



The Dragon, the Gazelle, and their Unicorn Omega

(Omegas of Animals: SD #11)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: One-night stands never become more...except when they do.

Alpha dragon shifter Magnus likes the finer things in life: designer suits, fancy watches, and real estate across the nation. He's living his best life. If only his dragon felt the same. He spends his days far too close to the surface for Magnus' liking and, if he doesn't figure out why, he's afraid he's going to lose control of his beast completely.

Alpha gazelle shifter Ayelet loves the ocean and, when a position in his company opens up near San Diego, he immediately applies. What could be better than daily trips to the beach? Having someone to go with him, that's what. Why does his mind keep wandering back to a one-night stand with a hottie dragon three years ago?

Omega unicorn shifter Harbor travels around the country in his converted van. Van life might not be for everyone, but it's working out okay for him. With no herd, it's not like he has a place to call home.

One night at Animals SD, when all three of them are in the same place for the first time, changes everything.

Total Pages (Source): 25

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Magnus

James, my business partner on one of the biggest financial deals of our lives, leaned over to me and whispered, “Hey, Magnus, we’re all going to the hotel bar afterward. You coming?”

The meeting, which had run late, was nearly over. We’d been crunching numbers all day. My dragon was restless, but all I really wanted to do was go back to my room, have a hot shower, and prepare for tomorrow morning’s final meetings. We had a flight home to catch in the afternoon.

My dragon nudged me hard. It was like being possessed. I heard myself say, “Sure. I’ll come.”

Ugh. That meant I’d have to be on a bit longer tonight. In full play mode. Drinking and making sure everyone saw the powerful alpha inside me, how put-together I was, how strong and successful.

I was those things. And sure, I loved the nightlife. But this day had kept me on my toes. My eyes were burning, my back stiff. I usually planned my recreation for when I was between deals, or on weekends. I liked to have a clear mind for my work.

“Great.” James packed his laptop away. He looked up at the room. “Folks, are we done here for the night?”

He was answered by a lot of yeses.

The people in the meeting room dispersed. When we stood, our assistants and several others from the company we were contracting with gathered around. They'd already planned drinks? Why was I the last to know?

I leaned over to James. "You could have told me sooner."

"Sorry. Forgot until just now. And sometimes when you're in work mode you can get a little, um, stuffy."

I glared at him. "What the?"

"You know what I mean."

"Not sure I do." Just as I thought maybe I'd change my mind and leave James dangling, my dragon nudged hard, as if he'd just smacked his tail against my insides. It was all mental, but the jolt of his attempts at control affected my physical body. He wanted me to go, and that was that.

I straightened my tie and ran one hand over the side of my head to make sure my hair was still in place. Stuffy indeed!

James clapped me on the shoulder and laughed. "No need to preen. You look great, as always. I'm glad you're coming. Let's go."

James had a way of making compliments sound like insults, but he was one of the best accountants I'd ever met. I might have wanted to shake him a time or two, but our team worked well together, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

My eyes adjusted well to the softer lights of the bar. Being under fluorescents all day sucked. Now, soft music played, glassware clinked, and people laughed. I took my time looking around the place, at the clientele. A tickle edged the back of my neck.

What could that be?

Wait.

Unusual. My dragon didn't talk much. But, when he wanted something, he got his way. And right now, he was determined.

I grabbed a martini and joined my cohorts at a table by the entrance. Someone had already ordered what looked like every appetizer on the menu for the group. Probably James. I'd go over the business expenses with him after the trip, but I didn't actually care about the money. It was about being informed. We could afford this.

Conversations devolved to jokes and laughter. My body relaxed. I joined in with all the talk, when my dragon forced his presence again. What I was about to say dropped from my mind, I forgot about the people at the table, and my gaze slid to the entrance. A pink filter fell into place. I watched through dragon eyes now.

The entrance was empty.

What was going on?

Wait.

The sound of my dragon's voice in my mind was like a deep, echoing gong.

Wait for what? There was no one else coming in at the moment. Nothing happening.

James kicked me under the table. I turned toward him and pretended to laugh at a joke I hadn't heard. I picked up a tortilla chip and dipped it in some guacamole, crunched slowly.

“Good choice,” I said.

“Here.” He shoved another dish at me. “Try the hot wings.”

I nodded but instead took a sip of my martini, peering again at the entrance, everything still pink-toned, dragon on alert.

A group of three walked up to the entrance. Two women, one man. I almost glanced away, but a flash of green in the man’s eyes caught my attention. Shifter.

Then, like an alpha in a rut, I lifted my chin and sniffed the air. To humans, it meant nothing. But, to shifters, it was a blatant display. We dragons were trained from an early age not to do it unless we meant business.

I breathed in wild sweet grass, sage, and a hint of the beach. A deer, maybe? No. A gazelle.

The shifter turned and met my eyes. His head tilted. One side of his mouth quirked up.

The two women on either side of him went ahead into the bar and got seats at the counter.

The man held my gaze for longer than merely a curious moment. Finally, he turned to join his friends, showing me the nice way he filled out his jeans.

His casual attire enhanced his natural good looks. His pullover shirt had the sleeves rucked up to the elbows, revealing graceful but strong forearms. Thick locks of dark hair hung nearly in his eyes.

I hung out at the table a little longer to be polite then quietly excused myself. Without

looking back, I made my way to the bar. This was what my dragon had sensed all the way from the upstairs meeting room? I had to admit he had good taste.

The man's female friends were sitting close together and looked to be having an intense conversation. I sat at the empty stool next to his.

He didn't turn right away. Of course, he sensed me. I stared straight ahead, watching the bartender make his way over to us. Finally, the shifter swiveled to face me.

"Hello."

His voice danced through my blood.

"Hello."

The quirk of a smile returned to his lips. "Buy me a drink?"

"All you want."

"Excellent. Because it's been a long day, and I could use a drink. Or three."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Let's get you a drink right away."

I waved at the bartender, and he ordered a mai tai to start.

"My name's Ayelet." He held out his hand to me.

"Magnus." I took his hand in mine and rubbed the back of it with my thumb. I wasn't slow. I knew what was happening between us.

He grinned. "Nice to meet you."

“Why was your day so long?”

He shrugged. “Meetings.” He took a long drink, his lips glistening. And distracting. “It’s no big deal. A few disagreements that will be resolved tomorrow.”

As we talked, it was as if I’d known the guy for years. The pink tinge did not quite leave my vision. My dragon had a definite interest, as well.

I plied him with liquor, but only because he loved it. He was already amenable. He held my gaze. Our knees bumped. He touched my thigh.

Finally, I blurted, “I’m only visiting. Leaving tomorrow.”

“And?” he prompted.

This felt like something bigger than a one-night stand, but it was all I could offer for now. “Would you like to come back to my room with me?”

“If you don’t mind me being an alpha.”

“I don’t mind. Do you mind?”

He leaned in, words soft. “I love omegas. But I love to bottom for alphas, too.”

That was all it took. I settled the tab, hooked arms with Ayelet as he said goodbye to his friends, and tapped James on the way out.

James looked up, one eyebrow raised. “See ya tomorrow?”

“Yep.”

“Have a good night.”

“I intend to.”

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Ayelet

I went with him.

Not my normal *modus operandi*, but how could I help myself? This man, this dragon's magnetism called to me. My gazelle was much louder and more eager than he'd ever been, although I knew he was not my mate. But there was no rule that said I could not sleep with him. If I wanted. My past experiences had me choosing not to have one-night stands anymore, but I couldn't have stopped myself if I tried.

And I didn't try.

Not at all.

I followed him in my own car to his hotel and into valet parking. There was probably an alternative, but it looked like the kind of fancy building where nobody parked their own cars, or, if they did, they had assigned spaces. Handing the keys to my leased car to the attendant, I tried to act as if I did it every day, but the guy's steady scrutiny made me think he was judging me and finding me less than wealthy.

Fair enough. But since I'd never see any of these people again, what difference did it make? Magnus and I strolled casually across the lobby, but once the elevator doors slid closed, we fell upon each other with the hunger that had been building since we first set eyes upon each other. The dragon's fire came out in other ways than the shifted creature's flames.

His mouth held banked heat as his lips closed over mine, and I glided my hands under

his shirt, wanting more of him, wanting to feel his skin and know if it was hotter too. I couldn't tell, exactly, but it certainly set me alight. I moaned, parting my lips and licking at the seam of his until he parted them and let me in.

Stroking the inside of his mouth, I tasted the drink he'd had at the club and a faint hint of smoke. Could he produce flame in this form? And if so, should I be concerned?

No...concern was left behind at the door. My non-mate was stepping out of the elevator. When did the doors open? And why did I have so many questions tonight? This was a single night with someone. I already knew more about him than others I had similar experiences with and while that should be waving a red flag, I brushed it aside. Nothing was making me give up this night. Tomorrow, we'd both be gone and that would be fine.

I followed Magnus into the biggest hotel suite I'd ever seen. Not that I had a whole lot of experience but when I traveled for business, my company put me up in nice places. This one seemed to take up half the top floor of the hotel and offered stunning views from floor-to-ceiling windows.

But I didn't look at them long because he took my hand and towed me into a bedroom with a king-sized bed. Clothing fell to the floor around us so fast it was almost like it happened on its own, but of course it did not. I wanted to be with this man, and while I preferred to top omegas, his energy was so strong, I had been very serious about bottoming.

Magnus unbuttoned my slacks and pulled them down, bringing my underwear with them before falling to his knees in front of me. Watching my face the whole time, he grasped my eager, throbbing cock and brought it to his lips, rubbed it over them. "I have to taste you."

And then he did, and my eyes rolled back at that extra heat I'd detected when he kissed me. It was probably only a degree or two higher than normal, but that made all the difference. I braced my hands on his shoulders, breathing harsh, and choking out encouragement as he took me deep in his throat. "Yes, please, like that. Ohhh."

I tried to shuffle back a little, wanting to brace my legs on the bed, but the dragon wrapped his arms around my thighs and held me in place, sucking, licking, and biting until my balls pulled tight and my cum poured down his throat. He swallowed, taking it all and then leaned back and looked up at me again, a pearlescent droplet of cum on his lip.

So. Hot.

Then the fierce dragon I would never see again after tonight turned me to face the bed and laid his palm on my back, urging me into bending over the edge and then stepping back. I heard his clothes, what remained of them, hit the floor then the snap of the cap of a bottle of lube. Such a distinctive sound but one I'd only heard a couple of times.

With an omega, they brought their own lubrication. This dragon had lube? He was prepared to fuck an alpha.

Me. I was the alpha.

Then slick fingers prodded at my butthole, working inside and stretching me, preparing me for him. "Thank you, dragon. I haven't done this very many times and I might be too tight."

"I like tight. And I have to apologize in advance if I'm too... Well, I'll be careful."

Oh no. What did I get myself into? I glanced over my shoulder and felt the blood

leave my face. That monster was going inside me? My not-quite-virgin asshole quivered.

“Shhh. I will make it so good for you, Ayelet. Just relax.”

Easy for him to say. I was the one about to be skewered.

“Sure. It’s fine.” If I didn’t die from pleasure or being split in two.

And then his fingers were gone, replaced by the broad head of his cock.

“Press down, Ayelet. It will help me get in.”

I tried to do what he said, but nerves were getting the best of me, and then, despite myself, he was working his way past the muscles at the entrance and I let out a cry.

“Am I hurting you?” His voice was breaking, and he held still, unmoving, waiting for my answer.

“Yes, but don’t stop. Ever.”

“I’ll do my best.” He retreated until only the head remained then he thrust forward again. And again. Speeding up. His drives were rubbing my cock against the bedding and the impossible happened. I soiled the sheets with a second orgasm right before he spurted his hot juices into my body.

He did not knot, not in an alpha, but we still lay together, panting and regaining our ability to breathe.

“Can you stay the night?” he asked.

“Only until about five because I have a flight to catch.”

“Then we’ll have to make this night count.”

Yes, we did. And then I left and boarded my flight and flew away sad but practical. We weren’t mates. It was just a great lust-filled night with a nice guy.

No more than that.

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Harbor

It had been a long day at work. We were stress testing a new system, and it didn't actually go that well, but by the time I left, we were at a good stopping point. We still had a month to get it up and fully functional, and staying there longer wouldn't do any of us any good.

There was just enough time to grab a sub at my favorite sandwich shop before they closed, which was another factor in calling it quits. Not that I'd confess that part to my boss. My plan was to go home, eat my sandwich while watching something silly on TV, more as background noise than entertainment, and then go to bed.

I should've known better than to make plans. Instead, when I arrived at the door, there was a notice taped to it. My landlord gave out "important" information this way. He could email them like a normal person, but no, he liked to tape them to the door.

The first time was a reminder that we needed to move our cars when it snowed. Mind you, he put that one up in August for reasons I still didn't understand. The second time was to let us know they were switching lawn services, another thing that didn't really impact my life. So, when I saw this one, I figured it was more of the same.

Only as I unfolded it, I saw it was anything but.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me." I pushed the door open and closed it behind me a little too loudly. My landlord was raising my rent—not by \$100 a month for my next lease cycle like he had in past years. No, he was raising it by 50 percent. If I crunched the numbers, my guess was I could afford it, but why? Why would I stay in

a studio apartment and pay that much more when I could find something else?

Only, as I searched the local ads, I really couldn't find anything else to even look at. All of the apartments had gone up exponentially. I had money saved in the hope of someday putting a down payment on a house. I could swing it to go up a tier in housing, as it were, but I hated the thought of that. I hated the thought of burning my cash just to keep my status quo, or possibly get a separate bedroom instead of studio fun.

Giving up, I shut my computer down, not wanting to think anything more about it. I had until the end of the month to decide, and then one more month after that before the change took place. I was just gonna punt this down the road and deal with it later.

I flicked on the television, not really paying attention to what was on, and finally got to my dinner. It was a steak-and-cheese sub. When I bought it, it was probably delicious, but now it was tepid, and the bread was gummy. Totally my fault—I was the one who had the bright idea to look for houses first.

When I finally paid attention to what was on the screen, what was it? Housing shows. It seemed to be in the cards tonight.

Could I have turned it off? Found something else to watch? Absolutely. But I didn't. I watched it like a train wreck.

The first show was about people moving internationally, taking their good salaries and finding extremely high-end living elsewhere. That felt kind of icky to me, and I didn't really understand the appeal. But the second show was fun—it was about someone who went around the country to find unusual homes. There was a house shaped like a mushroom, one built into the side of a hill that looked more like a hobbit house than a modern one, and even a person who lived in a cave they had converted into a home.

The next show really caught my attention. It was all about people living in their vehicles—by choice. It featured people who were taking vans that cost as much as houses in some parts of the country and converting them into homes to travel around in. That wasn't for me. It seemed to me that a better idea than spending nearly \$100,000 for a home on wheels would be to either get a camper, which was already done, or buy a home with land.

But it got me thinking... What about an old minivan? Could that be converted? Those were significantly cheaper, and I wouldn't need much by way of amenities. Not really. Or a ton of space. It wasn't like I had a huge place now.

Being a unicorn, there was a certain appeal to that style of life. If I were parked out in the woods, I could shift and enjoy the space. My beast wouldn't feel trapped, surrounded by concrete. And, of course, there was my career. I was lucky in that my job could, in theory, be fully remote. The more I thought about it, the more I saw this as not only a possibility but also an adventure. It had been a long time since I'd been on one of those.

Instead of going to sleep like I had planned, I went down a rabbit hole—a rabbit hole that left me with a list of car dealers to visit the next morning. Ones with some really good deals on some minivans whose interiors had seen better days. Kids with drink boxes and snacks might have ruined the seating, but if I was gonna take it out anyway... Maybe, just maybe, that would be a better way to go than signing my next lease.

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Magnus

I plopped my black card down on the stack of designer suits, eyeing the jewelry case at the last minute. My dragon could not resist more gold for the hoard. My safe deposit boxes were full, but he nudged me into another watch and diamond ring.

