t a far-fetched assumption. “Are you ready to go in for our ultrasound?” I asked, hoping to pull Roman away. We were only a few minutes behind, and honestly, I didn’t think that Dr. King would be upset.

“I am,” Roman said as he smiled. I could see nothing but love in his gaze, and I never knew just how much I could love someone until I met him. Roman wrapped his arm around my shoulders and pulled me close. “Don’t be a stranger,” Roman said to my brother. “Your brother would love for you to come spend time with us if you can spare it.”

Evan nodded as he looked directly at me. I smiled before I directed my eyes to the ground. We weren’t where we were before, and probably never would be, but our relationship wasn’t as strained as it had been when I first met Roman. There were a lot of changes, for both me and Evan, and we would always be brothers. We had to learn how to adapt, and that had been the difficult part. At least for me.

“Send me a picture of my nephew later,” Evan said. “That is, if you get some.”

I looked up at my brother and found him smiling. “I will. I know I already said it, but be careful.”

“I will. It’s a pack; how dangerous can they be?”

I shrugged because I honestly didn’t know. But I wanted my brother to be safe just the same. Evan waved as he walked away. I looked up at Roman after a moment and found him looking conflicted. Now that I was staring at my mate, I reached out through our bond and realized that he was worried.

“What’s wrong? Was it stressful getting here to me? I’m perfectly safe up here.”

Roman smiled down at me again. “That’s not it. Alexander called earlier. I couldn’t answer because I was in the middle of a lecture. Phineas’s omega line has started opening. Alexander is watching over him, but their baby will be born very soon.”

I started to smile, but at the emotions running through Roman, my happiness for the impending birth dissipated. “You’re not happy about a new nephew? If you’d rather be there with your brother, I understand.”

Roman pulled me into his arms and held on tight. “That’s not it at all.” Our own little bundle chose that moment to kick. It wasn’t hard, more like a flutter, but it was enough that I certainly felt it. “Ramsey is a mess, and Alexander is doing all he can to calm him. Alexander almost bled to death while delivering Rowan. Chief Daegal has had to intervene, and I guess it’s tense.” Roman kissed the top of my head before he released me.

“Where’s Hazel?”

“With Knox and Philip. She’s going to be having a sleepover at theirs for the next week or so.”

I understood Roman’s worry. “Do you want to skip the ultrasound and go see your brother? I understand if you do?”

“No. I can’t do anything more for my brother than anyone else there. I’ve already messaged Phineas, and he replied that he was fine. Just some contractions. That’s how I know that Ramsey is a mess.” Roman leaned down and kissed my forehead. “Right now, I want to go have our ultrasound and see our little guy for the first time.”

I couldn’t help but smile. I had only chatted with Phineas because he’d had his heat at the same time I had my fertile period, and then we’d been ill. It just hadn’t been a good time for us to meet in person. But I could understand Roman’s worry, and I, too, hoped that everything went well with his labor and then his delivery.

“I want that too,” I said. “Shall we?”

Roman responded by opening the door. Out of the sun and into the cheerful interior of the omega clinic we went. We were greeted by Todd, but standing with him was not Dr. King.

“You must be Roman and Beau. I’m Constantine, but most call me Costas. I’m filling in for Dr. King because he’s with your brother, I’m told,” Costas said as he looked directly at Roman.

“Is Phineas all right?”

“Doing perfectly fine, from what I’ve heard. I think it’s more a precaution after what Alexander went through. Still waiting on the omega line to fully open at my last update.” Roman nodded, and I squeezed his hand. Costas glanced between us before

he focused on me. “It seems as if your alpha is a bit worried. How about we go show him the baby in hopes it helps distract him for a bit.”

“Yes, please,” I said. I wanted nothing more than to calm Roman.

We followed Costas down the hallway and into the room on the left. It was already set up for me, and without a thought, I climbed up onto the table. I felt Roman’s hands on my waist, and with a little boost, I was on the table and turning around without issue. I was showing, sure, but I wasn’t so large that I couldn’t move. At least not yet. I had a feeling that I was going to show quite a bit more before I gave birth.

“I do wish to apologize to the both of you for the sudden change in provider without notice. I’ve worked with the council for years until they found Maxwell. I have been the coven doctor for Master Edison and now Master Arthur for longer than I care to admit.”

I smiled at Costas. “I’m not upset. I understand that Phineas needs to be the focus for Dr. King.”

“Yes. How about we get to it?”

I nodded. I couldn’t help it—I was excited. I wanted to see my baby. Yes, I was worried about Phineas, but I couldn’t do more than offer support. It was probably wrong, but I wanted to see my baby.

