



# Singing the Dragon's Heart

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Dragon shifter Kami has always been a loner. With no keep to call his own and just his best friend Talon to help him, Kami rescues dragons who need relocating, and hes really good at what he does. Until he has to do the unthinkable and give his heartstone to Talon.

They show up at the mountain keep run by a dragon named Cain just as Kami is slowly fading away, but when Kami meets the big male dragon Reno, all hell breaks loose. Because Kami has no trouble finding a new heartstone among the gems Cain has collected. Or bonding with it.

Neither Kami nor Reno has ever really heard of a stone singer, but theyre about to find out how rare that is among dragons, and to discover how that complicates everything.

This is a dragon shifter mpreg romance.

**Total Pages (Source):** 25

# Page 1

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## Chapter

### One

“ You’re going to have to take them and run, Talon. We’re almost out of darkness.” Kami knew it. The sun was creeping up on them, the sky beginning to whisper with pinks and oranges, and they needed to fly.

There was no way they were going to get all the omegas out if they didn’t move now, and he was slowing all of them down. He wasn’t trying to, but he was exhausted. He hadn’t known how badly it would hurt, to be without a stone, to do what he’d done.

But he had, and he didn’t regret it.

But he couldn’t...he just couldn’t do this anymore, and faced with the cliffs before him—there was no way he could shift, much less fly.

He met his best friend’s gaze, the huge scarred dragon glaring daggers at him. “The needs of the many, right?”

“I’m not going to leave you here to die, you stubborn ass,” Talon growled, the ground beneath them rumbling, some of the children beginning to cry.

“What does it matter?” he snapped back, his temper flaring. They didn’t have time to argue. It wasn’t as if no one would know who had done this. They’d made enough magical noise to wake the dead, smashing the wards to make it seem as if someone was invading so they could escape with a mass of unmated omegas and little ones, all

eager to take their chances in a wild new world where they were free to come and go as they would. “What does it matter if I die here, or I die free? I’m dying one way or the other. Take the omegas and run.”

“Seriously, you two? You both have damned martyr complexes, and it’s going to get us all killed!” Katerina, one of the omegas with a child wrapped close to her chest, snapped at them, her eyes flashing with lightning. “Put him on your damn back and carry him, alpha. We’re not idiots; we are omegas. I swear by all I hold holy. You two are determined to out-sacrifice one another. Not only is it irritating, but it’s becoming boring.”

The rumble of the other omegas surprised him, but apparently, they were all in agreement.

They’d managed to sneak out of the keep in the dark of night, staying low and along the edge of the water until they reached the rocky edge of the mountains. The dawn was about to come, and they had very little time left to fly up and over to the human realm. From there, they were going to have to head up into the Rocky Mountains to find the sanctuary.

Talon had heard a rumor that his brother, Triton, had escaped to the freehold, that the entire place was protected from danger.

That they could all be free.

That didn’t matter now. Now they had to get up and over the rocky cliffs before they were in danger of being spotted. They had to slip into the human realm. Find a place to spend the day. Find transport, food. There were so many parts to this and... Kami just couldn’t think.

“All right. There’s no time to argue. We have to get up over those cliffs. We have to

do it now.” Talon gave him a judging glance, serious as a heart attack. “Do you think you can fly, or do you want to ride me? As a human, I can carry you no problem, but I’m not leaving you behind. So either shift and fly, or let’s go. I can feel the warriors; they’re getting close.”

Kami shook his head, so frustrated, but there was no time to argue. “I can’t shift. I think... I think that’s done for me now.”

“Fine. Then we’ll fly.” Talon nodded. “All right, let’s do this. Everyone, you’re going to go up and over. As soon as you get on the other side and into human air space, you go down and you shift back so they can’t catch you. There’s a hotel right on the other side. There are eight reserved rooms, they’ve already been paid for. Katerina, they’re under your name.”

“Wait, what?” When had Talon done any of that?

Talon just ignored him. “I’ll send transport; they’ll pick you up, and they’ll bring you to us.”

Katerina nodded. “Then let’s do this. Is everyone ready? We have to move now. Dawn’s about to come, and if they catch us on this side...”

No one wanted to think about that.

The dragons began to shift, two dozen of them, six with little ones, swarming up along the cliff face.

“I don’t understand, Talon. Why aren’t we dealing with all this?”

“Because I’m taking you to the keep. The rumor is that there’s a seer there that can fix this, and my brother knows things I don’t. I don’t know how, but I’m not going to

just let you die. Not for me, not like this.”

“I don’t think that you get a choice in that.”

“You haven’t given me a choice in a lot of things,” Talon snapped. “But that’s really not the issue. Now let’s go. It’s time to fly. When I shift, you grab on and hold on tight.” Talon wrapped him in warm layers of blanket.

“I’ll do my best.”

“You do that.” Talon shifted, his huge dragon form so impressive, even if the scars were worse in this form, slashing across his scales. Still, he was a massive warrior alpha, and he gleamed an iridescent platinum color.

Healthier now that he had a new heartstone.

Well, new to Talon.

He put a foot on Talon’s foreleg, and he was lifted up. He clambered over Talon’s back, sliding in between wing ridges and neck scales. Now all he had to do was hold on. Mostly with his legs. He could sleep right here, to be honest. He would just have to not slide off...

Don’t you dare slide off. You are my hero, my best friend.

I’m no one’s hero. The words made him smile, though, pleasing him down to the bone.

Shut up, Kami. I can have you for a hero if I want. Talon sounded so affronted.

You can. He squeezed Talon with his legs. I couldn’t let them kill you. You are—

Talon was willing to help him smuggle dragons out. They'd been doing it for months, going keep to keep, gauging interest, slowly bleeding them out so they could fly free.

Not everyone wanted to go; in fact, it was the smallest amount, and?—

Kami! Hold on!

Talon wheeled around, roaring furiously as a wave of warriors came screeching toward them. The stones from the mountain seemed to be hurling themselves off the cliff face itself and lobbing toward the dragons.

Most of the omegas were well over the edge, moving to the human's air space.

But he knew they had to give them more time, and that Talon would have to be the one to turn and fight. So Kami had to hold on for dear life.

He bent down to Talon's neck. Don't drop me.

Doing my best.

Three dragons appeared behind them as Talon wheeled about. More rocks rained down, the earth along the edge of the opening rising and spitting itself out at the dragons coming their way, spitting fire.

Stay down!

He nodded against Talon's neck, his heart racing, his body feeling weaker by the moment. Oh, he wasn't dying. Not yet. But he was not well.

He heard some of the children screaming, and he closed his eyes, trying to call up his magic. The water would dance for him if he could call to it. It wasn't like breathing

fire, but sometimes he could do it.

He sucked in a deep breath, then concentrated on making a funnel of water. A water tornado, or cyclone. He just needed it to put a wall between them and their attackers. Just long enough.

Be careful! Talon roared. Not too close.

I'm trying. It's not an exact thing! Water did have a mind of its own, based on wind, waves and more. And the beating dragon wings were stirring up crazy air currents.

Talon back winged, and dragons roared, great gouts of steam geysering as bursts of fire met the water. They had to get away, or they would be flash steamed like a limp vegetable.

A glance told him that all the omegas were now in human territory and on the way to safety.

“Go, Talon! Go now.”

Hold on! Talon shouted at him again, then swooped low, drawing one dragon to crash into the cliff. Then Talon rose sharply, and G forces pulled at him, making Kami dizzy.

He fought for purchase, but as soon as they evened out over land, human land, he let go of his waterspouts, and gray mist of a different kind crept into his vision. His grip weakened on Talon's neck, and he gave a weak cry.

He was going to fall.

Kami! No! Talon's mental shout was the last thing he heard, and then everything

went black as he spun off into the air.



## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Two

“Reno! Incoming!” The bellow from Triton made Reno scramble to the edge of the decking that ran around the outside pool, his heart pounding.

He looked up at where Triton was pointing, and he was stunned to see a dragon, laboring through the wards, pushing down from the mountains to the west.

The sanctuary sat in a bowl ringed in mountains from all directions. It was pretty much perfectly defensible, but someone, a huge alpha from the looks of it, had broken through.

He has a civilian with him. In his claws. What do we do? That was one of the young alphas who was guarding the heights, sounding completely panicked.

“Let him land.”

Reno turned to stare at Triton’s omega mate, Elowyn, his eyebrows rising. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Triton groaned. “Hailee...”

“We are a sanctuary, are we not?” That delicate chin set in a hard line.

“Yes, but?—”

“No, man,” Reno said with a chuckle. “Don’t argue with your mate. I have seen bad, bad things happen to braaken who did.” He crossed his arms, watching the big dragon falter and dip, then valiantly try to stay the course.

Triton squinted, his face taking on a stony cast. “It can’t?—”

“What’s the matter, my friend?” Reno felt damn bad for the big intruder, actually. He looked exhausted, his scales nearly transparent. But he couldn’t offer help. Not until he knew if this one was friend or foe.

But Triton trumpeted suddenly, shifting and leaping into the air, and Reno was more than a little worried that he’d lost his shit.

The guy had been through a lot.

But Reno couldn’t let him just attack, so he shifted as well, arrowing after Triton.

Triton! You have to stop!

No! No, I know him! Triton flew faster than Reno had ever seen him, circling around behind the struggling dragon to come up under his belly, supporting him as he started to drop.

Okay, shit. Clearly Triton was gonna help this alpha land, so Reno went to lend a wing.

Which was a damn good thing, because as Triton took most of the dragon’s weight, those wings went limp, and the dragon drooped onto Triton’s back.

His claw opened, and a slight human form tumbled out, and Reno roared, putting on a burst of speed so he could catch the man who shook loose when the dragon stopped supporting his own weight.

Reno just managed to open a claw to catch the omega, who was thin and unconscious and cold, before the limp guy fell right into the lake.

Cradling the omega in his claw, Reno spiraled down to the ground right near the outdoor kitchen, his heart pounding, his clawed paw shaking.

“What happened?” Several alphas came running, his best friends Boone and Durango among them.

“He was carrying this one. Triton says he knows the alpha. He’ll need help.”

“Got it.” Durango broke into a run again, racing out to where Triton landed, the huge alpha rolling off his back and onto the ground with a thud.

The medical staff swarmed in. The new doctor followed by a handful of others.

“What the hell is going on?” Dr. Glace snapped, and Reno rolled his eyes. Glace’s skill was command, but the young son of a bitch forgot how to use it, and he tended to freeze a room rather than getting answers.

“The big bastard came in carrying this one. Neither one looks like they’re gonna make it until the morning.” Which was a damn shame, given that the omega in his arms was amazing, even in his weakened state. Ebony hair, leathered skin, whip-cord lean—the scars screamed that he was a warrior, but he was icy cold and so pale.

“All right, well, let’s get that one down to medical. I can’t move the dragon, so I’ll deal with him up here. We’ll get him warmed up and see what we can do for him.

What the hell is up with Triton?"

Elowyn stood there, the little guy looking just about stunned, and he could hear Cerran hollering from the back of the crowd, demanding to be let through, three babies trailing behind him like a train. "Those are my mates! What the hell is going on?"

"Triton says it's his brother!" Elowyn swayed, sucking air. "Cerran! I need you. Triton says this is his brother."

Well, that was a shock. He'd heard stories about Triton's brother. Not a lot, but some, as much as they ever spoke about what they'd lost, when they left their old keeps behind. Of course, his brother had been gone before Triton ever escaped his keep. Still, it would be fascinating to find out whether or not the brother was friend or foe.

Not really his call.

That was up to the keep's seers.

Reno just lifted the little guy up, and they started heading downstairs, two medics following him.

He liked Izzy. She was a round, happy omega that managed to keep the peace and organize the medical staff with an iron hand at the same time.

"We'll take him down into one of the open rooms. There are lots, today. There's been precious few emergencies, so we're doing all right," Izzy said, winking at him, but Reno wasn't in the mood to joke.

"He's cold as ice."

“Well, we’ll get him warmed up, see what we can do. He looks like he’s been through a war.” She clucked softly, shaking her head. “Is he an omega warrior? Are those a thing in the old keeps?”

“It doesn’t happen often, if ever.” He’d never heard of it, but that meant as little as the thought that buzzed through his brain. He hadn’t heard of many things, and that didn’t make them less true. He hadn’t heard of k’gra—evil, magical dragons that existed only to cause pain and fear—but they had come after Elowyn and their babies, hadn’t they?

“He doesn’t look happy, that’s for sure. At least we can get him warm and comfortable, even if the worst scenario happens.

“Don’t say that,” Reno snapped at her. “Don’t you dare say that.” No way this little one was going to show up, land in his claws all battle-hardened and fierce, and then just die like some coward. No way.

His—this—omega was a warrior.

“All right, alpha. Of course. I’m sorry.” Izzy shot him a quizzical look. “We’re almost there. You can just leave him with us; it’ll be all right.”

He hated that humoring-the-lunatic tone. “I’m not leaving him.”

“What?”

“You heard me. I said, I’m not leaving him. He’ll need to know he has a friend when he wakes up.”

He needed to know that Reno wasn’t going to let anybody die. Not on his watch. Not this one.

This little one was going to live.

Do you hear me, fighter? I have decided that you will live.

What? The mental voice was painfully soft, yet it rocketed through him, clear and crisp and utterly shocked. Who are you to decide anything?

I am Reno. I am your braaken, hailee, and I have decided that I will not lose you, so prepare to heal.

He heard a soft mental snort. I'm so tired, though.

You can rest all you need to, but I'm not letting you go.

You and Talon. There was a soft sigh. It's not really up to you.

Doubt assailed him. Talon? That's the big guy?

Talon. Yes.

Shit. Was Talon this one's mate? Surely not. There was no way Reno could feel this way about someone else's mate.

Let's get you warm.

We flew so far...

"You're safe here," he said aloud, because Izzy was staring.

Are the others safe? the omega asked.

“The others? What others?” What the hell was he talking about?

We were supposed to send transport for them. We were supposed to help them.

You and this Talon?

Yes, me and Talon. We have been rescuing omegas. We were supposed to send transport and get them out. Did they come here?

Izzy started wrapping the man in blankets, and as soon as he began to get warm, his teeth began to chatter. “You’re going to be fine. You’ll warm up.”

How could he hear this man, this omega, so easily if he had a mate? What was going on?

Was this like Triton and Cerran? Where they were both going to mate with their omega? Reno wasn’t sure that his ability to share was quite that large.

He didn’t feel a connection, a draw toward the new dragon upstairs, but what did he know?

Are you listening to me? I need you to find out what happened to them. I didn’t give up my heartstone so that they would just die in a hotel room in the human lands. Go get them.

Well, if nothing else, Reno would say that this little omega was firm and demanding.

It was kind of hot, even if it made him want to pop him on the butt and yell, don’t tell me what to do.

Which Reno would never do because he wasn’t a child, but he wanted to.

“I’m going to go see what the hell this omega’s talking about. You’ve got this under control?”

Izzy looked at him like he was a little insane but nodded. “Yes, sir, we’ve got it under control. You go do you, Boo. If you see Doc, tell him that I’ve got another room ready for the big guy. Once he is, you know, smaller.”

“Copy.” He strode out of the infirmary, heading up to see if he could find Cain. If anyone knew that a group of omegas was due imminently, it would be their seer. He had no doubt.

He found Cain with the good doctor, who stood with his hands on the side of the big dragon, who looked to be barely breathing as he lay on the terrace.

“Boss. A word?”

“Of course.” Cain walked over to him, half his attention still on the downed dragon.

“I was down at the infirmary. The omega that came in with him says there was a coterie of omegas and children who were supposed to be picked up and brought here. They helped them to escape.”

Cain’s eyebrows rose. “I assumed they had decided to go elsewhere.”

“So wait, you knew they were meant to be coming?”

“Yes, but when they didn’t arrive, I sent a message through the intermediary. I never heard back...” Cain scowled. “They’re still out there?”

“It appears so.”



“Damn.” Cain whirled and stared at the big dragon. “We need to find them, Reno.”

“That’s what I do best, boss. Oh, and the omega said something about giving up his heartstone.” And Reno was going to need Cain to find the guy a new one.

ASAP.

“So he’s awake. I should go speak to him.”

“No. No, he’s still unconscious.”

Cain’s eyebrows flew up, the white melding with his hair. “Then how did you talk with him?”

“I, uh, can hear him. But, you know, he looks like a fighter, not a healer or a seer. Maybe that’s why. Warrior communication.”

“Interesting.” Cain glanced at the big dragon again. “Can you hear him?”

“Huh? No.” He flushed, because he’d already thought of that, hadn’t he? “I mean, I haven’t tried too hard.”

“And did you try with the—with the omega?” Cain was back to watching him carefully.

“No. I mean, I guess I was just thinking really loud.”

“Maybe.”

Glance growled, the sound drawing their attention. “Will someone get me the sedative I asked for! He won’t shift unless I give it to him.”

“Yes, braaken!” Someone went running, and he and Cain moved over to stand by Triton, who rested a big hand on the huge dragon’s head.

“He’s really your brother?” Reno asked.

Triton nodded. “Talon. He has many more scars, but?—”

“But it’s definitely him,” Cerran put in, standing close to his alpha mate.

“I thought he was dead.” Triton’s voice had dropped to a whisper. “I didn’t know.”

“You would never have stopped looking if you had,” Elowyn said.

“I would not have.” Triton swallowed hard. “Cain?—”

“Dr. Glace can help him.”

“I can. He’s exhausted from flying, and I would say he’s had some sort of magical trauma recently as well. But if I can get him to the medical bay, we’ll be fine.”

“Here, Doc.” The kid who had run off came back with a huge syringe loaded with a cloudy liquid.

“Thank you.” The Doc moved to stand where Talon’s foreleg met his chest. “I need to get in here between the scales. Triton, if you could keep an eye on both teeth and tail?”

“I’ll help,” Reno said.

An injured alpha could be a real danger. Reno knew it from personal experience. So he stepped up to guard Doc’s back.

Triton slid between his brother's head and Doc, and then Doc jabbed the guy with the needle.

The very earth beneath their feet rumbled, and Triton made soft noises. "It's all right, Talon. We're trying to help you, not hurt you."

"Shhhh." Doc patted the big forearm, then pulled free with the syringe.

"Ouch," Reno murmured.

"Yeah, but it's for his own good." Doc sighed. "Come on, big guy. Shrink."

"I've been trying to reach him, but he's so deeply out..." Triton looked agonized.

Cain moved closer, then put a hand next to Triton's on Talon's body. He closed his eyes, and a deep groan reverberated through the still dragon before the guy shifted in a heartbeat.

"That did it. Thanks, Cain." Doc waved forward a set of dragons, who wrapped the big guy in a blanket and lifted him onto a stretcher.

"Triton, Cerran. Go with Doc. Reno, Boone, Durango? With me." Cain marched off without waiting to see if they were coming.

"What's up, Reno?" Durango asked.

"A group of omegas and kids has gone missing."

"Shit. And these guys have something to do with it?"

"The omega told me we had to find them. That he and Talon had arranged transport

here.”

“Then why didn’t our guys go pick them up?”

It was good question that Boone was asking. They had three retrieval teams now, and another in training. Why would anyone send a group from one of the keeps they patrolled via regular transport?

“Cain said he thought they had decided not to come.”

“That is what I thought,” Cain murmured as he led them into his office. “I did try to double-check, but I kept getting no answer.”

“Damn. What keep were they coming from?”

“A remote one on the West Coast. Right up near Victoria.”

“So we send a team. Let them canvass the area.”

“I want you to take point, Reno.”

“Huh?” He didn’t run rescues anymore.

“I need you on it. The omega clearly connected with you.”

“Well, I mean, he told me that there were omegas and stuff, yeah. He also told me that he gave his heartstone away. I didn’t even think it was a thing.”

Durango stared at him. “It’s not a thing.”

“See, that’s what I thought.” Reno felt vindicated, a little bit. “It’s not a thing, but

that's what he said."

"It's a thing." Cain didn't sound impressed. And if it was a thing, shouldn't Cain sound impressed? It seemed like it would be a hard thing. "The omega has to have a huge amount of will."

"Yeah, he's kind of strident."

Hey! I'm not strident. I just need you to go and do what I told you to do.

"Quit talking to me. You're not supposed to be able to talk to me." Reno didn't like this. Not one bit.

"Did you get hit in the head by the big dragon?" Durango asked. "I think maybe... Cain? Can someone look at his head?"

Boone sort of blinked at them all. "What am I missing? I don't... I'm pretty sure that I was supposed to be doing something else. Right now, not whatever this is."

"I'm going to send you all to Borneo permanently," Cain snapped.

Boone stared at Cain. "I have six children. Six. Like one more than five. Do you honestly think that Borneo is a threat? Six babies, five of whom are toddlers. I would go in a heartbeat."

"All right. Will you all please just calm down?"

Oh, Reno hated it when Cain pulled the whole 'charm the wild alpha' thing.

"Look, I did not ask to be listening to this strident omega who doesn't like to be called strident."

“So stop calling him strident.” Durango wasn’t helping.

I’m going to kick your ass.

“You can try.”

“Who the fuck is Reno talking to?” Boone asked. “I don’t understand.”

Durango’s eyes began to twinkle. “Really, bro, you gotta catch up. I think maybe having all of those diapers around your house has made you a little stupid.”

Boone arched one eyebrow. “Do you want me to tell Eyv what you just said? Because I will.”

“Worse,” Reno pointed out. “You could tell Eyv that Durango wants more babies. That he’s ready. They’ve only got three. They’ve got four to catch up to you.”

He needed a hamburger.

Cain took a deep breath, then let it out. The sudden smell of something golden, like cleansing light, filled the air.

Boss was frustrated.

We left them at a hotel. They were supposed to be picked up there. The omega in his head sent him a name and a set of coordinates.

That made my head hurt.

You think yours does.

How does someone give up their heartstone, anyway?

“Reno!”

“Don’t yell, boss. Not a good look for a seer who’s supposed to be all Zen.”

“I am going to kill you.”

“And then I won’t be able to go get those damn omegas.”

Boone sighed. “I’m going to tell Lake that this is all your fault. If you suddenly are deposed by Skye, you know why.”

“Thanks. Go get the omegas, please? Fast and easy. There are children.”

“We’re on it, boss. No worries.” Reno and his team were the best, after all.

“So—” Boone glanced all around. “Am I in the field?”

“Neither of you have to go,” Reno said. “I can take the other guys.”

“No. No, this is going to require all of you, including the two newer members.”

“My mate is going to kill me,” Boone moaned.

“They can all stay together like a slumber party,” Durango put in. “We’ll be home in no time.”

“You better hope so,” Boone said. “Or you’re all going down. Including the seer.”

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Three

K ami personally just thought that dying should be one: faster, and two: one hell of a lot less painful.

Really, if it were, more people would be into it. That would take care of the population problem.

The whole thing, as it was, took for fucking ever.

And it hurt.

He didn't really mind the hurting part; it was the boredom part.

"It's your own fault, you know," Talon said to him. "If you hadn't been an asshole, then you wouldn't be dying."

"If I hadn't been an asshole, you'd already be dead. Why are you bitching? Don't you have a brother to make up with or something?" Seriously, they'd talked about this already.

"No. I'm going to hang out with you until you die, and then I'll go make up with my brother some more. He has three babies—three—and I think that his mate is pregnant again. It's like they don't know what causes that."



“You’re just irritated because you haven’t found a mate yet. Once you find a mate, you’re going to have like twenty thousand babies. And you have to promise to name them after me. Like start with a K and then go through every letter of my entire name as you have babies.” That was a fabulous idea, in fact.

Talon shook his head. “No, I don’t want to name a baby anything that starts with an I.”

“Too fucking bad. I sacrificed my whole self for you, so you have to do it. Ichabod is a great name. Isabelle. Imogen. Isaac. Uh. Imhotep.”

Talon stared at him. “You are a sick, sad little dragon, and I don’t like you.”

Liar. “That’s okay, I don’t like you either, but still, since I sacrificed myself for you and everything, you have to do it. Kevin, Andy, Murgatroyd, and Imhotep.”

“Oh, that’s great. That’s fabulous. Kevin and Murgatroyd.”

He grinned. “Don’t forget Imhotep and Andy.”

“Is Andy an Andrew?” Talon asked.

“Possibly an Andrea?”

“Why aren’t you dead yet?”

He stuck his tongue out at Talon. “I’m sure it’s because you keep bothering me, and you’re not seeing your brother.”

They stared at each other, and to his utter horror, Talon’s eyes began to shimmer with tears.

He shook his head and said, “Nope, no, no, no. Don’t you even dare.” He reached out and took Talon’s hand. “It was worth it. I did it willingly. Don’t dishonor my gift.” Don’t cry. I knew what it meant. I knew.

“You’re an asshole, and I kind of hate you.” Talon’s big head drooped forward in defeat.

“Good. Have I told you what my middle name is yet?”

“Shut up.”

“So tell me, did they get the omegas?” He remembered, he thought, telling someone, some big amazing someone, where the omegas were. But he wasn’t sure now.

Time had passed and things were fuzzy, and it hadn’t happened again, so maybe he was dreaming it. He just wasn’t sure.

“The seer wants to come see you,” Talon told him. “Cain. The one who started this place.”

“Why?” He blinked. He was just an omega who was on his way off the mortal dragon coil. “And did they get the omegas?”

“Yes, they did. Their transport took the money and ran rather than going to get them.”

“Oh, there’s a special level of hell for that.” His muscles cramped up, and he panted, trying to ride the pain.

“There is. Those dragons deserve a safe space. And the seer wants to talk to you about a heartstone.”

“Talon! What did you tell him?”

“About what?”

“About us switching stones!” That was no one’s business but theirs.

“I didn’t tell him. The alpha you dreamtalked with when you first got here told him.”

“I told him that?”

“Looks like it.”

“Well, damn.” What had he been thinking? He didn’t need that kind of “what was he thinking”, pitying kind of BS. Right? “So, uh, where is he? The alpha?”

“He went to get our omegas. His name is Reno. He was banished years ago. With his heartstone.”

“Wow. Well, good for him. Everyone deserves to have their stone. Is the seer going to let you stay with your brother?”

“I haven’t asked.”

“Talon...”

“What? We’ve been apart for years. He doesn’t know me anymore.”

“And you don’t know what he went through. Go to sibling therapy.”

“No.” That stubborn jaw went rock hard. “Not now. I have time to make nice with Triton.”

“When? What if you hiding from him pisses him off?”

“Kami, stop. I told him what was going on, and he said we would be fine.”

Kami groaned. “So the whole keep knows.”

Talon blew out a sigh. “I suppose by now. Yes. So will you talk to the seer?”

“For a few minutes, yeah. After I rest.” His bones hurt, and his eyelids felt like lead weights sat on them suddenly.

“Okay.” Talon took his hand. “Sleep. I’ll wait right here.”

“Don’t be an...ass.” He couldn’t breathe.

“Kami—”

He closed his eyes and fell into something like sleep.

You need to stay with us, bud.

What? Why? It hurts.

Tough shit. I told you, hailee. You’ve got to wait for me.

I can’t. Suddenly Kami wanted to cry . I’m sorry. I gave Talon my heartstone. I can’t  
? —

You can wait for me. I’ll be there tomorrow morning. Let Cain help you. He can make you feel better. Even more than the healers. I know.

You promise?

I do. Stay with me, stay here for me. I'm almost home. You did so well. Everyone is safe. All the omegas, all the babies.

He began to cry. "Send the seer."

Such a good hailee. Thank you.

You better make this worth it, braaken.

I will. I promise.

Talon called out to someone nearby. "He said to get Cain!"

"Excellent," another voice rejoined. The healer, he thought. One of them, anyway. There seemed to be an endless parade.

Are you okay? You have the omegas?

We do. Easy peasy. Which is good, because I feel like I have the human flu. I blame you.

Me! I didn't do anything.

Yes, you did. You showed up all pale and tragic and mine, buddy. And then I had to leave.

A giggle actually burst from him, drying up the tears, and making Talon squeeze his hand.

“Kami?”

He opened his eyes with a hard effort. “The braaken...he’s talking to me. He told me to see Cain.”

“I’m glad.” Talon smiled. “I want him to help ease your pain, if nothing else.”

Kami licked his lips. “Dry.”

Talon got him water immediately.

“Thank you. Did you talk to Cain? Tell him about what we did?”

“No. Just Triton.”

He knows, though. I mean, what I could tell him.

I can’t remember your—what is your name?

Reno.

Reno. He tested the name, finding it odd but appealing. Where is that from? What keep?

It’s not. That’s the city I landed in when they magically banished me.

So you have another name?

There was a long, long pause. Yeah. I’ll tell you in person when I see you.

“Oh, that dick.”

“What?” Talon stared at him.

“Reno. He won’t tell me his real name until he sees me. Which means now I do have to wait for him. I want to know.”

“Well, then, that gives you something to look forward to.”

He nodded, breathing in and out. Just talking to Reno did make it better, though, so maybe it was partly the same “flu” Reno was talking about. How sad, to have found his mate just when he was going to die.

You’re not going to die, you jerk.

You don’t know. I gave up my heartstone. I deserve to, but Talon needed it more than me. He’ll mate and make strong dragon babies.

Well, you’re my mate, so where does that leave me?

Tears stung his eyes again, but there was a commotion at the door before he could answer. “Kami. Thank you for letting me come to see you. And you, Talon.” Cain came right to him, a bright, aqua shimmer of a dragon. He put his hands on Kami, and energy hummed around them.

It didn’t stop the pain, but it eased it, making him relax down into the surprisingly comfortable bed in the infirmary.

“Better?” Cain asked him, and he nodded.

“So much better.” He could breathe, and the pain was down to a dull roar.

Cain smiled at him, settling on the corner of his bed. “Excellent. Now can one of you

two please tell me what happened?”

“I didn’t ask him to do it,” Talon said. “I didn’t even know he could do it.” The big dragon’s expression was devastated. “I swear to you I didn’t ask.”

“Of course you didn’t. Dipshit.” Kami rolled his eyes. Naturally Talon hadn’t asked. “He was captured. We were running a rescue mission, and he got caught, and I didn’t get to him in time. Not before the fuckers crushed his stone. And my stone was the same; we both had emeralds. So fuck it.”

Simple as that.

“You both had emeralds?” Cain seemed confused. “That’s still hardly interchangeable.”

“You don’t understand. Talon is amazing. Talon is a hero. He’s this fucking legendary dragon.” And Kami wasn’t. He was one omega, who didn’t have babies. Who didn’t want to be knotted by some random Joe. He wasn’t interested in doing what he was told and staying in his lane. “I couldn’t let him just die. I couldn’t. He’s my best friend.”

“Exactly.” Talon took his hand and held on. “Do you see? He gave me everything. He gave me my life back.”

“You’re going to have a mate and babies and an amazing life. Yeah?” Kami knew that was what was important.

Talon shook his head. “Yeah.”

“Listen.” Cain’s voice brooked no argument. “You both will have mates and babies. We will find you a new stone. It’s just... How did you do it?”



Kami shrugged. "I did it. I guess I told the stone that this was what was going to happen. That's all."

"You just told your stone?" Cain looked absolutely, utterly stymied. "How does that even happen? Do you hear it?"

"Can I hear what?" Of course he could. Talon's stone had been his. It was happy, settled, proud. Kami tilted his head.

"Your stone."

"You mean Talon's stone." He wasn't going to confuse the poor thing.

"All right. You can hear Talon's stone?" Cain bit the words out.

"What? You don't hear yours? You're a seer." Kami was confused and his head hurt. Something weird is going on here.

What? Reno's answer was immediate. What's wrong?

I don't know, but your seer is looking more and more worried.

"Can I see your back please?" Cain asked, standing in a sudden rush.

"Pardon me?"

"Your back. Can I see it?"

"You're the seer. Talon, can you help me?" He leaned forward, and Cain moved his shirt, staring.

“You’re a stone singer,” Cain said.

“What?” He didn’t follow.

“A stone singer.” Cain stepped away, and Talon eased him back on the bed. “Where did you come from? What keep did you come from?”

“I didn’t.”

“I’m sorry?”

“I didn’t grow up on a coast. I grew up in the desert. My parents had left the keep system, and then when I was a young adult, I was curious. I went looking for a keep, and I visited some, but none of them were for me. Problem was that since I didn’t belong there, they didn’t try to keep me, but there were lots of omegas they were trying to restrain, and that was a problem for me. I couldn’t just let them.” Freedom was a basic dragon right.

“You don’t understand. We’ve got a problem.”

“Okay.” Reno. I’m not going to be able to stay. I’m sorry, braaken, but I can’t stay. There’s something wrong.

No, you promised. Just until I get there. Then if you can’t stay, I’ll go with you. I won’t make you go alone.

“What do you mean problem? What kind of problem?” Talon was beginning to growl now.

“He’s a stone singer. He should have been sent to the mines as a child for training.”

Talon arched one eyebrow. “Well, he escaped that too. Good for him.”

“That’s not a bad thing, Talon,” Cain said through his teeth. “It’s quite an honor.”

“Well, whoop-dee-doo,” Kami snipped. “It’s a bit late now.”

