



# Xarius (Shunned Mages #1)

**Author:** *Regitse Liljadorff*

**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Niam:

Being shunned from my home world because I lack magic is one thing. Surviving in a foreign world that has never had any magic is something else. When I start feeling eyes on me, I need to add a stalker to my list of problems to deal with. I just hope I survive it.

Xarius:

Being the first shunned mage and the son of one of the leaders in the Council of Mages has its perks. I know the council only shunned us to Sutiner because they feared us, because as soon as I find my soulmatch, I'll be more powerful than them. We will be more powerful. Now I just have to chase my soulmatch down and hope that he, too, wants revenge. And if I end up kidnapping him to make him hear me out, then so be it. Whatever it takes, I'll make that man mine.

**Total Pages (Source):** 29

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Niam

“Don’t look at them,” my father hissed. We were walking down the street towards the center of town. Today would be my very last day here.

I was being shunned.

I kept walking, but instead of glaring back at the people who had come outside to watch me, I listened to my father and looked down at my feet instead.

“You will respect the council of mages and their decision. You’re already a disappointment, so at least try to appear respectful. Your poor mother is hiding inside our house because of you,” my father whispered again, his tone laced with resentment towards me, the mage without magic .

When I hadn’t shown any signs of magic at age fourteen, my father had changed.

Gone was the kind, warm man that had raised me, instead was a father who wanted me gone.

My mother cried herself to sleep every night, ashamed of having a child with no magic.

I’d had until I turned eighteen to prove myself, but my eighteenth birthday was yesterday.

No magic showed itself and no party was had.

I was walking towards my eviction. The council didn't allow mages here without magic.

I was to be shunned to Sutiner, like other magicless mages before me.

In the past five years three others had been sent away.

I hoped to find them once I arrived at Sutiner via portal.

I had no idea how to live somewhere where people didn't use magic freely.

At least I would be amongst people like myself for a change.

For once I would be considered normal. The thought made a little flutter of happiness stir inside of me, and the worry of how to survive took a backseat as I let the ease of being normal take over.

I had friends, before I turned fourteen.

Friends that left me as soon as we got the letter.

It was never a good sign to see a black raven with a letter waiting outside your house.

I'd gotten the first of many letters, stating I had four years left.

When my father had stolen the letter from my hands, that's when everything changed.

"Don't even think about saying a word when they speak to you," my father continued, standing straight as he led me down the street, acting like he was escorting a prisoner; like I had done something wrong just by being born.

I nodded, grateful he was whispering. The amount of people who stood and watched my eviction was a surprise.

Definitely not a good one. Did they all hate me?

Or were they appalled I was getting shunned?

Did they even care? I forced my gaze ahead of me, ignoring their watchful eyes as I saw the castle up ahead.

Four mages made up the council of mages.

Stavi, Leah, Sal, and Mallum. They were the most powerful mages, and therefore the council that ruled our world.

If someone came into more power than them, they would fight for the position of council member.

It happened rarely, and mostly, the council members' children took over their positions when they grew too old.

Thirty minutes later we were met outside the castle gates by an earth mage who escorted us inside.

I could tell their elemental power from their brooch, which was a copper color.

Each element had their own sign and color, letting people know what kind of magic they carried.

It was law that mages had to show their power sign when at work.

The man didn't say anything, just led us through the castle until we reached the ballroom.

I'd heard rumors that this was where both parties and evictions took place.

How could a room hold such a joyous occasion and such a horrible one?

I averted my gaze, already knowing my fate.

I wouldn't be able to avoid being shunned.

No one else ever had. I would do my father the kind gesture of fulfilling his last order of me.

I would shut my mouth and leave. Not that I had a choice.

I was terrified, but also hopeful of my future.

I hadn't been welcomed here in four years.

Four years with no familial love or friendship.

No one had even dared to send me as much as a coded letter.

I was ready for my new future. One without magic.

Fuck magic.

I'd lived without it for eighteen years. If I could do without it, then so could others.

I tightened my grip on the duffle bag I was allowed to bring with me, letting it anchor

me in the moment as I recalled all my sketches.

I thought looking for a job in the arts would be perfect for me.

They wouldn't allow me to take everything I wanted with me, but those were approved.

I could use them as my portfolio and hopefully get a well enough paying job painting and drawing.

For whom, I had no idea. But drawing had been a passion of mine since I was a child.

Allowing myself a hobby to get lost in had helped with the loneliness, making me great at drawing.