“Please,” Roman said. “I agree with your earlier statement. A distraction would be nice, and Beau deserves to have his ultrasound.” Roman reached out and took my hand, bringing it to his lips and kissing the back of it.

“I agree. Maxwell will keep me updated if anything goes amiss, but he has said that Phineas is laboring quite well. He’s young, and that should help, despite the difficulty

of gargoyle pregnancies,” Costas told us just before the lights in the room dimmed. Seconds later, there was an image floating in the air in front of us, and I gasped. There was no doubt what we were seeing: it was our little guy.

“That’s our baby,” I said.

“It is. He’s quite healthy and large for his gestational age.” Costas stared at the image that was projected for a moment before he looked over at us. “Do you happen to know if you were an overly large baby?”

“I’m not certain,” Roman said. “Most likely though. The twins were small, but they’re fox shifters and twins.”

Costas nodded. “I’ve read over Maxwell’s notes. He has your baby being due the first week of October. I’m not sure you will make it that long. Everything looks as it should. His gestational age is on track and exactly where it should be. The length of bones, organ development, all of those things are right where he should be at this age. His size is just larger.”

I sighed. “I’m not surprised. Roman isn’t as tall or wide in the shoulders as the dragons, but he’s not short either. Nor is he skinny like I am.”

Roman leaned close. “You’re perfect for me, sweetness. Don’t ever feel as if you aren’t.”

I smiled at my mate. He was always like that. From the beginning, he’d been so sweet. He had a sexy side too, one that I didn’t think others realized, but that was all right with me. I was more than happy to have all of Roman’s sexual fantasies just for me.

“Would you like to hear the heartbeat?” Costas asked, pulling us apart, but only

slightly.

“Yes, please,” I said. I’d been able to “hear” our baby, but I didn’t know how to project his heartbeat or his images so Roman could see and hear him. The room was suddenly filled with the quick swishing sound of our little one. Roman’s hand squeezed mine while I felt his awe through our bond. I was so thankful that we were able to do this. Not only for me but for Roman. He had experienced so much heartbreak in his lifetime, and the fact that I was getting to spend my life and build a family with him was more than I ever thought I’d have.

There was a pinging sound, and when Costas pulled his phone from his pocket, the light from the screen illuminated his face in the darkened room. After a moment, he smiled, then turned the phone off. When he raised his head, I struggled to see his face, but his voice was clear.

“Phineas is in active labor and will be pushing soon,” Costas told us. Roman’s body tensed instantly, but it relaxed almost as quickly.

“We can go if you’d like,” I whispered.

Roman leaned down and kissed my forehead. “No. We’ll see them soon enough, I’m certain. This is important and where we need to be.”

I stared up at Roman for a long moment before I nodded. That seemed to be what Costas needed to continue with our ultrasound. The image of our baby turned, and then we were staring at tiny little toes. I couldn’t help but smile at the image projected. It made me want to hold our little one even more. Soon, I told myself.



### Chapter 19

#### Roman

I didn't think Beau could be any cuter, but I'd been wrong. He was effectively three months into his four-month pregnancy, and I didn't know if he had any more room to grow. I would never voice it out loud, but he had a waddle to him now, and it was the cutest thing. Of course, I did all that I could to make him as comfortable as possible. We had to be careful while getting him from our house to Treasure Ridge now, though, because there absolutely was no hiding the fact that he was pregnant. Sadly, that meant he'd had to start riding in the back seat of the SUV. I much preferred he rode up front with me, but we couldn't risk him being seen by someone at a stoplight.

"Do you think they'll let me hold the baby?" Beau asked, pulling me from my thoughts as we sat at a red light in Timber Valley. There were only three more streets to go before we would be through town, and then it would be only a few more minutes before we arrived at the cabin. "Of course they won't. They've only met me the once when they were in the bakery. They don't know me, so why would they let me hold the new baby."

I shook my head and reached between the seats. Beau's smaller hand found mine, and when he gave it a squeeze, I smiled. "I'm sure Phineas and Ramsey will have no issues with you holding Rynn. All you need to do is ask. Yes, Ramsey is going to be a bit protective, but that's normal for any alpha."

"I just don't want to overstep. But I'm excited. I've not really ever been around a baby before. Sure, there were people in our village that had babies, but my family

consisted of me and Evan.”

“I’m sure they’ll let you hold the baby,” I told Beau again. I’d made it to the outskirts of town, and now we only had a few more minutes before we would be at the cabin. It was secluded enough that there shouldn’t be any issues getting inside without Beau being seen, but the last I’d heard, that had been addressed with Konrad, and the cabin currently had a security fence that was being installed around the perimeter. It would have a coded gate, much like our neighborhood had, and although it sounded like it would be a headache, the council was taking the safety of everyone seriously.