When was enough enough?

He had been close to the surface and bossy for several months. I took him out more often to the private woods my clutch owned. It didn't help. He'd stretch his wings for about five minutes then hang out on his favorite craggy perch and stare toward the west for hours. Once, he flew too far out of the shifter safety range. I'd yelled in our mind to turn back six or eight times before he circled, landing in a clearing and forcing me to walk, naked, back to the changing booth where I'd left my clothes.

"The clutch could imprison us if they found out how far you flew," I'd muttered. "What did you think you were doing?"

Day after day, his constant surfacing presence affected my sleep. I got headaches when I'd never suffered them before. I worried things might get worse, that he might try to force shifts at inappropriate moments. Shifters who could not control their inner beasts to the point of endangering the secrecy of their communities and other inappropriate behavior could be hospitalized or, worse, caged.

Today, I thought a bit of shopping would take the edge off both of us. When I got my packages home to my penthouse suite, I dumped everything on my bed. It was all just stuff. How many more suits did I need? How many more watches?

I walked into my living room. The huge windows overlooked the city which was just lighting up for the night. So many colored lights mixed to create an aurora of beauty I was privileged to see. I loved it.

I grabbed a wineglass and filled it to nearly overflowing. As I sat on my couch to appreciate all that I had, the inner restlessness continued.

I took a few gulps. It was the finest vintage. I had no complaints. Yet, discontent surged.

“What is it?” I asked.

Nothing.

If only he would communicate more. I knew shifters who had entire telepathic conversations with their inner dragons. Not me.

As the last of the daylight slipped away to the west, I leaned back on my couch and closed my eyes. Everything. I had everything.

Well, that wasn't exactly true. I didn't have a mate.

As soon as the word mate passed through my mind, I saw an image of Ayelet. The gazelle. It had been three years since our one-night stand. I'd had many since but nothing long-term. He was the one I never forgot.

The one.

My dragon came suddenly awake. I opened my eyes to pink dragon vision.

“Maybe,” I said to my dragon. “He was a keeper. But the one? I thought we were

waiting for our omega to show up some day?”

Go back.

“Go back where?”

Go back.

Ayelet had been visiting San Diego just like I had the night of our beautiful encounter. Going back made no sense. He lived in New Mexico. He wouldn't be in San Diego, and I had no idea how to contact him.

I ordered a steak dinner and turned on a movie. The pink filter on my vision would not go away. I couldn't concentrate on the movie. I kept reliving images of my night with Ayelet until I was aroused and frustrated.

That night, I dreamed of San Diego. It was so vivid, I woke to the scent of the salty Pacific lingering in the room. The downtown skyline over the harbor flashed in my mind. Images of jacaranda, eucalyptus, and palm swayed before my eyes.

I sat up and looked at my bedside clock. Five a.m. Too early to start the day. But then again, who did I have to answer to but myself? I was in a position to do as I pleased. Work as much as I wanted. Live where I wished.

San Diego had been wonderful. It was where I'd left a crucial memory, a gazelle shifter I could not forget. Why not go there? I could rent a hotel penthouse suite and see where that path led. At the very least, it might appease my dragon and stop the headaches.

It was just before dawn when I booked my flight. The pressure from my dragon immediately eased.

I didn't understand it, nor did I question it, but I had a knack for picking the winners. My dragon instinct told me when to buy and when to sell. Impulse action had been the very cornerstone of why I was successful in investment and grew my hoard so quickly. Why should my personal life be different?

If I had fantastic luck with money, it was not so with my love life. All this time, I'd been waiting for my mate to come to me instead of going out and finding him for myself. That wasn't the way my powers—if instinct could be called that—worked.

I spent a couple of hours packing. I needed only the essentials from my penthouse. Anything else I could buy in San Diego.

Then I called a car to take me to the airport. On the way, I called James.

"I'm going to San Diego for about a month."

"When?"

"Today."

"What?"

"It's no big deal. We can work long-distance," I said. "I can look for more investments."

"True. But this is a bombshell. Why San Diego? And why didn't you let me know before now? I would have thrown you an awesome bon voyage party."

"It's something I have to do, and it can't wait."

"What about your penthouse?" he asked.

“What about it?”

“Are you subleasing it?”

“No. I’ll be back.”

“But why San Diego?”

“It’s a beautiful place. Why not San Diego?”

He grumbled and hummed “Can’t fault that logic. You’re right that real estate there is prime. We’ve done some great deals and own some wonderful properties out there. That huge condo complex we went in on three years ago with Hiller Investments is paying huge and has doubled in value.”

That was the very deal we’d made the night I’d met Ayelet. The fact that he brought it up right this moment sealed my determination.

“I’ll call when I get there and settled.”

“Hell, yeah. I’d love to make some more investments out West.”

No doubts now. This was the right move for me.

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Ayelet

Living on the plains with my herd was, to all appearances, ideal. Not only the deer and the antelope play there, but the higher slopes were less populated by the other gazelles who didn't love the cold. As shifters, we were a unique version of the animal, and our winter coats and sturdy hooves allowed us to enjoy an area other gazelles avoided. But we were close enough that a human seeing us would not be surprised, and our resemblance to a very rare species kept us from being hunted.

If a poacher tried, they would find themselves facing an “animal” more than capable of handling the situation—and they would never be seen again. If it happened... It was paradise for our herd there, both in two- and four-legged form. Fully content, everyone went about their lives, with few complaints.

Except me.

Unlike my family and other herd mates, I was not fond of the land where I was born. Oh, I could appreciate the beauty and freedom for shifting. But after a trip a few years ago, a sense of discontent colored my world. Until then, I'd have said I was fine. I liked my job, the small house on our lands I'd fixed up myself, my family and friends... I never waxed rhapsodic as many did, but it was...yeah. Fine.

When I made a business trip to San Diego, I caught my first glimpse of the ocean. Somehow, I'd always pictured the Pacific as blue. Like the Mediterranean or the Bahamas. Even Florida... But in fact, as we flew in to land, we looped out over the ocean. A green ocean, foaming white along the shore. Sailboats and all sorts of watercraft from Jet Skis to an aircraft carrier dotted the water below, and I pressed

my face to the window. Enchanted. I disembarked and even before checking into my hotel took an Uber to the beach. I wanted to touch the sand, feel the waves curling around my feet. Bask in the warm sunlight. I never wanted to leave.

And that was before I had a one-night stand with a hottie dragon.

But my life lay in New Mexico, and when I finished my meetings at the local office, I boarded another plane and returned home. It was a fantasy, living near the ocean. And a brief encounter was just that. So, why had I been unable to fully settle in for three years? Going through the motions, I did what I needed to do, but whatever peace I'd found before my trip was gone.

And then, out of the blue, I learned of an opening in the San Diego office where I'd attended those meetings. I had inquired since my return but was told they almost never had any availability since it was the most popular location in the entire company. The building had a view of my beloved ocean and was close enough to walk to the beach on a lunch break, something I had done every day of my last visit.

Heart pounding, I dove into the company website and found the page to apply for inhouse transfers. I was not going to be the only one who wanted this job, for sure, and the sooner I got my name in, the better. My hands shook as I typed and I had to back up to make corrections more than once. Overreaction in the extreme. Especially since my odds of being chosen probably weren't great.

But my gazelle was on board and prancing to make the move. He didn't really understand about jobs and housing and income that I was so concerned about. He also didn't know why he couldn't gallop on the beach. Maybe late at night in the winter when it was very foggy it might be possible. We'd have to see.

If I got the job. I couldn't get ahead of myself on that. I was 100 percent qualified, but how many others with seniority over me also were? No way of knowing in a

company as big as ours. I would have to cross my fingers and hope for the best.

But not while typing! Crossed fingers would only slow me down.

Considering it was an intercompany situation, the application and other forms I had to fill out were quite extensive, but I didn't want to miss a line to type or a box to check. I began to wonder if they wouldn't use the updated information against me in some way. Then shrugged that off. It was essentially the full application I'd filled out, with a little extra about my current job there. At the end, they informed the applicant—me—that they would be speaking to their supervisor.

In some cases that might be an issue, but mine was a nice laid-back guy with two years to retirement, and as soon as I hit "submit," I called Jerry up to inform him. Why let him be blindsided? I wouldn't like that in his shoes.

"Hi, Ayelet. Everything all right?"

Although Jerry was a sloth shifter, he was anything but lazy, and we were always allowed to call him, but a glance at the clock showed it was almost eleven. Even the nicest boss would not love being called at that time.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't realize how late it had gotten. We can talk in the morning."

"You're not leaving us, are you?"

Was I? "Um, not exactly. I-I—"

"It's an hour past my bedtime, son. Just tell me what the problem is so we can solve it." This man was above and beyond. If I didn't want to get back to the coast so badly, I'd never leave. But then he'd be retiring soon, and who knew who would take his place.

“I’m applying for a transfer to San Diego, and since they will speak to you about me, I wanted to give you a heads-up.”

Silence.

More silence.

I squirmed. “Jerry? Are you mad?”

“No, but I’ve thought for a while that I’d be recommending you for my job when I retire.”

Three years ago, I’d have done backflips. “That’s quite a compliment.”

“Does it change your mind?”

“No.”

“You didn’t even have to think.” He sighed. “Well, you can count on a great recommendation from me, even if I will regret having to finish my career without your good work.”

My throat tightened. Jerry had been a good boss to me and all of us in his department. “I probably won’t get it, but if I do, I’ll miss working with you, too.”

“You’ll get it. If it’s what you need, I’ll see to it. You’ve always given your best to the company. Now, this old man needs his sleep, so I’ll say good night.”

“Night, Jerry.” I disconnected the call. Could he really see to it that I got the position? I didn’t want to get my hopes up. There would be nothing better than daily trips to the beach. So why did I keep picturing the hottie dragon from three years ago at my side?

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:09 pm

Harbor

It was still hard to believe I actually did it. I went and bought a beat-up old minivan and did some DIY conversions to make it my home. And then, a little over a month ago, I packed everything I owned inside of it and drove away from my apartment and the city that had been my home.

Driving around the country, working in random state parks, national parks, and even parking lots was a far easier adjustment than I thought it would be. My unicorn took to the life easily and, since I still had my job, there wasn't the stress of money.

On super-fancy days, I stayed at truck stops, and I enjoyed it. There were hot showers, good food, and lots of company. This new life? It was working.

I hadn't realized how tied down my beast had felt being in the city, how much he longed for this freedom. We'd never been part of a herd, and I never felt the loss of being away from our kind, or shifters in general. Sure, there were shifters in the city, but there had been none at my company nor in my apartment building, and those were the people I interacted with on a regular basis.

It was funny, but in a way, this new adventure showed me that there was something missing in my life, and that my beast had just been compensating for it, helping me keep things in line. I wasn't altogether clear on what that missing component was, but every day, I felt like I was getting closer to finding it.

My boss hadn't been too excited when I told him I was going fully remote. He said he was worried I wouldn't be as available and possibly wouldn't get as much work done.

Neither of those had been a concern of mine, and I'd proved myself many times over already.

I ended up getting exactly the same amount of work done, only in less time—not that I let my boss in on the less-time part. I was on salary and didn't want him to find an excuse to put more on my plate just because he could.

Looking back, I hadn't realized how many hours were lost each week to people stopping by my desk on their way to grab a cup of coffee or to get something off the printer. But now that I didn't have any of that distraction, I was getting a ton done quickly. And as long as I kept my phone and computer on, I was available during the times they needed, even if I wasn't strictly working.

The first couple of weeks were a big learning curve—figuring out the best places to park, the best spots for a more camping-type environment, and how to keep the temperature inside the van where I wanted it, along with making sure I had the cell service I needed. I managed, but it took a great deal out of me to do so.

But after that adjustment period, it was easy peasy, and, better than that, it was fun. I loved that my unicorn was able to run and run and run multiple times a week, instead of once, maybe twice a month. I loved that I was constantly encountering new people without the pressure of forming intentional bonds with them. I wasn't meeting a neighbor whom I had to be cautious around because I might be living near them for the next two, three, or five years. I could shoot the breeze with someone camping near where I parked and call it good. There was a certain freedom in that, which I enjoyed.

There was also an undercurrent of sadness though. And that sucked. Loneliness was always right there, close to the surface. Because at the end of the day, when I shut the van doors and covered the windows, it was just me. There was no one else.

I tried not to think about that too much as I wandered the country. I had no real plan as far as where I would end up. The only guide I used was the cellular service map, knowing that if I was without reception during the workweek, my boss could take back my remote status, and I'd be right where I was a few months earlier, looking at an expensive rent and depleting savings.

A few months in, I ended up on the West Coast. It hadn't been a goal, just how it worked out. I pulled into San Diego and went straight toward the beach. I'd never been to this side of the country or seen the Pacific Ocean. I assumed it would be the equivalent of the Atlantic only on the other side of the country. And in a way, it was, but it was also a 1,000 percent different.

When I opened the door after parking at the beach, the scent of the salty air tickled my nose, and I knew I'd be staying here longer than I had at the last few places. There was so much to do, so much to explore, so much to soak in.

My unicorn instantly liked it here. He was calm, although he did show me his desire to run along the sandy beaches—not that I saw how that would be possible. He hardly blended in, and the beaches were far from vacant. I promised him I'd try and I would. But not today.

As I sat on a rock and used my phone to try to figure out the best place to park for the night, I realized how much this journey had changed me already. Would San Diego change me too? Only time would tell. And now that my home was on wheels, I had all the time in the world.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:09 pm

Magnus

My penthouse suite came with the most comfortable couch. I collapsed on it, ready to end the day.

I had been in San Diego five days and had yet to find a moment to relax. I'd been looking at apartment complexes, office buildings, and other places to invest in. Work never ended for me.

The soft, brushed-leather couch cushioned my body. I closed my eyes and dozed.

At that moment, my phone chimed. I checked the name. James. He'd been bugging me all day for investment updates. I let it go to voicemail.

I needed time off. A little recreation. My dragon hadn't flown in a week. If I didn't take care of him, there was no predicting what he might do.

After a short, refreshing nap, I showered and put on my flashiest suit, the gray wool with a bright-pink tie. It was Friday. Time to dive into the San Diego nightlife and hopefully make an impression.

But first, dragon-care.

I got into my rental, a sleek, black BMW, and headed west toward the beach.

When I pulled down the private road specified in the directions, I came to a gate with a guard office. I rolled down my window, and the tang of the shore wafted in.

“Hey there, sir. This is private property.”

“I know. I have ID.”

He looked everything over, nodding, then handed me back my cards. He leaned in the window and said, “Follow the road half a mile in. It curves around the cliffs, and you’ll find parking. The cliffs and the inlet create privacy. Don’t fly beyond those boundaries.”

“Got it. Thank you.”

I pulled into a sandy parking space. Two other cars took up spaces nearby, but no people were within sight.

I got out and gazed past the shoreline to the little bay and the vast ocean beyond. It looked wide open, empty. But was the security decent? I was used to thick woods and private airspace.

I spotted several changing benches along a low wall. Where were the lockable booths?

My gold rings flashed. My suit and sand didn’t mix. I was distinctly out of place here. What had I been thinking?

Well, my car would have to become my locker.

My dragon was already rustling, but no pink vision yet.

“What, not interested?” I said, shouldering out of my jacket.

Not a peep.

I collected all my jewelry and hid it in the glove compartment. It probably wasn't the wisest move. That was the first place any thief would look.

When I finished undressing, I grabbed a towel and wrapped it around my waist. I walked to one of the benches, removed the towel, and neatly folded it. Beyond, the shore was wide and long. Perfect for dragon takeoffs and landings.

I stood between the shore and the wall, sand squishing between my toes, and waited. My dragon did nothing.

I stretched out my arms. "Well?" It was as if I was asking the sunset and the universe an all-encompassing question.