“Not really. If you’re a stone singer, that makes the problem of finding you a new stone far easier.” Cain spread his hands. “But it makes things more complicated for me.”

Kami wasn’t sure he was supposed to care. “So, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. There’s no reason for you to be sorry. It is literally not your fault. It is absolutely my problem in that I may have started something that I was totally and woefully unprepared to sustain.”

“Okay.” Talon stared at Cain. “What do you mean exactly? Does this have to do with my brother?”

“Yes. Yes, it has to do with your brother. It has to do with incredibly precious stones and a dozen seers and stealing twenty-some-odd warriors from your old keep. And that the gods have sort of quite literally blessed this keep. And now? Now we have a stone singer. Did I mention the nobles? Have I mentioned that?” Cain ran his hand through his white hair.

Talon tilted his head. “Which ones?”

“Lady Arden and her sons, Lake and Skye.”

Wow.

Kami looked at Talon and whispered, “Am I supposed to be impressed?”

“Well, you don’t have to be, but you ought to pretend to be, probably.”

“Cool. Wow,” he echoed.

Nice job , Reno thought.

Are you supposed to be eavesdropping or aren’t you supposed to be rescuing omegas?

I’m not driving. Boone is. I’m on break, so I’m just sort of sitting here in the back of the truck.

“You’ve got quite a problem here.” Talon sounded partially worried, partially incredibly impressed. “Good thing for you that my brother and I are incredibly equipped to handle immense problems. You really took the second-in-command of the keep.”

Talon stopped. Blinked. “Triton blew up the keep?” The image came to him clear as day.

“It was less blowing up than just, um, well, it was a diversion.” Cain kind of chuckled.

Talon shook his head, expression stunned. Triton blew up the keep.

Did you blow up the keep? Kami asked Reno.

Reno snorted. I was in the keep. Or next to the keep in the jail when they blew it up. I was not involved in the actual explosions. The taking of the stone was totally me.

Durango too.

Oh.

And I was involved in the taking of the seers and the lady. That was me. But that was before the explosion, like way before.

“Fabulous. I’ve just inserted myself into a goddamn war. Somebody better get me a stone so I can fight.”

“That’s the idea,” Cain put in. “Not the fighting. The stone.”

“My head hurts.” Kami might have whimpered. But then Cain touched him and made it all pretty decent again. Thank the gods.

Tell them you need to rest. We can have a conference when I get back.

“Reno says to leave me alone.”

Cain’s eyebrows rose almost to his hairline. “Did he indeed?”

“Yes. He says we can all meet when he gets home. I’m sorry. I’m just so tired.”

Cain sighed softly. “I know you are. I’m sorry. But if you need me, call for me. I can help. In the meantime, I shall be gathering stones.” He rose, patting Kami’s shoulder, then smiled at Talon. “He’ll be all right.”

“Sure.” Talon waited until Cain was out of sight. “Are you okay?”

“Huh? Yeah. I mean, I’m better than I was. He’s like the Energizer bunny.”

“Well, good. You needed some energy.” Talon winked. “Want me to read to you?”

“You can read?” He opened his eyes very wide.

“I think I’m going to beat you to death,” Talon said.

Kami snorted, closing his eyes and grinning. “Well, at least then it will be over and done with.”

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

### Chapter

### Four

Reno pushed the guys hard the last hundred miles or so. In fact, he drove, and he did it like a bat out of hell. The omegas and their kids slept in the back, cuddled together, with Boone, Durango, and the other two alphas stacked like firewood along one wall of the van, sound asleep.

He needed to get back to the keep. Now.

This was such a clusterfuck. His mate needed a new heartstone. His mate! Who gave away their heartstone? And how? And how did they go about getting him a new one?

Reno knew how it had worked for Boone and Durango's mates. And Dex. And—But what if Kami was too weak to go through the process? It had kicked the other guys' asses.

What then?

He was going to lose his shit.

Boone climbed up into the passenger seat next to him, hair all over the place, his clothes rumpled. "Damn. You're making good time."

Reno gave him a grim stare. "He's fading, man."

“Shit. Okay, when we get there, you go. Don’t worry about anything else. Go get his ass and deal with him and Cain.”

“Okay. Okay, yeah. I swear, man, my head is killing me and my chest hurts.”

“Shit, man. I hear you, and mine wasn’t—” Boone took a deep breath. “Way to make it about me. This sucks for you and him. So go. Be together. It will help him.”

“Thanks, man.” He had the best friends in the world. Reno knew it. There was no denying the guys had his back.

“You need to pull over and let me drive.”

“No, I’ll go nuts because he’s not answering me. I hope he’s just sleeping, but I can’t tell.”

“You got this. I know it. The gods wouldn’t give you a mate and then let him die.”

“He won’t be going alone.”

“Reno.” Boone sounded so shocked.

“I’m not all suicidal, man, but I can tell. We’re bonded. And it will only get worse once I’m next to him. Close enough to touch.”

“Shit.” Boone glanced behind him. “Durango will plotz.”

“I’m going to figure out how to save him. If I have to plug his ass into Cain for a while, I will. Or Skye. They’re not healers, I know, but they have that wild energy.”

“I know. I do.” Boone reached over to squeeze his shoulder. “Anything we can do.



Seriously.”

“Thanks.” He probed mentally for Kami again and got a sort of sleepy mumble.

And all of a sudden, he could breathe again.

“He’s still there.”

“Good. We’re five minutes out.”

“Are we almost there?” The soft question came from an omega named Kalia, who had an infant and a toddler. Her mate had been killed in a storm at sea, but she had been able to navigate the loss thanks to her kids.

“We are. Very close.”

“Good.” She chuckled. “I need a restroom.”

“Five minutes. Can you make it?” Boone asked.

“I can. I would rather not pee on the side of the road in the mountains.”

“Hold onto your butts,” Reno said. “We’re going down into the valley.”

He took the switchback like a maniac, glad that most everyone was asleep. Even Boone was a little tense until they hit the road into the gated section of the keep, and he squealed to a halt in front of the main building as Boone started waking the others up.

“Go,” Boone told him, and he ran for it, racing into the building and heading for the infirmary. He would have just flown, but he’d been on a mission, and he didn’t give

up his spot on the team even for the most urgent personal issues.

He hit the sick bay like a freight train, and the tech on duty out front jumped half a foot when he burst in. “Where’s Kami?”

“Room three,” she said.

He ran there, slamming into the room, where a big dragon who had to be Talon leaped to his feet.

“Stand down, man. I’m Reno. His mate.”

“Reno. You were there when I flew in.”

“I was. I’m here for him.”

“I am too. He saved my life. I swear to you I didn’t ask him to.”

“Regret is overrated.” He scooped Kami up and held him. “I’m going to find him a stone.”

Talon stood, loaded for bear. “Good. How can I help?”

Reno already liked Talon. It didn’t take much. He liked Triton. They were basically two peas in a pod. Solid warriors.

“Thanks. Like I said, we’re going to find him a stone. Now let’s get Cain.” He hauled Kami up into his arms and headed out of the sick bay, which caused a huge flurry and a flutter.

“Where are you going?”

“You can’t leave.”

“You can’t do this.”

Obviously, these folks didn’t understand what the word ‘can’t’ meant. They didn’t want him to do it, but he totally could do it, and he was doing it, and so they were all going to have to just learn to live with it.

“Somebody get me Cain. Now.” He headed up with Talon right behind him.

“How are the omegas?”

“Here, safe, solid. Some of them have to pee. They’re going to be fine.” They’d been through way worse, after all. “They’re a brave bunch. I thought that Katerina was going to beat us to death when we got there. She was going to defend them, the rest of them to the ends of the earth.”

“Okay, good. Good. How far up are we going?”

He snorted. “All the way to the top, bay-bee.”

He felt more than heard Kami’s chuckle. Stubborn alpha.

Be good, hailee, we have a lot to discuss once you’re well. Starting with being ridiculous enough to give away your stone.

I am not ridiculous! I—it had to be done.

Never again. Reno would have shaken Kami if he didn’t think it would probably kill him, and that would be problematic. Pretend that I’m shaking you.

Yes, braaken. Shake, shake, shake.

Reno put on a burst of speed, his lips curling in a smile. They were going to have so much fun together.

He knew it.

Kami had a warrior's spirit and a sweet omega's warmth, and they would wrangle and wrestle and love their way through life.

Assuming he could get that stone for his mate.

Which he would.

Cain met them in the hallway that led to the big guy's private quarters. "Reno, what are you doing?"

"We need to get this show on the road, boss. He needs a stone."

Cain studied them. "Do you think he's strong enough?"

"He's right here," Kami muttered.

"Well, I don't think he's gonna get any stronger, are you, babe? I mean, right now, he has me and you to bolster him, and he's fading." Agony tore through him, but Reno pushed it aside ruthlessly. They had a job to do.

Period.

"We just need to find, uh, what kind of stone do you have, Hailee?" Reno asked.

“It’s an emerald.” Talon’s lips were pressed together so tightly they were white.

“An emerald. Okay, emeralds. Yay emeralds.” Reno knew dick about rocks. “So find him a green stone. There have to be other kinds of green stones, or if you have emeralds, those will work too.”

Green .

“Emeralds are green. Don’t argue with me, you’re dying.”

I need a barrel stone.

“A barrel. Barrel is for beer and wine and carrying stuff, not for rocks.” Surely Kami didn’t mean like one of those rock tumbler things. Now that was stupid.

Cain blinked at him. “Beryl. B. E. R. Y. L. Emeralds are beryls. That’s the class of the stones themselves.”

He looked at Cain. “Like I care. What do I need to look for? Do they come in different colors? Do you have any barrel rocks? How do you have these bitches organized?”

Cain stared at him as if he was absolutely bonkers. “I don’t organize them. They’re stones.”

“Why the hell not?”

“Because I don’t have a stone singer, Reno!”

Oh, for fuck’s sake.

“Well, assuming you don’t kill this one, you do, huh? Now come on.” That was Talon, and that was impressive.

“I do like you, man.”

“Good, because you’re going to be around me a lot. This is my best friend. Now stones. Stones, people. Focus.” Talon waved a hand in frustration.

Cain stared at them all. “I don’t know when I lost control of this situation.”

“Boss, please .” Reno didn’t have time to discuss this. He would apologize later when things were not quite so fraught.

Cain stared at him for a long moment, then nodded and led them into a cave carved in the back of his quarters.

The door glowed with a gentle light, an odd sort of hum on the air, like the space was singing its welcome.

As soon as they walked in, they were hit with a blast of noise, and Kami’s eyes shot open, a white light seeming to pour out of them.

“Oh fuck, oh fuck. What is this? What is going on?” Reno stood there, feeling as if his legs had been turned into stone.

Cain shook his head. “I don’t know.”

Talon frowned deeply, the lines in his craggy face even more pronounced. “Well, this can’t be good, but we can’t back out now.”

So Talon just sort of shouldered Cain out of the way, wrapped his arms around Reno,

and just hauled them deeper into the cave.

He thought Kami's screams were silent, but Reno could still hear them echoing everywhere, and he would do anything, anything at all, to make them stop.

"Can you tell the direction?" Talon yelled in his ears, so maybe it wasn't so silent.

"Which way, hailee? You have to point me. Shoot me somewhere."

All Kami did in answer was scream, so Reno just made an executive decision and moved to where the answering ringing from the stones was the loudest.

It was either going to cure them or kill them, and at this point, he wasn't sure he cared which one was which.

He moved like a very old man dragon, his feet like lead, wading against this current of pain and the vibration of a hundred-hundred stones.

His head rattled like his brain had solidified in his skull, and he tried to get through to Kami again.

Which one, baby? What color is it? What shape?

Pink. It's pink. Or white or pink, maybe pink. It's totally pink.

Let's see. Emeralds weren't pink, but he wasn't going to argue. Not when they were both about to die over this stone. "Okay. Pinky Stone. We're looking for pink. Something pink."

"Pink?"

“Talon, don’t argue. Pink. He wants pink. Get the son of a bitch pink. Pink.”

“You got it. Pinking pinky pinky pink pink.” Talon started throwing stones around like a whirlwind, like this massive tornado, kind of chunking anything that was white or pink or red or purple or any color that wasn’t blue or green at them.

More like toward them.

Suddenly a small stone—almost like a chip of a stone, really—hit Kami in the center of the chest, and he slammed his hands over the top of it, the screaming stopping so quickly that Reno’s legs just went out from underneath him.

For a horrifying moment, he had no idea whether or not Kami was dead or unconscious.

Surely that little piece of stone wasn’t enough to be a heartstone. It wasn’t the size of a fist. It wasn’t even the size of a golf ball.

It was sort of the size of a cherry.

Are you maligning my heartstone?

Aren’t you supposed to be desperately ill?

I’ve already done that. I feel better.

But how can that be a heartstone?

Because it’s mine. Because no one else wants it, and it’s crying out for a home. It’s got incredible fire on the inside.



He had to admit, it did look like cool pink ice on the outside, with a center of peachy salmon pink fire. He could see it because Kami almost shoved it into his eye.

“Yes, hailee, it’s lovely.”

“Kami?” Talon asked, eyes wide, surrounded by all the stones he’d heaved around the room.

“Uh-huh.” Kami’s voice was weak and rough as a cob, but it was there, and he seemed to be gaining strength every second. “This is it. This is the stone.”

“I’m relieved,” Cain said. “The screaming was rather intense.”

“I was singing to my stone,” Kami said. “Trying to pick it out. Nice selection by the way.”

Cain chuckled. “Thank you. Would you like to get out of my private space, Reno?”

“Huh?” He glanced down at Kami, who he still held like a ragdoll. “Oh. Yeah. Yeah, sure.” He strode out of the cave space, managing not to trip on rocks. “Uh, should I take you to the healers so they can check you over, Kami?”

“Are you kidding? I’m not going back to that infirmary if I don’t have to. Let Cain lay hands on me if you need reassurance.”

Naughty hailee.

I never claimed to be the obedient type.

“Cain, will you?” He nodded down at Kami.

“Put him on the couch so I don’t have to worry about confusing his energy with yours.”

Reno very gently laid Kami on the couch.

“Perfect. Now back away a bit, you and Talon both.”

“Sure.” But, fuck, it was hard to step away and let Cain move close to touch his hailee. Really freaking hard.

“It’s okay, Reno. I swear.” Kami winked at him, the dark circles under his bright gray eyes already fading.

Cain slid close and put his hands on Kami’s chest, his breath catching for a moment. He closed his eyes and breathed in deep inhales and exhailes. And then he smiled.

“Yes. He’s not only picked a stone, he’s already bonded with it. He’s improving rapidly. Well done, all of you.”

“Wooo!” Reno waited for Cain to move, and then he picked Kami up again and kissed him soundly on the mouth.

“You are a take-charge guy,” Kami said with a wink.

“Kami...” Talon looked like he might just fall over dead, but he was smiling, tears streaming down his scarred face.

“I got to tell you, big guy, I was worried for a hot minute,” Kami told Talon.

“I was worried for some very cold ones.” Talon came to clap Reno on the back.

“Thank you.”

“Hey, I couldn’t just let him slip away without a fight. He would have taken me with him.”

Cain blinked at him, mouth dropping open. “You really think so?”

“I know so, man. This is my one true thing. And we bonded right away. I felt like I had the fire flu every minute we were away from each other.”

“Fascinating.” Cain folded his arms, one hand up so he could tap his forefinger against his lips.

“Well, yeah, but you are so not studying us. Bye-eeee. Talon, it’s time to check out your quarters and settle in.” Reno strode out with his mate clasped in his arms. He wanted some alone time, and he wanted it now.

Even if Kami wasn’t up to anything strenuous.

“You know what I want?” Kami asked.

“What, baby?”

“A shower. A long, hot shower. And a milkshake.”

“I just happen to be able to provide both.” He had this amazing rainbath shower with seats and a heated floor that he’d had installed when he’d moved into his private quarters, one of the many indulgences Cain had allowed him. The seer was generous to a fault.

And Reno was starving. “I’ll call down to the kitchens,” he went on. “I want a patty melt and a pile of onion rings.”

Kami wrapped both arms around his neck. “Oooh. Can they do fried cheese?”

“You know it. What kind? Mozzarella sticks? Paneer pakoras? Cheddar curds?”

“Yes. I love cheese.” Kami laughed, the sound one of pure joy. “Oh, I can tell I’m going to like it around here.”

Reno nodded. “Hailee, I guarantee it.”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

### Chapter

### Five

The shower was perfect, exactly what he needed even if he'd had to keep his stone in his hand the entire time because he wasn't ready to let loose of it. It was a lovely little thing—a teeny tiny package that carried an immense jolt of power. Kami approved.

He sighed and leaned against the malachite-colored tiles, soaking up the hot water like a parched thing.

Reno's quarters were lovely, very masculine, decorated in greens and deep browns cut with the periodic jolt of bright red or burnt orange. Very natural. Very right.

As pretty as they were, they weren't as attractive as the man himself. Big and dark with a scattering of near-black scales on his face, hair the color of obsidian, a body of carved marble.

Kami was one hundred percent absolutely interested.

Reno was, too. He'd made that very clear.

So now he just had to get dried off and get dressed, walk out there, eat and then?—

Well, Kami figured he had one of two options. Option number one—he could let Reno drive, let the big guy figure out how to seduce him, and he could be all come hither and such. Or option two—he could just climb into Reno's lap and ride what he

was sure was going to be an amazing cock.

Kami was sure there was an option three, but the fact was, he was going with option two, so it really didn't matter. He just wasn't the sit still and be seduced kind of dragon.

He needed to find some way to keep his stone close, though. Maybe he'd wrap it in some wire and stick it on a chain. Oh, or a mojo bag. He could just tie that right around his neck for a few days and keep that closeness that the stone required while still giving him the autonomy that he required out of...basically everything.

Reno came strolling into the bathroom. "Are you done yet? Food is here."

He looked over, lips twitching as Reno fucked him with his eyes. "You ever heard of privacy?"

Reno grinned at him, wolfish as he leaned on the door. "Don't need privacy. My bathroom, my shower. My mate."

"Oh, you're kind of a grunt-and-clicky kind of guy, aren't you? Good to know." He approved. Modesty wasn't a thing for him.

"Good, because the guys and I kind of have an open-door policy."

Guys? What guys? "Fine, so long as we lock it when we're having sex. I'm not an exhibitionist. I mean I could be if you needed it, but not my thing." He wasn't going to be all oversharing, either.

"That's excellent to know. I was more talking about the kids."

"Kids?"

“My team—my brothers. They have children. Six going on seven, and three.”

He tilted his head. Now did that mean ages or amounts? An almost seven-year-old and a three-year-old was a totally different thing compared to ten children.

“Let’s talk about it over milkshakes.” He turned off the water and held out his hand. “Give me a towel.”

“I could just lick you clean,” Reno offered.

“You could, but then my milkshake would melt, and that would make me grumpy.” He winked and took the fuzzy bath sheet Reno offered. Oh, fancy. “You don’t blow ice, I can tell.”

“No, neither do you.” Reno never stopped watching him for a second.

“No, no, that’s not my thing. I find things. That’s what my gift is. Well, and I have an affinity for water.” If he needed someone to blow a fire, he’d hire it done.

Reno tilted his head. “No shit?”

“Nope. I’m a finder. I’ve never breathed a hint of smoke or ice or anything. I can call to water a little, but you need a carburetor and a roll of duct tape? I’m your guy.”

“Well, you’re mine anyway,” Reno said, wrapping him in a robe, then putting a smaller towel around his hair. Reno picked him up. “What do we need to do about your stone?”

“Do you have a bag and a cord?”

“I can do one better. I have some wire and a cord. I can make you a necklace.”

He beamed at Reno. “You’re handy.”

“You have no idea.”

“I want to though, now, but it’s—” His belly growled loud enough that it made his cheeks pink. “However, I should probably get dressed and eat. Oh, and by the way, hey. I’m Kami. Kami Hart.”

“Reno Sute. Pleased, and you can eat in the robe. No one will know, I promise.”

“Fair enough. It makes things way easier access, doesn’t it?”

Reno growled happily. “Exactly. I do like an omega who knows what he likes.”

“That’s not one of my problems.” He might have forty or fifty thousand of those problems but being wishy-washy wasn’t one of them.

“Good.”

They headed into the big open area that was the front room. Reno had a huge sectional, a television, a stone table. The wall hangings were adorable—all drawn by children and framed like each one was precious, priceless art. It made him like Reno more than ever, the pride and love there like a beacon.

“I like your view.” The entire wall was glass, and it looked over a huge lake. “That’s a lot of windows. You’re not worried about someone cracking through?”

“Oh man, that’s already happened. Not with me, but up above with Triton, Talon’s brother. It was a whole thing. Now, boom, we have this blue bubble covering us, and nobody can get in.”



Kami tilted his head. “I must have missed that part.”

“Yeah, you were kind of out of it when you got here, but, no worries, we can hang out on the balcony all we’d like.” Reno brought a tray over, and there were milkshakes, onion rings, and burgers. “Now, while they can’t see in the windows, if we fuck on the balcony, there’ll be people able to see, and Cain will probably growl.”

“All right, tempting. Again, not an exhibitionist, but aggravating people? Always a temptation.” He winked at Reno and grabbed his milkshake. Oh, caramel. Yum. “I’m glad that Talon found his brother. They needed each other.”

“He’s a good friend of mine. Triton, I mean. We train together every day, and yeah, he’s talked about his brother a lot.”

“Excellent.” That made Kami happy, on a deep soul level. He’d known it was the right thing to give Talon his heartstone. He’d known it.

“You could have died. Don’t ever do it again.”

“No.” The stone in his hand seemed to throb. “This little one doesn’t seem like it’s going anywhere. It seems very specific. The little thing is just bursting with power.”

“I like little things that are just bursting with power.” Reno looked him up and down. “And if you don’t finish your goddamn milkshake soon, I’m going to just fuck you through the sofa. I mean, with your permission, of course.”

“Consent is a thing. Let’s just make that clear. I’m saying yes. After the milkshake, and assuming we’re both not exhausted, of course. But. If the question is: wanna fuck? My answer is absolutely.”

Reno beamed at him. “You’re not like anybody I’ve ever met.”

“Damn straight.”

Reno winked. “Or not, as the case may be.”

He hooted. “That’s like, a human concept, I think.”

Shrugging, Reno inhaled about half his burger. “I’ve never been attracted to females, but one never knows, I guess.”

Kami tilted his head the other way. “Have you ever had sex with a male alpha?”

Reno chuckled. “I’ve had my share of hand jobs in the dark like any soldier.” He popped an onion ring in his mouth.

“That’s a pretty image.” Kami sucked down more of his shake. Oh, he was so happy not to be sipping broth anymore.

Damn.

He ate hearty, stopping only when his belly told him he was tipping toward imminent explosion.

“You done?”

Kami grinned. “Uh-huh. But I have to tell you, maybe a hand job? I’m getting sleepy.”

Reno’s I’m-horny expression faded into a little grin. “Hailee, you just almost died from losing your heartstone. You’re allowed to take a nap if you want to.”

“I don’t really want to.” Kami snorted, then finished off his milkshake. “But I think

I'm gonna have to."

"Then we table the sexy times until you're ready."

He scoffed. "I'm ready now. I'm just not sure I'm able."

"Well, I want you able." Reno held out his arms, and it felt as natural as breathing to let Reno lift him and take him back into the bedroom. The view there was just as good, and the bed...

"I could write epic odes to this bed."

"You like it, huh?" Reno set him down on it with perfect gentleness.

Which was good. He wasn't tired like he had been before the new stone, but he was worn out. He just needed to sleep for a while. Like real rest, not oh I'm dying and I may never get up again sleep.

"Yeah. No dying."

"Sorry, Reno. I know I let you think we were going to make naughty."

"We will. I can sit here and keep myself hard..."

He moaned. "No fair. Although, they say no erections that last more than four hours."

Reno snort-laughed. "I'll keep that in mind. Sleep now, honey. I'll be here when you wake up."

"Okay." He cuddled into the cloud-soft covers, and he was asleep before he really even got his eyes closed.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Six

R eno watched Kami sleep.

Oh, he'd napped, spooned around Kami, his slow, steady breathing lulling Reno right to sleep. But he was a cat napper, used to getting what he could on assignment, so he was awake long before Kami.

And he watched.

Not because he was worried. But because he wasn't. He'd gotten some wire, and with Kami sleeping right through it, had wrapped the stone in it while Kami held it. Then he'd put it on a cord and strung it around Kami's neck to keep it close.

And Kami had rested, his skin looking better, his scales popping out in color, his hair looking sleeker.

It was stunning.

He had plans for when Kami woke, but he could bide his time.

His phone buzzed, group text with him, Triton, and Cerran showing up.

How is your hailee?

Resting. Really resting. Tal with you?

He's swimming. Restless I think

He'll settle

Or he won't. It is his choice

Yeah

Kami stirred, and he signed off.

later

Triton sent a thumbs-up, which made him laugh, and he set his phone aside as Kami blinked those storm-over-the-ocean gray eyes at him.

"Did I wake you?"

"No. I need to run to the bathroom." Kami yawned, looking a little like a fiesty kitten.

"You need me to walk with you."

"Nope. I'll be right back." Kami crawled out of bed, then shivered. "Woo. Chilly. Be right back."

Reno thought about turning up the heat, but he knew a better way to keep Kami warm if his mate was up for it. So he waited.

"Yeeeeeahhhhhh!" Kami came running back into the bedroom to do a cannonball on the bed, the high-pitched shout making Reno duck for cover. Kami laughed like a

maniac. “Got you!”

“You did. You scared the fire out of me. You okay?”

“I am. Thanks for making my stone into a pendant.”

“We’ll get the goldsmith to do something once you’re fully bonded, but this will work for now, huh?”

“Heck yeah. Hands free.” Kami reached up to touch his cheek. “I like that. I have two hands to touch you that way.”

“Imagine that.” Reno let Kami scramble onto his lap, and he grabbed that tight little butt. “Hey.”

“Hey.” Kami rose up to touch their lips together.

The dam broke then, and Reno took the kiss he wanted to badly, pressing his mouth to Kami’s, tongue pushing at the seam of those soft lips. So good.

Kami was like a little kitten, part cuddles and part claw. He threw himself into the kiss, wrapping around Reno and holding on tight.

I thought for a second when I was sleeping you weren’t real. That I had died, and I was just fantasizing you. Like this was my version of heaven. Stupid, huh? Kami’s eyes searched his, begging for some sort of answer, and Reno intended to give it.

I’m completely real. And so are you.

Prove it.

That single thought was deadly serious, showing that his hailee wasn't near as blasé as he pretended to be.

He wrapped the blankets around them, cocooning them and making a space where they could be warm and explore. Kami was fine under his fingers, whip-cord lean, and Reno was fascinated by all the angles and planes of that smooth skin. It stole all his attention, finding smatterings of scales along Kami's ribs, his hips, his collarbones.

His hailee, on the other hand, went straight for this cock, exploring it from base to tip and making Reno threaten to roar before disappearing and counting his ribs one by one.

Little tease.

No, I just want to know everything. I swear I'm not a cock tease. Kami blinked at him, the kisses never stopping. If anything, they just got deeper and deeper. I'm just curious. I've never slept with my mate before, and we're never going to have a first time ever again.

True . Reno thought that was beautiful, but a lot of pressure on them both. But we will have so many times afterward.

Kami smiled at him. Noted .

Those curious, clever fingers returned to his prick, stroking him again and making his eyes roll back in his head. You're going to fit so good, fill me up and make me shoot. I know it.

His entire body surged at the words, his hips bucking, pushing up to meet Kami's touch.

“Dammit, hailee, be careful. You make me need, and I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Nonsense.” Kami held his gaze, so sure, so determined. “You’re not going to hurt me. You’re going to fuck me. You’re going to fill me up. Then I’m going to shoot, and all the while I’ll be caught on your fat, thick knot.” Kami kept touching him and making his eyes cross, and he started moving into the touch again, his body caught in the web Kami was weaving. Kami circled the base of his prick with his fingers and tugged hard, making his knot threaten to swell.

Reno didn’t want to do that. He didn’t want to lose control and come from a hand job. He wanted to make love.

“Are you going to ride me?” He had to start fighting fire with fire, or he was screwed here. He had to slow this thing down. “I can guess how wet you are.” He nuzzled against Kami’s temple, their scales rasping together. “I can smell you. I can smell how badly you want me.”

Then he dragged his fingers down Kami’s spine, right to that slick hole, and pushed one finger in. His hailee cried out and arched, bucking into his touch before driving down and taking his finger.

Kami was on fire inside, and his dragon roared in a combination of desire and triumph.

My mate!

Kami nodded and surged against him, hands like claws on his shoulders. “Yours! More, braaken. Please.”

He nodded and pulled his finger away, his own hands wrapping around Kami’s hips, moving him to hover over his needy cock. “I need you.”



Kami nodded, bringing that sweet heated sheath right to where he needed it. “I’m yours. Fill me up, Reno. I want.”

Then Kami slammed down, taking him in to the root.

Reno roared, his head banging against the wall as he was swallowed in pure heat. He’d never felt anything so delicious, so utterly perfect, so right.

This wasn’t sex. It was more than that. This was connecting on a cellular level with his mate.

“Yes. Yes, I feel you.” Kami shuddered around him, vibrating, the heat around him rippling and threatening to drive him mad.

When one of them started to move, time was going to stop, he knew it.

Reno grabbed Kami and eased him up, almost to the tip of his cock, then slammed him down.

Kami’s lips parted, his eyes wide, his body bowing. “Oh. Oh, gods. Yes. More.”

Reno’s lips pulled back in a wild grin, and he nodded, lifting Kami again, then tugging him down. The friction was perfect, even with as wet as Kami was, because his mate was so tight. So damn heated.

He groaned when Kami got into the rhythm of it, rising and falling, those lean muscles standing out along his chest and arms and thighs.

“I could just eat you up,” he growled, his tone guttural.

“Anything you want, braaken.”

“Anything.” He liked that. His knot threatened to swell, and he panted, wanting to give Kami more, harder, deeper, faster.

He didn’t want his lover to believe for a second that he wasn’t devoted to giving the most pleasure he could.

As long as he could.

Reno thought about mud, about baseball stats, about chocolate pudding between his toes, anything to hold back, but Kami growled and pushed down, then clenched, that perfect ass tight as a fist around him.

His knot swelled and he roared, the sound seeming to rock the keep as his cock swelled, filling his lover to the brim and locking them together.

Reno grabbed Kami’s prick and palmed it, stroking from base to tip, over and over, spreading the drops that leaked from the tip along the shaft. He felt each and every bit of his touch around his own cock, Kami’s body fluttering around him wildly.

“Please,” Kami begged. “Please, don’t stop. I’m so close.”

Reno squeezed tighter. “Not stopping, hailee. I have you. Come for me.”

Kami arched down over him to kiss him, tongue pressing in to fuck his lips, that low cry perfect as Kami offered himself up, gave himself over.

Heat poured over his fingers, and Reno’s cock was clenched, milked, his balls heavy and aching as they released his seed, pouring into his mate and filling him.

Kami’s kiss became sloppy, his hailee swaying down to cuddle into him, a soft rumbling purr filling the air.

“Good, mate?” He hoped Kami wasn’t an Energizer bunny post orgasm. It would be awkward when they were knotted, to be honest.

“Better than.” Kami blinked at him, face lax. “That was kind of amazing.”

“Just kind of?”

“It was the first time, after all. It was practice.”

“Don’t make me beat you, hailee.” That would be a waste of a lovely afterglow.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Seven

R eno was out doing something martial.

Kami had no idea what, but he knew it had to do with throwing other dragons around and barking orders and such.

He was still on mandatory bedrest, which felt silly, but at the same time, it meant he got to lay in bed and listen to his, and Reno's, stone's songs. They twined beautifully together, the harmony kind of amazing.

He was also catching up on shows he liked, which included cooking and baking ones from England. So nice to each other, those folks. They always made him smile.

He was just starting a new season with a glass of milk next to him and a piece of leftover pizza hanging out of his mouth when the door chime went off.

Dammit.

He sighed and put his pizza down, then climbed out of bed. He didn't really know anyone here, so that was probably Talon. Which was fine. Talon liked the British baking series too.

He got to the door, opened it, and he wished he'd put on his robe over his boxer briefs and one of Reno's T-shirts...

“Hi!” Two omegas stood there, smiling. One held a box of doughnuts, and the other one held a drink carrier.

“Uh. Hi.” Kami smiled, or tried to. He wasn’t sure if it translated into that or a teeth baring.

“I’m Lake.”

“And I’m Eyv.”

“We’re Boone and Durango’s mates. They’re Reno’s best friends.”

“Oh.” He blinked several times. “Uh. I’m Kami. Nice to meet you.”

“Can we come in? We brought doughnuts.”

“Sure.” He stepped back, totally unsure what to expect. Was this the omega welcome wagon?

“Here you go!” The one called Lake handed him the doughnuts.

“Thank you. Come and sit down.” He felt a little odd offering to entertain guests in Reno’s apartment...

“Reno said you liked caramel lattes. I hope he wasn’t blowing smoke out of his ass,” Eyv said.