I felt the turmoil that Beau was experiencing through our bond. I glanced back at him, wishing more than ever that he could be up-front with me. “Why are you so conflicted? What’s going on? You’re excited to be meeting the family for longer than a few minutes, are you not?”

“Yes. I was talking to Philip earlier. He is excited to see me again. But I’m a bit nervous to see Ramsey and Phineas. I know Phineas had such a terrible pregnancy, and Ramsey is a bit intimidating.”

I grinned. “That is probably a good thing since he’s one of the council’s enforcers. But between you and me, he has been in trouble with Chief Daegal more than anyone else when it comes to gargoyle enforcers. He’s going to be protective because Phineas just gave birth, but he was the one that was the voice of reason when you and I first discovered each other.” I would never be able to thank my brother-in-law for that.

I pulled into the cabin’s driveway and, moments later, parked near the door. I glanced back at Beau but found him staring out the window. After I got out of the SUV, my tiger was on alert, but there was no threat to our mate or unborn child. There was nobody nearby, so I rounded the vehicle and opened the door for Beau. He spared me a glance but quickly slid from the SUV. We hurried inside, and it was there that I was

finally able to pull him into my arms.

“Hey? What’s going on?”

Beau took a deep breath. “Nothing. I just want Phineas to like me. I’m your mate, and yeah, Philip and I get along well, but I’ve never been able to do more than chat with Phineas. And even then, I didn’t want to bother him too much because his pregnancy was so difficult.”

“He’s going to love you. Philip was always the much more serious twin, and Phineas was always more carefree. Trust me when I say that you and Phineas are going to get along just fine.” I only had Evan to worry about, and in all honesty, even if he didn’t like me, I wouldn’t have cared too much. Beau was my mate—my focus.

“I hope you’re right. I mean, you know the twins better than I do, obviously.”

I leaned down and kissed Beau, pulling away when the desire to linger presented. We had a very healthy sexual relationship, and although it had only seemed to increase as Beau’s pregnancy progressed, now was not the time to start anything.

“You have nothing to worry about. I understand that your pregnancy has made you a bit more emotional, in your own words, but you truly have no need to fret.” It was such a relief when I finally felt Beau relax through our bond. His shoulders lost the tenseness they’d held, and although it was a good thing he was finally relaxing, I had to wonder if perhaps it wasn’t something else that was bothering him.

I pushed the newly installed button on the wall, letting whoever was on transport duty know that we were here and would need a lift to the mountain. Seconds later, a familiar face came through the doorway that led to the back of the cabin.

“Timothy. I guess I should have called out to see if anyone was here. My tiger didn’t

sense anyone though.”

“I wasn’t here. I’ve just found that sometimes I frighten people when I suddenly appear in front of them. I’ve taken to popping into the kitchen’s pantry and then coming through to see what everyone needs. To Treasure Ridge, I assume?”

“Yes, please. We’re going to my brother’s house to see his new baby.”

“Ah, yes. Ramsey’s baby?” Timothy asked. “Chief Daegal has shared the news of a new gargoyle baby around the mountaintop for over a week now.”

I chuckled. It was always exciting when any new baby was born, but I could understand the created gargoyle’s excitement. Gargoyle babies weren’t exactly common, and the council now had three gargoyle babies.

“Yes,” I told the older warlock. I pulled Beau a bit closer, and seconds later, that familiar swirl in my stomach happened. We went from the cabin to the transport building on the mountain, and with a wave from Timothy, Beau and I were on our way toward Ramsey and Phineas’s house. “I should have thought to ask to borrow Ramsey’s XUV so you wouldn’t have to walk.”

“It’s not a far walk, and the exercise is good for me. I spend a good deal of my day on my feet while I’m at work. And I walk from here to the bakery.”

“Yes, but we can actually see the bakery,” I told my mate as I pointed at the building. It was up and running smoothly, and it had been decided that on Sundays, the bakery would be closed, and Saturdays, it would only be open for a few hours. Lewis was more than willing to run it seven days a week, but the council had insisted that it be closed on Sundays and Saturdays be part days. It was better for those that worked there, just as the council itself only had a very few in on the weekends.

“Sure, but that short distance is nothing compared to standing all day. It hurts less when I’m walking.”

I looked down at my mate. “What do you mean, hurts less? Are you in pain?” I asked, suddenly worried.