Finally, the tickles and the surge washed over me. My vision turned pink with gold at the edges. The sea was quiet here. Seagulls called overhead but flew fast away as soon as we unfurled our wings.

We only had to run a few steps before the sharp sea air lifted us and we soared.

I let go completely, the wind rushing against armored scales and exposed leathery skin. We circled the inlet once, brushing our claws in the tiny waves, then came to land minutes later just up the beach. Immediately, I was my human self, naked on the sand.

That was it? One circle?

I made my way to the bench, wrapping my towel about my waist as two dolphins leapt up, flipped together, and swam to shore. Two naked male humans emerged from the water.

They grabbed towels they'd left on a blanket by the shoreline then came toward the

parking lot.

“Hello,” one said as he passed by.

The other stopped. “We saw you. Magnificent.”

“Thanks.”

“Haven’t seen you around here before.”

“First time. I just moved here.”

“Welcome to San Diego. I’m Akamu. My husband is Chris.”

“Magnus. Nice to meet you.” We shook hands.

Together, we walked to the lot. The sky was red on the horizon, midnight-blue overhead.

“This is a great place to shift. I’m glad you found it,” Akamu said. His husband was already putting the blanket away and getting dressed behind their car.

“Yeah, me, too. It’s beautiful. I figure I’ll be checking out the downtown area next.”

“Hmm, yeah. There are some shifter bars, but the real go-to place is Animals.”

“Animals?”

“There’s nothing like it for shifters in all of San Diego. It’s a nightclub with great music and food, plus a private place to shift out back. If you’re looking to meet others like us, it’s the central hangout. Safe. Secure. And fun. Look it up on the shifter web.”

“I will. Thanks again.”

They drove off before I finished dressing.

When I got into the front seat, I grabbed my phone and switched to the shifter web. I spoke aloud. “Animals.”

Up popped the website and easy directions. My dragon-vision returned full force.

“So, that’s where you want to go?”

Animals.

“You know it? Have you been going out behind my back?”

A huge push had me fearing he was going to start to shift right there in the front seat.

Animals.

“Fine. Keep your cool. We’ll start there.”

Traffic wasn’t too terrible, and I pulled up to Animals not long after their website said they opened. The lot was packed, so I used their valet parking. Despite a line, I got in fairly quickly.

Dragon-vision made everything soft and pretty. So many mixed scents filled the air, it was overwhelming. When in doubt, always start with a drink. I went to the bar and ordered.

Live music played from a good-sized stage. People danced. Laughed. Booths lined the walls, all taken.

Drink in hand, I explored. My dragon eagerly nudged me this way and that. The pink haze in my eyes never went away. I realized it right then—this was the place he had chosen. He was hunting.

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Ayelet

Jerry came through. My former supervisor's word had been the factor that pushed me over the top. So many applications for one opening—without him, I'd never have made it out of the heap. And, the cherry on top was they wanted me out there ASAP to pick up the reins of my department. Yes, it was a promotion as well to the level of my former supervisor. I would be over a half dozen staff members and working at that building walking distance from the beach. It was going to be a whole new life by the ocean.

With the need for speed, the company had even provided me with a furnished apartment for six months, meaning, all I had to do was pack up my personal items and catch a plane. It all happened so fast I barely had time to think. One moment, I was living with the herd and working out of the small office building in our area and the next, on a jet plane headed for San Diego. As I sipped from the plastic cup of Diet Coke, I allowed thoughts I'd tried to suppress to come to the fore.

Sure, I loved the ocean, and my gazelle was already picturing himself cantering along the beach, but under all of that was another motivation. One I had tried to keep myself from thinking about.

That one-night stand with a dragon. He was an alpha, and that in itself was unusual for me. Not that he'd been my first, but most of those I'd been attracted to had been of the omega persuasion. The dragon was magnificent and had been the best lover I'd ever had the pleasure of spending a night with. And since my return to New Mexico, I'd reminded myself over and over that it was no more than that. A night.

There had been a different kind of energy in our night. For the first time, I hadn't walked away feeling bad or sad or empty. Rather, once I left Magnus, I did so with a sense of regret that he was not my mate. And never entirely forgot him.

Of course, he had also been a visitor to San Diego when we met, and he had long since returned to his life, maybe even found his fated by now. Whoever he ended up with was one lucky SOB. I wished him happiness. Of course.

Disembarking, I strode through the airport, picked up my luggage, and met the car agency representative outside the glass doors. Remarkably, the position came with a leased car as well. I would have to meet clients occasionally, but it wasn't really the type of job you expect to get a car with. It was just getting better and better. I put the address into my GPS, although I did well remember the way, and headed over to see my workspace and say hello to my coworkers before going to my new apartment. So much to adjust to and yet I didn't feel adrift or nervous at all. My gazelle was confident in our choice and our future.

More confident than me, but I was still very optimistic. Riding the elevator up to my floor, I tapped my foot in anticipation. While out here previously, I had met a number of people, but there would be faces new to me also. And, now I was in charge of several of them. That might be an adjustment.

Exiting the elevator, I approached the receptionist for the floor who greeted me as Mr. Hirsch and buzzed my assistant to come and show me to my office. Although I was not starting work until Monday, nobody seemed surprised to see me and I had to tell at least six people to still call me Ayelet. Jerry had always kept things on a first-name basis, and I liked the atmosphere he had created. Never any doubt who made the final decisions for the department, but also never any kind of barrier between him and the rest of us. His door was quite literally open nearly all the time, and we were welcome to come in anytime we needed his feedback or had a question. I'd even seen a few people dumping their personal problems in his lap.

My office was furnished with a desk, executive high-backed chair, two guest chairs, and even a small sofa and low table against the inner wall. Sandy's desk sat right outside. The large window behind my desk overlooked the ocean, and I was soon taking the walk I had every day on my earlier visit down to greet the waves. Taking off my shoes and socks and rolling up my pant legs, I waded into the edge of the surf. The frothy retreating wave reminded me even more of my last trip and what had happened then.

The dragon.

Sometimes it was hard to remember that he was not my mate. We'd had such an incredible time together, not just the sex which absolutely had been stellar but talking. My gazelle butted me inside and wanted to see Magnus again, but he'd been a visitor to the area as well and for some reason, we had not even exchanged information. I had hoped he'd offer, but he had not, and I didn't want to be pushy with another alpha. I should have been pushy...

But since meeting up with him was not going to happen unless Fate was remarkably kind and set us up for another chance encounter—and that was too much to ask—I decided to check out the club I'd heard several people mention when I was here before.

Animals.

The sun was setting over the Pacific, and since we were heading into the weekend and any popular club was going to be mobbed, I needed to get a move on, or I didn't stand a chance of getting in. I did not, however, want to show up in my traveling clothes that probably reeked of recycled airplane air.

That meant a stop by my new home and changing into something in my roller bag. Most of my things were being shipped out on the company's nickel, but they weren't

going to arrive for several days, so I'd make do. I took just a few minutes to look over my new digs before showering quickly and donning my favorite butt-hugging jeans and a soft polo shirt and heading for the club. Which was how I ended up arriving way earlier than just about anyone else. Back home, there were a lot of early to bed types, and so club life ended about eleven. It was not really even a club, more a bar with a small dance floor and live bands on the weekend.

But Animals here in the urban sprawl of San Diego, according to the guy ahead of me in line—one of three—didn't really get going until later. They did point out that getting here at this time would have us inside the moment the doors opened, and I called that a win.

Unlike most shifter venues, the Animals chain was known for allowing all sorts of paranormal people into their clubs and even humans who could behave themselves. They permitted shifting inside, so long as nobody acted out or did anything like eat someone else in a bad way. Also, I'd heard that witches' brooms had to be checked at the door due to an incident a while back that caused a lot of damage.

About a half hour after I arrived, the doors opened and I was able to enter. While we'd been waiting, the line had grown considerably, making me glad to have arrived so early. I got a table near the dance floor, was served a beverage, and settled in to people watch and relax. The crowd was more shifters than others, but I spotted a few fae and a vampire and some I couldn't quite identify. In my old town, I'd never seen the variety of shifters who were already here, either. I liked San Diego more and more and had a feeling things were going to get interesting.

"Ayelet, is that you?"

My hand tightened on my cocktail. It couldn't be. I set the glass down and turned, praying to the goddess that she and Fate had my back again... "Magnus."

The dragon of my dreams.

“I can’t believe I found you here.” He beckoned to the empty chair next to mine.

“Mind?”

“No not at all. Why...how?”

“I might ask the same,” he said, a low, sexy chuckle rolling over me. “Except I’m afraid it’s a dream and I’ll wake up to find myself in bed alone.”

A server came and took his order then returned with one of the night’s specials, a tall glass with a faint mist rising from it. Then we spent a few minutes catching up and shared the delightful news that we were both living here now.

“That’s amazing. Sounds a lot like Fate. Maybe we aren’t mates, but there is something here.”

“You should know that I don’t always have full control of my beast.” His cheeks reddened a little. “If that makes you want to avoid me, I get it.”

I waved off his comments. “Takes longer for some. But I don’t see that as a deal-breaker. Maybe we can work on it together?”

Magnus took a long drink and then faced me again. “So what do we do?”

“I don’t know long-term, but for tonight?” I stood up and held out my hand. “I spotted a hallway where we might find a little privacy.”

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Harbor

I was on day three of my time in San Diego and still hadn't explored very much. We'd had a couple of issues at work, and I ended up putting in extra hours...a ton of extra hours. It wasn't ideal, but I got compensated on the other end, so I wasn't working for free. So at least there was that.

But the longer I stayed in the parking lot I'd been using as home base, working my day and long into the night away, the more I felt like I needed to really get out and discover something—anything—about the area. Why come all the way to the opposite coast if I was going to see such a miniscule part of it?

I'd managed to find a shifter beach to squat in. They didn't call it that, obviously, but mostly shifters came here, and as luck would have it, they didn't seem to have a problem with me parking there overnight. It was a big relief because there weren't a ton of places that welcomed people like me. If anything, most of the maps told me to park randomly late at night and hope no one noticed I was there. That was hardly the road I wanted to go down.

This location was great though. I loved waking up to the sound of the waves lapping at the shore, looking at the sunrises over the horizon, and being able to dip my feet in the cool water. This place was sheltered enough that I was even able to give my unicorn a chance to run along the beach, just like he wanted.

But, for the most part, I was stuck inside, dealing with one work fire after another, and I was exhausted. Beyond exhausted. It would be over soon, and things would get back to normal. I'd be back to working half time for full-time pay.

I contemplated just curling up in bed and going to sleep for the night, but then I remembered hearing a couple of the raccoon shifters earlier that day talking about going to Animals. I perked up quickly at that one. I'd heard of Animals SD, and I had even stopped at one of the sister clubs in Louisiana when I was passing through. I half knew there were other sister clubs floating around but hadn't thought much about them, figuring if they were where I was, I'd figure it out. And I suppose that was true. It wasn't until the raccoons were talking that I realized there was one here.

The one I hung out at in Louisiana was interesting because it wasn't just shifters who frequented there. Given it was New Orleans, it probably was a shock to no one that there were vampires and a few other things I couldn't quite figure out but was too embarrassed and a little too scared to ask. I'd correctly thought it might be best not to bring up who and what the patrons of the club were. Some things were best left secret.

Out here, I suspected it was mostly going to be shifters, which was good—but also, I didn't really fit in with most shifters, my creature the subject of storybooks. Not really, but that's how most people thought of them. Most people didn't believe that I was a unicorn until I actually shifted in front of them for the first time. It made no sense, since there were enough of us floating around this country, but the whole unicorns and dragons were fairy tales myth seemed to be holding on for dear life.

I grabbed some jeans, swapped out my shorts, and took a look in the mirror. Good enough. I wasn't really going to Animals for any specific purpose beyond meeting some people or at least being around other shifters. Although, I wasn't turning down any possible one-night stands. It had been a long time since I had anyone in my bed.

When I drove down, I didn't expect it to be empty. It was a weekend, and they were the hottest club in town. But what I drove into was... It was packed, which shouldn't have been a surprise but to the extent of it, it was.

I parked and walked past the front door on the way to the end of the long line. But as I passed him, the first bouncer said, “Hey, you. I think you’re needed inside.”

“I’m pretty sure you have the wrong guy,” I told him. I didn’t know who he thought I was, but there was nothing VIP about my sorry ass.

He leaned in closer and looked at me before inhaling deeply and giving me a big smile. “Nope, not the wrong guy. Boss man said to expect you.”

“I don’t even know who the boss man is,” I replied, wondering if I accidentally walked into something I needed to get out of and stat. “I bet he doesn’t know who I am either.”

But the bouncer just shrugged and said, “You’re a unicorn, so get in there before you have to wait in line.”

I probably should have stayed and argued with him a little longer, but I wasn’t in the mood. If I could get in, I was doing it. As the door opened and before I even stepped inside, my unicorn pressed forward, and I sensed them. My mate was here.

Mates, my unicorn corrected.

“Mates, as in two?” It wasn’t the way I thought tonight was going to go, but also, I wasn’t going to tell Fate to eff off and come get their shit, especially when the only other person in this conversation was me, and I might be “their shit.”

I jumped back in surprise and then went inside, following the scent until I found two men in the hallway, pressed against each other. They were making out, hands all over, and it was hot as hell. I inhaled deeply. Sure enough, they were my mates. Gods, were they sexy.

One of them mumbled something about knowing the other one was right. I didn't really understand it—my lower brain wanted my attention. No, scratch that, it wanted to join them. I cleared my throat.

“Excuse me,” I said.

The shifter, dressed like he belonged on the cover of a magazine, growled. It was sexy as fuck. He turned around, a scowl on his face, but I saw the second he scented me, the second he realized I was theirs.

Both of theirs.

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Magnus

I clasped my hands over Ayelet's shoulders and pressed him into the hallway wall. His delicious scent clouded my every thought. His arms tightened about my neck.

I pulled back for air, gasping. "Three years, and I've never forgotten you."

"Same."

"It feels like it's fated." That word kept coming up.

Ayelet was about to answer when I kissed him again. Those luscious lips opened for me with no hesitation. He pulled at the short fine hair at my nape.

I thought I'd lost him. If it weren't for my dragon's instincts, I wouldn't be here. I would never have known Ayelet had also been drawn back to San Diego.

The second time I pulled back, I took in his face, memorizing every curve, plane, and dimple.

His eyes were glowing. He grinned. "But, Magnus. Don't you feel it?"

"This? Deeply. Sincerely. We can work something out here, yes?"

"Yes, this. But also, something—" He sniffed the air. "More?"

"It's been you all along. In my dreams. In my fantasies."

His fingers trailed along my head until he cupped my jaw. “Use your dragon instincts.”

“My dragon wants you .”

Ayelet laughed and kissed me again then quickly broke it off. “It’s a hint of sugar, stars, the open road. I don’t know, but it’s—”

“Oof.” Someone bumped into me and muttered, “Sorry, dude.”

There was so much noise and too many people, even in the hallway.

Ayelet made my thoughts into chaos. What was he saying? Something sweet burned the air. My vision turned a darker pink.

Nudge. Nudge.

My dragon kicked. But Ayelet was here in my arms. We’d found him. No need for more nudges.

“I see the look on your face. You smell him, too.”

I tilted my head. Ayelet made no sense. “What is that? Are they making fresh donuts on site?”

“I haven’t found him yet, but he’s here.”

“Churros, then.” A lightbulb moment. “Better! Funnel cake with powdered sugar!”

My dragon actually growled.

Ayelet laughed. “It’s not food. It’s an omega.”

I blinked hard. Omega funnel cake. I’d never heard of that.

My dragon stomped on my thoughts with claws out, poking them all aside. Then said, with a deep yowl, Mate!

Of course, I knew now. Ayelet was my mate. He was an alpha, but when it came to fated mates, that didn’t matter.

Be still!

Ayelet, with his wide, sweet eyes, held my gaze. Voice low, he said, “He’s coming closer.”