The bag was made of red leather, almost the same shade as my hair, which was why I'd picked that bag for my eviction.

It hadn't been easy to make myself invisible at school.

I was the magicless freak with the red hair.

Not that red hair was so uncommon here, but I was the only one in my year with naturally red hair.

I knew they would've found something else to pick on had my hair been black.

It was mostly just a need for them to bully me with something other than my lack of magic.

The council of mages were in this room, watching me as we approached. I kept my

gaze firmly on the ground as we moved closer.

“Look at us, boy,” Mallum ordered, his tone cold and indifferent.

I submitted to his order, letting my eyes land on him, sitting bored on one of the thrones.

He looked like he got some sort of kink out of this power exchange, like he was looking forward to shunning someone from their home world.

Sick people, our council, or rather their council. I didn’t consider them mine any longer.

Leah’s own son had been shunned, making her the coldest in our council.

In fact, her son was the first to get shunned to Sutiner.

She never spoke aloud since, making the others do the talking at gatherings, almost as if she was still humiliated for birthing a mage without magic.

I admitted to listening in on the rumors back when it happened.

The council of mages were the most powerful after all, so her having a son without any power was a surprise to everyone.

I stifled the shiver that threatened to spread over my skin.

She truly was the most heartless of them all.

Stavi leaned over and whispered something to Mallum, who nodded and continued.

“You’ll be sent off to a location we’ve picked out for you.

The portal will close behind you immediately.

In this bag is some money, and that’s all the help you’re getting from us.

You’re on your own, boy.” I was handed the bag from a water mage while I nodded, surprised they offered me anything, but it would likely only be enough for one meal, maybe even less than that.

I knew the world mirrored our own, except the magic part.

I had already planned what to do once I arrived there.

Finding a job before I got too dirty was my number one priority, then a place to live.

I hadn’t been able to prepare too much, though, not knowing how exactly our worlds differed.

Stavi spoke up then, “Preo, the portal.” A man stepped forward and wove the portal with smooth hand movements.

It was something only a few mages could do, a certain power they were trained to master.

I watched, fascinated as a portal came to life in the middle of the room.

A pinkish blue filled the inside, white smoke surrounding it.

I would walk through that thing. I swallowed, not feeling as brave as I had a minute ago.



“Say your goodbyes,” Stavi stated, clearly just as bored as Mallum, but also pleased with feeling powerful. I was just glad they rarely got to shun mages, if this was something that they secretly got off on. I didn’t want to bring them further pleasure by begging. I was done hiding.

I looked at my father and smiled. Not a kind one, he didn’t deserve that.

No, my smile was filled with promise. Of what I didn’t know yet, but I hoped it would keep him guessing until the day he died.

I shifted my gaze to the council members and changed my smile to a smug one, letting them believe I knew something they didn’t.

I wouldn’t utter a word, but act like I wasn’t scared shitless.

That, at least, I could do. For four years I’d acted like I wasn’t dying inside from loneliness.

Pretending that I wasn’t hurting. This? This was nothing on my acting skills.

I walked confidently over to the portal, not slowing my stride, my gaze fixed firmly on my new future, then entered it.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Xarius

Five years earlier.

My mom was crying. I could hear her faint sniffles carry through the wall from my parents' bedroom to mine. I hated myself for making her cry. Why couldn't I just use magic? I was angry at myself for letting her down. For not being the mage I was born to be.

I sat on my bed, my head tilted back against the wall.

I loved this room. The dark blue walls had so many holes in them from over the years.

I'd been one of those kids who believed I could do anything, even hang things on my walls without help.

The many holes were proof of how wrong I'd been.

I held my controller in hand. Not that I was playing at the moment, it just felt good to hold something while my mind wandered.

Gaming was my way of escaping, my way of having sort of friends.

Not that they knew the real me. Had they known, then they wouldn't have played with me anymore.

A knock on my door interrupted my thoughts, and I called out to my mother who I knew was on the other side. She opened the door silently, walking over to sit beside me. “Your mom worries only for your future, dear,” she said soothingly, knowing I could hear her cries.

I nodded, looking down at my worn carpet. “I hate that I disappointed you and Mom,” I whispered, fearing what this meant for me, for us. I turned eighteen yesterday, and I still had no magic.

She grabbed my chin gently and looked into my eyes.

“My dear son, your mom and I are proud of you. You not having any magic doesn’t change that.

No, what we are fearing is what the other council members have planned for you.

” My mom was one of the four members of the council mages.