“No more than any other pregnant omega. You try carrying an extra fifteen pounds in your stomach. Our little one loves to push against my bladder, kick my kidneys, and keep my diaphragm from being able to expand.” Beau sighed. “It’s all expected and nothing out of the ordinary. Especially with our baby being so large.” Beau looked down at his rounded pregnancy belly and rubbed it with his free hand. “It’s not like I’d ever complain. I’m not. I love being pregnant with our son. I do wish he wouldn’t decide to do tumbling when it’s bedtime though.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle at that and agree. Many times, Beau had become restless when it was time for us to go to sleep. His reasoning had always been that he couldn’t get comfortable because the baby always became active then. More than once, I’d taken him to the bath, and after he and I had relaxed in the tub for a bit, I would end up carrying a sleepy Beau to our bed. Whatever worked at this point, I was all for it.

“Very well,” I told my mate. “But you won’t be upset if I ask to use it to get you back to the transport building, will you?”

“No. I’m sure by that time, I’ll be worn-out. I’ll probably not want to walk back, even if it’s only a ten-minute walk.”

I didn’t want to tell my adorable mate that it was only a ten-minute walk if he moved a bit faster. I had no experience with being pregnant or having to waddle when walking, but I had no doubt that there were all sorts of challenges pregnant omegas faced on a daily basis.

“Have you thought about names? We already have the nursery finished, but I was trying to come up with some names for the middle name the other day and kept coming back to Cooper. That’s a good middle name for a tiger shifter, don’t you think?” Beau made a noise, worrying me, but he looked up at me with imploring eyes. “What’s wrong? If you don’t like it, I won’t be upset. I just thought it would be a good middle name for our son.”

“No,” Beau said. I was going to agree with him without question until he stopped and grabbed for me. “I want that for his name,” Beau said. “It’s a perfect name, and actually, it’s on the list of names I was thinking about.” Beau suddenly narrowed his eyes. “Did you sneak into my thoughts and pick it because I liked that name so much?”

I held my hands out in surrender. “No, I promise. It’s one that I just really liked and thought was fitting.”

Beau nodded quickly. “Good.” He started walking again, and I fell into step beside him. “Can we give him your dad’s middle name? Doesn’t Cooper Daniel sound nice?” Beau asked. He looked up at me, his face now hopeful. “That sounds like a tiger alpha, right?”

I couldn’t love this man more. I stopped him with a gentle tug on our joined hands. When Beau looked up at me, I smiled down at him. “I love you, Beau. So much. I love that you want to honor my father. I think it’s a wonderful name.” I leaned down and kissed Beau again but once more kept it quick. There would be plenty of time for deeper kisses once we were home, but now wasn’t the time.

“Good. Then that’s settled. Now we just need to wait for baby Cooper to arrive.” Beau sighed. “I think I agree with Constantine and what he said about me not making it to my due date. At least, I don’t think I want to be pregnant that long. I’d love to stay pregnant as long as I need to, but I’m afraid that if I get much bigger, I’ll be

really uncomfortable.”

I agreed completely. “We’ll make sure Dr. King checks up on you frequently.” I hadn’t told Beau, but I’d already been in contact with the doctor about Beau’s pregnancy. He’d stated that it was possible that Beau might need to be placed on bed rest if his stomach became too big because it could cause his body issues. I wasn’t sure exactly how, but it hadn’t exactly helped calm my tiger’s restlessness.

We continued our walk, the neighborhood that the enforcers lived in coming into view only minutes later. When we entered the neighborhood, the sound of children playing could be heard. Off to the left, there were some toddler-aged children swinging while their parents pushed them. Beau and I went to the right toward the house Ramsey and Phineas shared. It only took a few minutes, even with Beau’s slower pace, but I felt my own nerves increase as we walked up the walkway at their house.

“This place is lovely,” Beau said as we reached the porch. “You know, for all of the time I lived here on Treasure Ridge, I never came over here.”

“Why not?”

“Because there was no reason. I didn’t want to impose on any of the mated enforcers. I lived with Evan, but only because I was allowed to. I didn’t venture out much, actually.”

I knocked while thinking about Beau’s words. I’d seen his memories. All of them. He’d been happy to be allowed to come with his brother, and he’d not really seemed terribly unhappy spending his days watching television. It was something new to him, and even I had joined him in his love for a certain sitcom about four guys who all worked at the same university in California.

The door swung open, and I was surprised to see Phineas standing there. I had expected Ramsey, or possibly Philip or Knox if they were already here, but there was my baby brother, who had just given birth two weeks ago.

