



Traveler (Soulbound #1)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Okay, so here's the deal. When I turned 18, I got a letter from my mom who's dead, but we ignore that. Anywho the letter was to explain that I'm a Traveler. If you're also asking yourself what the **** does, that mean?... welcome to the club. Basically, I can travel to different realms in my sleep,

Naturally, I thought my mom was just a little off her rocker. She said she was a Traveler too, but she gave it up to be with my dad, and honestly, I thought she was just a hopeless romantic with a wild imagination. That is until I woke up in an Elemental Realm—for real—and apparently, this is where my mom is from. Suddenly, I'm at Stonebrooke Academy, surrounded by magic I didn't know existed. And, oh yeah, seven possible soulmates who are all way hotter than I ever expected. Oh and lets not forget about the psycho who wants to kidnap me and use me to overthrow the Council... this should be fun.

So, here I am: one confused, magical mess, trying to figure out how to control my powers, navigate a school full of people who have been practicing magic for years, and maybe—just maybe—find my seven mates before the equinox in a few months. Because if I don't, they will given the opportunity to find new mates, and sorry, not sorry. That just can't happen. I've been reading about reverse harems for years, and this is my chance to have my own. So, wish me luck.

Let's just hope I don't blow myself up in the process. or get murdered. I've got hot men to Mate? Marry? I don't know, man. This is all new.

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Aly

The last thing I saw was the snow , coming fast at my face. Falling was not a great idea. Before I can slam hard into the face of the earth, I Am blinking my eyes open, I roll over to turn off my alarm clock. Ugh. Honestly, who the hell allowed me to pick an 8 am class? If I could go back in time to when I selected classes and slap myself, I totally would.

Dragging myself out of bed, I walk to my bathroom without turning on the light. I splash my face with some water and grab my toothbrush. Looking in the mirror, I grimace at the sight. Dear lord , last night's dream was crazier than I thought. When I turned 20, I started having the most vivid dreams. My mom used to have them, too. Every morning at breakfast, she would sit down and tell me about her dreams and the rules that went along with them—saying I'd likely inherit them as well. It used to be my favorite part of my day.

The rules were always the same. 1. Never do something in the dream You wouldn't do in real life. 2. Search every dream for Your guardian angel 3. Never tell anyone but Your guardian angel You're dreaming.

Mom told me, my guardian angel would follow me through every dream and help guide me through it. She said it took her time to find hers until she noticed the same guy showing up in all her dreams. I hadn't noticed anyone until recently, but just like Mom said, there she was in every dream I can remember. I haven't worked up the courage to talk to her, but I would soon. Maybe.

Last night's dream was super fun, though. Well, until the end. I lived my best life like

Katara from The Last Airbender: tundra, Waterpower's, and all. Right before I woke up this morning, I had slipped off a glacier and taken quite the tumble; based on the image looking back at me in the mirror, I'm glad I don't have a boyfriend, or that poor man would probably have gotten a taste of my nonexistent kung-fu skills.

Shaking my head, I take a brush to my hair. Once I have my dark Curls under control, I decide I probably should blow dry my white face-framing pieces. I really should have thought through the hairstyle when I dyed my hair like this the last time I went to the hairdresser. In my defense, it looks fantastic. It just means I have to at least style the white pieces, so my curtain bangs don't look like limp noodles. Trust me, it is not a good look.

Walking to my closet, I grab a pair of baggy jeans and an off-the-shoulder sweater to wear. Snatching my bag off the floor by my door, I walk down the hallway, throwing my bag over my shoulder as I slide down the railing of the stairs. When I get to the bottom, I grab my favorite pair of black combat boots and give myself a once over in the mirror before rushing out of the door to my car.

Honestly, I'm super lucky. If You ignore the whole, both my parents are dead thing, which I choose to do. I'm thankfully not Your typical broke college student. I own my home and car and have enough money to put myself through college and support myself for a few years if I need to without struggling too much. But I'm frugal, so I could stretch it a little longer. I'm not planning to, but just knowing I could, makes me give myself a mental high-five. Yay, financial responsibility! Gag . Seriously, this whole adult thing is a total scam. Who looked at the rest of the world and said, '18 is a good age to allow these CHILDREN to play grown up. They are totally capable.' Prison immediately.

Any who, back to my dreams, I'm the world's best lucid dreamer. At least, that's how my mom explained it. Although I don't think lucid dreaming is the best way to describe it. When I googled it, everything said lucid dreaming was when You could

manipulate the dream into what You want it to be. I can't do that, not because of a lack of effort, but because it's more like an insanely vivid dream. Avid readers say they live a thousand lives in their books. I do that in my dreams. Once, I had a dream. I was in the middle of a Coup to overthrow the queen. Of what country, I have no idea, but I gotta say, if I ever have the dream again, I have some ideas of how to not end up on the chopping block. Literally. The mental image of me running down cobblestone streets, trying to avoid the guards, was an image that haunted me for months. Pulling into the parking lot for my favorite coffee shop, I take a deep breath. Me + No coffee = a monster the world is not prepared for.

“Aly, Hey! “Alora, the barista that takes my order every morning, says, holding up a Latte I pray to the gods is for me.

“Please tell me that’s mine?” I say with a smirk. Don't look at me like that . You're telling me You don't flirt with the pretty barista? Liar

“Yep, pay the ransom of 7 dollars and 50 cents, and nothing bad will happen.” She snarks back. One hand is on her hip, and the other point is at the register.

“Damn, I need to step up my flirting game.” Rolling my eyes, I pull out a ten and trade it slowly like it’s a hostage from NCIS.

“Girl, you’re hot and all, but I like sausage parties, and unless You're hiding one somewhere....” she tracks her eyes down my body in silent question.

“Nope, no smuggled sausages... but I figured we could have one hostage negotiation didn't have a steep price tag if I flirted a little.” Laughing, I wave as I head out of the door.

When I reach for the handle, I hear Alora say, “Never, Mamma has to pay bills, and a life of crime was always my dream.”

I laugh as I reach for the door again and make my way back to my car to mentally prepare to sit through my Psych class. Look, I'm totally interested in the topic, but there is nothing quite as sleep-inducing as Your monotone professor who talks at five words a minute explaining how trauma affects Your brain. Bor-ing.

I find my seat near the back and pull out my notebook. When the professor walks in, he moves to the front of the class and starts explaining the differences between attachment styles. Like I said, complete snooze fest. About halfway through the class, my mind wandered back to my dreams. The older I've gotten, the longer the dreams have lasted. I've never had the same one twice, and the only constant through them all is the girl with blue hair. I know I needed to try to talk to her, but something about talking to her made what Mom said much more real. When my parents died, my parent's lawyer gave me a letter from my mom where she brought up the dreams again, but it was entirely more terrifying.

At the time, I thought she must have been a little off her rocker or that maybe she left that letter as a joke, and I'd find a different letter later. That never happened, but the one thing I had to hold on to was, I never found the 'guardian angel' my mom kept talking about, and somehow, in my mind, it was grounds for me to pretend everything else was wrong. Until I saw her. And I then kept seeing her. I mean, if I'm honest, it took me two months of dreams to consider the slight possibility that she was the one my mom was talking about. But I've never talked to her. I never let myself stare or acknowledge in any way that I saw her because the last thing I wanted was for her to decide if I wasn't going to talk to her that she would talk to me. Mom's message was short and terrifying. Plus, I mean, we've already discussed the ignoring the fact they are dead thing, so...

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Aly

Throwing My key s into the Dish next to the door, I walk into my kitchen to get a glass of water. And grab a cold piece of pizza, I forgot to eat today, and I think my stomach is eating itself. Taking a deep breath, I walk upstairs to my parent's bedroom and sit on the edge of their bed.

Nights are the hardest. You go from Your parent's voices telling You dinner is ready, the TV playing, dishes rattling, smiles, laughs, and then.... Nothing. The silence is a shitty reminder that not only are You grown up, so this is normal, but even if You wanted to call them. You can't. See, this is what I mean: the sun goes down, and I'm a walking 'I need therapy' sign. I love laying in here, I can't bring myself to actually sleep in here or move my stuff in here. Mainly because I can still smell my mom's perfume and I'm not ready to give that up. Pulling myself from my regularly scheduled pity party.

Looking into the Floor-length mirror across from me I notice something at the bottom of the mirror. I climb off the bed and realize it's a box under the bed. Bending down, I see a wooden box with a lock on the side. Reaching out, I grab it and pull it towards me.

What the hell? I've been over this room a million times, Mom and Dad's accident. I've never seen this before. I place the box down, pick up the ring on my mom's dresser, and flip through the keys. Most of these are keys I recognize from Mom's jewelry box and the safe in the closet with all of our passports, birth certificates, and socials—the key to her bedroom. I have no idea what the last three are for, though. I've tried every door in the house and looked into the idea that Mom had a safety deposit box, but

nothing. I find a key that look small enough to fit and place it in the lock. The lid from the box pops open.

Looking into the box, I see a bunch of photos I don't recognize. It's of my mom and a girl who—h oly shit on a stick. There are two of them.

I mean, okay, I'm aware there aren't actually two of her, but since when did mom have a twin, and where is she? Looking through the rest of the photos, I see family photos from my mom's childhood and what I can only guess are from college. I try to remember what school mom said she went to, but cant. It's beautiful, like 100 times prettier than anywhere I've seen. The colors are more vibrant, and the architecture is unlike anything I've ever seen. After flipping through the photos, I look around in the rest of the box. A necklace I've never seen sits at the bottom. It's a golden plate with small constellations embossed on the edges. My mom's birthstone, a sapphire sits in the center. It's beautiful. The only other thing left in a box is a smaller photo of my mom dad and 3 other guys. I take everything from the box and decide I need to sleep. This is just way too much.

Making my way down the hall, I grab the bag I sleep in from by the door. Weirdly enough, after falling asleep with a book during the whole coup dream, I found out that whatever I'm holding comes with me. Trust me, Haunting Adeline was not an effective weapon, minus the skull on the front. Ninety percent sure at least five people thought I was a Satanist.

Since then, I have slept with a backpack with some essentials since I never know how long I will be somewhere, recently, I've added some more personal Stuff: A change of clothes and my combat boots, which usually go with any society without being too noticeable, a knife, a picture of my parents, mom's letter and a small purse of some coins that belonged to my mom there are a few different types, In a few of my dreams I've needed money and some of the coins matched that place, weird I know . But remember we are ignoring that . I throw the pictures and the necklace into the bag

and head to the bathroom to wash my face and braid my hair.

While I don't want to think Mom was right, how stupid would I be to completely ignore it and end up stuck and leave behind the one thing that contains answers? And before You say it because I know you're judging me, yes, I am aware that all signs point to my mom being right and most definitely not crazy. But sue me, how awesome would this all be true. I mean? Traveling different realms, the whole multiple mate's thing, doesn't hurt either. Mom may not have been down with that, but this girl has been reading reverse harem books for years and having my own sounds awesome if I do say so myself. But if we are keeping tally of how my luck runs, dead parents. No more family, no boyfriend. (Apparently, talking to Yourself in Your head and laughing is considered weird).

Currently, the tally is cruel joke-3 Aly- 0.

I change into a Brown skirt that hangs to about my mid-calf, it's flowy and soft enough that I can fall asleep but modest enough not to get me arrested in case I find myself in another mid-evil town. God, I hate those. Its way to prim and proper for my liking . I pair it with a tank top and a white sweater.

Climates are weird and trying to find outfit's that can work no matter where you find yourself is hard, but I've got it mostly figured out. In my bag I have leggings and shorts and a T-shirt case. That, combined with a skirt and the sweater, I'm pretty much covered unless it's snowing like last night. Thankfully, I'm not entirely above borrowing someone's stuff.

Grabbing the bag, I pull it over one shoulder. To most, it looks like I'm getting ready for night classes, but nope, I'm the weirdo who sleeps with a backpack and fully clothed. But hey, at least I'm prepared. God, I sound Insane. Groaning, I lay down on my side and pull the blanket up. It's been a long day, and I am ready to do something that doesn't involve adulting. Closing my eyes, I let the dreams come.

I'm Laying Somewhere soft when I feel someone kick my side softly. “Ehm, are You just going to lay there all day, or can we get to the” I let out a scream and throw myself backward, opening my eyes to see the blue-haired girl with crossed arms staring at me with a slight smirk her lips

“—The part where You scream. Great, now that that's over, let's get going. We don't have all day, and we have a lot to talk about since you decided to spend the last three months ignoring me and pretending like I don't exist.” She rolls her eyes and looks at me expectantly.

“Uhm. I don't know what You're talking about. Who are You?” I ask, feigning ignorance. Remember when I said the last thing I needed was this girl deciding to talk to me if I wasn't ready? Yeah, well, welcome to my own personal hell.

Cruel joke-4 Aly -0.

“Alyssa, we don't have time for this. I have a lot to get through and not enough time to do it. You and I both know that I'm Your guardian. My name is Vivianne, and playing dumb will get You nowhere. You have questions; I have answers. What neither of us has is time, so get up, come sit over here, have some coffee, and let's chat, shall we?” she says, shaking her head. I thought fairy godmothers were supposed to be nice.

Grumbling, I sit up and look around. We are in some sort of room with tall ceilings. I'm lying on the bed while Vivianne stands near a small table with a coffee pot and cups. Climbing off the bed, I make my way to the table and sit slowly in the chair.

“Great, now how about we get started? I will give you a brief rundown You are going to wait until I'm finished, and if I leave anything out after I'm done, you can ask

away, and I'll tell You anything You need to know. Kay?" Giving her a small nod, she continues

"Cool, so as I'm sure your mom told you, You're a traveler. The gods designed travelers to help balance the need for mates in other realms. Your mother decided to forgo her calling, which was her choice, and You will also have the choice to do the same. Your mother had five mates, and she only married one, Your father. You may mate with all or none of Your mates, but the choice is ultimately Yours. We are in a city called StoneBrooke, where You will attend the academy where You will find Your mates. You have until the equinox to find and complete all of the bonds. Otherwise, the goddess will grant them the opportunity to meet a different mate. You following along so far?"

I nod.

"Unfortunately, we have to give You a fake Ish background because No one can know You're a traveler, so no blabbing to your mates that you're a traveler until the bond is complete. You know, for Your protection and all that good stuff." She waves her hand and takes a drink of her coffee. I open my mouth to ask a question, and she gives me a sharp glare. Okay, then I guess she wasn't quite done.

"Like I said, you will have Your turn. You shouldn't run into anyone who will want to hurt You for being a traveler here. However, the chances aren't zero. The gods have decided that it's better if your mates find out later to avoid anyone with, Ill intent. However, few there may be in this realm. Now for the jaw-dropping stuff. This is an elemental fae realm, as this was Your mother's original realm, she grew up right here in stonebrooke and actually attended the academy. You do have magic. You will have to learn to use it as well as the additional powers gifted by the gods to all travelers. We aren't sure what yours will be, so we will have to test for that later. As far as money goes, before your mom left here, she had quite a lot of money that is now yours, however, I'd like to wait to get that account set up until after we have

taken care of a few things. your enrollment has been situated. We just have to get Your dorm set up before tonight. Classes start in two days, and I will attend the school with you to help you in any way you need. Now it's Your turn.”

Staring at her, speechless, I open and close my mouth a few times. My mother's original realm? Elemental magic? Special powers? Holy shit . My head starts to spin as the world goes black. The last thing I hear is Vivianne groaning out, “Dear Gods, do not faint “

Rolling over to feel for my phone to turn off my alarm, I freeze. Patting the - Floor? I realize I'm not in bed, and my alarm isn't going off. What the fuck. Sitting straight up, I look around, and God damn it, Vivienne is still here. Leaning against the wall spinning a fucking knife! “What the hell is happening?”

“What’s happening is You can't control Yourself and passed out, which wasted more time than we have now. Can you pull it together? Ask your questions so we can head to the school to get You situated and ready for classes to start?” She raises an eyebrow

“Okay, let me get this straight. You're my Guardian?”

“Yep.”

“This is my mom's original realm.”

“Like I said. Yep.”

“I have powers.”

“Yeah, is there a question anywhere? I already told You all of this.” She Snaps

“How many Mates do I have?” I ask, pursing my lips. This girl has a severe attitude problem.

“Seven. But the potential for more if you decide seven isn't enough.”

“I'm sorry. WHAT?! “I jump from the floor and start pacing seven mates. SEVEN. How would anyone be able to handle seven people? I Pause. “Did You say more if I decide seven isn't enough?”

Rolling her eyes, she sets down her mug. “Yes, Alyssa, remember the whole piece about this being Your choice? You have seven needed matches to make this ‘successful,’ so to speak, but there are additional options that you have been matched with should You like them and decide You would like to add them to Your little harem. Now, before You freak out, like I said, you can choose none of them or all 11 of them if You want. This is completely Your choice.”

“How will I know who is my mate? “I ask in a small voice. I know I said I would love a harem of my own, but let's be real here. Eleven mates are WAYYYY too many men. And not going to happen. But then again...No! Not Happening, Aly pull it together.

“It's pretty simple. Take a deep breath and close Your eyes. “Giving her a weird look, she rolls her eyes and says, “Look, I get it; You're overwhelmed, but if you hadn't taken so long to talk to me, I could have been preparing this whole time. That didn't happen, so now I have to get You ready for classes and settled in less than two days.”

“You could have talked to me. This is in fact a two-way street.” I snark.

“No, I in fact could not. Until you reach the realm the gods have designed for you,

I'm barred from involving myself and or interfering with your life. So, no its not a two-way street. You just need therapy. Now could you please-" she waves the knife up and down at me.

Giving in, I take a deep breath and close my eyes. "Great, now search inward. You should see colors. That's your magic. Most people find it in their chests, some in their stomachs. If You focus closely, you should see silver strands leaving Your magic. Those are Your mate bonds; as the relationships develop, they will shift colors from silver to gold. Those ties link You to Your seven mates. When You get close to Your mates, you will feel like You're being pulled to them."

Holy shit, this is real . There is a swirling ball of colors right where she said it would be, extending from that, I see 7 Strands of silver. I let myself think about this for a second. If I'm honest, this is everything I've ever wanted. Sure, maybe I wasn't expecting the whole magic thing, but a Harem, a family, answers. Fuck it, I can do this, and like Vivi said, if I don't want all or any of the bonds, that's my choice. If I'm honest, knowing I have a choice makes me feel much better. It makes me feel mildly powerful, but I'll leave the power trip for later.

When I look up, I see Vivianne smiling at me. "I'm Glad we're past the whole freak out and straight to the fun thoughts. Now, let's go. We have to get to the school and get You checked in. Just wait till You see the campus; it's pretty kickass if I do say so myself." She smirks and grabs my hand to yank me out of the chair.

She leads me down a hallway to a door that leads outside. When we get to the door, she stops and looks at me. "Look, I know this is a lot to ask, but keep in mind You aren't supposed to be here, so over the next two days, I'm going to be feeding Your information. It's important You remember it. We can't have anyone suspecting You're not from here. And to make sure that doesn't happen, we can't have You wide-eyed and amazed at everything you see out here. We have to go through a portal. It's exactly how you would imagine a portal looks. It won't hurt You. When we walk up

to it, you need to pretend You've done this a million times. Kay?"

I give her a small smile. "I can handle that. Thanks for the warning, uhm, but just one question. If someone asks where I'm from, what do I say? "

"Oh! Right, well, we will get to that later. For now, no one should ask." She says, avoiding looking at me. Before I can say anything else, she yanks on my arm, pulling me out of the door.

I freeze. Holy shit, this place is stunning. All around are tall trees, and all of the colors seem so vivid. If I didn't know any better, I'd say I was on drugs . Wait. Am I? Taking stock of how my body feels, everything seems normal. But I've also never done drugs, so I could be and wouldn't know. But I'm not entirely sure that's how drugs work.

"Dear god, Alyssa, remember what I said? You have to act like You've seen all of this before," Vivianne hisses through a clenched smile.

"Have You ever tried to act sober when you're drunk? That's how I feel right now." I say, trying to school my features and smile, though I'm almost positive it looks more like a grimace.

"That's how You look . Can You just act like a normal person for like 10 minutes? You can freak out behind closed doors." She says stiffly

Walking down the main road, I look around. There are small shops and lots of people walking around with their parents. I assume shopping for the upcoming school year. A pang of sadness hit's me as I remember that my parents aren't here. God, when did I become this emotional?

Pulling myself together, I smile and try not to look around too much. Nothing

screams, 'I'm not from here' like a head on a swivel. When we get to the end of the street, I see a few people standing next to a swirling wall. It's beautiful. Imagine someone takes all of the photos of the northern lights and shoves them onto a wall that, my friend's, is a portal, well, at least what it looks like.

As we approach the portal, Vivianne looks back at me and gives me a pointed look that I ignore. I turn my head slightly to seem unfazed. Ha! See, I can look normal. As that thought goes through my head, everyone standing by the portal gets the show of a lifetime as the biggest butterfly I've ever seen, and I'm not just talking about abnormally large. No, this thing is the size of a damn frisbee flies directly into my face.

“AHH!!! WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT!” I screech, batting my hands, trying and failing to get it away from me. About halfway through one of my swats, I fall straight onto my ass. Dead. Silence. Then, as if on cue, everyone starts laughing, including Vivianne. Shooting her a look that I hope lets her know that I hate her, and I hope a giant monster butterfly eats her face off. This, of course, only makes her laugh harder.

“Oh, my Gods! Have You never seen a butterfly before?” She says while bent over, holding her stomach and wiping literal tears from her eyes

Standing up, I brush nonexistent dirt from my legs. “Of course I have, normal-sized butterflies. That thing was huge. And not normal.” I mumble, sniffing lightly.

“God’s help me. Come on, we are going to be late.” Viviane says, rolling her eyes with a smile on her face.

She takes my hand and leads me through the portal, which was somewhat underwhelming. It literally felt like walking through a doorway. Where was the spinning and nausea that everyone describes in books?

Liars.

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

Aly

Looking up , I freeze Holy Christ on a cracker. This is the academy. Try a giant castle the size of Florida. In front of us is a large stone archway with the words 'StoneBrooke Academy 'etched into the top. Walking through the gates feels like stepping into a whole new world. Ha, get it. Cause I'm in a new world? No? Look if I don't laugh, I'll cry.

The path to the main courtyard is lined with stone arches. The courtyard itself is beautiful. In the middle, there's this huge fountain—like really huge—and it's not just water falling from it. The water shifts color as it falls, almost like it's alive. Sometimes, it's clear and bright, then it's deep blue, then green, and I could swear it looks like there's fire in it for a split second. The buildings surrounding the courtyard look like something out of a dream no pun intended.

They're made of stone, and glass, all blending together in this perfect, almost effortless way. The stone is a mix of dark grays and earthy browns, and the walls are carved with these intricate designs—trees, waves, flames, and wind, all etched into the surface. It's not just architecture; it feels like the whole place was made to reflect the four elements, each building embodying one of them.

The Earth building is made of thick stone and moss-covered roof tiles, like it just grew out of the earth beneath it. The Fire building is impossible to miss—it's made from dark volcanic stone that almost seems to glow, with windows that have a dark tint to them.

The Water building is the most calming, with its glass walls that seem to ripple,

giving off this almost liquid vibe. And then there's the Air building, with its tall towers reaching into the sky, and the whole thing looks like it's floating.

Beyond the buildings, there are open fields and ponds those must be the training grounds. I'm looking around taking everything in when I feel like I'm being watched. Yep no, that's going to be a hard no for me.

Before I know what is happening, I'm being yanked to a building that sits off the main archway. Vivianne leads me through the doors and takes me to a small room off the entrance. The name Barrett Hastings is on the door in front of us, and a woman sits behind a desk typing on her computer.

"What do You want." the woman says, looking at me with a sneer.

"Who pissed in Your cheerios." Slips out before I can catch myself, and I hear a snort from Vivianne when the woman's eyes slide her way. She freezes.

"Oh, Ms.-" Before she can finish her sentence Vivianne cuts her off telling her we need to speak to the dean.

"One moment, I'll let Mr. Hastings know You're here." A blush creeps up her face. Poor girl, she looks like she's going to be fired. But then again, I don't know much about this place, so for all I know, she will be.

Not even a second later, the door on our left opens, and a large man steps out. He slams the door and stomps out of the waiting room. The Woman, er- Harlow, gets up and softly knocks on the door before poking her head in, she disappears for a moment before stepping in. when she returns, she is holding two folders.

"Mr. Hastings is busy with council business and needs to reschedule your meeting for the first day of classes, these are you're your orientation packets I'm sure you can get

yourself situated. I will send you a message on your tablets that have been left in your room with the day and time of the new meeting. Please let me know if anything is missing.” She turns and walks back to her desk effectively dismissing us. Rude.

Vivianne purses her lips, and I swear to God growls before turning and marching out of the doors. I race behind her trying to catch up.

Vivianne meets me outside and pulls me through the courtyard to a building with a Water symbol on it directly across from the office. Once inside, we go to the 4th floor and walk down to room 407. Grabbing the keys from the folder, she unlocks the door and pulls me inside.

Looking around, we have a bathroom and two large beds on either side of the room. Each side has a desk and wardrobe. On the far wall is a door leading to a balcony that overlooks a lake at the back of the building.

Vivianne picks up a tablet on her desk and types something out before looking to me. “I’m going to take a shower and change before dinner. I had it sent here for us so we can eat and then get some rest. I’m sure You’re tired. “

When she turns and walks into the bathroom, I plop down on the bed closest to me. I pick up the tablet and click through some of the tabs. Messages, all of my professors are listed.

My first class is Water basics with Saul Jacobs

Earth Basics with Margie Lewis

Realm history with Alicent Mabel

Air basics with Lavender Valen

Defensive Magic with... no one? It doesn't have. A teacher listed.

What about fire? I click through some more tabs to see if maybe I just missed it but find nothing. Weird. Maybe fire is something you learn later on?

The next tab click is an app that looks suspiciously like Instagram, I scroll for a while looking at all the new posts of people's dorms with #moveinday. In every caption. When I click on my profile, I see it filled out for me

Alyssa James, 20 Taurus. Major undecided. The only thing missing is a profile picture. I slide off the bed and turn to face the window. Lighting. Snapping a few photos, I sit back down before flipping through and deciding on the last one. I look happy but not serial killer happy. You know what I'm talking about. The photos where you look back at them and your eyes are just a little too wide.

I spend the next thirty minutes putting away what clothes I have and unpacking the pictures and note from my mom before deciding to close my eyes. How long of a shower does this girl need to take.

Today has been amazing and exhausting. The only thoughts running through my mind as I drift off are, 'Please don't let this be a dream. '

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

Aly

The Smell Of food pulls me from my sleep. Rolling over, I sit up, and looking around, I see Vivianne sitting on her bed, holding her plate, watching me.

“Ah, she wakes! Do You want to talk while we eat or eat and then talk?” She asks, pointing to containers sitting on my desk. I climb off the bed and grab a plate with spaghetti and meatballs. When I'm satisfied, I walk over and plop down on the bed, motioning for her to continue.

“So, Completing the bond happens when you sleep with each other, so hold off on sleeping with your potential mates until, you are sure. I know there may be some internal reservations about being with multiple people. Here in this realm, that isn't a concern You should have; most people have multiple mates, and the idea of fated mates is very common. When your complete bonds, you will be moved from these dorms to the family dorms, with enough space for You and whoever You accept. Your main goal during this time is to find your mates, choose what kind of relationship You want with each of them, and learn to control your magic. I am here to guide you, counsel you, keep you safe, and answer questions as You have them. Ultimately, we want this transition to be as seamless as possible. Now, what questions do You have.”

Swallowing the last of my dinner. I think through what she just said. “What does completing the bond mean?”

“When You mate, you both will gain markings, like tattoos. Mate bonds are like soul mates. They can't be manipulated or altered. Once you accept a mate, you're like...

what do they call it where you are from? Oh! Married. except the whole divorce thing isn't real. You like can't break up. So, like I said choose wisely."

"So, at the end of this, I could potentially be married to 11 people?" I squeak.

"Yep, oh! When You get a chance, look in Your closet; You have to wear a uniform here. But don't worry, they are super cute, and You can wear pants or a skirt, whatever makes You more comfortable." She smiles, swinging her legs and jumping off her bed.

I need a shower and some quiet time. Turning on the water, I strip out of my clothes and climb in. Clearing my mind, I focus on the reality of my new situation: I'm safe, I think I could genuinely be happy here, I'm honest with myself. I'm relieved. Living in that house with all of the memories but without my parents was draining me. And as much as I'll miss the familiarity, there is a part of me that's glad that I didn't have to be the one to give myself a fresh start. Is that fucked up?

Groaning, I go through my shower routine, and when I get out, I start searching, praying to the Gods- or is it just one? Anyway, I need a blow dryer, so whoever I need to pray to will do—sticking my head out of the bathroom, "Hey, Vivianne? Is there a Blow dryer anywhere? "As soon as the words are out of my mouth, Vivianne falls off the bed laughing.

"Girl, you are at a supernatural academy for elemental magic, and You are asking if there is basically a wind device to dry Your hair?" She continues to laugh as she gets up and walks to the bathroom. Pushing open the door she grabs my shoulders and points me at the mirror.

"Okay, remember when I taught You how to find Your magic? You're going to look for the white wisps and slowly push it to Your hands. Try not to push too hard. Wind likes to be guided, not forced."

Closing my eyes, I locate my magic again and try to nudge my air magic towards my hands. At first, nothing happens, but then I feel small gusts of wind pouring from my hands.

“Great. Now, try to push a little more and move Your hands so You blow the air down. You don't want to walk around campus looking like You've been electrocuted.”

Doing as she says, I try to style my hair. It isn't as easy as people make it sound, but after around 10 minutes, I get the hang of it. When my hair is done, I take a deep breath. “Thanks. I feel a little out of my depth here,” I say quietly.

“It's okay not to know everything; that's why I'm here. As long as You actually take classes and Your job seriously, you'll do just fine. I promise.” Giving me something I think resembles a hug but is more like a head lock, she returns to her bed.

Throwing on some clothes, I climb into bed. Pulling the covers up, I turn to Face Vivianne's side of the room. “What's the plan for tomorrow?” I ask

“Well, when we wake up, we will get ready and head out to do Your tour of the campus and grab some coffee. We need to stop by the library to pick up Your books and get You some needed supplies. After that, we have a meeting to go to, but other than that, it's a pretty relaxed day, so You can rest and study a little before classes start the next day.” Nodding, I turn and let myself fall asleep.

When I wake up the next morning, I notice Vivianne is gone, so I get up and head to the bathroom to get ready. When I walk in, there is makeup on the counter that all looks brand new with a note.

Thought You might want to not look like a drooling mess in case we meet any of Your men. This is for You. Your uniform is in Your wardrobe. Be back soon - V

Don't mind if I do. Throwing on a bit of makeup, I finish in the bathroom by brushing my teeth and head to the wardrobe to try on the uniform. They gave me both the option of pants and a skirt. I appreciate the gesture, but unless I haven't shaved my legs, which I did. Thank God . I will be rocking the full effect of the schoolgirl look. I got mates to impress.

Smiling to myself, I button up my shirt and slip the tie over my head. At the bottom of the wardrobe, I see three types of shoes. One is a pair of black flats, which are cute, but not my style. The second is a pair of black platform heels with a thick heel that will ensure I don't topple. The Third is a pair of stilettos that would be super adorable with the pants. Grabbing the platforms, I slip them on and smooth down my hair.

When I finish, I walk over to the full-length mirror and not to toot my own horn or anything, but I look hot in this thing. The skirt falls a few inches above my knee, and the heels make my legs look longer than they are, which is always a win. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice a jacket hanging near the door. Grabbing it, I slip it on, and now I look like I belong on an episode of Gossip Girl. When I finish my once-over, I empty my backpack and throw my tablet in it, so I don't have to carry everything later.

Seconds later, Vivianne opens the door. "Oh good, You're ready. Let's go." she says, holding the door open. When we left the dorm, she shows me the main buildings, like the library and classrooms. The grounds are beautiful. It's 10/10 better than anything I've seen back home. The colors seem.... More? Everything is clean, almost sparkling. People are scattered around the lawn, talking with friends and laughing. Everyone looks so happy. There is part of my mind that I can't believe my mom is from here.

How could someone come from a world that looks like this to Earth? Is this still considered earth? Add that to my list of things to ask about. Taking a deep breath, I move to catch up with Vivianne, who seems to have decided I was walking too slow.

“Okay, so over here is the fountain. This is where most people hang out and probably the easiest place to get Your barring, in case You get lost.” She quips.

“Got it, but aren't You going to be with me the whole time?” I say, looking into the fountain.

“Well, yeah, but You're going to want some time alone with Your mates, and when You meet up with them between classes, this might be the best spot to meet.” Rolling her eyes, she turns and starts heading to the office buildings for the teachers.

When we walk in, I take in the marble floors and high ceilings. God, this place is beautiful. “Oh, I meant to ask. Are there Gods.... Plural, or is it just the one?” “Vivianne stops in her tracks, making me bump into her back before she starts giggling.

“Girl, you need to get Your priorities straight. You've been thrust into a new world where You have to mate at least seven people, and Your concern is whether there are gods or just a god?” she continues laughing before giving in “gods.”

“Hey, it's not my fault. I know nothing about this place, and You told me to ask questions.” I huff.

“Over here is where all of Your professor's offices are, so if You need additional help or have questions, you can find them here during office hours. They are posted on the doors and on Your tablet. “

About halfway down the hall, Vivianne turns into a room. When I follow, I stop dead

in my tracks. My mouth opens and closes a few times, all words dying in my throat. A woman sits behind a desk talking with Vivianne glasses hanging low on her nose as she looks above them...

“Mom?” I croak. Tears sting behind my eyes. The woman looks up at me, and her face softens.

“Alyssa, please. Come sit.” she says softly, her eyebrows wrinkled. She points at the seat next to Vivianne.

On shaky legs, I make my way over to the seat and slowly lower myself to the chair. Obviously, this isn't my mom. Mom's dead. My mind finally catches up, realizing this is her twin sister. “Holy shit.” I breathe.

“Holy shit indeed. I'm Your Aunt Genevieve.” She says Laughing. “How are You settling in?” She asks

“I- I'm doing alright. Honestly, I'm a little overwhelmed. I didn't know You would be teaching here. Are You one of my Professors?” Chewing on my lip, I try to process this. I mean, this could be great. Having family here might make this all easier, but... every time I look at her, all I see is mom. Looking down at the Plack on her desk, I see ‘Professor Genevieve James ‘Fuck my life. I can't catch a break to save my life.

“I am one of Your Professors. I will be teaching all of Your Fire element classes. I'm sorry about Sarah. Vivianne told me what happened, and I'm sorry I couldn't be there for You. I asked that I be omitted from your schedule until we could meet. I wanted you to meet me before realizing you have a whole lot of family here.” Her eyes drop to her hands. The thought that she missed her sister's funeral, that she hasn't seen her in years except for in the mirror, forces the tears I've been holding back to fall. This is the first time I've ever had to think about the fact that there are people out there who loved my parents and who miss them too. Getting up from my seat, I move around

her desk and drop to my knees, wrapping my arms around her.

“I’m sorry, too. “My words muffled by her shoulder. She holds onto me while we both take a moment. When I pull back, I see a soft smile on her face.

“You look so much like her.” She whispers.

Giggling to myself, I give her a look. “So do You.” I snark back

Returning to my seat, I take a deep breath and look at Vivianne, who gives me a small smile and nods. “So, obviously, I’m here if You need anything, as well as Your grandparents, who will be coming for family day. They are excited to meet You. With Vivianne also back, we are excited to be a family again. “She says softly. At her words, I choke for a second before whirling around to look at a cringing Vivianne.

“Shit. “ She mumbles, looking at me out of the corner of her eye.

“I’m sorry, Family?! As in, we are related?” I squeak, looking at my aunt, who is trying and failing to hide her laugh.

“Yes, Family, as in Vivianne is Your cousin. My Daughter.” She says after composing herself

“I didn’t want to overwhelm You. With the whole ‘ Hey, cuz, you don’t know me, but my mom is a clone of Your mom, and we are sister cousins. Oh, and also, you have at least seven mates that You also have to process how to deal with .’ Kind of thought that would be a bit much.” She rambles, throwing her hands in the air.

Okay, so mental checklist One: You have a whole family, including an aunt, grandparents, and a sister cousin. Who calls it that? Seriously? Who is also Your guardian supposed to help You locate the seven men who are supposed to be Your

husbands in a world full of magic that You have to learn to use and control? Okay, wait, is that all One? Oh, I am so fucked. Like, send an ambulance I think I'm having a heart attack and aneurysm at the same time. #sendhelp

Cruel Joke-5, Aly -0

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Aly

Hyperventilating, I try to take suck in air, but it's not working. Blood rushes to my ears. This is all way too much. Standing, I rush out of the room, down the hallway, and out the front doors. The second the air hit's my face, I double over, sucking in lung fulls. As I'm actively attempting not to die, I see a shadow fall over me, and before I know what's happening, I'm being picked up and pushed into someone's chest. The ache settles, and I'm finally able to take a breath. The hand rubbing circles on my back slows. my hearing slowly returns, I hear a deep voice whispering, "You're okay. Just breathe, little one. Good job: there You go. "

His face is pressed to my neck. When I pull back, I see one of the most beautiful people I've ever seen. His light blonde hair has fallen into his face, blocking part of his glasses. Before I realize what, I'm doing, I push the hair back. My touch sends shivers through both of us.

"I- Thank You." I stammer, suddenly feeling awkward because I'm sitting on a stranger's lap. I try to get up, but his arms tighten to keep me still.

"No need to thank me. What happened?" he asks, his voice soft.

"I- Just got overwhelmed and needed a second." he must notice the question on my face because he laughs lightly before setting me down next to him on the bench.

"I'm Saul Jacobs, I'm a professor here at the academy. "He says reaching his hand out to shake mine.

“Alyssa James, Tomorrow is my first day.” Good God Alyssa get it together stop being so mokey. This is one of your mates, and You're acting like a literal child right now. Straightening my back, I take his hand and give it a firm shake. Enjoy the male eye candy today, therapy tomorrow

His face morphs to shock briefly before tilting his head slightly. “Genna Is Your?”

“Ah- Aunt. Vivianne my cousin is actually going to be attending classes with me.”

“It’s good You'll have someone. School here can be... Intense. You're a James so Your family name will help, but people here can be snobby.” He says in a low tone. Before I get a chance to respond Vivianne comes running out of the building and stops dead in her tracks when she sees me sitting with Saul.

“Mr. Jacobs. How was Your Holiday Break?” she asks her eyes cutting to me briefly.

Clearing his throat Saul Straightens. “It was relaxing, it’s good to see You're back. “He says all professional now.

He stands looking to me one last time before excusing himself to run some errands before classes start. Vivianne and me decide to head back to the Dorms so we can relax. My mind keeps going back to the fact that I have a whole family now. It’s been years since I’ve had anyone and to go from nothing to all of this is overwhelming. Ugh save it for therapy Aly! Shoving the feelings down I bump my shoulder against Vivianne's.

“I’m not mad.” I say giving her a small smile.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell You, I just didn't want to add more to Your plate. This is a lot as it is. “She laughs.

“I do have a question though. What do I tell people about my mom. I know you said I'm not supposed to talk about being a traveler, but Saul knew we were related and ask how I was related to Your mom. I just don't know how to explain why no one has seen my mom in over 20 years and yet. Here I am.”