That made him cackle. “I doubt he could do that, but one never knows. He’s a talented guy.”

That had the other two chuckling, and they handed him his coffee.

“So, is that your heartstone?” Lake asked.

He touched the pendant against his chest, feeling the stone throb with power. “Yeah. Morganite.”

“It’s lovely.”

“Thanks.” He studied the doughnuts, because this was an important choice. How many did they get of what? What did that tell him about which ones they wanted?

“Reno told me a little about how rough it was on you both to bond with a new stone.”

Lake rolled his eyes. “Almost killed Eyv.”

Eyv snorted. “It almost killed you too, Kami. Just sort of front-loaded.”

“Yeah. I felt like it went fast as soon as I handed it over to Talon.”

”How do you even do that?” Lake’s eyes went wide.

Kami shrugged, his cheeks heating. “I don’t know. I mean, I just did it, you know? Cain says I’m some sort of stone magician, so maybe it just did what I told it to.”

Eyv grinned. “I’ve never met a stone singer before.”

Kami rolled his eyes. “Neither have I. I grew up in a weird little commune in the desert with like, three families.”

“That’s wild.” Lake finally grabbed a jelly doughnut.

Okay, whew. He grabbed a Boston creme, because that was his fave, and there were three of those...

“Oh, yum.” That had to be the best doughnut he’d ever had.

“Right? The head pastry chef makes them herself, and they’re so yum. Like, just right. Fluffy and light but crispy on the outside...”

“And she actually fills them,” Eyv agreed. “No wimpy dot of jelly for her.”

He grinned. “You guys get me.”

“Yay!” Lake sipped his coffee. “Man, it’s so quiet in here. I’ve forgotten what a room sounds like without kids in it.”

“Oh my God, so many children.” Eyv grabbed a lemon filled, from the smell of it.

They all munched for a bit before he asked, “What should I save for Reno?”

“The apple fritters and the blueberry one.”

“Okay cool.” So he could have another Boston. “So what do you guys do around here?”

Lake just chuckled, cheeks pink. “I take care of kids.”

“That seems to be a theme.”

“It kinda happens when we mate with our braaken.” Eyv shrugged.

“Mmm.” He kept that noncommittal. “I can tell Reno is a good uncle.”

“He’s amazing,” Lake said. “So is Triton. Is Talon a lot like him?”

He blinked. “I have no idea. I met Talon after he was banished.”

“Oh.” Eyv stared at him. “Oh! So have you even met Triton?”

“Not yet, no. I think it’s pretty complicated still, so I’m hanging back.” And he was supposed to be on bed rest.

Which was boring. Doughnuts were better.

“Well, I think you’ll like him. He’s really loosened up a lot. He was kind of formal when he showed up here. But his mates have really made his life better.”

“I’m glad.” He really did hope Triton and Talon could come back around to being brothers in all the good ways.

He was all over that. Seriously.

He yawned, surprising himself, and he gave the guys a sheepish grin. “Sorry. I guess I’m still sleepy.”

“It’s hard on a body, going through all that.”

“No shit on that. It’s brutal, but I’m feeling so much better.” He had to smile, even chuckle. “I mean, it sucked, that dying thing. This is way more fun...”

Eyv snorted. “I’m the head teacher. It sucks worse than a class of hormonal teenagers, and let me tell you?—”

“Oh man...” Now that was something else. “This is a growing keep, is it?”

He wasn’t going to be adding to that growing thing, at least he didn’t think so. He’d



never had hot monkey heat sex, so that meant that he wasn't super-duper fertile dude, right?

Kami hadn't been in a situation where the other teenagers he'd known were appealing in the least, so when he'd left home and had sex—and there had been a lot of that, thank you—he'd never done that whole heat thing.

Maybe that had to do with the stone singing stuff.

Maybe they couldn't breed.

Kami didn't care. He had Reno. He had his stone. He had his best friend. He had a mission.

Save the omegas and get them somewhere they could thrive.

“Are you okay? Should we go?” Lake touched his arm, expression all pinched and worried. “We just wanted to stop by and introduce ourselves. Reno is important to us, and we wanted to meet his mate. He's over the moon that you're here.”

Eyv nodded. “I've never seen him so happy. He actually smiles at people. It's amazing.”

“He is. He is down having patty melts with the guys right now.”

One of Kami's eyebrows winged up. “He is?”

Jealousy didn't suit him.

Lake nodded. “Boone, my mate—he was checking in. He's going to bring supper home so I don't have to worry about it.”

How very...domestic. "How many children do you have?"

"Six. For now."

"Oh." Are you bringing supper home to me too? he sent to Reno.

Did you want me to, hailee? You were sleeping.

I would like that, yes. I have apple fritters.

Lake grinned at him. "Is he going to bring you food?"

"I think so, yes. I've been wanting milkshakes. A patty melt sounds like just the thing." How could he be hungry after—he checked—three doughnuts?

Eyv just chuckled. "Near-death makes one hungry. We'll get out of your scales. We just wanted to tell you how welcome you are, and that you have friends here."

"I appreciate that." Patty melt, onion rings, and shake.

He could feel Reno grin . You got it.

Good deal, the welcome wagon came.

Did they? Innocence did not suit Reno at all.

Uh-huh. In fact, he remembered his manners and ushered Lake and Eyv out, closing the door behind them after a wave and a smile. They're very nice.

You say that like it's a bad thing. They want to make friends.

I don't make friends, Reno.

Neither did I. They don't give you much of a choice, so you just have to give in. They're both very friendly.

I noticed. They did come bearing doughnuts and coffee, which was decent enough.

Soon he would just go work out with Boone and Durango and the rest of the warriors. Maybe teach the big lugs some tricks. Talon had been surprised to find out how much Kami learned on the streets. It was hard being a little guy trying to save whoever he could. You had to learn things, or you died.

The guys didn't want you to feel alone. They're worrywarts, but they're kind, you know? You'll be fine.

I am fine. Go do whatever it is you're going to do, and don't forget supper.

He was going to go back to bed and hide, licking his wounds, real and imagined.

Both Eyv and Lake, he could tell, were highborn, not just random assholes like him. He wasn't sure that they'd even met random assholes like him. It was more than a little unnerving, if he was honest.

A little aggravating.

He wasn't sure that any of them even had a scar.

Okay, that was unfair. They might not be scarred, but they did know what it was like to lose their stone, and they had survived. And they were Reno's friends' mates. So basically they were like family. It was just...

He didn't know.

Kami wasn't used to making random friends. He had Talon, who was another outcast like him, someone unconcerned with all the vagaries of the rules.

Okay, he didn't want to think about this. It was too complicated.

So, the simplest answer was the best. He was going to go back to bed, crawl into the covers, and just let everything go so he could float in the clouds.

He had to get healed up so he could head back out. Maybe if he was lucky, the boss, whatever his name was, could help him out. Send Reno his way, so they could work together. Reno, him, and Talon, rescuing omegas everywhere they could.

It was a good thought. A pleasant one.

One he could sleep on.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Eight

Reno was a little worried about Kami.

His hailee didn't seem thrilled to be here. He didn't want to make friends with the other omegas. He was avoiding Cain.

And he was kind of...well, not withholding relations, really, but kind of not running hot like he had at the very beginning.

Reno knew they were mates. He knew Kami wanted him. So he seemed to be running scared, maybe. But of what?

He found himself sitting on Triton and Cerran's balcony, staring at Triton and his brother, Talon, and frowning.

He didn't like feeling things.

He didn't like worrying.

"What's wrong with him?" Talon stared at him, scarred face stony and scaly. The man was the most dragony-in-human-form dragon Reno had ever met.

"I was hoping you could tell me."

“Maybe he’s ready to get back to work.” Talon didn’t seem nearly as concerned about that thought as he was. “I’ll be ready soon. I’m still getting to know my nieces. They’re amazing.”

Reno wasn’t sure that Cain was going to be all over that, to be honest. The seer seemed incredibly worried about the fact that there was a stone singer here in the keep, but he seemed to be much more worried about the idea of Kami leaving the keep and being found out.

Reno didn’t know.

Stone singers had always been way above his pay grade to be honest.

He hadn’t ever even met one until he’d mated with one.

“But he’s not...” He sighed and shook his head. He couldn’t discuss this with Kami’s friend. He’d just figure it out.

“Is this about him not being fertile?” Talon asked, and Reno blinked.

“What?”

“Has he not told you?”

“No.” It didn’t matter to Reno, not really. He’d not been expecting a mate, much less a family. What did he care? He had his hailee. “Why would that make him not want to have sex? He doesn’t have to worry about birth control.”

Triton tilted his head. “Is he unhappy about not being able to have babies? Has he seen Rowan?”

“He doesn’t have to have babies, brother,” Talon snapped.

“I never said he did!”

“Then why would he see the midwife?”

“Because if he’s got a medical problem, he should make sure it isn’t dangerous? I mean no offense.”

Reno sighed. “I’ll ask him about it.” He would. At some point. Maybe not today.

“Don’t avoid hard topics, Reno,” Boone murmured. “They’ll fester.”

“Everyone has advice.” He rolled his eyes.

“It’s true, though,” Triton said with a snort. “I have two mates. Imagine how hard that is when you want to not talk about something.”

“Ha.” Reno shook his head. “I need to go spend some time with him. Can you let the guys know I won’t be in the second half of training?”

“Of course.” Talon stood. “I will walk you out.”

He blinked. “Okay, sure.”

“Come.” Talon walked with him, and once they were far enough away, he stopped Reno with a hand on his shoulder.

“Why does he think he’s infertile?”

“He says he’s never had a heat.”

“Hmmm.” Okay, that was different from “I know I’m infertile,” now wasn’t it?

“Yes. Be gentle with him.”

“He’s my hailee, Talon. I’m not gonna yell or beat him or some shit.”

Humor sparked in Talon’s eyes. “As if he would let you.”

“Yeah.” Reno got that impression as well. “Thanks for telling me.” He headed off to his quarters, wondering why he was having such a hard time with this. Kami was made for him. Seriously.

Irreverent. Not formal at all. Not versed in dragon society. Hot as a two-dollar pistol. So what was the deal?

Surely Kami wasn’t freaking out because of the baby thing.

He made his way into the apartment. “Babe? You here?”

“In the kitchen!”

Reno walked to the kitchen, finding Kami sitting on the counter eating cereal out of a box.

“Uh. You know we have a cafe you can call down to.”

“I like cereal.”

“Right.” He stared at Kami, trying to read him even a little. “Are you—Babe, are you miserable here?”



“Huh?” Kami stared back. “No. I mean, I’m bored. A little lonely. But I’m not miserable.”

“I’m sorry. I’m just so used to doing my thing...”

“I know.” Kami shrugged. “Thing is, I’m used to doing mine too. And see, I think you’re accustomed to omegas who need a long time to recover. I just got a clean bill of health from the healers, though.”

“Oh?” He grinned. “Cool. Now I can play rough.”

“Hey, that sounds like fun.” Kami beamed at him. “Want some cereal?”

“Nope. I want spaghetti and meatballs.”

“Is this a thing we can have?”

“We can. Come on.”

Kami put the cereal aside and jumped off the counter. “Am I dressed okay?”

He studied the loose jeans and sweater. “Fine. Shoes might be good.”

“Bitch bitch bitch.” But Kami put on some slip-ons, and they headed out. He would take Kami down to where the Italian wood-fired oven reigned supreme, and where meatballs came with smoky cheese in the middle.

They walked side by side, and he took Kami’s hand in his, swinging it a little. He wasn’t sure exactly how to be part of a couple. He’d never done it.

Kami grinned at him, eyes dancing. “Me too.”

“What?”

“I’m at a loss as well.”

“Oh.” He chuckled. “So, are you really infertile?”

Damn. Way to go.

Kami stopped dead in his tracks. “What?”

“Talon—Sorry, babe. I should have been gentler about asking.”

“Wait, so Talon told you?” Kami crossed his arms over his chest, his chin sticking out.

“He says you’ve never had heat sex.”

“Well, he’s right. Not even when I was a teenager.”

He got them walking again, because it was easier that way. Not having to stare at each other. “Well, how many people were around when you were a teenager? That you weren’t related to, I mean.”

“I should still have gone into heat. And I’ve had plenty of opportunity since.”

Reno growled, his body tensing. “Only with me now.”

“I know!” Kami threw up his hands. “And I’m fine with that. But I don’t think we’ll have babies.”

“I have a ton of nieces and nephews.”

“But you love kids.”

“So? And there are orphans. Trust me. Do you hate kids?”

“What? No. I mean, I’ve never really been around them... Maybe stone song people don’t have babies.”

“Or maybe we just don’t need to worry about it right now. I just had a bunch of alphas tell me not to avoid the hard topics, and you seem like you’re avoiding having sex with me. Is something wrong with me?”

That was what worried him. That Kami was regretting this whole situation.

“No! No, I just don’t want you to get your hopes up. About the babies.”

“And I would just rather have wild monkey sex with you!” he shouted, just as they walked out into a big intersection of halls with lots of people passing...

Kami’s eyebrows went up. “Huh. Good to know. I’ll keep that in mind.” Kami looked around, gave everybody a smile. “Did you hear that? He wants to have wild hot monkey sex with me. Nobody else, just me. I just want us all to be clear on that he is not up for public consumption. I’m the consumer.”

If Kami’s position wasn’t clear before, it was now because tons of little omega dragons went running. It was kind of adorable, actually. Reno approved.

“All right. Come on, hot monkey sex boy. Let’s go have meatballs.”

Kami nodded, obviously satisfied. “Sounds like a plan. I’m totally into meatballs. And you, just to be clear, and I don’t want to hang around in the room anymore. I’m an experienced omega rescuer, and I got work to do.”

“All right. I have to warn you, though, I don’t go out in the field anymore at all hardly. I’m a trainer.” And he loved it.

“That’s fine. You can wait here for me. I mean, I have to figure out how to find more omegas. Talon and I are sort of screwed. Our cover has been basically blown, for all intents and purposes.”

Reno wasn’t one hundred percent sure that this whole stone singer thing wasn’t gonna blow Kami’s universe out of the water.

Like boom.

He hoped not. But that was all he could do, hope.

Kami frowned, shot him a worried glance. “What is it?”

He didn’t bother to prevaricate. “I think the stone singer thing is a big deal. We should talk about that, but not here.”

Kami nodded, and he did love that, a man who understood tactics. “Fair enough, I’m all over talking about it. Not here. Right now, it’s about spaghetti and being outside and showing me things because I’m bored.”

“Have you seen the pool?” Did Kami swim?

“I haven’t seen anything but your place and the med center. Nothing. I’ve seen nothing.”

“Well, then we better do something about that. Let’s get on our pony and ride.”

“I am so in.”

They headed to the outdoor kitchen, and Kami looked around, eyes wide. “Oh, my gods. Look at this place.”

“Yeah, and in the winter, it can be closed in with heated tents and covers. It’s amazing.”

“It smells like heaven.”

“Right? The pizza and Italian food area is over here. It has the wood-fired ovens.” His belly snarled like a wild animal. It took an enormous amount of food to keep a dragon going. It was like their magic kind of...grated against the world around them now.

“This is wild.”

“Reno!” One of the chefs waved him down. “Is this your mate?”

“It is. It so is. This is Kami.” All of a sudden, he had to smile. Right, he had a mate. He hadn’t imagined it was going to happen. And yet here it was, his mate. Right here with him, standing beside him.

You good, Reno?

Goddess, yes. I’m happy. I never expected you.

Kami waggled his eyebrows. No one expects the Spanish Inquisition.

“Shut up.” Oops, he’d said that out loud. “Sorry, buddy, not you. My mate was being a prick.”

“He probably deserved it,” Donny teased.

Kami grinned at Donny. “I see you know my mate. He absolutely one hundred percent deserves it, and I don’t even know what it is. I can’t wait to find out what smells so good, and can I have some? I was promised spaghetti and meatballs, but if that’s not what that smell is, I’ll take whatever that is.”

Guy hooted like a giant scaly owl. “So it’s meatballs wrapped in pizza. Basically, you know, calzones. Want one?”

“Yes. Can I have more than one if I need it? It smells so much better than cereal.”

Reno rolled his eyes. “I found him standing in the kitchen eating cereal out of the box.”

“I was sitting on the counter.”

Reno shrugged. “It was still cereal out of the box.”

“I found it in your cabinets,” Kami shot back.

Donny shook his head. “No cereal. Cereal bad. We make good breakfasts here.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Make with the calzones, man.” Kami shot Reno a wild glance. I don’t have any money. How do I pay him? I don’t even know where my wallet is like I got credit cards but ? —

It’s all good. Cain has a system in place. We all work, and he pays for the food and shit. Some kind of investment system.

“Oh wow.” That popped out in real talk, Kami’s surprise obvious.

“Right? You want salad?”

“I like salad, yeah. Ranch dressing?”

“Sure, garlic bread?” Donny winked at him, grinned.

“Calzones and garlic bread? Heaven.” Kami put his hand over his heart and swayed, fake swooning. “Be still my beating heart.”

Guy laughed. “Go sit. I’ll have one of the younglings send it out.”

“Thanks, man. I appreciate it.” He led Kami over to a table in the sunshine and they settled together.

“This is something else.” Kami leaned back into the light, and the sunshine glinted off his scales. Fuck, that was pretty.

You like?

I do. What was not to like? He was turned on as hell. He wanted to explore each and every scale with the tip of his tongue, hear what sounds that drew from his mate.

Kami grinned. “This is really cool, braaken. I could get used to this.”

“You never said if you swim.” He wanted to see Kami swim. To see him fly.

“Do I swim? I mean, I’m not like a water dragon, but I love the water.” Kami nodded, watching the pool with pleasure, but not hunger. “But honestly? If I have to choose between ocean and mountains, I’m going mountains every time.”

“Oh, that’s gonna please Cain. He’s doomed to have coastal dragons moving his direction and asking for help. And they’re all mourning the sea.”

“Even you?”

Reno shrugged. “Less than Boone and Durango, more than Cain. It’s pretty.”

“It is, but that’s not me. I mean, I like it, don’t get me wrong, and I love lakes and rivers, but...” Kami’s eyes actually sparkled, like literally sparkled with an inner light. “I do love a mountain, and I am totally into a cave.”

“Are you a spelunker?” He loved that word. Spelunker.

“You know it, and it’s way easier when you’re a dragon, because you can just fly out if you get caught.”

“Have you ever been caught in a landslide?”

Kami shook his head. “No, I hear them coming, and I get out. Because, you know, apparently me and rocks are buds.”

Speaking of rocks. “So I’ve been looking up this stone singer thing.”

“You read?”

“Shut up. I read. I have a computer. You sleep a lot.”

Kami stuck his tongue out. “That’s boredom.”

“Well, I looked it up. I have to find some birthmark. Apparently, all stone singers have a birthmark.”

“Oh, that sounds fun. Birthmark hunting.”



“Yeah. I bet.” He waggled his eyebrows. “I bet it’s going to be a blast.”

“Where do you suppose it is?”

“It’s meant to be on your back, I think.”

“Cain asked to see my back.”

Reno growled. He loved the boss, but he didn’t want the guy manhandling his mate. Or seeing stuff that Reno had never seen.

“He can stay away from your skin and your scales,” Reno said.

Kami’s grin said he was pleased that Reno was possessive. “Yep. He can.”

“Good.”

“Salads.” One of the runners dropped their salads for them, then whizzed away.

“Wow. That’s efficient.”

“Guy runs a tight ship.”

“There’s that ocean imagery again,” Kami pointed out.

“Or pirate. Arrrrr,” Reno tossed at him, winking.

“They have eyepatches if you have a weak eyelid, Captain Reno.”

God, his hailee was quick. Clever. He loved it.

“I’m sure I just need garlic bread.”

“Mmm.”

“Here you go.” The same kid plopped a basket of said bread down. “Calzones in a bit!”

“Thanks, kiddo.” He had never met this server before, so he didn’t know his name yet.

“You’re welcome!”

Kami grabbed a piece of bread, tore it in half, and handed him one side. Then he bit into it.

“OMG this is so good. God. It’s stunning. And it comes with red sauce?” Kami dipped the unbitten side of his bread in.

“You can double dip, honey. We share spit.”

“Good point.” Kami brightened even more. “I can see new bright sides to this mate thing.”

“Oh, I’m glad you love me for my lips.”

Kami stared at him, mouth hanging open. Then he blinked. “Holy shit. I do love you. Like...that’s nuts. I mean, we barely know each other. How can I love you so much already?”

“We’re mates.” Okay, that left him feeling a little bit smug. He wanted Kami to be amazed by him.

Like he was with Kami.

They dipped their bread and munched salads, saying hey to the guys who stopped by to meet Kami and give him shit about taking the afternoon off.

But he ran them all away. This was a him and Kami thing.

“So. Birthmark.”

“Huh?”

Kami poked his leg. “Stone singer. Birthmark. Why do you think this is all going to be weird?”

“Because Cain is wigged out.” Reno chuckled. “Cain is hardly ever wigged out.”

“Hmmm.” Kami sighed, licking his fingers. “I just want to do what I do.”

“Yeah, I said that a while back too. But I also love what I do now.”

“But it’s kind of the same thing.”

“Oh, gods, no. I used to be on the road twenty-eight days out of thirty. Hungry. Usually dirty. The rescues were hella rewarding, but the life was a little grinding.”

“Sure. I mean, it wears you down.” Kami crossed his arms over his chest. “But it’s good.”

“It is. But who says finding stones for dragons who have had theirs taken won’t be just as cool?”

“Sure, but I’m no seer.” Kami hunched his shoulders. Soon he would disappear under the table.

“No, but you are a stone singer.” Reno sighed. “Which I still have no idea what that means.”

“Neither do I.” Kami’s pout disappeared when the calzones showed up. “That is as big as my head.”

“It’s golden brown and delicious,” their server sang, then winked and sashayed off.

“I like him,” Kami said with a grin.

“He’s cute.”

Kami threatened to stab him with a fork.

“But not as cute as you. Look, babe, I’m just saying keep your options open. Don’t get all defensive and reject stuff immediately. Okay?”

“I’ll try.” Kami touched his hand. “But you’re worth all sorts of effort, so it’s no big.”

He turned his hand to grasp Kami’s. “Thanks, babe. That means a lot. Now, let’s do this and then get spaghetti to go for later...”

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

### Chapter

### Nine

K ami decided he was going to explore his new home a few days after the great spaghetti-in-bed incident.

He grabbed a towel and his swim trunks, which Reno had ordered in for him, and he headed out to look for the pool. Reno said it was super cool, and even Talon had mentioned that it was really nice.

For Talon, that was huge, ringing endorsement.

He wandered, taking every left-hand hall for a while. Then he went outside. Because the sky was super blue and?—

He glanced up in the sky, seeing two dragons flying. Sparring, really, swooping around each other, their huge wings creating wind that shook the treetops nearby.

That was awesome. Especially since one of the dragons was Talon. He would know that silver and black form anywhere, the long scar on the dragon's underbelly so clear to him.

The other dragon was the color of earth and fire, and he was fast. So fast.

Reno.

Oh. His mate was gorgeous. He'd never even thought Reno could be this beautiful.

He wanted to fly. Now.

Love? Can I join you?

Reno circled around to glide over him. He knew the moment Talon spotted him too. Come on, babe. Come fly with us.

So he dropped his towel and shifted, springing from the ground and zipping up toward them. He knew how fast he was. And while he couldn't breathe fire or make the earth move, he could move through the sky like a rocket.

Talon swooped down, their wings brushing together in a clear greeting, and he had to grin, because he'd seen Talon happy before, of course he had.

But this was Talon satisfied.

No, it wasn't even satisfied.

Playing. This was Talon playing.

Kami dove down toward Reno, pulling up just so that their scales barely touched, so close that they made tinkling noises as they slipped together.

You're beautiful. He loved the awe in Reno's voice. It made him feel as if he was the most amazing dragon in the history of dragons. Like no one had ever seen him like Reno did.

Which was weird and wonderful all at the same time.

Kami decided right then and there that weird and wonderful was totally going to be a part of his life from now on.

He showed off a little bit, doing curlicues in the air, twining around Reno and then shooting up, coming back to do a drive-by on Talon's tail.

Tag, you're it.

I'm coming for you, Talon roared, the sound of ringing through the valley.

Yes.

An answering roar came from closer to the keep, and a silver dragon shot up to join them, this one the spitting image of Kami's best friend, but without the huge scar. Triton had some of course.

Both Talon and Triton were warriors. Triton had just won many more battles. While Talon knew what it meant to lose something more precious than anything else.

He shook that thought off and then set to having fun.

They flew for what had to be an hour, playing this makeshift game of tag with different dragons coming up and joining their game and then heading back down to watch.

He felt...at home for the first time since he'd come, and he dove down to skim his claws along the cold lake. Then he back winged into the big outdoor courtyard at the compound, because he was tiring some. He needed to get back to working out, dammit.

Reno floated down to land near him, and for a moment, they twined necks and tails,

both of them rumbling.

Reno's chuckle sounded in his head. Hot tub?

Ooooh. Is it big enough for us and the huge guys? Kami asked as Talon and Triton touched down simultaneously.

It is. I'll show you where.

The pool could wait. Bubbling sore muscles was worth shifting back to his smaller human form. But he found he didn't have to. The dragon-sized hot tub was more like a huge spring.

The tub was absolutely perfect, and he sank in, tail twining with Reno's. Oh, this is wondrous.

Isn't it? I could spend my life in here.

He ended up, basically in Reno's lap. Ostensibly, it was to let the big guys have enough room, but really it was just because that's where he wanted to be.

Brother. This is my friend. Kami.

Triton nodded his huge head toward Kami. It is my pleasure.

I'm glad that he found you.

Our family owes you. So much.

He shook his head. No. Nobody owed him a damn thing. He'd done what he'd done because it was the right thing to do, and because he loved Talon. He hadn't done it



because he was owed anything, because he wanted anything. He just wanted Talon to live and be happy. We're even. I don't keep score.

Suddenly there was this wild giggle, and a little girl came squealing, splashing into the hot tub, and jumping right on Triton. "DA!"

"Sorry, sorry, guys, she got away from me." There was a harried-looking dragon carrying a set of twins who were struggling to get down. And then there was an empty stroller with the straps burned off of it. "Cerran's getting food for the girls. They were hungry, and then our little beast saw you flying. It was all over, as soon as you came down close enough for her to know where you were going to land. I tried."

The little one rolled her eyes, the giggles absolutely merry. "Da."

Someone was not worried about interrupting her father in the least. In fact, Kami would say that this child had absolutely no doubt of her place in the world. It was amazing to see.

The big guy just nuzzled her gently, his huge snout seeming to dwarf her, but the love was clear.

She bounced and bobbed in the bubbles, and Triton allowed it for long moments before scooping her out, where her omega dad wrapped a towel around her "Come on, baby girl. Let's go get that food."

She frowned. "Da?"

Go on. Triton handed her over. I'll bring Uncle Talon in a minute.

"Tal!"

That's right, Tal.

Talon was beaming like this, light just coming from him like the giant dork that he was. Oh, someone liked being Uncle Tal.

She's so cute. She's fierce.

They rescued her, Talon said. Like they blew up an entire keep, our whole keep — they blew it up to rescue her. They were going to kill her.

Then why did they rescue her?

No, Talon explained. They—Triton and Cerran—rescued her because they—my old keep, also known as the bad guys—were going to kill her.

Oh. Pronouns are important. Also why would they want to kill her? She's just a baby. I mean she's kind of demanding but ? —

She had bonded with a rare stone. Triton's expression was very serious. And they decided that the stone was more important than she was.

Kami's mouth literally fell open, his jaw hit his chest and his lungs emptied in a rush, leaving him a little dizzy. You're not serious. No stone is worth a dragon.

Yes, losing his stone had been agonizing, but that pain had been tempered with this intense satisfaction of knowing that Talon would be all right. Not only that, but he had done it willingly, of his own volition.

Triton nodded. Exactly. You understand. I had to save her. We had to save her. They killed her omega parent. They killed her alpha. They were going to kill her. They wanted me to kill her.

No, I'll never understand. Why are people so mean?

Reno snorted. When someone has power, they want to keep it. The more power they have, the more they'll do to control it and to keep it and make it grow. Once you possess it, the power eats at you, I think. His mate shrugged. I don't have any power. Don't need it either. I have a home. I have food for my mate. I have family and friends. I love them, and they love me.

Kami nodded. He got that. The omegas that he'd helped, they just wanted out. They wanted out of a shit situation, whether it be a job that they didn't love, or a home they didn't love. A caste that they didn't love.

Hell, half of them just wanted freedom. And while the keeps didn't want to let them go because omegas were 'Important' for making babies, so there were more dragons to do the work to create the power. Why can't people just go where they need to go, and do what makes them happy?

Because that's taking the power from the ones who have it. Once you put it in the hands of the people, that's scary. Triton shook his head and stood, the water pouring off his scales and wings as he stretched up tall. Let's go have lunch.

That seemed like the best possible way to end a good flight and a soak with friends.

And Kami really did feel like he had some friends now.

It was kind of amazing.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Ten

Reno watched Kami with all the kids, which was kind of hilarious. He thought maybe his mate looked a lot like Mowgli when he sees the human girl in that Disney Jungle Book movie.

A little entranced, Reno loved all of his besties' kids. He really did. And gods knew, Boone and Lake had so damn many. Durango and Eyv had a couple, and Triton and Cerran and Elowyn had three.

Felicity, who was Jack and Dex's oldest, adored Reno. But it was Durango's little Serenity who attached herself to Kami and wouldn't let go.

She clung to his leg and to his every word, her hero worship very clear. It was amazing, because she absolutely was the opposite to her name, and usually she would have a meltdown in minutes if someone ignored her or left her to her own devices for too long.

But Kami fascinated her.

And he thought Serenity totally befuddled his hailee.

Reno. Help me. What do I do with this little one? She won't leave me alone. Kami was trying to pry Serenity off his leg.

Oh, you're doing fine. He examined the drawing little Daniel was showing him. "Oh, very nice, kiddo."

Reno!

What? It's good for you.

Why? I'm not going to have any. So it doesn't matter if I know how to deal with them.

But there are a billion kids around here, and you can't escape them.

Ugh.

He laughed, and then he picked up Gertie, who was Felicity's little sister. He swung her in a circle, then tossed her in the air.

She giggled madly before kissing his cheek with a big smack.

"Kam! Uppies." Serenity tugged and pulled and started climbing Kami like a tree.

Oh my Gods. Help me!

My hands are full.

"Um. Eyv? Would you like your daughter?" Kami asked.

"Oh no. I have them all the time. Can you hold her for a bit?" Butter wouldn't melt in Eyv's mouth.

"I—I guess?" He caught Serenity when she would have fallen, then stared her in the

face as he lifted her, holding her out at arm's length.

Reno had to work hard not to just burst out laughing.

“He looks terrified,” Talon said, his grin huge as a couple of the kids crawled over him. They were at the palatial apartment Jack and Dex had, and while they were maybe more high-class than Reno and his team, they were nice folks who loved to entertain.

And they always invited everyone's children.

“Gertie, get down. I want Reno to look at my book with me.”

Jack's eyes flashed gold. “Felicity, do not be rude.”

“Sorry, soffar. I didn't mean to.” She gave Reno big, sad eyes. Patently false. “I just miss Reno. I haven't seen him in soooo long.”

“I'll sit with you and read after I love on Gertie, hon,” Reno promised her.

“Okay.” Felicity sat down, waiting. Right at his feet.

He grinned at Kami, who was now being held around his neck and was being jabbered with complete confidence and utter incomprehensibility.

Reno loved it.

I am going to wrap you up in a bedsheet and beat you to death tonight , Kami told him.

You can try. Reno waggled his eyebrows at his hailee. This was better than color TV.

“So, when are you two joining the ranks of us desperate-to-sleep parents?” Dex asked Kami, smiling as he offered a tray of cheese.

Kami did send him a panicked stare now.

“We’re not in any hurry,” Reno put in, not wanting to put Kami on the spot. “Kami has been working a lot and feels a little more like an alpha than an omega.”

That had Kami rolling his eyes, but his shoulders relaxed. He gave Reno a grateful smile.

Dex glanced back and forth between them, but he seemed to catch on, smiling. “Well, we can always use more help with rescuing people and training teams.”

“See, that’s what I thought,” Kami murmured. “I can help in all kinds of ways.”

Jack gave him a look glinting with sympathy. He was a damn quick study.

Serenity patted Kami’s cheeks, and then she crawled down to go play with Boone’s toddlers who were obviously building something insane with gigantic blocks.

Kami relaxed as she walked away, and then Talon handed him one of Elowyn’s twins and a bottle. “Here. Make yourself useful as well as ornamental.”

Kami stared at Talon. “You’re their uncle.”

“You’re family now, congratulations. Welcome to the clan. Apparently making babies is a thing. You might as well get used to helping, stone singer.”

I’m going to kill him. When they find him dead in the morning, skinned and hanging for the entire keep to see, it was me, I did it.

Good to know. I'll be your alibi.

Kami beamed at him. Thank you, mate.

"So you're really a stone singer?" Eyv asked. "I've never met one that I know of. It's an incredible talent you have."