“Oh my fates. You look like you are ready to pop,” he said as his eyes zeroed in on Beau’s stomach. “Can I touch it? I know I only liked a few people to touch my belly when I was pregnant, but every time someone tried, Ramsey would growl at them.”

“Phineas?” Beau asked.

“Oh, yeah! Hi!” my brother said. “I thought you realized. I don’t know why since you’ve only met me once and then only for like a split second, and the bakery was slammed with people.”

Beau looked up at me, his eyes suddenly worried. “Will I look that amazing two weeks after giving birth?”

I bit my lower lip to keep from laughing.

“You will! It’s a blessing, actually,” Phineas said. He reached out and grabbed Beau by the arm. “Come inside. You need to meet Rynn, and really, there’s no reason for you to stand on the front porch.” Phineas pulled Beau inside, with me following my brother and mate. Phineas gave me a hug, and when he held on for a bit longer, I gave him a tighter squeeze. I met Beau’s eyes over my brother’s head and found them smiling at us. “You’ll have to pry Rynn out of Ramsey’s arms though, but he’s been pretty good about sharing. Although your best bet is when he’s also cuddling Hazel. Then he’s more likely to not complain too much about giving either of them up for even a bit.” Phineas turned and held out his arms toward Beau.

I watched as my mate gave my brother a hug, and something inside clicked. My family was finally together. Beau and Phineas hadn’t had a chance to meet because of



how difficult Phineas's pregnancy had been.

"It's so good to finally meet you again," Beau said.

"Same. And thank you for all of the yummy goodies you sent over," Phineas said. "You do not know how much they were appreciated. When you have to lay around and watch your toddler run around and can't chase her, life gets frustrating. Insert distracting donuts, cakes, and whatever those amazing puffy things are, and life is so much better."

Beau smiled. "I'm glad they helped. I can't use my magic very well right now, but I can have Lewis send some over tomorrow if you want."

"Yes, please. Always. Any of them. They're so good. I'll send Phineas, and maybe then I'll get the chance to actually feed Rynn for a change." Phineas sighed and touched his chest. "Not that I'm complaining, because I'm not. Ramsey is such an amazing daddy. And it's so beautiful to see him completely enamored with both of them."

"Are we going to get to come in and at least see them, or are you going to just tell us about them and make us continue to wonder?" I asked, teasing my brother. He'd always been talkative, and him being mated and a daddy hadn't changed that.

"Oh, yeah," Phineas said. He leaned down close to Beau's stomach. "You need to learn to tell me to stop talking when you're older. Your uncle Phineas talks too much when he's excited. Or nervous." Phineas stood up and smiled at Beau. "I've been nervous about meeting you again. I know we've texted, and you've talked to me a few times on the phone, but it's not the same."

"No, it's not. Philip has told me so much about you during family dinners though, so I think I probably have an advantage." Beau rubbed his stomach and sighed. "But I'm

not sure how many more I'll be able to make. I know Roman hasn't told me as much, but I'm aware that Dr. King has mentioned that I might have to go on bed rest if a certain someone gets too much bigger."

Phineas's eyes widened. "That's certainly not fun."

He would know since he'd basically spent his entire pregnancy on bed rest. First because he was so sick and then because the pregnancy was just that difficult. I was thankful that I was mated to a tiger shifter and I didn't have to worry about all of the extra things that happened in gargoyle pregnancies. Add in that Phineas was a fox shifter and his pregnancies were only on average ten weeks long, that meant his poor body had to work extra hard to create all three forms of their little gargoyle.

"There you are," Philip said when we entered the back room where everyone was gathered.

"Sorry," Beau said. "I'm slow now and can't walk that fast," he added as he waddled over to the couch, where he leaned heavily on the arm and then carefully sat down with my help.

"Understandable," Philip said. "You look like I did when I was about to give birth. Only I had two in there. Are you sure you're only having one?" Philip asked. The room suddenly went quiet, and all eyes were looking at me and Beau. Was it possible that one of the babies had somehow been missed and Beau was actually carrying twins? Wouldn't that just be a surprise.

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I was done. Over it. Miserable. I was all the things. But mostly, I was finished with being pregnant. My waist was long gone, as was anything below my stomach. My body and it's needs and desires were no longer my own, and one minute I was starving, and the next, I didn't want to look at food. The only thing that didn't irritate me was my mate. Roman had been the most amazing during all of this, but I was honestly going to be surprised if he wanted to go through it with me again. I knew I hadn't been the easiest to deal with, despite my trying my best to be as easygoing as possible.