She often didn’t see eye to eye with them, which was why there were four of them, so it would seem fair, whatever they decided .

“What have they planned?” I asked, fearing for my future, knowing it couldn’t be anything good.

We’d had many visits from the other council members, checking my body and making sure I didn’t have hidden magic inside of me.

I was what they called a freak. My friends had turned on me when I turned fifteen, no longer wanting to associate with the “freak mage”.

No, whatever they’d planned, would be devastating, I knew that much.

“There are rumors, my dear. Of mages a long time ago, who were born without magic. The other council members fear you are like them.” My mother often spoke about the legends and gods of old time, not that I believed everything she told me about them.

However, I doubted the council would believe them, too.

I shook my head, confused. “But how would a mage without magic be a threat?”

She smiled. “Ah, they had magic, but it wasn’t available to them before they met their soulmatch.”

“A soul what?” I asked, intrigued by the story, even if it was a mere fairytale.

“A soulmatch. Like a soulmate, but it is called a match because that’s what their magic does—it matches.

Once they found their person and performed a bonding ritual, they unlocked their magic.

They were stronger than the ones born with unlocked magic.

I even read that they had familiars, strong animals that helped them fight off enemies and protect them.

” She’d read about that? Was it actually true?

She continued, “they want you away from our world, my dear. You mom couldn’t fight them on it, although she tried. You’re being shunned to Sutiner.”

“Shit... Oh, sorry,” I added quickly, letting my mind work through this new

information. “And the council believes I have a soulmatch here? That’s why I’m being shunned?” Great way to say fuck you to those who could become more powerful than they were.

“Yes. They fear you’ll take over once you gain your powers.

If the legends are true, you and your bonded mage would be the most powerful mages alive.

” She sounded almost wistful as she spoke of the legends.

I hoped it was true. I wasn’t done fighting, but an eighteen-year-old with no magic wasn’t exactly threatening to the most powerful mages alive.

“Holy...” I breathed, then the crushing reality of me being shunned away from our world hit. I would never meet my soulmatch, even if I was lucky enough to have one. I hoped, whoever they were, that they wouldn’t have the same life I’d had, being called a freak and treated as such.

“It is to be kept a secret. I swore I wouldn’t tell you.

” She sighed. “I asked your mom about it, and she didn’t say the words outright but nodded when I asked.

I believe that was her way of letting me know I was right.

” I had no words. I finally had a shot at gaining my magic, only to be evicted to some random world far away from here.

They hadn’t yet said that it was their final decision.

But mother seemed to think that would be the verdict, so maybe they had.

I just wasn't deemed important enough to get notified of my banishment.

"Your mom gave me this." She handed me a silver locket that was connected to a silver chain. It had another metal swirling around the surface, creating a beautiful pattern.

I took it and turned it over. It was a simple silver locket, but I couldn't see any way of opening it. "What is it?"

"Your mom infused it with her magic and added your essence in it. Once you arrive on Sutiner you need to look out for your soulmatch. Once the next magicless mage is sent down to Sutiner it could be him or her. It will glow once your soulmatch enters Sutiner. If they're far away it will be a dim light, but as you near them it will become brighter.

You will know without a doubt once you see them, that they are yours. "

Other mages would be shunned like me? They would be magicless just like I was, but if I managed to find them, then we would be able to fight the council of mages. I would be able to return here. "Oh," I said, unable to say anything else as I took in the locket, wondering how it would light up.

She patted my arm. "Keep it hidden under your shirt. Tell no one about this. Once you find your soulmatch, help the others who are coming. I know of two others that show no signs of magic yet. The council is keeping an eye on them constantly. Help the others find their matches, too, and then you will be able to return here and claim your rightful place as rulers."

Present day .

I narrowed my eyes at the barista, willing her to understand my problem. She sighed, “Xar, please don’t make me repeat myself again.” I had no idea what her problem was, since I was the one with coffee all over me. The stupid new machine she’d bought had it out for me and everyone knew it.

“Repeat what?” I asked, wiping furiously at my apron, thankful that I always wore the same cheap clothes for work. Coffee stains were a bitch to get out of fabric, and I didn’t always have the option to do laundry each week.

“You need to close this thing here,” she pointed. “ Before starting it! I told you this twice yesterday.” She rubbed the bridge of her nose, truly loving having hired me five years ago. She told me so often, always with a sarcastic tone to her voice, but I chose to ignore it.

“Oh,” I said, acting surprised. I totally remembered something about that. Too bad it took me to be bathed in coffee to remember it.