“He?”

“Ours.”

Omega. Mate.

That was when I realized how slow I’d been. In my defense, Ayelet had my brain in a fog of arousal. Who could see past such a handsome gazelle?

“Our omega?” My whisper was lost in the club’s din. But Ayelet nodded anyway, understanding.

The scent was everywhere, now. My stomach growled. Ayelet had my pulse up, but what he said got me curious enough to turn my head. In that same moment, the crowd surged and parted, and there stood a young man with his eyebrows narrowed, mouth open, staring at the both of us. The way the lights hit him in those first few seconds

gave him a sparkly aura, magical, as if he'd just beamed in from his silver starship.

"That one. There." I grabbed Ayelet a bit harder than I'd intended, but he came willingly with me.

I sniffed high, low, then bent to the stranger's throat and inhaled. I'd never been raised to be so rude. But the stranger didn't take offense. Instead, he let out a giggle that rippled straight to my heart.

Ayelet also leaned in, nostrils flaring. "It's him. He's the one."

"Wow. Found you! I didn't think it'd be that easy," the omega said.

I turned to Ayelet. "That's why we couldn't understand it three years ago. We didn't have all the puzzle pieces."

The omega looked up at us, eyes shining. "Two alphas? Two? Jackpot. We need to talk."

He had sensed us, as well. Fated mates. It took a magical intervention of the Fates to push us in directions we needed to go in order to meet. With three of us linked, that was much harder. And it had taken three years. But here we were.

"I, uh, see you two have already met," the omega said.

"Three years ago," I replied.

His mouth fell open. "You've been together three years?"

"No, we met three years ago and have been wanting to find each other ever since," Ayelet explained.

“When we first met, we thought it wasn’t meant to be,” I said.

Ayelet nodded. “We didn’t realize we were missing you. Not until tonight. We just reunited minutes ago.”

“Magnus.” The omega bit his lower lip. “What a great dragon name. I’m Harbor. I’m a unicorn. And I scented you both as soon as I walked in.”

Hell, I’d always loved unicorns. When I was little, I’d slept with a stuffed unicorn toy. Had my dragon known that far back?

Ayelet grinned. “My name’s Ayelet. Gazelle.”

Harbor lifted his hand and pinched himself on the forearm.

I reached out, touching his wrist. “Don’t hurt yourself.”

He laughed. “Just making sure I’m not dreaming. I never thought this would happen to me.”

“We need to go somewhere and talk,” I said.

Together, we made our way through the crowds and found a less noisy, less populated outdoor patio. The area was surrounded by a forest of trees. The wind shushed softly as it blew through the branches.

Ayelet and I grabbed the same chair, both pulling it out for our omega, then laughed to see we were both already letting our alpha selves take over. Harbor hopped into the seat. Someone came and took our drink order.

Finally, we could talk. Instead, we all sat gazing at each other for nearly a minute

before Harbor broke the spell.

“I guess this means we’re engaged. Or do we do that dating thing first?” Harbor said.

We all laughed, tension alleviated for the moment.

“I’ll do whatever you want,” Ayelet said.

Damn. I hated dating. Should I just go for it? “What do you say our first real date is going shopping to pick out rings?”

Both their eyes got very large.

“Hey, no worries.” I spread my hands in a not-my-fault gesture. “I invited you, so that means I’m buying.”

“I want us to shift together,” Ayelet said.

“I want that, too,” Harbor said.

My heart fell. Maybe I was moving too fast.

“And rings,” they added at the same time, smiling wide.

Such a relief to know my eagerness wasn’t just all me.

My dragon shivered in delight, something I’d rarely felt from him. And this time, it wasn’t because he loved to shop.

“I heard there’s a private place to shift around here,” I said.

“I want to see both your animals,” Harbor said. “Where do we go?”

Just then, the waiter came by to take another drink order.

“Can you shift on the property?” I asked.

“Definitely. The changing benches are that way.” He pointed. “Around the corner of the building. The area is private and guarded.” He looked at me, eyebrow raised. “We ask those who fly not to go more than fifty feet above the treetops.”

“Will do. Another round of drinks first?” I asked, holding out my credit card.

“Hello! Yes!” Harbor bounced on his chair.

Drunk shifting. What a great meet cute this was turning out to be.

Ayelet

I never did one-night stands. Well, maybe not never but not recently. They were simply not satisfying and usually left me feeling empty and sad. As a young gazelle shifter, I'd sowed my share of wild oats before recognizing this issue and as my peers found their mates and began families, I doubled down into work, only now realizing how that was an attempt to mask my loneliness. Among other things, of course.

After the music and chatter of the club, outside's quiet was weirdly loud.

The moon was climbing into the sky as we shed our clothes and folded them on the bench beside other piles of discarded club attire. Autumn meant warm days and cool nights in this area, as I recalled, and although we weren't right next to the ocean, it was visible in the distance, the foam like lace edging on a dark flounced skirt and the crescent moon reflecting in the water. We had to stay no higher than fifty feet above the trees, but that wasn't a problem for two of us. Only our magnificent dragon had that ability. And I couldn't wait to watch.

"You don't mind if I fly?" Magnus hesitated, standing nude in the moonlight, his long legs braced a foot or so apart, chest muscled, and skin glowing. I remembered all those parts of him plus what his stance revealed so clearly. I licked my lips, remembering the salty taste and silky skin encasing that long, stiff shaft. "See something you want, alpha?"

I shivered. That voice... My gaze left the dragon and moved to the unicorn. Every bit as mouthwatering as the dragon, but he stood sturdier, the unicorn's equine connection visible in his limbs and long, graceful neck. I looked from one to the

other. “I see everything I want.”

But we were going to shift, and if we stood here another minute, we’d instead be putting on the kind of show that Animals probably did not want on the property. At least not here where anyone—guest or staff— could come across us rolling about on the ground. Not that the image was present in my mind or anything.

I was never gladder to be in a place where shifting was possible. In the past, most of my shifts had been with members of the herd or on rare occasions, a random friend, but even they were usually gazelles or something similar. I’d never been with anyone so different than me but so perfectly right for me as the dragon and the unicorn who walked with me out to the area where Animals allowed us to shift. Inside, there was a lot of leeway because it was all paras and those who knew about them, but many humans chose to look the other way and the possibility of coming to harm was real.

Magnus and Harbor were fantasy creatures, the shifters even my herd didn’t know for sure existed. When Magnus and I met three years before, I’d been blown away by everything about him, and standing here now, I could not imagine how I’d managed to walk away after the most incredible night of my life to date.

I kept saying he wasn’t my mate. That I was overthinking and just needed to recognize it for great sex and wait for my omega. But I couldn’t have been more wrong. Fate had something else in mind. Something that took three to click into place.

“Ready, alpha?” Magnus asked, rising on tiptoe.

“Ready. Omega?”

Harbor didn’t even answer, just shifted in a way I’d never seen before. No incremental changes, no twisting or convulsing, no obvious hairs poking out. Just one

second, two legs and the next, four and a magnificent horn sprouting from his forehead. Bam.

If I hadn't seen it, I'd never have believed it.

Magnus and I approached him slowly, closing in on either side. I had never seen a unicorn shifter in person before and I guess I thought they were more delicate, smaller and maybe pony sized. Maybe it was possible for me to be even more wrong than when I didn't know Magnus was my mate.

Harbor stood taller than any of the horses I'd seen or ridden growing up. He was white but not flat white. Rather, he glowed in the moonlight, his twisted golden horn rising from his forehead toward the sky. I laid a hand on his side, stroking the softness, feeling the musculature flex underneath. "Wow. Our mate is nobody's toy."

"He's magnificent," Magnus whispered, stroking the opposite flank. "I had no idea."

The unicorn stood while we admired him for a few minutes, but when he stamped a foot, we stepped back and shifted at the same time. Neither as fast or graceful as our unicorn, but in our own ways every bit as magical.

My gazelle took in his mates with an appreciative eye, but his only comments to me were, Mate and Ours . And then Magnus took two steps, broad wings spreading wide, then lifting and lowering once before he launched into the air and lifted above the trees. I wasn't sure if he was going higher than allowed but decided he knew what he was doing. And then he was heading into the distance. The unicorn bumped me gently with his horn and took off after our dragon. I took the hint and joined them, stretching out my legs and flying along the path beaten down by many before us. We came upon a few others as we ran, a rabbit and squirrel, a pair of deer. Even a bear. But most of the time it was just us, the native fauna giving us a wide berth.

The property was larger than I'd realized, and we were able to run for a while, climbing a slope behind the club and through an area of trees thick enough to make it hard to see our dragon above. But the flap of his wings was a distinctive sound that helped us know where he was. When we reached the top of the hill, we had another great view of the ocean in the distance. Magnus landed beside us, and we all stood side by side and just breathed the fresh air with a hint of salt. My mates were a sight to see, the unicorn standing solid, the dragon's wings drooping until he lifted off again, and then we were racing back toward the club, the cool breeze ruffling Harbor's coat and mane, his tail blowing out behind him. I could watch him forever. Both of them, really, but at the moment, Magnus was hidden by the tree canopy.

And then, with a whoosh of wings, he reappeared, leading us back.

Exhilaration filled me at running with my mates. It was an excellent way to start out our mating time together and a great time for our mates to connect. My gazelle hadn't said anything else, but his mood matched mine.

We shifted back, Harbor's taking nearly no time. And then we dressed and looked at one another. We'd already said ring shopping was in the future, but I could see something else coming up first. "Who lives closest?"

Harbor raised his hand. "I think I do." We compared addresses and he was right.

Harbor

Leaving the club and finding someplace to be private was a no-brainer. Not a single speck of me that doubted these two men were my mates. Why would we bother with the human notions of courtship when Fate took care of all of that for us. I was theirs, they were mine, and while none of us knew how that was going to look for us beyond this moment, the understanding that we were going to be together from now on was there.

I'd been quick to say I was closest, wanting to get them alone and naked, to taste them, mark them, feel their bodies against mine with no fabric between us. At the time, it was the best idea ever, but now that we were on our way, I saw how flawed it was.

I offered my place because it was closer. That didn't make it better. There was barely room for me in there, much less enough space to do all the things I planned to do with my two mates. Yum.

But when you thought with your desire and not your brain, impractical decisions were made, like this one.

As we reached my van, embarrassment flooded me. My cheeks burned, my heart raced, and there was a moment of fear that they were going to say, "Never mind," and walk off together.

They had been doing just fine when I first saw them. Better than fine. Gods, maybe I should've left them there and just watched and then introduced myself. What a

glorious show that would've been.

The dragon, Magnus, let out a rich laugh. "Yeah, I've been using a lot of the wrong brain too." His hand playfully smacked my ass, and my fears flew away. I'd known I wasn't alone in this heady, needy feeling, but hearing him say it made it somehow more real.

"How so?" It was an attempt at flirty and by the quizzical look that crossed Ayelet's face, I was a tad off the mark.

"This is your place?" Ayelet wasn't judgy in his tone, more curious. On most days, I'd have jumped at the opportunity to geek out about all I'd done to turn this into my home, but today, I wanted to get to the naked parts. A tour would have to wait.

I nodded.

"Huh. When you said your place was closer, I didn't expect...this."

And I realized I wasn't getting away without giving at least a minimal tour. I popped the back of the minivan open. "This is it."

The two of them took it all in.

"You live here?" my gazelle shifter asked.

"Well, not here like in this parking lot, but in the van, yeah. I've been traveling across the country, and it's great. I was able to see the country and work from anywhere, but...it's not exactly conducive to the kind of evening I was expecting us to have."

Magnus chuckled. "Wait until you see where I'm staying. It's like you're my Jack Sprat." He took my hand, and I had to admit he was right. "And that means we'll fit

together perfectly.”

He was wearing a suit that probably cost more than my van, but there was no judgment in his eyes. He was simply stating that we’d complement each other, at least in that way. It was an odd thing to say, but also, it gave such a feeling of acceptance that I was glad for it.

It didn’t bother him that I was living this version of van life, one far removed from all the influencers—the ones who were wealthy, playing homeless to get views and edge closer to the fame they longed for. This was just me, living a life on the road, turning something old into someplace I could live until I found where I belonged.

Who would’ve thought that my sense of belonging would present itself in a shifter nightclub of all places. But it had. I knew from the second that door opened and the scent tickled my nose. These two men were my future, and it was so much more than the pheromones and lust bouncing between us talking. Fate brought them here, at this time, because they were meant for me, and I was meant for them.

“We could try it,” I said, because having them leave wasn’t going to work for me, and my jeans were so tight I was about to bust a zipper. “I’m game.”

In hindsight, it was a weird thing to say, given that one of my mates was one of the fiercest predators on the planet and I was, in fact, game. Even hunters who didn’t know my kind existed had been hunting my kind’s ass for pretty much ever.

“Wait a minute. If you’re Jack Sprat, and Magnus is your spouse, where do I fit in all of this?” There was no worry in Ayelet’s tone, but, as with all jokes, there was probably a hint of truth to his words, and I wanted to squash that down and stat.

Magnus and I looked at him and said in unison, “Ours,” at the same time, both of us on the same page.

Ayelet grinned from ear to ear and wrapped his arms around both of us, pulling us into a group hug. “Yeah, that works for me.”

It worked for me too.

“So, my place is officially off the short list. Who’s next closest from here?” The longer our scents mingled, the more difficult it was to ignore the pull between us.

“I think I am.” Magnus stepped back, much to my unicorn’s displeasure. “And as much as I love your home, my place has enough room for us to get creative.”

Creative. Yes, please.

“Gods, I love the sound of that.”

Magnus

Harbor ran ahead, up the hallway to the two double doors. He turned. “I’ve never been in a hotel room with double doors before!”

Ayelet and I hurried to keep up.

“I’ve only been here five days. But it’s rented for a month.”

“Well, the hallway itself is a lot bigger than my van, I’ll say that much.”

We all laughed. But following that, a twinge of pain pinched just behind my ribs. My alpha instinct to care for an omega mate reared up. Harbor was technically homeless. Though he didn’t appear to mind, I did. My dragon didn’t judge. Simply, he needed to hold, protect, guard.

I walked up behind Harbor and stroked my hand gently down his back. “Let me show you what a penthouse suite is like.”

He leaned in to me.

I turned to Ayelet and winked.

Ayelet shook his head, a held-back smile twisting his lips. “I smelled him first.”

I rolled my eyes at him and opened the doors.

Harbor skipped right in as if he had always belonged. He let out all sorts of exclamations, complimenting everything in sight. He touched and sniffed all over, wandering faster than we could keep up. He ran toward the kitchen and up to the balcony sliding glass doors with a view of the harbor lights.

“And look. It has a kitchen! It’s huge!”

A pang went through me. My poor omega had been without things for so long. Yet, he looked happy. Healthy. It had been his choice. I spoiled myself. Maybe Harbor could teach me that life was about more than that.

I turned to Ayelet. “He’s adorable.”

“And ours,” Ayelet said.

“I want to give you both everything.”

“Thank you, Magnus. But what we both want is you.”

The edges of my eyes stung. I blinked hard. No one before them had ever said that to me without conditions, without wanting things or money. It was why all my encounters were one-night stands.

Ayelet put his arm around me. He nuzzled my neck and kissed me there then breathed in. “Mmm, you smell so good.”

Harbor danced over to us. “Hey, I want some, too.”

They wanted me. Not the suite or my designer suit or the fancy engagement rings I wanted to buy them. We were here because it was fated. We needed each other. Desired each other.

Ayelet and I embraced Harbor, and suddenly we were entangled in a beautiful three-way kiss. Harbor pushed up on one side of me and Ayelet on the other. I'd never felt desire like this. I wanted to take Harbor, shove him up on the counter, and have my way with him. For a moment, it scared me. I was a controlled person, even in bed.

I pulled back, gasping.

"Magnus," Ayelet asked. "You okay?"

I nodded. "I'm great. The two of you—is the room spinning?"