“Everyone has been told Your mom went to live in Ender, with her mate. So, if anyone asks that is where You're from.” She says quietly pulling me into our room and shutting the door before walking over to her wardrobe and pulling out maps and papers.

“Okay so basics about this realm so You don't make a complete fool of Yourself. “Cue Eye roll. God this girl is asking for me to draw a giant dick on her forehead in her sleep. Pointing at the map now laid on the floor she starts her history lesson.

“There are three territories in this realm Ender, which is where You are from. She coughs. The main terrain in that territory is desert based so lots of sand rock formations stone houses things like that significantly less vibrant than here but pretty in its own way. There is an academy there as well called Ashfield Academy. Which is where You would have gone if Your parents... “

“Hadn't died, yeah got it.” I finish for her. For someone who likes to give me shit she's super shy about the whole dead parents' thing.

“Yeah that, Anyway the other two are where we are which is the Woodlands. Our whole family is from here and the James family is considered a legacy family so Merry Christmas no one should fuck with you too bad. “

They celebrate Christmas here. Seeing the look on my face she rolls her eyes.

“Yes, we celebrate Christmas. And no , Santa isn't real here either. We live in a realm called Narine ; we are currently in a city called Stonebrooke hence the giant signs

everywhere that say 'Stonebrooke Academy for Elemental Magic'. Lastly there are the Isles, there are a few Academies there, Tidefall is the most well-known but that's less important. Any Questions?"

Uh, yeah how about. Can You repeat all of that? Letting the information she just shoved at me sink in I try to think about what's more relevant to me. The isles are at the bottom of that list.

"So, wait Ember I'm assuming has Cities what City do I say I'm from? "That seems like a less stupid question. Go me!

"Mom thinks it would be best if You say you're from Ironwood. It's a small town big enough that not everyone knows everyone but still smaller. If someone suspects Your lying it genuinely isn't that big of a deal. Being a traveler isn't a bad thing, but they are rare, and different. People don't like things that are different for them it means Dangerous."

"You mentioned before that there are powers that travelers have that others don't what are those?" remembering she mentioned that.

"Oh yes! Sorry we should test for those. All I need is a little bit of Your blood." She chirps

Jumping from the floor to grab a bag in her wardrobe. When she sits back down, she pulls out a bowl, knife, and six jars. I place my hand in hers, she takes the knife and cuts a small line on my palm pulling a squeak from me. Don't look at me like that I don't like pain. Well, okay that's not entirely true I don't like pain that isn't matched with pleasure. She flips my hand over and pushed at the bottom of the cut to force blood from the wound, mixing in a clear liquid she split's the contents of the bowl between the jars.

“Now what?” I ask holding the towel she handed me to the cut.

“Now, we wait until one glows.” She picks up each one and flips them to mix the liquids. By the end two are glowing. One is bright purple color, the other a light blue.

“What do the colors mean?”

"Yellow's all about light it's the power to create it or take it away. Green boosts physical abilities: things like speed, strength, agility anything that gives You an edge in the physical world. Silver, on the other hand, is tied to Divination, so it gives You glimpses into the future or even peeks into the past. Black is for Shadows, and that's more than just being able to move in darkness. Some with the Black can travel through shadows, and others have the crazy ability to create entire pocket dimensions. Purples for pain. She grimaces. It sounds worse than it is. You can give and take away pain. It's meant as a defensive power to help travelers protect themselves. And then there's Blue. Blue lets You tap into someone's mind, so You can read their thoughts, read their emotions, and even see their memories if they let You, of course."

“I’m sorry. Did You just say- “I start to sputter before she cuts me off

“That You can read minds? Yep! Honestly, it's not bad it's something You'd actively attempt to do and as far as invading someone's privacy that's between You and Your own moral code.” She quips picking Up the vials and putting them back where she got them. Okay that was not the power I was asking about but whatever.

“What are these powers for anyway? Why doesn't anyone else have them? “

“Remember when I told You that travelers weren't always accepted? They were given powers to help them survive whether that's getting away from danger, using dreams to alter perceptions of them, hiding ‘incriminating’ evidence in pocket

deletions.” She gives me a pointed look

“Yeah, fine but You said it’s mostly safe now so why do the powers still exist!”

“Things change all the time Aly; things might be okay now but what happens tomorrow if someone says fuck it and tries to kill every traveler known and they succeed because people can’t save themselves?”

She lets the thought sit with me while she busies herself getting ready for bed. My thoughts move to tomorrow. I finally get to start classes and try to find some normalcy; this place is amazing but at the same time I can’t help but feel like a fish out of water.

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Aly

Walking into my first class of the day I almost stop dead in my tracks. I was shown the outside of the building and where my classes are. But we couldn't actually go in the classroom.

Walking into this room feels... different. The walls- they're not walls, exactly. They're like sheets of glass or smooth stone, glowing faintly in shades of blue and green. The floor is made of the same material. Smooth and shining beneath my feet.

At the center of the room is a pool. It's shallow, the water clear, and still- too still, like it's waiting for something. Vivianne points at it and tells me it's where we practice for class. Chairs and desks line the outside of the pool, creating a semi-circle, everything facing the pool and the professor's desk in front of the room. It's simple but beautiful. It's made of smooth stone, curved, and almost seems like it grew here. It feels like part of the room, not something that was placed in it.

Looking to the room's edges, I notice the shelves lined with jars, bottles, and books. There's a quiet glow to everything in here. Even the lanterns floating overhead give off a soft, gentle light, not harsh or artificial.

Vivianne Pulls me to a seat close to the professors' desk and when I look up, I notice Shit ... It's Saul. Or Mr. Jacobs is what Vivianne called him yesterday. The Pull that's just been a dull thrum all morning suddenly intensifies and suddenly I'm so.... not focused on magic

I settle into my seat, trying to look casual, but my attention is immediately drawn to

Saul standing at the front of the room. He's leaning against the lectern, one hand casually resting on his hip, the other holding a vial of water that he's absentmindedly swirling. His blonde hair is perfectly tousled, and the way his sleeves are rolled up just enough to show off his forearms makes it hard to concentrate on anything else. I mean, seriously, how is someone this good-looking teaching?

Okay, focus. Focus. This is water magic class, not a modeling shoot.

"Water magic," Saul starts, his voice smooth like a river, calm but commanding, "is about flow. You're not forcing it. You're guiding it, like a current. If You think of water as a thing to control, you'll fail. If You think of it as a force to work with, well...." He pauses, glancing up at the class with a slight smile that makes my heart do this weird little flip. "You might just have a chance of understanding it."

I try to snap myself out of my thoughts. Right. Water magic. He's saying something important.

He moves to the center of the room, where the pool of water sits, and casually flicks his wrist. The water ripples slightly before shooting up in a perfect arc, hanging in the air like it's frozen in time.

"Water," he continues, his gaze sweeping across the class, "is in constant motion. But You," he points a finger, and I swear it's aimed directly at me, "are not. You have to be fluid. Let go of any idea of rigidity. Water is n't rigid. So, if You try to force it into shapes or boundaries that don't exist, you're going to waste a lot of energy."

I nod along, trying to look like I'm totally absorbing the information, when, in reality, I'm just trying to focus on not staring at his arms. Focus, focus, focus. He shifts again, turning slightly to face the pool, and as he does, his posture changes. His shoulders are tight like he's uncomfortable.

“Take a deep breath,” he says, his voice softening a little. “Close Your eyes, feel the energy around You, and then gently reach out with Your senses. Do n’ t force the water to move. Just.... suggest it. Guide it.” He demonstrates, his fingers barely touching the air above the water. The liquid seems to respond to him without hesitation, rising and falling with nothing more than a slight twitch of his fingers.

I close my eyes, trying to replicate what h e’ s doing. I feel a bit silly, but I focus anyway. I can almost feel the air around me shifting, but.... not quite. I’ m trying to feel it, but I do n’ t think I’ m doing it right. Maybe if I—

“Not bad, Miss James.” His voice snaps me out of my trance, and I immediately open my eyes, meeting his gaze.

Saul raises an eyebrow; a slow smirk appears. “Yo u’ re a little tense. But Yo u’ re on the right track. Relax, and remember water flows . Let it flow through You.”

I’ m sure I’ m blushing now, because my face is hot, but I quickly look down at my hands, pretending to focus. I inhale deeply, trying to push away the embarrassing thoughts circling in my head. Stupid attractive mates.

Saul Stops and goes rigid before his eyes flicker to mine his eyes going wide briefly so quick I almost miss it. Wait... did he... no. there’s no way. He returns to teaching, and I push the thought from my mind. There’s no way he heard that Vivianne said only travelers have that power

When class ends, I stand and try to rush out the door as quickly as possible when unfortunately. “Mrs. James please stay for a moment.” Both Vivianne and I stop and turn to Saul. His eyes trained only on me. “Alyssa James.” He clips

Vivianne gives me a small nod before turning and leaving class. I slowly make my way to the front of the class before speaking. “Yes? Professor”

Before I know it, he's grabbed me and pulled me into a hug dropping his head. "When we are alone You can call me Saul little one." He says in a soft voice. His head buried between my neck and shoulder. He takes a deep breath. "I'm sorry the bond is pushing me to You and being close helps the pull. "He mutters

I feel a smile spread on my face. "I don't mind." I murmur.

After a few seconds he pulls back and leans against his desk. "Have you found any other mates. I just ask so I can introduce myself."

"Full transparency I- I haven't but I do know I'm going to have seven." I grimace "So it won't just be one or two."

He laughs. "I figured little one. Most people have at least 4." he gives me a weird look as if that's common knowledge. So much for the crash course Vivianne gave me.

"Right , Well I'll see you tomorrow." I say letting him pull me into one last hug he drops a kiss to my forehead.

"Be good little one."

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Xander

The Air Basic s classroom feels less like a "whimsical cloud palace" and more like a trap. Too open. Too bright. The enchanted window framing endless sky makes my stomach drop—like I'm one misstep from tumbling into the void. Jared would've strutted in here like he owned the place, cracking jokes about the floating desks. But I'm not Jared. I'm the brother who stains his hoodies with ramen and types texts to his boyfriend three times before hitting "send."

I slink to the back row, knees knocking against the absurdly light desk. 90% air, 10% existential dread. The professor flips a book with a flick of her wrist, pages blurring. Magic. Always magic.

A girl plops down beside me, all chaotic energy and cherry-scented shampoo. I sink lower, gripping my bag like a shield. Don't look. Don't engage. But her foot taps a frenetic rhythm against the floor, and suddenly I'm hyperaware of her—the way she hums under her breath, the glitter pen she spins between her fingers.

Don't look at her. Don't even—

“—auditioning for ‘Most Mysterious Person in the Room’?”

My head whips toward her. The kin bond snaps into place. Mother fucking ... gods damn it. Momma told us about the different bonds growing up. There is obviously the mate bond, but everyone knows about those. Way less common is a kin bond. Basically, think soulmate level best friend. This girl probably thinks I'm Jared. That's why she's being so nice.

“I—uh, I’m fine,” I stammer, face burning. Kale’s voice echoes in my head: “Babe, when you panic, you sound like a dial-up modem.”

She smirks, and I’m suddenly certain she can hear my thoughts. Impossible.

Professor Valen claps, and the desks rearrange, forcing me face-to-face with Cherry Shampoo Girl. Her grin widens.

“So... levitation?” I mumble, staring at the feather between us like it holds the secrets of the universe. “You, uh, guide the air. Like water.”

Wow. Riveting lecture, Professor Obvious.

She closes her eyes, and a breeze ripples through her hair. The feather lifts— both feathers—hovering at perfect heights. First try.

My jaw tightens. Show-off.

“Nah, my cousin taught me,” she says, sticking out her hand. “Alyssa.”

I recoil. Another one. They always want something—a story about Jared, a connection to the “fun” twin. “I’m not who you think I am,” I snap.

Her brow furrows. “Considering I don’t think anything about you...”

“Xander,” I grit out. There. Happy?

She leans in, undeterred. “You’re good at this. The air stuff.”

A traitorous warmth blooms in my chest. No. Nope. I focus on my feather, channeling the breeze until it dances in sync with hers. The kin bond prickles—a

thread I didn't ask for, stitching us together.

Too much.

When the bell rings, I bolt, nearly tripping over the cloud-patterned rug. Safe in the hallway, I clutch my phone, thumb hovering over Kale's contact.

I glance back at the classroom. Alyssa's laughing with the professor, her feather still floating midair. The kin bond tugs, insistent.

Maybe tomorrow, I think, fleeing toward the stairwell. Maybe never

Vernon

The Council Hall's marble floor echoed with every step I took, the sound sharp and deliberate, like the ticking of a clock counting down to my victory. Shadows clung to me like loyal hounds. I didn't turn when Harlow scurried in—her frantic breaths and the rustle of parchment betrayed her fear. Pathetic.

“Out with it,” I said, staring at the obsidian throne ahead.

“The Woodlands sensors—” Her voice trembled. “A surge during the equinox storm. A Traveler's signature. Stronger than anything in decades. The girl—Aly James—enrolled at Stonebrooke yesterday.”

I stilled. Traveler . The word slithered into my veins, hot and intoxicating. Slowly, I turned. Harlow clutched a crystal orb like a lifeline, her knuckles white.

“Proof?”

She thrust the orb toward me. Inside, jagged holographic runes spiraled wildly, their patterns unmistakable. Traveler magic—untamed, volatile. Just like Sarah James' must have been before she traveled to the mortal world. But her daughter? Was here.

“The Guardian is telling people she's from ender.” Harlow whispered, “but her records are forged. Her parents... Sarah and Tom James... died years ago in the mortal world. A car accident.”

I smirked. Convenient . Barrett, the sanctimonious fool, had swallowed the lie whole.

“And the Council?”

“The gods compelled him to report a Traveler’s presence, but he’s hiding her true nature. The Council knows nothing.”

Good . Barrett’s weakness for rules would strangle him eventually. The less people know she’s a traveler the better. Can’t have the council expecting the storm coming their way.

I snatched the orb from her, tracing Aly’s name etched into the glass. “If the Council hears of this before I’m ready,” I said softly, “I’ll peel the skin from your hands. You do need those to scribble your little reports, don’t you?”

Harlow’s face drained of color. She nodded, scurrying out like a roach fleeing light.

Alone, I stared into the orb. Sarah’s daughter . Young. Untrained. A weapon waiting to be sharpened.

The greenhouse stank of damp soil and sentimentality. Moonblossoms—Elara’s moonblossoms—clung to the walls, their faint glow mocking me. My son knelt among them, dirt staining his hands, as if tending weeds could resurrect the dead. Weakness.

“Carion.”

He stiffened but didn’t turn. “Father.”

I struck the ground with my cane. A terracotta pot shattered. “Look at me.”

He faced me, his cheek smeared with soil. I sneered. “You’ve been assigned a new

sparring partner. Aly James.”

His face hardens briefly. Interesting. This could be good.

“Get close to her,” I ordered.

He crossed his arms. “Why?”

“Her magic.”

“Her... magic?”

I stepped closer, crowding him against the wall. “She’s a Traveler. Like her mother. Like yours .” His jaw twitched. Good. Let the guilt fester. “But this one...” I smiled. “Young. Impressionable. You’ll befriend her. Earn her trust. And when she trusts you, you’ll bring her to me.”

“No.”

I backhanded him. Blood bloomed on his lip. “You think this is a request? Your mother refused me too. Look where that got her.”

His fists clenched, but he stayed silent. Coward .

I leaned in, close enough to smell the fear on him. “Travelers bend realms. Shatter armies. Aly’s magic is raw. A weapon .”

“She’s not a tool—”

“No.” I gripped his collar, yanking him forward. “She’s a key. And you’ll turn her for me, or I’ll take her by force. Your choice.”

Silence. His throat bobbed.

I released him, straightening my coat. “Start tomorrow. And Carion?” I paused at the door, glancing at the moonblossoms. “Warn her, and I’ll make you watch as I skin her alive.”

The flowers trembled as I left. Let them .

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

Aly

I burst through the door of our dorm room, practically slamming it in my excitement. Vivianne looks up from her bed, raising an eyebrow at me, her blue hair wrapped up in a messy bun

“What happened?” she asks, already knowing the answer is probably a disaster or some kind of insane thing I’m going to have to process.

“Oh my god,” I start, collapsing onto my bed dramatically. “I had the weirdest thing happen in air basics.” I pause for a second, throwing her a sideways glance. “Also, you’re kind of rude for leaving me to walk up seven flights of stairs alone.”

Vivianne gives me a sideways grin, while she casually flips through a magazine like she’s not the one who made me walk up those stairs in the first place. “You lived. Besides, it builds character. And You don’t need me around to hold Your hand. You’re capable.”

“Yeah, capable enough to collapse in the middle of the staircase and die from exhaustion,” I mutter,

“Okay, okay. So, what happened in Your class?” Vivianne asks, flipping her magazine closed.

I sit up and rub my temples, trying to calm my excitement. “Where do I even start? So, first of all, Xander—the guy who sat next to me—totally weird. He’s super shy and I thought it was going to be fun and maybe we would be friends, but he completely

ignored me the whole class ”

Vivianne raises an eyebrow, clearly confused about why she should care. I feel a flush rise in my cheeks. Vivianne chews on her lip, clearly mulling over the situation.

“ So?” she prompts me to continue

“ Well then, I was making jokes, and he kept shutting me down and when I tried to introduce myself, he literally jumped down my throat yapping about how ‘he’s not who I think he is’ or something.” I cross my arms, still super confused about what the hell happened. “I mean I don't know how to explain it, but it just felt like we had to be friends. It doesn't make sense.”

“ Sounds like a kin bond,” Vivianne says, a mischievous grin tugging at the corner of her lips. “ Did You forget I told You there are some bonds that will feel more familial than Your mates?”

“ Well,” I say, leaning back and folding my arms, “ okay I might have forgotten about that, but he didn't act like he felt any kind of bond. So, I thought I was just being crazy plus he was a total ass....”

“ Dear gods ” Vivianne says, pinching the bridge of her nose. “Bonds like that aren't well known Aly he probably had no idea what was happening. Also, if he's jumping down your throat thinking you believe he's someone else did you maybe stop and think that it maybe happens pretty often, and the poor guy was just worried it was happening again?”

I frown. “Well- I didn't know they don't feel it like I do Viv, I'm not from here. And You're probably right about the whole mistaken identity thing. It just.... hurt? I don't know I don't handle rejection well.”

“ No way, I had no idea” Vivianne deadpans, her eyes sparkling. Her voice dripping with sarcasm. “Look just give him some time. “

“ Yup. Got it, giving him time.” I add with a dramatic sigh. “ But then, get this, we get paired up for the levitation exercise. You know, the whole ‘ levitate two feather s ’ thing. And guess what? I totally nailed it on the first try. Like, no big deal.”

Vivianne looks impressed. “ You nailed it? First try?”

I shrug, trying to act casual. “ Yeah, I just let the air flow naturally. I t’ s simple once You get the hang of it. You know, blow drying my hair and stuff helped.”

“ Cocky” Vivianne teases, leaning back against her pillow.

I laugh.

Viviann e’ s grin grows wider. “ I’ m glad You’ re getting the hang of things.”

“Yeah, I’ m adjusting okay honestly, I just feel super overwhelmed sometimes. I mean I have what 10 weeks before the equinox? Plus, I’ m learning all new stuff that people here have been doing since they were born.”

“You’ ll get the hang of it. But don’ t put pressure on yourself the gods are in the driver’ s seat just sit back and enjoy the ride. Plus, I’ m here if you need help me and mom are always willing to help even if it’ s just to talk things out.” she shakes her head a look in her eyes that just says ‘DU H ’

I roll my eyes, but I ca n’ t help but smile. “Thank You, honestly, I needed that reminder. Since mom and dad died, I’ ve been on my own. There is a lot of deprogramming going on its super weird. Oh! and speaking of weird, I have a serious question for You.”

Vivianne raises an eyebrow. “What now?”

“ Why didn’t You tell me I could talk in peoples’ brains.” I sass, crossing my arms and cocking my eyebrow.,

Vivianne goes still for a moment, her eyes narrowing. “ What did You just say? What do You mean ‘ Talk in people’s brains.”

“ Wait? You didn’t know?” I take in the shock on her face. Shit.... “I think I sent my thoughts to Saul and Xander earlier. I don't know how to describe it was like I had a thought and then they both froze like they were shocked... almost like they could hear me.” I frown. How the hell doesn’t she know.

Viviann e’ s eyes widen slightly, and she leans forward. “ Tha t’ s.... not good, Alyssa. You need to be careful. I've never heard of that happening.”

“I- How? Maybe I’m imagining it?” I ask my voice tight.

Vivianne exhales slowly, clearly thinking it over. “ Doubtful. If it had only happened once I’d say maybe. But twice? I can reach out to some people and see if they know anything about it. But until then You have to start practicing with me. You need to learn to control it we don't need You broadcasting Your thoughts to the wrong person.”

I nod, my stomach churning with a mix of confusion and fear. “ Yeah. I can do that.”

Vivianne jumps up soothing down her shirt.” Great. Now common You have a meeting with the dean.” She says walking to the door before shoving me through.

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

Barrett

The fire crackle s low in my office hearth, its warmth doing little to ease the tension coiled in my shoulders. I adjust the stack of reports on my desk—Aly James, unstable magic, high potential—but the words blur. They mean very little. Aly is a Traveler and has never done magic in her life. It's normal to not have control over all the elements right off the bat.

A knock.

“Enter.”

She slips inside; shoulders hunched like she's bracing for a blow. Her storm-gray eyes dart to the star charts on the walls, the obsidian relics, everywhere but me.

“Sit,” I say, voice softer than I'd ever use with anyone else.

She perches on the edge of the chair, fingers twisting in her lap. A pull yanks at my chest. What the fuck is that?

Then she looks up.

Gods.

The air leaves my lungs. Heat floods my veins, sudden and relentless, as if my blood has turned to wildfire. Mate. The word slams into me, raw and undeniable. Her eyes widen—she feels it too— “Oh god, already? Just found one. Why—?” She cuts off

her thoughts, and her worried eyes lock with mine.

“You found a mate already?” My voice is tight. I understood I’d be sharing her, but gods, it’s her first day.

She nods.

“Who?” I soften my voice, though my grip tightens on the edge of the desk.

“Professor Jacobs,” she Mumbles, dropping her eyes.

Relief and irritation war in my chest. Saul Jacobs. Of course. The man’s a good friend of mine—loyal, competent, annoyingly patient. But the thought of him touching her, even in a world where bonds are shared, sends a possessive snarl clawing up my throat. I swallow it.

“Aly, you’re going to have multiple mates. It’s normal. No one is upset by that.” I force a smirk, leaning back in my chair. “But between me and you, I don’t think Saul would enjoy hearing you refer to him as ‘ professor .’ Unless that’s something he’s into.”

Her cheeks flush crimson. “I didn’t—it’s just... he’s, my teacher. Isn’t this... complicated?”

“Yes.” No lies. No platitudes. “But it’s not a problem unless you make it one.”

She tugs at the sleeve of her academy uniform, magic flickering around her like static. “What if I can’t handle this? The bonds, the magic, the... expectations ?”

I stand abruptly, circling the desk. Her breath hitches as I stop in front of her, close enough that the bond thrums between us, insistent and hungry. “You’re a Traveler.

You were born to handle chaos.”

“Wait you know? Vivianne said- “

“That no one can know? Usually that’s true but when travelers arrive at the academy, they usually have no idea how to use magic, so they do poorly in classes, and people notice. The gods have a system in place to ensure that people don’t catch on. We usually require all travelers have a tutor to help catch them up. We will do the same with you.”

“But I’m not good at this stuff. I don’t like pressure.” she whispers. “I don’t know how to be... this.”

I crouch, meeting her eye level. The gesture feels foreign—I don’t kneel for anyone. But for her? For this? My knuckles brush her wrist, and the bond flares, molten and sweet. “You don’t have to be anything but what you are. The bonds will guide you. We will guide you.”

Her gaze flicks to my hand. “We?”

“Saul. Me. Others, eventually.” My jaw tightens. “Whether I like it or not.”

She huffs a shaky laugh. “You don’t seem thrilled.”

“Thrilled?” I rise, retreating to the hearth to put space between us before I do something reckless—like pull her into my arms and dare the gods to take her from me. “I’ve waited centuries for a bond. Now I have to share it with a man who lectures about water. ”

A startled giggle escapes her. “He’s not that boring.”

“He says ‘be fluid’ like every five seconds. Aly.”

She covers her mouth, shoulders shaking. The sound of her laughter loosens something in my chest. Mine. Ours.

I rise, retreating to the fireplace before I do something reckless—like pin her against the desk. Shit now I’m hard. “You’ll have a tutor. And this.”

I pull the platinum card from my desk, its surface gleaming under the firelight.

She stares at it like it’s a live serpent. “I don’t need your money.”

“You might not. But you’ll take it anyway...” I scratch the access code onto a Post-it. “Clothes. Books. Weapons. Whatever you need or want.”

“Weapons?!” She all but screeches.

“You’re a Traveler in a realm of power-hungry assholes. Assume everything wants to kill you.” I tuck the card into an envelope and hold it out. “Take it.”

She doesn’t move.

“Aly.” Her name is a growl. A plea.

She snatches the envelope, cheeks flushed. “This isn’t over.”

I smirk. “Yes, it is.”

I toss her a small, leather-bound journal from my desk. “Write down every time your traveler magic surges. Times, triggers, sensations. Saul will want data, want patterns. It is different than elemental magic so we need to know what triggers you so we can

figure out how to hide it.”

She catches it, brow furrowing. “And you? What do you want?”

A drink.

“I want you alive,” I say, tone hardening to steel. “Which means you’ll train with a tutor on any subjects you are having issues with. I need to know you can manage your magic. Your professors noticed your lack control today. Obviously, they don't know what you are, so they have no idea this is the first time you've tried any of this.”

She stands, clutching the journal to her chest. “Yes, sir.”

A groan threatens to leave my throat. This girl... trouble. “And Aly?” I brace a hand against the mantel, the firelight shadowing my face. “Tell Saul he owes me a drink. For the emotional turmoil.”

Her lips twitch. “I’ll... let him know.”

The door clicks shut. I stare into the flames, the bond simmering under my skin like a second heartbeat.

The council can’t know what she is. They’d leash her, weaponize her, break her.

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

Aly

Vivianne and I are sprawled on our beds looking at the ceiling talking about everything going on recently, I filled her in on the meeting with Barrett. For some weird reason she thought the fact I'm mates with the dean absolutely hilarious. My tablet buzzes. When I look down, I see a message from Barrett.

I shoot back. Okay saying 'usually 'might be a stretch because let's be real. Men suck. But he doesn't need to know that. I 100% am going on that date and am not offended. Make him sweat a bit girl. Fuck them.

"Will there be any issue between me and Barrett being in a relationship? I mean, where I'm from, that kind of relationship is frowned upon." I ask

"Here, rules like that go out the window when mate bonds are involved. Now, some things would be different. Say You have a professor as a mate, and that professor would either be unable to teach You or find another professor to grade Your work. All are easy fixes. Remember, you are here because mate bonds are considered rare in the population, so they try to accommodate the bonds that form. "

"Wait, but how would they know the bonds are real? Couldn't someone just say they have a mate bond to sleep with a student or something?" her eyes fly wide as if I've just said the most insane thing ever. I've heard of people doing more insane shit for sex.

"Absolutely not. Aly, being mates is more permanent than being married. There is no way to have a 'fling' with a mate. And no one worth a damn would try to fake it.

Also, its less weird because you are all similar in age. Saul is only 26 and Barrett is 28. Not a huge age gap.”

My tablet buzzes again and it becomes apparent that I’m not good at making anyone sweat.

What the hell do I even say to that... cocky fucking asshole. I throw the tablet down taking a deep breath.

I was practically buzzing with excitement as I looked in the mirror. Vivianne had worked her magic, pulling together an outfit that felt like it was made just for me. She insisted I go for something simple but with a little flair, and I could n’ t have been happier with the result.

I was wearing a soft, form-fitting, deep emerald, green dress. just the right balance of elegant and casual, with a scoop neckline that was n’ t too daring but still showed just enough to feel confident. The fabric hugged my curves in all the right places and swayed lightly with every movement.

My hair was the real standout. Vivianne had spent what felt like hours curling it, pinning half of it up in a small braid, soft curls framed my face and cascaded down my shoulders. A few stray strands fell gently in front of my eyes, and I push some of them back tucking shorter pieces behind my ear

For shoes, I was in a pair of black, pointed-toe heels. They were comfortable enough to walk in.

The last thing I needed was to be worrying about sore feet. Vivianne had chosen them, too, saying they were the perfect balance of comfort and style. I was nervous,

But also so excited. I was finally getting to go on a date! Believe it or not I've never been on one before. I know. Sad Now, all I needed was for the night to go well.

Just as finished me once over a notification rings out over the music. Picking up my tablet I see two messages. In a group chat?

Damn, these guys work fast. The second the clock hit's 6:30 a knock at my door sounds through the room. Opening the door, I feel a smile stretch across my face.

"On the dot." I snark.

A slow smile appears. His blue eyes sparkle briefly before he holds his hand out. "I don't like to be late. Are You ready?"

Grabbing his hand, I look over my room one more time to double check I'm not forgetting anything. "Ready?"

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

Aly

The sound of Barrett's car engine hummed steadily as I climbed into the passenger seat, excitement and nerves tingling in my stomach. I tried to act casual, like this was any other dinner, but it was hard to ignore the fact that Barrett was, well, the Dean of my college and my mate, Husband? Or is that after we complete the bond? Vivianne had said it was fine but, it's not like I can forget the social norms from my world so quickly.

He glanced over at me for a second as I buckled in, his lips curving up in a small, relaxed smile. "I can practically hear you thinking... You look Beautiful," he said, his voice smooth and easy.

I smiled back, catching my own reflection in the side mirror. "Thanks. I like that suit it's a nice color" He looked effortlessly put-together, his suit a light grey, fit well. His broad shoulders and tan skin make it seem like it was made just for him. Well, okay it probably was, the dude was stupid rich.

The car moved into gear, and we started rolling down the street, the city lights flickering outside the windows. I was n't sure what to say, so I went with something safe "Yo u' ve been to this place before?" I asked, glancing at him.

"Yeah," Barrett answered, keeping his eyes on the road. "A couple times. I t' s nothing fancy, but i t' s good food. Thought Yo u' d like it."

I nodded, already feeling more relaxed. ' Nothing fancy. ' I can do nothing fancy. I am not built for a 5-star Michelin restaurant. Do they even have that here? Ugh this is

so difficult. We fell into a comfortable silence for a few moments,

“ How are You settling in?” Barrett said, breaking the silence. He turned his head slightly, glancing at me with a raised eyebrow. It was a simple enough question, but for some reason, it made me stop and think.

I shifted in my seat, tapping my fingers against my bag nervously. “ Good, I mean it’s hard I’m not so sure how things work here but Vivienne has been working with me. And I have my aunt too incase I need anything else. “

Barrett smiled, “I’m glad. Saul and I are here as well if You need anything You know that right?”

I thought about it for a second. “Of course, I just- I don't know how to navigate relationships like this. How do You juggle 7 People?” I say rambling

He tilted his head, the corners of his mouth turning up in that easy smile of his. “I ll admit, I haven't had many relationships, but it’s all about communication we talk when things are good and when they are difficult. It’s important we all talk. Sometimes one of us might need more of You. But that’s something we work out as a family.”

He reaches over to take my hand, and squeeze. “ I guess, it’s just overwhelming. Where I’m from relationships like this aren't usual.” I said, sheepishly. “it’s just going to take some getting used to.”

Barrett nodded

The car ride did n’ t feel long, even though the restaurant was a bit out of the way. The way we talked made the time pass easily, and by the time we pulled into the parking lot, I realized how relaxed I felt. No weird tension, no awkward silences.

Just.... normal. Like we were two people going to dinner. No weird power plays or formalities. It was just Barrett and me.

When he parked the car, he turned off the engine and looked over at me with a slight smile. “ Ready?”

I nodded, feeling a little nervous now that we were here, but more in a way that was just.... excited. “ Yeah. Le t’ s go.”

We walked into the restaurant together, the warm lighting casting a soft glow on everything. It was a cozy place. Barrett led the way to the stand in the front giving his last name. The waiter nods motioning for us to follow him, to a table in the back. Out of the way and isolated. I took a seat at the table near the window, the quiet hum of the restaurant around us, and Barrett took the seat opposite me.

“ So,” Barrett said, picking up the menu. “ Tell me about Your realm.”

I scanned the menu quickly, my nerves kicking in a little, talking about home is hard. There was nothing there that I missed. My parents are gone. I had no friends, no other family. It was just me. “ Uhm, honestly, it’s a lot like here. Bigger, the map Vivienne showed me makes it seem like it’s around half the size. Obviously, there is no magic there. Honestly so far that seems to be the only major difference. That and the government structure.”

He glanced up at me, “Do You miss it?” He asks his voice low.

I Shake my head. “After my parents died, I was on my own. I mean, I was in foster care for a while, but it was really just me. And since I’ve been here, I’ve felt... closer to my mom . “

Barrett smiles lightly. “ I’m glad You're here.” he says lightly. The waiter comes and

takes our drink and dinner orders. We both just got wine and steaks. Great minds think alike. Aside from the fact I'm sitting across from a psychopath who eats his steak well done.

I met his gaze, “ So,” I said, a little more casually now, “ how did you end up as dean?”

Barrett chuckled softly, leaning back in his chair like he was settling into a good story. "How did I end up as Dean?" He repeated, as if weighing the question. "Well, it was n' t exactly part of the plan." He gave me a quick, wry smile, his fingers tracing the edge of his wine glass before taking a slow sip.

“ I started as a professor, just like everyone else," he continued, his voice easy, but there was a quiet kind of conviction in the way he spoke. "I Hated it, I was rethinking my job choice when the previous dean announced she wanted to retire. Saul came home one night and told me I should try it out. Said he thought I'd be good at it. I've always done better with more administrative work. So, when the opportunity to take on more responsibility came up, I thought, why not?"

"How about You?" he asked, raising an eyebrow, clearly shifting the attention back to me. "What did You do before You came here?"

The waiter returned with our drinks, and I took a sip of my wine before answering. “ I was in my last year of my psychology degree. I liked it but I didn't' love it. “

We continued chatting about everything and nothing—school, life, random thoughts that popped into our heads. By the time the food arrived, w e' d covered most of the usual first-date topics.

Siblings? Barrett had two: a brother and a sister, twins who were four years Younger than him. I could tell he adored them.

Favorite food? He loved sushi

Parents? A little more complicated. His parents had passed away when he was 20, and he'd ended up raising his younger siblings. The way he said it was n't heavy, just matter of fact, like it was part of his life.

Dinner itself was just.... comfortable. There was no pressure, no awkward pauses. laughing over stories of his childhood—most of which involved a lot of sibling antics and him trying to keep his younger brother and sister out of trouble.

As we finished the last of our food, I found myself laughing so hard I almost spilled my drink. The more Barrett talked about his family, the more I realized how much of his sense of humor came from those chaotic, messy years of growing up. He might have had a more serious side when it came to work, but right now. Right now, he was just a guy with a great laugh and a ton of stories. Maybe the gods had the right idea. Because right now the two of us made so much sense.

The night air was cool against my skin as Barrett and I stepped out of the car, the soft hum of the academy around us. It was late but people were still out, walking around. I was still feeling that warm buzz from dinner, full, a little light-headed from the wine, but mostly just.... happy. It had been a good night, surprisingly easy. It was just what I needed. Things have been so intense and crazy that having one night where I can pretend to be a little normal, it made me feel so much better.

Barrett walked beside me, hands casually tucked into the pockets of his jacket, the quiet click of our footsteps on the pavement the only sound between us. I glanced over at him, trying to read his expression, but he looked relaxed, like the world was n't rushing around him.

We rounded the corner of the building my dorm was in, and I could feel the Bond pulling at my chest.... My steps felt heavier, like I did n' t want this night to end, the easy flow of conversation, the relaxed chemistry between us, was something I did n' t want to lose just yet. Rubbing at the spot on my chest I tried to lessen the pressure. It wasn't working.

When we reached the door to the building, I stopped and turned toward him. “ Well, this is it,” I said, trying to sound casual, but I could feel my pulse quickening a little. “ Thanks for dinner. I had a great time.”

Barrett stopped too, looking down at me with that same quiet intensity. He did n' t say anything right away, just studied me, like he was weighing his next move. Then, after a moment, he stepped closer, just a little, the air between us thickening.

“ So, how was the rest of the night?” Barrett asked, his voice low and easy. “ Did You have a good time?”

“ Yeah, I' m good,” I replied, flashing a quick smile. “I had a great time. I'm glad we had some time together.” I say quietly ducking my head

“I' m glad you had fun,” he said softly. “I' m looking forward to doing this again.”

I smiled, feeling a spark of excitement in my chest. “ Yeah. Me too.”

His eyes move between my lips and eyes in question. When he sees whatever, he was looking for he dips his head. His kiss is strong, intense, and all consuming. He reaches his hands around my waist pulling me flush to him and I sink into the feeling of his body.

Comfortable, safe, home. This feeling isn't normal. It's like nothing ever felt. I can't tell if it's just him or because he's my mate it makes it more intense.... But if it's the

latter, pucker up boys I'm going to be kissing you all, often. Barrett freezes eyes going wide before he pulls back. "Did You just?"

"Talk in Your mind? Yeah, I think so. It's been happening all day. Vivianne said she's never heard of that happening, so I don't really know how to control it. I'm so sorry." I ramble panic gripping me.

He pulls me into his chest taking a deep breath and soothing his hand over my hair. "You can be in my mind whenever You like baby. I'm not mad I was just shocked." He gives me a sincere look before dropping a kiss to my forehead and moving me to my door

"I'll see You soon, be good." He says before turning to walk back down the hall

"Yes, sir" I say mock saluting he stops in his tracks and groans.

"I'm going to need You to walk into Your room now gorgeous, I'm trying to be a gentleman here." Scrubbing his hand over his face. I squeak and rush into my room. The last thing I hear before I close the door is the sound of his deep laugh. Asshole.

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

Aly

The next few days go by without anything crazy happening. I was supposed to go to Saul's house for dinner yesterday, but he had a last-minute staff meeting and had to cancel. Xander was still trying to pretend I didn't exist. Jerk. I still didn't know what his problem was, but I also didn't have the time or energy to figure it out. He can pull his head out of his ass whenever, but I won't be doing it for him .

Today was my first Saturday at the academy and I wanted to go wonder around for a bit. There was so much of the campus I hadn't seen. Vivianne had told me about a cafe near the dinner hall and honestly, I could go for a latte. Making my way out of my room I'm looking down at my tablet responding to the group chat with Saul and Barrett when I slam right into someone toppling both of us.

"Umph." The person below me grabs my hip and rolls me to the side caving in on himself. Full fetal position. Looking down I notice my knee is still firmly lodged between his legs.

"Oh my god! are You okay?" I reach my hands out not sure if I should try to help him or not.

Cruel joke-6 Aly -1 this average is not getting any better....

He sticks his hand in the air waving me off "I'm good, I'm good. "He wheezes moving to his knees.