"Thanks, I didn't know I was one, but apparently it's a thing."

Eyv nodded. "Usually when singer babies are found, they're taken to these amazing underground cities and trained to talk to the stones. They're adored, and they're considered incredibly blessed."

Durango shook his head. "It's a little creepy if you ask me."

"Well, you know." Kami's drawl was deceptively soft. "I'm really not the blessed kind."

"Goddess, no," Talon said. "He's more of the blasted kind. Yeah. I have seen him cause a couple of landslides."

"That's fun." Triton grinned, hands filled with children.

"Thanks, Tal. You're the best of friends." Kami rolled his eyes and shrugged. "Look, I don't know what the rumor is or the tradition, but I didn't grow up with dragons. I grew up in the human world, and we didn't really deal with anything. I left when I was a teenager to go find a dragon keep, and what I found, I didn't like. But I'm not interested in going and being in some magical underground city. That's not my deal."

"You might not have a choice." Jack's voice was deadly serious. "From what I understand, this gift is rare enough that politically, it's a problem."



Kami's eyes flashed. "Then I'll leave."

"He goes, I go too." That was easy. Reno wasn't going to be without his mate.

"No one's going to have to go anywhere." That was Boone. "I'll just tell Cain no. Isn't that part of this whole deal of us being at this keep? That we don't have to follow all these stupid rules?"

Lake nodded his head. "Exactly. That's why we came here, because the rules were hidebound and old-fashioned and not functional, and we didn't want to be constrained by tradition. They're killing omegas. They were going to kill babies!"

Eyv touched Lake's arm. "Easy. Children, little ears."

"Sorry."

"I'm not sorry. What the heck is going on, man?" Reno noticed that Kami was managing to have an argument and feed a baby at the same time, which was an improvement.

"What's going on is the world is changing." Tempest smiled at him. She was his dearest friend here, as far as the children were concerned. He'd worked hard to become friends with her. And the little seer made him happy deep down. "Everything is changing, and it's hard, but you're not going anywhere. You're staying here. It's not going to be easy, but you'll stay."

"Well, that's that then." Durango nodded, looking utterly satisfied. "I believe in my kaiinaa."

"I love you too, soffar."

Durango beamed at her, and their bond as parent and child was so obvious now.

“I’ll talk to Cain,” Reno finally said. “No one is taking away my hailee. And I think, stone singer or not, Kami is going to do what he wants to do. Right, baby?” I got your back.

I trust you. “ I am. I’m a rescue guy. I can’t just stop that.”

Jack finally nodded. “Okay. That’s fair.”

Hell, for all that he’d left his keep to become a talent agent, Jack could be the most hidebound of guys sometimes. Old-fashioned when it came to hailees and braaken. So if he was on board, it would be a real help.

They were all in this together. As a keep.

# Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Eleven

Kami decided that he'd had enough of hesitating.

Reno was out doing his thing, and so he just got himself dressed, braided his hair, and headed to the seer's.

This Cain guy, who he remembered, of course, could just...

Hell.

Cain had proven that he was a decent sort, had made him feel better so he could wait for Reno. They could just have a conversation. He didn't want to be sent anywhere.

He wasn't anyone's to send.

Kami got lost a couple of times wandering through the keep, but he figured he just kept going up. In his experience, the guys who were in charge were always at the top, so he just kept following stairs.

Eventually, he came to a huge, open area, with sofas everywhere. And the skylight above was vast.

It was wicked cool, to be honest.

“Please have a seat. Can I help you with something?” A very prim-looking dragon sat there at a desk, playing on her phone.

Dude, he needed a phone. “Do you know who I ask about getting a phone?”

She offered him a smile. “That would be me. It used to be Jack, but Jack got busy, so I’m kind of funneling requests.”

She held out one hand, grinned. “I’m Betty.”

“Kami. I need to see the seer, please.”

“Let me let him know you’re here. Also, we’ll get you a phone.” She tapped away. “I’m very glad that you found a new stone.”

“You know about that?”

“Lots of people know about that, but I was actually here when you all came through. To be honest, I’m here all the time.”

“All the time?” Well, that sounded like hell on earth and absolutely zero fun.

“Basically, I live right there. I’m sort of Cain’s beck-and-call person.”

“Why?”

She shrugged. “It’s a good job. It’s interesting. I get to meet everybody, and I know all of the gossip. I like having my fingers on the pulse of everything. This is the best way to do that.”

Well, that was honest.

Her phone beeped, and she looked up. “Cain’s not busy right now if you’d like to go on in.”

She pointed, not to the great big doors that he was expecting, but to a kind of nondescript door on one side.

“Are you a tea person, a coffee person, or...?”

“Uh, actually I would really like a root beer.”

She nodded like that was not an issue. “No problem, I’ll have root beer and snacks sent in. It’s good to meet you. If you ever need anything, just text.”

She winked at him. He liked her. She seemed a little wicked. He required a little wickedness in his friends.

The door opened into a long hallway, and he thought about how the sci-fi horror fics all started this way. But he finally reached a double front door type entrance, and he rang the little electronic doorbell on the front.

“Kami!” He half expected Cain to have a butler or a valet or something to answer the door, but it was the man himself, beaming with pleasure. “Come in, come in. Oh, you look so much better.”

He walked into Cain’s apartment, looking around, not trying to hide his curiosity. He’d been to Cain’s rock room and shit, but this, he didn’t remember.

If surroundings told about the dragon, then Cain was a homey, bright, Boho kind of guy. He had comfy couches and chairs, big pillows in bright colors, and two cats and a dog who came running to see who Kami was.

“Well, hey, guys.” He rubbed ears and tails, and the belly on the dog. “So I thought you might come by. I was waiting for you to settle in. I do want to chat, but you were very ill, and you’re newly mated.”

“I am. But Reno is training right now, so I hope it’s okay that I asked the lady out there for root beer.”

“Oh, that’s a lovely idea. I adore a nice cold root beer. One of our dragons brews his own.”

Of course he did. This place was kind of like a crazy utopia. Like the zoo one in the movie...

They sat together on the big couch, Cain tucking his feet up under him, the big pit bull dog jumping up next to him.

“Do you want to wait for root beer and snacks?”

“Nah.” He sighed. “Look, I don’t know anything about stone singers, but I’m not interested in going to some cave city and calling the rocks.”

Cain chuckled, his blue eyes bright. He was an odd-looking dragon, all pale and slight, but so, so powerful. “That’s a vast oversimplification, but that is the gist of what usually happens.”

“Yeah, Jack was all, well, you might have to. But no one is sending me anywhere.”

“Of course we’re not. No one says you must go. Or stay. Although I imagine Reno would prefer that.”

“Yeah, he said he would go with me if I have to leave, but I can tell he loves it here.”

“What do you think of it?”

“Of the keep?” Kami asked. At Cain’s nod, he pondered that. “It’s a little too perfect, maybe? Which is a little freaky to a guy like me. But it’s cool.”

Cain grinned at him, the expression surprisingly youthful. “Now you sound like Triton did when he first came. No wonder you are friends with his brother.”

“Yeah. I guess when you’ve had it rough, you question good things.”

Cain sobered. “Certainly. You say you’re not particularly aware of dragon society, so you don’t know what happens to seers, do you?”

Aw shit, had he stepped in it? “Um. No.”

“In a traditional keep, we’re taken from our families at a young age and educated for a few years with any peers we might have. Then each of us are isolated, usually in the highest towers of the keep.”

“What? Why?” He just blurted it right out, but that sounded like a shit thing to do to a kid.

“So that our ability to See is not clouded by relationships. No biases or false visions brought about by strong emotions for others.”

“Jesus.” He sat back, eyes wide, feeling like he’d taken a hammer blow to the chest. “That’s inhumane. What do dragons call inhumane?”

“Anagraake. It literally translates to against dragon tradition.”

“Huh.” His mom had taught him some dragon words, but nothing that deep.

The door chimed, and Cain rose to let in a waiter with a tray loaded with covered dishes and bottles and glasses. “Root beer and French fries, pizza rolls, and those weird tiny fishes you like fried, Cain. Anything else?”

“No, that’s perfect. Thank you, Glen.”

Kami waited for the guy to leave. “He’s not a dragon.”

“No, he’s an otter shifter. He came here after he got arrested for swimming on someone’s private lands.”

Kami growled a little. That sucked too!

“Dig in.” Cain popped the top on a root beer bottle and poured it into a glass.

“Is it okay if I drink it out of the bottle?” That conserved the bubbles.

“Go for it.”

“Thanks.” He grabbed the root beer, then a pizza snack that he dipped in red sauce. Ranch next. All the little dip cups were there. He thought the fish one had cocktail and tartar sauces. He munched, humming at how good it was. “So is that your way of telling me you know from hardship?”

“More that I know isolation. I never lacked for comforts, but I never had company. And I can be a bit awkward.”

“Mmm.” Kami got that. He could be blunt and not very patient. He tried, for the sake of Reno and Talon, but...

“At any rate, I have no intention of asking you to go anywhere or stopping your



rescue work.”

Well, that was good. Kami could handle that. He was totally into making sure people got what they needed. “So tell me how this whole thing started.”

“Believe it or not, we haven’t been around long. I know it looks like we have, but it hasn’t even been...” Cain frowned. “Felicity’s what? Seven years old?”

“Felicity?” It took a second for him to follow. “You mean that Jack guy, his little girl?”

Cain chuckled and nodded. “Yeah, that’s who I mean. Dex had lost his stone. It had been destroyed, and Jack came to ask me if I could help. We found Dex’s stone. That was when I figured out that it was possible, if not absolute, to save these omegas. And so that’s where it started.”

“This whole thing, this whole place? It’s only been around for seven years?” That didn’t seem remotely possible.

Cain offered him a shrug. “Give or take. Yeah.”

He ate another pizza roll, chewing hard, pondering all this. It was wild. “What’s your success rate?”

“It depends on the omega, of course, but I’d say thirty percent, give or take?”

Whoa. “That’s kind of crappy.”

“I know. I know, like I said, it really depends on what shape the omega is in. We’ve had way more luck with alphas. Keeps tend to dump them out with their stones instead of destroying them.”

“Right.” Alphas couldn’t carry unwanted babies, he guessed.

“So what about all the alphas that came with Talon’s brother. What about them? How did they get their stones out? Triton said they were in jail.”

Cain nodded. “That was all Triton, believe it or not. He was smuggling the stones and supplies out like you wouldn’t believe. Seriously. He even got Leilani’s stone out.”

“That’s pretty impressive. So—” He stared at Cain, trying to figure out...well, anything to be honest. “So you’re a seer. Did you see this whole thing? Did you know this was what you were going to do? Build this thing? And what’s your end game? What is it you want?”

Cain shrugged, rolled his eyes. “A little bit of nap. I think a nap. I had no idea that I was going to end up with this very complicated situation. It’s more than what I had expected or intended. But I can’t stop now. This is a home for all of these people. This is their home. This has to stay a functional place.”

“Uh-huh.” Cain was a sweetheart, but Kami had been listening to Reno and everyone. This place had nobility and shit. Money. Big money. “I’m going to be real with you here, man. At some point, you’re going to need like a governing body. You’re going to have to make things official.”

He could tell that Cain wasn’t following, but this place was big, and it was only getting bigger. It had a seer or two, maybe more. It was very confusing, and everybody seemed to know everybody’s business but him, and goddess knew everyone wanted him to be in their clique.

Kami understood, since he was an outsider. They felt bad for him. It didn’t matter, but there were already groups of people. It wasn’t one big happy family. It wasn’t one big grumpy family either. That was sort of kind of his point.

This wasn't a family. This was a community.

There were going to have to be laws and stuff and ways to deal with shit.

He just didn't see this Cain guy being the one who was going to be able to do all that and see stuff.

"I know, that sounds awful, doesn't it? This was just supposed to be a safe space for people."

"Dude, you have like a pizza oven thing. You have a hospital. You have a school sort of, with two different teachers. This isn't just a little safe space. If you're going to make it a big safe space, you're going to have to play with the big dogs."

"So are you going to do that?" Cain asked him, and he snorted.

"Are you kidding? Do I look like the planning-shit kind? No, no. I'm not even the particularly big-happy-family kind. I'm more of the let's-get-shit-done kind."

"I think you're kind of amazing. I'm glad you're here."

Kami tried not to let that affect him, because that was the kind of bullshit people said when they wanted you to do things. Still, it was nice to hear.

Even if he didn't want to hear it.

"Thanks. Seriously. I'm glad. This is the safest place I've ever been. That's why I don't want you to fuck it up. More than that, I don't want me to fuck it up." He took another long swig of his root beer. "Now let's talk rocks."

"Very well. What about them?"

“Well, I’m meant to be this big-ass stone expert, right?”

“Ideally, yes.” Cain grinned at him. “You are, by birth, a stone singer. Now, honing that innate talent will need some work.”

“Okay, but practically, what do I do with it?”

Cain blinked at him, and then his eyes rolled back in his head, his lips opening on a weird sigh.

“Oh, holy shit, are you having a vision?”

There was no answer right away, and Cain began to shake, which was a little, uh, terrifying.

Kami was about ten thousand percent sure that whatever was going to come out of Cain’s mouth, he did not want to hear it. Why didn’t he have any duct tape? Where the fuck was his backpack?

“The stones know you’re here.”

“Well, duh. I sort of went not so crazy, and people were throwing rocks at me. Not people—Talon was throwing rocks at me until I found the right one. So yeah...” He didn’t know if he was supposed to talk back to a seer. He wasn’t sure if Cain knew he was here.

“And they’re going to be coming now.”

“Who? The rocks?” Was that a thing? “Dude, I’m fairly sure that rocks are stationary. That’s why they’re rocks.”

Cain's eyes focused on him, and suddenly, he just couldn't look away. "They're coming. They're going to need your help. They'll all be coming here. You're the answer."

Shit, if he was the answer, he didn't want to know what the question was.

"Come on, man, snap out of it. Seriously. You're scaring me. You are way above my pay grade."

"The stones know you're here. They're singing right now."

Kami glanced around the room. He wasn't sure which door led to the cave with all the rocks, but, if they were singing, he wasn't going. "It's going to be fine, man."

"It is. Because you're going to be able to help them all. You're so much more than what you think you are."

Unlikely. He had a fairly healthy sense of self-importance.

"Well, this has been a great root beer, but?—"

Cain blinked up at him. "Sorry, what?"

"I think Reno is calling me."

A little smile appeared on Cain's lips. Could he remember what he saw when he did that? Or did someone need to be around to hear it.

"Of course," Cain said. "Thank you for coming. Take all the snacks but the fish."

"Oh, cool. Thanks. Reno will love them."

“Kami. Just give some thought to the stone singer thing. I can pull someone in to help train you.”

“Sure. Of course. I’ll do that.” Nope. Nuh-uh. No way. In hell.

He grabbed the plates with the food and took off.

Kami? What’s wrong? Reno asked it as soon as he left Cain’s airspace.

Nothing. I was just talking to Cain. I have snacks.

Well, meet me at the picnic area.

Okay. That he could do. He wanted to see Reno so bad all of a sudden. Maybe he needed to ask his mate to take a few days off. Just to, you know, bond.

He felt very itchy and out of control at the moment.

But not in public. Wait. Can you come home?

Sure, baby. I just thought you liked getting out and about.

I do, but I just want to see you. Only you.

Okay. On my way.

Thanks. This whole thing with Cain had given him the jitters. Kami preferred to just do things, not think about them too hard, and this situation was a hell of a lot to think about.

He made his way back to Reno’s apartment, their apartment he guessed. He still felt

like a guest. Which was not Reno's fault. Kami just hadn't settled in. And Reno acted a little like he was a roommate.

Maybe Reno didn't know any other way to be.

Kami sighed. God, he was an idiot.

He got to the apartment about the same time as Reno, who opened the door for him, then took the plates. "What's wrong, baby?"

"I don't know." He sighed. "Come sit with me. I ate like a bird with Cain because he wasn't eating."

"Did he get the weird fish?"

"Yeah. They have eyeballs." Kami shuddered.

"I know. He doesn't like to wig anyone out." Reno fed him a bite.

"Well, good for him. He wigged me right the hell out. I'm all...itchy."

"Are you sure that's not from the stone room? I mean, I bet you heard them all singing to you." Reno watched him carefully.

"I guess?" Kami scratched his arm. "Can you take some time off?"

Reno blinked, maybe at the change of subject. "Sure. How much?"

"Just a few days. I know I said I didn't need you to, and I was all good with life moving on as usual, but I feel like we're ships passing in the night." He blew out a breath. "I also feel like one of those needy omegas I always read about."

“Mmm.” Reno reached out to pull him into that warm lap, arms going around him. Reno nuzzled his neck, which made goosebumps rise up on his arms and his nipples harden. “I want to be with you, baby. I was just trying to give you what you wanted. You were recovering from losing your stone.”

“Well, what I want is you.”

“You got me.” Reno’s eyes went unfocused for a moment, and Kami had a feeling he was talking to someone. “Okay. I got three days off, and I can add more if I need to.”

“Thanks.” He leaned on Reno’s broad chest, taking in his scent. It was all toasty warm and a little brimstone, but also musky and male and perfect. His cock hardened in a rush, leaving him a bit shocked. Because he was getting wet, too.

“You smell damn good, baby.”

“Onion rings and root beer?”

“No, you smell like mine. Earthy. Hot. Something herbal. Your soap, maybe? But it’s the perfect combination. And you fit perfectly up against me.”

“I feel that way too. You’re making me all hard and hot.”

“I’m hard as rock for you.”

He looked up, meeting Reno’s crazy bright blue eyes. “Bedroom?”

Reno bent to take a kiss that seared his mouth and curled his toes. He clung to Reno’s neck, trying to get more, and he felt like he was flying again when Reno picked him up, striding to the bedroom, kissing him all the while.



They landed on the bed, and he grunted when part of Reno's weight came down on him. But then he wrapped around Reno and clung like a monkey on a branch, and they were kissing again, Reno's tongue pushing into his mouth to stroke his.

Delicious.

Heat spread through him like a wildfire, and he was desperate all of a sudden, using his legs for leverage to wrench Reno to his back, and then he climbed up to rub them together while they kissed again and again.

Reno got busy with his clothes, the cool air when he was naked making him shiver.

"So damn pretty," Reno told him, pinching his nipples.

"Am I? Do you really think so?" He loved that. "Prove it."

He was totally willing and able and ready for Reno to?—

Reno grabbed his hips and yanked, pulling him down so that their cocks rubbed together good and hard. "Okay, does this feel real to you?"

It did, but it wasn't what he craved right this second. He didn't want to mess around with blow jobs or hand jobs, or any kind of job, he wanted to be fucked, and he wanted to be fucked good and hard, and now was good for him. He didn't bother trying to explain all of this, of course. He just surged up and back, hitting the tip of Reno's cock against his hole and slamming them together. It was like the very best scratch to the very worst itch.

Reno's lips curled away from his teeth, and he growled, deep and low under his breath. "Don't let me hurt you."

“I’m in control of this right now. I know exactly what I want.” So Kami leaned up, almost losing Reno’s fat cock before he slammed down again. His entire body arched with the deep waves of sensation filling him. The base of Reno’s prick began to swell, and his eyes crossed as each motion threatened to lock Reno within him.

His lover’s—his braaken’s—hands came to rest on his hips, and Reno began to thrust and roll up with his hips, meeting each and every bounce he made down.

“Hailee.”

Kami loved how breathless Reno was, how the hunger showed, how much Reno needed him. In fact, he was over the moon.

If only he could focus.

“Look at me, hailee. Right into my eyes.”

Kami blinked, then stared down at Reno, nodding. His breath came in pants, and he bounced harder, his cock slapping around, his thighs shaking.

There. Everything slid into startling clarity, and he could feel every nerve ending. Every hair and scale. His whole body shook with need, his entire self on fire, the feel of Reno’s knot swelling in him making him want to scream, it was so good.

Reno grinned. At least it was probably a grin. Kami wasn’t sure, and he didn’t really care because it was a look of pleasure so huge that it was painful anyway. He understood because he was feeling it too.

Don’t stop. Please don’t stop. He’d never wanted anything quite as badly as he needed this right now, right this second. He wanted Reno to fill him up, he wanted to shoot, he wanted to come and to be one with Reno, locked together, breathing as one.

You can have it. You can have it all. Reno's hand slid down his leg and then moved up over his inner thigh. Reno grabbed hold of his cock, pulled from base to tip, and then rubbed hard in the slit with his thumb . You can have every inch of me. I'm yours, hailee. All of you. I'm all yours.

He felt it the second that they clicked together. It was a kind of magic that seemed to ring out.

All Kami could do was feel, his body squeezing Reno tight. As he did, Kami came, heat spilling over Reno's belly.

That was all he could do. He didn't have anything left.

Then he felt Reno's knot swell and felt heat filling him up inside.

He'd never felt anything like it. Kami understood all the stories about mating now. All the tales about joining in this amazing, perfect fucking way. He'd thought he and Reno had done that before...

Gods knew, he understood now. This was mating. This was perfect. He could hear Reno inside him. Reno's heartbeat in his ears, throbbing right along with his.

And he was stuck there, that knot seriously keeping him right there, not letting him move.

Fuck, it was taking his breath.

Reno held him close, stroking his spine, keeping him close and warm, letting him breathe. "I have you, hailee. I have you."

Kami sure hoped so, because he wasn't going anywhere for a few minutes. Not even

turning a hose on them would accomplish separating them now.

### Chapter

### Twelve

“Reno, dude, where have you been?”

“Busy. Why?” Reno really didn’t feel like talking, at least not to anybody but Kami right now. It had been three of the best days of his entire life, and he wasn’t ready for it to be over. So he called in another favor and pulled another three days.

Boone sighed, so dramatic. “Lake wants to know if you two want to come over for?—”

“Nope. We’re busy right now.” Kami was antisocial at best, and neither one of them were at their best right now. Or maybe they were at their super best, but they weren’t being social. Boone and Durango were just going to have to deal with it.

He didn’t think this was permanent. It hadn’t been for the guys.

Okay, maybe it was a little bit with Triton. This wasn’t a vacation to hang out with family. This was him and his hailee and quiet. With a healthy side of licking and biting.

“All right, fine. But when Lake pouts, you have to deal with him.”

“He’s not my hailee.”

“No, but the kids are your nieces and nephews, and I haven’t even started in with Tempest yet. She’s going to start banging on the door. You do realize she can just walk across the way without anybody caring.”

That wasn’t fair. He might have to call her and take her to lunch, one on one. “It’s not personal. I promise. I just need some time to bond with him, all right?”

If you want to go over, go see them. I don’t care. I think it’s shitty, though, that they won’t respect what you have to say. Oh, Kami was aggravated.

They’re just not used to not seeing me.

So what? You’re at their beck and call? What about your convenience?

“Look, Boone, I gotta go.” He hung up his phone. He wanted to be focused for this conversation. “You don’t miss Talon?”

Kami shrugged. “He’s safe. He’s just a few floors up. We talk every few days.”

“Well, my brothers are used to seeing me every day, and their children are used to seeing me most every day. And their mates are used to seeing me almost every day. They come from big families; they’re used to large gatherings. They just don’t understand.”

“So you should totally go. Visit. Hang out.”

“I want to hang out with you.” And if Kami didn’t wanna hang out with them, then what?

Then he didn’t know what he was going to do.

“I’ll have to go up and see Talon soon, see if we have a bead on another mission. I’ve been really lazy about wanting to get one, I admit it. But that would be a perfect time for you to go and see the guys.”

“Yeah, I totally can, but Lake and Eyv will want to know if you’re angry.” He shook his head. “By the way, I’m not looking forward to you leaving either.”

He sort of hated the idea, which was stupid. They were warriors.

“So why did you stop going out? What made you stop doing missions?”

He shrugged. That was easy. “The kids. Boone stopped first because they had Daniel and four others all at once. And then? Eyv came with Durango. And suddenly there were all these kids, and the guys didn’t want to leave them. And about the same time Eyv came, all of these warriors—twenty plus, you know—and the warriors kept coming in, so it didn’t seem logical to do missions when I could train them to be safe. And there were all of these babies that worried when I would go out.”

“Aren’t you bored?”

“No. No, I have friends. I get to see people heal and thrive. I’m making a difference. I know that sounds stupid.” Because it was one of those things that, had Reno heard it as a younger dragon, he would have thought it was ridiculous.

But he was getting older. And he wanted a family; he wanted a home, and he wanted to be who he was here.

“I have to tell you, I’m not sure who I am, but I can’t see myself settling down and just being in one place.”

“Then I’ll come with you.” He would hate it, but he would hate being without Kami

more, so he'd do what he had to do.

"And what? Be miserable?"

"Do we have to decide today?" They still had a day and a half together to laugh and relax and make love.

Why was this hard?

It hadn't been hard for Boone or Durango.

In fact, it had been easy as pie.

"No. No, of course not. I'm not ready to share you yet, that's all."

"Okay, then. We don't share right now." He grinned, hugging Kami to him. "I think we can work it all out, love."

"I hope so." Kami chewed his lower lip. "I just feel like—I mean, what do you get out of this with me? I'm grumpy. Antisocial. Not used to family or interference in my plans."

"I get that." He winked, but his grin died when Kami didn't smile back. "Babe. I just want to be with you. We can compromise, right? I can go out on jobs with you, maybe you can hang out with the fam on occasion."

"I'm willing to try." Kami stroked his cheek, fingers trailing over his lips. "I mean, you make me happy deep in my chest. I'm just so set in my ways."

"I think you're scared, too."



Kami drew back to stare at him, brows snapping down in a frown. “What?”

“Dragons aren’t meant to be alone, Kami. We’re social creatures, no matter what our keeps did to us.” Reno paused, gathering his thoughts. He was no seer or philosopher. “But you didn’t grow up with a bunch of close family or friends. You’re not sure what to do with us all, so it’s safer not to open yourself up to it.”

Kami kept scowling at him. “I’m not a coward,” he snapped.

“I never said you were. Not one bit. But you are afraid that to have a family, you have to give up who you are. That’s not how it works.”

“No?” One eyebrow winged up. “Isn’t that what happened with Boone and Durango, and even Triton and Cerran? They have milquetoast omegas, so they stay home to make them happy?”

That hit him like a punch to the chest, so hard Reno actually grunted. He sat back a little, not wanting to look Kami in the eye. “That’s not really fair, baby.”

Kami was silent for a long moment, long enough that Reno glanced up to see his stricken expression.

“No. No, that was a shitty low blow, and it’s not right. Lake and Eyv and Elowyn have been super nice to me, even if I think they don’t like me. I’m sorry.”

“Thank you.” Reno sighed. “And I didn’t mean you were a coward at all.”

Kami chewed his lower lip. “But what if I am? I mean, this whole stone singer thing is scary as shit, and then there’s the fact that I’m not liable to give you kids, and you love them so much. I know you say it doesn’t matter, but I can see how much you want them.” Kami seemed to crumple.

“Babe.” He said it gently, because this was going to be a bombshell. “After the last few days, do you really think you’re still not having heat?”

Oh gods, Kami’s expression would have been comical if the situation hadn’t been so serious. “What?” popped right out, his hailee shocked into speechlessness.

“Oh, love.” He grinned, because he was wrung out and felt well-used. “You have been all over me for days. You’ve been wild. I mean, I know we’re mate-bonding, but I’ve had trouble keeping up with you.” His Kami did mating the way he did everything. Straightforward and flat-out full speed.

Kami sat there, mouth hanging open, eyes wide. Finally, he blinked. “Shit. You really think so?”

“I really do. I mean, I’m no healer...”

“Well, yeah, but you’ve been around a lot of mated pairs.”

Reno wondered if Kami knew he was rubbing his belly. He would bet the motion was strictly unconscious.

“I have. And I’ve never had sex like that before with anyone. Ever.” He was a little sore, truth be told. But in the best way. “But even if that’s not the case, it’s you I want, Kami. We’ve just got to meet in the middle. I don’t want either of us to be miserable.”

Kami dove into his arms. “Neither do I!”

“Then will you work with me? Meet me halfway with my friends and family? And I promise to go into the field with you if you really mean to go.”

“I need to help other dragons, Reno.”

“I get that. I really do.” Reno stroked Kami’s hair, then the scales that rattled on the side of his face. “We can do it.”

“Okay. I love you.” Kami buried his face in Reno’s neck.

“I love you too. Don’t get all worried, okay? We have a lot to learn about each other. I mean, shit, Jack left Dex alone for years, not knowing it would mean Dex would get hurt by it. We’re already doing better than that.”

That had his mate laughing like a loon. “Low standards, Reno.”

“I say take it where we can get it.”

Kami was still chortling. “That’s it. Well, I’m not leaving you to die a slow painful death, so be happy.”

“Or even a fast painful death. I broke into Cain’s to get you a stone.”

“True enough.” Kami kissed his jaw. “Thank you, love.”

“It was pure panic. I can’t lose you.” Reno would do anything but that. Go out in the field, go without kids, never eat a patty melt again...

“That patty melt part seems pretty extreme.”

“Oh, I think so too.” He chuckled. “But I mean it.”

“I know. And that’s what makes me want to try harder too. Let’s hang out with your peeps in say, two more days? Just let us have this time.”

“I can totally do that.”

Kami grabbed Reno’s phone. “Text them. Lock us in.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. I’m not ready to entertain or anything, but like, a game night? I can see that.”

“Oh, the guys would love that. Cards and board games. Do you actually like that, though?”

“I’ve always played blackjack and poker and checkers with Talon. So yeah. I think that will work.”

“Okay, cool. I’ll set it up. I appreciate you trying so hard, baby. I really do.”

Kami snorted. “Don’t thank me yet. I’m competitive. I might rip heads off.”

“I’ll make sure there’s good food. That solves a lot.”

Nodding, Kami moved to lean on him more comfortably. “Good food makes everything better. And besides you? That’s the best thing about this place.”

Reno laughed, patting his hailee’s back. “We do have some damn good cooks. And this way, I don’t have to give up my patty melts.”

“Gods forbid,” Kami told him, and they settled in together again.

Crisis averted. For now.

Chapter

Thirteen

Kami looked down at himself. “Are you sure that this is cool? I mean...”

Was it cool? Why would he care?

Okay, so he cared because it was important to Reno, but Kami didn’t have a whole lot of clothing options. He just hadn’t come equipped with tons of things—a couple of disguises, a pair of jeans, some soft pants, a handful of T-shirts. Today’s T-shirt was Rainbow Brite, in fact.

“I think it’s perfect.”

Kami had to admit that Reno was dressed similarly—he had on jeans and a Led Zeppelin T-shirt, so...

“Are we supposed to bring anything?”

Reno shook his head. “No, they ordered in. If we brought something, we would just be bringing something that we ordered. So might as well just have them handle it.”

“Okay, cool. And are we going to have all of the kids there?” He liked to know the lay of the land.

“We are going to have all the kids there for supper, and then the teenagers are going

to take the children next door with the nanny, and they're going to try a slumber party slash babysitting slash probably some weird social experiment. So you'll have to deal with children for a short period of time, but then we'll have adult time."

"Fair enough." He was prepared; he could handle it. In theory, he liked kids. He'd just never been around them.

Soft rapping came to the door. "Uncle Reno. It's time. The food's here. Soffar got patty melts and French fries for everybody."

Reno sort of bounced to the door like a Minion from the movies and opened it. "Tempest!"

Reno got a delighted grin, her purple scales shining. "I missed you." The girl jumped into Reno's arms and squeezed him. "It's been such an exciting time. There are so many new children, and you haven't met any of them." She peered over Reno's shoulder at Kami, nodded, and then she frowned. "You're the one who brought them all here, the omegas."

He nodded. "My friend Talon and I helped get them out. Reno here brought them in."

"But you're going to be the one that helps everybody new."

Kami blinked at her. Huh. "I'm sorry, I don't understand. I go out, and I help omegas that want to get free. Alphas too. Whoever."

She shook her head at him. "No, no, that's not right. You think it's right, but that's not how it works."

Her eyes began to glow, and he tilted his head, staring at Reno. No weird "seeing" stuff. And I am not ready for this.

She's just—she's a seer. It's a thing. She can't help it.

But we're going to play games. Games, no weird seer stuff.

I'll try. "Come on, Tempest. Focus. Dinner and games."

Nope, still glowing.

"You can deny all you want. You're going. To help all the new ones, every single new dragon in the keep. And some old ones." Her voice was kind of a monotone.

"Well, thank you." What the fuck does that mean?

What does anything any seer ever said mean?

I don't know. Well, at least he didn't feel like he was that far off in left field. Seriously, if Reno wasn't going 'you have to believe the little purple seer' then he didn't feel like it was necessary to be all awed by her pronouncement.

"Come on, let's go play games. I mean, I know us kids are going to play games in the other apartment. But it'll be fun to have a big game night. The babies are gonna play go to sleep." She rubbed her hands together and laughed like a Disney villain.

"I hope so, for everyone's sake." Reno took his arm and just hauled him and Tempest both back across the hallway to where the door was wide open, a baby gate standing in front of it.

Boone waved from the door. "Hey, there. Everyone's trying to escape. They've been watching Tempest go in and out and to your apartment, and I think they're figuring it out."