Harbor leaned back against Ayelet. "It is for me."

"Am I drunk?" I asked.

"Maybe a little when we shifted but not anymore," Harbor said.

Ayelet laughed. "Magnus, can you show us to the bedroom?"

That I could do. If only I could focus.

"It's on the second floor."

"The penthouse has two floors?" Harbor asked.

"It sure does. Want to see?"

He linked arms with both of us. "Do I ever."

When we reached the stairs, I stopped, turned, then picked Harbor up and threw him over my shoulder. I turned to Ayelet. His mouth was wide open in shock.

“This way,” I said.

Harbor giggled. “Uh-oh, the big bad dragon captured me. Ayelet. Help.”

Ayelet came up in front of us and shouldered under Harbor’s legs to assist in supporting him.

Our omega shrieked in delight. “That’s not what I meant by help.”

Together, we climbed the stairs with the unicorn aloft between us.

We entered the bedroom and headed straight for the bed then set Harbor upon it gently, like he was the most precious treasure.

They both looked up then around.

“This is huge,” Harbor said.

“Look how tall the ceilings are,” Ayelet said.

I was already sliding my suit jacket off my shoulders. I turned back to Harbor, knelt between his legs, and began helping him out of his shirt. Ayelet joined me, and Harbor fell back onto the bed.

“This bed is amazing. The comforter’s like a cloud. Faster, guys. I want to feel it on my naked skin.”

Ayelet grabbed our omega’s shoes while I pulled his shirt all the way off. Both of us tugged at his pants and boxers until a golden-skinned unicorn shifter lay squirming between us.

My breath shuddered. “So pretty.”

“Harbor, you’re downright gorgeous,” Ayelet hissed.

Our omega was aroused, slick shining from deep between his legs, cock tight against his belly.

“No fair.” He started to sit up but seemed to lose strength and flopped back. “You two have seen each other naked but I haven’t.”

“We saw each other when we shifted,” Ayelet said.

“Not the same,” Harbor replied.

I started to unbutton my dress shirt.

“Wait.” Harbor’s eyes were slitted as he stuck another pillow behind his head. “Ayelet, you undress him. I want to watch.”

I turned to face him, alpha to alpha. Ayelet grinned and undid every button and cuff. He paid no attention to caring for my clothes but threw them aside as if they offended him. I had zero problem with that. I had more suits than I knew what to do with. He bent down to remove my trousers and briefs. When the air hit my cock, it was jarring. It bounced up and stood straight and proud from my body.

As I kicked away my shoes and trousers, Ayelet reached out and gave my cock a soft stroke, sending fire throughout my body. “I remember this,” he said.

“No touching yet. Not until I say,” Harbor ordered.

Ayelet’s eyebrows shot up. “We have a bossy omega.”

I grinned. “Seems so.”

Harbor sat partway up. “Hey. I’m not bossy. I just like seeing you two together. Now, Magnus, you undress Ayelet, please.”

“My pleasure.”

I leaned in to kiss my old lover, who opened his mouth to me.

“What did I say about touching?” Harbor asked.

“Sorry, not sorry,” I said, pulling Ayelet’s shirt over his head.

Ayelet already had his belt off and was nudging his shoes aside when I got to the waistband of his jeans. I yanked everything down. His cock sprang free. His long, gazelle legs flexed as he kicked the pants away.

Without waiting, we both scampered onto the bed and covered our omega with kisses on his thighs, his balls, his stomach, and chest. Harbor squealed, trying to hug us both at the same time.

He was breathless with demands. “You, Magnus, on my left. Ayelet, on the other side. I can’t decide which of you should take me first.”

Alpha need flamed in my blood. I couldn’t deny I wanted him right now. “I’m already about to explode,” I confessed.

“Really?” Ayelet gazed at me. “That might be interesting to see.”

“No fighting over me. There’s enough to go around.” Harbor turned onto his side, presenting to me. “Magnus, can you please look to see if I’m slick enough?”

The room spun. I closed my eyes, but that didn't help.

I leaned down and nuzzled his throat, licking and nipping at the side of his neck. I stroked one hand down his spine and between his cheeks. He was hot and slippery.

"Oh, Magnus, please. Touch me."

My finger slid over his hole, which opened at the touch. I caught my breath.

"Kiss me," Harbor whispered.

I moved my head up to obey and saw Ayelet take his mouth instead. Beautiful.

I nuzzled his neck some more, pushing my finger gently against Harbor's entrance. He took it in easily, crying out into Ayelet's mouth.

I lifted my head as Harbor moved up and onto his knees, using Ayelet's shoulders for balance. He stuck out his ass and said, "Now, Magnus."

I followed him up, kneeling between his legs. He pushed back against me, forehead pressed to Ayelet's chest, and I quickly lined up. Harbor did the rest. He thrust back and impaled himself on me. My cock slipped inside his warmth and tightness and immediately I was flying over rooftops and through clouds, my dragon roaring.

"More," Harbor called out. "Harder."

I leaned over his back, thrusting, my skin burning as he moaned. I licked at his nape.

Someone was petting my back. Ayelet. In my ear, the alpha whispered, "That's it. Claim him. He's ready. Claim him now."

I couldn't think. I could only be the alpha I truly was, the one who'd finally found his mates. I bit down. Harbor cried out, "I'm coming."

Ayelet groaned as if I'd bitten him as well.

A sacred bond was already forming between the three of us.

My knot swelled, and I came until white lights took over my vision.

Ayelet threw his arm over me, rubbing against my shoulder then kissing my neck. When his teeth sank in, I nearly passed out.

I came again, my knot firmly inside Harbor, Ayelet's teeth clutching at my skin. It was too much. Yet all I wanted was more.

Ayelet

Watching Magnus impale Harbor on that magnificent cock brought back memories of our night together. I had not been very comfortable sitting on the plane after three...or maybe four times during our night together, but I would do it again, some other time.

Tonight, I was ready to mate and mark our unicorn. I had already marked Magnus when he was deep in Harbor's body. As they stayed together, held by his knot, I nuzzled the unicorn's throat and pierced his perspiration-slick skin, marking him as mine. I licked the wound closed before my fist closed around his cock, and then my mouth, and I sucked the omega deep, licking and nibbling and doing everything in my power to bring him to orgasm before I lost all control and speared him.

The desire to be inside his body was sharp, and while I'd been with other omegas, none had made me feel like our mate. The mark on his throat was what everyone talked about, what people could see, but the marking inside his body, painting his walls with my cum, that was the true marking. Our scents would be forever changed by this as well.

No sooner did I have that thought than the first salty spurt hit the roof of my mouth, and I sucked hard, swallowing his cum in gulps that had him trembling. When he lay still, I rose above him and brought one of his knees to his chest, opening him wider. His slick glimmered in the low light from the living room, showing me he was more than ready, and I didn't hesitate to place the head of my cock in position and drive forward. I wasn't as long as Magnus, but I had more girth, and I didn't want to hurt him, so I moved slowly.

Harbor's whimper and his other leg wrapping around my hip urged me onward though. "Eager omega," I murmured.

Magnus, who lay on his side, idly stroking himself and watching us, chuckled. "And tight."

"Mmm. Yes." His inner muscles clung to me when I pulled out and made the inward thrusts a study in torture as far as self-control went. This first time together was special, and I wanted him to enjoy it, but my body was ready to go over the edge at any time. "You're so tight, omega. Milking me already."

Harbor's body was welcoming and demanding all at the same time, and I was helpless to fight him. I didn't really want to, and then Magnus sat up and kissed me, ran his lips down my throat and left his own mark; there was no holding back at all. I shuddered, cum racing from my tight balls and spurting into our omega's body. I was vaguely aware of Harbor and Magnus kissing, of Harbor nipping at the dragon's throat and then reaching for me and drawing me down to complete the marking.

My knot swelled, and I hung over the omega, braced on my hands and trying not to crush him, but he wrapped his arms around my neck and pulled me down. "You can't crush me, alpha. I'm not that delicate."

Reaching for Magnus, I brought him into our embrace and we lay there together until my knot eased enough that I could pull free. Everything was changed. We were mated, marked, and cuddling together in a puppy pile on our alpha's bed.

How had we ever gotten along without each other? I'd only met Magnus once before and met Harbor tonight, but it felt as if they'd been with me forever or maybe that I'd yearned for them forever. Everyone said when you met your mate you would understand what it meant. Why so many didn't survive their mates' death and followed closely after from heartbreak or disease that swept them away so easily.

I got it. Already. If anything happened to these men, how could I live?

We lay together, arms and legs tangled, speaking softly, getting to know one another in a where have you been all my life, and what have you been up to sort of way. I wanted to know everything about them. What were they doing before we ended up here. And then, once we had that settled, I wanted to know where we went from here.

It would be together, for sure, but we had no plans yet, and I was anxious to have them. The future lay before us. And it was bright.

Two or three more times during the night, we woke and made love. I wasn't even sure we slept between. The room was redolent of our sexy times, and I still wanted more. Would it be like this again? I didn't know, and it didn't really matter.

What did was that I found my mates.

Fate made us for each other.

Harbor

I was the first one awake, snuggled between Ayelet and Magnus. I was the center of their sexy sandwich, but now I was on my back, both of them snuggled into my chest. It was absolutely breathtaking seeing them like this—so free, so relaxed, so mine. I didn't even know how long I just watched them, listening to their breaths as they echoed each other in the elegance that was this suite.

Last night, I slept so well, better than I had in eons. An argument could be made that it was because I wasn't on a plywood bed frame with egg crates for my mattress. But that wasn't it. I was content, and my unicorn settled for the very first time in a long time. I didn't even realize how off-kilter he'd been until I was marked by both my mates, and I marked them in return. There was this peace, this calmness, this completeness that came with our bond. It was everything, but also it was just the beginning. It was like a promise—a promise of the life that was to come, a life that apparently included beds the size of Nebraska.

I couldn't even begin to fathom the amount of money Magnus had, if this was his hotel room. It was more than I'd ever seen, for sure. When we first came in here, it was fun and exciting to see it all. But now, in the light of day, I saw just how true that Jack Sprat comment had been. We were complete opposites in this, and I wasn't sure I knew how to live this life.

“You're thinking too loudly,” Magnus mumbled into my chest.

“Is that a thing? Can one think too loudly?”

He looked up at me, eyes sleepy. “Your heart started beating faster. Is there anything we can talk about?”

“No.”

He gave me the look, the one that said he didn’t believe me.

“Fine. I was just thinking about how wonderful last night was and how this hotel room is so not me.” And even if it was me, there was no way I’d have ever set foot in here on my own dime.

“It’s not me either,” he said, but I don’t think he meant it in the same way I did. This might not be his style, but it was within his budget. It wasn’t in the same county as mine.

“Everybody’s talking,” Ayelet mumbled, his eyes still closed. “Does that mean it’s time for breakfast?”

“Did you work up an appetite last night?” Magnus ran a finger down our gazelle’s arm.

“I think we all did.” A sweet smile crossed Ayelet’s face.

“Accurate.” Now that food was mentioned, I was more than ready to eat. Waking up with sexy men flanking me had distracted me from my hunger.

We got up and took a shower—together. The shower was large enough for all three of us to be comfortable and with the million and one showerheads, none of us had to deal with being the one with a cold ass.

Our intentions were to go in, wash up, and then eat. We accomplished that goal but

with a long-ass detour in the middle. But it had to be expected. I had two hot alphas, naked, under unlimited running water. No omega in my position would've let that opportunity go to waste.

Magnus offered to order us room service, but I didn't want that. It wasn't that I didn't love the idea of having amazing food delivered to us. I did, but also, I wasn't ready to share these two wonderful men with anyone yet, not even for the short time it would take to drop off some food. I was selfish and wanted them all to myself.

So instead, we dug through the kitchen to see what food had been stocked and what we could make from it. I'd never had someone decide what groceries I'd have at my place, not as an adult. I didn't think I'd like it, but Magnus acted as if it was normal. And I supposed that for him it was.

The pantry had the typical items. There was fancy granola, oatmeal, basic spices. Nothing that called to us.

In the fridge, there was remarkably a lot, but at the same time, nothing. There were cheeses I had never heard of, multiple different milk-type products for coffees, and a bunch of fancy little meats that were, I guess, charcuterie-type snacks. I didn't know, but in the end, we found a nice loaf of French bread on the counter and opted to make French toast.

It was quick, easy, and delicious. I'd never had it with this kind of crusty bread, but I figured as long as we let it soak in the egg mixture a little longer than normal, it would be good. If not, we could fall back on the call-room-service plan.

We divided the tasks and worked together to create our first meal as mates. Our first meal together, period.

I was in charge of slicing the thick bread, while Ayelet mixed up the eggs and milk.

Surprisingly, we didn't have any vanilla, but there was some cinnamon, and we called that good enough. Magnus, he was the grill master, cooking them up till they were nice and crispy, soft but not mushy.

We grabbed a box of cherries and mixed berries, threw on a pot of coffee, and were ready for breakfast.

It was such a normal activity in such an extravagant place. And that normalcy had me realizing I was making a mountain out of nothing. It didn't matter that he was rich and I wasn't, or that Ayelet and I had hooves and Magnus had wings, or that I had a horn, or Magnus had fire.

None of that made a bit of difference because we were mates—were meant to be and everything was how it should be.

Magnus

Ayelet climbed out of the hotel pool dripping wet.

Harbor called out to him. “Come back.” He held up his beach ball.

Ayelet walked into the shade, grabbed a towel, and lay back on a lounge chair. “Your turn to play with him,” he said. “Our omega never runs out of energy.”

I’d rented a private cabana where a waiter brought us drinks and food. The pool was one of three huge pools at the resort, so it wasn’t too crowded. This was how all Saturdays should be spent.

I got up and walked to the edge of the deep end then dove in, swimming underwater all the way to where Harbor had been left behind. Dragons loved to swim.

I grabbed him around the waist and lifted him out of the water.

Harbor squealed and fell back in a wave of cool water, losing his beach ball. I grabbed it. We played keepaway for a few minutes then a game of volley. He was like a kid, never wanting to leave the water. When I finally got him out, we joined Ayelet and ordered an afternoon meal to eat underneath our cabana.

“Who knew unicorns were water babies, too?” Ayelet remarked.

Harbor puffed out his pretty, hairless chest. “Horses swim very well, I’ll have you know.”

“Unicorns aren’t horses,” I said.

“Well, unicorns only like virgins, too.” He smirked. “Yet here I am.”

“That’s a myth,” Ayelet said.

“Is it?” Harbor wiggled his eyebrows at him.

“That has me wondering,” Ayelet added. “Are unicorns virgins themselves, all pure and chaste until they meet their fated mates?”

Harbor scratched his wet head. “You must be confused. That’s hawk shifter culture.”

Almost one month together, and we were like a family already. We got along well, bonded like magical fated mates were supposed to, and spent all our days off and every night together.

But the time I’d planned to be in San Diego was coming to an end.

The food arrived: dripping cheeseburgers, fat steak fries, tossed salads. We’d all worked up an appetite swimming.

As we ate, I felt it was time to have a serious discussion about my situation.

“Mates, I need to talk about something serious with you both.”

They looked up, eyes wide.

“I only planned to be here a month. I’ve got to go back to the East Coast. My business partner lives there and is demanding I go look at properties in upstate New York.”

Harbor gulped his bite of food. “You’re leaving?”

“I have to. My home is in New York. That’s where my business offices are. And my partner. My clutch. It’s where I grew up.”

Ayelet dropped the French fry he’d been holding and wouldn’t meet my eyes.

Harbor stared at me. “The East Coast?”

I nodded, looking from him to Ayelet and back again.

“Well,” Harbor said. “I suppose I can live anywhere doing my job remotely. I’m not tied down.”

“That’s just it. I’m asking you both. Will you two come with me? I own a beautiful penthouse there. Big enough for the three of us.”

“With double doors and two stories?” Harbor asked.