"God, I'm so sorry! I wasn't paying attention and I- "

“You’re fine, it was an accident.” He mumbles still folded in half. After a minuet he sits up eyes closed taking a deep breath. When he opens them, he smiles

Oh no, the weird pull I get when my mates are near is currently rushing through me full force. Now that he’s no longer writhing in pain, I’m able to feel it. I just kneed my mate in the balls! My mate! Is this a bad time to add another tally to the cruel joke tally? Maybe I’ll just add it to number 6? Way to fuck this up before it starts Alyssa.

His eyes fly wide the smile dropping from his face. “What-“ I start to ask but I’m currently being scooped up and pulled into the biggest bear hug.

“Uh- Hi?” I mutter pulling my head back to get a good look at my newest mate. His dark hair looked like it was a little messy, like he’d just rolled out of bed and didn’t care. His green eyes were rich, deep, and full of shock. Even though he was still on the floor with me I could tell he was tall, like Really Tall. He’s not overly buff but built enough that he doesn’t look lanky.

Like he just realized he had grabbed me he stands keeping hold of my hands to pull me to my feet. “Hi, I’m Alex” he says his voice calm and sultry. Hello wet dream.

“Alyssa” I say pointing at my door. “I’m so sorry again I was just heading out I really didn’t see You.”

“Feel free to run into me whenever You want sweetheart.” A smirk plays on his face.

God this man is sex on a stick and trying to get ahold of the bond and my hormones is not easy “Do You have time for coffee? Maybe I can buy You a drink as a sorry?”

“I’ve got time. But I don’t know about You buying. We can talk about it.” He laughs grabbing my hand and pulls me down the hall. Pulling out my tablet I shoot off a text to the guys

A laugh escapes me in case anyone was wondering this is the best example of my mate's personalities I've ever seen. "What's Your last name?" I ask Alex

He glances down at my tablet understanding dawning on his face. "Danvers." He says

"So how many mates do You have?" Alex asks a slight laugh to his voice.

"Right now, there are three of you."

"Do You think that will be it?" His voice doesn't hold any contempt just curiosity.

"Uh- no. there will be seven." I say Sheepishly God this is so uncomfortable. Having to tell my many boyfriends? That there are going to be more of them is so weird. But Alex takes it in stride nodding his head.

We walk into the cafe and order our favorites. I do not get to pay. Alex decided to play dirty, by pointing outside and pulling the 'what is that?'. It worked. When the barista is done making our drinks, we take them and walk over to a bench just outside the door.

We sat there for a moment, both of us stirring our coffees quietly. "So, you're new right? Where are you from?" he asked, casually leaning back in his chair.

I look up from my coffee and shrugged, a slight smile tugging at my lips. "I'm from Ender. Small town. I came here for school"

"Really?" He raised an eyebrow. "I thought Your last name was James?" is that not a common last name?

I let out a nervous chuckle, shaking my head. "Yeah, it is, my mom found her mate there and so she moved. After my parents died, I decided to move closer to my

mom's family." the lie rolls off my tongue my mouth tastes bitter. I hate to lie to him.
But I have to

He tilts his head, "My parents died when I was fourteen. I'm sorry You lost them."

He hesitated, a little flicker of something crossing his face. "Are you settling in all right. I bet it's overwhelming being in a new place without them."

I smiled, letting that sit for a moment. "It's been going well. I miss them though. It's hard to be here, where my mom grew up, without her."

He met my eyes, and I see the understanding flicker in his eyes. "I feel that way all the time."

"So, did You move in with family after Your parents?" I asked, leaning forward a little.

He took a long sip of his coffee before answering, eyes shifting to look out the window. "No, none of my parent's family wanted to take me in, I moved in with my best friend's family. They adopted me. Honestly it was for the best. They are all the family I need."

I nodded slowly, a smile on my face "I'm glad You had someone. Screw everyone else."

There was a brief silence as he considered my words, and then his lips twitched in a slight grin. "Life would have been very boring if gran had decided I was worth the time."

I laughed, "Fair, I mean it would be kind of screwed up to take out all Your teenage angst on some poor old lady"

We both laugh. When we calm down, we sit there for a moment, just enjoying the ease of it all.

He takes a deep breath and looks at me out of the corner of my eye “You know we are neighbors, right?”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “Oh, so we can play tackle football more often?”

“I’m always down for a workout.” he said with a grin. My face heats as I take a drink of my coffee

The next moment, both our tablets go off. pulling them out we laugh. Barrett has added him to the group chat.

Alex is still laughing when he adds

Alex puts down his phone and holds his hand out to me. “Let’s go sweetheart. We should probably get out of the sun.”

Opening the door to the hallway, I realize I forgot my tablet on my desk. I rush over to grab it and turn to shut and lock the door.

Vivianne is leaning against the wall next to the door. “Are You ready?” she asked, practically rolling her eyes. “We are going to be late to class.”

I smiled, though part of me wanted to smack her. “I’m ready,” I said, grabbing my bag and slinging it over my shoulder. “But we’re not going to be late We have an hour before class.” Locking the door, I turn to look around the hall, glancing at Vivianne. “Did You see Alex yet?” I whisper.

Vivianne's eyes sparkled mischievously. "You mean the guy who lives right next door? No, I haven't. Although I'm sure if You knock on the door. You'll be able to see if he's home.... You know like a normal person?" She says all too loudly. Fuck

I rolled my eyes. "Fine. I'll knock." I raise my hand to knock on the door when it swings open what I think is Xander is standing in the doorway. The bond snapping into place almost immediately. That's not possible me and Xander don't have a bond at least not one like that. Oh. My. Gods. He's a twin. "Oh, you've got to be fucking kidding me!" I practically shout in his face. Vivianne of course drops to the floor laughing. Oh, she totally knew, didn't she?

Whirling around I point a finger at her "You and I will discuss this later." This of course only makes her laugh harder.

The man clears his throat. Raising his eyebrow. "Can I help You?" My mouth drops.

"Well- I- uh. I was knocking to see if Alex was here." I finally. Get the words out. A look of confusion crosses his face....

"Alex? Uh- sure one second." He pushes the door open more turning his head "Hey Alex, there is someone here to see You."

Alex appears over the man's shoulder. "Aly! This is my best friend I was telling You about, Jared. And Jared this is my mate, Alyssa. "A proud smile on his face until he notices both of us are still frozen staring at each other. "What's wrong?" He asks

"Oh! I'd be happy to give You a play by play. Aly knocked to ask if You wanted to grab coffee with us and walk to class but then Bam Jared here opens the door and they both freeze for a second before Aly loses her mind and all but screams in Jared's face that he has to be 'fucking joking' "Vivianne's smile only makes me consider shaving her head in her sleep that much more. It's on.

“Wait, so... You two are...”

“Mates yep. Now that we are all on the same page lets go get coffee. Jared You too.”
Vivianne says before turning and walking down the hall.

We all kind of just stare after her before we all move at once in silence. Seriously a mate a day is exhausting I just found Alex yesterday You’d think the gods would give me a break.... famous last words.

We all walk in silence to the cafe and order when we turn to sit down, I see Xander sitting with a man on the couch. They look adorable. I want to offer to have him come sit with us but after the freak out about him thinking I thought he was jarred which is totally valid without the bond I would totally think they were the same person. I don't know what their relationship is like, and I don’t want to make him uncomfortable.

Apparently, I’m staring to long because when I look back over, I see jarred is glaring at me. “What- is there an issue with a man sitting with his boyfriend?” Jared spits. Clearly misunderstanding. Men, shoot first and ask questions later. Cue eyeroll.

“No, but they do have a kin bond and he’s been ignoring her so she’s wondering if it’s because he thought she thought he was You or if it’s because he shy about having a boyfriend. Or if he thought she was hitting on him,” A deep voice says from somewhere behind me. Barrett. He scoops me up from where I’m standing and sits down on a couch with me in his lap.

“I have no issue with Your brother being gay. This week has been super confusing and I’m taking things one at a time. I would have thought You were Xander had it not been for the bond, so his concern was valid. But we have this bond and it’s pulling me to him, I was just thinking about how to approach it.” I roll my eyes.... Barrett runs his hands over my hair, forcing me to relax.

“I told You to just give him time. Obviously, you being mates with his clone will hopefully make it easier but try not to stress. It’s not good for your particular magic
“Vivianne adds softly so only I can hear. Moving to sit next to me and Barrett. Jared and Alex are standing close by Jared looking properly chastised for accusing me of being a homophobe. “I- I’m sorry Alyssa, I shouldn’t have assumed. People are sometimes just awful to Xan and well- “

“You wanted to protect him. I can get that. But assuming the worst of me when You literally just met me 20 minuets ago is not cool.” I understand the need to protect his brother but I’m also not down with someone accusing me of something so horrible when they literally don't know me. Bond or not.

Jared nods in understanding “I should have asked What was going on. I’m sorry. Could I maybe take you out sometime this week? I’d like to make it up to you. Maybe explain everything?”

“Yeah, we can do that. How does tomorrow work? I don’t have anything I need to get done this weekend.”

“It works perfect. Thank you.” He says

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

Jared

Frostfire Parlor isn't just an ice cream shop—it's a shrine to chaos. The walls are painted in spirals of neon frosting, and the ceiling drips with enchanted icicles that never melt, refracting rainbows over the marble countertops. The air smells like burnt sugar and for some reason, I love it, which is why I come here twice a week. Today, though my pretty girl is coming with me. I hadn't really had time to think through the fact that I have a mate now, I needed some time with her.

Aly stares at the menu board, her nose scrunched in a way that makes my ribs ache. “Chili Chocolate ? Fog Berry ? Is this place trying to kill people?”

I lean against the counter, smirking. “Only the boring ones. C'mon, pretty girl. Live a little.”

She glares at the nickname but doesn't argue, which is progress. “Why is the mint chip glowing ?”

“Magic stabilizer. Keeps it from melting.” I tap the glass case where a scoop of Starlight Vanilla levitates lazily, sprinkling edible glitter onto a cone below. “Don't worry, it won't turn your tongue green.”

“Pass.” She squints at the Midnight Espresso swirl. “What's your usual?”

“Caramel Inferno .” I nod at the server, a wiry guy with blue flames tattooed up his arms. “Two cones. One Inferno, one... let's surprise her. Something that'll make her swear at me.”

The server grins. “Got just the thing.”

Aly kicks my shin under the counter. “I hate you.”

“You’ll love this.”

We take the cones to the rooftop terrace, where iron-wrought tables hover on patches of grass. Aly licks her Fog Berry —a violent shade of purple that does turn her tongue glittery—and freezes. “Oh, my gods. This tastes like... summer?”

“Told you.” I bite into my Caramel Inferno , the heat of it blooming across my tongue. “Frostfire’s taste is cold and maybe spicy is the best way to put it. Yours must be nice.”

She hesitates, staring at the cone. “I can’t believe my mom grew up here.”

Her voice cracks.

“What do you mean? You grew up in Ender, right? How different can it be?” that seems to shock her out of her thoughts, her eyes going wide a moment before she gives me a pained smile.

“Not very, it’s just less volcanic here. So much prettier.” she says quickly...

I swipe her cone, take a bite, and nearly choke. “ So sweet. ” I spit it out onto my napkin. Gods that tasted like diabetes in a cone.

She snorts, snatching it back. “You’re a disaster.”

“But you’re smiling.”

She kicks me again.

The tavern is buried in the roots of an ancient oak tree, its gnarled doorway framed by bioluminescent mushrooms. Not a lot of people come here, but the food is amazing. It's one of the oldest businesses in Stonebrooke, hence the whole building it into a tree thing. We claim a booth carved into the trunk itself.

“Tell me something about your childhood,” I say, stealing a fry from her plate. Her burger looks good but based on the look on her face I shouldn't take a bite of that.

Aly stabs a fork at me trying to shoo my hand. “What do you mean?”

“Not the polished academy crap. Something messy.” I pop the fry into my mouth. “I'll go first. When I was fourteen, I stole my sister's Jessa and Juliet's clothes and returned them for clothes 3 sizes too big. So, me and Alex could show her what real fashion looked like.

Her eyes widen. “You're only three sizes bigger than your sisters?” She looks me up and down. “Gods she must be tiny. Your parents like J's” “She laughs

“She is... Tiny. Also, I was fourteen so I'm much bigger than her now.” I lean back, flexing my muscles a little. “And yeah, she unfortunately didn't make that choice when she had me and Xan apparently that was an afterthought and there aren't many girl names with an X”

Laughing, she shakes her head at me. “Much?” she sasses

“Your turn.”

She swirls her iced tea and whispers, “when I was 10 my mom had these earrings that my dad got her, she loved them. So naturally I loved them. Well... one day I put them

on not realizing that my ears were too small, and I ripped my earlobe and dropped the earring in the toilet.” She trails off, cheeks pink.

“Shit, how mad was she?” I laugh

“She wasn't. I never told her. I found a band aid and wore my hair down for like 2 months. She tore apart the house looking for the other earring, but she never found out.”

I double over laughing. “Gods is your ear, okay? Like did it heal fully?”

She turns her head and lets me see and low and behold there is a scar... “At least it's not like split permanently.”

“Yeah... Only part that sucked was getting it repierced. Apparently getting scar tissue repierced is not a pleasant experience.” I grimace. Ouch.

The server saves me, dropping off two steaming mugs of hot chocolate . Aly sips hers and coughs. “This is just hot chocolate with... peppers ?”

“ Yeah ,” I chuckle. “Makes your breath smoke for an hour.” I blow a plume of silver vapor at her, grinning.

She blows smoke back. It’s pink.

“Show-off,” I mutter.

“I don't do coffee. Tastes like mud.”

Her offended gasp makes me smile. “How dare you, Coffee is delicious.”

“Yeah, no. no it's not.”

“I'm sorry to bring this up, but- could we talk about what happened yesterday?”

I take a deep breath. “Yeah, I had a girlfriend a few years ago. She- she was great. To Xan, was always so sweet to him and Kale. But I guess that wasn't what was actually happening. Xan hated her and I couldn't figure out why. We were fighting all the time because in my eyes, he was being a dick to someone who just wanted to be his friend.” I pick at my food. This is harder for me to talk about. It's one of the things I'm the least proud of.

“Xan and I got into it one day, and he called her a homophobic cunt. I lost it. I mean like really fucking lost it. We ended up in a fist fight and when kale walked in, he grabbed me and chucked my ass into the nearest wall.” She gasps.

“I didn't know it at the time, but I definitely deserved that. Turns out the whole time Maddie was making shit comments when I wasn't there. Calling him horrible names. And made it very clear that if Xan said anything to me that she would out him to our parents. He hadn't told them yet. “

“Why?”

“It wasn't really a big deal; it wasn't that my parents would have or did care they just want their kids happy it was more of the principal. Xan wasn't ready to tell anyone and also wanted to be the one to tell our parents. When I asked him about it later, he just said that he could take it and could deal until he was ready to tell them. He didn't want to tell me either because he didn't want to break my heart.” Rubbing my forehead, I think back to that time. My twin brother is my best friend next to Alex. This part of my life hurts.

“I obviously dumped her ass the second I found out. But just remembering the look

on his face when he told me, the pain...it broke my heart. So, when I saw you staring.”

“You thought it was going to be the same thing all over.” She answers for me. I not.

“I shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions, I just wanted to protect my brother. He’s too kind for this world.”

“I can understand where you were coming from. I was just shocked because I didn’t realize I was really staring. When we first met, I was kind of teasing him since he was so shy. When I introduced myself, he bit my head off saying he wasn’t you. I was just trying to figure out what happened.”

“People have tried to use Xander to get to me. It- just isn’t- fun for him.” We sit in silence for a moment before I throw some money on the table and grab her hand.

“Common we are going dancing.”

The dance hall is one of my favorite places. I usually come with my family; they live around the corner. Unfortunately, momma makes me dance with Jessa and Juliet. But tonight, I get to dance with Aly. Tonight, a fiddle band plays a reel so fast it’s like trying to dance during an earthquake.

Aly freezes at the edge of the floor. “I don’t know how to do this.”

“What, follow my genius?” I grab her hand, tugging her into the whirl of bodies. Her palms sweaty. Cute . “Just mirror me. And try not to step on my boots.”

“You’re wearing steel toed boots!”

“Exactly. You’ll break your toes.”

She laughs, and the sound cuts through the noise like a knife. We spin, stumble, and crash into a group of people, they laugh at us before joining in on the dance. By the third song, she's got the rhythm—hips swaying, hair wild, her cheeks flushed under the lights.

I pull her close, my mouth at her ear. "You look beautiful."

"You're terrible at leading," she lies, her breath hitching as I dip her low.

The music slows, the fiddle melting into a haunting waltz... Aly's hands slide up my arms, tentative, like she's afraid I'll bolt.

Joke's on her. I'm already rooted here.

"How have you been with the whole 7 mates thing?" she Mumbles, her forehead brushing my collarbone.

"It's been great. The guys are amazing. I do wish I had more time with you. But I don't mind sharing. Knowing you're loved is enough reassurance for me. All I want is for you to be happy. And as long as we are all doing that. I'm happy."

"But I want you happy." She wines. Shaking her head

I spin her out, then reel her back. Her chest collides with mine. "I am happy, I've been looking forward to meeting my mate for as long as I can remember. Watching my dad's love my mom was one of the most beautiful things I've seen. I wanted that. And I have it" I drop a kiss to her forehead and look into her eyes.

She studies me, her eyes reflecting the wisps' glow. "You're sure? If you need something from me, I just need you guys to ask. I'm neck deep in mates and I just don't want anyone feeling neglected."

“We are all big boys. We will let you know if there is something we need.”

We take the long way back, cutting through the market where vendors are packing up stalls. Aly stops next to a jewelry stand.

I turn to look at the options. Before I know what is happening, I feel something slam against my head. I have one last thought before everything goes black.

Aly .

Things come back to me before I even open my eyes. I know two things. 1. My head is pounding. 2 I am going to kill someone if Aly is hurt in any way. I jump up looking around. I see Aly being dragged backwards by a man. Fuck no.

“Jared!” she screams, her voice cracking with terror. The sound makes my anger flare.

My magic flares to life. Fire slams out of me so violently I almost knock myself over. “Let her go!” I shout. The flames fly across the ground moving around Aly. I snake the flames around her and up the man's leg. He lets her go long enough to douse the flames in water.

Aly takes this chance to run Slamming into my chest as I push her to get behind me. I pull water around him trying to trap him in the orb, but he slams up walls of mud so high, the water doesn't even touch him.

The next second Aly is standing in front of me. I try to yank her back. But before I can I see a dark look on her face before she whispers one word holding her hand out. “Pain.”

The man drops screaming in pain. She allows him to keep going until she uses her air magic to silence him. Walking closer to the man she drops to the ground “You touched my mate.” she growls. “Heal” she commands. The man stops writhing. Long enough to catch his breath. Before starting again. “Pain.”

The look on her face is nothing but the pure rage I still feel. “Aly.” I place my hand on her arm.

“We need to know if he's the one stalking you.” I murmur, running my hand down her arm. She twitches briefly before dropping her hand and sitting crisscross applesauce on the floor. A small smile on her face.

“I’m so sorry about that, I let my anger get ahead of me. Now what I should have done was use the last two to get my answers. Now I'm going to have to do it again so we can get some answers.” gods this woman... Perfection.

“Now, be a good bad guy and tell me what I need to know.” she stares at him and when he says nothing, I almost think she is going to do whatever the fuck she did earlier again. Seconds later she nods. Standing. Swaying a little on her feet.

“He doesn't know anything, he was hired. To kidnap me that's all.” she huffs, turning and stomping away.

I have so many questions about how she knows that. But the only thing I can really think about is how hot this woman is.

Aly

The day goes by slowly . When I get to Air basics and sit next to Xander I decide I need to apologize for teasing him the other day .

“Hey, I just wanted to say I’m sorry for teasing You that day in class. It wasn’t right of me. It’s just, we are Kin bonded, and I thought you knew and were ignoring me because You were shy. It doesn’t make it right I took it to far. But I just wanted to say I’m sorry?”

He looks at me assessing for a moment before he nods. “I knew but, while society is a lot better with it, being ‘Jared Andrews Bi brother, has its setbacks. I didn’t know if you thought I was Jared and that’s why You seemed so excited. plus, still have a hard time explaining I like men.” He gives me a small smile.

“Well that my friend is Your first issue, never explain. You don't have to. Just say You have a boyfriend and call it a day. Besides if anyone took it any further than that or made You feel bad, I have a feeling Jared would just burn them alive.”

He laughs. “You’re not wrong. He’s protective that’s for sure. How do You know Jared?”

“He and Alex are two of my mates.” I say giving him a smile. “We were at the cafe the other morning and I saw you and your boyfriend. I kind of stared, trying to figure out which portion of the information I had just found out this morning made You defensive and Jared thought I was freaking out because You had a boyfriend.” I give him a nervous smile.

Xander smiles scooting his chair closer to me and leaning in conspiratorially. "My brother is super ticklish. You got to get him when he doesn't suspect it. But if You need a good laugh that should do the trick." We both laugh. Weird thing to just drop but hey I'll take everything I can get, who knows when Jared might piss me off...

We continued to talk and laugh while working through the exercises on the board. When we got through them all we all looked to the front of the class where professor Valen stood. her sharp eyes scanning over us.

"Alright, class," she began, her voice smooth but carrying an undercurrent of authority, "I've got an extra credit assignment for You this semester."

A few of us perked up. Extra credit could be a lifeline in classes. Others groaned—"Extra Credit is always just busy work that is meant for us to just take a ton of time doing" Xander leans over to whisper, rolling his eyes he straightens back up to listen to what the assignment is.

She waved her hand, and the chalk in mid-air floated over to the board, starting to write out the details of the assignment. "You'll need to head to the library, pick out a book on air magic, and write a paper on it. It could be anything—spells, historical accounts, or even something more abstract. I don't care what it is, as long as it's relevant. But don't come back with a basic summary. Show me Your understanding of the magic, Your analysis. Insight, not regurgitation."

I was kind of excited this would also give me the chance to look at books on mate bonds and the history of this place, I needed all the information I could get now. I still had mates I hadn't met yet. And now that things were more defined with Xander I knew I actually had 3 more mates somewhere not 2.

Professor Valen's eyes flicked across the room, making sure we were all paying attention. "Remember," she said, her voice dropping a little lower, "I only offer one

chance for extra credit a semester I strongly urge all of You to complete the assignment even if You are doing well in class now things can always change. This assignment is due in two weeks, so I'd get started..."

I was definitely taking the extra credit. I wasn't really struggling in any of my classes in a way that would make me think I needed it, but I also wasn't wanting to take the risk as things got more difficult...

Professor Valen dismissed us, and I packed up all of my stuff before making my way to the library.

The library was sleek, modern. Soft, ambient lighting bathed the room, and the shelves were neat, orderly, and filled with shiny new books, each one practically glowing. Everything smelled fresh—like polished wood, soft leather, and the faint scent of freshly printed pages. The feeling I was being watched kept growing as I made my way around the library.

The library was bustling with students, so pinpointing exactly where the feeling was coming from was nearly impossible. People wandered between the shelves, some reading at the tables, others tapping away at their tablets. At the end of each row of books was a book on a wooden pedestal it told You what books were in each section.

I wandered between the aisles, trying to find a spot more isolated so I could try to figure it out. I ran my fingers along the spines of books, simultaneously trying not to make it apparent I knew someone was there. Everything from air magic to elemental theory to the history of magical realms. "Whispers of the Wind: Air Magic Through the Ages" stood out to me. I pulled the book off the shelf and started flipping through... History, magic, and—hopefully—enough I could do a paper on it.

I walked to the end of aisle and started flipping through the book to see if there was anything about mate bonds. There wasn't much but L6 had a few books that might be worth looking through.

When I stared in that direction I felt the familiar pull. Shit. I switched directions and went looking for the cause. When I turned down an aisle there sitting on a couch literally surrounded by books was a man. His nose buried in a book. His brown hair falls into his glasses. I honestly don't even know if he's noticed me yet. I walk closer taking in his rumpled uniform. How long has he been sitting there?

"Hey." I say softly. Hey? Really Alyssa that's all You could come up with?

The poor guy jumps two feet in the air dropping his book. His brown eyes are so wide I'm genuinely shocked they haven't fallen out of his head. Darting his head around to double check I meant him "Uh- Hi?" He says obviously confused. He has a British accent. Wait there is no England here. So, it's not British, whatever You get the point.

I say nothing waiting for him to notice. Not even a second later somehow his eyes get wider. "Oh, my gods." He looks down at himself and then me. A blush creeping up his face. Okay this guy is adorable

"I'm Alyssa James." I say walking to him and sticking out my hand.

He looks at it a moment before swallowing and taking my hand electricity lighting every nerve ending on fire. He sucks in a breath. "Elliott Caldwell." His eyes are firmly planted on the ground, and I almost feel bad for ambushing him.

"How long have You been sitting here?" I ask. He obviously hasn't left the spot in a while, but I figured I'd ask.

"Uh what time is it?" He said looking around for his tablet.

“4:30. “

“Uhm 6 hours? I didn’t have any classes today.” He responds the blush getting comically deeper.

“Come on.” sticking out my hand I grab his and pull him to a standing position before starting to grab his books.

“Wha-“ he starts to stammer obviously a little panicked, oh Vivianne was going to have so much fun messing with him.

“You need to eat. So, you’re coming with me. We are going to grab dinner and only after You’ve eaten will You get Your books back.” He starts to protest something about how I ‘ can’t do that’ or something before I put my hands on my hips and shoot him a look that says, ‘ try me.’

He stops arguing and helps me grab the books after smirking at me trying to carry them all by myself. Okay so technically he has the books, but I won’t let him read them so Ha! Take that

“Come on darling, can’t have You holding my books hostage forever, can I?” Okay I know back home everyone would make a big deal about a cowboy calling You ‘darlin’ but to be clear being called darling by someone with a not-British accent was way... better.

We both check out the books we have to and make our way to the dining hall to place our orders for dinner. After we are done, he takes me to fire hall and up to the 6th floor. Once we get to his room, he opens the door and rushes in trying to clean off books from every surface known to mankind. Okay so Elliot likes to read, noted.

“I’m sorry about the mess, I wasn’t expecting company.” He rambles. I sit down on

the side of his bed and pull out my tablet to message the guys to unfortunately have already started blowing up the group chat with random memes and jokes. This is why I hate group chats.

I decide I'll read the messages later and just shoot off a text letting them know I'm Elliot's room and preemptively give Barrett his last name so he or Saul don't come banging down the door.

When I look back up Elliot has a sad look on his face, and I realize I totally just came in and immediately picked up my tablet. How rude

I throw the tablet down and give him my full attention. "I'm sorry about that, just needed to let my other mates know where I am so none of them send out a search team. Not that they would really need it I have a weird feeling at least one of them is tracking me or something."

At this his eyes relax, and he clears his throat. "So, how many mates do You have?"

"You make number 5, but I know there are going to be 2 more."

The food is delivered, and I watch as Elliott all but inhales his food obviously the idea that he needed to eat was a good one.

"So, what year are You?" It seems like he's eaten enough to talk a bit.

"Uh 3rd, You?"

"1st, what kind of books do You read." Looking at the pile of books next to me I notice he's taken the dust jackets off of almost all of them. Actually, now that I'm looking at it. "Did You rebind these?" I ask

“Uh- yeah, I did. I don't really like people to know what I'm reading when I'm out in public. The first page says the title of the book, so I didn't need it on the cover to know.” His blush is back with a vengeance “and I- I read mainly romance novels.”

Be still my beating heart. “Really? Do You have a favorite trope? If I'm honest I was always partial to reverse harems.” I smirk. How ironic.

“I love those too. But I also like a brother's best friend. The angst is always great and never about them. You know?”

“Actually, I do, I think that was always the issue I had with a bully romance. Someone was always just a fundamentally bad person, and I couldn't get behind it. But brother's best friend was always more so about an age gap or because they didn't want to hurt the brother.”

His eyes light up and he stands and walks to the corner of the room picking up two books and walking back over. “I've been meaning to start this book; I have two copies want to read with me?” And that's what we do.

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

Aly

I'm not in my room. That much I can tell. First of all, there is someone spooning me and Vivianne would never. I take a second to remember what happened and I smile. Elliott and I had been reading and talking about the book as we went along. We both must have fallen asleep at some point. I close my eyes again enjoying the feeling of his arm around me. He squeezes me briefly before kissing the back of my head.

He freezes. Eyes flying open and sitting up to look at me. When he realizes it's me, he calms down. "Good morning, I'm sorry I forgot You were here."

"It's okay I forgot too for a second. I roll to my back looking up at him. His glasses are gone, and I can fully see his dark eyes. His hair is in his face and sticking up at odd angles. Giving him a small smile I grab his arm and pull him down so I can cuddle. "Just a second longer."

He tightens his arms "You can have all the seconds You want darling. I'll never complain."

"This is totally weird right? I mean we just met yesterday and I'm demanding more cuddles..."

"No, it's not weird. Mate bonds are weird, but they know what they are doing. You feel the way You do because a part of Your soul that was missing the bond is actually able to calm. "

Yep. I'm totally keeping him. I snuggle deeper into his chest letting the moments tick

by. My tablet goes off. and I remember the guys are probably wondering where I am. I sit up and reach for the tablet and see a message from Vivianne

Switching to the group chat I almost drop the tablet... okay so not telling them I was staying over was maybe not my brightest moment.

Looking at Elliott I see he's read the texts and is smiling. "Good to know they are looking out for You, common darling we can stop by Your dorm so you can change"

When we walk into, I smile seeing all of my men together as well as Vivianne and Xander. Kale is at the counter grabbing drinks. The second I walked in all of the guy's eyes move straight to me. I look over at Elliott and see he looks a little nervous. I grab his hand and squeeze lightly.

"Hey guys." I chirp.

Vivianne rolls her eyes and Xander laughs punching his brother in the shoulder. "Told You." And holds his hand out Jared drops 10 bucks into it.

Barrett just cocks an eyebrow and smiles. Holding his hand out to me. I leave Elliott's side and slide into Barretts lap. "Hi big guy." I say softly.

"Little mate. You do know You're in trouble, right?" Saul says rubbing at his temples.

"Why? I told You I was with Elliott I'm sorry if You assumed I would be heading back to my dorm at some point, but I never said that. Besides. I'm an adult and fully within my right to sleep over wherever and whenever I want. I don't need permission" I say sweetly pasting on my sweetest smile.

Alex and Xander fall over laughing. Barrett leans in close to my ear. “Baby, Saul is going to spank Your ass red. And I’m not going to stop him. He just wants to know You’re okay. Obviously, no one expects you to ask us.”

Fuck. Don't look at me like that I can't help it, I might not have a lot of experience. But I'm a slut at heart what do You want from me. I let out a squeak and jump up rushing to Alex my eyes pleading for him to help me.

“Not a chance gorgeous, I might take a turn after Saul.” He says chuckling darkly. Abort mission . I change directions and try to make it to Elliott but before I can reach him Saul's arm bands around my waist yanking me into his lap.

“Tsk. You don't actually think You'd be able to escape do You little mate? I'm glad You're safe. We will talk about the rest later. We all Just worry about you.” He says low. He angles his face and presses a kiss to my lips. And lord does this man know how to kiss. It's hard and demanding I squeeze my thighs together trying to tamp down on the desire now running through me. Saul lets out a dark chuckle and lifts me slapping a hand to my ass before dropping me in a thoroughly amused Elliott's lap. I thought he was supposed to be my sweet boy. Traitor.

“Oh, don't pout darling, I'm always on Your side. However, the guys are right. You should have texted them. I'll make sure one of us does next time.” He kisses the edge of my frown before handing me off to Jared. What is this pass the Aly?

“Here pretty girl. We got You Your latte.” He hands me arguably the only thing I like more than them and smiles when I take the biggest drink. “You're my favorite today.”

“How do You feel about spending the afternoon with me and Alex?” Jared says.

I throw a look at Saul when he nods, I agree. I feel bad all of the other guys have

gotten to spend some kind of time with me, but me and Saul haven't really had time together since the whole panic attack situation. I let my power loose briefly and extend it to Saul I attempt to prod at his mind. Somehow, he notices and his eyes snap to me he raises an eyebrow and seems to let me in

'Would You like to explain how You have the power to do this little one?' His deep voice resonates in my mind.

'Not really, I was just wanting to double check You're okay with this.'

'Okay with You spending time with Your mates? Yes, little one I'm okay with this. We will have our time. However, we will be discussing this little power thing at some point. Especially because You can do more than just create a link can't You.'

At that I shut the link and reign in my power before I accidentally read Vivienne's thoughts. The last time I did she threatened to shave my eyebrows off. I avoid Saul's looks, but I know he's staring a hole in the side of my head. Not being able to tell them what's going on is hard. What if they feel betrayed because I lied to them? Ugh.

Reaching out to Barrett, I let him know Saul is asking questions and he tells me he will handle it. What that means I have no idea but if it gets Saul to avoid the conversation until our bond is complete that's great.

"That would be great."

The bell above the café door jingles as Jared holds it open for me, his trademark smirk firmly in place. "Come on, pretty girl. We've got a surprise for you," he teases, his blue eyes twinkling mischievously.

Alex follows close behind, balancing a paper bag in one hand and a thermos in the other. “It’s not really a surprise if you keep hinting at it, Jared,” he says, shooting his friend an exasperated look before softening it with a grin.

“Details, Alex. It’s all about the suspense,” Jared counters, slinging an arm casually around my shoulder.

“Something about the two of you and a surprise is slightly concerning,” I deadpan, narrowing my eyes at both of them. “Where are we going anyway?”

Jared chuckles and gives my shoulder a squeeze. “Relax. You’ll love it. Trust me.”

Alex walks on my other side, quieter but no less confident. “You’ll see when we get there,” he assures me, his voice calm.

We take a left on the path away from the buildings on campus and head in the direction of the training grounds. We cross over a bridge, and I take a deep breath. I’m not a crazy outdoor person, but I like the smell of fresh-cut grass and fresh air as much as the next girl.

We round a bend, and suddenly, there it is: a sparkling lake, its surface shimmering in the sunlight. Jared and Alex lead me toward a small clearing shaded by an old oak tree. Spread out on the grass is a plaid picnic blanket, complete with a wicker basket, pillows, and a small bouquet of daisies.

“You two planned all this?” I ask, glancing between them, trying to hide my awe.

Alex kneels to unload the basket, his soft smile making my chest flutter. “We thought you deserved a break.”

“And by ‘we,’ he means me,” Jared quips, plopping down on the blanket and leaning

back on his elbows. “I mean, sure, Alex did the cooking, but I handled the ambiance. You’re welcome.”

Alex rolls his eyes but doesn’t deny it. Instead, he pulls out a plate of sandwiches and a couple of pastries from the café. “Ignore him. Just sit, eat, and enjoy the view.”

I sit between them, the gentle breeze playing with my hair. “How do you even know anything about ambiance, Jared?” I ask, narrowing my eyes playfully.

He gasps, covering his heart in mock hurt. “I’m wounded, pretty girl. I know all about ambiance. It’s part of my charm.” He winks. Okay, now I’m narrowing my eyes .

“Attempting to swoon half of the academy?” I ask lightly. But something I’m choosing to ignore roars to life in my chest, and while I’m not the most violent of people, Vivianne is—and I’m sure she’d handle it if I asked her to.

“Only you,” he says, leaning across the blanket right over the top of the sandwiches, which, of course, sets Alex off on a tirade about “ungrateful fucking assholes” and how he put “so much work into those damn sandwiches.”

Jared and I burst into laughter, and the next thing I know, I’m being held down with air magic. I freeze as Alex’s face comes into view. “You weren’t laughing at me, were you, gorgeous? Cause that would mean I’d have to call Saul over here to get that spanking out of the way—and then add a few more for being mean.” I gulp. He wears a smile on his face, my body heats with desire, and when I try to squeeze my legs together, he tightens his hold on his magic and uses a small tendril of fire to sneak up my leg. Fuck . It doesn’t burn or hurt—it’s just warm and feels way too good against my cool skin. Before I can say anything, he pulls back his magic and hands me a plate of food with a cocky smirk on his face.

“Damn it, Alex, you can’t tease her like that and leave me hanging,” Jared whines, adjusting his pants.

I throw an airball at his chest that hits him like a pillow. “Leave you hanging? You ? What about me !”

“Children, children. No need to fight. I’m sure at some point, you’ll both be thoroughly satisfied after my teasing. Now eat.”

Jared and I lock eyes and smile before turning to Alex, both of us pouting and in unison, “Yes, mommy.” Alex’s eyes snap up, and he gets a cruel look on his face before picking us both up and throwing us into the lake.

I really need to learn combative magic. I’ve got nothin’ . At the last second, Jared grabs hold of Alex, and all three of us end up in the lake, splashing and laughing. I get swept up by Alex, who lifts me briefly before slamming me down into the water. Jared picks me up and holds me while we both rush to get Alex.

It’s moments like these that remind me how fucking lonely I used to be. I have so many people around me all the time, and I love it. I feel seen . And that, my friends, is an amazing feeling.

By the time the sun starts dipping low over the lake, painting the sky in fiery reds and oranges, we climb out of the water and lay on our backs, making shapes out of clouds. Which I have no idea how to do, but the guys help me.

Jared turns his head in my direction. “Told you you’d love it,” he murmurs, his voice low and teasing.

Alex adds, quieter, “We’re glad you’re here.”

“I’m glad I’m here too. Thank you so much for this. I didn’t realize how much I needed it,” I say softly.

The guys walk me back to my room, each giving me a kiss on the cheek before heading next door. When I’ve gotten ready for bed and climbed in, I start to think about how insane the last few weeks have been. I mean, two weeks ago, I was climbing into bed alone, praying I’d dream about something cool. And now I’m at a magical school that my mom went to, with family I never knew I had, five mates, and a kin bond. This is everything I didn’t know I needed .

Cruel joke- 6 Aly- 2

Aly

The sunlight streaming through my dorm window felt brighter than usual, but maybe that was just my mood. I was practically buzzing as I rummaged through my wardrobe, tossing rejected outfits onto my bed. “Too casual. Too formal. Too much like I’m trying to look like I didn’t try.” I muttered to myself, holding up a light blue dress before finally settling on a soft, flowy outfit that seemed just right.

Saul and I hadn’t had much time together lately. Between his packed schedule of classes, helping students perfect water channeling techniques and my own workload, it was hard to find a time that worked for us. We would have to talk about that, because being away from him outside of classes like this physically hurt. Vivianne said because the equinox is coming up that the bond is pushing me harder to complete it. But if I’m honest I’ve been trying to wait to complete bonds until I found all of my mates.

Shaking myself out of my thoughts, I use a small towel to wipe at the corner of my eye where some mascara smudged. Today, Saul promised to clear his schedule, and I was not about to let anything ruin it.

I glanced in the mirror, smoothing my hair and taking a deep breath. “You’ve got this,” I told my reflection. Excitement fluttered in my chest, and I grabbed my bag, practically skipping down the halls toward his class. He told me he would meet me at my room, but that was going to take longer since his last meeting for today should be ending right now, so figured I would meet him there.

Walking into Saul's classroom I head to his desk and take a seat on top. He wasn’t

here yet so might as well practice my water a little. I take my hand and allow my magic to flow, I make a stream of water arch out of the pool and try to twist it into shapes. First a question mark, a circle, a heart. I'm in the process of trying to form a star when his door opens and a woman steps through.

I look over my shoulder and give her a smile. "Saul will be here in a second he had a meeting." I turn my focus back to the pool and keep alternating through. My shapes. A scoff comes from behind me, and I glance back again. Raising an eyebrow. I shut off the flow of magic and spin on his desk to face the door

"Can I help You?" I ask. She rolls her eyes and crosses her arms over her chest. She must be a professor, she's too old to be a student. Okay she's not that old but look I don't like the way she's looking at me.