“Don’t say that.” Lake seemed more than a little bit confused and worried about this whole thing. The little silvery blue dragon was just about hysterical, actually.

“Don’t worry, hailee. I won’t let the babies escape.” Boone winked and took Tempest from Reno, looking totally unrepentant. “But I am going to leave the baby gate up until we don’t need it anymore.”

The floor was filled with tiny crawling beasts. Actually, only one of them was crawling.

Most of them were walking, or kind of swaying around with their bowed little legs, lurching toward each other and everyone who walked in. It was at once creepy and kind of adorable.

“I can’t believe how big they’re getting,” Reno said. “Every time I see them, they’ve grown.”

“Apparently that’s something that happens with these dragon creatures. They just keep getting bigger.” Durango winked at him as he walked by, scooping up one of the children. “Hey, Kami, I’m glad you could make it.”

“Thanks for inviting us, I appreciate it.” I don’t know what to do, Reno. What am I supposed to do?

Let’s go find a place to sit and let the kids come to us if they want to.

Should I offer to help?

Help what? Pass out plates? The teenagers have this. It’s all right.

Reno led them over to a low sofa, and Reno sat in the corner, pulling him in close.



“Soon we’ll have visitors.”

“Will we now?”

Sure enough, within seconds, a bright blue-scaled little dragon popped up, a huge smile on his quirky little face. “Hi.”

Kami looked at him and then leaned down close. “Hey. I’m Kami.”

“Blue.”

“No, I’m green. You’re blue.”

“Gween?” The little boy’s head tilted.

“Yes, I’m green.”

“Gween.”

A little girl baby with the darkest, reddest curls he’d ever seen appeared next to the blue dragon.

“Dis gween,” he pronounced.

“Gee?” She stared at him. “Scawet.”

“Yeah, you’re Scarlet. I’m green.” Too cute.

“Geen?”

The little blue dude shook his head. “Guh. Ween.”

“Gaween.”

The little blue dragon nodded. “Uh-huh. Gaween.”

She stared at Kami for a long moment, and he could see the smoke just barely pop out of her nose. Just barely. “Gaween. Hi.”

Then she pulled the little blue dragon away.

“That was Blue and Scarlet. Indigo and Violet are around here somewhere.”

“Those are their names?”

“Yep. They all were rescued from a keep, and Lake adopted them. About seven seconds before he had little Daniel.” Reno was too amused for words.

“That long, huh?”

“Yes, and unfortunately, I think that they’ve just decided that your name is Gaween.” Lake gave him a little bit of a sheepish grin. “They haven’t quite gotten to the point where they can differentiate themselves from colors, yet. I wouldn’t have named them colors if I thought about it first, but it just seemed so easy at the time, and I was very pregnant.”

“So how did you come up with Daniel? I mean, you’re a Lake. That’s a Boone, whatever the hell a Boone is. Oh.” It hit him all of a sudden, “Right. Daniel Boone. I get it. Never mind.”

Lake kind of chuckled softly. “At least I didn’t call him doggy. Like boondoggie.”

“Or baby like boom baby.”

“Or Ka like Kaboom.”

Oh, that was bad, and he couldn't help but laugh, though. Okay, there was a hint of wickedness in Lake, maybe more than a hint.

“It must have been a real thing to go from no babies to five.”

“What was the worse thing, believe it or not, was going from five to six. That was unexpected. I love them all, but I may or may not have threatened to eat someone at some point, and I'm incredibly thankful for Samantha. Everybody needs a nanny.”

“I think it's great that you have help.” That was noncommittal, right? He knew nothing about childcare. Or nannies. Or anything.

God, he was so out of his league.

Reno grabbed his hand and squeezed. “So Kami has no idea what to do. Do you guys need help?”

“Um...” Lake looked at Durango.

“Why don't you guys come help me set up the game tables?” Durango asked.

“Sure.” Kami popped back up right away. “Thanks. I need to be busy if I can.” He followed Durango to where a long, folding trestle table leaned on a wall well away from all the staggering infants. They picked it up and let the legs down before settling it on the floor.

“Come on. We'll get all the cards and games and all.” Durango winked at him.

“You rock.” He just had all this nervous energy.

Once he'd helped with that, Eyv had him help set out food, and he got to do all sorts of little things until Reno came to fill a plate and take him to sit again, this time with a drink and a bunch of food.

Better. Hands and mouth full. He was way less likely to make an ass out of himself that way.

You okay? Reno glanced at him while sipping his beer.

I am. I was just getting in my own head too much.

Okay. I want you to be comfortable with my friends.

I know. I'm trying. So are they.

Yeah. They really are.

"So, Kami. You really went on rescues?" Eyv asked.

"I did. Me and Talon here. We make a good team, huh, buddy?"

"The best." Talon's grin made him chuckle. "We've done dozens of missions."

"That's really cool. I mean, where we come from, omegas would be absolutely discouraged from anything like that." Eyv rolled his eyes. "So annoying."

"Yeah." Lake snorted. "We're like Victorian human women, I think. Expected to be all soft and useless. Keep culture. Graake."

"Dragon tradition?" Kami was learning a lot of the words he hadn't been taught as a kid.

“Exactly.”

They chatted, ate, and the kids gradually fell asleep. Then they were all taken off to play games or go to bed, and it was to the game tables.

This was way more his scene. Kami shuffled cards to play Spades with Talon and one of the recruits from Reno’s teams, with Reno as his partner. “Prepare to go down,” he told Talon.

“Ha! You forget I know all your tells.”

“And mates don’t get to do brain talk,” Lake said.

“Oh, no fair,” Reno moaned. “I finally get to brain meld and you all call it off-limits.”

Kami chortled. “Yeah, but really, how are they going to know?”

Reno laughed with him. “Good point.”

Two rounds of beating Talon and his partner’s ass later, they switched to playing a board game with Lake and Boone. Lake was damn competitive. Kami liked that about him.

They raced around the board, him and Lake way ahead of the alphas. They were just better at this stuff. Reno might be great at chess, but damn. He and Lake were really good at rolling dice and taking risks.

“Who wants dessert?” Lake said once Kami won the game. “We have lemon meringue mini pies or chocolate cream cakes.”

“Yum. Can we have one of each?” Kami asked. He was starving, even though he’d

eaten a ton of food. He was getting better every day.

“You may have as many of each as you want.”

Kami popped up. “I’ll help you bring them around.”

“Oooh. Wait staff.” Lake jostled him on the way to the kitchen, and he laughed, the roughhousing surprising him. He really liked this guy now.

Which was too cool.

He could really use a friend who wasn’t trying to have visions about him all the time...

And who was going to stay put. He had a feeling if he wanted back into the field, he was going to have to fight for it.

Chapter

Fourteen

R eno took Kami with him once his time off was over, wanting to assess his skills.

If his mate was going to be off running missions, he needed to be okayed by the training master.

And that was Reno.

As it was, it took him about three weeks to get Kami into the training room. They had a rescue that had to happen in between, another two omegas coming to make their home at the keep.

“So are they settling in?” Kami kept peppering him with questions about the mission, wanting to know how it was carried out and what went right and wrong.

“They are. I mean, I’m not the one who’s debriefing them, but?—”

“But they’re okay?”

“Well, one is without a stone.” They’d been over this, but Kami really seemed to feel left out. Which sucked. Oh, he was settling in too. He and Lake had become fast friends, and while Tempest seemed to wig Kami out still, he loved little Blue and Scarlet.

“Ah.” Kami’s eyes glowed when Reno glanced back at him, and Reno raised an eyebrow.

“Did you want to go commune with the stones?”

“What? No.” But Kami seemed to vibrate some.

He wasn’t fooling Reno at all.

“That’s fine, hailee.” Reno motioned to the mat. “Ready to spar?”

“I am.” Kami dropped his towel and kicked off his shoes.

Reno did the same thing, then took a fighting stance.

Kami faced off across from him, hands up. They circled each other, and Reno feinted, knowing how fast Kami could be. He had to test what his mate could do.

Coming in low, Kami went after his knee.

He backed off, falling and rolling. Then he hopped up and grabbed Kami, tossing him like a sack of potatoes to the mat.

“Nice.” Kami gave him a wild grin. “Let’s go again.”

They sparred, and Reno was damn impressed with Kami’s skills. Such a fine fighter. What he lacked in brute strength, he made up in speed and strategy.

But after one move where Reno spun him around and landed him on the mat on his back, Kami turned damn green, his eyes widening.



“Bathroom!”

Rather than trying to point it out, Reno picked up his mate and hauled him there in a rush, where Kami proceeded to heave up his guts.

“Oh, gods. Nasty,” Kami moaned.

“Something you ate, baby?” Reno ran some water into a paper cup that was by the water cooler.

“We ate the same thing!”

“Hmmm.” He handed Kami the water, and he rinsed and spit.

“Ugh.” Kami sat back on the floor. “Sorry.”

“You can’t have motion sickness.”

“Gods no. But something is definitely wrong.” Kami put a hand over his belly.

“Yuck.”

“Hey, I think that it’s time to stop. Once you throw up, that’s the end of training for you right now, today.”

Kami looked like he was going to argue, but Reno just held up one hand. “It’s not my rule. That’s the training salle rules, sorry. Nobody wants to clean it up. Nobody wants to smell it.”

And that set Kami off again.

Boom.

Okay, so no talking about it, that was for sure.

“God. I need something fizzy,” Kami groaned.

“Sure, that sounds like a plan. Let me run out and get you something.”

He headed out to the little cooler that they kept in the training room. It was filled with water and different juices and drinks. There was even a bubbly orange drink in there that everybody seemed to love. So he grabbed that along with one that was lemon and lime and headed back toward the bathroom.

One of the newer warriors came jogging up, expression so serious. “Reno, Sir.”

Oh damn. “Yeah, what you need, kid?”

“Seer Cain asked if you and your mate could please come to the seer’s quarters. There’s a problem, and he would like you to come. Immediately.”

“Sure. Give us half an hour.” Fuck a doodle. “Uh, can you holler at Betty and tell her we’ll be up there as soon as we can?”

It was going to do no one any good if Kami just walked up there and puked on Cain. Cain was a nice guy and incredibly thoughtful, but that might be a bridge too far.

Funny, and he would laugh his ass off with Boone and Durango later, but yeah. Not so good. “How you doing, man?”

“Better. Better, I think I might live.” Kami took the orange drink and gulped it down. Then he took the other one and just sipped it.

“So Cain needs to see us both, he says. There’s some sort of a problem.”

Kami glanced up, blinked. “What kind of a problem?”

“Don’t know, all I know is that he requested us. We got to go.”

“Maybe we’re going to be sent on a mission.”

Unlikely, but who knew? “I don’t know, honey. Let’s go see. Get your shoes on. Wash your mouth out.” God knows nobody wanted puke breath on him.

Stop it. Kami sounded less amused than he obviously was.

Sorry, but you got to admit, it’s weird. In fact, he was running scenarios on why Kami was sick, and not a lot made sense. They’d shared a couple of plates at breakfast. He wasn’t sick. Kami didn’t have weird psychological problems with sparring, he didn’t think, so that ruled that?—

A thought occurred to him, and he stared at Kami, his nose working to see if Kami’s scent was different.

It was, just a bit. There was a deeper, more earthy edge to it.

Oh, shit. Could Kami be pregnant? Had he just tossed his pregnant hailee all over the training room?

“What’s wrong? Why are you staring at me like that? Why are you sniffing me? Stop it.” Kami frowned at him, scowled actually.

“What do you think I’m doing?” Reno asked.

“We’re not thinking anything. We’re going to meet with the seer so he can think things for us because that’s what he does, obviously. Let’s go.”

Oh man, he had totally just thrown his pregnant hailee all over the damn training salle.

That had been him.

What if something happened? What if he had jostled the new dragon baby?

He was going to have to talk to the midwife, Rowan, but then he might get in trouble. Should he talk to Boone? Durango couldn't keep a secret to save his life. He adored the man, but secrets were not his big thing.

And he couldn't tell Triton because Triton would tell Talon, who would tell Kami, who might just slit his throat in the middle of the night out of sheer rage.

This was a topic for concern.

Yeah, it was totally going to have to be Boone.

"You're concerning me." Kami started putting his shoes on.

"Just stuff on my mind. I hate having a sick hailee. We have to go up to Cain's."

Boone, I have got to talk to you.

Why? What's up?

What do you know about how hard you can throw a pregnant hailee before you hurt something.

There was a moment of utter silence. Sorry, what?

I think Kami is pregnant, and we just had a sparring match, and I may have just slammed him into the ground and made him throw up.

Oh. Well, that's new. Boone didn't sound amused. I don't know. I can't imagine any point at which I would throw my hailee on the ground. They're kind of delicate.

Oh, please. I have seen Lake wrangle six toddlers in the swimming pool and dress down a server who couldn't remember that they all needed apple juice at the same time. That man is not delicate. That man has carried two giant babies while taking care of other babies during it. Not delicate. You don't think I hurt him, do you?

No, man, you would know. People have wild monkey sex when they're pregnant. Like wild. Trust me on this. Lots.

Oh, well. Okay, you've got a point there. Sex was absolutely more jostly than a couple of knocks on a padded floor. Hell, they'd had sex yesterday, which had been harder than that. Thanks, I'm heading to Cain's.

Are you going out on a mission?

Nope, I don't think so. Not if Kami was pregnant, they weren't. He was not missioning with a pregnant Kami.

"What are you doing?" Kami asked him. "Who are you talking to? Where are you?"

"Boone needed something. Let's go." He led the way to Cain's, giving Boone a quick goodbye. He needed to focus on Kami, so he put his hand on the small of Kami's back, giving him some warmth, letting his love flow through their bond.

Kami gave him a quick, uncertain grin.

They made it to the hall that led to Cain's door, and Kami dug in his heels. "Do you think he's kicking me out?"

"Baby, why would he do that?" Reno wrapped his arm around his mate. "Besides that, let me assure you I wouldn't let it happen. And neither would anybody else. I think Cain actually likes you."

Honestly, Cain was basically a nice guy. A seer, so he was a little bossy, but basically nice. And he always had good snacks.

Betty was waiting there in the foyer, nodding at both of them. "Oh, good deal. He's kind of frantic, so just go right in."

"Frantic?" Kami hurried up, rather than slowed down, and Reno took that as a good sign.

They hit the door together, sort of like a freight train, finding a pair of dragons there, Cain kneeling down beside them.

"What's going on?"

"We can't find her stone. I can't... I can't help her and we're going to lose her." Cain was pale and shaken, obviously stressed.

One of the warriors Reno knew from training—Kayla, maybe, he couldn't remember her name—stared up at him with her eyes glowing bright red. "Please. I can't lose her, not now. I just found her."

Reno understood this on a deep level. "What can we do?"

He was willing to throw stones at the little omega, just like Talon had done for them.

She was so pale she was almost transparent, and he didn't want her dying on his damn watch.

"Okay." And Cain was looking at Kami. "Can you help me? Can you try?"

There wasn't even a hesitation when Kami nodded. "Absolutely. What was your stone before?"

"What does it matter?" Kayla cried.

"Don't argue with me. What the fuck was your stone before?"

"Aquamarine. It was an aquamarine," the omega croaked out, the light in her blue eyes visibly fading.

"Cool, cool, cool. We got this. Reno, I need you. Come with me." Kami grabbed his hand, and off Reno went into that huge cavern of stones.

"Hailee? What am I supposed to do?"

"Well, we're going to find this chick a stone."

"Cool, how?"

"Aquamarine, so it's another beryl. I'm into beryls. That's what my stuff is so... I'm going to start calling to it, and then if you see something glow or hum or... I don't know. I wasn't really with it when I was trying for mine, but it worked so, and I can't—" Kami stopped and took a deep breath. "We're going to help this woman. You and me, we're going to fix this, understood?"

He saluted. "You start singing, baby, I will make this happen."

“Yeah.” Kami nodded, then closed his eyes and started humming. It wasn’t really a sound that came from his lungs or his lips, though. It seemed to come from deeper, as if his body was vibrating and causing this hum.

For a second, Reno worried that that vibration might disturb the baby should Kami be pregnant, but he wasn’t going to start messing with things now.

If Kami was pregnant, he was just pregnant. And if he wasn’t supposed to be doing this, he wouldn’t be doing it.

This type of thing, this came from way above even Cain’s pay grade.

Kami kept humming, and they moved deeper and deeper into the cave, back past even where all the stones seemed to be.

“Should we stop? Shouldn’t we go back?”

Kami didn’t answer him, but that humming got louder, so Reno went with it.

What else was he supposed to do?

He followed Kami, eyes peeled in the dark for anything that seemed to be out of the ordinary.

“Hurry!” Cain called. “Please.”

Kami growled, and he winced. How could he tell the seer to shut up and let Kami work?

Then he saw it. Something started to glow gold. He saw it, but he could hardly believe it. “I need some tools! Cain! A shovel or a pick!”



Kami's song intensified, and the stone glowed brighter, so bright he had to shield his eyes. He heard heavy footsteps running, and then Boone and Durango were there carrying tools.

"Holy shit," Boone said. "I don't want to break it."

"Give me the pick." Through Kami, the stone was telling Reno what to do. He went in from the top, swinging the pick hard, and damn if the golden beryl didn't pop right out, a chunk of granite still encasing it.

"Kami! Come with me. Sing it to her." The stone would have to be cut down, but he and Boone heaved it up and ran back to Cain's. The omega needed to be able to touch it.

They slid to a stop in front of the omega and Kayla, and they placed it carefully on the floor. Instinctively, Reno knew Kami could make it easier on her to bond with it, to find her space with it.

Kami's song never wavered. If anything, it got louder, and Reno grabbed the omega's hands and put it on the stone. She had to get with the program, but she was so weak...

She gasped, her eyes going wide and the blue coming back into them, taking over the grayish-white film that had covered them. "Oh!"

That's it. Keep her on it, Kami told him, his whole body vibrating with the hum.

Reno's teeth were going to rattle right out of his head. "You got it, hailee."

"Got what?" Cain asked.

"Kami says not to let her let go of the rock." So Reno knelt by Kayla. "Get in there

and drape yourself over her and the rock. Add your strength.”

“I will.” Kayla put on her alpha face and covered her hailee, groaning when the stone started to glow and fade in a kind of pulsing pattern.

He looked at Kami, who was still singing to the stone, and it felt to Reno like his mate was fine-tuning the damn thing. Like he was making it better respond to the omega. It was amazing to see, like a gem cutter honing his craft and bringing out the beauty in a diamond.

It’s a golden beryl. Like aquamarine, but bright gold yellow...

It’s perfect for her, baby.

I know. Kami’s hair was all but floating around his head like he was touching one of those energy balls. The magic in the room was so powerful that everyone looked a little awed by it. It wasn’t all Kami now, because the omega was gaining strength, but it was nuts.

Totally.

Reno went to Kami, doing as he said. He grabbed Kami’s hand, adding his strength to the proceedings.

Thank you. Kami’s eyes glowed as he smiled at Reno, and Reno nodded, trying to just get them through this.

The omega slumped over the stone, and Kayla cried out, but it was soon pretty damn apparent that it was a good sound.

“She’s asleep. Like really asleep. Oh, thank you.” She was just bawling, tears

streaming down her face.

Kami slumped against him, leaning on his shoulder.

“Do you need us anymore right now, Cain?” He could tell Kami’s energy was blown. In fact, he lifted his hailee into his arms, wanting to get him a bath and bed.

“I don’t think so. I’ll call you if something new should crop up. For now, I need to get them to the healers.”

“We’re gonna rest for a bit.”

“I’ll cover for you, dude,” Boone put in.

“Thanks, bud.” He took Kami with him, and Talon met them in the hall outside their apartment.

“Kami, are you well?”

Kami raised his head, giving Talon a soft, worn out chuckle. “I am. I’m just a little tired.”

“But at least you’re not puking,” Reno murmured.

“Puking?” Talon demanded. “What happened?”

“I was just a little sick during training this morning,” Kami said. “That’s all.”

“You are never sick.”

“Talon, man, I love you, but I need to take Kami to get him a shower and a bed.

We're covered in rock dust from digging a stone out of a cave."

Talon stopped and stared at him. "You will explain?"

"Let's have pancakes tomorrow morning. Huh?"

"I will come over at eight." Talon marched off, and Kami laughed.

"Take me in and lock the door." Kami patted his cheek.

"Yes, hailee." He did exactly that, then hauled Kami into the big shower in the bathroom and got the water going, steam pouring out of the space in no time. He stripped Kami out of his clothes, then got his gone, and he took them into the shower.

"Ohhhhh." Kami moaned, leaning into him and letting the water beat down on him. "That's good."

"You? Are fucking amazing, baby," Reno said.

"I'm trying. I couldn't let her die, but none of those stones were hers. I could hear it, though. It was calling to me."

"And you saved her."

Kami glanced up at him, serious as a heart attack. "No. We did. I couldn't have done it without you."

"Glad I was there with you, so that you wouldn't have to be there alone." He couldn't imagine Kami having to go through that by himself—not because it had been horrifying or anything, but because of the sheer amount of energy it had taken out of the dragon.

“I’ve never done anything like that before, but she’s going to be okay, right?”

“You know it. She is, because of you.”

Kami shook his head and said, “No. Because of us.”

Reno wasn’t sure about that, but he was certain it didn’t matter. He wasn’t going to make Kami go it alone, one way or the other.

## Page 15

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Chapter

Fifteen

“So what’s wrong with you?” Talon stared at Kami, eyes narrowed, nostrils flaring as if he was insane. “Why are you sick? What happened with those stones? What is going on?”

Then Talon turned to stare at Reno. “I know that I am not his mate, but I am his friend. What are you doing? Why are you allowing this?”

Reno shrugged, juggling plates of pancakes on the way to the table. “Well, I don’t know. Following directions, I guess. You know, it’s sort of my job.”

He really cares for you, huh? It’s super cute. Reno told him.

Be good.

Nope. He’s having a temper tantrum before I’ve had my second cup of coffee. He’s going to have to deal with terse me.

Kami’s lips twisted. Asshole alpha.

Yep.

“This isn’t funny,” Talon growled. “What is going on?”

“That omega, she was sick. She was going to die, and now she’s not. Simple as that.”

“But what happened?” Talon brought over three cups of coffee, and Kami’s nose wrinkled.

That didn’t smell great.

“I don’t know. I found her stone. I called to it, and it answered me. I mean, that’s really the best I have.” Kami didn’t want to get yelled at. He was nursing the world’s worst headache, and his stomach was just rolling. “I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“No, but I’m worried about you. You’re never sick. Perhaps it’s the stones?”

Kami shook his head. He didn’t think so. That had felt good, calling the stone. And helping their seer, that had felt great. “How can it be? What do you need from me to feel better?”

“I don’t know,” Talon admitted. “I just don’t know.” He blew out a hard breath. “I’m worried about my friend, but if you’re not feeling like you’re being ill-used, then you have my support.”

“Well, thank you. I’m not being ill-used. I’m happy, mostly. I think. I don’t know. This is all new.” He glanced at Reno, who seemed like his words had hit a nerve. “New, but it’s not bad. I liked it, helping. Being useful. Seriously, Talon. I don’t know why this has to be a thing.”

“Well, you did shake the entire keep and have to be carried out.”

Kami rolled his eyes. “Reno likes carrying me.”

Reno snorted but nodded. “I do. It makes me feel useful. I’m super good at useful.”

Yeah, okay. He'd totally hit a nerve with his comments if Reno was repeating stuff...

You know I love you more than my luggage.

Reno raised an eyebrow. I sure hope so.

"But what about you being so sick?" Talon pressed.

"Gods, could you get the coffee out from under my nose? The pancakes smell amazing, but that coffee is going to make me puke."

Reno whisked it away, replacing it with the fizzy orange drink he was becoming addicted to.

"See?" Talon waved a hand. "Sick. It's weird. And frightening."

"It's not frightening. He's just pregnant," Reno snapped, and Kami stared at him.

Excuse me?

Well, you are, aren't you?

Well, I don't...shut up. He couldn't quite breathe, but he knew—all of the sudden, without even understanding why, he felt like he was carrying their baby. Even if I was, and I'm not saying I am, because I don't know if I am, but don't you think you should discuss it with me before you just pop it out in front of my best friend?

Kami was totally going to kill Reno. How long had the bastard known? Have you told anybody else?

Reno blinked at him, cheeks flushing. Not exactly.



What does that mean? Oh, that couldn't be good.

Well, I had to ask Boone, because I noticed it...

When?

Well, you puked when I threw you on the floor. But I did carry you afterward...

So Boone knows, which means Durango knows, and Lake knows and Eyv knows and ? —

Talon didn't know!

The only reason that Talon—and by extension, Triton and Cerran and Elowyn—don't know is because they were busy yesterday! But they sure know now. "I want to?—"

"Have a sip of your drink, hailee."

"Don't tell me what to do." He pointed his finger at Reno, glaring a little bit. "You're in trouble."

Reno managed to look a tiny bit contrite.

Talon, on the other hand, was just sitting there like a lump, staring at him with eyes about as big as saucers. "You're having a baby."

"That is what pregnant means." He was going to kill someone.

Talon spun to point one finger at Reno. "Then why were you in the training salle yesterday? You could have hurt him."

“I didn’t hurt him,” Reno insisted. “It was just a little throw, and I didn’t know he was pregnant then.”

You don’t know if I’m pregnant now.

Let’s discuss this later.

“Why aren’t we eating our pancakes?”

“Because you almost puked over the coffee?” Reno pointed out.

Kami was about one second from losing his shit. “Is pregnancy like this all the time, with everybody telling you what it is they think that you know or don’t know?”

“You’d have to ask Lake and Eyv. Lake knows a lot about it.” Reno’s voice was dry as dust.

“So does the seer know that you’re pregnant?” Talon asked. “Is it safe for you to be calling rocks when you’re pregnant? What if it vibrates the baby out of your belly? That could be bad. Or what if you make it short? What if you hurt the baby or you make it deaf or something?”

Reno glared at Talon. “You are not helping.”

“Nobody’s helping. Both of you get out. I’m going to eat the pancakes by myself, and then I’m going back to bed. That’s it.” Kami crossed his arms and stared them down.

Reno chuckled. “But, love, I actually made the pancakes.”

“From a mix,” he pointed out.

“I still cooked.” Reno wagged his eyebrows. “That’s an act of love.”

“An act of desperation, no doubt.”

Talon chuckled, and Reno glared at him. “You weren’t mad at me when I made them.”

“He has a point,” Talon said.

“Bah.” It was true enough, though. Reno had cooked for him to be nice.

Because he was pregnant.

Kami growled, grabbing his fork and stabbing the pancakes.

No. I was nice to you because you’re my hailee. I took the coffee away because you’re pregnant, and it made you queasy.

Have I explained I never did like you? Kami sighed and took another bite. They really were good pancakes.

“So I do think that you need to see the midwife and the seer and make sure that this rock-calling situation isn’t dangerous for you. And also, is Reno going to stay home when you do missions? I think this is an exceptional idea. I will go out with you, and Reno can stay home with your baby.” Talon sat back, arms crossed over his chest like he was the king of the room or some such shit.

He was just about done with alphas, to be honest. Kami didn’t need anyone fucking with him or making decisions for him. He was totally capable of—

Reno growled deep in his throat, distracting him and derailing his ponderings. “You

can have as many thoughts as you'd like, but I do believe that that is something that my mate and I get to decide."

"We'll see about that." Talon leaned forward, getting in Reno's space. "I'm just doing what is best for Kami."

Kami was sitting right there. Kami was fixing to eat somebody's face.

"Kami is an adult," Reno snarled. "And he can make whatever decisions he needs to. Hopefully, we'll make them together, but that's for us to discuss, just the two of us—he and I, not you. Not Cain. Just us. His body. His life. His choice. Am I clear?" Reno's words went a huge distance to making the burning anger in Kami's belly ease.

Because nowhere in those words was 'I will make all new decisions for my mate' involved. In fact, it was clear that Reno wanted it to be something that they discussed together. Kami loved the big lug more than ever.

The only problem with Reno being a reasonable adult: did that mean that he had to be one too? And it seemed basically unfair. He was really into having a snit.

Especially about everyone knowing he was preggers before he did.

Talon rolled his eyes. "Very well. But just because Kami wants me to back off."

"Still right here!" Kami snapped. "Tal, you're my best buddy, but if you don't stop acting like a jilted suitor, I'm going to kick your ass."

Talon gave him a look. "I was just trying to look out for you."

Kami softened a little. "Just like you always have. I know. But I don't think Reno intends to fuck me over."

“No. Just?—”

“That’s not a good idea, Talon,” Reno growled.

“Sorry. You’re right.” Talon held up his hands. “That was out of line.” He sighed. “If you don’t go out in the field anymore, what am I to do, Kami?”

“Oh.” He reached out to grab Talon’s hand, and even Reno looked sympathetic. “Shit, man, there’s a shit ton of stuff here to do. And gods know, there are a ton of rescues to be done.”

“You can lead your own team, Talon,” Reno put in. “We have some good guys here.”

“I mean, I can totally see going back out once the baby is born.” He gave Reno a wink when he growled again. “But I would feel weird doing it while I’m preggers.”

“No. No, of course not.”

Well played, love.

Hey, I get it. He’s feeling a little trapped and worried that he’s worthless and toothless now.

But he has his family. And there’s plenty to do.

Yeah, but you weren’t on your own that long, right? We were in the wind for years.

I know. I’m sorry. I’m a little grrr. You’re pregnant, and I haven’t had time to get used to the idea.

You haven’t? Kami retorted. “Tal, we’ll figure it out. All of us. We’ve barely been

here any time at all.”

“Yeah, but you’re suddenly singing gems out of solid rock.” Talon grinned at him, then tipped his head back and ululated.

Which made them all lose it, laughing like loons. That loosened things up, and Talon finally took his leave, hugging Kami tight.

“Just you and me for lunch tomorrow. Huh?”

“Yes, my friend. Just us.”

Reno was on him as soon as the door closed behind Talon, grabbing him to hold him close. “I’m sorry, baby. I was waiting to talk to you and then this happened.”

“I know.” Kami leaned against Reno’s chest. “Those were good pancakes.”

“I had a feeling they would work for you.”

“Yeah, but you shot yourself in the foot. Now that I know you can make them, I’ll be asking for them at like, three a.m.”

“I can do it. I’ll put in a stock of pancake mix.” Reno winked at him, then kissed his nose.

“Don’t patronize me.” He twisted Reno’s nipple.

“Ow! I wasn’t patronizing. I was being serious. I want to pamper you. I had to watch my friends be deliriously happy. Now it’s my turn, I hope.”

“I hope so too. I really didn’t think…”

“Oh, you can do heat.” Reno’s voice was back to a growl, but this one was so not mean. “I bet you can also do hormone sex.”

Kami’s body started to throb a little with need. “I bet I can. Let’s go try it.”

He could be mad at everyone later.

Or not.

Right now, he wanted Reno.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Sixteen

Reno waited for Kami to stop puking, and to get all cooled down and everything, before asking. “Hey, love, want to go visit Kayla and her omega?”

“What’s her name?”

“Who?”

Kami blinked at him, a little toothpaste on his lower lip still. “The omega.”

“Oh! Anara.”

“Sure.” Kami gave him a tired grin. Bless his heart, the morning sickness was kicking his ass. But he was eating fine later in the day. He was just so sick before noon... It made him a little gray.

Reno hated it.

Oh, he loved a pregnant mate. Loved Kami. But he felt so helpless. He hated not being able to action something out of existence. Especially when it was Kami suffering.

He got Kami bundled into a sweater and some soft pants, because he was freezing all the time now—hormones and a desert upbringing—and they headed to see the omega



and her stone.

Anara was recovering really well. Way faster than the healers had expected. And Reno had the idea that it was because Kami had matched a stone to her. Exactly. He hadn't just taken a stone from Cain's collection and shoehorned it to fit enough that the bearer could survive.

Not that he would bitch about that. Cain had saved lives. A lot of them.

But this—shit, this was a breakthrough.

He took Kami's hand in his, frowning at how cold it was. "Maybe we should stop and see the midwife, love."

"Rowan?" Kami glanced at him sideways, eyebrows up. "Why?"

"I don't like how you're freezing all the time. And now you're cold to the touch."

"I do feel really chilly." Kami let go of his hands to rub his arms. "But, I mean, it's already turning to fall here. Where I grew up, it would be two more months."

"Yeah, but what if it's just like, a hormone imbalance?"

"Maybe..." Kami nodded after chewing his lip for a few seconds. "Okay, yeah. We'll stop and see Rowan if he's not busy."

Relief flooded him. "Thanks, baby. I appreciate it. I know you get impatient."

"Me?" Kami snorted. "Only every day. But not with the bean here." Kami put his hand on his belly. "He or she has no choice but to depend on me to shelter them in this body, you know? So I have to take that responsibility carefully."

“So do I.” He stopped Kami to kiss his mouth, sharing how proud he was of Kami for letting this whole situation roll off him some. He knew it had to be hard.

They wandered down toward the lower levels of the keep where the medical center was. It was nice to be able to go in a non-emergency sort of way, if he was honest.