I reached out and ran my hand down his back. “Not with two stories. But yes to the double doors.”

“I’m in. I like adventure. Maybe I’ll like it.”

I turned to Ayelet. “You’re very quiet.”

He nodded then looked up at me. “I just transferred my job here.”

My heart fell.

“But,” he continued, “maybe I can do some work remotely. Or transfer again.”

“I don’t want to disrupt your life.”

Ayelet gave me a small smile. “Magnus, you don’t disrupt my life. You enhance it. Everything else is a side gig.”

Harbor grinned. “I love that. Are you saying he’s the main course?”

“Yep.”

“What about me?” Harbor asked.

“I’m always hungry,” Ayelet said. “So the Fates decided I get to have two main courses.”

Harbor beamed. “Steak or fish?”

Ayelet reached out to bop him gently on the nose. “We can’t ever get you out of the pool in a timely manner, so fish it is.”

Harbor laughed.

“Ayelet,” I began, still worried about the proposition I’d just put to my mates. “I’m sorry if this disrupts everything.”

“I came to San Diego because of you,” Ayelet said. “Because of the memory from three years ago. I came to look for you. Now I’ve found you. Like I said, my job will have to adapt to me.”

“We’ll take it slow at first. See how we settle.”

Both Harbor and Ayelet nodded.

“Plus, we can always come back here for extended vacations.”

“Can we stay at this very same resort again? In the penthouse?” Harbor asked.

“Yes, we can.”

I looked to Ayelet, sensing hesitation through our bond. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah. I am. Wherever you two are, I am complete.”

I believed him, but I also knew he loved the ocean and had wanted that in his life, as well. Sand. Salt. Seaweed. I loved it, too.

“We’ll come back. Several times a year,” I said. “I promise.”

Harbor clapped his hands. “I love it here. Vacations in San Diego. What more could I ask?”

“We’re in agreement, then?” I asked.

My mates nodded.

“Can you both be ready to go in five days?”

“Oh no. What will I do with my van?” Harbor hung his head.

“We can store it. And later, have it delivered,” I said.

“Yeah. Okay.”

“I’ve barely unpacked myself,” Ayelet said. “I’ve been spending all my nights with

you two at the penthouse. It will be easy to be ready. I'll store the new furniture and washer and dryer I bought."

It was settled. But that night, I sensed a sadness in Ayelet. In bed, I embraced him gently. He bent to me, asking to be filled.

My beautiful, willowy gazelle was graceful in all areas of life, including this. It was like doing a dance to make love to him. Harbor lay alongside him, kissing him, stroking him from the front. Together, we brought our gazelle to peaks of ecstasy, reminding him how greatly loved and revered he was.

Ayelet

The view from Magnus' penthouse was spectacular, in a very urban sort of way.

I wouldn't have believed it, but my company allowed me to work remotely on a temporary basis. As a supervisor, I would have expected to be required to be in the office every day, but since most of those I supervised only came in a day or two a week anyway, it didn't seem to matter. I would need to work West Coast hours, but that didn't seem too onerous. It meant I would get to sleep in. And the company did not mind not having to pay my rent for the rest of the six months they'd agreed to, so they would of course cover any travel expenses if they needed me on-site. This would not be long-term, probably, but I'd deal with that issue when it became one. My company did have offices here as well, but nothing I'd heard about them made me want to transfer.

With that in mind, I put my resume together. In New Mexico, in our relatively small town, there hadn't been a lot of other opportunities, but here? There was no reason to pretend I worked for the only company in the world. Maybe it was a good chance to expand my horizons professionally as I had personally.

Even that first move came together so easily. Because of Fate? I'd been amazed at getting the transfer to San Diego to start with, an office everyone wanted to work from with its short walk to the beach and beautiful views from every window. I loved it there but not as much as I loved my mates.

Moving toward the bedroom window, I surveyed the view from this high, high perspective. Buildings, many skyscrapers marched on toward the other end of the

island of Manhattan. We could also see Central Park's green acreage, and well, I knew that many people would pay any price to be here, to be us.

I should be more grateful about it.

People looked so small down below, scurrying back and forth on errands, coming and going from work and school and wherever their day took them. And there were so many of them. More humans and paranormals visible right at this moment than the population of the town where I grew up...or at least so I estimated. From this height, I couldn't really tell them apart, but it only made sense that there would be all kinds of people down there.

Magnus had taken us to some of his favorite restaurants and dives, shown us how to order food and other supplies on the accounts he had set up, and been a terrific host all the way around. Unfortunately, I did feel more like we were guests with a host than people who shared a home. Unlike the penthouse in San Diego, this one had been professionally decorated to meet Magnus' taste to the point it felt like there was no room for us.

There was not a thing wrong with it, every piece of furniture perfect for its space, even the dishes and flatware selected to look perfect on the marble-top table. The bedroom where I now stood was a designer's dream. And nothing like the "bedroom set" my omega dad was so proud of. Each piece—the bed, dresser, pair of chairs by the window, etc.—was selected to blend into a perfect whole. Although some of the pieces were antique and others brand-new handcrafted items, with the addition of the luxury bedding, I couldn't imagine anything nicer.

And sliding into those billion-thread-count sheets with the fluffy comforters piled on top almost made it worth leaving my favorite place on the face of the Earth. What did make it worthwhile was who lay in that bed with me. If they wanted to move to the face of the sun, I'd just buy lots of sunscreen because where they were was home.

Down below, the shadows lengthened as the sun moved on toward the end of the day. All those people lived here by choice, and they didn't even have the two best mates in the whole world. I could live anywhere as long as we were together. Maybe we could take the subway to a beach and walk along. It wouldn't be the Pacific, but the Atlantic was sure to have its own beauty and charm, and it was unreasonable of me not to at least give it a chance.

"Penny for your thoughts, alpha?" Harbor spoke from so close behind me, I could feel his warm breath on the back of my neck. "Or maybe it should be a quarter now?"

I reached back and brought him around in front of me, his back to my front. "Just admiring the view and wondering where everyone down there is going in such a hurry." I pressed my lips to his nape, inhaling his scent. Tension seeped from my shoulders.

"I sometimes do that, too. It's a beautiful city, isn't it?"

"As cities go." I rested my chin on his shoulder. "And the penthouse is fabulous."

"True. Are you sure you weren't missing San Diego?"

So perceptive, our unicorn. I'd carefully not said that, never wanting to take the least chance of Magnus feeling like I wasn't happy to be here. "Maybe a little." Saying anything different would be a lie.

"I do too, but it feels ungrateful. Magnus doesn't even care if I work or not. He just wants us to be happy."

"I know." Outside, the sky darkened and lights began to come on. "And it will be fine. We just have to adjust. Magnus has his whole business here, and his home. So far, my job is being really good about it, and I'm thinking of looking around for

something different. Maybe I'm missing out on a better opportunity."

"But you love your job." Harbor turned in my arms and faced me.

"Not as much as I love the two of you." I bent to kiss him, and as always, the outside world faded away. As long as we were together...

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Harbor

Being in the city this long was rough.

Really, really rough.

I'd be lying if I said it wasn't. This place wasn't for a shifter like me. There were pluses, of course. I could do my work here easy peasy, there was a great coffee shop down the road where I could hang out, and my mates were here.

And because it was a city, there were so many activities. If I wanted to go to one of the fancy cinemas where they brought food to the table, and your seats reclined all the way—I could. If I wanted to go to an art gallery—I had my pick. If I wanted to go on a boat tour—there was one leaving in an hour.

The options were endless. If I was bored, it was because I chose to be. Work and mates and boredom—none of that was the issue. My unicorn was.

My beast wasn't okay. He absolutely despised the city. Between the noise of the vehicles, the scent of the soot from car exhaust, and the concrete—oh-so much concrete, he felt like he could never get away from it. And yes, the penthouse was luxurious and beautiful, but even there, my beast was on edge. He hated being this far up.

Obviously, there were some parks we could escape to for a little while, but it wasn't enough to give him the reprieve he needed. He was pacing inside me, back and forth, wanting to get out. I tried to convince him to stop, but it was like he didn't even hear

me, sense me. I was starting to worry.

Normally if he even hinted at being upset at our surroundings, I'd move the van and find a place where he could shift. But we weren't mobile anymore. It wasn't as easy as that. And being an animal that didn't blend, it wasn't like we could find someplace and just shift for a stop gap.

This is one of those times when being a squirrel would have been super handy, or even a raccoon. But as a unicorn, he had to suffer in silence.

And I hated that for him. I hated that I was making that choice for him, because that's what this was. This was a choice I was making for him, not with him.

I loved my mates, loved them with all that I was. Magnus' life was here and, unlike mine, he couldn't drive to the next place and call it good. His life was here, and asking him to give that up? I wasn't going to do that.

Objectively, what was I giving up by moving here? A little van that was barely holding together. It was in stark contrast to what he would be giving up, which was everything. I couldn't ask that of him. I refused.

My unicorn would adjust. He just needed time.

"I'm going to grab some coffee," I said, picking up my backpack, the one that held my laptop. Magnus had offered to buy me something nice, a satchel, or whatever fancy rich people used to carry their computers, but I liked this one. It was comfortable, and if someone was looking for something to steal, they weren't going to see it and think they'd found gold. If anything, they'd put money in the faded thing.

"Sure, I'll go with you." Ayelet looked up from his laptop. "I just have to finish one

thing first.”

I wasn’t sure what he was doing on his computer, but I grabbed a water bottle while I waited for him to close everything up.

Magnus was working, and that left us with a couple of hours to kill before we could hang with him. It was the perfect amount of time for a coffee run.

We walked, hand in hand, down the road. There was a street performer on the corner, singing a really bad version of some musical number familiar enough that I should know it, but just badly enough that I couldn’t quite place it. They’d be asked to move soon. This wasn’t a “sanctioned” location for such activities, and the city had moved away from the free for all that used to be the norm.

That was one of the odd things about the city. It had all this freedom and individuality, but it was ensconced in regulation. The two shouldn’t work together, but they sort of did in this uncomfortable way. Or maybe it was only uncomfortable to me because I had a freaking unicorn pacing inside of me.

“I like it here.” Ayelet shoulder bumped me. “Not the city in general but here. It’s like the place where make-believe and reality meet.”

“Yeah, I can see that.” Within two blocks, we would go from the place of the elite to the place where the average Joe hung out and...got their joe.

The next corner featured a man wearing a bear costume and using duct-taped plastic buckets as drums. He sounded remarkably good, and I wondered if his day job was in the orchestra for a musical or in a rock band.

I had to admit, it was one of my favorite parts of being in the city—the people saying all the wild and silly and off-the-wall things that they did. But I could find a million

things I loved about the city, and it wouldn't counteract the way my unicorn was feeling.

We arrived at the coffee shop, and it was packed. Not crowded packed, but it would be hard to get to the counter packed.

"I thought we were arriving during off hours," I said by way of apology. There was no way we were going to get a seat, even if we managed to get a coffee.

"Want to grab it to go? I just wanted to spend time with you. The coffee was a bonus." He gave my hand a squeeze. Ayelet was such a sweetie.

"So, did you want to go somewhere else instead? We could go to the bakery that Magnus likes. Maybe get some dessert for tonight."

"I do like dessert." He gave me a little hip check.

"Not that kind of dessert."

"Why can't we have both?"

Spoiler alert: We opted for both.

Magnus

I walked to the edge of the bedroom door and stopped. Harbor and Ayelet were talking low. I leaned against the wall and listened.

Worry laced Ayelet's voice. "Please don't tell Magnus I'm not comfortable. We both know how much he loves it here."

"He does. Plus, he provides everything we need."

"True. But I also love my job. I wanted it to be in San Diego with the ocean and the boats and all that sunshine."

"It drew you because that's where you first met Magnus."

"Yes. But I never really thought I'd find him. I'm so happy I did. We did. But San Diego itself called, too."

"Me, too." Harbor's whisper was barely audible. "I'm just not a New York City type, I guess."

I padded softly back down the hall and into the living room. I went to the big windows overlooking the city and Central Park. The view was priceless. But not what I wanted if my mates didn't want it, too.

I'd lived here my whole life. My business was centered here. My clutch was here. And, though I rarely saw them, my family. It was as natural as breathing for me to

live and grow my business here. But now I had my own family. If we had children, they'd need more. A yard. Their own rooms. Safety to shift. We, as a family, needed room to spread our wings, so to speak. Of course, the East Coast had that room. We didn't have to live in the city itself. But it didn't feel right here.

Maybe it was why San Diego had called me and my dragon, too?

The bond with my mates ran deeper every day. But it wasn't just Ayelet who wanted his job back the way it was, or Harbor dreaming of open blue skies. It was me, too, who wished for a change. My new family called me to new beginnings. That yearning burned inside me, too.

I couldn't hear my mates talking anymore, but through the bond, their emotions sang to me as they comforted and consoled each other about the huge decision I had sprung on them last minute regarding moving to New York.

It was very clear to me, now. They didn't like the city. I hadn't been fair about that to them, or to myself. Alone here, I had been fine. Satisfied, if not a bit empty. But with them in my life, all that was different. The city wasn't as bright or exciting. I wasn't lonely. I'd found my place. They were my bright lights now. My view. My everything.

Go back.

I nodded as if to answer my dragon.

San Diego was where we'd met, our souls colliding on a fated, wondrous ride. Our hearts had beaten strong there. Our eyes shone whether it was overcast or brightly sunny. Even the ocean called to us. We all loved to swim.

The buzz of emotions quieted in the bond. Their conversation was ending.

I went to my wet bar and poured three drinks, remembering the favorites of each of my mates. When they came into the living room, I was ready, the drinks lined up on the table in front of my couch.

I stood facing them. “Will you join me for a drink?”

Harbor jogged forward, picking his drink up from the table. “My favorite. What’s this all about?”

Ayelet followed, and I handed him his drink.

“Will you all please sit?”

Harbor bounced his ass down on the couch, balancing his drink so it didn’t spill, eager for everything, as always.

Ayelet was more graceful, my beautiful gazelle. He took his drink and balanced himself on the armrest.

I sat beside Harbor, who immediately leaned into my shoulder. I put my arm around him and crossed my legs.

“I want to talk to you both about something.”

“Sounds serious,” Harbor said.

“It is. I’ve come to a decision about my work.”

Ayelet sipped his drink. “Yeah?”

“Yes. I don’t want to work in this city anymore.”

Harbor nearly choked. “Huh? But we just got here.”

“It’s only been five weeks,” Ayelet said.

“I know. And for that I owe you two a big apology.”

“Why?” they both asked in unison.

“Because I made assumptions without a clear mind. Because I thought if this was my home, it could be your home, too.”

“You know we’ll go anywhere with you,” Ayelet said.

“I know. But the assumption I made was that this would be our home, when actually it was only my home.”

“Still, if that’s how you feel, then you should be here,” Ayelet said.

I held up my hand. “I’m not finished. That was what it felt like before I met you both. But not now. It isn’t right.”

“It’s a beautiful penthouse,” Harbor offered.

“And convenient. You have your offices only two blocks away,” Ayelet said.

I cleared my throat. “I’ll be closing them.”

“What?” Ayelet sat forward and placed his drink on the table. “Close them? They’re your life. Your everything.”

I leaned forward and grabbed him by the hand, pulling him until he slid off the

armrest and nearly into my lap. “You’re my everything. You two. That’s what I need. And this big, loud city isn’t the place for our family, our future. I know it’s not what you want, either.”

“Were you listening to us while we were in the bedroom?” Harbor accused.

“Not every word,” I confessed.

Ayelet sputtered. I nuzzled him.

“I already knew how you two felt before today. And I have the same feelings. What I loved about this place is the past. Nostalgia. It isn’t about us. Not anymore. We have a different life to lead together.”

“Where?” Harbor asked.

“What if I asked you if we could go back to San Diego? It’s where we claimed each other. It holds that memory, that essence, and all of what we’ve become to each other. Would you both like that?”