"You need to remove Yourself from Professor Jacobs desk. He will not be happy to have someone using it as a chair. You need remember Your manners, he is a professor and not Saul , to You." She sneers at me. I open my magic and allow her thoughts to slip through. Slut. Ohhh, I get it now.

A sickly-sweet smile spreads on my face. "Well professor Jacobs will be back soon. He had a meeting. As for me moving from his desk. I think I'll stay right here thank You though for Your concern."

"Remove Yourself from his desk or I will drag You to the dean." She threatens and look I'm not usually so mean, but this bitch is in my mate's room alone and trying to tell me what to do. So, fuck her.

"That wouldn't be productive. But You're more than welcome to try and drag me somewhere. Professor... I'm sorry I don't know who You are." I say cocking my head to the side. Her face flames in anger as she steps closer.

“Look You little slut, Professor Jacobs doesn’t sleep with students so they can raise their grades. He likes women with class. Not children.” She looks pointedly at my short skirt that I was hoping was going to make this trip to his classroom significantly more fun. But hey I’ll settle for the look on her face whenever she realizes she’s an idiot.

“What a shame.” I quip raising and dropping one shoulder. Right then I see Saul open the door quietly and slip in his eyes going wide when he sees me and the professor. “Although calling me a slut was completely unnecessary.” I say sweetly.

“If the shoe fits. You come into a professor’s classroom alone and sit on his desk like You have any right to be here in a skirt like that. If You think he would ever fuck You. You’re Wrong. I’ll be discussing this with the dean. This is grounds for expulsion.”

“Well, you’re more than welcome to talk to Barrett about her sitting on my desk however he’s not going to do a damn thing other than laugh in Your face and probably fire You for calling our mate a slut.” Saul’s voice is icy and lethal.

She spins eyes going wide. “Saul this student- “

“Is my mate. And welcome to sit on any surface in any length of skirt she wants.” His eyes rake hungrily down my body. “You’ll do well to remember You are on Your last warning for harassing me, Victoria.”

She moves for the door her eyes glancing at me full of anger. “Oh, and Professor. When You talk to Barrett tell him I miss him, and I’ll be stopping by sometime this week.”

Fucking bitch she spits. And yeah, maybe I am but guess what. I don’t care. God this power is so helpful.

Is there a reason You messing with her? Saul says in his mind. I have to bite the inside of my cheek to keep my smile at bay until she leaves the rooms slamming the door behind her. When she's gone, I slide my eyes to him.

He's leaning against the wall his arms crossed, and an eyebrow raised. His blonde hair is messy and looks like he's been running his hands through it all day.

Are You planning on answering me little one? His voice taking on a slow drawl. I would like to point out that until this point, I've done a great job at pretending I can't hear him. But alas, all good things must come to an end.

Probably not. A slow smirk falls on my face.

Is this a bad idea? Probably he's already told me he's planning on spanking me. Teasing him is probably not on my list of smartest life choices.

He nods, as he slowly makes his way to me. He steps between my legs planting his hands on my hips pulling me closer to him. His lips are so close. Tell me little one, do You enjoying being a brat? He growls. Shit,

One of his hands leaves my waist to trail a finger slowly down my neck. Before he grabs my throat and squeezes slightly. His eyes never leaving mine. "Brat."

"I'm sorry, Professor. What are You going to do to me? Are You going to spank me?" Please oh please tell me he's planning to spank me .

squirming as Saul presses his palm to my lower back, holding me still. " You want that, do n' t You?" He squeezes my throat again more softly.

" Mmmhmm." I wiggle under his hold. My body throbs for his attention. I feel as if I'll explode if I do n' t get what I need.

“ Too bad. Only good girls get what they want. Now hold still. Be quiet. If You make any noise, I'll stop. Yo u' ll have to wait until we get home.” His breathy voice tickles my ear as he rests on top of me, pressing me into the desk.

He drops to his knees the image short circuit's what's left of my brain which admittedly is not much. Considering we are in the middle of his classroom, and I'm spread out on his desk. Fuck.

Hiking my skirt as he pulls me to the edge of the desk, I lean back on my palms, letting him spread my legs wider to rest on his shoulders.

My mind short circuits with his slow, sensual touch as he spreads me open with two fingers and kisses my clit, he knows i t' s what I need from him at this moment. I gasp and bite the inside of my lip, closing my eyes as the pressure of his mouth builds, his tongue tracing my body as if he can kiss the ache away. As if he can kiss away my need. “ Saul” I cry out.

Saul groans between my legs, shooting pleasure to my core. I swallow my words, my breath panting. I feel as if I'll shatter without him. My desire steals away my sense of reason. It denies me the ability to be patient. He steps back keeping eye contact as my breath comes out labored. Slowly he loops his thumbs in his waistband and pulls his pants off allowing himself to fall free. Holy shit no way. Absolutely no way that thing is going anywhere near me. His erection was hard and throbbing. Seeing my face, he chuckles darkly.” Don't worry little one it will fit.”

Any thoughts of self-preservation go out the window. Reaching out, he cupped my cheek and stroked it with his thumb. “I' ve loved You since the day I met You.” Surprise riddled through me, and Saul swallowed my gasps as he descended on me in kisses that made my head spin. My arms wound around his neck, and his hands lifted me by my hips as I hooked my legs around his waist. His eyes searched mine for permission, and I nodded.

My back arched as he thrust into me in one swift buck of his hips. “ Ah,” I moaned, and his forehead rested against mine. “ Are You okay?” Concern was thick in his voice but so was the desire. Saul filled me completely, and the back of my right shoulder started to tingle as I adjusted to him.

“I’ m better than okay.” His fingers bit into my hips as he held me up, and he pulled himself almost all the way out before sliding back in. He kept the slow pace, and a burning sensation started to rise within me, and I whimpered.

“ Do You want me to go harder?” I gripped his shoulders and pulled myself up to give him a better angle and nodded.

“ Please.” He obliged me, and his thrusts became harder. Heat spread over my skin as the burn inside me built up. Magic and pleasure vibrated through my bones, and I cried out as I feel the bond solidify. He sucked in a sharp breath before a low moan left his lips. “Little one, Yo u’ re everything to me.”

Sau l’ s home was tucked away in the eastern section of campus, nestled near the cascading pools used for advanced water magic practice. It was a cozy, one-story house with large windows and ivy creeping up the stone walls. As I approached, I could hear the gentle sound of water, like a constant melody around his home.

His house was exactly what I’ d imagined: bookshelves overflowing with tomes on water theory and elemental convergence, potted plants thriving under enchantments, and a small bubbling fountain in the corner of the living room.

“ Alright, so her e’ s the plan,” he said, grabbing a lightweight jacket and tossing it over his shoulder. “ W e’ re heading to the lagoon. I know you’ve been working on channeling, and I thought we could practice.... but also relax. Just us, no distractions.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Relax? You sure You know how to do that?”

He rolled his eyes but grinned, grabbing a small satchel and motioning for me to follow him out the door.

The walk to the lagoon was peaceful, the sound of water trickling through the academy's irrigation streams accompanying us. Saul pointed out little details along the way, like how the enchanted lilies in the ponds only bloomed under moonlight or how the fountain near the student dorms was actually fed by an underground water vein he'd helped redirect.

When we reached the lagoon, I couldn't help but gasp. It was stunning—a crystal-clear body of water surrounded by smooth rocks and cascading waterfalls that shimmered in the sunlight. The water practically sparkled, infused with the energy of the elemental wards that kept it pristine.

“Wow,” I breathed. “I've never been here at night.” The only time I'd actually been here at all was during the tour. Vivianne had told me these areas were off limits to students. Perks of dating the professor. Or holy shit

“We are mated!” I screech freezing. Trying to look over my shoulder Saul smiles pulling out his phone to take a photo of my shoulder turning the screen to show me. A small intricate design is woven over my skin. Bright gold. But it cuts off about halfway through one of the swirls showing the missing mate marks. Holy shit I've mated one of my guys. My eyes go wide.

“There is something You should know-“ I start to say now that we are mated, I can tell him I'm a traveler.

“You're a traveler.” He says matter of fact raising an eyebrow.

“Uh- yeah. How did You?”

“Little one there are very few beings that can read minds and talk telepathically. Gods, and travelers. And while I totally would argue You’re a goddess in Your own right. I don’t think the beings that be, would agree with me. So that leaves traveler. “

“My mom was a traveler; she went to where I grew up when she was 21 and- well her and my dad died before I left home to come here.” I say quietly gods I miss my parents. Being here and experiencing everything the way that I am but not being able to talk to them is the hardest part.

Saul smiled, his expression softening as he watched me take it all in. “ I’m sorry You lost them. From what I’ve heard from Genna Your mother was amazing.”

“They bother were. I wish my mom would have told me about this place before she died. Where I come from is nothing like here.

“I’m sure it was hard for her; she left her parents and siblings to go to a place completely different Than anything she’s ever known.” He gives me a small smile and pulls me closer to the water.

He led me to a smooth boulder near the water’s edge, setting down his satchel and pulling out two small, enchanted spheres. He handed one to me.

“ What’s this?” I asked, turning it over in my hands.

“ Focus spheres,” he explained. “ They’re great for fine-tuning Your control. Thought we could practice a bit; see how long You can keep it suspended without breaking Your focus.”

I gave him a playful glare. “ So, this is a date and a lesson?”

“ Hey,” he said, raising his hands defensively. “I’ m a multitasker.”

Despite the teasing, the practice turned out to be fun. Saul was patient as he guided me through the exercise, his voice calm and steady as he offered tips. “ I t’ s all about flow,” he said, his hands moving gracefully as he demonstrated. “ Do n’ t fight the current. Work with it.”

Before I knew it, I’ d gotten the hang of it, and we spent the rest of the afternoon experimenting with different techniques. At one point, Saul flicked his fingers, sending a small splash of water my way.

“ Did You just—?” I laughed, splashing him back.

His grin was pure mischief. “ Yo u’ re gonna regret that.”

What followed was a full-blown water fight, with me accidentally summoning a mini wave that nearly knocked us both over. By the time we called a truce, we were soaked and laughing so hard it hurt.

As we sat on the warm rocks, drying off under the sun, Saul turned to me, his expression softer than usual. “I’ ve needed this,” he said quietly.

I leaned back on my hands, letting the warmth seep into my skin. “ Me too.”

“I’m Sorry I’ve been super busy recently. I’ve been setting up for someone to take over my classes next year and apparently that is a lot more work than I thought. “He says taking my hand and squeezing.

“Wait, what? You don’t want to teach anymore?” I know Barrett didn’t like teaching, so he moves positions but I kind of thought teaching was perfect for Saul.

He chuckles lightly pulling my head into his lap and stroking my hair. “I just wanted to take a break. Money’s not an issue and with You here and there being so many of us I think it would be nice to have someone home to help out around the house. Plus, if I’m honest, teaching can be exhausting and recently the council has been more involved with the curriculum than I’d like. Barrett does what he can to field their issues but not being able to teach what I think will be most beneficial for my students in real life is kind of sucking the joy I get from it. The council thinks You learning to create shapes and form orbs that can sit on Your desk for hours shows You’re capable of handling the element. However, when was the last time You needed a star made of water for life?”

“So, you’re taking time off because of me?” I ask my voice quiet.

“No little one, you are just the best reason. I had been thinking of taking some time off, but You showing up made the thought more of a reality. “

“What do You think is necessary for us to learn?” I ask. Tracing circles on his leg.

“How to locate water, how to pull water out of Your surroundings, using water to transport items, how to control water during rainstorms or something similar, it all sounds more complicated as it is and more like survivalist stuff, but the reality is that those basic skills are things that help day to day. You drop Your phone or tablet in water, you need to know how to remove it. You need water for a potion, but You aren’t able to find any near You, you can locate the closest source. Transportation is I think the most functional. Need to cross a lake but don’t want to use the roads to go around? Well just use the water to carry You across or carry Your things across. “

That all makes as ton more sense than whatever the council wants him to teach. “So Vivianne mentioned after bonds are completed that we move into the family houses?”

“Ahh, we won’t. Me and Barrett started additions onto our houses. We live next door.

So, we started the building process to make it one large house so when You decide to add members to Your little harem, they will all move in there.”

“Will there be enough space? God having 7 mates is not a small harem”

“There is plenty of space, I had a three bedroom. And Barrett being the dean had 5 bedrooms combining the two we will have more than enough space. We had an idea for it, but we are going to wait until renovations are done to tell You. So, we can all show You as a family.”

Family, getting used to that word again is way harder than I thought it would be. Not only did I have my mom’s family here, but I was.

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

Aly

The following day I got a message from Barrett telling me that I had a meeting with my new tutor. Which I totally needed. Vin, I guess his name was, sent me a list of things to work on before we met later today. So off to the training grounds I went.

Vivianne had told me that I could head to the training grounds this morning, and no one should be over there. And considering I was about to try and probably fail epically at this, not having an audience seemed ideal.

When I finally arrive at the fire training grounds, I decide to practice the meditation that Vin sent me. Apparently centering Yourself and not stressing helps You to I don't know... not light Yourself on fire.

I take 3 calming breaths and allow my fire magic to come forward but sit simmering still inside of my body allowing the pressure to grow without allowing it to take over. And trust me it's a lot harder than it sounds.

Eventually I allow small amounts of magic to escape trying to create a small ring of fire around me in the sand.

My magic surges and I attempt to keep it at bay. Shit this is not working. Before I can reign it back in, I'm doused in the coldest water I think I've ever felt. Holy shit.

"What the fuck!" I screech my eyes fly open to see a scowling man standing across from me his hand still raised from his assault

The second our eyes meet the bond snaps into place and where my mouth drops, and my eyes grow wide from the shock this guy's face twists in anger.

"What are You doing here?" He growls.

"Uh- trying to work on my fire magic." I allow a little of my magic to slip out allowing the heat to dry me and my clothes.

"I reserved this circle. You shouldn't be here." He grits. Looking me up and down.

"Well, I'm sorry I didn't know I had to reserve it. Did You really have to dump a lake worth of water on my head?"

"I mean it was that or You start a small forest fire." He smirks.

I glared at him, my body still tingling from the icy assault. "I had it under control."

He let out a sharp laugh, cold and cutting. "Oh, really ? Because from where I'm standing, it looked like You were two seconds away from torching the entire clearing."

"Maybe I was!" I shot back, crossing my arms. "And I would've handled it, but someone decided to dump half a lake on my head instead of giving me a chance to fix it!"

He cocked his head, his dark eyes narrowing. "Right. You looked so in control with Your magic flaring out of You like a broken faucet. If I had n't stopped You, you'd be halfway to starting a wildfire by now."

I ground my teeth together, trying not to focus on how irritatingly smug he looked standing there. His sharp jaw and tousled hair might've been attractive if he were n't

t such an ass. “Who even are You?”

“Carion,” he said simply, his gaze sweeping over me again, as if sizing me up. “And I reserved this training ground. You should n’ t even be here.”

“Well, I did n’ t know reservations were a thing,” I snapped. “My cousin told me this place would be empty, so forgive me for not expecting to get ambushed by the fire circle police.”

His lips twitched, like he was holding back a smirk. “Fire circle police? Tha t’ s cute.”

“Glad You think so,” I said flatly. “Now, if Yo u’ re done playing hero, I’ d like to get back to my practice—unless You plan to soak me every time, I breathe too hard.”

Cario n’ s eyes darkened, his expression sharpening. “You do n’ t get it, do You? This magic Yo u’ re playing with—i t’ s dangerous. You lose focus for one second, and someone will get hurt. Next time, it might not be just You.”

I hesitated, the weight of his words sinking in despite my irritation. But I was n’ t about to let him see that. “I am trying to control it. Tha t’ s why I’ m here. I do n’ t need You babysitting me.”

He stepped closer, and I stiffened, the air between us charged with tension. “Not likely firefly, more like trying to keep the bunnies in the forest safe.” His voice dropped, low and edged with sarcasm that would make Vivienne proud. “What You need is someone who actually knows what the y’ re doing. Because from what I’ ve seen. Yo u’ re nowhere near ready to be out here on Your own.”

“Oh, and let me guess—You think Yo u’ re the guy to teach me?” I said, my voice dripping with sarcasm.

Carion raised an eyebrow, his smirk returning. “ Maybe. Or maybe I just do n’ t feel like spending the rest of my day putting out the fires You ca n’ t handle.”

I glared at him, my magic flaring instinctively under my skin. “ I can handle myself just fine.”

“ Sure.” he said, taking a step back but not looking away. “You need a tutor.” He clips walking closer to me. “And let me make myself clear, this bond. The one You’re dying to mention. Will never happen.” He takes a step back to walk away “And stay off my training ground when I reserve it.” He yells over his shoulder.

I stood frozen in the clearing, the heat of my magic flickering against my skin like embers waiting to ignite. My heart hammered against my ribs, and no matter how much I wanted to shrug it off, Cario n’ s words lingered, sharp and cutting.

This bond will never happen.

The declaration echoed in my mind, and it left me feeling strangely hollow, like the ground had been pulled out from under me and I was left flailing, trying to find my footing.

Why did I care? Why was I still standing here, replaying the way his eyes had burned into mine, the way his voice had curled around those words, the tension between us crackling like fire and lightning clashing in a storm?

“ Asshole,” I muttered under my breath, the word doing little to ease the tight knot in my chest. My fingers curled into fists at my sides, my magic humming in response to my frustration.

What the hell was that ? Who does that? Comes out of nowhere, dumps ice-cold water on someone, picks a fight, and then ends it with a dramatic mic drop about a

bond.

I clenched my fists, the heat flaring up again before I forced it back down. He did n' t know me. He did n' t know what I could do or what I' d been through to get here. And he sure as hell did n' t get to decide what I was capable of.

The more I thought about it, the more annoyed I got. He had no idea what I was dealing with, what this bond felt like—not just a hum in the background but something alive, something pushing at the edges of my mind like it wanted to be acknowledged. And the worst part? Now I could n' t stop thinking about him . That stupid smirk, the way he looked at me like I was nothing more than an inconvenience, like h e' d already decided I was n' t worth the effort.

Let me make myself clear... This bond will never happen.

The words rattled around in my skull again, and this time they lit a spark of anger. Fine. If tha t' s how he wanted to play it, so be it. I did n' t need him. I did n' t need his approval, and I sure as hell did n' t need his help. I have five amazing mates who want me. You've got me all the way fucked up if You think I'm going to chase the one who doesn't want me. Fuck that.

I stopped pacing and took a deep breath, forcing my magic back down until it was nothing more than a simmer beneath my skin. My fingers relaxed, and I rolled my shoulders back, brushing off the lingering tension like dust.

Carion might think he had me all figured out, but he did n' t know me. Not really. I was n' t about to let some arrogant guy with a god complex and a sharp jawline dictate how I handled myself—or my magic

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

Alex

We wander to the academy's cliffside overlook at dusk, where the sea crashes against jagged rocks far below. Aly's flame flickers in her palm, casting amber light over her face as she leans against the railing. her laughter echoing as I sculpt a rose from damp soil.

"Show-off," she teases, plucking the flower. It glows faintly, veins pulsing with bioluminescent sap. "What's next? A palace?"

"Too mainstream." I tap the ground, and roots surge upward, braiding into a twisting archway over her head. Sunlight fractures through the leaves, painting her face in dappled gold. "How about a private forest?"

She leans back, mischief in her eyes. "Still not as impressive as my fire tornado."

"That incinerated the greenhouse," I remind her, grinning.

"Rebuilt the greenhouse," she corrects, snapping her fingers. A tiny flame dances above her palm, casting shadows over the rose in her hair. "With better ventilation."

I laugh, but the soil beneath my palm's prickles—a tremor, faint and foreign.

Someone's here.

My magic hums, mapping the grove through vibrations in the earth. Footsteps. Too deliberate. Too still.

East of the oak, behind the stone bench.

I glance casually over Aly's shoulder. A man leans against the bench, silver hair stark against the ivy. His arms are crossed, gaze locked on Aly like she's a puzzle to solve.

Carion.

Aly flicks a pebble at my forehead. "Earth to Alex. You're zoning."

"Just plotting my next masterpiece," I lie, coaxing a cluster of star-shaped flowers to bloom around her ankles.

She kicks off her sandals, toes brushing the petals. "Admit it. You're obsessed with me."

"Guilty." I smile.

"Bet I can hit the water," she says, eyeing the drop.

"Don't." My hand closes over hers, extinguishing the flame. "Let's... not test gravity today."

She raises a brow. "Since when are you the cautious one?"

I tug her closer, my thumb tracing the pulse in her wrist. "I love you Aly..."

She softens, pressing her forehead to mine. "You're stuck with me, rock boy."

The ground trembles—Carion's footstep, closer now.

I grab Aly's hand and pull her back to the academy

The pathway glows with lanterns, hanging on either side of the road. Aly drags me to a vendor selling spiced cider, her fingers sticky with caramel as she licks sugar from her thumb.

“Try this,” she orders, holding her cup to my lips.

I sip, but my mind is racing. Why is he watching her? Aly has told us all over the last few weeks that she felt like someone was watching her.

Aly frowns. “You’re not even tasting it.”

“It’s perfect,” I say, forcing a smile. “Like you.”

She rolls her eyes but leans into me, her warmth a counterpoint to the chill in my veins.

We end up back at the Academy, the bioluminescent flowers now a constellation. She kisses me then, slow and sweet, her hands tangled in my hair. The soil hums a warning.

Carion stands at the grove’s edge, a silhouette against the moon.

I break the kiss, pulling Aly behind me. “We should go.”

She blinks. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” I lace my fingers through hers, tight. “Just... Someone’s watching us. Don't look I've got you.”

She nods her big eyes wide and scared.

I walk her to her dorm, my magic screaming with every step. Carion tails us, a shadow with silver hair.

At her door, Aly hesitates. “You’re acting weird.”

“I’m sorry I’ve been out of it. I just noticed someone there at the cliffs.”, kissing her knuckles. “I’ll make it up to you. I need to go call the guys. Sleep well.”

She narrows her eyes but slips inside.

Carion leans against the bell tower across the quad, lighting a cigarette. Our eyes meet.

He nods at me.

I text the group before I’ve taken three steps.

We all meet up at the dorms and make our way to Carion. “What the hell are you doing?” I shout stalking up to him.

“Keeping an eye on her.” he looks around the group. “She’s my mate too.” he groans.

“You’ve been ignoring her since you met her. Treating her like shit.” Saul Spits. “Why are you stalking her?”

Carion’s eyes dart to Barrett. “My dad. He knows what she is. I don’t trust him not to try and take her. I- I need to make sure she’s safe.”

“She was with me. She was perfectly safe.”

“And yet you didn’t notice me until we were at the cliff. I had been following her

since she stepped out of the dorm.”

“Okay, how about this. When she is with one of us you back off. We all want her safe. We will keep a closer eye on her. “Barrett asks.

Carion shakes his head.” you don't understand. It's not that easy. My father.”

“Is a psycho, we know. But we need time with her without you watching our every move. We deserve some alone time with our mate.” Saul adds motioning to me.

“Fine.” Carrion grits out.

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

Aly

The most annoying part of all of this, was the fact that before I had never even seen Carion but all of the sudden, he was everywhere. The cafe, on the way to earth basics, even walking to my damn dorm room. By the end of the day, I was in a terrible mood. The bond was pushing me to want to fix whatever was wrong with me and Carion, but I have no interest in doing stuff just cause a stupid bond says I should. He made himself clear and until he changes his mind and tells me that. I'm uninterested.

Vivianne had been trying to get me to focus for the last hour on her newest history lesson about bonds and her plots for dorm design after I move out now that Saul and I have completed the bond.

"I also have a basement full of dead bodies."

My head snaps up. The words slipping through my current pity party. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Oh, you know, the usual the pesky losers who piss me off I just." She draws her hand across her throat in a cutting motion.

"Okay I'm guessing you're joking because, A we don't have a basement. And B I'm hoping that I haven't been sleeping next to a psychopath."

"Oh babe, you are one hundred percent, sleeping next to a psychopath. But I have a firm no murdering family policy, so You should be safe." She winks rolling onto her stomach.

“Okay okay I get it, I wasn’t paying attention. I’m sorry “

“It’s okay, what’s going on. Why are You so out of it?” She asks her eyebrows raised

“I- I met another mate. He- well he dumped water on me and basically told me he wouldn’t touch me with a ten-foot pole.” I flop onto my back. Staring at my ceiling

“Who is it?”

“I don't know his last name, but he said his name is Carion.”

Vivianne's eyes grow wide. “Carion Mitchell.” She says quietly. “Listen Aly I- I don't know much but his dad is a total prick and.... well the rumors aren’t great. It might not be entirely his fault.”

“What do You mean not his fault? How is it not his fault.?” Rolling my eyes. Rule of thumb, your decisions are in fact: Your fault

“Look all I know are rumors, maybe just talk to him? “

Trying to remind myself that not everything can go my way and that this isn’t a book where the girl can snap her fingers and get her guys is way harder than I thought it would be. The rest of my guys wanted me. And Carion just doesn’t.

Setting the phone down I decide I need to head to tutoring. Might as well get this over with. I’m hoping this is helpful; I’m kind of sick of being behind. Not that it’s my fault.

When I get to the Fire training grounds, I see a man standing against one of the walls his head in his tablet and the closer I notice a pull begging to yank me to him. Shit on a stick. You have got to be kidding me. What is this? This is the second time today.

Can Your girl get a break. I Stop walking to take him in.

SOS, how is one supposed to handle 7 mates that are all wayyy too hot for their own good? Genuinely asking because I'm not entirely sure how I'm supposed to be focusing on learning when Saul is my teacher and Vin here is my tutor. But if I'm honest You've got me all the way fucked up if You think I'm going to actually ask Barrett to change my tutor so I can learn. #let's-hope-I-burn-our-clothes off. he's not as tall as Barrett, or as built as Alex. His long blond hair is curly and falling into his face. His jawline is arguably the poster child for 'perfection'. I'm so fucked.

I get about 5 feet from him when his blue eyes snap to mine. He looks shell shocked, for about .5 seconds his mouth curving into a smirk. "Well, this is a surprise." He drawls.

I cock an eyebrow. "I'm Aly it's nice to meet You." I stick my hand out to shake his, but he just looks at it before slowly taking it and slightly shaking It.

"Vin Astor. The dean asked me to help tutor You for Your fire and earth magic. He said you struggle more with fire, so I'd like to start with that if You're cool with it."

Looking inward I notice my magic is still a little low after today's almost forest fire. "Uhm, that should be okay but I- well I was working on it earlier today so I'm a little low on power."

"Perfect. You're less likely to burn the school down if You don't have a lot of gas." He jokes walking to the center of the circle and sitting in the center, "Come sit." He pats the ground in front of him.

Crossing my legs I sit across from him. "I have an issue keeping the magic low. It's like it takes on a mind of its own and grows without me noticing. "

“That happens You have to learn to put a ‘stopper’ if You will on it. So basically, a limit Your fire can reach. A ‘max intensity.’ It helps to keep it from growing to a dangerous level. What I want You to do is hold out Your hand and before letting the magic out I want You to create a wall in the well of magic and You lift the wall long enough for enough magic to flow for You to create a fire ball. When You have enough, drop the wall down and don't allow any more magic through. “

Closing my eyes I try to picture a wall in the magic I picture a grey brick wall. Blocking through route to escape. I lift the wall in my mind and allow a little bit of magic to flow out.

“A little more.” Vin says

I let a little more out before slamming the wall back down. I open my eyes and see a perfectly formed ball in my hand. I can feel more of my magic attempting to escape and it's getting harder to keep the wall up.

“Don't strain Yourself, if You're tired put the fire out and let Yourself rest.”

Listening to him I pull back in my magic and drop the wall. Breathing heavy I take the water bottle he has in his hand and take a big drink.

“Yeah, sure You can have a sip.” He jokes smiling.

“Thanks.” I laugh. Flopping to my back I take some more deep breaths. Trying to manage two thinks with my magic at once is a lot harder than You might think and I'm exhausted after this morning.

Vin lays down next to me and nudges my shoulder. “So-. Mates. Huh? “

“Ah yeah, sorry I had a rough day and wanted to get through this before having to

think about more mates.”

“More mates? How many do You have? You are my Seventh and my last mate. Well kind of. I met another mate this morning but he kind of told me to fuck off so I'm not sure how well that is going to go but it is what it is.”

“Seven, damn. Well, I suppose you'll never be bored.” He laughs before turning to the side to look at me.” As for the mate You met this morning, screw him. “

“Do You maybe want to come to dinner with me and the guys tonight? I wanted to do a movie night with everyone to get my mind off Carion.”

His face morphs to a grimace, he covers it up so quickly I almost miss it. “I'd love to.” He says quietly taking my hand he pulls me up to a seated position.

“What's wrong.” I ask.

“Nothing Doll, I just didn't realize that Carion is the one You were talking about. He's a good friend. He- he's been through a lot. Maybe don't count him out just yet. He just needs some time.”

I roll my eyes. “That's what Vivianne said. I won't count him out I just have to also protect myself. It's not fair to all of You guys if I go chasing him. He can take his time, and I won't push but I'm also not going to be getting my hopes up.”

When I get to my bag, I pull out my tablet to text the guys

Aly

The guys had done themselves. The living room was cozy, with blankets and pillows strewn about

“Who was in charge of snacks,” I said, setting out bowls of popcorn, pretzels, and a few sweet treats—candied fruit, chocolate truffles, and some sparkling herbal drinks. The room already smelled like melted butter from the popcorn.

“We all brought some.” Alex chirps from his spot on the floor.

“Well, you all did great then, I love soft pretzels.” grabbing a plate I load up with the pretzels and a small bowl of cheese. I take bite and let out a small moan. Dear god these are good.

Jared and Vin were the first to plop down on the couch, instantly making themselves comfortable. Jared was already cracking jokes, flinging a piece of popcorn at Vin, who caught it with a smug grin.

“You know,” Jared said, pointing at the screen, “I’ve got a theory that every movie is better with more explosions. Like, if this rom com had just a few more car chases and some gunfire, it’d be way more interesting.”

Vin, who was still chuckling, raised an eyebrow. “What’s wrong with a nice rom com?” he said,

Alex chuckles his smile turning mischievous. “Jared cries during the big love

proclamations. Every. Single. time.”

“ Hey!” Jared throws a pillow at Alex. “ I will have You know I have no shame about the tears from the notebook. Them dying together was so sweet and if You didn't cry, You're a monster.” He huffs

Elliott, who was sitting on the arm of the couch, smiled sweetly at the two of them. “ I also cried at the end of the notebook. Rom- Coms are sweet. Action movies stress me out. I'm always stressed someone's about to die”

“ Elliot t's got a point,” Alex chimed in from the floor, wrapped in a blanket. “ Sometimes, all You need is a bit of comfort , no need for all the chaos.” He gave me a warm smile. He reaches out a hand and pulls me down next to him.

Barrett, still sitting quietly, finally spoke up, his deep voice cutting through the noise. “ Alright, enough talk. W e' ve got a movie to watch. Le t' s get to it.” His tone was firm, but there was a playful edge to it. Even though Barrett was known for being intense, but if I didn't know any better is think he was enjoying himself.

Saul, who usually had the intensity of a thunderstorm, was sitting beside Barrett, quietly watching the screen. His sharp gaze never left the movie, but I could tell he was enjoying the evening.

“ So, what are we watching tonight?” Vin asked, looking over the selection. “ Rom-com? Action movie? Horror?”

“ Definitely not horror,” Saul said, his tone as serious as ever. “I' m not spending my evening in a state of perpetual stress.” His voice was deep, low, and steady, and though he could seem like a walking storm most of the time.

“ Yo u' re missing out,” Jared grinned, “ I swear, if You just gave it a chance, you'd

be hooked on the thrill of a good horror flick.”

Vin raised his hands in mock surrender. “ Alright, alright, no horror.”

“ I love horror movies.” Jared said, leaning back on the couch. “ Something with explosions, high-speed chases, and a great soundtrack. This movie could use some of that.”

Alex smiled to himself, adjusting the blanket around his shoulders. “ Alright, no explosions. How about a comedy?”

That got a few enthusiastic nods from everyone. Comedy it was.

We popped in Stepbrothers. Don't look at me like that. It's a classic. And everyone loves Stepbrothers As the movie started, the familiar cheesy opening credits rolled, and we all settled in.

Jared was, of course, the first to start cracking jokes. Every time a ridiculous line came up, he would repeat it in a perfect impression.

“ Oh, this is where it gets good,” Jared said, practically bouncing in his seat. “ Comedic Gold in three.... two.... one....”

“I know you touched my drumstick. Cause the left one has a chip in it!” Jared Shouts.

“ Are You fucking crazy, man? You sound insane. Do You realize that? You should be medicated.” Vin Chimes in. and as of Brennan and Dale were in living room both Vin and Jared give us the performance of a lifetime. By the time Vin informs Jared he is going to go rub his ball sack on his drum set all of us are practically rolling on the floor we are laughing so hard.

Next thing we know Jared has tackled Vin and the boys are now rolling around shouting obscenities.

Barrett stands from the couch and grabs Jared to separate them. “Alright, alright. That’s enough.”

“ I do n’ t understand how they made this scene funny,” Saul muttered, but there was a little twinkle in his eye.

“ See?” Jared said, triumphant. “ I t’ s all about the timing.”

Elliott giggled, shaking his head at their antics. “ You two are impossible. You never just watch a movie, do You?”

“ Impossible in the best way,” Vin said, nudging Elliott gently. “ At least it makes things more fun.”

“ See? I told You,” Jared said with a grin. “ Just a few jokes and some explosions and i t’ s perfect .”

“I wouldn't call Crashing a boat an ‘ explosio n ’ but sure.” Alex says.

The rest of us laughed as the movie continued. Every so often, Saul would lean over and mutter a technical comment about the way the scene was shot, which Barrett would respond to with a few brief words of his own.

As the movie neared its end, we were all lounging lazily, each of us in our own little bubble of comfort. The jokes had slowed down, replaced by easy conversation.

“ So,” Vin said after a long pause, “ Are we doing this again next weekend?”

“ Absolutely,” I said, smiling at the group. “ No excuses. Everyone will be here on Saturdays for movie nights at 6:00 new family tradition.”

“ W e’ ll make sure to find more explosions for Jared,” Barrett said with a smirk, and even Saul let out a soft chuckle at that.

“I’ m in,” Jared said, throwing a thumb up.

“So little mate, are You planning to tell us why You wanted to see us all tonight.” Barrett lifts me from my spot on the floor with Alex and pulls me into his lap.

“What, cant a girl just want to spend some time with her mates? “I mumble. Cuddling into Barretts chest.

“Of course You can darling. But let’s not pretend that is what this was yeah?”

“I found another mate this morning when I was on the training grounds getting ready for my tutoring with vin. It didn’t go well, and I don't think he’s interested in being with us. Which isn’t that big of a deal it just hurt my feelings, and I wanted to spend some time with You guys.”

“I’m sorry pretty girl. Who is it?”

“Carion Mitchell.” Vin says looking around the room. Everyone’s faces turn to grimaces.

Throwing my hands up in the air I groan “Okay what is going on why does everyone know something I don't.”

“It’s not really our story to tell Aly, but just so You have an idea. Mate bonds are strong and usually mated pairs eventually can share thoughts, emotions can flood

through, and intense physical feelings. Carion's dad.... well, it's kind of a rumor but carion has shown up to classes with some really bad bruises and, well- “

“People think his dad is abusing him. If You're bond and it grows to a certain point, there is a chance You would feel the physical effects of what his dad does to him.”

My heart starts pounding. What the fuck. Why hasn't anyone done anything?

People have tried little one. It's never been proven, and Carion hasn't ever admitted anything so no one can do anything. There are also some other things that go into this. His dad is less than quiet about wanting to become the prime and if he does that the whole of Narine would be affected

He is probably trying to protect You little mate.

Fuck that! I don't need protection. He on the other hand.

Anger like I've never known clouds my mind. Before I know what's happening I feel my magic flood my body. It overwhelms me and before I can reign it back in a flood of magic is flung from my body, and everything goes black.

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

Aly

Holy headach e . My head is pounding so bad I feel like I was hit by a truck. “Ugh, What the fuck” blinking open my eyes I notice I'm lying in a bed. When I try to sit up the arm around me tightens.

“Five more minutes.” Barrett mumbles.

“What happened?”

“You set off a bomb of magic after we told You about Carion’s dad last night.” Alex says from the doorway. Coffees in hand. He passes a few out before coming to sit next to me.

“You’ve been out for 7 hours.” He says quietly handing me a latte. Brushing hair out of my face I take coffee and take a long sip.

“Is everyone okay?” My voice is small. God what if I hurt someone.

I’m pulled from between Alex and Barrett. Vin holds me to him. “Everyone is fine Doll, we were all just worried about You. You used a lot of magic last night and You were out way longer than You should have.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what happened. It was like the rage just took over and before I realized it...”

“You exploded. “Saul’s deep voice comes from the armchair in the corner of the

room.” It happens Little one, we just have to work on keeping Your magic inside You. It’s nothing to be sorry for. It was just a blast of air.”

Barrett is sitting up his eyes trained firmly on me. “Come here little mate.” I climb off Vin and walk over to Barrett. He pulls me to him inhaling deeply.

“We will give You guys some time.” Jared says before everyone leaves the room.

“You Scared me half to death little mate.” Muttering Into my hair. “Watching You crumple like that- we need to help You learn to control it. And I’m not saying that to hurt Your feelings but watching that. Crushed me.” He breaths

“I know big guy, I’m sorry. It caught me off guard I was just so angry. I can’t imagine how hard it’s been for him and with him being my mate the thought of someone hurting him- it just didn’t sit right.”

“I understand. The thought of something like that happening to You makes me want to skin someone alive. “

Giggling I cuddle closer to him “Thanks big guy, thankfully for the population no one needs their skin removed.”

Moving his chest back to look down at me “I’m so proud of how well You’re taking all of this. The fact You haven’t completely broken down is amazing.” He dips his head capturing my lips in a searing kiss.

I melt into his touch letting him deepen the kiss... Barrett grabs the hem of my t-shirt that I’m 90 percent sure Saul put on me. He pulls until I’m completely bare beneath him. He pulls away from our kiss to drag his tongue closer to my ear. “I need You.” he whispers. His breath fanning across my ear before he drops lower trailing his tongue down my neck, over my collar bone.

The tip of his tongue skims down the slope of my chest, keeping contact even as my chest rises and falls with my deep swallows of breath. I'm a live wire beneath him, and I swivel my hips, rubbing my arousal against his thigh. Our groans came out in the same pitch, low and soaked with desire.

"Alyssa." He whispered it at the base of my neck. "I need You to tell me You're okay with this."

Oh, God. The muscles deep in my belly clenched in response, so tight it was almost painful. "Yes." I whispered. At least I think I did. I couldn't tell with how dry my mouth was if the words were able to escape. I lift my head to gaze at him as he pushes down his underwear, I have to press my lips together to stifle the whimper. His dick is impossibly long and thick, so hard it had a slight upward curve to it. His eyes were hungry. His measured gaze worked along the length of my bare body, lingering over my chest." I want my mark here." he says pushing his hand to my tit's. I feel flushed and breathless.

"Jesus, Alyssa," he groans.