Rowan was kind of the de facto head of the medical unit down here, at least he was going to be that until they brought somebody else in.

Someone would come.

If nothing else, he’d figured that out. This keep was building itself in a wild manner, and Reno thought Kami was a part of that somehow.

The magic had made it happen.

As soon as they opened the doors, a cheery-looking young dragon came up to them, her face wreathed in a smile, iridescent scales shimmering. “Can I help you?”

“We’re hoping to see Rowan, if he’s not busy.” Reno tried on a good smile. “My mate’s pregnant, and he seems very cold to the touch.”

The little dragon frowned at them, tilted her head. “All right, come on in, and have a seat in the waiting area, and I’ll tell Rowan you’re here. You’re Reno, yes?”

“Yes, and this is my mate, Kami.”

“So pleased to meet you.” She beamed at Kami.

The waiting area was a little room with six chairs and a coffee table. It wasn’t even a very big coffee table. There was a deck of cards on it, though, so obviously people

stayed here and waited.

Kami grinned at him. “This is adorable.”

“Isn’t it?” He grinned at Kami. “It’s like we’re trying to be real. Look at us, we’re a grown-up keep. We have a waiting room.”

Kami’s chuckles filled the air. “Oh, this keep is something else, I mean. It just started with Dex and Jack?”

“Yeah, for all intents and purposes.” Reno shrugged. “Cain had a home here, a very well-appointed home, but all of the insanity started with Dex. Cain found me when Dex was still pregnant. We were the first ones—me, and I hired Boone and Durango. We went out and started rescuing.” Things had changed so much in such a little amount of time. Jack and Dex’s Felicity was not a baby anymore. Hell, she was, if not a young lady, then a precocious little girl. Hell, even Eyv’s littlest one was walking around and trying to talk.

“How long has it been?” Kami asked, and he shrugged.

“Well, Felicity is almost seven. So, I’ve been here six years, a little more than. Feels like longer.”

“What were you doing before?”

He grinned at his mate, who was beginning to relax, hands warming up. “Gathering up bachelor alphas who got tossed out. I helped Boone and Durango find each other. They had gotten magicked into the human world almost 2000 miles from each other. But things just really started exploding here, so I was glad I was running a team.”

Reno paused to gather his thoughts. “It was Lake’s keep who changed things—we

have the former head of a keep, their entire complement of young seers, twenty of their warriors..." Not to mention their big fancy fucking stone and Leilani who was connected to the gods.

It was insane.

"Yeah. It sounds to me like they imploded."

Reno snorted. "Toxic design, man. I mean, like I said, not all old keeps are bad at all. But that one? The old guard had a stranglehold, and they were not about to lose it."

Kami snuggled up in his lap suddenly, freezing against him, so Reno wrapped him in a hug. "Talon talks about it sometimes."

"Yeah. He and Triton had it bad."

Kami's teeth were chattering so much it was ridiculous, so Reno leaned in, blowing warm air over his mate.

Almost immediately. Kami relaxed, and the pale kind of went out of his face.

"All right, that felt really good."

Reno nodded. It did to him too. Anything that he could do to make it better, had him feeling ten thousand feet tall.

Rowan appeared in the doorway, a mass of dark hair and huge black eyes. "Congratulations are in order, I hear."

"That's what they tell me," Kami said. "God knows, I've been puking."

“Oh, that’s so much fun. Hey, Reno, how’s it going?”

“He’s cold all the time, like icy cold to the touch.”

Rowan nodded like it was no big deal. “Come on, let’s go to my office where we can speak. But, Reno, I’m glad you brought him down. I can help, if nothing else, with the nausea.”

Kami’s eyebrow arched as they stood. “I thought it was perfectly normal.”

“So is bleeding really bad when you get cut. It doesn’t mean we don’t put a bandage on it.” Rowan cracked his ass up.

“I mean, if you like puking, it’s not going to hurt anything for sure. You can totally vomit all you’d like, but I do have some teas that will be amazing. You drink it before you sit up in the morning with a straw, cold or hot, whichever you prefer. Then there’s a tea you can drink throughout the day. It’ll just kind of balance some of the more crazy wild hormonal surges.”

Kami beamed at Rowan. “That sounds amazing. What about the cold?”

“Well. I’ll be honest, I’ve never had a stone-singer pregnancy, but I have been through a number of fire-drake pregnancies, and their omegas tend toward chilly. I think it has to do with how much energy the baby is pulling. And also, just so you know, the chances of your baby blowing sparks is pretty big. You’ve got a fire-drake alpha and the cold.”

“So what do I do?”

“Warm baths, warm clothes. Reno’s presence will help. Have him hold you and focus some energy toward the baby. Some focused thought energy toward the baby, Reno.

It'll help. It's just he—or she, of course—is just grabbing to build up his fire power. I will say that while uncomfortable, it's not hurting you at all. And it's not hurting the baby either, I'm sure if it."

Rowan's words made both him and Kami relax.

"Honestly, though. Warm foods, spicy foods, thick socks, warm baths. Hot springs. Lots of hot tea. All of those things will make you less uncomfortable." Rowan beamed at them. "At some point midway through the pregnancy, that should ease, and the baby's energy will be more focused on getting bigger instead of getting hotter. And then all of a sudden, I bet you're rolling around in the snow outside."

We should have come earlier, Kami admitted. I feel so much better.

Me too. I really do.

Good. I love you, Kami told him.

Ditto.

Kami smacked his arm, and he laughed, relief making him a little giddy. I love you too, sweetheart.

"Let me mix up those teas," Rowan said. "I mix them to order, because the fresher the ingredients, the better."

"Thanks so much," Reno told him. "That's really a good deal."

"So this is all your fault, you big lug," Kami said.

"Looks like it. Sorry, babe."

“Shit, that just means you’re super strong.” Kami stroked his chest. “That bodes well for the kid.”

“It does.” And now that he was less worried that something was wrong, he and Kami could both relax and enjoy the pregnancy more. Or at least that was what Boone and Durango told him.

Kami leaned on him. “Is it okay if all this is really fucking weird?”

“Yes. All the other omegas on earth can be Zen. You’re my omega, and we feel how we feel.”

“That’s the best thing you’ve ever said to me, I think.”

It was his turn to pinch Kami gently.

“Omega abuse! Omega abuse!” Kami dissolved laughing when Reno gave him a raspberry on his neck, and the staff who had come running groaned and left them.

“As long as you’re okay, baby? I’m okay with whatever weirdness is going on.”

“I would say ditto, but I’m really looking forward to that tea. If I could stop puking...”

“We could take over the world. Muahahahaha.” He rubbed his hands together while evil laughing.

Kami chortled. “I would just settle for conquering a tour of this damn keep.”

“Done. As soon as you’re up to it. The whole thing.”

“Good deal.” Kami leaned on him some more. “But not until after the tea.”



## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

### Chapter

### Seventeen

Kami breathed in, pulling his hands up to his chest, letting them touch his sternum. Then he exhaled, pushing his hands out, focusing on letting energy flow through him.

Turned out tai chi was really good for moving blocked energy around, which kept him warmer. It still took Reno to really blow that heat into him like his own perfect furnace, but he was doing better. Functioning more. Of course, as it got colder in the icebox valley they kept lay in, he wore more layers.

But that was okay.

Reno liked to strip them off him.

In. Out. He drew one arm across his chest, turning his feet so that he did a super-slow open-handed strike to the right. He repeated it to the left.

“Practicing to fight maple syrup dragons?” Talon teased, walking up, towel draped around his neck.

“Suck my left nut,” Kami said. Inner peace. Slow and steady. Do not beat down the big warrior.

“Nah. It’s sweaty, I bet.”

“It’s actually cold. I think I will have Lake crochet me a nut sling made out of that chunky wool.”

Talon laughed so loud it echoed in the training salle. “You’re starting to show, even with your huge sweater.”

“You think?” He glared. “Thanks for letting me know. I forgot.” If he’d ever had any idea that he was going back into the field once the morning sickness had worn off, which he really hadn’t, he knew now that was impossible. The baby bump threw his balance totally out of whack.

To work on that, he lifted his right leg into a big stork kind of move, then set it back down and bent his knee, leaning into a lunge with both hands pushing out in front of him.

“I’m bored, Kami.” Talon sighed, falling in beside him as he did the other leg. Talon matched him move for move, his big body surprisingly graceful.

“I’m sorry.” He was, too. “Have you talked to the guys? Reno and Boone and Durango? They could coordinate?—”

“I don’t want to go out without you.”

His heart ached for his friend, because Kami knew the only time Talon had felt he’d fit in was when he and Kami had worked together. And he was the one who was moving on.

“I know, man, but at this point, I would be a danger to you. And now that this whole stone singer thing is awakened...” He heard the fucking rocks all the time. And he didn’t even mind it. They were kind of comforting and super interesting, and he loved finding them in the rough.

“Yes. It would be a distraction in the field.”

“It would. Some omega would be stoneless, and I would hear their stone and boom. I could be a crispy critter in no time. And I’m gonna have a baby in the not-too-distant future.”

“Will you...will you talk to them with me? I don’t think they like me.”

“That’s because you’re an asshole.” Inhale. Exhale. He glanced sideways, expecting a grin, but Talon had paused, his expression stricken. “Dude. You’re really worried about this. What’s not to like? I mean that. You’re my best friend.”

“Well, yes. So you must perforce like me.”

He stopped moving, letting his balance settle before he turned to grab Talon by the forearms. “Tal, your brother had trouble assimilating, too, but look at him now.”

“Bah. He had Cerran even when he came here. I am alone.”

He poked the big guy in the chest. “No. You. Are. Not.” He punctuated each word with a poke. “I am your friend. Reno would do anything for you. Your brother loves you deeply.”

“I feel as though I have no purpose.”

“Okay. So what do you want to do?”

Talon shrugged and sighed. “I think I’m going to leave.”

He stopped short and damn near toppled over. “What? What did you say?”

Talon caught him easily. “I’m going to leave. I don’t think there’s a place for me here. I think it’s time for me to move on.”

“You’re not even going to stay to see the baby?” Kami knew he was gaping at Talon, but he couldn’t help himself. “How are you going to be a godfather if you leave?”

That stopped Talon for a second or two. “You’ll find another one. You have a whole other family now, a whole life. I’m a third wheel or an eighteenth wheel or whatever many wheel.”

“It probably has to be an odd number. Can I point that out? Otherwise, the metaphor doesn’t make any sense.”

“Is it a metaphor or a simile?”

Kami glared at him. “Oh, shut up. Don’t go. You’re my best friend. Please. I need you, okay? And so does Triton. Reno says he talked about you all the time when you were apart.”

That made Talon smile a little bit, which felt like a huge score, then the smile disappeared and Tal shook his head. “I don’t want to live at his house anymore.”

“That I can do something about. I don’t know if you want to live on the same floor that I’m on, because there are a lot of children, but I can totally arrange for you to get an apartment. And I can also talk to Reno about helping you get something to do. That’s got to be more fun than sitting around Triton’s place.” And less complicated.

“Okay. What can I do here? I’m really not a paperwork kind of guy. I’m not really a teacher kind of guy. I’m more like a point-and-shoot kind of guy.”

Kami thought about that for a second and pursed his lips. Talon had a point—he was

not particularly educational and he was...shit. Kami wasn't even sure he knew how to read and write. It had never come up. "What if I tell him that I need you to come help me?"

"What?"

"Well, you know Reno has a job beyond bothering me." He whapped Talon when he put on a wide-eyed, patently shocked expression. "He's a trainer, dude. But you know, whenever I need somebody to get rocks out of strata, you're always there to help. If you could help me, you could be my muscle, so to speak. That's not any different than ever."

Talon gave him the side-eye. "Are you just making up jobs so that I have something to do?"

"Probably. But you do happen to be doing the job that I'm making up. I mean, literally everything I know about this whole stupid stone singer thing you know, because you've been there. We don't know. But if it's not a real job, then we'll make it up. Nobody's told me that we don't get to have muscle." It made sense, after all. When he was finding a stone, he didn't need to be always digging in the damn dirt, right?

Of course right.

"That could work, I suppose."

"And you're an experienced rescue guy. If a team needs help, you go, right? Keep your toes in that water too."

Talon nodded slowly. "I can talk to the others about that, yes. If I can get my own place to live..."

“That I know we can do. Cain is like, all over helping with that shit.” He hoped. That was what Reno said, anyway.

“Thank you, Kami. I hate feeling...whiny.”

“Bah. You’ve had a lot to adjust to.” He patted his friend’s arm.

“Not as much as you.”

“I have a mate to help.” He gave Talon a wicked grin. “And omegas are way more flexible than braaken.”

“Are they now?”

“Uh-huh. Just ask me, I’ll tell you.”

Talon rolled his eyes. “I can tell you that I remember now why I left my keep.”

“Yeah? Your brother a little hidebound for you?” He clicked his tongue, waggling his eyebrows.

“Little bit. Hell, a lotta bit. I’m very used to making my own rules.”

“I imagine especially given you’re the older brother, you should just growl at him and tell him that you’re the boss.”

They both chuckled together, then Talon winked at him. “Have you met Elowyn? Spoken to him? Trust me, of Triton and Cerran and their hailee, Elowyn is the boss. No question.”

“Ooh kinky. I don’t need to know kinky shit about your brother.”

“He’s in a committed threesome. That’s a little unusual, especially given that two of them are alphas, you know.”

“How does that work exactly?” He had to know.

Talon shook his head. “I didn’t ask. I don’t want to know. Gross.”

“You do seem to lack a certain basic curiosity about cool shit, man. I would have asked.”

“You have Elowyn’s number. Go for it.” Talon looked a little like he was smelling onions.

“Trust me, getting your own place will help. Let me figure out how to do that real quick.” Reno, braaken, are you busy?

No. Mentally, he saw one of the trainee warriors kind of go flying across the room. What do you need?

Talon needs his own apartment. How do I do this?

I would say talk to Cain, but he has a lot on his plate. There’s got to be some sort of housing person. I’m assuming that’s not Jack. He’s more of a supplies person. Try Betty.

I like Betty. I can do that. Have a good afternoon. Are we having supper together?

I don’t know why we wouldn’t. Okay. Well, that was sure.

Good deal.

He offered Talon a smile. “All right, so we’re going to go see Betty.”

“Now?”

“Do you have something better to do?”

“Well, no, not really.” Talon shrugged. “It just seems very sudden.”

“I’m not a big fan of waiting for shit, you know that. Let’s go talk to Betty. Then we’ll find you an apartment. Have some soup. Get you moved in.” One foot in front of the other and shit. They just needed to get things done.

Talon rolled his eyes, but Kami got a laugh and he thought it sounded relieved. “All right, lead the way.”

He snorted. “Like you don’t know the way.”

They clomped upstairs, not really saying much. There honestly wasn’t a whole lot to say. Kami was feeling very much as if he’d solved some major problem, and he was also kind of feeling very self-important.

He’d let it go to his head but?—

They opened the door, coming face-to-face with an incredibly grumpy-looking woman with hair the color of slate standing with Cain in the middle of the office floor, having a nice scream at one another.

Like spittle-flying screaming. Neat.

“—required by law to send him back with me,” she screamed, and Cain bellowed back.



“This is not your keep! You do not define the laws for my people. We do not answer to you!”

“This is bigger than you. You are not allowed to have a stone singer here!”

Hey, they were talking about him.

Talon’s eyes began to glow, and he growled.

Oh. Oops.

Reno, you’d better get up here now.

Why? What’s the matter?

Well, I’m about one hundred percent sure that someone’s fixing to try to kidnap me, and if and when that happens, Talon’s going to eat them, and I’m going to let him. I thought you’d like first crack.

Absolutely. All right, I’ll be right there. Two shakes.

Thanks, mate, I appreciate it.

He cracked his knuckles. He’d been waiting for weeks to find some good trouble.

“Who is this?” She flung a hand at him and Talon. “I am not done with you yet!”

“None of your business, and yes, you are!” Silver light seemed to be gathering around Cain, and he and Tal might not even get to fight, because Cain was going to UV fry this lady.

Kami cleared his throat, drawing their stares. “Who are you?”

The lady dragon drew herself up, looking down her nose at him. “Lady Barra. I am from the Hanash keep, which is a mine on the western coast.”

“Sounds...wet.” Talon snorted, and Kami winked at him. “And why do you think this stone singer is bound to go with you?”

“Because it is our keep’s turn! When a new, very strong singer is discovered, they are sent, in turn to all of the major mines.”

“Well, we clearly have a mine here,” Cain said. “And we have never had a singer. So it is actually our turn.”

“Ooh, nice turn of logic, boss.” Reno slid into the room, the scent of brimstone wafting from him.

“What is going on here?” Lady Barra shouted.

“Well, I came up to see if we could get Tal here an apartment of his own.” Kami waved a hand at Talon. “Tal came because I made him. And Reno showed up because he’s my mate. I’m the stone singer.”

Her eyes popped crazy wide. “What? You?” She blinked rapidly. “Let me see your back.”

Kami shook his head. “Oh, no, there will be no nakey time with you. I like my alphas male, and you screech a lot. Like one of those tiny owls.”

“How dare you.”

Reno chuckled. “That was a good one, baby.”

“Thanks.” He bowed. “I’m here—well, I’m pretty much here. I’m not from a keep, Lady Barbie.”

“Barra!”

“Right.” He sighed, then let go of the mean teasing. “Look, I wasn’t raised in a keep. I’m from a banished dragon family. So I don’t have to follow your rules. I am totally willing to take training as a stone singer if it makes everyone happy, but I’ll be doing that, and working, here. Or not at all.”

She opened her mouth, but Tal and Reno moved in on either side of him, and she snapped it shut. She glanced at Cain, who he thought was trying not to appear smug.

“Lady Barra, Kami has agreed to stay here at this keep, and I am pleased and proud to have him. I would never hold him here, but I will not ask him to follow some antiquated tradition, either. It is his choice.”

“But graake dictates...”

“No.” Reno stepped in front of him. Watch me be all braaken, baby. If that doesn’t work, Tal can eat her.

Sex-ay.

“He is my mate. He has said he has no wish to go. I was raised in the Lladris keep, and I loathe your traditions. He will do nothing he does not wish to do. This warrior decrees it.” Reno thumped his chest. It was an impressive display, especially when smoke started curling from Reno’s nose.

Talon grinned. He's pretty good at that. I will roar at her if I need to.

That might shake the baby out of me.

Oh, ick.

Barra blew out an angry breath. "I shall be forming a tribunal about this."

"Knock yourself out," Cain said, his diction as informal as Kami had ever heard it.

She huffed before turning on her heel and striding out of the room.

Cain smoothed his hands down his heavy tunic. "So. An apartment you said? You have decided to stay, Talon?"

Tal's eyebrows went up. "How did you—Yes. For now."

"Good. Good. As you see, we will need you in the coming months. Barra will not give up. Her keep is in decline, and she feels she needs you for the prestige, Kami."

"And why do you need me?" Kami asked.

"Because you save dragons. You're Reno's mate. Talon's best friend. You play a wicked game of Go."

He grinned wider. "I do."

"Wait, you play board games with Cain?"

"Um..." He peeked at Reno sideways. "You work a lot."

“I do. But I have been trying to spend more time with you.”

“You have. And you guys are all my heroes. She is unfriendly.”

“That’s an understatement of the century. She was hot as a wet hen. You know, man, you shouldn’t have let her in.” Reno’s eyes were twinkling now.

Blue bubble of protective joy. Kami loved that thing. He thought it was fucking cool, thought it was even cooler that three babies had created it.

“Speaking of, Cain,” Reno winked at him. “Her entourage is still waiting outside like they are supposed to be. They don’t get to come in, they don’t get to play, and she is being escorted out right now. I believe Triton’s doing the honors, friend.”

That made Talon smile. “My brother is nothing if not impressive.”

“Oh, you don’t do half bad,” Cain said. “So, an apartment. Do you want to be on the same hallway as Kami?”

Kami knew that there was no way Talon would want?—

“Please, as close as possible. I am the godfather of the baby, so I need to be close.”

He’d be damned.

Talon’s lips twisted. If I’m going to stay, I want to be close to my chosen family. You are dear to me, you pain in the ass.

Cain’s smile widened. “Well, congratulations. I believe there is one next door, actually. Or there’s one across the hallway next to Lake.”

“I’ll take the one by Kami and Reno.” Talon winked. “Six children is a lot to have next door.”

“I’ll tell you a secret.” Cain leaned forward and winked at Talon. “Six children is just a lot.”

No shit on that.

“Let’s do this. Apartment ho!” he called, feeling as if they’d vanquished the foe.

Cain called in Betty, who he thought had been hiding from the old battle-ax lady. “Can you get the keys to the apartment beside Reno?”

“Of course.” She beamed at Talon. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you.” Talon bowed a little.

Betty left to get the keys, and Cain smiled at Talon. “If there’s anything you want to change or demo, let Betty know. Ellie is the assistant who can help you with furnishings.”

“Thank you, Cain. I appreciate it all. I have simple needs.”

“A big bed, a TV, and a phone to call and order food,” Kami teased.

Reno snorted. “A dragon after my own heart.”

“I need a couch as well. One large enough to fit my friends.” Talon stopped and smiled. “And my godchild, my ki’kai.”

Betty beamed at him. “You are the baby’s ki’soff? How wonderful. You must be so

pleased.”

“I am honored. I have been blessed with a great responsibility. I will teach him, or her, all the things that a warrior needs to know.”

Reno grinned, one arm around his waist. That’s adorable. Boone and Durango are going to be so jealous.

Boone and Durango have eighty-seven thousand children between them. They’re not going to care.

You have a point.

“All right. Come, friend. Let us go and find my apartment so that I can settle.” Talon turned for the door, and he and Reno followed along.

Kami was fairly sure he’d lived six days in the last hour and a half. It was almost like being out on in the field. Almost.

He’d take it.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:32 am*

Chapter

Eighteen

Reno held Kami as he slept, his brain running a mile a minute.

They'd gotten Talon moved in. They'd been spending time with his buddies and all their kids. He thought Kami was doing full immersion therapy. Getting used to holding kids, to talking to them.

It was quite a feat for his independent mate.

But now he was thinking of the details. He needed to get a nursery up and functional. They needed a cradle or a bassinet, and Reno was no woodworker...

Oh, he may not be a woodworker, but he had a phone. So he texted Jack.

Hey. I hear you're not doing the furniture and the supplying anymore.

I'm sort of managing the people who do that, but

Jack shot back in seconds.

I could totally help a friend. What you need?

Well, my mate's pregnant I need stuff. Like baby stuff?



OK. So practically, what does that mean? Do you want a room painted or do you want paint? Do you need a crib? A bassinet? Changing tables, Rocking chairs. What?

I don't paint.

What color? Have you talked to your hailee about this?

It's a surprise.

There was a pause, then three dots, then:

Are you sure that's smart?

Huh?

He didn't follow. Why wouldn't he be smart? Surprising your mate with something wonderful like a nursery was romantic.

Let's see. Well, your mate could have ideas. I know it's hard to believe. But possible. Can I call?

Two shakes.

He slid out of bed and took his phone with him. He grabbed the kettle and filled it, then dug out his favorite mug.

Once the water was heating, and the tea bags were in the cup, he called Jack. "So you don't think that surprising Kami with the nursery's a good idea?"

"I think it's sweet and spectacularly stupid." Jack was always such a joy to deal with. "Trust me, they get ideas. They decide what they want, they don't tell us, and then

when we don't do it right, we get in trouble."

"You sound long-suffering."

"Dex is pregnant again."

"Oh." Damn.

"Exactly. Felicity decided that she wanted to decorate the nursery for the new baby in dragons. Dex was in tears because he wanted rainbows and clouds and suns and moons, but he couldn't take the dragons down because Felicity had done it, and she was so proud. I have had to listen to this for hours. So, I'm telling you, talk to your hailee about it, then call me, and I'll get you anything you want."

Reno scratched his jaw and poured the water into his mug. "I suppose you have a point. I was just trying to be nice."

"I understand, and you were. The fact is, however, that this is a mine-laden garden path. I'm trying to steer you through a field of one disaster after another, and since some of us have more experience than you do, I'm just going to help."

"Suns and moons, huh?"

"Yes, please don't suggest them to your mate. Dex is still mad."

"No problem, I'm going to try to steer toward?—"

"Don't. Don't steer, no steering. You are not driving this particular train. I don't know how to be clearer with you." He'd never heard Jack sound quite so passionate. "Trust me here, when you're the one with the baby in the belly, you get to drive the train. Until the baby is out of the belly? No train driving. You don't even get to play

with the horn. Nothing. Periodically, if you're lucky, they get hormonal, and you get to play with the gear shift, if you get my drift."

He tilted his head. "Do trains have gear shifts?"

"Pay attention, Reno. Once the baby's born, you might get to drive once or twice. Maybe, maybe not. You may just perpetually be sitting there in the coal room, shoveling coal and changing diapers. That's not up to you."

"No?" Wow, Dex must be really hormonal. "Well, I will talk to Kami then, and we'll call you back."

"Just send a text. That's fine. No suns or moons."

"Got it, dude. No suns, no moons, no moony suns or sunny moons. How about eggs?"

"What?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Uh. Thanks, man. Bye." He hung up. Maybe he should send Jack some booze or something.

Or ask him to lunch. Maybe he needed to get out more...

Yeah, he could do that.

He sipped his tea, decaf, and stood in the kitchen, leaning against the counter. He wanted Kami to sleep. Nice and deep and still. He needed the rest.

It had been a busy few weeks, and Kami was getting past the morning sickness, but not so much the tiredness.

He was warmer now, though. Reno had learned?—

Braaken? I'm cold.

Reno chuckled, pouring another cup of tea . On my way, baby.

Mmm. Yay.

He headed to bed, handing the tea to Kami. "I needed something to drink."

"Ah." Kami grabbed it and took a sip. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." He crawled in and got Kami all snuggled up next to him. "So, have you had any thoughts about the nursery?"

"The what?" Kami gazed at him, eyes wide.

"The baby's room." He waited for that to sink in.

"Oh." Kami tilted his head to one side. "Should I have?"

"Well, Jack assures me that omegas have thoughts." He winked.

"I haven't had a one. Does that make me weird?"

"Nope. That means you've been busy, and that you had no idea you were supposed to be thinking about it."

"Oh." That had Kami grinning. "So what do you think?"

"Well, I would kind of like to be in charge of the cradle." That was traditional. He

was the braaken. “But Jack has asked us not to do suns and moons and stars.”

“Um, do I want to know?”

He snorted. “Dex was going to do that. He’s pregnant again. But Felicity did dragons and stuff. Dex is really upset, but Felicity is his girl, so he can’t change it.”

Kami chuckled, shaking his head. “No suns and moons then.” He breathed in the tea, then sipped. “Man, I got cold fast when you left.”

“Sorry, baby.” He put his phone on the side table. “I’ll hang out.”

“Are you awake-awake?”

“A little, yeah.” He stroked Kami’s back, warming his lover.

“Can we watch a movie?” Kami kissed his chest, burrowing in and setting the tea aside.

“Absolutely. What do you want to watch?” Reno asked.

“Something silly and gentle.”

“Animated or just goofy?” He grabbed the remote.

“Oh, just goofy. Maybe like the 1999 Mummy movie.”

“I’m on it.” Kami had chosen this movie before, and they both loved it. “You okay?”

“I am now.” Kami grinned. “I must have been dreaming hard.”

“You must have. I got you.”

They snuggled in and started the movie, and soon enough, Kami dozed off.

Which was totally cool. Except that he still had no idea what to do with the nursery.

Kami stood in the little bedroom in his and Reno’s apartment, hands on his hips, lips pursed.

A nursery.

He’d stared at this room now for, like, two weeks. And he still had no ideas. He’d talked to Lake. To Eyv. To Elowyn. They all just told him not to upset Dex.

Poor guy. He was really a hormonal mess.

Kami kind of got it, because while he wasn’t bursting into tears, he was getting super pissed at Reno and chewing his ass, and then wanting to hug and cuddle and snuggle and apologize.

But right now, he wanted to figure out this whole nursery thing.

He stomped to the front room, where Reno and Talon were playing chess. “What the hell should we do?”

“Baby, I have been reliably informed that I am not steering.”

When Reno had told him about Jack’s long discussion about that, he’d thought it was funny. Now he pursed his lips and glared.

“I need help!”

Talon glanced at him, then at Reno. “Well, what do you feel? Neutral? Boy? Girl?”

“I have no idea.” He put his hand on his belly, trying to like, feel the baby.

His eyes went wide.

“Reno!”

Reno popped up like a jack-in-the-box. “What? What’s wrong?”

“Come here! Come here now.”

Reno crossed the room in two long strides. “Is it the baby? Do I need to take you to the healer?”

“No. No, give me your hand.” He grabbed Reno’s hand and put it on his belly. “Feel that.”

Reno waited, looking bemused, but then his jaw dropped. “The baby is moving.”

“Yes.” Awed, he leaned into Reno’s touch. “Do you feel that, bean? That’s your soffaren.”

Reno beamed at him. “Oh, baby.”

“Should I?—”

“No.” Reno turned to Talon. “Come here. Right, Kami?”

Kami nodded. “He is the baby’s ki’soff. There’s no one better to feel, right?”

“Exactly.” Reno motioned for Talon again.

Talon came over and put his hand on Kami’s belly right where Reno’s had been. It took a second, but then the baby kicked, punching Talon right in the center of his hand.

Talone stilled, then beamed at him. “That’s my ki’kai.”

Kami nodded, his heart full. “It is.”

“Wow.” The three of them stood there a bit, like they were frozen in time, then Talon leaned away. “How does it feel to you?”

Kami chuckled—like he’d swallowed a thousand butterflies. “Weird. Really weird, but cool.”

Reno encouraged them all to move over to the sofa and sit. He snuggled back into Reno’s arms, soaking up the warmth and the strength. Our baby moved.

He did.

Are we having a son, do you think? Kami asked.

I don’t care. I just want a healthy, happy little one to love.

Talon sat beside him, brow creased as he thought.

“Don’t hurt yourself, friend,” he teased. “What are you thinking about so hard?”

“Rainbows.”



“Pardon?” He didn’t follow.

“Why don’t you do a bunch of crystals, like for mobiles and stuff, so when the sun hits them, it casts rainbows. You could do rainbows.”

Talon might have hit on something. He loved that idea, and he didn’t think it would hurt Dex’s feelings at all.

“You know, I could. We could. That would actually be kind of cool.”

Talon shrugged and opened his hands. “You could paint the walls a super light sky blue, with some pinks and some oranges that were barely there.”

Oh, he loved that idea. “And then—prisms everywhere. Some big soft plushy rainbow things. They have to exist, right?”

Reno nodded. “Yes, I have seen them in the books. They even have rainbow chairs that are soft. They have a rainbow changing table, everything.”

The idea of his braaken searching through catalogs of baby furniture was hilarious and dear and he loved it.

Not as much as he loved the fact that they were finished with making that decision. He didn’t have to think about it anymore, and it was neither suns nor moons. So he wasn’t going to get in trouble with every person in the keep. “Really good idea, Talon.”

“I have my moments.”

“Thank you.” Kami rubbed his hands together. “So now that that’s done, I could play too. Well, not chess. We could play cards.”

“Sounds good to me.” Reno hugged him. “I like a good game of cards.”

“I’ll grab the deck.” Talon stood and glanced at them. “You’ll have to move out of Reno’s arms, though, otherwise he’ll cheat.”

Reno scowled at Talon playfully. “I don’t have to cheat to beat you.”

“No, but you do have to cheat to beat Kami.”

Reno laughed. “True enough.”

Kami climbed out of Reno’s lap so Reno could scoot the coffee table into position for them all to play. He grabbed a notebook to keep score, and Talon came back with a deck of cards.

He had the best braaken and best friend in the world.

And now he was going to have prismatic rainbows.

### Chapter

### Nineteen

Reno, Talon, Triton, and Boone trooped after Kami, pushing through the gemstone room and cave in Cain's quarters to wander into the cave system behind it.

Durango had been called to work, so he was the only one missing out on this wild mission they were on, which was to find colored crystals for the nursery, which was now painted and furnished with a rocker, an overstuffed rainbow chair, a rainbow changing table, and a bunch of rainbow rugs and curtains and...

It was a unicorn barf room, and it was awesome.

"I don't want to get anything that someone might need for their heartstone. I just want little chips of prettiness, you know? So, we're not looking for anything major, and if you find something big, we'll take it back and put it in Cain's area."

Personally, Reno thought that that was really going to become Kami's area.

It was still protected by the foyer and Betty, but Cain hadn't been back here, so far as he knew, since Kami showed up.

Kami didn't seem to be doing much, really. It was fascinating because he hummed, and Reno could feel the energy kind of bubbling forth from both Kami and the walls around them.

But it wasn't like there was this big thing. Every so often, there would be a little spark and one of them would scoop it up. Then something sparked and they scooped, spark, scoop.

It was fascinating, and they kept walking, each of them having in their bag different colored stones that he assumed Kami would do something with or give to someone to do something with, either way.