Ayelet’s jaw dropped. Harbor started to bounce his knees up and down.

“You did listen in,” Ayelet said.

“I didn’t have to listen. I’d already been thinking about it. This is the right decision.”

“Yes!” Harbor nearly squealed the word. “I would love to go back. Can we get the same penthouse you had?”

“We can. Until we find property we want to buy.”

“Oh boy! I can get my van back out of storage. I can swim in the hotel pool. We can go to Shifter Beach together. And Animals!”

Ayelet lifted his head from my shoulder. “Are you sure about this?”

“I’ve never been more sure.”

“What about the money?” Ayelet asked.

“Screw the money. I have more saved up than I’ll ever need. Our kids can go to any college. We’ll be fine.”

“Kids?” Harbor asked.

I shrugged, grinning at him. “You never know.”

He shrugged. “Very true.”

I turned back to Ayelet. “And you can get your job back there, if you want.”

Ayelet blinked away the shine in his eyes. “Thank you, Magnus.”

I hugged him and Harbor to me, one at each side, and all the tension I’d been sensing the past few weeks vanished. My dragon huffed a bit, then said, San Diego .

We entered the two-story penthouse suite, dragging suitcases behind us. Harbor dropped his and ran all around the room like an excited little boy. He did three circles before coming to stand, breathless, in front of me and Ayelet.

“It still smells like us. Like the claiming.”

Ayelet sniffed the air. “Actually, it does.”

“It’s been waiting for us to come back,” Harbor said. “Now, here we are.”

I took a deep breath. We were home.

Ayelet

I was willing to try anything just to be with my mates. Even if we had to stay there, it would have been so much better than being anywhere without them. I told myself that. My gazelle agreed, but when we arrived at the penthouse in San Diego, and I was still worried a bit about hurting Magnus' feelings, our unicorn did not hold back his joy.

And, somehow, that freed his alphas to drop our attempts at control and fall into a laughing heap on the sofa. Magnus had made a big sacrifice for us, no matter how much wealth he had. He'd essentially walked away from a crazy successful gig in the Big Apple because his mates were not comfortable there, and after weeks of all three of us trying to make one another happy by hiding our true feelings, we were back in the penthouse where we'd claimed one another. The West Coast just made me happy.

And it wasn't because NYC was a bad place or felt icky or had too many people. The change from New Mexico to San Diego was equally extreme. And I enjoyed meeting those I did in both communities. There was no Animals branch in New York, at least not that we heard of, but there was certainly no lack of entertainment.

Late one evening, we'd gone into Central Park, which was so much bigger than I'd ever imagined, and followed Magnus to a huge open field where many other shifters were hanging out and having a great time. Picnics were spread out on blankets, some were strumming guitars, and it could have been a love-in from the 1960s, except with less sex and more wolves. Magical! Who knew that right in the middle of one of the densest urban areas in the US, probably in the world, such things went on.

But we had just begun to explore San Diego, and there was a whole lot here to love. The beaches and mountains and desert were all easy day trips, and there were miles of open country where we could let our animals out, even the dragon, as long as we were aware of our surroundings. Hiking, running, flying... We went whale watching, which my gazelle was puzzled by but I liked. And I was going to learn to sail, something I'd never dreamed possible.

And the restaurants. In addition to delicious Mexican food, there were all sorts of other international options and, of course, plentiful seafood. We went out for that maybe too often because it was so good.

One night not long after we arrived on the West Coast, I snapped awake with the knowledge that one of my mates was not in bed with me. And, from the bathroom, came gagging sounds.

"Magnus?" I shook our dragon's shoulder. "I think Harbor is sick."

He nodded, eyes still closed. "I hear. How many of those oysters did he have at dinner last night?"

"I don't know. I had a bunch of them, didn't you?"

"Yes. And all the ones I ate tasted great, but it only takes one bad one." Magnus sat up and dangled his legs over the side of the bed. "I'd better go check on him."

I scooted off the mattress and reached for my boxer shorts. "I'll go."

"No, really, I don't mind." He grabbed the robe he kept across the bottom of the bed on these cool mornings. "I was the one who ordered the oysters."

Shifters are immune to nearly all human diseases, but a bad oyster can take down

even the biggest bear. “Let’s both go.”

I heard a chuckle and turned to find our unicorn standing in the bathroom doorway. He swayed a little and we both jumped to steady him. “You alphas are a couple of worry warts. I didn’t even eat any oysters.”

“You didn’t? But they are your favorite thing.”

“Not at the moment. They didn’t appeal to me at all last night. I just ate some bread and butter.”

“Wait.” My head reeled. “We had all your favorites. Shellfish for miles and miles.”

He shrugged. “I think I might be coming down with something. My stomach has been off for a few days.”

“I don’t like you missing meals, omega. If you didn’t want seafood, we could have gone for Mexican.” Magnus started toward him. “Tacos, enchiladas...omega?”

Hand clapped over his mouth, Harbor disappeared into the bathroom, banging the door closed behind him. Gagging resumed.

“What did I do?” Magnus made to follow him, but I grabbed his arm.

“You talked about food. I’m surprised he survived our oyster conversation.” I drew Magnus back to bed. “Let him be. He’ll call us if he wants us.”

It was easy to say but a whole lot harder to do. I linked my fingers on my lap and tried not to panic. Harbor was the healthiest among us, never slowing down for a minute, and I couldn’t remember him even being tired.

“Do you think he ate an oyster and forgot?” Magnus shifted uncomfortably next to me. “Or oyster juice got on the bread or something?”

I shrugged. Didn’t seem likely, but whatever was going on, it was starting to scare me.

After more sounds that turned my stomach and made me want to rush in and save our omega from whatever was making him so sick, I turned to Magnus. “Maybe we need to get him to a healer.” I couldn’t think of anything else. “He sounds really ill.”

“I think you’re right. I’ll go pull the car around.” Magnus was tapping his foot when the bathroom door opened to reveal our unicorn, pale and sweaty.

“Harbor.” I jumped to my feet and hurried to his side. “We are going to take you to a healer and it will all be all right, okay?”

Magnus went into the walk-in closet and emerged in jeans and a hoodie. “You help him get dressed, and I’ll meet you both at the garage exit.”

“Really, there’s no need.” Harbor grinned and held up his closed hand. “I know what the issue is, and it’s going to resolve itself in time.”

“Don’t waste time, omega.” I opened his top dresser drawer and fished out a pair of undershorts. “The healer will tell us what the problem is.”

“I don’t think it’s a problem.” His smile wavered, and he extended his hand and opened it. “At least, I hope you won’t think it is.”

“What’s that?” I looked closer and gasped. “Is it? Do you mean?”

He nodded.

Magnus had his car keys in hand, but I stopped him. “Mate...you’ll want to see this.”

“No, we need to go.”

“Magnus, we don’t. Not yet, anyway.”

He huffed but approached and held out his hand. “What is it?”

Mischief in his sparkling eyes, Harbor dropped the stick in his palm. “You may regret this.”

“What is it...omega? Did you pee on this?”

“I don’t know another way to find out if I’m pregnant.”

Magnus let out a cheer and lifted Harbor, swinging him around in a circle. “We’re having a baby!”

I grabbed them both before swinging turned into something much less pleasant. “Maybe we can celebrate without anything that’s going to make someone dizzy.”

Magnus eased him down onto his feet and bent to kiss his lips. “I’m sorry, omega. I’m just so thrilled.”

I kissed him next. Then I kissed Magnus. Then we all kissed each other again. We would need to go to the healer eventually, but not today. Today, we would celebrate the best day of our lives.

Harbor

Being pregnant was wild.

Some omegas had stomach issues, or were tired, or had mood swings. I didn't come into this completely unaware, but I was woefully unprepared. I could go from not wanting to eat, to needing to eat everything, to feeling like I wanted to be sick—all in the matter of an hour, and in any order. There was no apparent logic to it. All I could do was ride it out.

And the exhaustion. I wasn't just tired. I was can I make it until at least dinnertime before I go to bed tired. My mates were great about it. They didn't push me to do more than I could, and they encouraged me to get the sleep that I needed.

And how did I reward them? With mood swings.

One minute, I'd be sitting there watching a movie, starting to doze off, and I'd hear the sink turn on, and I'd snap at them for being loud. It wasn't loud, and even as I was yelling at them, I understood I wasn't being rational. I'd actually be thinking it at the same time the words fell from my lips. But could I stop myself? No.

And that's why, even though the healer's office said I could wait until twelve weeks alone to see them, I pushed back. I was not going to be doing that. Nope. I needed to see a healer sooner rather than later just in case all of this was a sign that something was wrong.

I made an appointment the second they could get me in because I needed some

answers. My hope was they'd change up my prenatal vitamins or tell me to eat more steak or something equally easy. But whatever the case might be, it was better to know than to not know.

Both my mates came with me as we drove to the office. They didn't realize that I had begged to come in earlier than normal. Heck, they didn't know that I was concerned at all. They were excited that we might get to see the baby. On that front, I guess I was too, even if they were still in the little blob stage where the ultrasounds don't look like anything to the trained eye.

When we arrived, they had me fill out a bunch of paperwork and do a bunch of forms on the tablet, which was weird, because one or the other should suffice. But it killed the time until we finally got called back—twenty minutes later than our appointment. The intake nurse took my vitals and brought me into the room, pulling in an extra chair for my mates.

And then we waited.

And waited.

Until finally there was a knock on the door and the healer came in.

We still hadn't decided if we were gonna stick with the healer the whole way or go over to the midwife, but Dr. Wolfe was a shifter, so we figured we would start here. He had all the medical equipment we might need and openings. It made sense.

“Hello, Dads. Congratulations.” The healer shook each of our hands.

I thanked him, and we went back and forth with him asking me questions and me answering them. He also asked my mates a couple about their family history—things that wouldn't go on a form because, well, shifters.

“Now let’s see if we can hear this little one’s heartbeat.” He took out a doppler.

Looking for the heartbeat was...terrifying. He kept moving the wand over my belly and saying, “Yeah, it’s probably just too early.”

Something in my gut told me that wasn’t it.

I looked to my mates to find both their faces schooled. They were as scared as I was. And the longer he prodded my belly with the wand, the more scared I became. My eyes were filling with tears, my mind racing to the worst.

“Stay right here.” Dr. Wolfe set the wand down. “Let’s get the ultra sound machine, then we can see your wee one.”

If there was a baby to be seen. Maybe I wasn’t pregnant after all. Mistakes happened, right? Maybe it was a false alarm. And if it was? What then? I wasn’t sure I could handle that. It would break me.

The healer left, coming back in a few minutes later with the ultrasound cart. My blood ran cold. It shouldn’t be this hard. They should be able to find our baby.

And as he put the transducer on, I asked the goddess to please make sure everything was okay. She heard my plea, just not in the way I thought I meant. Everything was beyond okay—just very different than I thought it would be.

“So, the reason you can’t hear the heartbeat is because the shells are in the way.” The healer said, not looking up from the computer screen.

“The...what? The shells?” I had to be hearing him wrong. He wasn’t making any sense.

“Yes, shells. It looks like you have some eggs in there.” He tapped on the screen to show me what he meant. Not that the pictures helped clarify anything.

“Excuse me?” I pushed myself to sit, and he didn’t fight me on it, instead taking the wand and setting it down.

“Yeah, eggs.”

“Makes sense.” Magnus didn’t sound the least bit shocked or concerned.

“How does this make sense?” I wasn’t a chicken.

“Your mate’s a dragon, right?” Dr. Wolfe, expert healer, turned off the machine. “Dragons come from eggs.”

“But I’m a unicorn! That’s not how genetics work.” I would grow babies, not lay eggs. It was the way of my kind for all of recorded history. That wouldn’t suddenly change, would it?

He chuckled. “But it is.”

So it was true. I was going to lay eggs. Eggs that held my babies...which meant babies, not baby. This was a whole lot to take in, and I didn’t even know where to begin asking my questions.

“So I’m guessing you need to learn a little bit about eggs?”

I nodded. “If by a little bit, you mean a lot, I do. And then maybe we could talk about my mood swings a little?”

“Don’t worry, Dad, that’s all part of the egg talk.”

The egg talk that took an hour. I had so much to learn, and it wasn't like they had books on this stuff. Why weren't there books?

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:09 pm

Magnus

“Harbor. I’m home. I got the pizza with anchovies you requested.”

No answer.

I checked the living room, kitchen, deck, and pool. No Harbor.

Strange. Sitting by the pool, even on cooler days, was one of his favorite things to do.

I set the pizza on the kitchen counter and headed upstairs. First, I checked our bedroom. Then the baby’s room. Nothing.

My home office was empty. The first guest room was silent, not even a dust mote floating by.

The second guest room, which Harbor had been considering turning into a children’s playroom for when they got older, held a familiar, heavenly, funnel cake scent. But nothing looked disturbed. The bed was neatly made, the curtains open and letting in the silvery afternoon sun.

Letting my nose lead me, I turned directly to the closet. It was a walk-in, so I knocked softly on the door.

No answer.

“Harbor? I know you’re in there. Can I come in?”

A rustling sounded from within. Bingo.

“Please?” I asked.

“Okay.” He said more words, but they were muffled.

I opened the door. Harbor blinked up at me from a pile of pillows and blankets. He had his tablet, his phone, and a water bottle by his side. The closet lights were off, and he shielded his eyes.

“Hi, Magnus. You found me.”

“I did. I have pizza.”

“Oh? Where is it?”

“Downstairs.”

“Oh.” He looked sad.

“What are you doing in here?”

“I just thought this was the perfect place for some peace and quiet. You know. I made it all comfy, and I’ve been playing games on my tablet.”

“In the dark?”

He nodded, frowning. “The light hurt my eyes.”

Nesting.

I already knew before my dragon said it.

I knelt down and smiled. My precious omega was nesting.

Dragons had many different nesting habits. But the one thing they all shared was they wanted a protected space that could be easily guarded. In the olden days, caves sufficed. We lived in modern times. No one raised their broods in caves anymore.

Though Harbor was a unicorn carrying dragon eggs, his instincts had become dragon-esque. I didn't think he realized it.

"Would you like me to bring the pizza up here?"

"Yes, please. It's okay if we eat some before Ayelet comes home, right?"

"It's a snack. Besides, he called and said he was working late. We'll have dinner later."

"You'll have some pizza with me though?" he asked.

"Sure." I liked anchovies okay, even though I usually didn't order them. Once he got past the morning-sickness phase, Harbor's love for all-things seafood returned with a vengeance.

When I came back with the pizza, Harbor graciously made room for me to sit beside him in the nest.

"Can I leave the door open?" I asked.

"Yes." He took the extra-large pizza box from me then said, "Oh boy, you got it from my favorite place."

“Of course I did. I know who makes the best.”

Harbor sat a little hunched so I couldn't quite see his baby bump. I loved how his body had changed. My handsome pregnant omega.

We got full after two cheesy, gooey pieces each. I closed the box and set it aside to pack up later as leftovers.

I put my arm around him, and we both lay back on the pillows. “It's pretty cozy in here,” I said.

“It's perfect. I took a nap and everything.”

“You feel safe here, right?”

He nodded. “Why do you say that?”

“Because of the eggs.”

“What about them?”

“Baby, I think you're nesting. In fact, I'm sure.”

“Like a dragon?”

“Exactly like a dragon.”

“But I'm a unicorn. We like sunshine and rainbows, not dark corners.”

“Well, I guess you like both now.”

He giggled. “Well, I could decorate in here with rainbows.”

“Anything you want. We can get soft lights with all different muted colors. And maybe some stars that glow in the dark on the walls and ceiling.”

“I love that idea. Magnus, you’re the best. I’m so lucky that I have two alphas to take care of me.”

“We’re the lucky ones. All of us.” I kissed the side of his head. “Did I ever thank you?”

“Thank me for what?”

“For being our omega. For having our babies.”