I had indeed been put on bed rest a week ago, and I was certain that added to my irritation. Roman had managed to talk his way into not having to go into work this week, and we were not sure how things were going to play out if I didn't have the baby soon. He had to go in next week for office hours, but he was hovering and was adamant that he stay home until I had our son.

With the dull ache I felt in my back, I was beginning to think it wouldn't be too much of an issue. "Roman?" I called out when the ache in my back suddenly intensified. He had run downstairs to check on something, but he was a shifter, and I knew he could hear me from anywhere in the house. The pain in my back moved to my side and intensified even more, and I was almost positive that labor was starting. "Roman?" I reached out through our bond.

"I'm on my way. I felt whatever that was and just messaged Dr. King."

I heard pounding footsteps coming up the stairs. Roman rushed into our bedroom, pure panic on his face. I tried to smile at my mate, but I was certain it was more of a grimace than anything.

“I don’t think you need to worry that much,” I told him. “I think I’m in labor, but probably not active to where it’s time to push.”

“Can I check your omega line? Dr. King wants me to look at it.”

I nodded and pulled my shirt up. Actually, it was Roman’s shirt because none of mine fit any longer. I could put them on, but they wouldn’t pull down over my stomach. That was an issue, but not so much so when I wore one of Roman’s. And the looks my mate had given me when he saw me in one of his shirts...if I hadn’t already been pregnant, it was possible that would have happened. My mate was incredibly possessive and quite handsy when he saw me wearing his clothing.

Roman’s face morphed from concern to what I’d call panic. He immediately pulled out his phone, but just as he did, there was a familiar voice from the stairwell.

“Hello? Might I come up and check on Beau?” Dr. King called out.

“Dr. King, there’s a head here, and it’s not Beau’s!” Roman shouted.

Seconds later, Dr. King came rushing into the bedroom. Immediately, I felt a calmness wash over the room. I wasn’t sure if it was simply because the doctor had arrived or if it was because he’d used some sort of magic to relax my panicking alpha. I didn’t feel the presence of magic, so it was most likely that it was simply that the doctor was here.

“I decided to simply come and check on Beau with him being so close to his due date and with how large the baby is.” Dr. King looked down at my stomach and nodded slowly. “It seems as if it was a good call on my part. Shall we get the baby delivered?”

“Yes, please,” I said. Dr. King smiled at me before he turned toward Roman. He stared at my mate for a moment before his smile grew, and he shook his head. There

was suddenly a chair beside the bed, and then Dr. King was moving Roman toward it. After Roman sat and looked at me, I couldn't help but chuckle despite the situation we were in. "Are you all right?" I asked my mate as I reached out and gently touched his arm.

Roman looked at me, somewhat in a daze. "There was a head there."

I smiled. "Well, it happens, you know. That's how babies are born. They have to come out somehow, and it's easier when the head comes out first."

"When did your waters break?" Dr. King asked, pulling my attention toward the doctor. "And are you having any sort of contractions?"

"Umm...I'm not sure they did?" I told him. "I mean, I really had to go to the bathroom this morning, and when I sat down, it seemed like there was a whole lot, but I thought that for some reason my bladder somehow was extra full? I haven't had any contractions, really, just an ache in my back. It's moved to my sides just recently though, and it became more than an ache."

Dr. King sighed and shook his head. "That was back labor. The extra from this morning was most likely your waters breaking since it would have been very obvious otherwise. You happened to get lucky that it happened on the toilet instead of when you were lying in bed. Although, if it had happened when it was more obvious, then you wouldn't have had to labor without assistance."

I thought about that a moment before I shrugged. "It hasn't been difficult." I side-eyed Roman before quickly looking back up at Dr. King. "I'm more worried about my mate, I think."

Dr. King looked at Roman before he chuckled. "He'll be all right. Some alphas experience that initial shock, and then they seem to simply snap out of it. But I'm wanting to focus on you. How about we get your little guy delivered?"

“Yes. I think that might help Roman?”

“It will certainly help you and most likely won’t hurt your alpha.”

I looked over at Roman while Dr. King moved closer to the side of the bed. I felt the ache and then didn’t. But there was magic, and when I looked at the doctor, his hand was glowing. “Is that the floating feeling that takes away pain?”

“Yes, but you don’t seem to be experiencing pain, so I’m not using quite as much up front. I’ll increase the magic if you feel a great deal of discomfort once you start pushing.”

“How will I know when to push? I don’t feel any contractions.”

“Can you just deliver the baby?” Roman asked, suddenly pulling from the shock he seemed to be experiencing.

Dr. King looked first at Roman and then at me. “I can, if that is what Beau wishes. I can deliver the baby much like I would for a warlock or vampire.”