“Oh, this is the most fun.” Kami rubbed his belly, chuckling softly. “We’re going to make rainbows for you, baby.”

All of the alphas looked at each other, and the fondness was palpable. Kami was so different from Lake and Elowyn and Eyv, so much less passive and so fascinated by everything.

You think that? Kami said. But Lake took four babies. No question. Pregnant as a house, he took those babies in. And Elowyn protected Leilani and his twins from hell. All by himself. He risked his entire soul to protect them. Eyv—he had a terrible time with his pregnancy, and he still taught the entire time up until he had the baby. You know. You were there right at the end. I’m different, no question, but I’ve gotten to know them and they are good dragons. You should be proud of them too.

I am.

Weirdly enough, that just made him prouder of his Kami.

“Will you find your rocks, please? Continue finding rocks.” Kami tilted his head and made a sudden turn to the right.

They walked through a short passage, and all took a deep breath.

The lights hit the crystals in the cavern, and there had to be thousands. Literally thousands—all reflecting the light and refracting it, and the rainbows were spinning.

Kami sat down, right on his butt.

“Oh my goddess, look at this place. Don’t touch anything.” Kami blinked, just staring at Reno. “This is wild. This is beautiful.”

“What is this place?” Triton asked, and Kami shook his head.

“I don’t know; it’s like a naturally occurring room, I guess. We shouldn’t touch it; it should just be allowed to be what it is. Someday, it’ll be important, right? Or not. It’s just beautiful.”

“You don’t want me to take any of the pieces then?” He wasn’t sure whether to pick Kami up or just stand there.

“No. No, don’t. We can bring the baby here and have him see it as it is, but don’t alter it.” Kami seemed dazed to him, and Reno was a little worried.

“Good deal. Come on, hailee. The rock can’t be good for your butt.”

Kami blinked at him. “You probably have a point. My knees just stopped working.” He held up his arms for Reno to grab him.

Reno hauled him to his feet, his eyes dazzled by the bouncing light. Damn. This place was really something. “Do you think we could bring the kids here? Like just to see?”

All of them, from Felicity to the teen seers to the littles would love this. It just sparkled so.

“Absolutely. I want to learn all about the native rock and teach them at the same time.” Kami wrapped both arms around his neck. “Are we heading back?”

“We are. I think we need to be more organized next time. We are dragons, so we can see, but rope, some carabiners, and better stuff to carry your rocks would be welcome.” Reno liked to be prepared.

“That sounds like a good idea,” Triton rumbled. “Come. I am hungry.”

“You guys are always hungry,” Kami said. Then he chuckled. “Of course, right now so am I.”

“Well, you are eating for two,” Boone pointed out. “Do you want to meet with the crew, or are you two wanting to be alone?”

Kami grinned all around. “Hey, you all came to help. Let’s let the kids help me sort stones and we’ll have something out at the grill.”

God, Reno was proud of Kami for learning to fold into the keep family. And Tal, too.

Talon bounced on his toes. “The little ones will be so pleased, yes, brother?”

Triton snorted. “They will make you crazed with how happy they are. They love to play with big bags of weird stuff.”

“Sounds like you guys. I’ve seen you with new bags of training weapons.”

Talon flicked his fingers at Kami. “You would be there too were it not for your growing belly.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Kami squeezed Reno’s neck. “Kill him for me.”

Reno hooted. “Are you kidding? Legendary warrior. And his brother. They would kick my ass.”

“Well, then taunt him for me, will you?”

“Absolutely.” Reno stuck out his tongue. And he knew the only reason there wasn’t a friendly scuffle was because he was carrying Kami.

By the time he set Kami down in a padded patio chair, the kids and omegas were all waiting for them, Lake grinning at Kami. “This was a great idea.”

“With the patio heaters and all the wind protection up, this is almost as nice as it is in the dead of summer,” Kami said.

“You still get lap blankets.” Reno covered him up. “What to eat, baby?”

“Chicken pesto calzone?”

Kami was craving those things like crazy. Had to be something in the pesto that he couldn’t pass up, something his body needed. Reno was always happy to oblige.

“You got it.” Reno gave his hailee a kiss, their lips clinging for a moment. That meant something yummy and red saucy for him, which he was always down for. “Come on, guys. Let’s feed the hungry horde.”

He and the other alphas headed off to get the food, and he heard much giggling and stomping feet and impatience, but Kami waited until they were all back and seated before nodding.

“All right, let’s show them what he got, gents.” Stones spilled across the big picnic table, and there was nothing but oohs and aaahs for several minutes.

“Can we touch them?” Felicity asked.

“Yes. Of course.” Kami looked like a proud...stone papa. Or something.

Felicity sifted through the stones with her hands, and they made a lovely clatter. Most of them were already tumbled naturally from water running through the cave, but some of them were larger crystal formations. Not big, but bigger than a worry stone.

“So pretty.” Tempest grinned, picking up a very bright piece of aquamarine, studying it.

“Would you like to keep that, Tempest?”

“May I? I think it would make a lovely focus stone for when I’m seeking.” She looked so pleased, cupping the stone in her hands.

“Can I have one?” Felicity asked.

“Sure, kiddo,” Kami said, winking at Reno when he laughed. He thought Kami got it. All the kids would want one. “I bet you like...topaz.” Kami handed Felicity a stone.

“Ooooh.” Felicity peered into it. “Like fires inside.”

“It is, huh? I like how orange it is in the middle.”

“Me too!”

The older kids all picked out a stone, but Kami grabbed one and handed it to him just as the food came.

“For me?” Reno asked, surprised.



Kami frowned. “Yes. Hold onto it. It’s important.”

“How?” Reno was a little worried, because Kami had never seemed like he had any kind of seer talent, but the seriousness in the command came across that way, for sure.

“I don’t know. I’ll tell you when I find out.”

“Okay, baby.” Maybe it was for their wee one. Not a heartstone, necessarily, but a talisman. The stone was a deep, rich red, with crystal structures that turned into white and pink spirals on the ends.

He slipped it into his pocket, and that was that.

By the time the food came, everyone had chosen their little stone, and then Kami oversaw the process of sorting all the colors of the rainbows and putting them into different little piles. It was lovely, and hopefully, it would take Kami the rest of this pregnancy to make the stones into mobiles or whatever it was he was going to do.

Whatever it was, it was going to be beautiful. Beautiful and natural to fill the nursery with light.

He knew it was gonna work.

Kami was used to going over to Talon’s house at least three or four times a week, maybe more. And Talon came to hang out a few times a week too.

It was a thing.

The last couple of days, Talon had been putting him off, telling him he wasn’t feeling well, that sort of situation, and Kami was worried.

It wasn't like Talon. Kami respected his privacy. He totally did, but damn it, if the man was going to do something exciting like find a mate or even a fuck buddy or go out on a mission. Or anything. He just wanted to know.

He was sort of living life vicariously these days.

Not only that, but Talon was making all this noise next door. Hammering. Moving furniture. How sick could he be if he was doing all of that? And the door was opening and closing...

So why couldn't Kami go over there.

"What are you pacing for?" Reno growled, and he arched one eyebrow at his braaken.

"I want to know what Talon's up to."

Reno shook his head. "Why?"

"Because I don't know." Duh. He was bored and curious. And this was his best friend they were talking about. Talon never hid things from him.

"That doesn't seem like the best reason."

He heard more sounds coming from next door, and Kami frowned again. "What on earth is he doing? Why is he making so much noise?"

"He's not making that much noise. He's a dragon in his own home; leave him alone." Reno kind of stared at the wall.

"I know he's a dragon. I know him very well. Why hasn't he been over?"

Reno gave him a look that was mild as milk. “He said he wasn’t feeling well.”

“Maybe he’s having convulsions and needs us.” It could happen.

Convulsions happened.

“It’s not like he doesn’t have a phone or that he can’t talk to you without ever coming over. Maybe he just doesn’t feel well.”

“I don’t like it. I don’t want him to be sick. I’m worried about him.” It wasn’t as if he didn’t care if Talon was sick. He did care, and Kami would get him chicken soup or something. But he wasn’t going to just sit back and let his next-door neighbor suffer. How cruel would that be? “I’m going over to check on him.”

“Leave the man be, Kami.”

“No, he wouldn’t leave me be if it was the same situation. He would bring me soup. Or possibly a baked potato.” Mmm...a baked potato.

“You hungry, hailee? We could go to the cafeteria, find something yummy. A baked potato with bacon and sour cream?”

Kami hated when Reno was in “humor the lunatic” mode. He hated even more that he was often in a place to deserve the humor-the-lunatic mode.

Still, it sounded good.

“Okay. A baked potato.”

“Perfect.” Reno handed him his big sweater they kept by the door for when he left their apartment. They kept their place hot as a greenhouse right now so he could walk

around naked if he wanted and be comfy. But out in the wild world of the keep, it was freaking cold.

“Are you ready to go, hailee?” Reno stood at the door with it half open, leaning against the doorframe.

“I am. Let’s go.”

Reno smiled at him, touched his nose. “Baked potato, ho.”

“I want bacon and cheese and sour cream and?—”

He thought he heard a few doors opening and closing, not just Talon’s, but across the way too. Weird.

“Did the guys wanna come with us?”

Reno blinked at him, head tilting. “What guys?”

He blew out a hard line of air, trying to keep his temper. “The guys, the ones that you are brothers with, you know, the ones with all the babies. What guys?” Kami was going to have a stroke.

“No. I think the kids are playing with the doors, but I want to have lunch, just the two of us.”

So sweet. “All right, that makes sense.” He would accept that as an answer, especially as there was potato-y goodness at the end. “I haven’t seen anybody it seems like in a couple of days. It’s almost like... I don’t know. They’ve been lost. Or maybe we have. Do you think that it’s possible that you and I are actually in some other dimension?”

“Another dimension?” Reno stared at him.

“Yeah, like, like you’ve shifted into some different dimension with me. But no one else is here, and they don’t know that we’re here. They think we’re missing and?—”

“Hey, hailee, I love you. We’ve talked to Cain in the last couple of days, we’ve had food delivered, we’ve had mail delivered.”

He stamped his foot a bit. “Don’t be logical. I’m playing.”

“Oh, sorry. Let me roll that back.” Reno made a show of taking a step backward and then coming forward again. “We totally could be in a different dimension. Maybe when we went into the crystal room, we fell through, and we don’t even know.”

“Oh, very nice. Not logical because we did have the big lunch with all the kids, remember, and the rocks? But I appreciate the effort.”

“Well, that’s really all that matters.” Reno got to laughing, and that tickled him. Reno hadn’t ever been known for being particularly playful, so when it happened, it always made Kami feel like he was amazing, like he could possibly be the funniest dragon in history.

Because he made Reno want to play.

“Oh, you are something else, braaken. Do you think we’ll have an alpha or an omega dragon?” He didn’t care. He just wanted a strong, happy, healthy little dragon.

“I don’t care, hailee. I just know that I’ll love them, no matter what. I just want to know them.” Reno’s expression was pure bliss. “I want to hold them and rock and play.”

“Fly.”

“Oh, yes. I want to fly together, all three of us, as a family.” Reno grabbed him suddenly and hugged him so tight. “As a family.”

He nodded against Reno’s chest, his nose a little squashed, but it didn’t matter. He loved how Reno smelled.

Talon’s door opened, and someone said, “Whoops!” and it closed again.

“Reno...”

“Baked potato.” Reno picked him up and carried him off after closing their apartment door.

“But what?—”

“Nope. Not now. When we get back from lunch, I promise we will drop in at Talon’s, okay?”

“Okay, but I’m not happy.”

“I will make a note of your complaint.” Reno laughed, and if people looked at them a little funny as they made their way through the halls, well, that was okay. Kami loved it when Reno held him.

They hit the cafeteria, the scents so good, but he could totally pick out the baked potato bar, and Kami grabbed Reno’s ears and steered him that direction.

“Mmmm. See? Potato goodness.”

“Hello, Reno. Kami. What may I get you?”

“Oh, I think I want butter, sour cream, bacon, cheese and chives,” Kami said. His belly rumbled.

“Of course.” The kid started loading him up.

“I’ll take chili and cheese,” Renu murmured.

“With butter and sour cream under it,” Kami said, laughing. “I know you.”

“You do.” They headed to a table after Reno had to set him down so they could grab his Sprite and Reno’s Coke.

“So.” Kami plopped down at the table. “Talon’s place. What are they doing?”

“Nope.” Reno made a show of buttoning his lip.

“No fair!”

“I told you, we’ll stop in on the way home.” Reno sipped his drink, eyes twinkling.

“Asshole braaken.”

“Me or Tal?”

“Both of you!” Kami smacked the table, trying not to pout. No one liked a pouty pregnant omega. Well, maybe someone did, but he didn’t.

The potato distracted him pretty well for a while. It was fluffy and perfect and had that baked/roasted flavor, not the microwave thing.

Yum.

He patted his belly. “Much better.”

“I’m glad, hailee.” Reno reached over to squeeze his hand. “And I promise, nothing is wrong with Talon. We’ll see when I’m done.” It took Reno forever to eat his potato. And he got dessert. But finally, he grinned and nodded.

“Then let’s go!” Kami grabbed Reno’s hand and hopped to his feet, practically dragging his mate back to their hallway.

Reno ambled.

That was the only word for it. And Kami was going to smite him. If nothing was wrong, why was Reno being so damn slow!

They turned the corner to go down their hall, and Tempest stood there wearing the prettiest emerald party dress. It had a full skirt and sequins around the ribbon-trimmed collar, and she looked absolutely overjoyed.

“Good afternoon.” She beamed at them. “How are you today?”

“Good,” Reno growled. “How are you, girl?”

“I’m great, Uncle Reno. How about you, Kami?”

“I am also great. Super. Fabulous. I just had the world’s best baked potato.” He didn’t want to sit and have small talk. He just wanted to go see what the hell was going on with Talon. “What are you doing out and about?”

He was trying not to be grumpy, because she didn’t have anything to do with his



mood. To be honest, she was a sweet kid who periodically had terrifying visions.

What bliss.

“Well, I was coming to see you.” She smiled at him.

“Is it time?” Reno asked, and Kami frowned.

“What did you say?”

Reno actually stopped. “I asked if she had time. She’s a very busy little girl, you know.”

“I’m not a little girl anymore, Uncle Reno,” she admonished. “But it totally seems to me that we have all the time in the world this afternoon. So you’ve got me for as long as you want me.”

Kami fought the urge to snarl. He was still not used to being in a social situation where people felt it was perfectly normal to just interrupt their plans. He didn’t like it, if he was honest.

He didn’t like it, but it was important to Reno that he make an effort to join in.

Reno had asked the others to ease back on dropping in unexpectedly, so it was only fair.

It still aggravated him, but it was fair.

So he took a deep breath and nodded. “Yes, but we promised to stop by and see Talon before we went home, remember? I’m worried about him.” Not to mention the fact that he was going to bite something if he didn’t get to see his best friend and just lay

eyes on him.

He didn't have to go in; he didn't. They didn't have to talk. He just wanted to see Talon and make sure he was okay.

"I told you, hailee, he's fine."

"Oh, good, I'll come with you."

Does this child not have parents? Doesn't she have someone who's paying attention to every move that she makes?

I don't think she really needs that, Reno admitted. She's very bright.

She took both their hands, then led them toward Talon's apartment door, chattering at both of them constantly. It was absolutely wild.

Believe it or not, she used to be very quiet. She was eight when they rescued her. She'd been in hiding for eight years, basically living in a closet in the seer's rooms so that they wouldn't hurt her.

Okay, so now he felt like an asshole. Sorry, I guess I'm just—desperately curious is what I am. I just want to know what's going on behind those doors. I hate a closed door.

They made him want to rip them open and see what he could see.

At least you know yourself. Reno winked at him. No stress, hailee. I was just saying she's loud, she's noisy, but she's earned it. I thought she was never even going to so much as say boo to me. And now? She's my good friend. I don't know about you, but I'm not going to complain.

No complaints. Open the damn door.

Reno knocked on Talon's door, and Tempest did a little dance beside him, one he thought might be as impatient as his.

The door swung open, seemingly by itself, and Reno waved him inside, bowing slightly.

He walked inside, and the lights came on, dragons springing out from all over. "Surprise!"

He damn near fell on his butt, but Reno caught him, bouncing him back into play.

Talon's front room was an explosion of rainbows.

Kami just stood there and stared at everything for a second, utterly awed. The entire room had changed.

The plain sofa had been replaced by a handful of cozy seating areas, and the television was there, framed on the huge mantel, a piece of art on the screen. The electric fireplace warmed the whole space, while a huge table groaning with food took up one entire wall.

There were dozens of appetizers and pastries, cookies and piles of fresh fruit. At the center stood a glorious, huge cake that was covered in rainbows. It was white and had to be at least five tiers with rainbows painted all over it and glitter everywhere. Crowning the cake was a topper that was a white dragon breathing out a prismatic riot of color. It was like an explosion of rainbow sparkly joy.

On one end of the table were coolers of iced drinks, and on the other, what looked to be games stacked, ready to play. Talon had even created a tiny play area for the

smaller children, filled with toys and no sharp edges.

There were wrapped presents stacked all around the outside of the room and on top of a highchair and a stroller and the most perfect cradle he'd ever seen.

Oh.

Did you make that for me, love?

You wouldn't fit... Reno was watching him closely, eyes searching his. Do you like it?

It's the most perfect thing I've ever seen. I can't wait to explore it. Our little one is going to be so blessed and comfortable.

Reno kissed his cheek. "I love you. Go enjoy your party."

Everyone was laughing and waving at him, and Talon stood there in the middle of it all, beaming. "My ki'kai needs a party, and so does my best friend."

Kami ran to Talon and hugged him hard. "Oh, you're amazing. This is amazing. Thank you so much. I?—"

"Were you surprised?"

"I was. So surprised." He couldn't believe Talon had pulled this off, to be honest. The room was freshly painted, and the recessed lighting had been changed to be giant ceiling fans, each one of which had a glittery streamer hanging off the edge of it so that, as it moved very slowly, it sparkled. The walls were covered in artwork—all different colors and different styles, but it ended up being a riot of joy, the entire collection seeming to thrum with energy.

He had worried, actually, that Talon was going to sit in this absolutely functional and lovely, but not at all personal, apartment and rot. But he could see it now, how Talon had changed things and made them his own.

And made it something to be shared too, because this was beautiful.

“Good. I’m glad. You almost caught us bringing in things a dozen times. I felt so bad, worrying you, but I couldn’t think of anything else that would have kept you away.” Talon shook his head. “Thank goodness for Reno and his advanced distraction tactics.”

“He’s good at that. Even if I did threaten to cas?—”

Little ears, hailee, Reno warned.

“—spank him a time or two.”

“Well, sacrifices have to be made, yes?”

“Absolutely. We all have our part to play in surprising Kami.” Reno didn’t seem worried, to be honest. Not at all.

One of the little ones—he thought it was Felicity’s little sister—came up to him, eyes lit up. “Bath party! We get to have a bath party for you!”

Tempest chuckled and grabbed the little one, struggling to haul her up. “That’s right; it’s a shower. It’s called a baby shower.”

“Where is baby?”

“The baby’s in Kami’s tummy. You know, like your new baby is in your daddy’s

tummy?”

“Oh.” The little one leaned over to pat his belly, and Tempest almost lost control of the child. She would have dropped her if Reno hadn’t caught her, scooping her up and taking her to Jack.

Tempest glanced over at him, her cheeks a deep purple with her flush. “Welcome to the family, Uncle Kami. Happy baby shower.”

“Thank you, I appreciate it.” Kami felt his eyes try to fill with tears. This was absolutely wild and utterly perfect.

Talon patted his back awkwardly. “Come sit at the place of honor, and then we’ll have people fetch and carry for you.”

“Okay, but I’m not that big yet.”

Talon sat him over next to Dex, who was possibly, literally, the size of a house.

“Don’t worry, you will be.” Dex winked at him, removing any actual sting from the words. “I’m assuming this one is a boy, because it seems really heavy.”

“Well, at least you have some time between them. I mean, you spaced everybody out well.”

“Yes, the girls are the same amount apart as this one will be from Gwen. So it’s a nice spread. It’ll be even nicer spread when it’s out.”

“Yeah. Well, thank you for coming. This is amazing and totally unexpected.” Nobody had ever given him a party before. Obviously, his parents had when he was a child, sure, but he’d never had a party with lots of friends, simply because his parents had

been worried about them mingling.

This was the best party ever, and he would never forget it—never, and he was unbelievably honored that he was so accepted, so welcomed.

And how bad did he feel about being so...antisocial now?

Love, it takes getting used to. It freaks a lot of us out.

I love you. Hormones were a bear. They really were.

I love you too. It's just your heart expanding to make space for all of us.

Oh. That was a lovely way to put it, wasn't it. He laughed, because they had just eaten, so starting with food seemed silly, at least for him.

“So can I open presents while everyone else eats?”

Chapter

Twenty

Reno put the last of the shower stuff away in the nursery, tucking away onesies and wee socks and a million other pieces of cloth. Then he went to lift the cradle that would stay in their bedroom until their baby was big enough to move to the crib in his room, putting it where he and Kami would be able to see it easily. He ran his fingers over the smooth wood, and he felt pride that he had helped to make it, learning the process as he went from one of the keep's craftsmen.

He had put his hands on this wood and made it into something lovely.

The day had worn Kami right out, and he was asleep in bed with the TV on. Reno wanted to snuggle with him, but he was also restless. He kept replaying Tempest's vision in his head, trying to figure out what it meant.

He could make himself crazy doing that, and he knew it, but that didn't stop him, so finally he pulled out his phone to text Boone and Durango.

Chat?

Meet you at the lounge

Boone shot back.

B right there



Every major floor of apartments had a lounge just for this reason. So if someone wanted to be restless and not disturb their mates or roomies, they could go play pool or turn on the TV or talk. That was new this past year.

Since more and more kids kept arriving.

He left a note for Kami right on top of Kami's phone, then headed for the lounge, grabbing beers to take to the guys on his way out.

"Hey, man." Boone met him first, showing off a bag of barbecue chips and a pot of dip. "Kami not wanting to cuddle?"

He rolled his eyes, handing over a beer. "Today wore him out."

Durango walked in. "Should we invite Talon?"

"Shit. Yes, we should." And he felt like a dick that he hadn't, too. He texted.

Beer in the lounge?

"I'll run get another beer," Boone said, and he was off.

"Thanks."

Be right there

Talon took a while to text, still. He wasn't much on the tech life. Apparently, that had been Kami's job.

He blew out a breath. "I feel like a dick."

“Nah.” Durango clapped him on the shoulder. “We’re all so used to each other. But he’s still the new guy.”

“Yeah.”

Boone slid in the door just as they heard Talon’s door open and shut.

“Whew.” Boone handed him back the beer he’d brought. “Give him that so it’s from you.”

“Thanks, man.” Reno winked.

Talon strode into the room, eyebrows rising at the sight of all of them. “Are we assembling the Avengers?”

“Dude! Good one.”

Reno grinned at how pleased Durango was.

“I needed to talk to you guys.” Reno plopped down on one of the comfy chairs.

“What’s wrong?” Boone tilted his head. He always knew.

“Is something the matter with Kami?” Talon barked.

“No. No. I just can’t shake this worry that Tempest’s vision means something bad is coming.”

“Hmm.” Durango shook his head. “You know how weird visions can be.”

“I do, but something tells me we need to listen.” He sighed. “I just worry that the

mine lady is going to be a problem.”

“Should I text Cain, see if he wants chips and dip?” Boone asked.

Talon blinked hard. “Would he come? He would do that?”

“He might, if he’s not busy or in the midst of some kind of meditation.” Boone tapped out a thing on his screen, and it was only about a minute later that he held up his phone. “See? He says he’ll be right here.”

“Cool.” Cain had stopped in at the shower, but they all knew that really big groups of people like that made the guy twitch. This was way more his speed.

They opened the chips and dip, and Reno went to get more beer, checking in on his hailee. Kami was clutching Reno’s pillow, but otherwise he was fine, so Reno crept back out with a bag of ice to put in the sink in the lounge and a bunch more beer.

Cain arrived not long after he did, and came to smile at all of them, putting more chips down on the table. “Ah, gentlemen. I love barbecue chips and beer.”

“Good.” Reno grinned. “Have a sit, boss.”

“Thank you. That was a lovely party today, Talon.”

“Anemone and Tempest had a great deal to do with it,” Talon said. “Such enterprising young ladies.”

“They’ll run you down like a lawn mo-mo,” Durango said.

Talon frowned. “A what?”

“A lawn mower. Grass cutter, man.”

“Ah. Yes.” Talon nodded. “I see the resemblance.”

They all chuckled, but they sobered soon enough, and Reno asked what was on his mind as Cain stuffed a chip in his mouth. “How much trouble is this Barra going to be?”

Cain munched, clearly thinking about it. “A great deal, I think,” he said after he swallowed.

“But she can’t get through the wards,” Durango said. “As long as Kami doesn’t leave, they can’t get to him.”

“He can’t be a prisoner!” Talon shook his head. “He’s too good for that.”

“We’re all too good for that, Tal,” Reno argued. “No one is a prisoner here.”

“Reno’s right, but I have the worry that this goes deeper.” Cain shook his head. “I think it goes much deeper than just our keep. The stone singers are... Well, they’re something special. They’re outside of graaken. I’ve never heard of a stone singer that wasn’t trained down there in the mines.”

“Just because you haven’t heard of it doesn’t mean it hasn’t happened.” Talon didn’t even look too worried on that front, to be honest.

Cain nodded, nibbling on a chip. “I’m sure you’re right. There have to be stone singers that no one knows about, and they are incredibly rare. Kami has the mark, I believe.”

Reno nodded. “He does.”

Everyone stared at him, but he didn't elaborate, and then Boone shrugged. "No one knew?"

"Obviously not. His parents are exiles. They live off the grid."

Talon nodded. "They are...free souls. They live in the middle of nowhere, raising goats and making art."

Reno had actually spoken to Kami's mother once, when they told her about the baby, and she'd seemed...nice-ish, but she hadn't loved the idea of her son in a keep. "But the simple fact is, if he doesn't want to go, he doesn't have to. They can't make him go."

"No, and I won't allow it." Cain shook his head and sighed. "I have to tell you guys, when I started this, I didn't think that it was going to become so big. I thought it was going to be just me and a couple of my friends hanging out here in the mountains. Not a keep."

"You're more than a keep. You're a revolution." Talon stared right into Cain's eyes, unafraid.

"You have everything that you need. And it's come up very quickly, boss." Durango went to get another beer.

Cain nodded to them. "Thank goodness I have Skye here. He's such a help when I get overwhelmed."

Tal looked confused, and Boone shrugged. "Skye is Lake's brother. He's another seer. He was a seer for Lake's keep. We took the seer and Lake's mother, and oh, about twenty-some-odd of their warriors and Cerran and Triton and Leilani and Leilani's stone..."

“And now we have a stone singer.” Reno shook his head. “Have you considered laying low for a while, Cain?”

Cain offered him a wild grin. “No, not even for a second. That’s bad, isn’t it? There’s something amazing about this place.”

Talon’s laugh filled the air. “I never thought I would return to a keep. Never, yet here I am. I have quarters .”

“We won’t let anything happen to you, to Kami. None of us will. And if there’s trouble, then we deal with it. However, we’ve let the dragon world know he belongs here with us, and he wants to stay here. His mate is here, his child is here. And he gets to be his own dragon, just like the rest of us.”

“That’s right.” Talon lifted his beer in a salute. “We are free.”

Durango rolled his shoulders. “So why is all this going on, do you think? Why are all these things happening now?”

Cain pulled his legs under him, his lips twisting as he thought. “Honestly? I think that the catalyst was Dex, weirdly enough. Dex and Jack. I mean, omegas have been having their stones crushed for an eternity. Keeps have been throwing out alphas when there were too many since forever. It was the way that they did things.”

“So what’s different about Jack and Dex.”

Cain snorted. “Jack decided he didn’t want to be a dragon anymore, so he just left. Somehow, Dex survived that. Dex survived longer without a stone than anyone that we know of. I think it’s possibly because the bond hadn’t formed yet, but we don’t know. But once he began to thrive? Then I knew we could manage it—saving omegas. Giving alphas homes. Allowing people to fall in love.”

Now they had a stone singer in Kami, and he made this change even easier because he could connect a dragon with an exact stone. Goddess, that had to be pissing everybody off.

Reno grinned and shook his head.

“What?” Boone asked.

“I just—we get what we need, don’t we?”

“I think we do, yeah.” Boone clinked their bottles together.

“It is because we put so much good out into the universe,” Talon said with deep certainty. “We are creating a new kind of magic.”

“Oh, I like that,” Cain murmured. He dipped a chip and popped it in his mouth. Once he finished it, he nodded once. “Yes, I think you’ve hit on it, Talon. The intent we have here, the way we all work together to make this place different... Dragon society, graake, got hidebound and insular when the human world pushed up to the edges of the sea. So we needed to expand what it means to be dragons.”

“I think that you just said we were the cowboy archetype of dragons.” Durango’s eyes lit up, sparkling. “As in yeehaw mother fucker.”

Talon sort of beamed at Durango. “I love cowboys!”

“Right?” Durango actually bounced, the blue scales catching the light. “Right. It works. We’re like the cowboys of dragons. But if we don’t need horses, we need...”

“Umm, you have pickups?” Reno offered, trying to help. “And we wear a lot of blue jeans when we’re home.”

“Right. And goddess knows we have all the babies.”

Everybody looked at Boone, and then Reno drawled, “Well, you have all the babies.”

“Hey!” Boone rolled his eyes. “By definition, Dex has got as many as me. He just adopted grown ones.”

“Dex is still one behind.”

“Yes, but he’s pregnant, and Tempest came to live with me. So he’s still one behind you. He’s still winning.” Durango looked so damn pleased with himself, getting one up in an argument with Boone.

“You’re all amazing.” Cain stared at them, one after the other. “You just took these babies, these children in. You saved the people you needed to save. It’s...it’s amazing to me. Everything I’ve asked of you, and so much I haven’t, you’ve accomplished.”

Reno’s cheeks went hot. He was proud of this keep, but it was moments like now where he felt as if he was important to Cain, like he was more than a cog in a wheel.

“We have all these new omegas, which is handy because we have more alphas than any keep I’ve ever even heard of, too. That was amazing, Talon, you bringing them in.”

Talon offered Cain a mild smile. “So long as there’s food and room and resources, Seer.”

“Exactly. Jack and I are already talking about Skye going to open another facility. But we have time before that happens.”

“We do. You really do an amazing job of infrastructure.”



Cain scoffed. “That’s Jack. He’s a whiz with anticipating what we need and how to build things in a sustainable way.”

“Yeah, but he’s a butthead. You’re the people guy,” Durango put in.

Cain flushed now, smiling. “Thank you. I think.”

“Totally a compliment.”

“Anyway, to circle back, the wards have been reinforced and should be fine. But I worry that Barra will have people waiting anytime someone comes or goes. So your teams need to be on alert, all of them.”

“You got it.” Boone sucked back the rest of his beer. “Okay. I need to go sleep this off before it’s actually time to wake up. Night, guys.”

“Night, man.” Reno waved.

Durango followed. “I need to go check on everyone and get back to bed. Later.”

Then it was just him, Talon, and Cain, who was working his way through the whole bag of barbecue chips.

Talon looked at Cain, serious and maybe a little worried. “What can we do about Kami, Cain? How can I help?”

“Right now, we just go on as we have been. We keep an eye out for anything odd. And we’ll get the teams on the ball to keep all new dragons coming in safe.” Cain shrugged. “And we let Kami decide what he wants to do.”

Reno nodded. “Like you said, Tal. He’s not a prisoner here.”

“Right.”

“Okay.” Cain grinned. “These chips are sooooo good.”

“Better than the weird fish things?” Reno asked.

Cain paused. “Well, don’t get crazy now...”

## Page 21

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### Chapter

### Twenty-One

Kami sang a little, following the stone he could hear into the caves behind Cain's apartments. Talon followed him, marking their path with a grease pen because chalk would dry things out, and unlike human spelunkers, dragons didn't have the skin oil that would kill stuff in a cave.

Which was nice, except that now water was dripping around him, and he was cold, because he was always cold, and he didn't have Reno to warm him up.

Because Reno was a butthead and had said he had work to do and that Kami had said this was Talon's job now. Which he had. He wanted Tal to have a job that wasn't going out and flinging himself into danger without Kami to back him up.

Now, these days, Kami trusted the teams, and if Talon went out with them, he would be okay with it, but he was pregnant. He should get to have Talon's muscle and Reno as an electric blanket all the time.

And unlike Cain and Rowan had said, he'd never started having hot flashes. He wasn't as cold as he had been, but?—

The song got so loud that he clapped his hands over his ears, his steps faltering to a stop.

"What is it?" Talon asked, his voice sounding distant.

“It’s so loud!”

“I cannot hear anything but a bit of a hum.”

“Which means you can hear it, and normally you can’t!” He felt like he was shouting.

“Kami, this cannot be good for the baby!”

“Hush and let me listen.” If he could just find the melody, could just tune with the stone, then he could enjoy the song, not have it trying to make his ears bleed. Gods.