He blushed beautifully, lowering his eyelids. “You’re welcome.” He leaned his whole body onto my chest, gazing up. “Can we really have glow-in-the-dark stars in here?”

“Anything you want, my love.”

Ayelet walked through the front door and straight into the kitchen. “What are we having for dinner? I’m starved. I worked such a long day.”

I turned from making the mashed potatoes to give him a hug. “Guess what? Harbor’s nesting.”

“What?” He sniffed. “Do I smell pizza?”

“We’re having chicken for dinner. But Harbor couldn’t wait. He had some pizza this afternoon.”

Ayelet nodded. “Did you just say he’s nesting?”

“Yep. Upstairs, second guest room, walk-in closet.”

“The closet?”

“He’s nesting like a dragon. But that doesn’t mean one of the eggs won’t turn out to be a gazelle. Or a unicorn.”

Ayelet grinned. “That’s so amazing. Gazelles, unicorns, dragons—it’s all good. I can’t wait. I love that we’re having kids so soon. Don’t you?”

“I do. Though I confess, I never thought about children the entire time I was in New York before we were mated.”

“Not once?”

“Nope. I didn’t actually care much for them or pay attention. Even to my relatives’ kids. But now that they’ll be mine—ours—I am in love with you two even more. The idea of our kids being raised in this house makes me happier than I ever thought I could be. I barely recognize myself anymore.”

“I do.” Ayelet slid his hand down my hip. “I recognize you. From the first time we met almost four years ago, I saw you. The person standing right in front of me. Not the dragon shifter obsessed with gaining more money, with hoarding. You showed me tenderness and openness that night. A vulnerability I couldn’t quite put my finger on. We connected. You may not realize it, but you showed me your heart. And it was so bright, it blinded me. I thought, is this the one? I’d never felt that way before.”

“I thought the same about you,” I whispered. “But it didn’t fit.”

“Back then, we couldn’t see how it would fit. Not until Harbor showed up.”

“It was all worth waiting for,” I said.

“Let’s go check on him,” Ayelet said, grabbing my hand. “Show me his nest.”

Dinner was almost ready. Everything was set, including the table. I could safely leave the kitchen for a few minutes.

I let Ayelet lead me upstairs to the closet where Harbor greeted us both with shrieks of delight. He started talking fast, filling Ayelet in about the stars we were going to put up for him, and the rainbows.

That night, after dinner, the three of us went shopping online and bought anything Harbor wanted for his nest, paying extra for overnight delivery. The first thing we bought was the basket to hold the eggs, a fancy, large one with silk pillows and a warming mat. Then we ordered a soft birthing mat with a washable cover of the ocean and sunsets. We went crazy for stuffies and squishies, stickers, and, of course, glow-in-the-dark stars.

Harbor clapped his hands when we were done. “We’re going to have the best nest ever for our babies.”

Neither Ayelet nor I could disagree with that.

Ayelet

Ayelet was a tyrant in the setup process, making us place and replace all the cushions and other parts of the nest. The warming basket for the eggs took pride of place. Who knew there were even enough dragons or other egg-carrying shifters to make something like that a thing? But I was so glad it was. Our omega and our children deserved the very best of everything we could give them.

Apparently each cushion had an optimum place, each blanket a specific fold, and finding those spots took some shifting around, which we were delighted to do for our omega. My favorite part was all the stars and rainbows. While our long-maned, gorgeous unicorn was magnificent, he was also sentimental and had a love for beauty of all kinds. And, after all, this closet nest was going to be our children's first nursery, and we wanted them to be born and/or hatched into the best we could share with them.

"No, over there." Harbor pointed to a spot that looked pretty much like every other spot to me. "On the blue one."

I shifted the lavender body pillow to where he indicated and then stepped back. "Magnus, come here."

Our dragon moved to stand next to me and slipped an arm around my waist. I loved how affectionate my mates were. "What's up?"

"Look at the nest. What do you see?" I rested my head on his shoulder, appreciating his warmth.

“I...oh. It is the rainbow.” The nest viewed from the right angle carried the colors in the order of the actual rainbow outside. ROY G BIV. More or less. We were limited by what cushions and throws and blankets we had found. But the effect was there. “I love it.”

“Do you?” Harbor came to join us, and we drew him into our embrace. “I hope the babies like it. Maybe we need to—”

Magnus laid a finger against his lips. “It’s perfect, omega. The babies will know how loved they are when they see this.”

Harbor turned around and took in the nest again. “It is perfect.” He patted his rounded belly. “It’s for you guys whenever you’re ready to come.”

“What did the healer say about that?” Magnus had been out meeting with James who was in town. He’d stepped back fully from his business for a bit but then decided he needed to work some for his sanity’s sake.

“Any time,” I told him. “With our mixed-up shifter species, it’s hard to be sure, but soon.”

Despite that prediction, after getting the nest all set up, things quieted briefly. We had rushed around making sure he had everything he needed or wanted, and sometimes I felt like I was the only one who didn’t know what was going on. After all, Magnus was a dragon and had explained that each of his kind had their own nesting style, and although Harbor was a unicorn, he was being driven by hormones, baby genetics, and who knew what all that I didn’t begin to understand.

But that was all right because even as an alpha, I had no issue with allowing my mates who were more in the know to guide me. And if that meant I had to suppress my fears about how a unicorn could carry eggs to start with much less deliver

them...then that was how it was going to have to be. As a result, I was working from home more often than going in to the office at this time. I was so glad to be living closer to the office and could go in anytime I needed to, and since I did not work for a shifter company, I couldn't exactly say my mate is about to lay eggs. I did however say my husband was having some complications of pregnancy and that until my paternity leave started, I would appreciate their patience and understanding.

The fact that my department was the most productive it had ever been since I took over made my bosses inclined to give me some leeway. Or maybe they were just nice. Could have been either way.

Harbor spent a lot of time on the nest, more every day, it seemed, until finally he was not coming out at all except to sleep. I found that concerning, but Magnus did not, reiterating that each dragon did it their own way.

We were all asleep when the moment came. Harbor jerked upright and struggled out of the tangle of arms and legs that we slept in. "Let. Me. Out."

I shook my head, trying to sort out what the fuss was. Then I remembered he was pregnant and peeing every hour or so, and I rolled off the bed to the floor to get out of his way. But, to my surprise, he didn't head for the bathroom but waddle-raced out the open doorway and disappeared down the hallways.

"It's egg time." Magnus grabbed his robe. "Ready to be a father?"

From that point, things happened fast. I put on boxers and a T-shirt and followed my mates to the nest. Harbor climbed the pile and dropped to a squat. Without any instruction, we moved, one on either side, prepared to support him if he needed it. He did not. Our magnificent omega gritted his jaw and laid three gorgeous pink-and-blue eggs. I'd wondered if they would all look alike but as we caught each one and laid it in the basket, I could see the differences of the patterns on each. Gorgeous. Delicate,

yet strong. And each held one of our children.

The healer also couldn't tell us exactly how long it would take for them to hatch.

Everything about our family would be a surprise.

After the third egg emerged, Harbor sagged into the cushions. He crawled over and curled up around the basket.

And that was where he stayed.

By the next morning, I figured out that unless his bladder was bursting, he wouldn't be leaving the nest. He settled in to watch over the eggs with a ferocity I hadn't seen in him before. Even if one or both of us were present, he was not leaving without a great deal of coaxing, and only the threat that he was going to freak the babies out with his stench got him to take a five-minute shower every couple of days.

Again...Magnus told me it was okay, that our unicorn was behaving like a really great dragon dad. But I still made him shower. For all our good.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:09 pm

Magnus

Harbor lay on his stomach, chin on his upturned palms, staring into the basket at the eggs. It was the middle of the night.

We'd all three taken to sleeping in the room with the nest. Ayelet and I took the bed. Harbor never left the nest. Sometimes we slept with him, but even with stacks of pillows, the floor got pretty hard.

A beautiful lantern with stars carved into the holder sat near the basket.

I entered the closet and lay down beside Harbor in the nest. "Have you slept at all?"

He shook his head. "They're due. Pips are due. Any day now. I don't want to miss it."

I folded him into my arms. "What if you take just a little nap and I'll watch and wake you immediately if anything happens."

"I'm not that tired." He yawned.

I ruffled his hair. "Well, maybe just close your eyes for a second, okay?"

He yawned again. "Just for a second."

I counted to ten, and he was fast asleep against my chest. True to my word, I watched the eggs. They were three of the most beautiful pink-and-blue dragon eggs I'd ever seen. I'd memorized each one's unique whorls and patterns.

We'd been discussing names for our babies, but I had my own private names for each egg. The one on the left was Fluffy because the way the colors softened into each other made it look like velvet. The middle one was Scrunchy because the tight spirals of color almost looked like they were squeezing the shell. I called the right egg Eight because the colors made soaring figure eights all around it.

The nicknames were a private thing I kept to myself.

Gently, I brushed my fingers over the shell tops. They were warm. The basket was made to keep the eggs heated at the perfect temperature to gestate.

Harbor's breath fluttered against my neck. He slept deeply, needing the rest.

The night was quiet, peaceful. Everything so right. A sense of wonder came over me. How far we'd come in so little time. Meeting each other. Claiming. Bonding. And now we were about to have three little babies.

I knew in this sacred moment the hatching would happen today. It was time.

"Hello, little ones," I whispered. "Time to come out to play."

I stared at the eggs, imagining holding the babies close to my chest, bathing them, dressing them in cute outfits, caring for all their needs.

I was the big investor dragon gone soft, dreaming of tiny T-shirts that said, Daddy's Girl or Dad's Little Dude .

Suddenly, someone was pounding my back.

"Magnus! You fell asleep."

I sat up abruptly. “Wh-what? I’m awake.”

Harbor scowled. “You were snoring.”

I hung my head. “Sorry.”

Harbor leaned in to check the eggs. “No pips yet,” he reported. “Good thing. Or I’d be real mad. You don’t want to see me when I’m real mad.”

“Oh? What’s that like?”

“Unicorn gone wild.” He quirked his forefinger at me. “And remember, we have pointy horns growing out of our foreheads and they are super sharp.”

“Threats? From a spangled cutie unicorn with a mane longer than his legs and who’s made of spun sugar and funnel cake? I’ll remind you, I can shoot fireballs from my mouth.”

“Hmph.” He leaned back, pouting.

I got up and made an early breakfast. When I returned with the tray, Ayelet was up and sitting in the nest with Harbor. He still wore his boxers and favorite sleep T-shirt, showing off his long, graceful legs.

“I’m not going to work. I decided to take a paternity day today. I have a feeling,” he said.

“Me, too,” I said.

“I hope you guys are right,” Harbor said. “It’s been a lot of waiting.”

I set the tray down and we all ate. And watched the eggs.

And watched.

And watched.

Ayelet took a short nap. I fiddled with Harbor's tablet. But Harbor would not be distracted.

It was noon when he cried out, "The basket moved!"

"What?" I stared at it.

"Just a smidge."

Ayelet grunted and came wide awake. I tossed the tablet away. From that second on, it was all tunnel vision on those eggs.

As we stared, one of the eggs gave a single shudder. The tiniest of cracks appeared.

We all spoke at once.

"Look."

"There's a pip."

"It just happened."

We slapped each other's backs, laughing.

"It's the most beautiful pip in the whole wide world," Harbor said.

“Look!” Ayelet yelled. “The middle egg has a pip now.”

“Remember.” I rubbed both my mates’ backs. “The healer said it would take at least twelve hours to hatch after the first pip.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” Harbor crossed his arms.

“Not even to pee?” Ayelet asked.

Harbor made a face. “I gotta pee now.” He jumped up, ran to the bathroom, and was back in sixty seconds.

“That was fast,” I said.

“I’m fast like that,” he replied. “What’d I miss?”

Soon after, the third egg showed a pip.

The hours stretched. I cooked the meals and took away the dirty dishes. Ayelet brought clean clothes for Harbor to change into and made sure all the baby clothes, blankets, and diapers were in place. Three cribs had been set up in our master bedroom. We’d move back in there once the babies were hatched.

We had started to count the pips, celebrating each new one, but after eight hours, we lost count. Our babies were strong. They were coming out full force.

We’d just finished supper when Fluffy, the first baby, broke its egg in half and poked out its head. It opened its muzzle and let out a fierce squeak.

“It’s a dragon!” Ayelet cried.

It took another couple of hours for the dragon to shed the rest of the shell. We were lectured over and over again by the healer that we were not allowed to help, or the dragon might end up too weakened for life to ever fly.

In the meantime, the middle egg I called Scrunchy popped its own lid. A golden horn emerged followed by a lot of tangled white hair.

“A unicorn!” I announced.

Eight was the last to emerge. A baby gazelle showed its face.

“One of each!” Harbor clapped his hands.

The babies would not stay shifted long once they were all the way out of their shells. The first to turn human was the dragon. We used a soft sponge to clean him up and wrapped him in warm blankets. Our new baby dragon was a boy.

Harbor held him close to his chest.

The unicorn came next. A girl. We cleaned her up and Ayelet took her into his arms. Both babies cried at first but quieted quickly. We had bottles ready. Harbor planned to chest feed, but he couldn’t keep up with all three.

Finally, the gazelle was fully born and shifted to her human form. I took her into my arms.

“Two girls and a boy,” Harbor exclaimed. “Exactly what I wanted.”

We each held a sleeping baby as we fell in love all over again. Soon, there would be chaos, but right now, everything was serene.

“We need to come to a final decision on names,” Ayelet whispered.

Harbor held the dragon. “Let’s say we each choose for the baby we’re holding.”

“That’s fine with me,” I said.

“Sounds fair,” Ayelet said.

“Aiden. He feels like an Aiden,” Harbor said.

“I love it.” I smiled.

“Me, too.” Ayelet looked down at our unicorn daughter. “Lily.”

I nodded.

Harbor grinned. “It’s perfect.”

When I looked down at our gazelle daughter, so much love rushed up inside me. Tears formed in the corners of my eyes. “Arianne.”

“Welcome to the world, Aiden, Lily, and Arianne,” Harbor said.

Our family had just doubled in size, and I couldn’t have been happier.

Ayelet

Three babies were the most wonderful thing in the world but also the most exhausting. My paternity leave was three months, and at the end of that time, all I could think of was that when I got to my desk, I could put my head down on it and take a short nap. I imagined how great it was going to feel all the way to the office, then when I got there, all I wanted was to get home and be with my family.

For a guy who'd been all about work for so long, what a change. My job was still great, my coworkers so glad to greet me. The woman who'd filled in as supervisor had added my department to the responsibilities she already had for hers without a complaint. At least, none I'd heard of. It was time for me to pick up my work again, but it was going to be awfully hard not to keep thinking of them all day. I didn't want to anyway, but if I didn't, I'd do a terrible job and get fired and be a bad influence on our children.

Perhaps in the future, I would be able to go fully remote or maybe I'd change jobs, but today, I would have to survive a few miles away from home where Magnus and Harbor cared for our triplets. I felt a little pouty about it then laughed at myself.

Lots of fathers went out to work, and some were even great dads when they got home. I promised myself right then I would be that. A great dad when I got home. For now...a better than average employee.

I could always stop on the way home and bring my mates a treat, buy a toy for the baby... I could make the best of having to go out of the house.

We were still in the penthouse, which had, as it turned out, been available for purchase. We all loved it. The time would come when our children would need a big yard to play in, but for now, the penthouse was the perfect nest for our family to grow in.

For now, it was home. But so would anything be as long as the six of us were together. As I was thinking about this, my phone chimed a notification for a text.

I picked it up and swiped. A picture of all three of the kids came through, at a rare moment when all three were laughing and kicking and being utterly adorable.

Thought you might be missing us a little. XOXO Your Family.

My family...and didn't that make a man's heart swell.

Love you all. I hit send and turned my attention to my work. I had a lot to catch up on before I could go home. But I left the picture of the triplets open on my phone.

For inspiration.