I close my eyes as my heart skips. He presses his fingertip to my clit, shooting sparks of pleasure down my legs, and used his other hand to stroke himself. His hooded gaze travels to where he's touching me, I grip the comforter at my sides. Need choking in my throat forcing me to choke on the sob threatening to escape. His face twists with pleasure, when he notices a finger speared into me as a reward. I bowed my back, clenching at the invasion. I thread my hands through his hair and shut my eyes tightly.

I move my hips to match his lazy tempo, writhing on the bed, my toes curl around the edge of the bed frame. His powerful body stood between my bent knees, his fingers fucking me exactly how I'd spent countless nights fantasizing he would.

“ You do n’ t know what Yo u’ re doing to me,” he whispers, “ No fucking clue how much I want this.” His fingers pump deeper and faster. His fingers retreat, he drags his hand to his cock before wetting it with my own arousal. It was erotic watching his beautiful hand work himself over. And then he slid his forearms under me, his hands on my thighs, and jerked me closer to the edge of the bed. My heart stopped, but when the hard tip of him brushed against me, it restarted in overdrive.

I hooked my quivering legs around his warm hips. He leaned over, setting a hand on the mattress beside my head as he steadied himself with his other. He was right at my entrance and began to push, easing inside. I locked my legs around him so tightly, his hipbones dug into the insides of my thighs. Barrett’ s green eyes were so bright and intense almost as if they were glowing slightly, and the color deepened as he advanced. He watched intently, studying every breath I swallowed as he claimed me. Oh, shit, the uncomfortable stretch felt good. A delicious shiver tore through my body.

I reached up a hand to cup the side of his face and held on to him, even as my lips rounded into a silent moan. “ Fuck,” he uttered so quietly, it was a ghost of a word. His slow push kept going. I whimpered as it felt even better. Another tremor rippled along my muscles. He was buried deep, possessing me, and it felt amazing. Not only physically, either. But just as soon as h e’ d given it to me, he began to take it away. His hips drew back, easing out and pulling the sensations with him, leaving me feeling empty for a moment. Until he slammed forward. My back arches pushing my boobs farther into his face. Which he takes as an invitation to pull one of my nipples into his mouth sucking slightly before biting down hard.

A scream tears from my throat. “Shh, you’re okay, baby, I got You.” he murmurs, rubbing the sting away. Fuck me, if You would have asked if I liked to be bitten, I would have told You no. but Barrett does it and well slap my ass and call me a whore. I’m very into it.

He places his hand on my hip in a bruising grip before continuing to slam into me. My chest warms as the bond snaps firmly into place. His mark burns into my skin just where he wanted it. Cementing what I already knew, he was mine. Love floods the bond. When he feels it his hips still his eyes connecting with mine. “Fuck, I- I love You too little mate.”

I groan as I tip my head back. He dips his head sucking hard on the side of my neck. Doubling his efforts he moves a hand to stroke my clit. “Let go for me baby, I want Your pleasure.” he snaps his hips and grinds slightly to the left the feel of him dragging against just the right spot. He notices and repeats the motion. Over. and over. And over again. My whole body tightens before stars explode behind my eyes. Blinding me, my ears start to ring when he doesn't slow the assault continuing the motion until I come for the second time.

“Fuck!” I scream out slamming my head against the bed my knees draw together in an attempt to keep him from continuing.

A deep chuckle leaves his throat before he moves one hand to pin my leg in place. Drawing more and more pleasure from me “Not just yet little mate. I need more. I’m a greedy bastard.” the vibration from his filthy words set off a chain of events I like to call Meeting god.

My whole body tightens as the bright light behind my eyes turn technicolored. My body begins to shake as Barrett changes pace. “ That's it, baby, god You're such a good girl.” he thrusts a few more times before his body tightens “Fucking Christ.” he spit’s. “ You're still squeezing me.”

He pulls out and stands, grabbing a hand towel I didn't see earlier before wiping me down. I’m trying to get my breathing under control when he lays down on the bed and pulls me to him. “I love You Alyssa James.” he says into my hair

“I love You too Big guy.” I whisper moving my hand to his mark

“I wasn’t too rough?”

“Not at all, I needed a little rough. I feel so much more relaxed. I don’t think I realized how tight my body felt.” I groan. Rolling to my back when I look up, I notice he has a mark on his neck. The swirling pattern reaching from the back of his shoulder up and around his neck. Reaching out my hand I trace the edges...

“Woah, it’s- “

“Beautiful. Yeah, little mate. So is Yours. As much as I would love to lay here with You all day. We should probably get up and head downstairs the guys made breakfast, and You need to eat.” Nipping my ear, he moves off the bed before picking me up and throwing me over his shoulder.

“Barrett Hastings! You put me down right now.” I shout reaching down to smack his ass. He stops dead in his tracks and for a moment I think he might actually put me down.

His hand flies up and smacks so hard I yelp.” Ow!”

“Don’t start shit You can’t finish baby.” He chuckles before moving to set me down on the bathroom counter, to turn on the water.

“Now can You be good for 5 minuets? We need to get You cleaned off and I’d like to do that in a timely manner, so sorry baby but You’re going to have to keep Your hands to Yourself.”

My mouth drops open. Me? Keep my hands to myself? He’s the one who went all ‘I need You now’ on me earlier.

A smirk curves his perfect lips. Oh, I'm well aware of who started last round. But I've seen how You eye fuck me when I'm fully clothed, I can only imagine how hard it will be for You when I'm all wet and soapy.

I narrow my eyes and open my mouth to snap back when the bastard winks at me. Game on.

I hop off the counter letting my tit's bounce. Before moving around, him adding some extra swish to my hips as I walk into the shower. I turn and tip my head up. I hear a strangled groan from the entrance of the shower. When I open my eyes Barretts eyes are firmly planted on my tit's.

A smile curves my lips. "Do You need to rinse off? I can switch spots with You while I was my hair." I say sweetly.

And that is how we ended up in the shower for another 20 minutes before we finally made it downstairs for breakfast. Oops.

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

Aly

When I get to the training grounds for defensive magic, I'm shitting my pants. The morning, I had with Barrett is unfortunately not helping. I mean can barely handle my basics courses and now I have to sit here and try and defend myself from people who have been doing this for years.

I hover near the entrance, my boots scuffing the sand-strewn floor. Aunt Genevieve—don't call her that, she's "Instructor James" here —stands at the center, her arms crossed like she's already disappointed in me. Which, fair. I've been late to three classes this week.

"You're staring at the ground like it's going to swallow you," she says, her voice slicing through the silence. "Stand like you mean to survive the hour."

I straighten, shoulders back, chin up. Survival posture . Right.

She nods once, sharp. "Today, you learn to smother fire with water. Without flooding the arena."

"Cool. Love a good challenge."

Her eyebrow twitches. Sarcasm is not part of the curriculum.

Before I can ask if we're starting with theory or, I don't know, not being set on fire , the doors slam open.

Carion strolls in, his academy jacket slung over one shoulder, that infuriating smirk already locked in place. “Firefly. Ready to cry yet?”

Genevieve cuts him a glare. “You’re here to spar, not provoke her.”

“Can’t I multitask?”

I clench my jaw. Asshole . The bond between us hums low in my gut, a persistent itch I can’t scratch. Not that I’d ever admit it.

Genevieve flicks her wrist, and a ring of braziers ignite around us, flames licking hungrily at the air. “Aly, contain his attacks. Carion, try not to maim her.”

“No promises,” he says, rolling up his sleeves.

First rule of defensive magic: Don’t panic .

I panic.

Carion flicks a ribbon of fire at me, lazy and precise. I slap my hands out, yanking moisture from the air. The water forms a wobbly wall just in time—the flames hit it with a hiss, steam scalding my cheeks.

“Cute,” he drawls. “Now hold it.”

The fire surges, hotter, thicker. My water shield trembles. Droplets bead down my arms, my magic fraying at the edges.

“Focus,” Genevieve snaps. “Shape it. Don’t just throw it.”

Easy for her to say . Sweat drips into my eyes. I grit my teeth, imagining the water

thickening, hardening—

The shield collapses.

Fire licks up my boots. I yelp, stomping wildly.

Carion laughs. “Dance for me, Firefly.”

Genevieve extinguishes the flames with a wave. “Again.”

By the fifth round, my tunic is soaked, my pride drowning in a puddle of failure. Carion hasn’t even broken a sweat.

“You’re pulling from the air,” Genevieve says, circling me. “Pull from the ground. The deeper reserves.”

“Ground’s dry,” I pant.

“Then dig deeper.”

Carion cracks his knuckles. “Or quit. My patience is evaporating faster than your puddles.”

I flip him off.

His next fire strike is a spiraling lance, aimed straight at my chest. I drop to my knees, slamming my palms into the sand. Deeper .

The earth groans. A geyser of water erupts beneath me, swallowing the flames in a roaring tidal wave.

Carion staggers back, soaked.

Genevieve freezes.

The water hangs in the air, trembling, before crashing down in a deluge.

Silence.

Carion wipes his face, his smirk finally gone. “You’re insane.”

“You’re welcome,” I wheeze.

Genevieve steps forward, her expression unreadable. “That was reckless.”

“But it worked.”

“It was stupid,” Carion snarls, shaking water from his hair. “You could’ve collapsed the whole arena pulling from the aquifers.”

“But I didn’t.”

He steps closer, eyes blazing. “You don’t get it. This isn’t a game. One wrong pull and you’ll drain the land dry, or worse—”

“Enough.” Genevieve’s voice cracks like a whip. “Aly, you’ll practice controlled pulls. Carion, you will stop antagonizing her.”

“But—”

“Out. Both of you.”

Carion shoves past me in the hallway, his shoulder clipping mine. “You’re going to get someone killed.”

I whirl on him. “Says the guy who tried to barbecue me!”

“I was holding back!”

“Could’ve fooled me!”

He leans in, his breath hot on my face. “You think I want this bond? You think I want to be tied to a walking disaster?”

The words sting. Yes . No . I don’t know .

I shove him. “Newsflash—I didn’t ask for this either! But here we are. So, either help me not die, or get out of my way!”

His jaw tightens. For a second, I think he’ll walk.

Then he grabs my wrist, dragging me toward the training grounds.

“Where are we—?”

“You want to learn control?” He yanks open the doors, sunlight spilling over the sand. “Then stop whining and listen .”

Carion

The girl is going to get herself killed.

That's the only thought in my head as I drag Aly through the training grounds, her wrist burning against my palm like I'm gripping a live wire. The bond between us thrums, insistent and unwelcome, a headache I can't shake. Firefly . The nickname fits—all flickering chaos and no direction.

“Let go of me!” she snarls, yanking against my grip.

I tighten my hold. “You wanted a lesson. Shut up and take it.”

She stumbles into the center of the arena, her hair still damp from the geyser stunt she pulled earlier. The memory of that tidal wave makes my jaw clench. Reckless. Dangerous. Stupid .

“You're not my instructor,” she spits, whirling on me.

“No. I'm the idiot cleaning up your messes.” I kick a charred training dummy out of the way. “Now, summon water. A trickle, not a tsunami.”

She crosses her arms. “Why should I listen to you?”

“Because the dean will expel you if you flood the armory again. And unlike you, I care about not wasting my time here.” Lie. I don't give a damn about this academy. But the thought of her getting herself incinerated? It needles me. The bond , I tell

myself. Just the bond.

“Barrett wouldn’t expel me.” She snaps. Rage ripples through my body

“Right, I forgot you were fucking him.” I snarl.

“Fuck you.” She murmurs. Her voice small.

“No thanks, now do what I said.”

She glares but raises her hands. A pathetic dribble of water pools in her palms.

“Pathetic,” I snap. “You pulled an aquifer earlier. Now you’re scared of a puddle?”

“I’m not scared —”

“Then stop hesitating!” I stride toward her, the bond buzzing louder with every step.

“Magic isn’t a pet. It’s a blade. You don’t ask it—you take it.”

Her eyes narrow. “You sound like Vivianne and she’s psychotic.”

I smirk. “I never claimed to be sane firefly. Perhaps you should focus less on my mental state and more on your lack of understanding of magic.”

A flare of heat licks the air—her temper sparking. Good.

“Again,” I order.

This time, the water surges faster, a shaky sphere hovering between her hands.

“Hold it,” I say, circling her. “Steady.”

“I’m trying—”

“Try harder.”

She grits her teeth, the sphere wobbling. I step closer, my shadow merging with hers. The bond hums, a low, traitorous pull. Her scent hits me—burnt sugar and rainwater. Annoying .

“Focus on the center,” I mutter. “The core of the water. Not the edges.”

“What does that even mean ?”

I grab her wrist, adjusting her stance. Her pulse races under my fingers. “It means stop trying to shove it into a jar. Pull it from the center to where you want it. You’re not going to get it if you keep just trying to yank on the sides . The shape begins in the center.”

She shivers. My thumb brushes the inside of her wrist before I drop her arm like it’s poisoned.

The sphere stabilizes, glowing faintly blue.

“Better,” I admit grudgingly.

A faint smile tugs her lips. It’s... irritating.

I send a spark of fire at the sphere. It hisses out.

“Hey!”

“Defend it,” I say, lobbing another flame.

She encases the water around it, smothering the fire. Clever.

“Again.”

We fall into a rhythm—fire and water, strike and shield. Her movements grow sharper, less frantic. The bond quiets, soothed by the cadence. Almost peaceful.

Then she overextends.

Her foot catches on a cracked tile. She stumbles, the water sphere exploding. Ice-cold droplets drench us both.

I freeze, soaked. She stares up at me, cheeks flushed, lips parted. The bond roars to life, sudden and suffocating.

Kiss her.

The thought is a knife to the gut. I step back; fists clenched. “You’re still sloppy.”

She scrambles up, defenses slamming into place. “And you’re still an ass.”

“But I’m an ass who just taught you control.” I turn, striding toward the exit. “Don’t waste it.”

“Carion.”

I pause, shoulders rigid.

“Why did you help me?”

Because the bond is a curse. Because you’re too bright to burnout. Because I’m the

most dangerous person to you, and you need to be able to stop me.

Because I can't stop myself.

“Because its less fun to kick your ass if you know nothing, It's boring.” I lie, vanishing into the shadows before she can see the truth in my eyes. As much as I wanted my firefly with every fiber of my being. I'd have to kill my father first.

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

Aly

The classroom buzzed with the hum of energy—literally. Today's lesson was on combining fire and air magic. Which was not something I was particularly looking forward to. You know, after the almost forest fire incident When You fused the two elements, things could either get really explosive or, if done correctly, create a controlled, powerful burst of energy. It could be really cool. if I didn't burn the entire room down first.

I sat at my desk, side by side with Alex, “are You sure You should be sitting next to me?” I asked, my voice a mix of teasing and genuine worry the classroom was filled with murmurs of excitement, students already pulling their tablets out, to take notes.

Alex gave me that soft, knowing smile of his, the one that always made my heart feel a little lighter. “I think you'll do fine. Just.... try not to incinerate anyone this time.”

“Ha, ha,” I muttered sarcastically. “I've got it under control. I think”

Alex chuckled quietly. "Hey, I'm sure You do."

As the instructor began explaining the key techniques to blend fire and air magic—basically, using air currents to shape and direct fire spells—I noticed a familiar face across the room.

Carion.

What the hell is he doing here?

The moment I spotted him, that familiar rush of irritation hit me. Carion had that devilish grin on his face—the kind that made You want to smack him, but also.... made You want to kiss him. Not that I’ d ever admit that.

He caught my eye, smirking and raising an eyebrow, clearly noticing me staring. shit.

I was about to look away when Carion stood up, making his way toward me. His steps were confident, like he already knew I’ d try to find a way to stop him.

“ Let me guess,” Carion said, voice smooth like liquid fire as he approached my desk, “ Yo u’ re worried You're going to burn the room down?”

I gave him a bored look. “ Like I told You last time, I'm capable of managing my own magic thank You very much.”

Carion smirked, leaning casually on my desk, so close I could feel the warmth radiating off him. He was tall, like a dangerous flame that You had to stay far from if You did n’ t want to get burned. His eyes flickered with mischief, and I felt my breath catch, though I refused to show it.

“ You think You can handle fire and air together?” he asked, his voice low enough only for me to hear.

“I’ m not sure.” I replied just as quietly, “ But I am pretty sure Yo u’ ll do something reckless and end up setting my hair on fire, just to spite me.”

He let out a quiet laugh, his gaze never leaving mine. “ I don't think about You enough to think of ways to spite You.”

I rolled my eyes, but I could n’ t keep the small grin from tugging at my lips. “ Sure Carion. Whatever You say”

Before he could shoot back a sarcastic reply, Alex's voice broke through, warm and full of amusement. "Are You two done? I'm not sure if I should step back and watch the sparks fly or get out of the way before You start causing an actual fire."

I shot Alex a grateful look, but Carlos's response was quick. He gave Alex a mock bow. "There are no sparks. Just trying to make sure Your girl doesn't burn the room down."

Alex smirked. "Oh, I'm sure You are. But I'm pretty sure we're all in more danger of her burning the entire room down with that temper of hers."

I grinned at that, tossing a playful glare Alex's way. "Oh, please, I'm way less psychotic than Vivianne."

"Your existence gives me a headache, go stand over there please." He groans turning and walking away.

"I'm sorry, did he just say my existence gives him a headache?" I whisper to Alex who's face has now turned red from trying not to laugh.

"Uh- Yeah gorgeous he did." I jab my elbow into Alex's side

"Hey, you're supposed to be on my side, and that was mean."

"I am always on Your side, but it was funny. Like You can't even really take it as an insult."

Grumbling, I turn back to the front of the class to listen to what the professor is saying. Alex spends all class to get my attention but guess what. People who laugh at me don't get my attention. Yes, that's a little petty but I'm sensitive. Leave me alone.

The rest of the class went by quickly. But before I could apologize to Alex for shutting him out for no reason I was shocked when I looked up to see Xander standing in front of me.

“Come on You’re spending lunch with me.” he says grabbing my hand to pull me out of class.

We made our way to a table by the window, the warm sunlight streaming in and making everything feel a little less frantic. I sat down, and Xander dropped into the chair across from me, already diving into his salad with the enthusiasm of someone who'd just been handed a gift.

“ So, how’s Your day been?” Xander asked between bites, casually flipping through the pages of a book he’d brought with him.

“ Honestly? Pretty good. Fire Basics was a disaster— I can barely handle fire on its own let alone fire and wind. Plus, carion being there through me off my game. But apparently, he’s the new TA so fuck me I guess.” I shook my head with a small laugh. “I’m pretty sure I blacked out for a second when I noticed him sitting in the room.”

Xander’s lips twitched into a grin. “ You? Blacking out when a hot guy who is also one of Your mates walks into a room. I’m shocked. ”

“ Oh, hush don't even try to act like You don't lose all trains of thoughts when a certain tattooed bad boy walks into a room,” I said, pointing at him with my fork. “ Throwing stones from a glass house or something like that.”

“ When he fucks as good as he does it’s impossible to keep thoughts coherent.” He

leaned back in his chair. Fair.

Before I could respond, a loud voice interrupted us.

“ Well, well, if it isn't my best friend and her best friend leaving me out of a friend lunch?! How rude.”

I turned just in time to see Vivianne stroll up to the table, her signature smirk already in place... "Vivianne," I said dryly, raising an eyebrow as she plopped down beside me without waiting for an invitation. “ Nice of You to join us.”

Vivianne tossed her hair over her shoulder dramatically. “Oh common, don't act like You hate me. Yo u’ re basically destined to be stuck with me forever, whether You like it or not.”

Xander looked over at me, feigning shock. “ Do You know her?” we are playing a dangerous game. But the look on Vivianne's face is totally worth my impending death

I nodded, rolling my eyes. “ Unfortunately.”

Vivianne grinned. “ Nice try. You can’t hurt my feelings You both love me.” she said, giving Xander an exaggerated thumbs-up. “ Besides I’m literally family, You’re both stuck with me.”

“ And You love us,” I replied,”

Vivianne chuckled. “ Love, loath. It's just different degrees of hate.”

I shot her a look. “ You’re a pain in my ass.”

“I’ m a gift , Aly,” she said with a grin, tossing her hair again. “ We should do a

friend's night. No mates. Either of You." she says shoving a point at both me and Xander

"I'm down. But You know you would probably enjoy hanging out with us and the guys if maybe You-" I started, but she waved her hand, cutting me off.

"There are no words in the English language to describe how little I want anything to do with mates." Vivianne leaned in, "We should do it this weekend. Family day is coming up, so things are about to get a little crazy"

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Aly

After class I'm exhausted. Professor Valen made us run through using Air to move other objects and elements so many times I think I'm just about out of magic.

I'm almost to my door when Jared and Alex's door swings open and before I know it, I'm being grabbed and yanked through. I let out a squeak as I'm picked up and plug across the room. Landing on the bed

"Jesus, 'Hi Aly want to come over to our dorm for a little' I mock "when I look up, I freeze. Both Jared and Alex and leaning against a wall with a smirk on their faces.

"Well, when I was trying to talk to You earlier You made quite the show of ignoring me. So, I figured if I wanted to get You in my bed, I should probably just kidnap You." Alex says running his eyes down my body.

"I- "

"You what Pretty girl? Were mad at Alex for not agreeing with You earlier? Should have communicated with You mate? "Jared adds slowly stalking towards me.

I start to back up slowly on the bed when my back hit's the wall my eyes dart around the room. "I- well Carion was mean to me earlier and Alex Laughed."

"Pretty girl, Carion wasn't being mean he said something that was funny. And instead of just saying Your feelings were hurt to Carion or Alex, you shut him out. Is that fair?" Jared continues to slowly stalk forward and fuck if I don't feel like prey right

now.

“You don't get to shut Your mates out. We all care about You, and we understand that You are having a hard time with everything going on with Carion. However. Just because we won't always agree with You doesn't mean You can shut us out.”

“I wasn't trying to shut You out. I just- I'm sorry. I don't know why I ignored You. I just took out my feelings out on You. That's not fair.”

“Good now that we've got that out of the way let's get to Your punishment.” Jared says as he wraps his large hand around my ankle.

“Punishment?” I squeak. Jared yanks my ankle to the side and pulls me down the bed so I'm flat on my back.

“You didn't think You could just say sorry, and it be all done right?” Alex purrs into my ear.

“Be a good girl Aly and take the punishment so we can all move on.” Jared lowers his mouth and begins trailing kisses up my leg.

My heart is pounding so hard in my ears I can barely register. What he's saying. Alex flicks open the top buttons on my shirt exposing my black bra.

“You're beautiful Alyssa.” He whispers before pulling off my shirt and massaging my breasts.

The feel of both Jared and Alex touching me is almost too much. Jared sinks to his knees his fingers tracing small circles on my thighs. He reaches a hand up and hooks a finger in the waist of my thong and pulls it down my thighs leaving me in nothing but my black lace bra and plaid skirt.

“Fuck me You’re stunning.” Jared breaths his mouth finding my core. He sucks my clit into his mouth.

Alex steps back briefly to remove his clothes.

Jared presses a finger into me making my back arch and a moan leave my lips that Alex swallows. I’m sat up so I’m straddling Alex.

A cock nudges against my opening, replacing Jared’s fingers as they swap out. Alex bottoms out inside me with one thrust that knocks up against my cervix and drives the air from my lungs. My toes curl as he drives it in and out of me. I spread my legs wider and grind, meeting him. “ You’re so pretty when You ride a cock, baby. Look at those gorgeous bouncy tits.”

“You have a filthy mouth,” Jared says, a smile in his voice. “ She likes it.” my hips meet each of Alex’s thrusts. His hand tightens on my hip to still me.

“ Stop for a moment, Gorgeous. We’re doing all sorts of firsts today.” Alex stops fucking me, and I whine as my building orgasm stutters and falls flat. But then something nudges behind me. Jared presses against Alex’s cock. I feel impossibly full my pussy burning as I stretch. I let out a guttural moan, my nipples tightening and my clit throbbing he forces his way into my pussy.

I’m so full I can’t take it. He slides in, his head forcing my body to make room for him or break. Before I can fully adjust to intrusion, I feel my skin begin to burn on my arm and shoulder. The bond searing them both into my skin. The heat combined with the feel of the both of them is almost enough to make me black out. My head swims as they slowly stroke my skin whispering words I can’t quite make out.

“You’re okay Pretty girl. Breathe for me. Deep breaths.” I suck in lung fulls of air. After a few moments my body adjusts, and I relax into their hold. They begin to

move slow measured thrusts. They give me a moment to get used to the feeling before Jared increases his thrusts in and out of me, his cock sliding alongside Alex's while they fuck me in tandem.

I can't speak, can't moan, can't even breathe as they both fuck in and out of me, their cocks slipping over one another as they both fuck my pussy.

"Oh, hell, that feels so fucking good," Alex growls, his voice rumbling through his whole body. It teases my clit where I'm sitting on him. Jared's grip on my hair tugs each time I twitch and try to stay still. But there's no staying still. Not while they slide in and out of me, my cunt always full. Jared palms one breast and pinches the nipple, pulling on it. My moan turns into a sob. I can't take it.

"I can... I can feel Your cock twitching inside her," Jared groans. He slips in and out. In and out, as Alex makes slow and careful thrusts. "I'm gonna come."

My mouth drops open in a silent scream, my brow knitting as Jared grunts and fucks me faster, chasing his pleasure. He's going to come inside of me while Alex is still fucking me. Jared leans down and puts his lips to my ear as he slicks a hand between us and finds my clit and strokes.

"Look at You, being such a good girl. You've got two cocks in You, baby. We are both going to come in Your wet, greedy hole. You're going to be leaking cum for days." Everything tightens, my fullness beyond the point of discomfort as pleasure and pain twine into one.

While Jared says such delicious, horrible things to me. He touches me. Strokes me. My orgasm hits me like a hurricane, drowning me in pulsing waves. My walls flutter and squeeze a groan from Jared, who comes, his cock jerking. Each pulse of cum threatens to spill out of me as Alex keeps fucking me through Jared's shuddering pulses.

When Jared withdraws, I moan from the loss of him until Alex works his cock deeper inside of me continuing his punishing pace. My pussy milks, draining the rest of him. Fatigue and contentment wash over me as Alex strokes his hands up and down my back while Jared collapses on the bed. God help me because if this is my punishment I'm going to be a total bitch from now on. I collapse, but Jared still has his hand burrowed between my ruined thighs...

Jared sits up pulling me to him as he wedges his hand between my thighs to wipe me down. "You did so good Pretty girl. I love You. so much." kissing my forehead he lifts me and sets me back down under the covers Alex pulled back.

Jared lays on one side while Alex lays on the other. Alex pulls me as close as possible to him "I love You Aly. Thank You for accepting me. We can talk about the traveler thing later." He mumbles into my hair

"I love You both too. Now shhh I'm sleeping." My brain is completely fried. sleep is pulling me under before I can full process what Alex means by 'traveler thing'.

Aly

The sun had just dipped below the horizon, casting a soft glow through the dorm windows, signaling the start of what I was pretty sure was going to be the best night ever. I stretched and grabbed the last of the snacks, mentally preparing for the chaos that was about to unfold.

Xander had somehow managed to sneak the entire stash of Chinese takeout—okay, maybe I encouraged him to get extra egg rolls, but still

I tossed a couple of pillows on the floor, making sure to clear space for all the food, and flopped down, practically sinking into the fluffy cushions. "Alright, team," I called out, grinning as I stretched my arms above my head. "It's officially friends' night. You both ready?"

Xander popped his head through the door, his hands full of takeout boxes. "Ready? I've been born ready for this," he said with a shy grin, clearly just as excited as I was. He dumped the containers on the floor next to me with a dramatic flourish. "Tonight, we feast like true heroes."

Vivianne sauntered in behind him, twirling a knife in her hand like it was some kind of weaponized art form. I raised an eyebrow. "Is that really necessary?"

She gave me a deadpan look. "You never know when a knife might come in handy. Especially when Xander tries to steal my spring rolls."

Xander scoffed dramatically. "I would never. I am a man of integrity."

Vivianne rolled her eyes. “ A man of integrity does n’ t steal the last dumpling, Xander.”

I laughed, she plopped down next to me, immediately grabbing an egg roll and biting into it with the grace of a savage —which, honestly, was part of her charm.

I grabbed a fortune cookie, cracking it open with one hand. “ So, wha t’ s the plan tonight, guys? Wha t’ s the vibe?”

“ Definitely not studying,” Xander said, settling down beside me and giving a half-nervous, half-enthusiastic look at the mountain of food we had between us. “Debauchery only. If I have to think about another class assignment, I might actually steal Vivianne’s knives and stab something.”

“You would lose a hand before You got ahold of one of my knives.” Vivianne sings. Psycho

“ Hey, no threatening to remove appendages off of my bonded friends.” grabbing a dumpling and practically inhaling it. “ W e’ re living the dream right now.” I groan

Vivianne, who was now on her second egg roll, gave me a side-eye. “ Okay, but someone better let me win at something tonight. I do n’ t care if i t’ s cards or dice or even rock-paper-scissors —I just want one win.”

I raised an eyebrow. “ You do realize that You're the one who always gets carried away in competitive games, right?”

“ Psh, as if tha t’ s a bad thing.” She gave me a mock, innocent smile and spun a knife in her hand again. “ Besides, i t’ s all in the fun of it. If I do n’ t win, I get a little stabby. I t’ s not my fault.”

Xander immediately backed up, holding his hands in front of him. “ No need for stabbings, please.”

“ Oh, I would n’ t stab You, Xander,” Vivianne said with a smile that was a little too sweet for comfort. “ Maybe...”

I snorted, trying to hide my laughter by taking another bite of food. Vivianne could be a little intense, but it keeps things interesting, so I wasn't going to complain.

“ So, what are we playing?” I asked, trying to steer us back on track before Vivianne started contemplating more knife-related activities .

Vivianne grinned like sh e’ d been waiting for this moment. “ W e’ re definitely playing Truth or Dare. I’ m picking first.”

Xander groaned, falling back onto the pile of pillows behind us. “ I hate Truth or Dare...”

“ Too bad You're playing,” Vivianne said, grabbing her bowl of noodles and slurping them dramatically. “ Truth or Dare is on. And You two are going down.”

“ How does one win at truth or dare?” Vivianne's eyes Narrow on me, and I threw my hands up in mock surrender. “ I’ m not letting You win. So, if You want it, earn it.”

“ Bring it on,” she said, eyes twinkling with mischief.

Xander groaned dramatically. “I’ m going to regret this, I just know it.”

We spent the next hour making fun of each other, daring Xander to do ridiculous things, like Giving us his best pole dancing routine. He totally missed his calling. Vivianne was dared to give her best impression of Barrett the day we met. Let's hope

he never finds out about that.

“ Okay, last one for the night,” Vivianne said, looking at both of us with a wicked grin. “ Aly, Truth or dare?”

“ You're fucked.” Xander says, leaning back against a pillow and popping a fortune cookie in his mouth.

“ I'll be Fair,” Vivianne said with a wink. “ Truth or dare.”

I snorted. “ Dare.”

“ I dare You.... To text the guys and tell them someone hit on You, and You are adding them to Your harem. Then shut Your tablet off.”

“ Aren't You the one who said no, guys? I'm 90% sure if she does that, we'll have six men banging down our door.”

“Eh, nights almost over. We might as well have some entertainment.” Vivianne shrugs, tossing her knife into the air

“This is going to end badly and probably with my ass getting turned red, but sure.” I pull out my phone and pull up the group-chat with the guys.

Aly's Fan Club

Before I can even turn my tablet off, it lights up like crazy. Vivianne's eyes go wide before she reaches for it, clicks the off button, and chucks it across the room

“Holy shit, why did you do that?” she whisper yells.

“You dared me!”

“Guys, we have a problem. My brother is next door. What are the chances-” Before Xander can finish the sentence someone is banging on the door.

We all freeze, casting glances at each other before I can tell someone else to get the door, I hear a lock click, and the front door slides open. To reveal all of my mates. Including Carion. Fuck.

“What are You doing, Pretty girl,” Jared says a smirk on his face.

“Well, we- I -” Before I can say anything else, Carion Stalks through the door, picks me up, and throws me over his shoulder.

“Hey! Put me down, you asshole,” I shout he walks into the bathroom and kicks the door shut before throwing up air magic to keep everyone from hearing.

“Who are You replacing me with, firefly.” his low voice sending shivers through me

“That is none of Your business, “ I sniff. “You said this bond would never happen.”

“I did. But I think I deserve to know who my replacement is.”

“No, you actually don't. You lost that privilege when You decided to not even give me a try.”

“I don't expect You to understand, firefly, but it's not that simple. I don't deserve you, and I refuse to bring my shit into Your life, I have to protect you. Even if it's from me.” he whispers, brushing my bangs out of my face.

“Yo u' re so beautiful, I wish I could have You. But I can't.” he captures my lips in a

searing kiss. Before I can deepen the kiss, he pulls away. Bastard.

“ That's not Your choice to make. I'm the one who decides who deserves what from me. Why won't You even talk to me about it?”

He gives me a small smile before removing the sound barrier and stepping away from me he opens the door to the bathroom and steps out, turning briefly “Think of me when you fuck yourself, will You, Princess?”

“Fuck me yourself, You Coward! “ I shout without thinking it through. The room erupts in laughter.

Carion smiles before leaving the dorm completely. “Only in my dreams.”

I huff out a sigh and slide down to the ground. Not my best comeback. But I meant it. Unfortunately.

Carion

The Hastings estate isn't a home—it's a tomb dressed in glass and greed. Ten-foot iron gates, twisted into the shape of roaring lions, part silently as my motorcycle growls up the driveway. Security cameras swivel to track me, their red lights blinking like hungry eyes. The manor's facade is all sharp angles and black marble, a monument to Vernon's obsession with control. Even the landscaping reeks of it: perfectly symmetrical hedges, fire orchids that bloom year-round with a pulse of his magic, and a koi pond where the water never ripples unless he commands it.

A butler waits at the door, a relic in a world of elemental chaos. Hemsley's been here since I was five, his face a wax mask of indifference. He says nothing as I stomp mud onto the Persian rug in the foyer, the one Vernon imported from a country he later got bombed in a council-sanctioned "resource realignment." The air smells like lemon polish and smoke.

"He's in the west study," Hemsley murmurs, eyes downcast. "You're late."

"Let him rot," I say, but follow anyway.

The hallway to Vernon's office is lined with portraits of our "legacy." My great-grandfather incinerating a village during the Border Wars. My grandmother drowning a rival family's heir in a wine barrel. And there, in the center, the largest frame: Vernon Hastings, standing over my mother's body.

Not a photograph. A painting.

He commissioned it the week after he killed her.

I stop, fists clenched, fire simmering under my skin. She's sprawled on the manor's front steps, her earth magic still clinging to the rosebushes she'd been pruning. Vernon's hand is raised, water dripping from his fingers—the element he used to collapse her lungs. The artist captured her face perfectly: wide brown eyes, parted lips, the way her hair fanned out like a dark halo.

I was nine. I watched from the upstairs window.

“Move,” Hemsley says flatly behind me.

I rip the painting off the wall and smash it against the floor. The frame splinters; the canvas tears. Hemsley doesn't react.

The study is a vault of cold calculation. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the manicured hellscape of the backyard, but the glass is reinforced with Vernon's earth magic—unbreakable, even for me. The walls are lined with shelves of leather-bound ledgers detailing every backroom deal, every blackmailed council member, every “accident” that cleared his path to power. His desk is a slab of obsidian, polished to a mirror shine, and behind it sits a throne-like chair forged from welded steel.

He's standing when I enter, swirling amber liquor in a crystal glass. Ice clinks, but his fire magic keeps it from melting.

“You broke the painting,” he says.

“You're lucky I didn't break your neck.”

He smirks, setting the glass down. “You've been neglecting your assignment, Carion. Four weeks at that academy, and you've barely spoken to the girl.”

I lean against the doorframe, arms crossed. “You said get close . You didn’t say rush her.”

“Don’t play naïve. You’re to gain her trust. Make her want to follow you here. And yet—” He flicks his wrist, and a hologram springs to life above his desk. Security footage of Aly in the academy courtyard, laughing as she juggles flames between her hands. “—you’ve done nothing but lurk in the shadows like a stray.”

My chest tightens. I’ve memorized the curve of her smile, the way her fire dances when she’s angry, the stupid nickname she’s given me (“Mr. Broody Boots”). Keeping her at arm’s length is a knife to the gut every day, but it’s the only way. Vernon can’t know about the bond. Can’t know that every time she brushes past me in the hallway, my magic surges like a live wire.

“She’s cautious,” I lie. “Pushing too fast will scare her off.”

“You think I care about her comfort?” Vernon rounds the desk, his tailored suit rippling with suppressed energy. “I sent Kael Vrost to retrieve her last night. He hasn’t reported back.”

Ice floods my veins. Kael Vrost . A mercenary who specializes in “quiet extractions.” The kind that leaves no witnesses.

“If you’ve hurt her—”

“ Hurt her ?” Vernon laughs, a low, venomous sound. “I want her alive . Turns out you don't have to worry your little head. Kael never returned. I wonder why that is?”

Fire erupts from my palms. “If you try to touch her again-”

Vernon’s eyes glint. “What? You’ll burn me where I stand?” He spreads his arms,

earth magic vibrating the floor. “Try it, boy. Let’s see if you’ve finally grown a spine.”

Fire spirals from my fists, searing the air. Vernon deflects it with a wall of water, then slams me into the bookshelves with a gust of wind. Ledgers rain down, their pages fluttering like dying birds.

“Pathetic,” he sneers, pinning me with air pressure. “You’ve always been weak. Just like her.”

Her . My mother’s face flashes in my mind—her hands caked in soil, her laughter as she taught me to coax vines from cracked concrete. The way she whispered “Don’t let him see, Carion. Hide your magic. Hide your heart,” before Vernon decided her earth affinity made her “disobedient.”

He strikes me with a whip of water, then a fist sheathed in rock. I taste blood.

“You’ll bring the girl to me,” he says, kicking my ribs. “Or I’ll send Kael back. And this time, he’ll carve through that pretty friend of hers. Vivianne, is it?”

Aly would never forgive me if something happened to her cousin. Rage ignites. I lunge, fire and wind colliding in a cyclone. Vernon stumbles, but recovers fast, ice spreading from his palms to coat the room.

“You care ,” he taunts, frost crawling up my legs. “How sweet. How stupid.”

He freezes me to the floor, my cheek pressed to the ice. “48 hours, Carion. Bring her willingly, or I’ll take her in pieces.”

Hemsley finds me an hour later, thawing in a pool of meltwater. He offers a hand. I spit blood at his shoes.

The ride back to the academy is a blur of pain and fury. Rain pelts my face, mingling with the blood still trickling from my split lip. Aly's face invades every thought—her smirk during combat drills, her stubborn refusal to back down, the way she'd looked at me yesterday when I “accidentally” incinerated the roses she picked to give to Elliott.

Stupid . Reckless . Mine . Not mine.

I park my bike in the woods behind the dorms, the bond in my chest tugging me toward her window. Her laughter floats through the glass, tangled with Vivianne's sharp retorts.

I could climb up. Could tell her everything.

Instead, I slide down the wall, rain soaking through my jacket. Arm's length. For her sake .

I have 48 hours to figure out how to protect Aly. Or Kill Vernon. 48 hours. The clock tower dings almost right on cue and the race is on.

The bond aches.

So, do I.