Talon touched him, but unlike when Reno did it, it didn’t help. He shook Talon off.

Reno, I need your help.

Do you need me to come? I can be right there.

I think it will be faster if you help me just like this. Just send me some energy. Like how you learned how to warm me up even while you were at work.

Okay. He felt the warmth stealing through him, and he took Reno’s power and twined it with his and focused on the stone.

The song throbbed, the bands of it twisting. Then it went back to being death metal. So he pulled more, leaning on Reno when he just didn’t think he was going to be able to do what he wanted.

Then it snapped into place, the melody swelling but not assaulting him. It was gorgeous.

“Kami?” Now Talon sounded totally normal, right there in his ear.

“Sorry. Whoa. That is some stone. Come on, let’s find it. It wants to see daylight.”

“If you’re sure you’re okay.”

“I am.” He wouldn’t tell Tal about Reno, but he sent some love his mate’s way and got a mental caress in return. So sweet, his braaken.

They walked around the cavern they had just entered, and sure enough, he saw a flash of blue in the wall, a ripple of music. “There it is. Maybe an aquamarine. I’ll help you figure out how to get it out.”

Talon grunted, setting down all his tools. “Good. It looks like I will have to swing the pick to get it out. You can barely see it.”

“No. I mean, yes, but I think I can help sing it out.”

“Like a baby?” Talon had gone to his last meeting with Rowan, who had said sometimes dragon babies needed all sorts of encouragement.

“Just like a baby, I hope.” He put one hand on his belly, stroking his little one. “This baby needs to stay where it’s at. We just need the rock baby.”

“The rock baby.” Talon rolled his eyes. “Are you sure about this?”

Sure? He was just making this shit up as he went along. “Sort of? I’m pretty sure it’ll work. Why wouldn’t it work? I am a stud, right?”

“Oh, fuck me.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I like you too much for that.” He winked at Talon who shook his head.

“I’m so going to call Reno, you psycho.”

Kami chuckled at his worrywart buddy and then put his hand on the face of the cave wall, the song now as pure and loud enough to rattle his teeth.

At least it wasn’t a death metal song to him anymore.

Come on, come on, Little Rock. You can do it. Come see me. You need to see the sunshine, let it shine for you, in you. I know how much you want to see the sunlight.

He wrapped his mind around the stone and began to tug. He’d done this a couple of times, encouraged stones that were being recalcitrant to allow themselves to be plucked from the walls, but this felt different.

This felt weirdly heavy.

In fact, this time, when he pulled, it felt like he was trying to move a pickup truck all by himself.

It made him a little dizzy, to be honest, and he began to sweat, the exertion making his heart race a little bit.

And he could hear Talon in the back of his mind. Or was it that his ears were ringing and he was hearing with his ears instead of his thoughts?

It didn’t matter. He was committed now, pulling hard, and he could feel the stone’s willingness to come out. It wasn’t that it was being stubborn; it was just so blasted big.

Sure. Come on, come on, come to me. Let’s go. I’ll take you outside and you can shine. You’ll be someone’s. Someone’s going to need you so much.

“Kami! Kami, you’re scaring me!” Talon tugged him away from the wall, breaking his concentration, and his knees buckled.

Luckily Talon caught him.

“What did you do that for?”

“Your scales are almost transparent. You were looking like you did when you lost your stone!”

I’m coming, love , came Reno’s voice. What is it? What’s wrong?

Nothing. Seriously. Just a big rock.

Bullshit. I lost you there for a moment. You were completely gone.

No shit? He looked at the wall, where a terminus of the stone could be seen now.

“Hailee, what in hell is going on?” Reno came running into the cavern, all puffy and blowing smoke.

“I’m working. You’re supposed to be working too. I’m fine.”

Talon rolled his eyes. “He’s not fine.”

“You’re not helping,” he snapped, and Talon stuck his tongue out at him.

“It’s not my job to help you, except that it is, and I am,” Talon growled. “Quit confusing me. He’s not okay, Reno. He turned clear. I could see his veins. I could maybe even see his lungs.”

Oh, for fuck's sake. "I have clothes on, dipshit."

"You know what I mean." Talon shook his head. "It was scary."

"There is a baby in there, hailee."

"I know," he growled. "I'm fully aware that there is a baby in here. That's not the point."

"What is it you were doing?"

It was hard to be mad at Reno when he had his concerned face on. "I was calling the rocks."

"This isn't Labyrinth."

"Look, no one wants to hear about you and your David Bowie obsession, Reno. I was just doing my job. There's this stone. Look at it. It's right here."

"It looks really big."

Talon grinned at Reno. "That's what he said."

"Stop it!" Kami snarled. "I'm surrounded by idiots."

"Hey!" That was both of them.

"Excuse me?"

"Seriously, Talon. Don't you have a pickaxe?" Reno was beginning to smoke again.



“I was going to do the thing with the pick, and Kami told me no. He said he was going to like suave the stone out.”

“Suave?” he asked, and Talon blew out a sharp breath.

“Shut up.”

“What is going on?” Cain appeared like a jonquil popping out of the snow.

“I’m working,” he yelled. “Go away. This isn’t your...rock room anymore.”

“Kami, did you have a stroke?”

He turned his back on all of them and focused on the stone again. Fuck these assholes. They were conspiring against him, and he knew it. They all had beers and chips and things when he wasn’t around. Did anybody ever offer him barbecue chips? No.

No, they offered him things like spaghetti and meatballs and oranges and fresh fruit, things that were good for the baby. They had less salt in them because he was a little swollen, and Rowan said it was important, and he didn’t like Rowan either.

Wow, you’re grumpy.

He ignored Reno.

He was not grumpy. He was working, and no one would let him do his job.

Now he wasn’t completely sure what that job was, but this rock was coming out of this fucking wall, and that was clear.

He stared at the rock.

You are coming out. You are going to let go of the wall and come to me and let me not look like an asshole in front of all of these dragons.

This time, the wall groaned really loud, and a couple of pebbles fell out of the ceiling.

See, you're doing a great job.

"Hailee, I think that you should stop."

"Working." Come on, don't make me look like an asshole. Do me a solid, and I'll find you a good dragon that will be yours forever. Come out of the wall. Out of the wall.

There was that weird creaking noise again, but louder this time, and he was pretty sure that he heard somebody say "oh", when the pebbles fell.

"Reno, this is bad. Not normal bad, but more like the only kind of bad that Kami can get us into, and I didn't think he could get us into that kind of bad here. That's why we stopped being on the road."

"I think that Talon is right on this. You know, I think that Kami's trying to destroy the mountain." Cain was starting to irritate him.

Okay, you look. Help a kid out. Notice I'm tired and I'm willing to whine. No stone wants a whiny stone singer. And who came up with that name anyway? That's a stupid fucking title. Why couldn't it be something neat like, oh, he didn't know...

He couldn't think of anything, which was probably why nobody had come up with a name that was better because nobody had thought of it either.

Fuck him, he was tired.

Also, he really wanted some barbecue chips now. Maybe in a sandwich?

A turkey and provolone and bacon sandwich with barbecue chips.

He tapped the stone with his finger sharply, letting it know that he was getting a little frustrated. “I said come out, you.”

A chunk about the size of his head fell out of the wall, kind of landing in his arms, and he ended up flat on his butt holding this great big rock.

Problem was that the sound of its song had just quintupled in volume.

Oops.

“Get the stone,” Reno snapped at Talon.

Talon grabbed it out of his arms, and Reno yanked him off the floor, lifting him into those brawny arms. Cain followed, a few more pebbles raining down, along with a sluice of water.

“Shit!” That was Reno. “No going back in there until we can shore it up, baby.”

“But the rock...”

“It showed you it was willing, and gave you a large chunk,” Cain said. “But you could collapse the whole cave.”

“No. It’s not?—”

“Baby, you were not wearing your reasonable face.”

Kami sighed. “Okay, maybe not. But I think that vein of aquamarine might be important.”

“And we’ve marked its location. I promise.” Cain had to puff a little to keep up with Reno and Talon.

“No one else will sing it out of the cave, baby. I promise, but you have to wait until after the baby is born.”

“But I—” Kami stopped, his eyes widening as he heard another kind of song in his head, thrumming through his body.

He put a hand on his belly. That wasn’t a rock. That was his kid. Their kid.

He’d heard little whispers, but now it was a full-on chorale.

“What?” Reno stopped, looking down at him. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. I can hear the baby. Like whoa.”

“Oh, wow.” Reno kissed him, then started walking again, never even breathing hard from carrying him. Butthead.

“Where would you like the stone?” Tal asked him.

“In our apartment.” He craned his neck to see over Reno’s shoulder. “Is that okay, Cain?”

“Of course it is, Kami.” Cain stopped when they hit the door from his long hallway,

smiling at them when they paused to look at him. “Call me when you know what you want to do with the stone. And have a few chips, Kami. Just a few won’t hurt him, Reno. Even Rowan can’t deny him a handful.”

“Okay, boss.” Reno winked down at him.

Talon lugged the stone back to their apartment, then kissed his cheek. “You need to rest and listen to your little one instead of the stone for a bit.”

“Yeah, yeah.” But he had a feeling Tal was right. Now that he could hear his baby so well, she drowned out everything else.

“Lunch tomorrow, Talon,” Reno said. “Our treat as a thank-you for all you do.”

Talon flushed, his eyes glowing a moment. “Thank you, friend.” He headed across the hall to his quarters, closing the door behind him.

Reno took him into the house and sat him on the couch. “Let me get you the chips and a drink.”

“I’d totally take some juice. But I don’t need chips. Will you just come sit with me?”

That got him a bright smile, Reno nodding. “Pineapple orange banana?”

“Oh, gods, yes.” Reno got him. Really got him.

They sat together, and he sipped his juice from the circle of Reno’s arms, on Reno’s lap. His favorite place to be.

“So what was it about that vein of rock, love?”

“I don’t know.” He shrugged. “I can’t even think about it now. All I can hear is our girl.”

“You can—Girl? We’re having a baby girl?”

“We are.”

Reno laughed, the sound one of pure joy. “Oh, hello, little girl. Soffar loves you. I do.” Reno talked right to his belly.

A tinkle of bright sound, like laughter, was the answer. “She loves you too, Papa.”

Reno kissed his neck. “No more spelunking for a while, okay? Please?”

“You have my word, babe.”

Those pebbles really had been telling him something. It was time to listen while someone else shored up the cave.

### Chapter

### Twenty-Two

Reno lay on the couch, feet up on the arm, reading.

He loved to read. While he enjoyed movies and video games, he'd grown up in a low-tech keep where those things weren't readily available, so he cracked a book whenever he could.

Kami was...cleaning.

More like rearranging shit. He wasn't allowed to use hardcore cleaners now, and he said orange oil and vinegar made his nose hurt. So he was carrying this book here and that plate there, and Kami was muttering at them at the same time.

Reno just let it flow over him, because Kami never annoyed him. And he'd talked to the mated alpha club, and they told him not to worry, that Kami was doing this thing called nesting.

Making the space for the baby, they said.

So he read. Until he found that he was twitching. His feet started it. And if he had his tail right now, it would be going too. There was this humming noise. Kind of like tinkling water. A steady wavelength of sound.

He looked around for Kami, but he couldn't find him at first glance.

For goodness sake, the apartment wasn't that big, and Kami was huge.

Reno tried to focus back on his book, but that twitching wouldn't go away. He'd ignore it, but he knew that was stupid. Trusting your instincts was ninety percent of getting through everything. The other ten percent was money.

He put his book down, stood up, and went searching for his hailee. Reno found him in the nursery, carefully unfolding and refolding all of the little clothes. "Hey, Kami, how are you doing?"

"I'm all right. Restless." Kami shrugged. "This is that nesting thing that everybody talks about, but Rowan says he doesn't think I'm quite in labor yet. I figured it was logical to just take advantage of the energy, though."

"Sounds good to me. You want some help?"

"I do." That earned him a warm smile, and Kami patted the floor.

He plopped down and started folding tiny socks into balls. That was a challenge and a half with his huge fingers.

Kami worked happily, a smile on his face. "I think we need to talk names, braaken."

He tilted his head. "You don't think we should meet her before we name her?"

"Right, but then we need to have some ideas. Like Kate."

Kate? Seriously? "Kate is not the right name." Reno said.

"But... I don't know. I like Catherine. And then we could call her Kate."



“But why not just name her Kate if you’re going to call her Kate?”

Kami just blinked at him. “I?—”

“You can’t name her Kate.”

“Why not?”

Reno reminded himself that arguing with his very, very pregnant hailee was bad, but Kami was still grinning, so... “Well, because your name has two syllables, and my name has two syllables, so her name should have more than one syllable.”

Kami blinked at him. “Well, it’s not a good reason, but it’s a reason. What do you feel about Cassandra?”

“Cassandra? Wasn’t she the seer that nobody believed? I think that’s dooming her in advance.” Not to mention it might be creepy.

“Well, that’s not a dragon myth; that’s a human myth. She’s not going to be human, and we could call her Cassie.”

“Which is very close to Kami and might be confusing.” Reno fought the twitching of his lips.

“Oh damn.” Kami pursed his lips. “You have a point.”

That really shouldn’t feel so damn satisfying, should it? “What about Samantha? Then she could be a Sammy.”

Kami shook his head. “Again, also very much like Kami, ergo confusing. I do like Samantha though, but Antha is a weird nickname.”

Kami did have a point there. Reno wracked his brain for another option. “What about Persephone?”

“Again, not with the good connotations. What do you feel about Stephanie?”

“No, I don’t love that. Derinda?” Reno had had an Aunt Derinda.

“Have you lost your mind?”

Reno was not going to laugh. “I also have an Aunt Harriet. Then you could call her Harry.”

“No.” That was very sure. “Can you imagine the teasing? Dragon children tease.”

This was harder than Reno had thought.

Seriously.

He just sort of assumed that at some point, baby’s names just popped out of the baby themselves. But no.

No, parents had to figure out what was good and if it sounded good and if they were going to get teased and all of that nonsense.

“Miranda.”

Reno sat with that one for a second. Miranda. He didn’t know what it meant, but it had a nice ring to it and then she could be a Randy. A Randa. Or an Annie.

And it kind of sounded like mirror.

Mirrors made prisms, and her entire bedroom was made of prisms.

“I sort of like it.”

Kami blinked at him. “I sort of do, too. Should we have a Miranda?”

“Why not? I mean, if when she’s born, we look at her and we don’t see Miranda, we could name her whatever we want to.”

“Except for Harriet.”

Reno rolled his eyes. “Fine, no Harriets. I mean, we can always name her Maude.”

Kami giggled. “Or Ethel?”

“Maxine.”

“Hortense.”

This was actually kind of fun. “Hortense is a great name. I mean, I wouldn’t name someone Hortense because, you know, teasing, but Hortense? I mean, this is the name of a strong human being. And—” He paused for effect. “She could be a Harry.”

“She can’t be a Harry. Hortense was fine, except for the whole Harry thing, which is creepy and weird and I don’t like it.”

“Right.” He reached over and stroked Kami’s belly. “But we were joking. We had moved beyond picking names into joking.”

“Right.” Kami glanced over at him. “I love you. You know that, don’t you?”

“I do know that, baby. I know our friends look at us sometimes and don’t see a traditional braaken and hailee, but I love it. I adore who we are together.”

Kami’s smile softened, becoming a little misty. “That’s the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

He reached out to stroke Kami’s cheek. “I mean it.”

Kami kissed his palm, and the humming, tinkling, thrumming noise got loud again, making Reno jump.

“Is that one of your rocks.”

Kami chuckled. “No, babe. That’s our little girl.”

Awe punched Reno right in the chest, taking his breath. “I can hear her.”

“Yep.” Kami handed him another stack of laundry. “Fold. She’ll be coming sometime soon.”

“I can’t wait to meet her.” Reno let the song wash over him, and he sat with his hailee and folded onesies.

Life was perfect.

Chapter

Twenty-Three

Life sucked.

Kami got out of bed to go pee again .

He was uncomfortable, and he couldn't quite get any sleep because he had heartburn all the time.

And because nowhere was comfortable.

And also, this baby was three weeks later than Rowan had thought she was going to be.

Rowan's advice was lots of sex, which was great, except that he didn't want to.

And walking, which again, great but very uncomfortable. Still he did it.

He walked upstairs and downstairs and around the pool and down into the pool and out of the pool. He walked with Triton, he walked with Talon, he walked with Lake, he walked with all of the kids.

He frowned, then tugged on a robe and headed out of the apartment.

He was going to see Cain, and the seer had better be awake.

He'd had an idea, and he needed to deal with it right now.

Why didn't they have dogs?

There were no dogs here besides Cain's. There were no cats besides Cain's either. This was not right. There should be dogs. Children deserved dogs. They had outside areas, sort of. They could make a dog-poop area. They needed dogs. There was just no question here.

That was what was wrong with this entire place.

"Hailee, what are you doing?" Reno's soft voice had him leaping out of his skin.

"I'm going to tell Cain that we need dogs here."

"Oh. It's three thirty in the morning."

"Well, then, he should have dealt with this dog thing before I had to wake him up."

"I guess so. You wanting to walk?" Reno offered an arm.

"No!" He waved his hands in the air. Maybe interpretive dance would get through to his braaken. "No, I don't want to walk anymore. I am sick of walking. I want a dog to play with. I want, if I am going to have to take endless walks, a dog to walk with. I would settle for a coyote! Or a mountain lion! Anything."

"Woof."

"Oh, ha-ha." He whacked Reno on the chest. "I don't like you anymore."

"You don't like me any less. Let's walk." Reno took his hand, leading him away from

Cain's.

"I want ice cream."

"Now, that I can do."

Kami shook his head. "Soft serve."

"They have serve-yourself at the cafe, hailee. Twenty-four-seven."

"Well, bring it on. Or fro-yo. Do they have fro-yo?"

"We'll see what's in the machines?—"

"Betty!" Kami all but jumped on Cain's assistant as she walked toward them, a box of sushi in hand. "I need to talk to Cain."

"Now?" She blinked hard, then glanced at Reno. "Is it an emergency?"

"No. Well, yes! I need a dog. The kids need dogs. We need a dog shelter or adoption center or something. A dog library. I could check out a dog to walk."

She mouthed, "A dog library..." Then she looked at Reno again. "Has his water broken?"

"Don't look at him!" Kami stomped his foot. Which was a mistake, because a gush of liquid came from him, and he grunted, eyes wide as he stared down at his feet.

"Well, now you've done it, baby," Reno teased.

"Asshole."

Betty chuckled. “Let me call someone to come clean up, and I’ll let Rowan know, too.”

“Thanks. Let’s go wash you up, baby, and then we’ll get ice cream.”

“Can I have ice cream now?” Kami was trying not to panic, everything Rowan the baby expert had ever told him flying right out of his mind.

“Yes.” Reno picked him up, which was quite the habit now, and took him home for a warm shower. Then they walked down to get soft serve. He was panting, having to stop every so many turns of the halls to breathe.

“You’re doing great, baby.”

“Oh, dark chocolate and coconut fro-yo,” he said, moaning happily. “It will be like a Mounds bar.”

“Yum.” Reno got vanilla and then doused it with hot fudge and caramel sauce. Because of course he did.

“This is so yum, you’re right.” He beamed at Reno. “Thanks for not just dumping me in bed and calling in Rowan.”

“He said you would have plenty of time. And I’m with you every step of the way. I know you’ve been uncomfortable.”

“And grumpy,” Kami said by way of apology.

“No more than usual.”

“Oh, asshat. You are a giant jerk.” But he was laughing his ass off.



“I am.” Reno licked his spoon. “But I love you.”

Kami beamed at him. “I love you too.”

They ate their fro-yo, then headed to the medical wing hand in hand. They would meet with Rowan and see where he wanted Kami. To be honest, Kami hoped he could do this at home and not in the medical area.

“Kami!” Rowan met them in the little waiting room, looking a little ruffled, which was unusual for him. He was wearing a nice soft sweater, and pants that, on anyone else, would be sweats. “How are you feeling?”

“Tired from walking. But I had fro-yo.”

“Mmhmm. Mmhmm. So when did your water break?”

“Whenever Betty called you.”

“Are you having pretty hard pains yet?”

“Describe hard pains.” He grinned. “I mean, compared to dying from giving away my heartstone? No. But compared to normal days? Yes.”

“Hmmm.” Rowan came to him, smiling. “May I touch you.”

“Sure.”

Rowan helped him raise his shirt, then put both hands on his belly. He felt a bit of warmth where those hands touched him, and Miranda’s little song became super intense for a moment.

“Mmm.”

Reno glanced at him, then at Rowan. “You keep making those noises.”

“Do you want to go home, Kami? Do this there?”

“I do.” He grinned. “I really like your little medical place, but I want to be in my bed and my bathtub and stuff.”

“Okay. You and Reno go ahead and get you settled. No sense in going to bed or anything, but make sure you can be comfortable. I’m going to wake one of my assistants and gather some supplies.”

“Thanks, Rowan.” He hugged the sweet dragon, because he was so relieved. Gods, he hated being such a wienie, but he hated med bays. He really did.

“Come on, love.”

They wandered back up, taking about an hour to do it. There was no rush, and he had to stop and breathe every five minutes or so.

Reno stayed right there, teasing and talking, breathing with him when he needed it.

“Are you excited?” He was. He imagined that excitement would turn to fear as the pain got worse, but right now, it wasn’t scary. He wasn’t comfortable, that was for sure, but he wasn’t in agony yet.

Lake assured him it was coming.

So did Dex.

Eyv said it was hard to remember, and he was just glad it was over.

Weirdly enough that was actually the scariest answer. He couldn't believe that someone wouldn't remember.

"I am. I'm nervous, and I want you not to hurt, but I do want to meet her, hold her, get to know her." Reno rubbed his back as the contraction deepened. "I never ever believed I would be a soffar, you know? This is such an honor. Thank you."

"Uh-huh." The sweet words deserved attention and all, but he was very busy breathing and trying not to scream.

This was not the place, even though it sure felt like the time for screaming.

Damn.

"Kami?" Now Reno sounded concerned.

"I just couldn't breathe there for a moment." He panted. "I think I need to get home."

"Put your arms around my neck."

Kami did as he was bid, and Reno scooped him up with exquisite gentleness, carrying him the rest of the way down their long hall to their apartments.

"I can feel your muscles clenching," Reno said. "We need Rowan."

"I'm here!" Rowan met them at their door, smiling at him. "All that walking was good, Kami."

"I sure hope so," he gritted out.

“Trust me. It makes things faster.”

They went inside and headed directly to the bedroom. Reno put him down, so gentle, and he found it so hard to let go.

His muscles tightened again, and he yanked Reno to him, his fingers clenching. “Don’t go!”

“Go? Go where?” Reno sat on the bed, holding him close. “Where would I go, hailee?”

Kami didn’t know. He didn’t really care. “I don’t have to be logical right now! I’m having a baby! I don’t know if I want to have a baby!”

Reno blinked at him and tilted his head. “This doesn’t seem like an appropriate time to decide that, Kami.”

“Don’t make me hurt you.” He was scared. “What if I suck? What if I suck at this? What will I do?”

“You’re amazing. I know you are, and so am I.” How could Reno sound so reasonable? It wasn’t fair. Not even a little bit.

“Kids love you.” He did have to agree with that. “But I still panic when someone spits up on me.”

“It’s different when it’s yours. Boone used to puke anytime someone else did. Trust me. I was on dozens of missions with him. But now? He just mops.”

“Ugh. Thanks for the puke-o-rama when I just ate fro-yo and then started with muscle spasms.”

Reno kissed the top of his head. “I live to serve, baby.”

Rowan came in, offered him a smile. “I suggest you find a robe, something open in the front and non-binding. You’ll be more comfortable. Also, if you’d like to get into the tub, you can. Whatever makes you happy right now.”

“Are you staying?”

“Let me peek at your birth line.”

He lifted his shirt and Rowan looked at the line, which was damn near purple and gaping some. “Yes, I think I will. I don’t think this will take too long.”

Kami wasn’t sure if that was terrifying or comforting, if he was honest.

Maybe it was both.

Rowan left the bedroom and Kami stood, stripping off his clothes. Rowan was right; he did feel better, less constrained, and the air felt amazing on his skin. “I don’t want a robe.”

“Okay.” Reno went to the bedroom door. “Rowan, he doesn’t want to put on a robe.”

“Alpha, he’s the one in labor. He can do whatever makes him happy. I’ve seen naked omegas before.” Rowan’s voice was calm, and Kami got the distinct impression that he had said these sorts of things before.

“Oh. Oh good. I’m so glad.” Reno came to him, helping him with the last of his clothes. “Would you like a drink? Juice or cold water? Tea?”

“Do we have any of that passionfruit tea left? I’d take that over ice.”

That would give him enough of a chance to breathe, to be alone. To focus on what was going on in his body.

He really just needed to get his proverbial shit together.

### Chapter

### Twenty-Four

Reno paced with Kami when he paced. He floated in the big tub with Kami when he wanted to be in the tub. And now he held Kami while he lay in the bed.

How long could this take?

Okay, he'd been there for his friends when their hailees had given birth, and he knew how much time could pass in this agony of purgatory.

But he wanted Kami to get through it fast.

Kami was panting, his body draped over his back, belly like a stone against his spine. He could feel it, the tight muscles rolling as they worked to birth this baby.

"Love you." Reno would take it all in a second. In an absolute second.

"Isn't he done yet?" Talon's voice boomed out. "He's taking forever."

"Oh fuck you, asshole!" Kami laughed though. "Who let you in?"

Talon appeared at the door, his eyes covered with his hand. "Rowan. I'm not looking, but you know that I can hear you screaming, right? Get with the program."

"You're an asshole!" Kami bellowed, his belly clenching hard against him. "Reno?"

Reno, something's wrong.”

“Get Rowan,” he snapped, turning to grab Kami and look at his belly. The baby’s head was there, wet and a dark blue. “Fuck. Now!”

“Going. Going.” Talon began to run, and Reno tried to decide whether to panic or not.

“I need to push.”

“You should wait.”

“Shut up! I can’t!”

Well, he guessed he should get ready to catch. “Let me grab a clean towel. I’d like to note that I am not a midwife.”

“You’ll do in a pinch.” Kami’s cheeks were bright red, his hailee clearly in distress.

“I know. I can do this. I’ve done way worse.” But he might die. This was—This was his mate’s insides... And his baby.

“The stone!”

“What?” The last thing he needed right now was for Kami to feel a new stone singing to him.

“The stone! The blue stone. The one I pulled out of the rock. Get Tal to bring it.”

“Talon!”



“Rowan is getting food!”

“I don’t care. Bring the big blue rock from the baby’s room! She’s coming!”

“She’s what?”

He roared, sparks flying as his voice snapped with the command of years and years of running missions. “Miranda is COMING! Big! Blue! Rock!”

“Right on.”

Kami sobbed softly. “Hurry. Please. Tell him to hurry.”

“I’m on it, hailee. You just hold your shit together for me.” He had this. He was a warrior. He would be the first one to hold their daughter and bring her into this world, dammit.

Talon came in, the huge aquamarine in his hands. As soon as he entered the room, the stone began to glow, and Kami screamed.

“Right on. Let’s do this. Talon, hold Kami’s shoulders for me. Take the stone with you.”

“Are you sure?”

He glared over. “You want to catch the baby?”

“Fuck no.”

“Then move!”

“On it.”

Talon rolled Kami up, Reno put his hand under Miranda’s head and waited. “Okay, hailee. Whenever you’re ready, push. We got this.”

Kami looked down at him with a wild grin. “We so do.”

“I love you, Kami.”

“Love you too, braaken.”

“Now. Push.”

Kami pushed, the sound coming from him in this amazing roar, and Reno groaned, wanting to ease his mate’s pain. Needing to.

“That’s good, Kami,” Rowan said. He had come back pretty quickly. “Very good. Breathe for a moment while you’re between contractions. Then we do it again.”

Kami nodded, and Reno wanted to wince and not watch, because pushing hurt his hailee so badly. But Kami pushed, bearing down, his cries making Reno want to smash things.

“That’s it, Kami. We’re so close. Your baby girl dragon is ready to come out and meet you.” Rowan had this way of encouraging and supporting and not making someone want to punch him in the face.

“I need this baby out!” Kami yelled at him, and he nodded, eyes wide.

“I know, love. I know. I—Can I do anything, Rowan?” He couldn’t just yank their daughter out.

“Sing to her.”

“I’m a shit singer.”

“No, asshole, he means in your mind. Like how you can hear her!”

“Right.” Reno put a hand on Kami’s back and hummed, deep in his heart. Come on, little one. Come meet us. We love you so much.

“That’s it, Reno. Kami, you’re doing amazing. Here she comes!” Rowan was so excited, he could tell, and then a blinding light in bright blue surrounded them before the wail of their baby sounded.

“Look at the stone!” Talon yelled, and he glanced at it. It was pulsing with blue light, but Reno was way more concerned with his hailee and baby.

“Kami?”

“I just need to rest.” Kami’s breath started to slow, and he was blinking hard.

“Rowan?”

“Your baby girl is fine, and Kami is strong. We just need to clean him up and let him rest.”

Relief hit him like a hammer blow to the chest. “Thank you.”

“You can help.” Rowan told him what to do, and they cut the cord and got Kami all cleaned up. By the time that was over, Miranda had bonded with her very large, very blue stone. It matched her scales.

“Look at her, love,” Reno said when Rowan handed him Miranda. “Look what you did.”

Kami opened his eyes, smiling at them. “She’s gorgeous. She’s blue.”

“Uh-huh. Something you want to tell me?” Reno teased.

“Ask Boone and Durango,” Kami shot back.

“Evil hailee.” He moved around so he could prop Kami up and put Miranda in his arms. “You did it.”

“We did it, braaken. Together.”

“We’re good that way,” Reno murmured.

“The best together.” Kami tilted his face up for a kiss. “Will you put her down when she’s ready, babe? I’m so tired.”

“I’ll keep her safe. Talon wants to feed her.”

“Of course.” Kami’s eyes drifted shut. “He’s a good...guy...”

He fell asleep, and for a long while, Reno just sat there, holding all that was most precious to him in his arms. Then Miranda started to fuss.

And then it was time for him to dad up and feed that baby.

### Chapter

### Twenty-Five

“Love? Where are you going?”

“Hmmm?” Kami tried for vague and possibly innocent, both of which he was bad at. He carried wee Miranda in a sling across his chest, and he clutched a bag of snacks, water, and formula in his hand.

“Um...”

Reno blocked his way, leaning in the kitchen doorway, arms crossed over his wide chest. “You’re not thinking of going into the cave, are you?”

“What? No.” He wagged his eyebrows. “I was just going to?”

Their front door banged open. “Kami!” Talon bellowed. “Come on! We have to get out of here before Reno... Whoops.” Talon skidded to a stop, looking peeved. “Sorry, my friend.”

“See, this is how it is. I come home early to spend time with my hailee and our new baby, and he’s creeping off to go caving with his best friend.”

Kami rolled his eyes. “Well, you were with your best friends beating the stuffing out of them.” Reno had needed a good workout, had needed to get out of the house, which smelled like spit up and poop and go whack things and then eat meat.

Looked like Reno had been stood up for the meat.

So he was home for lunch. Yay! But then he knew what Kami was up to. Boo.

“Kami. Hailee, you cannot take the baby caving.”

He went for fluttering his eyelashes. “Why not?”

“Uh...spelunking is bad for babies?”

“Who says? Back me up, Talon.”

He noticed Talon kept his mouth shut.

“She’s made for it. She wants to go. Ask her.”

Reno stared at him, eyebrows almost to his hairline. This wasn’t working.

“They’re calling to me, braaken. The stones need to be drawn out. There’s a whole vein of it. I know it.”

“What does Cain say?”

Kami fastened Reno with a glare. “The caves aren’t Cain’s to say boo about anymore. They’re mine. Ask me, I’ll tell you. Your daughter wants to see the caves.”

“She does? Do you want to see the caves, little one?” She reached out, flailing for her father. It was absolutely unnatural how much she loved that man. Just unnatural.

“There’s a huge vein of aquamarine down there. Reno, I know there is. We’ve just got to get it out.”

Reno shook his head, but Kami knew that it was just begging to be explored down there. He could hear it begging.

“Oh, hailee. What am I going to do with you?”

“We can make sure that we’re safe. You can even come with us,” he offered.

Reno frowned. “We go together. When I say stop, we stop and you—” He turned and glared at Talon. “Do not go behind my back, man.”

“He’s kind of my boss.”

“Not in this. If the baby is involved, I’m the boss.”

Kami blinked at Reno. “You?”

“Yes, because you’re addicted to this whole stone thing, so I get to win.”

Kami rolled his eyes, but his mate was being reasonable, and he was getting to go. “Fine. We’ll all go. I’ll stop when you say stop. But you hold the baby.”

Reno’s eyes lit up, and he smiled, attention on Miranda. “Anytime. I would carry you both. Forever.”

Gemstones.

A best friend.

A happy baby.

And a braaken that promised forever.

What more could a stone singer, a pall'hakh want?

End