I shrugged. “Maybe that will be best? I truly don’t feel the need to push. But Roman said there’s a head there?”

Dr. King glanced back down at my stomach and nodded slowly. “Yes, indeed. It would seem that your son has your hair, Beau. There’s a head full of dark hair right there.” Dr. King moved his hands, I felt more magic, and then he nodded. “Yes, so I’ll increase the magic, and we’ll get your son delivered.”

Before I could say a thing, I definitely felt that floaty feeling overcome me. Dr. King wasted no time getting to work. I felt my body wiggle, and watching the doctor’s face was an experience. His brow furrowed, he narrowed his eyes, and finally, after my body moved a bit more, Dr. King’s face relaxed. Then he held up our son, and he had

to be one of the largest babies ever.

“Roman, would you grab that towel that is beside your mate, please?”

Roman reached for the towel that I knew hadn’t been there earlier, and when he held it out, Dr. King carefully placed Cooper in it. Roman wrapped our son up, but when I didn’t hear any noise from the baby, I became worried.

“Did you wish to cut the cord?” Dr. King asked.

“No, I’m good with you taking care of that,” Roman said.

Dr. King did something that I couldn’t quite see, and then a green glow surrounded the towel and our son in Roman’s arms. That seemed to be everything that was needed because Cooper gasped, then let out a loud wail. Some might be annoyed by that sound, but I thought it was the most beautiful sound I’d ever heard. Cooper continued to cry, but Roman immediately went into daddy mode and started gently bouncing him.

That didn’t seem to help too much, but when Roman brought our son to his chest and spoke to him, that worked. Cooper’s cries quieted, and after a few more softly spoken words of love, Cooper became quiet. When Roman turned my way, there were tears in his eyes. He gave me a look that anyone would be able to define: pure, unconditional love.

“He’s beautiful, Beau,” Roman said as he brought our son closer so I could see him. “He definitely has your hair, but his eyes are blue.”

I smiled as I got my first look at our son. He looked...squished but adorable. Roman wasn’t wrong though. He had dark hair and big blue eyes.

“Hey there, little fella. Well, not so little, I guess. Welcome to the world. Your daddy

there has been waiting to meet you,” I said quietly.

“Beau, I’m going to use magic to close your omega line,” Dr. King said, drawing our attention. When I pulled my eyes away from the baby, Dr. King looked at me with a serious expression. “Your omega line tore on both sides, and it will be incredibly painful unless I close it magically. You will still be able to have more children, but if they are large like this one, you might have tearing again.”

“I understand,” I said. I wasn’t surprised. Cooper looked like he was a large baby, and I wasn’t that big. Dr. King nodded before he bent back down to take care of my omega line. I turned my attention back to Roman and our son and couldn’t help but reach out to wipe away the tears that were running down my mate’s face.

“I’m sorry he’s so large and has caused you issues,” Roman said.

“Don’t be. Large babies happen. Who knows, maybe our next one will be a tiny little fae and I won’t even look pregnant.”

Roman chuckled a bit before he wiped at his eyes. “You just gave birth, literally, and you’re already talking about the next one?” Roman shook his head. “I love you,” he whispered. “I’m not sure how I was gifted such an amazing man as you, but I know I’ll cherish you and all of the children you are willing to gift to me.”

“I love you too,” I told him.

Dr. King cleared his throat, grabbing both of our attention. “I just wish to get Beau situated so he can see the baby better and hold him.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll move.” Roman stood and went around to the foot of the bed where he stood and watched as Dr. King expertly helped me sit somewhat upright.

“You cannot stand until you can feel your legs. If you need something, that is what



your mate is for. Have him fetch things for you.”

I smiled up at Dr. King at those words. “I will. I’m good at that already.”

Dr. King nodded once. He pulled a light blanket up to my waist before he stood. “Good. Rest up for a bit. Your omega line is closing quite nicely. The sides that tore, I used magic, and they are already healed. I will be downstairs getting the paperwork sorted for the council to file for Cooper. He is a big boy. He’s ten pounds and thirteen ounces.” Dr. King made a face. “I apologize. I should have delivered him for you a week ago. One never knows if we should let things happen naturally or if we should intervene. I am pleased that things turned out as they have and everyone is healthy.”

I was still stuck on the almost eleven-pound baby. That was...huge. Maybe not for an omega dragon or bear, but for me? There was no wonder now why I looked like I was going to deliver at any moment a month ago.

“Is there anything I need to do for Beau?” Roman asked.