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

Aly

Family Day . The words hung over my head like an ominous cloud as I stared out the dorm window, watching the courtyard buzz with activity. Parents, siblings, cousins—all the usual suspects were arriving in droves. Hugs, laughter, and excited chatter filled the air.

And soon, my family—the family I did n’ t even know existed a few months ago—would be here too.

I shifted uncomfortably, tugging at the hem of my academy-issued jacket. What if they did n’ t like me ?

A knock at the door made me jump. Vivianne, poked her head in, her face split into a grin. “ You ready? Pretty sure the y’ re down at the entrance waiting for You.”

“ Waiting for me?” My voice cracked slightly, and I cleared my throat to cover it. “ Are You sure? What if they don't like me... maybe You should just go ahead and-”

Vivianne snorted. “ Not happening, they are here for both of us. Stop stalling and common. Yo u’ re gonna be fine.”

I grabbed my bag and trudged toward the door, my nerves building with each step down the winding halls. By the time I reached the front entrance, I could feel my palms slick with sweat.

Then I saw them.

They stood off to the side, looking around like everyone was trying to spot us first. Deep breath Aly You can do this. My uncle was the first I noticed—tall and broad-shouldered, wearing a worn leather jacket that screamed Next to him was Vivianne's brother, shifting awkwardly from foot to foot, his hands jammed in his pockets. And then there were my grandparents. My grandmother stood with a serene smile, her silver hair shining in the sunlight, while my grandfather's. Stood slightly behind her my aunt gonna was talking to the four of them her mates stood close by.

I froze in place.

They had n' t seen me yet, but my heart was already pounding like a drum. What if this was a mistake? What if I' m not what they expected? I mean this family was huge Aunt gonna had three mates herself Grandma Joyce had 3. So, like tons of people.

“ Hey, kiddo!” My uncl e' s voice boomed through the courtyard, snapping me out of my spiral. He waved, grinning at Vivianne. His eyes slid to me, and he freezes.

Grandma Joyce looks to where Uncle Ander is staring and her face lights up, and before I could blink, she was bustling toward me with open arms. “ Oh, look at You,” she said, pulling me into a warm hug that smelled faintly of lavender. “ You look so much like Your mom” a tear escapes her eye. She brushes it away pulling me further into the group.

Callum Vivianne's brother shuffled up next, offering a sheepish grin. “ Hey,” he mumbled. “ It' s, nice to meet You, I guess.”

“ I t' s Nice to meet You.” I replied, my voice unsteady.

Aunt Genna introduces me to my grandpa's George, Alan, and victor. Each pull me into a tight hug and smile. “It's so good to have You here, after Your mom... well, it

was hard not being able to say goodbye. But knowing she was happy and had You. Well, that makes it a little easier.” Grandpa Alan says squeezing me a little tighter.

Ander my mom’s younger brother stands behind the group just watching. Pain lacing his face. I step closer to him to introduce myself. But before I get the chance, he yanks me into a hug. His shoulders shake before pulling back enough to look at me his eyebrows furrowed. “I’m so sorry about Sarah. But I’m glad You home now.” He says softly a small smile appearing before he pulls me back in. “If You need anything, anything at all. You call me.”

We all spend the next hour getting to know each other. Vivianne says hi to her other mom and dads. Before making her way to torment her brother. They share stories about my mom’s childhood and ask me questions about mine. Out of the corner of my eye I see Alex and Jared walking over with their family. Before they make it over to us, I open my bag and pull out a family photo I found in the box under moms’ bed and hand it to my grandma.

She takes it with shaking hands. Sobs wracking her body before coming to me and hugging me tightly. “We are all so glad You are here. “

“I heard You’re building quite the harem.” Ander says smirking an eyebrow cocking at the approaching group. I blush turning to look at the guys. I smile and wave them over Jared’s mom and dads as well as his sister come over large smiles plastered on all of their faces, except... uh oh. Jesse the older of the two has her eyes firmly planted on a blushing Callum. Vivianne’s eyes narrow briefly before I elbow her in the side.

Be nice. I hiss in her mind.

‘ He’s too Young to date she can keep her eyes off of him.’ She snaps.

‘ He’s 17 and so is she. They are just looking at each other. Not proposing marriage or trying to form a mate bond.’ Rolling my eyes I glance at Callum

‘She is going to break his heart. Besides she’s a twin if he’s looking at her, he’s looking at Juliet.’ She grinds.

‘Jared is a twin. I have no interest in Xan.’ She doesn’t respond. Poor kids.

‘ Be careful, your sister looks ready to punch Jessa and Juliet in the face. ‘

His eyes blow wide for a second his eyes finding me before melting briefly. ‘Jessa. she’s stunning.’

‘Yeah yeah, don’t forget three of her brothers are also here.’ I snark a smirk falling to my lips.

“Hey pretty girl. This is our mom, Arianna. And our dads Steven James and Matt.” Jared points to all of his parents.

Arianna pulls me into a hug before whispering “Thank You, Jared and Alex have been inseparable since they started walking and we were worried they would be separated if they mated.”

I huff a laugh hugging her back. “To be fair I didn’t really do anything. The goddess did. But You raised amazing men. Including Xander, he’s been a breath of fresh air.”

“Hey, rude. I’ve been taking care of your crazy self since You got here.” Vivianne huffs crossing her arms.

“ My crazy self? As in you’re sane?” I laugh.

“Okay so I have a bit of an attitude problem. But if You didn’t want sarcastic answers, you really shouldn’t ask stupid questions all the time.” She says completely exasperated.

We all laugh and soon Elliot and his mom Marissa have made their way over. His little sister marina who is 6 is so adorable. We make our introductions. And eventually all of my mates have made their way over here. All but one. The guys told me about Carion’s dad. And since then, I can’t get it out of my mind. Looking around I try to find him, but cant.

We spend the day playing games and getting to know each other. By the end of it all we all feel like one big family. And when I say big, I mean BIG there are a total of thirty of us when You count me and my mates, plus our families. Saul and Barrett didn’t even bring their families and the more I think about it the more I realize it’s likely we end up with close to 50 people in our family. But it’s worth it, I can’t remember the last time I smiled and laughed like this.

We all line up to take a huge group photo. Me and my mates in the center our families surrounding us. right as Maddie Kale’s friend goes to take the photo, we are all posed and about to say cheese. Fuck me sideways. The pulling in my chest strengthens and my face drops.

“Uh, girl You’re supposed to smile for a photo.” Maddie says smiling here eyebrows have hit her hairline.

A bolt of pain slams into me, stealing my breath. My knees buckle, and Vin's arm is the only thing that keeps me upright. "Aly? What's wrong?"

The pain fades, then returns with shattering force. Carion . I try to open the bond, to understand what's happening, but the agony is like a living thing, writhing and lashing out. I can't—I have to find him.

Without thinking, I tear myself from Vin's grasp and bolt toward the gap between the buildings, my powers flaring to life. Shouts echo behind me, my family and mates calling my name, but the pull is a vice around my heart. I have to get to him. Need to get to him.

When I skid to a halt in the alley, the sight that greets me twists my stomach into knots. Carion is on his knees, his back a charred mess of blisters and blood. A man stands over him, face contorted in fury as he rains down blows of fire. Rage consumes me, and before I can stop it, tendrils of purple magic lash out, slamming into both of them.

The man collapses, convulsing, while Carion hunches forward, the arc of energy still tethering them together. I rush to his side, my hands hovering uselessly. "Carion—oh gods, Carion, what happened?"

He looks up, eyes wild. "Aly, you have to run—"

Footsteps echo, and a black van peels into the alley, its tires screeching. Two men burst out, their faces obscured by masks, and reach for me with gloved hands.

I try to summon my fire, to fight back, but I used too much magic... I don't have enough energy... One of the men grabs me, their grip like iron, and the world lurches as they drag me toward the van.

Carion screams , straining against the energy still binding him to the other man. "ALY! NO!"

The doors slam shut, cutting off his voice. I thrash, but the men hold me fast, a damp cloth pressed over my mouth and nose. Panic claws at my throat, and as the world starts to fade, I hear a voice Familiar voice murmur, "Sweet dreams, Traveler."

Then nothing.

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

Vin

My sneakers skid on cobblestones as I sprint toward the commotion. Students freeze, their laughter dying mid-breath. Ahead, Jared crouches near the fountain, his hands fisted in Alex's shirt. Alex's earth magic ripples beneath their feet, fracturing the ground in jagged seams.

"They took her!" Jared's voice cracks, raw and unfamiliar. "Black SUVs, they dragged her—"

Saul materializes beside me, flames licking up his forearms. "Who?"

"Vernon!" Alex snarls, slamming a fist into the earth. A fissure splits the courtyard, swallowing a bench. "Her and Carion—they're gone."

My lungs lock. Aly. Gone. The world sharpens—the too-bright sun, the scent of singed grass from Saul's rage, the distant chime of the academy bell tower. This isn't happening.

Elliott materializes beside me, his ice-blue gaze scanning the scene. "Barrett is looking at campus surveillance. Vivianne's interrogating witnesses. Move."

Barrett's office looks like a hurricane has hit it. Laptops glow on every surface, security feeds flashing across screens. Vivianne leans over Barrett's shoulder, her dagger tapping a rhythm on his desk. "The SUVs exited through the east gate. No plates, tinted windows."

Xander hovers near the door, his hands trembling. Kale stands behind him, fingers knotted in Xander's hoodie like an anchor. "The kin-bond," Kale urges. "Try again."

Xander closes his eyes, his breath hitching. A faint gold thread sparks in the air—Aly's signature, frayed but alive. "She's... underground. Somewhere with dampening stones. I can't—"

"The old alchemy labs," Barrett cuts in. "Basement levels were retrofitted with steel walls during the war."

Jared slams a fist into the wall, cracking plaster. "Why the hell would they take her there ?"

"Because it's the one place we can't blast our way into," Vivianne says coldly. "And they know it."

Elliott pulls up blueprints, his glasses reflecting schematics of the labyrinthine tunnels beneath the academy. "Three access points: the greenhouse hatch, the library archive, and the storm drain. They'll have guards."

Saul's flames flare. "I am going to melt someone's face off in about ten minutes if we don't find her."

Barrett shoots him a look. "We need precision, not pyrotechnics. Aly's in there."

The front doors of the old alchemy lab loom ahead, their once-grand carvings choked by ivy and time. Barrett doesn't hesitate—he slams his palm against the rusted metal, ice crawling from his fingertips to devour the hinges. The lock snaps with a brittle crack , and the doors groan inward, exhaling a breath of stale air laced with the sharp tang of decaying potions.

Xander shoves past me, his fingers brushing the doorframe. "She's close. The bond's... pulling ."

Barrett's flashlight pierces the gloom, revealing a cavernous foyer choked with cobwebs and toppled bookshelves. Moonlight filters through grime-caked windows, painting the dust motes silver. "Stay sharp," he mutters. "They'll have traps."

I step inside, my sneakers silent on cracked marble. The air tastes like ash and ammonia, nothing like the sterile halls of the modern academy. Ahead, a staircase spirals downward, its banister splintered. Xander lunges toward it, but Barrett catches his arm.

"Wait." Barrett kneels, brushing frost over the first step. The ice hisses, then sizzles—a glowing rune flares to life beneath it. "Pressure trigger. Step here, and the whole place collapses."

Xander pales. "So, we don't step."

Barrett smirks, conjuring an ice bridge that arcs over the stairwell. "After you."

We move like ghosts through the lab's carcass. Barrett's ice neutralizes every trap—disarming flame runes, freezing tripwires—while Xander's bond tugs us deeper. The corridors narrow, walls scarred with blast marks and faded glyphs.

A muffled voice echoes ahead.

"—keep her in the containment circle. Boss said no marks."

Barrett freezes, holding up a fist. Two guards , he mouths, nodding toward a half-open door.

Xander's breath hitches. "Aly's... behind them. Hurting."

I don't think. I move .

The first guard whirls, taser crackling, but my kick sends it clattering into shadows. The second lunges—Barrett's ice encases his legs mid-stride.

"Where?" I growl, pinning the first guard's throat to the wall.

"V-vault! Down the hall!"

Barrett ices their mouths shut. "Noise draws more. Let's go."

The vault door is steel, its surface etched with containment sigils. Xander presses both hands to it, gold threads of the kin-bond seeping through the cracks. "She's here. Here ."

Barrett studies the sigils. "Suppression wards. My ice won't break this."

I crack my knuckles. "Then we burn it."

"Wait." Xander's voice trembles. "I think I can..." He closes his eyes, and the gold threads flare, melting the sigils like candle wax.

The door creaks open.

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

Aly

The first thing I feel is the cold. It seeps through the

concrete floor, biting into my bones, and the damp, iron-tanged air tells me I'm underground. My wrists burn—thick metal cuffs lined with spongy, moss-like material clamp my arms behind my back, leaching the heat from my fire magic. Elemental dampeners. Shit.

I blink, my vision swimming. The last thing I remember is sprinting through the academy woods, the bond in my chest screaming. Carion's pain . It had been a white-hot knife, carving through my ribs, his agony so visceral I'd doubled over in the hallway. Vivianne shouted after me, but I didn't stop. Couldn't stop. The bond dragged me like a chain, past the gates, into a black van idling under the pines. Then—nothing.

A low groan rasps to my left.

Carion .

He's slumped against the wall, shirtless, his torso a mess of bruises and burns. His wrists are cuffed too, but with ordinary steel—no dampeners. Blood trickles from his split lip, his dark hair matted to his forehead. His eyes crack open, glassy with pain.

"Aly...?" His voice is shredded. "No. No . Why didn't you—"

"Shut up," I hiss, fighting the cuffs. The dampeners squelch, absorbing the sparks I

manage to summon. “Your dad set a trap. I felt you—your pain, your fear —and I... I couldn’t just...”

He flinches. “You shouldn’t have come.”

“Yeah, well, I’m a slow learner.”

The room is a concrete box, lit by a single flickering bulb. No windows. A steel door sealed with a keypad. Carion’s breathing is shallow, labored, but his gaze never leaves me.

“You need to run,” he whispers. “When he comes back, you-”

The door clangs open.

Vernon Hastings steps inside, his polished loafers clicking against the floor. He’s shorter than I expected, wiry, with Carion’s sharp jawline but none of his rage. His smile is a scalpel.

“Ah. The Traveler awakens.”

I bare my teeth. “Let him go.”

Vernon tilts his head, amused. “Or what? You’ll kill me with the magic you can’t access?” He nods to my cuffs. “Aren’t those clever? My design. The moss is from the Gloaming Swamps— absorbs elemental energy. But don’t worry. You won’t need your fire where you’re going.”

He crouches in front of Carion, gripping his chin. “You failed. Again. But at least you brought her to me.”

Carion spits blood in his face.

Vernon backhands him, the crack echoing off the walls. “Ungrateful. After everything I’ve given you. A name. Power. Purpose.”

“You gave me nothing,” Carion snarls. “You murdered my mother. I’ll kill you before you touch Aly, one way or another.”

Vernon stands, wiping his cheek with a silk handkerchief. “You’ve always been sentimental. Weak.” He turns to me. “But you ... you’re fascinating. A Traveler. The council doesn’t even know you exist. Yet here you are, bonded to my worthless son.”

I freeze. He knows? Carion’s eyes slam shut.

Vernon laughs. “Did you think I wouldn’t figure it out? The way he avoids you. The way he bleeds for you?” He kicks Carion’s ribs. “Pathetic.”

Carion wheezes, but his voice is steady. “Please.” the heart break in his voice crushes a part of my soul.

“Well because you said please....” Vernon Taunts. “Here’s the deal Alyssa. You and I are going to head to the capital. You will help me overthrow the council. Understand?”

“I’m not doing a damn thing for you. You’ll have to kill me.” I sneer.

He smirks. “Oh! This is my favorite part. If you don’t. I’ll torture him. Kill him. And every single one of your mates and friends until you figure out how to comply. Oh! And I’ll make you watch.” the smile on his face is nothing but pure evil.

I thrash, but the cuffs hold. Carion strains against his chains, raw fury in his eyes.

“Touch her and I’ll kill you.”

“You’ve tried.” Vernon uncaps the syringe. “If she’s good I’ll let her bond the person of my choosing.”

The bond screams. Carion’s terror mirrors mine, a feedback loop of dread.

He meets my gaze, and for the first time, there’s no wall between us. No armor. Just raw, desperate trust.

Your magic . His voice runs through my mind.

I need him closer.

I lunge forward; teeth bared. “You want my magic? Come take it, you coward!”

Vernon grabs my hair, yanking my head back. “Gladly.”

The syringe glints.

Carion roars.

“Pain.” I murmur... Vernon drops screaming. Before climbing back to his feet. Carion leaps to his feet tackling Vernon, the syringe skidding across the floor. They crash into the wall, fists and flames colliding.

“Aly, the cuffs!” Carion shouts, pinning Vernon with a knee to the throat. “Burn through them!”

“I can’t—the dampeners—”

“ Try! ”

I focus, clawing at the bond between us. His pain floods me, his fear, his strength . The dampeners sizzle, the moss blackening as I channel everything—fire, wind, earth, water—into the cuffs.

They snap.

Vernon throws Carion off, air magic slamming him into the ceiling. He crumples, motionless.

“ No! ” I scream, scrambling for the syringe.

Vernon aims a whirlwind at me, but I’m faster. “Pain.” I scream. Throwing everything I can at him.

He collapses, twitching, as my magic seeps into his body. seizing his muscles.

I crawl to Carion, rolling him onto his back. His face is bloodied, his breathing shallow, but his hand finds mine. “Told you... to run...”

“And miss all the fun?” I press my forehead to his, the bond humming between us.

My body slams against a wall. Can’t this fucker just die already. When I get back to my feet, I see him slam a knife into Carion. My world goes red purple sparks dance across my vision. How dare he. How dare he touch what’s mine. My magic flows from my body straight to his father. I’m going to fucking kill him.

I hear my mates and Viv screaming at me. But I can't hear what they are saying. The magic wraps around Vernon’s throat. The purple sparks start lashing out. Fuck, I’m going to hurt one of them. I try to pull in my magic, but I can't. The rage is all

consuming. “Darling, you are seeking too much magic, you're going to kill us all. You have to try and breathe.”

“I’m, Trying.” I grit through clenched teeth. The rage is all consuming and I can’t think straight.

Vivianne appears and before I can stop her, she places a finger to my forehead, and whispers something in a language I don't recognize. Before I can ask what, she’s doing. it all goes black.

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

Aly

I shoot u p from where I'm lying. "Carion!" Panic grips me, then pain. "Vivianne, you shouldn't have knocked me out." I spin around and freeze.

"Well, I'd say Vivianne did you and your squad a solid!" A voice chirps—bright, bubbly, and slightly unhinged.

"What—where am I?" I croak, squinting at my surroundings.

Instead of a dingy basement, I'm in a cozy loft that looks like a TikTok influencer's dream. A neon sign reading "Love Sucks ? ? " glows above a velvet couch, a lava lamp bubbles on a side table, and the air smells like vanilla body spray and... burnt toast? A beanbag shaped like a giant heart sits in the corner.

"Ta-da! Welcome to the Love zone!"

A girl materializes in front of me, neon-pink hair in pigtails and wearing a cropped hoodie that say's "Chaotic Cupid." She tosses a handful of glitter into the air, which hangs suspended like tiny disco balls. "I'm Zara! Goddess of love, Also, your mom's here. Surprise!"

My mom steps out from behind the couch, her paint-splattered overalls and frizzy curls exactly as I remember.

"Mom...?" My voice cracks.

She smiles, tears in her eyes. “Hi, Lyssa.”

Zara fake-sniffles, wiping nonexistent tears. “Dead mom reunion! So wholesome. I’m obsessed.” She plops onto the heart beanbag and pulls out a bag of Doritos. “Snack? They’re enchanted. Zero calories. Wink.”

I ignore her, staring at my mom. “How are you... here?”

“Not here-here,” Mom says gently. “But close enough. I’ve been watching you. You’ve got your dad’s knack for burning pancakes.”

Zara snort-laughes, Dorito crumbs spraying. “And your habit of nearly blowing up schools! Girl, your panic attacks are next level.”

I bristle. “I wasn’t trying to—”

“Leak enough magic to power a small city? Oh, I know!” Zara waves a hand, and a hologram of Carion appears—shirtless, bruised, but alive, his burns fading as golden light swirls around him. “Hot Broody Boyfriend’s fine, by the way. Your bond is healing him. So romantic. I ship it.”

“He’s not my—”

“Yet.” She waggles her eyebrows.

My mom clears her throat. “Zara brought us here to help you, Lyssa. Your magic... it’s tied to your bonds. To love. But when you’re scared, it... leaks.”

Zara nods, tossing a Dorito at the hologram. “Panic + magic = boom. Vivianne yeeted you into a magical nap so we could chat. Also, I wanted to meet you! You’re, like, way funnier in your head.”

Now, I've been traveling to realms and doing some weird shit for the past few weeks, but this? Having a goddess talk to me in my brain? Yeah, I can't say I was prepared for it. But, then again, I have telepathy. Maybe it's like.... cosmic Wi-Fi?

I sink onto the couch. "Is Carion safe? His dad—"

"Got arrested! Slay!" what the fuck is happening. She looks down at her hologram looking thing "I used that correct, right? I don't really get to talk to anyone by my mom, so I learn all my slang from TikTok." she chirps

My mom pinches the bridge of her nose. "Zara, please."

My mom sits beside me, her hand warm on mine. "You are doing so good. Although I think you need to complete those bonds. Your mates are gorgeous..."

"I'm working on it! But also... Ew. I want them all." I groan.

Zara gasps, clutching her chest. "All of them? Spicy! But valid." She leans forward, suddenly serious. "Look, bonding isn't just about smooching—though highly recommended. It's about balance. Your magic's a nuclear reactor, and your mates? They're the control rods. Metaphorically."

I groan. "I didn't mean it like that you perv. Where I'm from, people don't just... accept bonds like this. What about jealousy?"

"Pfft. Jealousy's a mortal problem," Zara says, rolling her eyes. "When your souls are literally tied? You'll know how they feel. No secrets. No drama. Just... love." again with the jazz hand sparkles. This girl is nuts.

My mom squeezes my hand. "It felt like home with your dad. Your mates... they'll feel like that too. All of them."

Zara fake-gags. “So cheesy. But true! Love’s messy, but worth it. Now—” She flips her hair, the room shuddering. “Nap time’s over! Go bond your harem, and maybe name your first kid after me?”

“Wait—can I see Dad?” I blurt.

Mom shakes her head. “Next time. We can only see you one at a time and we figured I could help the most.” She rolls her eyes fondly.

“Go!” Zara claps, glitter exploding around us. “And tell Vivianne to enjoy the DJ!”

“I love You Always.” my mom soothes. And it's the last thing I hear before I feel my soul jolt back to my body.

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

Aly

The moment I woke up , I knew I wasn't dreaming anymore. The warmth of my mom's hug was gone, and the Iris wasn't standing in front of me. Instead, I was in my dorm at the Academy, and Vivianne was sitting cross-legged on my desk, popping a piece of gum in her mouth like nothing had happened.

"About time," she said. "You were out for a while. I was starting to think I'd have to draw on Your face."

I groaned, pushing myself up. My body ached like I'd been through a battle—because, in a way, I had.

"Viv, what the hell? You put me to sleep?"

She rolled her eyes. "Yeah, and You're welcome. You were about to light this place up like a damn fireworks show. I did what had to be done."

I let out a breath and rubbed my temples. I wasn't mad. Mom had already talked me through it, and honestly, Viv had probably saved everyone. Still, everything felt heavy.

"It wasn't just a dream," I said quietly. "I saw my mom. And the goddess. It was real."

Viv didn't even hesitate. "I know."

I blinked at her. "Wait. You know? "

She popped her gum. "Of course. Look, you're one of the most powerful travelers I've ever met. If a goddess wants to drop in for a chat, who am I to be surprised?"

I exhaled, the weight in my chest loosening just a little. "It was.... intense. Seeing my mom again. Talking to her. It made me realize how much I miss her."

Viv's smirk softened. "Yeah. I get that. I can't imagine not having my mom. As annoying as she is, she's who I run to when I'm lost. I'm glad You got a chance to talk. she's still keeping an eye on You."

That thought settled something deep inside me. "I wish You could have gotten to meet her. But she did say that the guys were hot so at least I'm not delusional."

Viv pointed at me. "See? Moms know their shit."

I laughed, a real one this time. "Yeah, they do."

She leaned back, balancing on her hands. "So, what's the plan now? You gonna keep stressing Yourself out, or are You gonna start dealing with all this?"

I chewed on my lip. "I think.... I think I need to start getting to know the rest of the guys. I still have a lot of bonds to complete before the equinox. I think I was kind of holding back until I met them all, you know so they all feel like they are on the same footing?"

Viv grinned. "Finally. I was starting to think I'd have to shake some sense into You."

I rolled my eyes. "Like that would work."

She nudged me with her foot. "You never know. Now, how about we get some food before You pass out again?"

I caught the apple she tossed at me and took a bite. "Thanks, Viv. For being here."

She shrugged, but I saw the warmth in her eyes. "Always, now hurry up. I'm starving."

As we headed out, I felt lighter. Now if I'm complaining as one does... I wish I could have talked to my dad, but maybe I can have Vivianne knock me out again.

The walk to the dining hall was quiet for a bit, and for once, Viv wasn't filling the silence with snarky comments. I glanced at her, expecting to see her usual playful smirk, but she just looked thoughtful.

"You ever think about how weird all this is?" she finally said, kicking a loose stone on the path. "Like, a few months ago, you were just a regular girl, and now You've got fated mates, magic stronger than anyone knows what to do with, and goddesses dropping in to give you life advice. That's some next-level fantasy novel bullshit."

I snorted. "Yeah, trust me, I think about it all the time. Sometimes I feel like I got thrown into a story I wasn't supposed to be in. Like, how do I even begin to process all of this?"

Viv nodded. "I mean, it's kind of badass. But also? Kinda terrifying."

"Understatement of the year."

Vivianne nudged me with her elbow. "So, what was she like? The goddess?"

I snorted, rubbing the lingering glitter off my palms. "Zara? She was... unhinged . Imagine if a golden retriever, a disco ball, and a TikTok algorithm had a baby. She threw glitter when she did jazz hands , Viv. Glitter . And she called Carion 'Hot and Broody'."

Vivianne's lips twitched. "Ah. Responsibly unhinged ."

"Exactly. One minute she's eating interdimensional Doritos, (with no Calories) the next she's dissecting my fear of bonding like a therapist with a glitter cannon. I half-expected her to start a PowerPoint titled 'Why Your Mates Are Simps (And That's Good) .'"

Vivianne burst out laughing. "So, the goddess of love is a meme lord. Perfect."

I grinned despite myself. "Oh, she's definitely the reason soulmates started sending each other Spotify playlists. But... yeah. For someone who talks in hashtags, she gets it. Even the messy parts.

"Viv whistled low. "If that's how You describe things I'm worried about Your grades."

"Can it. I am a fantastic describer. You go meet a goddess and try to describe Your experience." I say knocking my shoulder against hers.

Viv was quiet for a second, then said, "Ha, Ha jokes on You I've met a god before so...." she sticks her tongue out

I stop walking. "Wait, when did You meet a god?!"

Viv shook her head. "When they made me a guardian. A god came from the fucking ceiling and was all 'You have a destiny and here are magic powers also Your charge

is Your cousin. Muah hahaha.' " she says in a deep ominous voice

I double over in laughter. "Ahh yes You have way better describing skills. I'm sure it happened just like that."

"Hey, don't judge, that's just how I remember it. I was freaked out. I'm ninety percent sure I tried to stab him. It was super humbling to get knocked on your ass." she grumbles

We walked a little further before she spoke again. "So, tell me more about Your mom. What was it like? Seeing her again?"

My throat tightened a little. "It was.... unreal. I kept thinking it had to be a trick or a dream or maybe she was a zombie I don't know. But it was really her. And she knew everything, Viv. She knew about my mates, about what I was going through. I don't think I realized how much I needed it."

Viv smirks. "Walking dead vibes?"

"Yeah," I say softly. "She told me she and my dad had to choose who got to talk to me. That next time, it would be him."

Viv was quiet for a second. "You're planning on asking me to knock You out again, aren't You?"

I nodded quickly. "Yes, yes I am."

Viv clapped a hand on my shoulder. "You'll owe me. I'll do it."

Asshole.

We reach the dining hall, and before we step inside, she turns to me. "You know, if You ever need to just.... talk, or scream, or set something on fire—preferably in a controlled environment—I'm here."

I chuckle. "I know. Same goes for You, by the way."

Viv grins. "I'll keep that in mind. Now, let's eat."

We walk inside, and for the first time in weeks, I feel a little more like myself.

Aly

The need to find Carion after everything that happened with his dad had been gnawing at me since family day. The images of him- the look of agony on his face, is an image I can't get out of my head.

I've been looking for him since last night. but it would appear the asshole is ignoring me. Thankfully one of my mates is the dean and was more than happy to 'leave' Carion's dorm number on his desk. What a man.

Walking down the hall of Earth tower I make my way up to the top floor and stop at room 1205. Does this make me a stalker? Maybe. But hey, if he would stop ignoring me I would haven't to. If You think about it, it really is his fault.

My knuckles hovered, trembling. Just knock. He's here. He's alive. The bandage on my wrist itched, a reminder of the ropes, the basement, the way Carion's voice had cracked when he begged his father to take him instead.

The door opened before I could decide.

Carion stood frozen, one hand still gripping the knob. His hoodie hung loose, sleeves shoved up to reveal fresh gauze wrapped around his forearms. Bruises bloomed along his jawline, purple and green like storm clouds. For a heartbeat, we just stared

"Alyssa," he rasped. His eyes were red-rimmed, hollow.

I stepped forward without thinking. He didn't retreat, but his breath hitched as I

reached for him. My fingers brushed his wrist, just above the bandages. “You weren’t in my dorm when I woke up...”

He looked away, throat bobbing. “Needed air.”

“Liar.” The word came out soft, frayed. “You’ve been hiding.”

His jaw tightened, but he didn’t deny it. The door swung wider, inviting me into the dim room. Blankets were piled haphazardly on the bed, an untouched tray of food congealing on the desk. The air smelled like antiseptic and the faint metallic tang of blood.

I turned to face him, my back against the door. “Talk to me.”

He sank onto the edge of the bed, shoulders hunched. “What’s left to say? You saw what he— what I—”

“Stop.” I crossed the room in two strides, kneeling in front of him. His hands were cold when I took them in mine. “None of that was you.”

“But it was.” His voice broke. “I was trying to protect you- I knew he- I knew he was going to hurt me to get to you. My mom told me how when mates spend time together the bond strengthens. I didn't want you hurting.”

“I hurt anyway. I wish you would have told me what was happening.” I pressed his palm to my chest, where my heartbeat thudded too fast. “But I also can't imagine-.” my voice breaks. “I can't imagine what you've been through. I'm so sorry I wasn't there.”

He shuddered, fingers curling into my shirt. “I couldn’t protect you. Not from him. Not from... me.”

“You think I need protecting?” I leaned in, our foreheads touching. “I need you. Here. Alive. Not locked in this room trying to vanish.”

His breath warmed my lips. “I don’t know how to be what you deserve.”

“Then let me show you.”

The kiss was soft, desperate—a press of lips searching for proof we’d survived. His hands slid into my hair, trembling, as I crawled onto his lap. The bed creaked, but he pulled me closer, his mouth slanting over mine with a hunger that felt like fear. Like if he let go, I’d dissolve.

I broke away, gasping. “Look at me.”

He did. Raw. Exposed. The boy who’d shielded me with his body when the man who had tormented him his whole life came for me. Who’d whispered, “Stay with me.”

“You aren’t alone. You have a family here with us just waiting for you to be ready.,” I said, thumbing away his tear. “Let us love you. Let me love you.”

His arms locked around me, face buried in my neck. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I do.” I tugged his hoodie off, fingers skimming the fresh bandages on his ribs. “Because I’m not leaving. Not after... this.”

He flinched when my lips brushed the bruise on his collarbone. “Alyssa—”

“Let me,” I whispered.

He stilled, then nodded, his breath stuttering as I traced every wound, every mark his father had left. As if my touch could rewrite them. As if love could be a salve.

Carion's lips slam to mine.

His hands slide from the side of my face to my hair, he uses the new placement to consume me. The air rushes from my lungs, he swallows everything, every breath every moan every thought. My heart is pounding as his other hand begins running from my neck down chest across my belly and wraps around my hip. I'm yanked hard against his body the heat radiating from him ignites something deep within me—a longing that had festered since I first laid eyes on his pained expression in that alleyway. I can feel the weight of our shared history press between us, pulling me closer, yet there's an undercurrent of uncertainty that almost breaks the spell. As I push back against him, my mind races. His touch is electric, and I can feel every nerve ending in my body come alive. But I need to remind him, remind myself, why this is happening. Why I fought through his walls to get here.

“You need to talk to me, Carion,” I manage to breathe between kisses, trying to ground us both in the reality of our situation.

His lips pull back slightly, those ocean-blue eyes searching mine, vulnerable yet fierce. “Firefly, I don't want to drag You down into my darkness. You have this light, and I—”

“I'm not going anywhere,” I insist, my fingers trembling as they play with the collar of his shirt. “I don't want to be in the dark alone. We can figure it out together.”

He looks conflicted, his brow furrowing as if he's wrestling with the very essence of what it means to let someone in. “This isn't fair to You. You deserve someone who

can give You all of themselves, who can understand everything You need.” His voice wavers, frustration leaking through as he turns his gaze to the floor, as if he can physically step away from this moment.

“Then let me help You become that person. Let’s grow together. You didn’t push me away when I needed You; no, you stood beside me.” I take a step back, forcing him to meet my gaze. “So why are You trying to push me away now?”

His expression shifts from conflict to softness, the tension in his body easing as he exhales sharply. “I thought... maybe You’d be better off if I just disappeared. I wanted to protect You from my mess, from my pain.”

I shake my head, my heart aching for him. “You think running away will protect me? Carion, it hurts to see You like this. To see you think you don’t deserve love. But You do. You do deserve it. And so, do I. I’ve been looking for you, remember?”

“I know,” he Mumbles, stepping closer again, as if pulled by an invisible force. “It’s just... my dad. It’s everything. The betrayal, the abandonment. The way he made me feel like I was never enough. He murdered my mom. She was a traveler he wanted to use her. She was his mate, and he wanted to use her. I don’t have a good example—” His voice trembles slightly, and I see the flicker of a thousand memories behind his eyes, scenes I can’t begin to understand.

I reach out, covering his hand with mine. “You’re not Your father. You’re not alone in this—let me in, please. Just give me a chance to show You what love can really feel like. It can be messy and imperfect, but it can also be beautiful if we let it.”

His gaze searches mine, and I catch a glimpse of the boy he used to be before all the pain took root. The tenderness in his expression almost shatters me; it proves that he’s still there, somewhere beneath the layers of heartache.

“Okay,” he finally whispers, the resolve in his voice filled with a glimmer of hope. “But I can’t promise it’ll be easy. I have so much to work through.”

“Neither can I,” I counter, determination threading through my words. “But I’m here, and I’m willing to fight for us—if You are.”

The air crackles between us again, and I pull him close, my heart racing as his arms wrap around my waist. This time, when our lips meet, it feels different—more profound, more laden with promise. I focus on the warmth blossoming in my chest, a budding fire fueled by the notion that we can find our way through the darkness together.

As I lean into him, I can’t help but feel that maybe—just maybe—he doesn’t have to carry this burden alone anymore.

He pulls away briefly leaning his forehead against mine his breathing heavy. “Tell me.” His deep voice demands.

“Wha-“ my brain isn’t working anymore; what does he want me to say?

“Tell me You want me. “He growls into my ear.

A whimper leaves my throat, as I process what he said. The words catch in my throat when he moves his hand from the back of my head to squeeze my throat lightly.

“Firefly, you need to use Your words.” His deep words snap me out of the trance I’ve been in

“I want You.” I say my voice breathless. Within seconds his mouth is back on mine. Carion uses the door behind me as leverage to pick me up and slam me back against it.

Every inch of my skin feels like it's on fire. A blaze that courses through my body so quickly I feel like it could consume me. My hands travel from his firm arms up to his head.

My fingers thread into his hair, pulling him closer as if I can absorb all his heat, all his intensity. The kiss deepens, our mouths moving in a wild dance fueled by pent-up desire and unspoken words. I can feel the weight of the world falling away, leaving just us—two souls igniting in a moment that feels electric.

He breaks the kiss only long enough to pull away slightly, his breath hot against my cheek. "Tell me how much You want me," he demands again, his voice dropping to that deliciously low growl that sends shivers racing down my spine.

"I want You so badly, Carion," I confess, the words spilling from me. "I want all of You. Every part." My voice trembles with longing as I trace my fingers down the contours of his jaw, feeling the rough stubble beneath my fingertips.

His eyes darken, a smirk tugging at the corner of his lips as he watches me, almost reveling in the desire he stirs within me. "Good. I want to hear You say it." The possessiveness in his tone sends another wave of heat surging through me as I arch my body against his.

"I want you, I need You." The words fall like a mantra from my lips, a plea and a promise wrapped in one. "I can't get enough of You."

With a primal growl, he crashes his lips against mine again, this time with a fervor that feels primal and raw. The way he holds me against the wall, the roughness of his grip, only fuels the fire within me. My heart races as his hands travel down my sides, exploring my waist and hips as though he's committing every curve to memory.

His touch sends sparks through my body, igniting every inch of my skin as he grips

my thigh and lifts my leg to wrap around his hip. The sudden shift leaves me breathless, my heart racing. There's something ineffably fierce in the way he claims me, as if he's both asking and telling me that I'm his.

"Let me show You how much I want You," he murmurs, his lips brushing against my neck, trailing hot kisses along my pulse point. I tilt my head back, gasping as his teeth graze my skin, igniting every nerve as he savors me like a fine wine.

"Carion," I breathe, my fingers digging into his arms. "Please, don't stop."

He pulls back slightly, the intensity in his eyes holding mine captive. "I won't. But I need You to tell me—are You sure?" The sincerity in his voice breaks through the haze of lust, grounding me in this moment.

"Yes! I'm sure," I cry out, my voice filled with urgency. "I'm so sure."

A predatory glint flashes across his face as he captures my mouth again, his lips moving fervently against mine. The air around us thickens with tension that crackles like electricity. He backs me up further into the room, our bodies pressed together, each kiss growing more desperate, more urgent.

In a swift motion, he pulls away again, much to my surprise, and states, "I want to remember this moment forever—this feeling."

I nod, overwhelmed by the intensity of it all. His expression softens and then transforms into something more intense. Uh oh.

His hands slide under my shirt, sending a rush of warmth flooding through me as he explores the bare skin of my stomach. My breath hitches as he leans down, kissing his way to my collarbone. I'm alive with sensation as each gentle bite and kiss melts another layer of my hesitation, leaving only desire in its wake.

“Carion, I—” I start, but he silences me with a searing kiss, his tongue gliding against mine, blending our breath into one.

“Just let go,” he Mumbles against my lips with an intensity that makes my heart race. “Let me show You everything You’ve been missing.”

His hands roam further, exploring the delicate curve of my waist before venturing higher, finding the soft fabric of my shirt. He hesitates, a flash of uncertainty passing over his features. “Is this, okay?”

“More than okay,” I gasp, urging him on, craving the warmth of his skin against mine.

He pulls my shirt over my head and tosses it aside, his eyes drinking in the sight of me.” Fuck.” He Groans sealing his lips to mine again. He reaches his had around and unclips my bra wasting no time sucking my hard nipple into his mouth.

My back arches, his arm moves around to the button my skirt and yanks so hard I hear the button snap from the fabric.

He takes a moment to take me in. Before flipping me and slamming my body into the bed. “I like things a little rough firefly.” If You need me to slow down or stop, just say so and I’ll stop. No pressure, okay?” He murmurs into my ear. I nod my understanding.

He pulls back and I hear his zipper lower. Before I can move, he is wedging himself under my hips and suctioning his mouth to my pussy licking and sucking. The suddenness forces me to shoot forward.

Carion’s arm wraps around my hips and yank me further onto his face. He groans and doubles his efforts. Adding a finger to the mix. The speed my orgasm hit’s me stuns

me. Pleasure explodes behind my eyes. Colors and sounds feel more intense. Before I get a second to breath Carion is flipping me over and dropping to his knees.

“Again.” He growls.

“Wha- “ I start to stammer but I’m cut off by him shoving two fingers inside me crooking them in just the right way.

“Holy fuck- Carion.” I moan

“I said again Aly, don’t make me force it.” Apparently, the bastard is more impatient than I originally thought because he picks up the speed moving his other hand to use water on my clit. Another orgasm rips through me.

I don’t even realize I’m screaming until he stops, and I feel how horse my voice feels “Oh. My. Gods.”

His dark chuckle both turns me on again and terrifies me. He lines his cock up with my entrance and pauses to look at me.

“Keep Your eyes open, and on me. The whole time.” He demands before slamming forward. I yelp at the intrusion and try to wiggle back.

He allows me one moment to adjust before jack hammering into me over and over again. His muscles bunched, I swear this man is one of the most stunning people I’ve ever seen.

Moving a hand to my throat he squeezes lightly before forcing my head down to watch him enter me.

“Gods, You’re so good, firefly. I love You.” He grounds out as he continues

pounding into me. “Give me one more.” I shake my head violently. There is no way

“Do it. Come for me baby. Come all over my cock. I want to feel You squeeze me.”
Ah shit. This man and his filthy mouth are going to be the death of me.

He moves his free hand to my tit’s and pinches my nipple before twisting. The orgasm hit’s me like a freight train. I’m writhing and crying? As I feel the bond begin to form. The head slides up my bicep and into my shoulder before wrapping to the front of my neck.

Carion grunts. Moaning his release as his hips writhe with his orgasm. He pulls me to his chest and takes me to the bathroom. He deposit’s me on the counter. Kissing my forehead, he turns and runs a bath.

“Come here firefly let me clean You up.” He sets me in the bath and climbs in behind me. He uses his water magic to wet my hair before shampooing it.

“You did so good baby. Thank You for accepting me.” He murmurs massaging my scalp.

A moan slips out as I relax in his arms. “I would have accepted You day one.” I whisper. Turning in the bath I take his face between my hands. “I promise I will never let anyone hurt You again.” His eyes search mine before he pulls me to his chest wrapping me in the biggest hug, as he cries.

“Thank You.” He whispers.

We spend the rest of the night cuddled up in bed watching movies. This was all I’ve ever wanted.

Elliott

The dorm hallway smells like lemon-scented cleaner and the faint musk of old textbooks as I wait outside Alyssa's door. Vivianne's voice drifts through the wood, sharp and teasing— "Bird's nest...twigs for flair..."—followed by Alyssa's laughter, light but edged with nerves. My thumb taps the wicker picnic basket Barrett packed: chocolate-covered strawberries, basil-mozzarella sandwiches, and a bottle of sparkling pomegranate juice he insisted was "date-approved."

I knock.

The door swings open, and there she is—sundress wrinkled, damp hair half-twisted into a bun, cheeks flushed like she's been pacing. Her eyes dart to the basket, then my face, and she smooths her skirt with forced casualness. Gods, she's radiant.

"You look great," I say, and her cheeks flush.

"Thanks!" She tucks a loose strand of hair behind her ear, voice too bright. "So, what's the first stop on our adventure?"

"The library." I offer my hand, pulse quickening when her fingers lace with mine.

"Then the pond. To do some reading. I have snacks."

She perks up. "Snacks? Perfect. Lead the way."

Vivianne snorts from her bed, waving a dagger in mock salute. "Don't Have her out too long. The bugs love her, Blondie."

“No promises,” I call over my shoulder, steering Alyssa into the hall before Viv can unravel her composure further.

The library’s oak doors groan as we step inside, the scent of aged paper and cedar wrapping around us like an old friend. Alyssa’s fingers graze book spines as we walk, her curiosity tactile, hungry . I guide her to the romance section, my thumb brushing the back of her hand.

“You’d love this one.” I pull *Undead Hearts* from the shelf, its cover worn from my own late-night reads. “Post-apocalyptic reverse harem. Zombies, three love interests, sustainable farming subplot.”

She grins, sharp and bright. “Sustainable farming? As a subplot. Why didn't you say so? Do you have an apocalypse plan?”

“Lay down and die,” I deadpan. “Unless they’re slow zombies. Then...bunker. Solar panels, fend our way through .”

Her eyes light up, hands animating the air as she outlines a survival strategy involving rainwater filtration and mountain hideouts. I lean against the shelf, memorizing the way her smile curves. This woman is everything I could have ever wanted in a mate.

“You’ve thought about this,” I murmur.

“Only every night before bed,” she says, then freezes, cheeks pink.

A flicker in her mind, fleeting but unmistakable. She’s worried I’ll find her odd.

I bite my tongue. “I take zombies very seriously too,” I lie smoothly, handing her *The Stormweaver’s Oath* . “This heroine stockpiles daggers in a haunted library.

You'd...appreciate her."

She flips to a dog-eared page, lips quirking. "Grudging affection for the idiot prince." Sold."

Alyssa settles against the trunk of the large oak tree turning so her back is to me. When I sit, she folds and lays with her head in my lap. "Read to me?"

I sink down, her head resting on my thigh. Sunlight fractures through the leaves as I read aloud, her voice dipping at the smutty parts. I comb fingers through her hair, undone by the breeze, and let her laughter warm the hollows of my chest.

"Why do you like reading?" she asks suddenly, marking the page with a blade of grass.

The truth claws up my throat. "They're escapes. And...they help me understand people. Even the fictional ones. I- I'm not great with people. I think books help me with that. Although if you ask mum, it does more harm than good because I'm never 'with anyone' jokes on her I'm with you and reading."

She hums, plucking another grass blade. "How have you been feeling about everything that's happened recently. Sometimes I forget to check on you guys."

"Well, if I'm honest the whole kidnapping thing was not fun for any of us. We were so worried about Carion" I joke, tapping her nose. "We knew you were fine. And more than likely giving Vernon hell. Thankfully the guys could feel that you weren't in any physical pain so that helped."

"I was scared." she says quietly.

"You are one of the most powerful travelers this realm has seen. You only have to be

able to fight for a little while. We will always come for you. It took everything after Vivianne knocked you out to calm Saul and Jared enough that they didn't kill Vernon.” if I’m honest. I almost let them. Watching the way she screamed. The pain when she saw Carion go down scared us all.

“I know. I just, I never want to see something like that happen again. Watching Carion-” her voice breaks.

“Carion is okay. Thanks to you. He has some mental scars that need time to heal. But you saved him. And as much as I know he would have been okay with us murdering his dad, he gets justice. So do you.” brushing strands of hair from her face I bend to kiss her full lips.

“Although we should probably leave Viv at home next time. There was a lot of mumbling about Castration, and I think it made all of us a little jumpy.” That girl is next level scary.

Her laugh scatters the ducks. We watch them regroup, her thumb absently circling my wrist.

As the sun bleeds into the horizon, her voice frays. “What if they leave? The others. What if they resent...all this? I mean who really wants to share their mate?”

I tilt her chin up, holding her gaze. Never. “Everyone. We all grow up knowing we will share. It's better that way. Where I lack, they pick up the slack and vice versa. You Are loved and taken care of. That's all we want. They won't leave. We chose this. You. ”

Her breath hitches— almost a kiss —but she deflects, grinning. “Jared would reorganize Saul’s closet.”

“Don’t give him ideas,” I groan, and her laughter stitches another crack in my ribs.

“Those two fight so much.” I smile.

She curls into my side, fireflies blinking around us. Her weight is a grounding. The need to be close to her has been intense. But I'm just glad she's here. Safe.

“Today was...” She yawns into my shirt.

“Perfect,” I finish, lips brushing her hairline.

Because you’re here. Because I get to keep you.

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

Aly

I walk through the halls on my way to Barrett's office significantly less clothed than would be appropriate. Thankfully it's the middle of the night. Lately, Barrett has been working crazy hours, and I haven't seen much of him since he hasn't really been able to leave. I texted Saul Earlier to double check he isn't home. Which shocker, he wasn't. The pull from our bond is becoming too much and I just need to see him.

I knock lightly on the door. "Come in!" he barks, ohhh someone's in a bad mood.

Pushing the door open, I step inside and find him at his desk, surrounded by piles of books and papers. The scent of polished wood in the air, the dark room feels almost pitch black in the dark. He has a single light on his desk. Feeling against the wall I find the switch and flip it, casting the room in more light, His eyes snap up, the anger softens when he sees me.

"Little mate." he sighs, leaning back in his chair. "I'm sorry I thought You were-."

"Someone coming to give You more work?" I supply as I take a seat across from him. "It's been weeks since we've had time together, I missed You, big guy..."

"I've missed You too baby" he chuckles, gesturing to his lap. "Come here."

I smile, feeling the tension in my shoulders ease. I move to climb in his lap "You know, I've heard it's good for hermits to have plant life around them. It's supposed to reduce stress."

Barrett raises an eyebrow playfully. “Oh really? It must be why I have this little guy.” He motions to a small potted plant on his desk. “Trying to make the office feel less intimidating.”

“You might want to try something bigger. Are we just going to ignore the hermit comment or...”

“Not even slightly but I'll make You pay for that later.” he smirks, but there's a warmth in his gaze.

I lean forward, resting my elbows on the desk. “Or You could make me pay for it now...”

His expression Darkens. “Little mate, you can't just say things like that...” he wraps his arm around my waist and lifts me to adjust himself. Win

“But I did, what are You going to do about it big guy.” I purr. “Unless of course You're too busy for me”

“Never.” he replies, his eyes sparkling. He moves his hand to slip beneath the coat I'm wearing only to freeze a growl leaves his throat. “Baby, where are Your clothes?”

“Oh, those? I figured I wouldn't need them.” I tease.

He chuckles, darkly. “Stand up.” as I do I feel a swat to my ass. He scoots his chair back and angles himself to give me more room.

“Strip.” the Command washes over me and before I even process what he said my hands are moving to untie the coat...

His eyes darken with every movement. Tracing each and every inch of skin I reveal

as I slowly remove the coat from my shoulders and drop it at my feet. The red lace corset top does wonders for my boobs and based off the look on Barrett's face I choose correctly on the color.

“Fucking Christ.” he says he grit’s out. “On Your knees little mate.”

“Yes sir.” I mock. But apparently, I said something right because the spot between his legs grows even larger, fuck me.

“Patience, on Your knees baby.” Barrett repeats. I drop to my knees and watch as he pops the button on his slacks and slowly lowers the zipper. “Crawl to me.”

D on't mind if I do.

I slowly make my way to him. I reach a handout to pull him out of his boxers, when he grabs my wrist to stop me. “Did I say take me out?” I shake my head no.

“Wait until I tell You.” He waits until I nod my understanding before continuing. “Now, take my cock out little mate.”

Reaching out my hand again I pull his boxers back, his dick springs forward smacking me in the lips as it is freed. It’s long and thick, my mouth waters at the sight. I squeeze my legs together and let out a little whine.

“Shhh.” he whispers as he pushes my hair out of my face, to fist it. “We should be alone, but we never know who could show up. You have to promise me You will be quiet.”

“I promise.” deciding to try the sir thing again I add. “Please, sir.”

Barrett releases a deep and guttural groan “Open.” he demands no sooner than I

separate my lips he thrusts his hips forward, his length hit's the back of my throat and I gag a little.

“Breathe, little mate. Relax Your throat, let me in.” he coos.

Relaxing my throat, he pushes my head down more signaling for me to continue. I flatten my tongue against him and drag my head up and down slowly a few times before stopping at the top to swirl my tongue against his head.

“Fuck, just like that baby.” His fist tightens in my hair as he thrusts up into my throat.

I hum in approval before doubling my efforts. In no time Barrett is thrusting in time with me and before I can push him over the edge, he yanks my hair back ripping my mouth from him. “Fuck, if You keep going, I'm going to blow my load before I get a chance to fuck You.” he growls. He uses my hair as leverage to spin me and pushes my back to bend me over the desk.

He pushes his hand between the desk and my body and begins rubbing circles around my clit. Electricity shoots through me. I'm so turned on right now, my brain is going haywire. I'm almost positive that I'm leaking magic.

“You know I love You right little mate?” He asks, bending over me to whisper in my ear.

“Ye- Yes. I love You too.” I stammer, trying to catch my breath. He's so close to where I want him it's hard to focus on the words leaving my mouth.

“Good, say Red if it's too much. I would have wanted our bonding to be more... Civilized. But I don't know if I can control myself right now.” he Growls.

“Be a good girl and remember to stay quiet.” he pulls back from my ear and doubles his assault on my clit, adding a finger inside me. He finds the spot I need him to so fast I almost have half a mind to be mad about it.

Before long I'm quaking and biting my lip so hard I think I might be bleeding.
“Barrett I-”

“Shh, baby. I know what You need.” he smooths a hand down my shoulder blades.

Barrett leans back to line himself up. In one thrust he settles himself deep inside me. It hurts just for a moment before deep seated pleasure takes over.

“Oh gods” I whine.

He gives me a moment to adjust before slowly drawing himself out just to slam back in hard.

“Fuck!” I shouted at the intrusion.

Barretts hand snaked over my mouth to cover it. “Shh, You're too loud. If You keep going, I'm going to have to stop.” I take a shallow breath before nodding my understanding.

He picks up the pace, plowing into me over and over again never stopping, his hand pressed firmly to my clit.

“God, this pussy is divine.” he grunts.

Pure ecstasy floods my body, the pain from the desk biting into my skin only heightens the pleasure.

“Please, I- I need to come.” I moan.

He moves the hand that was covering my mouth to my chest and pinches my nipple, twisting it slightly. Fireworks explode between my eyes and before I know it his body slows, drawing out what is left of my orgasm. In one final thrust Barrett empties himself inside me and slumps over my body. Keeping me pressed between him and the desk. Holy fucking multitasking batman.

He pulls himself out of me and moves to sit back in his chair. With a wave of his hand, he coaxes the water from the dish sat on the edge of his desk and uses it to wipe the cum leaking down my legs off before drying me and pulling me back to his lap.

A yawn breaks free and without another word, Barrett moves to dress me back in my coat. When he's done, he sits me on his desk, while he gets himself dressed. “Come on little mate, let's get home, work can wait a few hours.” And with that he picks me up, and we go home.

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

Aly

The last bell rings, echoing through the halls of the academy and signaling the end of another long day. I stretch in my seat, letting out a sigh of relief as I gather my things. My final class of the day has been about Air magic, which, while interesting, always leaves me feeling as lightheaded as a balloon drifting far too close to the sun.

“We actually worked on summoning gusts of wind today, but I think my gust might’ve come out as more of a pathetic breeze,” I say to Jared, who’s already halfway to the door, a teasing smile playing on his lips.

“I mean, it’s hard to be dramatic when You’re blowing away dandelions, Aly,” he quips, chuckling as he exits the classroom. “At least You didn’t summon a tornado and blow away the snacks in the cafeteria!”

“Hey, those snacks are sacred! I’d never commit such a crime!” I protest, but the laughter bubbling in my chest only makes my words less convincing.

Once the room clears out, I take a moment to collect myself, Gods I suck at fire magic. gag. I have my training session with Vin in the Fire training grounds, and the thought of it ignites a spark of excitement in my chest.

As I walk towards the training grounds, I reflect on my attempts to manage fire magic. I am quite good at lighting fires, but it would in fact not be a good idea to keep doing that. As I approach the grounds, I spot Vin on the training field, his curly blonde hair is flopping around as he runs laps around the center. Vin Astor is one of the most beautiful men I've ever seen, he's tall and lean. You know now that I'm

thinking about it, he's too pretty. "Hey, Aly! Just in time!" he calls out, his voice carrying over the field.

"Am I late? I swear those dandelions were plotting against me!" I reply, half-joking as I approach. "How are You?" I ask as I step up to his open arms. He wraps me in a tight hug.

"Good, I've missed You." He motions for me to join him at the center of the field, where a ring of fire dances around a sandy area. My stomach flutters with anticipation. "We'll focus on controlling the flames and using them in tandem with Your will."

I laugh nervously. "So, I know you know this but maybe I should remind You. Me + fire= Wildfire." I grimace

"I remember, but I'm here so I can put it out if it gets out of hand but if You don't try, you'll always be a liability," he replies, a warm smile on his face that instantly puts me at ease. "You need to harness Your power, not fear it. Nothing bad is going to happen."

"Ugh fine, just don't let me burn the school down." I grin, my nerves settling into a comfortable rhythm alongside Vin's calm energy.

"Let's see what You can do!" he encourages, motioning for me to step forward. I take a deep breath, grounding myself, feeling the flicker of energy within me, like the embers of a fire just waiting to be ignited.

"Okay, just remember focus," Vin instructs. "Feel the fire within You and let it flow outward."

I nod, concentrating on the familiar warmth pooling in my hands. Slowly, I begin to

summon the flames, visualizing them swirling around me like a protective cocoon. I raise my hands, channeling the magic, and the fire erupts in vibrant colors—reds, oranges, and yellows swirling together.

“Good! Now, try to shape it.” Vin encourages, pacing beside me. “Let it become an extension of You.”

As I focus, I attempt to guide the flames into a small sphere, but it flickers before growing bigger. I huff in frustration, “Why does it feel like I’m over filling the circle”

“Because You might just be! Flame can be playful, but it also demands respect. Try to connect with it more.” Vin steps closer, demonstrating with graceful fluidity, dancing through the fire in a way that makes it look effortless.

“I do respect it! I mean, have You seen me in the kitchen?” I joke, but he doesn’t laugh. His serious expression urges me to concentrate again.

I focus on the energy sparking within me and picture it as an extension of me—the center of my being. Slowly, the flames respond, beginning to take shape, flickering with vibrant energy.

“There You go!” Vin says, his tone encouraging. “Feel the connection—let the fire become part of You!”

It’s as if the fire recognizes my intentions, swirling higher into a controlled spiral. I’m amazed by the sensation—like a dance choreographed perfectly between my instincts and the magic itself. “I think I’m getting the hang of it!” I exclaim, a grin breaking across my face.

“Don’t get too cocky just yet,” he teases, holding up his hands. “Let’s see You maintain that while we add some complexity.”

“Complexity as in?” My excitement momentarily dims.

“Why don’t we try to move with it?” Vin suggests, stepping back. “Create a path of fire through the space without losing control.”

“Shit.” I say murmur, my stomach knots at the challenge.

Vin watches as I take a deep breath and begin guiding the flames in a sweeping arc. I focus, feeling the heat push against my skin as I try to maintain control. The flames flicker and dance to my will, and for a moment, I’m on top of the world—until a sudden gust of wind sweeps through.

“Whoa—hey!” The fire suddenly flares wildly, nearly spiraling out of control, and I scramble to stop the flames.

Vin steps closer, his eyes steady but full of concern. “Calm down. Breathe.”

I take a deep breath, my heart racing, and focus on stabilizing the flames. “I’m trying! But it’s about to explode!”

“Just remember: You’re stronger than the fire. You control it, not the other way around.” He scuffs his foot against the ground, shaking his head slightly but maintaining that calm demeanor.

“Yes, wise teacher! Can I have my ‘Masters of Fire’ diploma now?” I exclaim, trying to lighten the tense moment.

He cracks a smile, and I feel my anxiety fading as he steps back to let me try again. “One step at a time, Aly.”

I focus once more, channeling the flames until they respond effortlessly to my will. A

small spark of pride ignites in my chest—each flame I control feels like a small victory.

“Now we’re getting somewhere,” Vin encourages, watching me with a mix of pride and admiration.

“Mind if I just put You in my backpack so You can help me in class?” I giggle, my confidence surging.

As we continue to train, a comfortable rhythm forms between us.

“You know,” I say, pausing for a moment, “I think I need a catchy title for today’s lesson. ‘How to Dance with Fire without Losing Your Eyebrows.’ What do You think?”

Vin laughs heartily, his eyes sparkling with amusement as he replies, “I’d say we’re off to a great start. Maybe even add, ‘And Still Look Fabulous While Doing It!’”

“Thank You for helping me today. I’ve been really struggling.”

“Technically it’s my job but I would help even if it wasn’t. So, I’ll take payment in kisses and maybe cookies.” smiling I walk closer to him and push to my toes. I hover my mouth so close to his I can feel his breath feather across my face. His eyes watching me closely. I move closer just briefly before turning my head and walking away.

“I’ll grab some cookies from the campus store before class tomorrow.” I sass over my shoulder.

“I’ll remember that.” Vin grumbles behind me. Before grabbing his bag out of the sand and walking me home.

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

Aly

Move-in day comes fast . One minute, I'm trying to process everything that has happened, and the next, I'm stuffing my new life into boxes. The dorm has been my home for months, but it isn't really mine. Not like this new place will be.

Viv sit's cross-legged on my bed, a bag of gummy worms in one hand, watching me pack with an unimpressed look. "You're just now getting to this?"

I scowl, shoving a sweater into a box. "I've been busy, okay?"

She pops a gummy worm into her mouth. "Busy brooding."

I grab a book from my desk and chuck it at her. She catches it with one hand—annoyingly graceful, as always—and flips through the pages. "Ooooh, reverse harem. This tracks."

"Not brooding," I correct, snatching the book back. "Processing."

"Uh-huh. Processing... sure"

Before I can argue, the door swings open, and Xander waltzes in, dramatically belting the first line of Since U Been Gone at full volume.

"Oh no," I mutter.

"Oh YES," Viv cheers, tossing a pillow at him like it's a rose for a rockstar.

Xander snatches it mid-spin, grinning. "I heard there was a packing emergency, so I've come to save the day."

"More like You smelled free pizza," I say, pointing to the box I have on my desk.

"I'm allowed to be here for both," he replies, grabbing a slice and hopping onto my desk like a king surveying his kingdom. "Now, what's the plan?"

"The plan," Viv says, stretching out dramatically, "is to make Aly's move as chaotic as possible."

I groan. "Or—and hear me out—we could pack efficiently and quietly so I don't lose my mind."

Xander gasps. "Boring."

Viv tosses a hoodie into a suitcase—unfolded, of course. "Unacceptable."

And just like that, all hell breaks loose.

Xander grabs a pair of my socks and puts them on his hands like puppets. "Hello, I'm Responsibility, and I'd like to make this easy!"

Viv snatches another pair and makes hers talk back. "And I'm Chaos, and I say we make this a dance party."

Before I can protest, Xander grabs my speaker, scrolls through my playlist, and hit's play. The first notes of Shut Up and Dance blast through the room.

"Oh, come on," I groan, but they are already gone.

Viv spins me in a circle, cackling, while Xander dramatically lip-syncs on my desk. Halfway through the chorus, he trips over a shoebox and tumbles off, landing in a heap.

Viv and I gasp.

Then we erupt into laughter.

"Are You okay?" I manage between wheezes.

He gives a thumbs up from the floor. "Still fabulous."

Somehow, amidst the singing, dancing, and questionable packing methods, we make progress. Kind of. Clothes are shoved into bags, books are thrown into boxes, and Xander finds my old diary, which I have to wrestle from his hands before he can read my very embarrassing middle school poetry.

By the time we finish, we're exhausted, the pizza is gone, and the room looks eerily empty aside from Vivianne's stuff on her side of the room...

Viv flops onto my bed. "Well, I hope Your new place has better lighting. This dorm made You too moody."

"Excuse You," I say. "I was moody way before I got here."

Xander throws an arm around my shoulder. "And we love You for it."

I sigh, looking around. The amount of change over the last few months is getting to me. But hopefully this will be the last move I make for the next free years.

"Alright," I say, stretching. "Who's carrying the heaviest box?"

Viv points at Xander. "Him."

Xander points at Viv. "Her."

I roll my eyes. "I should've packed You two in a box."

And with that, we drag everything out, still laughing, still singing, if You can call the screeching Viv is doing, singing.

By the time we finish stuffing the last box into the car, the guys are already outside, waiting with their own piles of luggage. All of the guys are moving in today as well. Even though I haven't technically completed the bonds I can't deny that I want it to happen soon. Xander whistles, hands on his hips. "Damn, Aly, how did You fit this much stuff in a tiny dorm?"

I shoot him a look. "Magic."

Viv snorts. "No, just poor organization skills."

"Okay, rude."

The drive to the house is short. The second it comes into view, my breath catches.

The house is massive, built from dark wood and stone, with towering windows that gleam in the afternoon sun. A wraparound porch stretches along the front, lined with rocking chairs I can already imagine us using on lazy weekends. The surrounding trees give it a sense of privacy, which Jared so crudely pointed out would be useful. Perv.

Viv lets out a low whistle. "Damn. This is nice."

Vin grins, slinging an arm around my shoulders. "Only the best for our girl."

The front door is already open, courtesy of Saul, who insists on getting inside first. "Come on, we've made some changes, so it feels more like our space."

As soon as we step inside, my eyes go wide.

The high ceilings make the place feel even bigger, and warm wooden beams stretch across them. The open kitchen has wooden countertops and an island big enough for all of us to crowd around. And the living room-. A massive stone fireplace stands as the centerpiece, just waiting for Christmas and too many blankets. The space that was one hundred percent a bachelor's pad now looks like an adorable cottage. It's perfect.

Viv claps her hands together. "Alright! Where's my designated best friend suite?"

Xander flops onto the couch, sighing dramatically. "Yes, where is our suite? You didn't think You'd escape us just because You got a fancy new house, did You?"

I roll my eyes. "If You claim a room, you help unpack."

Xander groans but doesn't move from the couch. "Fine, I'll be emotional support."

Unpacking is pure chaos.

Saul and Alex immediately get into a heated argument over the best way to set up the couch.

"It should go against the wall!" Saul insists, arms crossed.

Alex shakes his head. "No, we should angle it so we can see both the fireplace and the TV."

"It's a couch, not a chessboard!"

Meanwhile, Elliot keeps stealing my books to "organize them"—which really means flopping onto the floor and reading them instead.

"Elliot," I warn, snatching a book from his hands. "You're supposed to be helping."

He blinks up at me innocently. "I am helping. I'm making sure Your books feel loved."

Viv cackles from the kitchen, where she is stacking plates in the cabinets. "Oh yeah, super helpful."

Carion, still adjusting to being around everyone, hovers near me, shifting boxes and making sure I'm not overwhelmed. Every time I turn around, he's there offering me water, pulling heavy things out of my hands, or just watching me like I might disappear if he blinks. The difference in him since we've completed the bond is intense. Note to self: ask him if he's okay later. Oh, don't look at me like that the poor guy has been through a lot and is currently acting more like Elliot than himself.

"You, okay?" he Mumbles after catching me zoning out.

I exhale, glancing around at the absolute disaster unfolding in my new house. "Yeah. It's just... a lot."

He nods, offering a small smile. "We've got time. No rush."

I squeeze his hand in thanks before turning to stop Xander from trying to slide down the stair railing like a child.

"Xander, if You break Your face, I'm not taking You to the infirmary."

"I shall reap the consequences!" he calls as he slides down, barely sticking the landing before raising his arms like an Olympic gymnast.

By the time everything has some semblance of order, we're exhausted. The kitchen is stocked, the bedrooms are claimed, and our clothes have found new homes—sort of.

Alex flops onto the couch, victorious. "I told You the angle was better!"

Saul groans, burying his face in a pillow. "I'm too tired to argue."

Viv stretches her arms above her head. "So... celebratory dance party?"

Xander perks up instantly. "Finally, something useful." he grabs my speaker, scrolls through my playlist, and hit's play. The opening beats of "glamorous" blast through the house, and within seconds, Viv and Xander have me in the middle of the living room, twirling me around like a rag doll.

Elliot abandons his book to jump onto the couch, air-guitaring wildly. Saul, despite his exhaustion, starts nodding along. And even Carion, lets himself be pulled into the mess, laughing and dancing wildly in a way I can only describe as a fish attempting to be sexy? Totally need to get him dance lessons.

I spin in a circle, arms thrown wide, and let the moment sink in.

It already felt lived in. Like home.

I sighed, stretching my arms before making my way upstairs to my room— our room.

The massive bed was calling my name, and the second I flopped onto it, I knew I wasn't moving for at least ten hours. My body ached, and sleep was already pulling at me when I heard the door creak open.

Jared is the first to join me, stretching out beside me and pulling me against his chest like he's been waiting all day to do it. His hand slides up my back in slow, soothing circles. "Tired?"

"Exhausted," I mumble into his shirt.

Elliot wanders in next, book still in hand, glasses slipping down his nose. He perches at the foot of the bed, completely absorbed in whatever he's reading. "You have terrible shelving organization," he mutters.

I crack an eye open. "Are You seriously critiquing my bookshelf right now?"

He doesn't even look up. "Just saying. We need a system. Genres, alphabetical order, by author—something. This chaos is unbearable."

Barrett enters next, rolling his eyes as he takes his spot near the headboard, arms crossed. "You're lucky she lets You reorganize anything at all, nerd."

Elliot just hums noncommittally, flipping a page.

The bed dips as Carion slides in behind me, his warmth instantly comforting as he tucks himself against my back. "I think her book system is fine," he Mumbles, voice laced with sleep.

Jared scoffs. "You just like anything she does."

Carion presses a lazy kiss to my shoulder. "Accurate."

Alex is the last to enter, hair damp from a shower, rubbing at his eyes as he collapses dramatically onto the bed. "Why did no one tell me moving was this exhausting? I think my muscles are permanently sore."

"Sore from all the 'supervising' You did?" Barrett grunts.

"Supervising is hard work," Alex shoots back.

I huff a laugh, stretching my legs out beneath the blankets, enjoying the way the bed fills with warmth. Alex sighs, rolling onto his side. "First night in our home. How does it feel?"

I take a deep breath, letting it sink in—"Perfect," I murmur.

Before I can ask where the rest of the guys are, my eyes grow heavy, and sleep finally takes me.

Aly

The late afternoon sunlight spills into my room, casting a warm glow across the scattered boxes that still clutter my space. I've made a decent dent in unpacking, but there's still a bit of chaos left—books half-shelved, clothes folded but not put away, and a few random things waiting to be organized. God, I hate moving, I mean seriously You never realize how much shit You have until You have to pack, move, and unpack it again. gag.

I'm kneeling next to an open box, unwrapping the photos Vivianne put into frames from my mom. I love them. I think something that makes losing a parent hard is because I lost them Young when I had so much life to live. I forget that they lived a full life, and yeah, they are going to miss out on my moments. But they had their moments and that's enough. Plus, if I ever really want to talk to them, I'll have Viv knock me out. #cheatcode . As I gently place it down on the dresser next to the window, I hear a soft knock on the door.

“Hey, you still alive?” Vin calls out teasingly from the other side.

I can't help but smile as I rise to my feet, glancing over my shoulder. “Barely, Come on in!”

The door creaks open, and he steps inside, an easygoing smile spreading across his face. He glances around, taking in the chaos of my unpacking. “Wow, I can't tell if it looks better or worse than this morning. It looks like a bomb went off.”

I chuckle, brushing a strand of hair behind my ear. “Hey! I'll have You know I think

it looks a lot better. Besides, a lot of these are empty Ish boxes. So, I'm almost done"

Vin walks over to where I stand. He leans against the wall, arms crossed as he surveys the scene. "You mind taking a break for a bit. I made You some lunch, plus with the guys out I would love some time with You."

"I'm not sure if I trust Your cooking." I tease, raising an eyebrow. "But I would love some time with You."

"My cooking is phenomenal, thank You very much." he moves his hand to his heart in mock outrage, pushing off the wall and stepping closer to me. "How are You feeling? You were super tired last night. Did You get enough sleep?"

I smile at him, feeling warm inside. "I feel a lot better thanks to Barrett excusing me from classes today. The extra few hours really helped."

"Lucky You, Alex and Jared complained the whole way to school because Barrett told them they needed to let You sleep and couldn't stay with You. Apparently, the dean's favors only extend to You. I believe Jared's exact words were. 'I'll cuddle You too if I can stay home.' Barrett wasn't interested." he teases.

Vin walks into the entryway of the room and returns with a plate. On said plate is a sandwich that is just... sad. And a few chips. When I look up at his face, he must see my horror because he bursts out laughing. "This one's for me; I only eat a small lunch because it makes me sick on my runs if I eat too much." He sets the plate down and comes back with a second sandwich that is way less depressing. "Oh, thank the gods. I wasn't going to say anything but a girls' gotta eat."

Smiling he nods before sitting on the floor with me "so, how are classes going?" he asks.

“Good, I mean fire basics have been better since we trained, I'm at least able to control it better. I'm still having a few issues with Earth, but Air and Water are going great. Having Xander in the air basics makes class less boring.”

“Don't You have Viv in all of Your other classes? And the guys in a few?”

“Yeah, but she's less fun and more likely to shank me for talking too much, and Jared is more likely to make me fail because I can't focus with him yapping all the time.” I laugh. Jared's eyes are glued to the spot behind me and a chill race up my spine. When I spin around, I see a smirking Vivianne.

“Well maybe if You didn't talk so much, I wouldn't have to threaten You. Bold to talk about Jared's speaking habit's when You do the same thing.” she rolls her eyes before setting a stack of papers on my vanity.

“That's why it's harder with Jared, we feed off each other and the next thing I know class is ending and I didn't learn a thing.” I pout. “What's that?” I ask, nodding to the papers.

“Just dropping off all of the stuff You missed from today's classes. I have to run though I'm having dinner with my parents. Maybe since Jared isn't here to distract You, you can learn something.” She bends down and pats me on the head before walking to the door. “Later bitches.”

Vin and I sit in silence for a moment before bursting into laughter. “Oh, my gods. The look on Your face!” Vin Screeches. “Comedic gold.”

I shoot him a look while wiping tears from my eyes.” Hey, you haven't seen how often she cleans those knives. She scares me. Like why does she even have them?”

We finish eating our food and decide we should probably get back to packing. “Let's

see..." I step over to another box and begin rummaging through it. "Gods, it's more clothes." I pull out an arm full of the clothes we just shoved not folded into this box and move to sit back down and fold. "I literally don't know how I ended up with so many." Actually, yes, I do, over the last few weeks all of the guys have been buying me clothes while making me promise to 'do a fashion show' for them.

Now if You're going 'Aly they must be cute outfit's that You can wear out.' You'd be wrong. This pile consists of a stack of lingerie so high I could probably wear one a day and still be able to make it to Christmas. Oh, and let's not forget the t-shirts that either have all of my guys' faces on them or shirtless photos of them with the words "Hands off" written over my tit's.

Vin leans in closer, intrigued. "You wear a lot of suspender thongs?." he says holding up rainbow-colored suspenders that join at the bottom to make a thong... courtesy of Alex 'for the professor, he also bought me a matching set of glasses and recommended that I wear nothing else to his classroom after school. Classy.

I nod, "All the time actually, didn't You know?" I joke. I carefully extract the offending garment from his hands and throw it to Alex's spot on the bed. He can wear them. "Alex." I say as if that explains it.

"That's a good one to have in Your arsenal," he replies, his gaze intent as he studies the rest of the collection. Then, a playful grin breaks through. "Hey, now that I'm thinking about it. You never did give me my fashion show."

"Oh really? I was sure I did." I can't help but laugh. "Which ones did You get me again?"

He reaches into the pile pulling a light blue set, a leather set, and a... Bunny outfit? "These." He drops them into my hand and wait's when I don't move. He nods to the closet door behind me. "Well, what are You waiting for? I have outfits to judge."

Groaning, I stand and move to the closet to get changed. Bunny outfit first gotta get the worst out of the way. It's a gray top that hides a whole lot of nothing aside from the two small paw prints to cover my nipples. The bottom is a grey... Skirt? Barely. With white fluff around the edges. Naturally the crotch is wide open. I brush my hair through with my fingers and slip the bunny ears on before turning to open the door. Before I can get it open even an inch I hear 'Pony' by Ginuwine start basting.

Fuck it.

I throw open the door the rest of the way and pose. Using the door frame to hold me up so I can push out my butt that has a cotton ball on the end, I give it a little shake. Turning I sway my hips until I reach the chair that Vin has now placed himself in. When I reach him, I get as close as I can before turning and pushing my ass further into his face, before walking back to the closet and shutting the door.

I give myself a little fist pump when I hear him groan and stand probably to adjust himself. Point 1 for Aly.

Next, I throw on the leather set. If You can call it a set. It's a small strip of leather that I suppose is supposed to be the world's smallest ban-do. And a leather set of cheeky panties. I use a little bit of wind magic to fluff my hair. And thankfully I still have the box with my makeup in it, so I throw on some red lipstick. This time when I open the door candy shop is playing.

I make the same lap as earlier pausing when I reach him to pull his tie from school. When he gets close to me, I let it go and shove his shoulder a little to force him back into his chair. When I go to walk away this time, he tries to grab me but I'm able to move out of the way just in time to go back to the closet.

The blue teddy slides over my body like silk. It's a pale shimmery blue, completely sheer and I decide I'm not going to put anything under it. I move back to my makeup

bag and wipe the lipstick off before throwing my hair into two space buns. And add two pieces of blue ribbon from the corset top Vivianne got me for a night on the town, I tie them into bows and look at myself in the full-length mirror. This is going to be his favorite.

When I walk out this time Vin is sitting with his arms crossed, when he notices me, he straightens and leans forward placing his elbows on his knees. “Fuck” he grits. I walk slower this time. My arms are behind me pushing my full breasts out, I cross my legs as I walk with a little sway. “See something You like?” I ask as sweetly as I can.

The second I'm close enough, Vin grabs me. He throws me over his shoulder and deposit's me on my bed. “You're beautiful.” he says before stepping back and losing his tie. Now it's my turn to ogle. He unbuttons his cuffs, and then the buttons on his shit. One. at. A. time. Torture, this is torture.

Once he has his shirt unbuttoned, he drops to his knees grabbing ahold of my ankles and yanks me to the edge of the bed. When I'm where he wants me, he grabs one leg and begins trailing kisses starting at my ankle. “You.” Kiss. Destroy.” kiss “me.” kiss when he reaches my knee, he looks up at me. “I need You. Please tell me I can have You.”

Pushing up on my elbows so I can look at him “Take me.” I state softly. Before I can even finish the words, he's on me. His hand moves to my belly and pushes on my lower stomach. He licks from back to front in one long swipe before slowly adding a finger. His mouth begins tracing around my clit but never touching it.

He sends me flying when he crooks his finger dragging it in and out of my hole. “Oh gods.” I moan.

Only then does he let his tongue touch my clit. He twists it in a way I've never felt and sends me sailing fast into an orgasm. Just as I'm about to fall he stops.

Everything. Sitting up I look at him in outrage. “What the fuck Vin, I was close.”