“Just take care of your mate as you have been doing. He will need to remain in bed for about an hour—give or take. Let him cuddle the baby, dote on him and the baby, things that you would expect a new alpha daddy to do.”

Roman grinned. “I’ll be sure to do all of those things. Thank you, Dr. King.”

“All in a day’s work,” the doctor said. He touched Roman’s shoulder as he walked past on his way out the door.

Roman returned to the side of the bed, but instead of sitting in the chair, he held out our son. I wasn’t even sure when it happened, but the baby was no longer wrapped in the towel. He was swaddled up in a light green blanket that we’d purchased for him.

I reached for the baby, and when I finally got him settled against my chest, he looked

up at me and gave a tiny little sigh before he wiggled a bit and then closed his eyes. When I searched for my mate, I found him sitting in the chair beside the bed. “Do you still like the name Cooper?” I asked.

“I do. Are you having second thoughts?”

Was I? Maybe, but I just wanted Roman to have everything he deserved. “I’m not if you aren’t,” I said. “I like the name a lot, and I think it fits him well. But if you want to name him something else, we can.”

Roman shook his head. “No. I love the name Cooper Daniel. Did you want to use Nelson or Thorne?”

I...was that even a question? I suddenly remembered a conversation that Roman and I had last month after Roman’s first visit to the university. “We’re getting married, right? So why wouldn’t we use your last name? I had assumed I would be taking your name as well. Isn’t that how it works sometimes?”

I really didn’t need to get married, nor did I need to start using Roman’s last name. But I had found it funny when he had first told me about his conversation at the university. Then, a few weeks later when we had been hanging out with Calum and Asher, I’d learned that they actually had gotten married, and Asher had taken Calum’s last name. So there were couples that actually took another step beyond claiming one another, but did I need that with Roman?

Roman’s lips parted. “You want to get married?”

My poor alpha. He seemed so lost for words, really. “Why wouldn’t I? I mean, I don’t need to. We’re already claimed. Nothing can break that except death. But of course I would marry you. Why not?”

Cooper became squirmy, but he was easy enough to calm by simply moving him

from my arm to my chest. He gave a little wiggle when I placed his head over my heart, and then his little body settled.

“You want to get married?” Roman asked again.

I looked at my mate and snorted. “No, Roman. It’s truly not necessary. I would if you asked and wanted to. I was only kidding around, though, because you mentioned the last name, and it made me think about the conversation you had at the university.”

Roman nodded slowly. He looked as if he wanted to say something else, but instead, he shook his head. If I hadn’t been staring at him so intently, I would have missed it.

“Would you like to let everyone know the newest member of our family has arrived?”

My eyes widened. “Oh. I was texting Phineas earlier. He kept saying I was going to go into labor today because of how my back was aching. We really should let him know that the baby is here. Everyone else too. Maybe in the family group chat?”

Roman smiled. “Perfect,” he said as he got up from the chair. I didn’t quite understand what he was doing until he rounded the bed and then crawled onto it with me. I smiled up at Roman as he got settled beside me. He carefully slid an arm behind me. “Did you want to look at the camera? Or maybe down at Cooper? Or up at me?”

I just stared up at Roman while holding our son. “I love you,” I said. Roman looked at me, and then I heard the sound of the picture being taken. It was unusual for Roman to have the ringer turned on, but it definitely helped to let me know when he’d taken the picture.

“What do you think?” Roman asked as he showed me the phone. “And I love you too. So much.” He kissed my temple, and I closed my eyes. My life couldn’t be more perfect. I had an amazing mate and a healthy baby boy. What more could I possibly need?

“I think it’s perfect,” I whispered after I looked at the image.

Roman moved his arm. “I agree.”

Roman: We regret that we need to skip this week’s family dinner. Beau and I are going to be a bit occupied with this not so little bundle that decided that today was the day he would finally make an appearance. We look forward to seeing everyone soon, but for now, we’re just enjoying cuddling with Cooper. Love, Roman photo attached

“What do you think?” Roman asked. I quickly read the message.

“It’s perfect. Who do you think will reply first?” I asked.

I watched as Roman attached the photo and then hit Send.

“I’m not sure. Probably Phineas since he’s on his phone more than anyone I know.”

Seconds later, Roman’s phone pinged. Then again, and again. He turned the ringer off before he tossed the phone off to the side of the bed.

“I’m not sure who was first, but we can check later. Right now, I think we need to spend some time getting to know this guy better,” Roman said. He slid his arm behind me again and gently placed his hand on top of mine that was on Cooper’s back.

I sighed and leaned into my mate’s embrace. He was right. Everything else could wait. This right here was all we needed.