A dark chuckle leaves his throat as he begins stripping out of his clothes.” I know, the first time I make You come is going to be with me inside You.” he slips his hand into the waistband of his boxers and slowly frees his cock.

Oh shit.

He's the biggest of my guys lengthwise. Ouch.

He steps between my legs and drags his length a few times through my folds. The friction on my clit has me almost coming again, but before I can he poises himself at my entrance. Freezing only to catch my eye. “I love You Alyssa.”

“I love You too.” without wasting another second he pushes into me. Slowly. fuck, too slowly

“Vin, please.” I choke.

“I have to go slow baby, or it will hurt.” After a few more agonizing seconds he's seated fully inside me. Gods, I feel so full. My back arches as he thrusts a little forward. He dips his head lower and captures my lips, in a slow and sensual kiss. A kiss that kills me and breathes life into me all at once. The kind of kiss that seems to show You the dawn of time and the end of it.

He continues his pace slowly dragging himself back and forth. The curve of him hit's every spot accept one, one he gladly hit's himself when he reaches down and strums my clit. The orgasm hit's me like a tidal wave washing over me hard and fast, before ebbing and flowing as he fucks me through it.

“More.” he demands. Doubling his effort.

“Wha- I - I-“ Can and will. Now give me more.

At the command my body rushes to respond. Another orgasm rips through my body blinding me leaving me breathless and shaking. I feel the bond mark begin to form wrapping around the back of my neck and trailing over my left shoulder. As the bond forms Vin picks up his pace plowing into me faster and faster.

“ Fuckkkk.” he shouts, spilling himself deep inside me.

He moves to the side and spins me to wrap his arms around me like a warm blanket “You’re mine.” he says almost in awe. Looking at his mark on his hand.

“Always.” I whisper. We lay there for a while, just taking everything in before getting up to finish the unpacking we were supposed to be working on.

Aly

The excitement hums in the air as I stand in front of my closet, rifling through clothes to find an outfit. Tonight is the night Viv has been talking about all week—a big group outing to the club and get this everyone is coming even Barrett was able to pull himself away from work tonight. The thought of spending the night dancing with my mates makes my heart race.

“Are You ready yet, or are You still in decision-making mode?” Viv calls from the bathroom, her voice slightly muffled.

“I’m getting there!” I respond, holding up two tops: a sparkly silver tank and a vibrant red off-the-shoulder number. “What do You think?”

“Definitely go with the red!” Xander interjects, poking his head out of the bathroom where he’s busy doing his makeup. His eyeliner is halfway done, and he’s looking fierce. “You’ll look amazing in it!”

“Alright, red it is!” I change quickly, slipping the top over my head and pairing it with my new black skinny jeans. Just then, Viv steps out of the bathroom, having tamed her blue hair into loose, voluminous waves.

“Red is definitely Your color” she says, her eyes sparkling. “Xander don't use the last of my eyeliner. I'm down to a nub left!”

“I'm not! I'm just adding a little more.” he replies, grinning as he finishes applying the last touches of eyeliner.

“I think we all better step our game up tonight,” I laugh, looking in the mirror.
“What’s next? Glitter?”

“I am not. Wearing glitter” Viv grumbles.

“It’s a club night! We have to shine! I’ve got some shimmering body spray if You want it.” Xander cackles ambushing Viv with the spray before turning to me.

“Oh You are so lucky Kale would torture me slowly if I hurt You. Otherwise, I'd punch You.” Viv says sweetly before leaving to the bathroom

“She is terrifying.” Xander says, shivering. “So, want some?” he asks, shaking the bottle.

“Yes, please!” I spin in a circle as Xander sprays me down.

“Now you’re ready to dazzle!” he says proudly and a wink.

“Almost ready! Just need my jewelry,” I remark, glancing at my jewelry box. “Do You think I should wear hoop earrings?”

“And upstage the rest of us? yeah.” Xander chimes in, mirroring Viv’s approval.

As I pop the hoops in, I can see Xander preparing to put on a necklace. “Hang on, can You help me with this?” he asks, holding up a chain that looks a bit tangled.

“Sure!” I step over and help him in untangling the thin chain. “Gods what did You do to this thing?”

“Oh, you know. Probably got fucked thoroughly in it. That'll do it.” he replies with a wink.

“Ugh, gross.” Viv gags

Viv finishes her hair, with a swift motion, I slip on my black heels and do a quick twirl to show off the full look. “How do we feel about this? I look a mess, don't I?”

“Gods, you look fine!” Viv says, shaking her head.

Xander strikes a dramatic pose. “Can we just take a moment to appreciate how fabulous I look tonight?”

We all laugh and hype him up before Viv pulls out her tablet, and we gather for a quick selfie, grinning widely.

“Okay, final touches! Let's grab our bags,” I say as we gather our things.

“Are we all set?” Viv asks as she grabs her glittering clutch.

“No body glitter but You'll use a glitter clutch?”

“Body glitter is annoying and stays on me worse than my ex-boyfriend. And this-” she says, shaking the bag. “Is a fashion statement.”

“Ready as ever!” Xander responds, adjusting his outfit once more. “Just don't leave me behind—I can't miss out on the dance floor!”

“Trust me, you'll be the star of the show,” I assure him as we head out toward the door.

As I make my way down the stairs, the anticipation builds inside me. I can hear the chatter of my friends mixed with bursts of laughter coming from the living room below. The guys already knew Xander's boyfriend Kale, so they've been hanging out

since we started getting ready. Kind of bullshit it only takes them 10 minutes to get dressed.

I take a deep breath, smoothing down my top before I reach the final step. The warm glow of the living room lights spills into the stairwell, and I pause for a brief moment at the bottom, gathering my confidence.

The laughter fades slightly as the group's attention shifts toward me, their gazes instantly locking in.

"Whoa," Jared is the first to speak up, his eyes wide with genuine surprise. "You look incredible!"

"Right?!" Viv cheers from behind me, practically bouncing with excitement.

Barrett's expression is one of pure admiration, a playful grin creeping across his face. "You look stunning, little mate."

I glance around the room, catching everyone's approving smiles—their eyes lit up with excitement. Vin leans against the wall, a sparkle of approval in his gaze. "You look beautiful, Alyssa."

"Jesus Christ." Alex chips in, "Barrett You're on murder duty. I have my good shoes on, and I can't ruin them." he sticks his leg out showing off the shoes.

Elliot smacks Alex on the back of the head "we are the luckiest guys in stonebrooke"

Kale, standing beside Xander, chuckles and nods. "No kidding! Someone's going to need to keep the droves of fans away."

I can't help but laugh, feeling the warmth of their compliments wash over me.

“Thanks, everyone! I was a bit nervous about it, but I just wanted to feel great tonight.”

“Stay close to one of us, little one.” Saul grumbles, his hands on his hips. “The last thing I need is to bail someone out of prison.”

“Oh, don't worry professor, I plan on dancing with each of You tonight.” I purr. Dragging my hand across his chest as I walk by

“Shit baby, you can't do that here. Or we will never leave.” Barrett says, rubbing his forehead.

“Sorry big guy, we would leave anyway. I need this.” I say as I take my leather jacket from Carion.

We all pile into various cars and head to town. We stop at a gas station for a moment to grab some snacks because someone. I won't say who. Wink wink nudge nudge, Xander. outed me for not eating anything today.

As we arrive at the club, the pulsating beat of the music greets us before we even step inside. The entrance is flanked by large, vibrant neon lights that shimmer in a kaleidoscope of colors, casting reflections on the pavement. A line of people stretches out, but with our group in tow, we glide past the crowd and head straight inside. Perks of Bennett.

The moment we cross the doorway; I'm enveloped by the energy of the place. The overhead lights are dimmed, while colorful lights dance across the walls and floor. The bass throbs through my body. The air is thick with excitement, mingling with the scents of cologne, perfume, and an underlying hint of something less sweet if You catch my drift.

“Alright, let’s find a table!” Xander shouts over the music, his eyes gleaming with enthusiasm. “I’ll snag us a good spot!”

“I’ll help!” Viv calls, darting after him as they weave through the throng of dancing bodies, leaving the rest of us at the entrance.

The club is alive with movement. Groups of people laughing and chatting cluster around the bar, while others are already lost in their own rhythm on the dance floor. A massive disco ball hangs from the ceiling, sending lights cascading across the room like stars twinkling in a night sky.

As I take it all in, I notice booths lining the walls, upholstered in sleek black leather, each one offering a bit of privacy. The bar stretches along one side, illuminated by glowing shelves filled with an array of bottles. The bartenders are in constant motion, bouncing from customer-to-customer filling orders as they go. My brain hurts thinking about it. We can scratch bartender of the list of potential professions

“Got us a table!” Xander’s voice cuts through my thoughts as he returns, gesturing enthusiastically toward a spacious booth located near the VIP area. It’s perfect—close enough to the dance floor but also private enough we won’t have to worry about too many eyes on us. Okay yes, I’m still a little weird about being married- er- mated to the dean.

“Thanks Xan.” I reply, as we make our way over. The table is adorned with glowing LED lights that change colors.

Once we settle in, Saul and Barrett head to the bar to order drinks, while the rest of us excitedly chat about the DJ, who Vivianne has decided will be her next conquest.

“Are You excited to dance?” Vin muses, his gaze wandering around the room as he takes in the scene.

“Definitely! I’ve been looking forward to this for too long,” I agree, my excitement bubbling over as I catch sight of the dance floor packed with people moving in sync with the music.

As Saul and Barrett return with a round of drinks, I can see everyone’s eyes lighting up. “We’ve got a mix of everything! Cocktails, beer, and some shots to kickstart the night,” Saul announces, setting the drinks on the table.

“If the ocean was beer and I was a duck, I’d swim to the bottom and drink my way up. But the ocean’s not beer and I’m not a duck so here’s to Tequila now let’s get fucked up!” Jared raises his glass high, and we all follow suit, clinking glasses together and laughing.

With the drinks in hand, I feel a tug on my arm and turn to find Viv and Xander waving me to the dance floor. The DJ shifts the music to something more upbeat, I turn back to the guys “What are we waiting for?” I call out, rising from my seat. “Let’s dance!”

we all make our way toward the dance floor,

As the music pulses through the club, I feel my body naturally moving to the rhythm alongside my friends. The dance floor is a sea of swaying bodies I can’t help but grin as I spot Jared shifting his hips to the beat.

I weave my way through the crowd and join him, letting the music take over. “You seriously have some moves!” I shout over the thumping bass, laughing as he spins me around playfully.

“Thanks! Just trying to keep up with You,” he replies with a grin. “So, how do You feel about all this? Having fun?”

“Absolutely! I’ve been looking forward to this forever. Classes and everything else has been a little overwhelming. I needed the break” I say, my laughter mixing with the music.

“Good! We definitely need to make this a regular thing,” he adds, giving me a playful nudge. “Now, let’s take this up a notch!” He pulls me into a twirl, and I laugh again.

After dancing with Jared for a bit, I move to find Vin, who’s grooving a little way away, a smile on his face. I step in close, swaying along to the beat beside him. “Mind if I join You?”

“Not at all! Come here,” he replies, grabbing my hands and pulling me into a spin. “You’re looking amazing tonight, by the way. I’m glad we were all able to come.”

“Flattery and dancing—now You’re speaking my language!” I tease, and we share a laugh as we move together. “And yeah, it’s been a little rough with Barrett and Saul working so much. They needed the break too.”

“What the rest of us aren’t good enough?” he jokes, then adds with a smile, “we miss them too You know. We all love each other in our own ways.”

“I know, and thank You for that. I can’t imagine how frustrating it would be if You all hated each other.”

Feeling the rhythm pulling us in, I let go and get lost in the moment with Vin. After a few songs, I spot Alex bouncing nearby and break away to join him.

“Hey, superstar!” I exclaim, throwing my arms up in the air. “You ready to show off those dance moves I’ve heard so much about?”

“Always! I’ve saved my best routines just for this night,” he laughs, shifting his feet

playfully. “You look amazing pretty girl, thank You for being ours.” he adds spinning me to face the dance floor while he moves our hips in rhythm

“I feel like I should thank You guys for being okay with sharing me so much.” I challenge, and he grins, “Eh the guys are alright, I suppose it's fine I share.” he says rolling his eyes in mock exasperation before launching into a fun little routine that I try to mimic. The two of us end up laughing more than actually dancing.

After our dance-off, I catch the eye of Saul, who’s standing around the edge of the crowd watching like he always does. I make my way to him. “Come dance with me. And before You say no we can ask Barrett to keep an eye on everyone for You.” I ask, looking over to find Barrett

“I am watching everyone, little mate. Four eyes are just better than 2.” Barrett's velvet voice says in my ear. I spin around to look at him and pout.

“I want a chance to dance with You all.” Saul chuckles before pulling me to the floor with him.

“And dance You shall little one we just need to make sure everyone is safe and someone is watching the drinks on the table.” leaning in closer as he dances. “How are You feeling? Enjoying the night?”

“I’m loving it! Thank You for coming. I've missed You,” I reply, leaning my head against his chest...

He grins and leans in closer. “I missed You too. We are trying to get things organized and things that used to be our responsibility sorted so we can be home more often. Not being home is hard”

“Aw, stop it!” I smack his chest lightly. “You’re making me blush.” we dance for a

little while longer before I grab a drink and move to find my big guy.

Moving around the dance floor, standing in a corner next to our booth. I join him and twirl, my laughter merging with the rhythm. “Ohhh big guy! It's Your turn.”

“Ohhh Aly! You need some water.” he jokes, bumping his shoulder against mine, and handing me a glass. “I'm glad You're having fun baby, but one thing. I don't dance. I love You and normally I would never tell You no. But I hate dancing.”

“Ugh, party pooper” I say, turning to look for my next victim. “Where is Carion?”

“He's running to get Viv another drink. I'll let him know you demand a dance when he gets back. Go dance with Elliot.” he chuckles, and I can't help but nod in agreement.

With a warm hug, I move on to find Elliot, who is dancing with Xander and Kale. “Hey pretty boy, You, me, dance” I shout, based on the confused look on his face I'm guessing the music drowned some of that out. I grab his hands and pull him to me.

Elliot beams back at me, “that makes so much more sense than what I thought You said.”

“What did You think I said?” I ask laughing when he shakes his head violently with wide eyes. “The nerdy look really works on You” I say, tossing my hair over my shoulder as I spin in a circle.

He laughs, pretending to look horrified. “Damn. I was going for a sexy biker man.”

Playing along I looked him up and down. “Oh, well I suppose You could pull that off too.” we dance some more laughing and smiling. Gods I needed this. “Hey, when we get home will You let the guys know I just want some time with the just two of us?” I

ask, when he nods, I move to find Carion.

Finally, I find him standing next to the Barrett leaning against the booth. Gods he's hot. His button up hugs his arms in the right places. His sleeves are rolled up to show his tattoos and his mating mark. "Hey! How's it going over here?" I ask, moving closer.

"I heard You are demanding dances with all of us," he says, spinning me around. "So, let's go Firefly."

"Yes!" I reply Fist pumping the air and dragging him to the center of the floor.

After a few more rounds of drinks and a couple more dances we decide to head home. The guys help lift a very drunk Xander into the car and Barrett runs back into the club to grab a paper bag, so Xander doesn't puke all over the back seat.

"You're hot" Xander slurs to Kale the grump laughs and sets Xander's head down on his lap

Poor guy didn't make it two minutes before he puked.

Aly

As we stumble through the front door, laughter and excitement still bubbling between us, the comforting familiarity of home wraps around me. The night out has filled me with a warm glow, and I can't help but steal glances at Elliot, who's beaming with the same carefree energy from the club.

"What a night." I groan, kicking off my heels at the door and letting out a content sigh. "I'm not sure I've ever danced that much in my life."

Elliot chuckles, running a hand through his tousled hair. "It was fun. Poor Kale is probably going to be scrubbing vomit from his slacks for weeks."

"There is a good chance Kale will make him pay for it in his own way." I tease, nudging him playfully as we make our way down the hallway.

We reach my room... I flick on the lamp, casting a soft glow around the space. With a gentle smile, I invite Elliot inside. I walk into the closet changing into one of Saul's t-shirts before moving to the room again.

"Want to read a bit before bed?" I ask, reaching for the stack of books on my nightstand.

"I'd love to, darling, what do You have?" he replies, settling onto the edge of the bed while glancing at the titles.

I pull out a well-worn fantasy novel and hold it up. "This one! It's gotten really

intense lately, and I can't wait to dive back into it."

"I've read that one, it's good." he grins, picking up a matching book from the stack.

We cozy up on the bed, propping pillows behind us for comfort. As we settle in, I can't help but steal glances at him over the top of my book. Elliot's expression shifts to one of deep focus as he flips open his novel, his brow furrowed slightly in that adorable way he does when he's really interested. Watching him in his element makes me almost giddy? I love seeing how comfortable he is with a book in his hand. I lean my head on Elliot's shoulder, happy to just be near him. The world outside fades away, and in this small space, it feels like only the two of us exist.

"Hey, thanks for tonight," I say softly after a while, feeling grateful for both the fun we had and this peaceful moment together. "I always have the best time when I'm with You."

He looks down at me, a gentle smile spreading across his face. "Funny, I was thinking the same thing..."

Elliot leans in closer, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. "Thank You for giving me some time with You."

I tilt my head up and move to press my lips against his. "I love You Elliot." I whisper. Pulling his neck down I move so he is over me.

"Aly are You sure?" he croaks. I nod.

He sits back and removes his glasses before pulling off his shirt, and then mine. He drags his hands down my sides, sending shivers down my spine.

He continues his slow examination. Taking in every inch of my body. "You're so

beautiful,” he whispers.

Bending his head he moves to suck on my nipple, swirling his tongue around it. My back arches off the bed pushing my breasts further into his face. His hand reaches up to massage the other one with his hands, his soft touch makes me shiver with anticipation and need. The need for more, the need for him to touch me, the need for a part of his soul to combine with mine.

Elliot drops his hand to my pussy and begins rubbing circles around my clit. The firm pressure giving me the friction I was begging to feel. I move my hips in time with his movements. The pleasure is so overwhelming I slam my eyes shut to feel. “Let me see.” Elliot’s quiet voice wraps around my mind, throwing open my eyes. I find his eyes watching me as I fall into a million pieces.

Before I have a chance to regain thought he's sliding down my body and suctioning his mouth to my clit. I shudder, pleasure sweeping up over me in a wave that had my fingers gripping the sheets so hard I'm sure I ripped them... The overload of his mouth so close to my last orgasm sends me flying straight into another one. Elliot groans, swallowing the flood of juices that now cover himself and the bed. fucking me with his tongue through the pleasure and leaving me exhausted.

He moves back just enough to slide back up my body, positioning the curve of his cock at my entrance and pushing through the last of the barrier that separates us. I'm sensitive, way too sensitive. I move to push his chest or maybe I try to pull him closer, I'm not sure of anything I'm doing in this moment. He grabs my hands and pins them against the bed. I was so full of him and trapped by him in the loveliest way possible. His mouth returns to my ear.

“You see what You do to me?” he groans in my ear. “You are the love I've been reading about for years, completely consuming. A fire I would happily let destroy everything. You are My muse and the main character in every love story I read. “He

bucks his hips, thrusting me into the bed. Pushing my head further and further to the headboard.

I moan, the sound guttural and desperate. All I want is more of him, because he is everything. A piece of my soul settles with every punishing thrust of his hips. The familiar burn of the mate mark makes it's way to my skin, searing his soul into mine, as the bond forms I feel my legs begin to shake as another orgasm washes over me.

“Holy shit.” I try and fail to hold on.

Elliott's body Slams against mine, every punishing thrust bottoming out inside me. I can do nothing but take it.

His eyes devour me as he destroys me and puts me back together with every thrust. Making me take every inch of him... “One more,” he breaths, muscles straining. He lets a hand fall to my throat while the other stays firmly planted on my arms.

My eyes flutter closed, and I surrendered to the pleasure beneath my skin and the feeling of being the center of someone's world. The orgasm that swims behind my eyes would kill me. I was sure of it, oh what a way to go.

Elliott's voice is a ghost against my skin. “Come for me, Darling” I obey.

My screams bounced off the walls. My body bows off the bed into his chest. I can't breathe. It's too much. I'm going to pass out. Elliott comes too, his moans joining mine. Neither of us can stop moving, aftershocks driving us to thrust against each other. We stare at each other until we can breathe normally.

“Come here darling.” Elliot says moving to the side and pulling me to his chest. “I love You, endlessly. It's like I can't tell where I end, and You begin.” his voice pulls at me almost as hard as the sleep threatening to take over.

“I love You too Elliott. You guys are the best thing that's ever happened to me.” I murmur, at least I think I do. Sleep pulls me under.

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

Aly

The grounds of the academy have been transformed into a vibrant wonderland. Twinkling lights hang from the trees, casting a glow over the dance floor, where students swirl and sway to the rhythm of laughter and music. The air is thick with excitement and the mingling scents of delicious food. A few months ago, I was alone and surviving a life I didn't want. I look around taking in my friends and family and smile.

Thank You. Thank You for bringing me to them.

You're welcome little one. Iris' ethereal voice sounds in my mind.

I stand at the edge of the festivities, a flowy dress swaying gently around my legs as I soak it all in. Tonight is a celebration of the Equinox—the party is significantly crazier than I thought it would be. I'm not complaining though. I finally heard back that I passed my first basics midterm and that is cause for celebration all on its own.

“Hey! Don't just stand there looking lost!” Viv calls out, shaking me from my thoughts. She appears beside me, her dress sparkling like the stars above us. “Come on, let's dance!”

I laugh, feeling the warmth of her energy pulse through me. “As if I could say no to that! Lead the way.”

We make our way onto the dance floor, which is full of energy of students swaying and spinning among the shimmering lights. Upbeat music pulses in the air, and I can't

help but join the rhythm with a twirl. “This is incredible!” I shout over the music, and Viv nods, his head whipping around like she’s looking for something. She’s been a little weird since the night at the club. I’ve been meaning to ask but can never find a moment alone with her...

As the night progresses, I catch glimpses of my mates throughout the crowd. Each of them adds a unique spark to the evening. I spot Jared in one corner, making ridiculous faces as he pretends to dance like a chicken, while Alex rushes by with a plate of food balanced precariously in his hands but somehow still manages to laugh.

Barrett stands tall with that brooding intensity of his, though I notice a soft smile playing on his lips as he chats with Saul, who seems to soothe some excited first-year students gathering around him.

And then there’s Vin, who is animatedly demonstrating fire tricks for some captivated onlookers, much to their delight. It’s clear that he’s having a blast.

Feeling adventurous, I decide to approach the food table, where an array of treats is laid out. Just as I grab a bright red apple, I hear a familiar, cheerful voice behind me. “Aly! You have to try these!” It’s Alex, holding up a colorful platter filled with what looks like candied fruit skewers.

“Those look amazing!” I grin, snagging one from the platter. “What is it?”

“Right? The best part is that they’re enchanted! They taste exactly like whatever Your favorite treat is.” He grins, and I raise my eyebrows in surprise.

“Serious? So, this one tastes like—” I take a bite, and a burst of chocolate and strawberries fills my mouth. “Oh my gosh, yes! It’s like I’m on a whole new level of dessert heaven!”

“See? I knew you’d love it!” he says, clearly pleased with himself. “You should bring some to the dance floor. It’ll make Your moves even sweeter.”

“Sweet moves coming right up!” I laugh, letting my heart soar with the joy that fills the air. I wander back onto the dance floor while the song shifts to a slow beat, and I grab Viv’s hand to pull her into the center of the pulsating crowd.

As we sway to the music, I glance around, absorbing the scene—a tapestry of fires, air, and laughter woven into this beautiful tapestry of life we’ve built together. I catch Vin’s eye across the floor, and he raises an eyebrow playfully, prompting me to join him for a dance. I make my way over, the cheerful vibe radiating through me.

“Hey, look at You, charming the crowd as usual,” I tease, a grin on my face as I join him in the rhythm.

“I’m only interested in charming You” he replies with a mock serious tone. “I’d never want to charm anyone else. Except for maybe Jared. He’s pretty.”

“Jared would be flattered. Although something tells me he’d have something up his sleeve to freak You out.” I laugh, letting the heat between us spark as we move together to the music.

As the night unfolds, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for each of my mates. Every quirky moment and each shared laugh threads itself into the fabric of who we are together, and I want to hold on to every second of it.

The music shifts, moving back to an upbeat tempo, and I can’t resist the urge to pull everyone into a group dance. I turn and wave to the guys, beckoning them to join us. They exchange glances and a few chuckles, but soon enough, they’re all moving towards the center of the dance floor.

“Alright, let’s show them how it’s done!” claps Barrett, his intense demeanor melting into delight.

We create a makeshift dance circle, and everyone begins to move, sharing silly steps and laughter, completely in the moment. I’m sandwiched between Jared and Alex, both of them breaking into the silliest dance moves I’ve ever seen, causing everyone to explode into laughter.

“You look stunning firefly.” Carion’s deep voice slides over me as he walks behind me. His hand wraps around pulling me flush to his chest. I lean my head back against his shoulder.

“Thank You. I’m so happy.” I said quietly. “I wish everyday could be like this.”

“Hmm, well I’m not sure we can have a party like this every day but I’m sure we could find some ways to make it memorable for You, what do You say little one. Want to play a game?” I look up to see 6 sets of hungry eyes, considering how hard Carion is gripping my hip right now I’m going to assume he’s included. So, make that 7 sets.

“What kind of game?” Tipping my head up I jut my chin out in hopes that they won’t be able to tell I feel like falling over.

A dark chuckle comes from Carion as he tightens his grip. All of my men crowd closer to me. “The game is simple pretty girl. We are only a few blocks from the house. If You can get home without one of us catching You get to decide how our evening ends. If You get caught by us the one who catches You gets to choose.”

As I glance around, I try to map out the best route for me to take. I think if I ran by the food tables I could run through the library and out the back door. That should spit me out just a block or two from the house. Barrett seems to read my mind. Which is

totally fucked cause that's my power not his. "Nuh-uh little mate." He reaches out to grab my shoulder and spins me a few times. When he stops, hands cover my eyes.

"Close Your eyes darling, I'm going to remove my hands. When I count to ten You run. "I nod my understanding before he removes his hand and moves away.

"One..." Vin says behind me

"Two..." Alex sings from my right.

"Three." Saul he's somewhere next to Alex

"Four..." Jared says from in front of me.

"Five..." Barrett growls from somewhere to the left.

"Six..." Carion whispers, in my ear

"Seven..." Elliot adds somewhere to the left.

"Eight..." Saul

"Nine..." Alex sounds more serious now.

"We will give You a 30 second head start." Carion chimes in his voice calm and cocky. Fuckkk the things his voice does to me when he talks like that.

"Ten..."

Before I can even think about who said it my eyes are thrown open and I run. I make it almost off the dance floor when I run smack dab into Vivienne who starts talking to

me about something when I shoulder her out of the way and begin running again.

Sorry the guys want to play a game. No time. I'm halfway up the steps to the library when I hear a one-word response.

Ew.

Chuckling to myself as I make my way through the aisles. When I make it to the back door, I hear the front door fly open and... wait. I only hear one set of footsteps. Before I can think about it, I turn around and dive behind a bookshelf. Trying to calm my breath so he can't hear me, I try to tap into the thoughts of whoever is here. What? It's not cheating. What else do You use these powers for?

Clearing my mind I listen... nothing. Shit. moments later I hear the back door open and close. I slowly stand and start to walk to the door. Just as I'm about to open it I feel an arm wrap around me, and a hand clamp over my mouth.

"Tsk, you didn't actually think I didn't feel You trying to poke around in my brain did You, my love?" Vin.

Vin spins me and throws me over his shoulder. "Hey that's not fair You tricked me."
I grumble

A hand smacks my ass, hard. "All is fair in love and sexy time my love."

"I believe the phrase You're looking for is 'love and war' my dude" I quip. Another smack. I clench my thighs together to relieve a little pressure.

When we reach the house Vin kicks open the front door and walks straight up the stairs to our room. Before I can attempt to keep some dignity and shimmy down the tree, I am currently in I'm sailing through the air and landing on the bed in a heap.

“Humph. "When I get my bearings and look up, I see all seven of my men. Naked and glorious. God, I got so lucky.

Vin takes a seat on the couch opposite to the bed and looks at me hungrily. “Jared. Relieve our mate in her dress, would You?”

Without skipping a beat, Jared crawls on the bed and moves behind me, he grabs the hem of my dress and slowly. Painfully slowly pulls my dress off, leaving me in nothing but the light blue lingerie set.

“Holy shit.” Elliot whispers.

“My thoughts exactly, Pretty boy.” no sooner than the words leave Carion’s mouth I hear a thump and a groan. When I look over, I see Carion doubled over with Elliott standing over him.

“No one, and I mean No one other than Aly is allowed to call me that, psycho.” When he stands, he blows me a kiss and winks and for a moment I question if maybe I nicknamed the wrong mate ‘psycho’.

Food for thought... I mean-

Focus little one.

Right, right. Sex.

Jared’s hand reaches around and caresses from my collar bone down between my breasts when he reaches the seam of my thong his hand freezes. Vin nods. And Jared takes the cue to dip his hand between my legs. My breath catches as he drags his finger through my folds, stopping to circle my clit.

Every thought leaves my body as he plays my body like an instrument. His mouth finds my neck placing small kisses as he continues his painfully slow assault.

“Fuck, please!”

“Please what? My love.” Vin’s voice is deeper and darker than I’ve ever heard it and fuck if it doesn’t do something to me. Apparently, they have grown impatient because for a moment Jared stops moving, forcing my attention back to the conversation.

“I believe Your mate asked You a question, Little mate.” Barrett growls in my ear. Where did he come from?

“I need more. Please give me more.” I beg Jared to resume. And with a nod of Vin’s head Barrett joins in his rough hands reach up to pinch my nipple. The pain and pleasure set every nerve on fire; I buck my hips trying to get more.

“You owe each of us an orgasm my love. I would get to it before Carion over here starts forcing them.” Vin’s hums. Carion chuckles from the wall he’s leaning against.

Jared adds a finger fucking me so thoroughly I don’t think Carion will have to do much forcing. Barrett sucks a nipple into his mouth and begins flicking his tongue over the sensitive nub. The combination as my first orgasm building, fast.

“Oh gods!” I mewl bucking my hips to get more, I need more. Barrett reads my body and bites lightly on my breast. “Fuck!” I shout as the orgasm rips through my body. I slump over shaking. Before I can catch my breath Jared flips me, so I am straddling him. His thick cock nudging my entrance. Barrett moves behind me, smoothing a hand down my spine. “You’re perfection.” he mumbles. I feel his hand move to the right. He takes a bottle from Saul and squirts a cool liquid between my cheeks.

Jared pushed into me, settling himself deep inside me and moves a few times until I

fully relax. Barrett lines his cock up with my back entrance and slowly pushes forward the burn is brief as he pushes past the first ring. Jared pinches my nipples hard drawing my attention from Barrett and back to him.

“Fuck.” I grit. “Please move, I need You guys to move.” with that they both begin slowly fucking me. Taking my body higher and higher. The pleasure builds as they pick up the pace, the feelings overwhelm me, and I cry out.

Before any noise can leave my throat, I feel Carion thrust his achingly hard dick through my lips slamming into the back of my throat causing me to choke briefly. I adjust my angle and start breathing through my nose as he fucks my throat mercilessly “Good girl. Swallow my dick firefly.” he says, bunching my hair into a ponytail for him to hold onto.

The three of them push my body to the edge and sent me barreling straight into another orgasm. Before emptying themselves inside of me. Carion lifts me off of Jared, flips me over and slams into me so hard I move several inches up the bed. His arms lock around my waist anchoring me to him

“Stay put Firefly.” he commands before shoving my head into the bed pinning me in place. He wraps an arm around my body as he wrecks my body to play with my overly sensitive clit. The sensation makes me buck in an attempt to get away. I'm so sensitive it almost hurts. Almost.

“Carion, Please I- I can't.” I whine.

“You can firefly, you'll be a good girl and come for me.” he grits. “Do it, come on my cock.”

He speeds up his pace fucking into me faster and faster until my body has no choice but to comply with the demand. The orgasm tears through me. My screams echo

through the house. The Pleasure takes over and for a moment I think I black out.

If I do it's only for a moment because I feel when Carion empties himself and passes me over to Alex who is now lying flat on the bed.

“Come here pretty girl” Alex coos. Sitting me on his cock. I moan. Even though I feel like I was hit by a bud these men make me so horny, I don't even care. I want all of them. I need them.

“Ride me, take Your time.” he whispers. Wiping the sweat from my brow. I raise up on my knees and slowly lower myself slowly taking every inch he has to offer. “That’s it, pretty girl, you’re doing so well.” he murmurs, pulling my head down so he can kiss me.

“Elliott.” I moan beckoning him closer. I open my mouth to signal where I want him and moan when he obliges. I run my tongue up and down his shaft taking more of him each time. When I get to the base, I turn my head and use my hands to slide over him as I take his balls in my mouth and suck.

“Oh Fuck!” he shouts, bucking his hips.

I take him deeper in my throat in time with me lowering myself on Alex's dick. The moan that leaves me is primal. Gods, I love these men.

‘We love You too, little one.’ Saul says

‘I want You’.

No sooner than I send the words Saul is behind me pushing into my pussy with Alex, the stretch makes me scream out around Elliott’s cock. I choke back tears. The mascara I put on earlier is totally running down my face. I can’t move I can’t think I

can't do anything other than beg.

Please.

Elliot takes over fucking my throat as Saul and Alex bot slowly fuck me through orgasm after orgasm. I completely loose count. My body is a boneless mess by the time they all come. I gulp down every drop Elliot gives me and roll to the side. Staring up at the ceiling I feel someone using water to clean me off. My head shoots up

Vin sits between my legs moving water and air to clean me. He gives me a happy smile and moves up the bed to cuddle me. "Sleep my love." he murmurs, rubbing his hand over my back.

"No, I want You too, please." I wine trying to pull him on top of me.

"My love, you can barely move. You need rest."

"No, I need You. I can handle it. Just be gentle." I say pulling him over. He settles on top of me searching my eyes. Whatever he sees he just nods and positions himself at my core.

"You've done so well for us. You're such a good girl." he coos slowly fucking me. He drops a hand to my clit and makes small, measured circles.

"I'm so proud of You." he soothes as he picks up the pace a little, twisting his hips to hit the spot that makes my head spin. The orgasm hit's me out of nowhere rocking through my body. Vin thrusts a few more times before emptying himself. He pulls me to the top of the bed and wraps me in his arms.

My other mates join us and all touch me in some way. "I love You guys." I say

sleepily.

Each of them returns their love. This is what I needed. This is the family I wanted. My life never felt like my own until I met them. With that thought I do actually pass out this time.

Cruel joke- 6 Aly- 7

HA! I win bitch.

Zara

The air hums with neon hues and the faint bassline of a Billie Eilish remix. I'm sprawled on a throne made of giant heart-shaped beanbags, tossing glitter into a hologram of Vivianne's scowling face. Ugh, emotional constipation. My least favorite. Poor girls got it bad.

She froze, eyes darting. "Where...?"

"My zone!" I grinned, tossing glitter into a nearby black hole (decorative). The sign above us flickered: "Zara's Chill Cave? – No Trauma Allowed (Just Kidding, Bring It)."

Vivianne hugged herself, shoulders taut. "Why am I here?"

I floated over, my tea evaporating. "To talk about the elephant in the room. And by elephant, I mean the bonds you're trying to pretend don't exist."

"I don't want to talk about it," she shoots back. "It was an accident, and I'm fine without all the drama."

"Accidents are just the universe's way of nudging us toward something real. You can't outrun bonds, Viv. They're not chains—they're lifelines." I say sweetly

Vivianne narrows her eyes, her expression hardening only slightly. "Oh, you want me to fall in love? Is that what this is. Well fuck that. I've been in love. Twice. I had mates I thought would choose me and I watched one of the men I loved more than

anything slit Max's throat. So no, fuck that."

"Trevor's a sentient red flag, Viv. I'd drop-kick him into a black hole if the cosmic council weren't obsessed with 'balance.'."

"After all the pain. All the hurt. You deserve love. Real love. Not the bullshit Trevor tried to pretend was love. Max and I have spoken. His only wish was that I give you mates. That you can be happy. He said he loves you so much. And not to blame yourself. You both were blind." I murmur, my voice quiet

She hesitates, and I see the flicker of Something in her eyes. "How do I know they will be able to share. Trevor..." Her voice breaks "He wanted me to himself. I can't go through that again goddess I can't lose more people I love."

stepping closer, I take her hand. Holding out my other "Trevor's greed was a cage. The bonds meant for you would never have an issue with you loving someone who loves you. Also, I'm the goddess of love. I know these things." A single rose blooms in my palm, petals fracturing into stardust. "And if they try? I'll scorch their shadows myself."

Vivianne looks down, the weight of my words sinking in. "It's just overwhelming."

"Overwhelming can be fun! Think of it this way: You can forge Your own path with them, hand in hand, in hand, in hand? I lost track of hands, but you get the gist. You don't have to abandon Yourself or Your aspirations. You can grow with each other—not instead of one another," I say, my voice soothing.

She meets my gaze, her resolve softening. "I'm just not built for it."

"Life is too fleeting to ignore the connections that spark joy, Vivianne. It can be messy and chaotic, but those moments of laughter make life vibrant. Believe me when I say not everyone gets the luxury. I have been waiting for my mother to tell me

it's my time to find my mates. To find love. For years. And that's not a manipulation tactic. It's okay that you haven't been interested all I'm saying is give the guys a chance. Give yourself a chance. Not every bond is perfect, sometimes it's the less than perfect moments that make your LIFE perfect... Besides I'm the best match marker there is and if you let yourself, you could be happy."

Vivianne takes a deep breath, a hesitant smile beginning to form on her lips. "Fine, I'll think about it..."

"Good enough!" I clapped, summoning a portal edged in memes. "Oh, and Viv? If anyone ever hurts, you again?" Glitter hardened into daggers around my fists. "I'll turn them into a kabab. Ugliest one ever." I say, clapping my hands together with delight.

"Aly said you were nuts" she laughs shaking her head.

As I conjure the shimmering portal back to the waking world, I can't help Smile. conjuring a bucket of rainbow popcorn.

She'll cave. Mr. Sunshine's got dimples for days. Poor girl, she's not going to know what hit her. I giggle at the thought as I move back to my throne. This should be fun. She will thank me latter don't worry. Besides she has nothing to worry about.

Yet.

Cue evil laugh* What? Okay, yes, I just say it. I'm not as good as the others with that and embarrassing myself is not on my to-do list bitches.

The room quieted, the neon hum fading to a whisper. For a second, I let myself pout. Twenty. The number glowed in my head like a countdown timer. Next week, the cosmic calendar flips, and finally—finally—the universe lets me meet them. The souls I've been mapping in secret since I first learned what a mate was. Mom says it's

“tradition” to wait but try telling that to a love goddess who’s been third-wheeling her own domain for nineteen years.

I flicked a hologram open—a blurry image of six figures laughing, their features smudged by celestial privacy settings. My chest ached. Patience, Mom always says. Your time’s coming.

“Easy for you to say,” I muttered to the comet-shaped nightlight on my desk. “You aren’t the goddess of love who hasn’t been in love.

I sighed, tossing popcorn at the hologram. “Better be worth the wait, guys.”