“Yes. Oh,” she said. Julie wasn’t just my boss.

She’d been my best friend ever since I was shunned five years ago.

We’d met on my second day on Sutiner, when she’d been walking her dog, who, unbeknownst to her, had eaten something in the bushes it shouldn’t have.

I’d been right there, helping out by carrying him to her car and driving with her to the vet, holding him as she drove.

She’d been so out of it with worry she hadn’t even cared she’d taken a stranger with her.

A fact we’d laughed about after her dog, Vaps, was declared fine by the doctor.

“I’ll remember from now on,” I said, truly wanting to be better at this coffee machine, even though I still thought it had a vendetta against me.

Julie had changed a few things around the shop over the last month, wanting it to look better now that she was making a decent income.

We’d painted the walls and I’d gotten to pick out the colors.

A dark blue shade filled the walls with gold trim, giving it an old school vibe.

With the blackboard behind the desk that had the different coffees and dessert options on it, the coffeeshop was looking better than ever.

My archnemesiis, aka the new coffee machine, was in a copper shade, looking fantastic, I had to admit that, but damn was it annoyingly high tech and complicated.

We’d thrifted new chairs and tables, painting all the chairs gold and adding dark blue cushions on them, to match the walls.

The tables were a dark wood, and we found some cute blue mugs that went perfectly with the color scheme and golden saucers.

“It’s fine. Always nice with the free entertainment,” she sassed and brought out the mop. “I was thinking about attending the charity event tomorrow.” She said it calmly, but I knew she was feeling anything but.

“Declan will be there,” I reminded her. She’d been engaged to a rich guy named Declan, who seemed to truly like her for who she was, but then his family had interfered before their engagement went public.

It was safe to say they did not approve of him marrying a woman who had her own



coffeeshop.

I didn't get what their problem was. She was a business owner, but they seemed to prefer he married a girl who'd been born rich and hadn't worked a day in her life.

That wasn't Julie. No, Julie was a hands-on woman, something I loved about her.

We didn't pay for painters to come in and fix up the place, no we'd been here, her and me, working our asses off painting everything ourselves. And the chairs and tables? Us, too.

"I know," she admitted, sighing a little as she mopped up my mess. "But the charity still means a lot to me." Her mother had passed away from breast cancer and every opportunity she had to donate to research; she took.

"Want me to come with you?" I offered, not wanting her to see Declan without a date.

Not that we would be going as a couple. I saw myself as a taken man, patiently waiting for my soulmatch to join me on Sutiner.

Or as patiently as I could, considering I'd waited over five years, the locket having not even emitted as much as a faint glow. Nothing.

"I would appreciate it, Xar." She put the mop away and stepped over to hug me.

She never asked why I didn't date, just continued to be my friend and likely waited for me to tell her if I ever found someone.

She'd seen Declan and one other guy since we'd become friends, and I was always there to help her with her broken heart, watching silly movies or whatever she

needed.

“Consider it payback,” I teased. I kept telling her I owed her for taking me in as an employee all those years ago, and every time she would roll her eyes at me.

“You don’t need to be my date as a thank you, Xar.

Your friendship has been enough, especially in the weeks following the break-up.

” She was the sort of person who never cried, but Declan had truly hurt her feelings.

She’d been looking forward to their future together, but little did she know her fiancé didn’t have a spine and as soon as his family told him they would cut him off financially, he’d dumped poor Julie.

“Being your friend is hard work,” I teased, shooting her a grin as I evaded the towel she threw at me. “So violent!” I gasped, cackling as we chased each other around the empty shop. We were opening in a few, making this way too early to run around.

“Customers!” she yelped, then stopped chasing me. “Truce!” I nodded, then resumed making my morning coffee, hoping the machine wouldn’t attack me again.

“This is so wrong,” I whispered into Julie’s ear. “Like she could be your twin!”

“Just shows he might have cared a little for me,” Julie replied sadly. “Or at least my looks. ”

Declan had shown up with a date that looked exactly like Julie, but unlike Julie, she was clearly from a family that had money, wearing a disdainful expression on her face that let people around her know they were beneath her.

“At least you don’t look like you smell something foul,” I muttered, trailing after Julie as she made her way over to the smiling staff who were accepting donation checks.

She liked to do it anonymously, but since she knew the charity workers, she was always invited.

They didn’t care how much each donated, treating everyone as equals as they greeted people, thanking them for coming.

I was wearing a rented tux, looking damn good if the mirror in the bathroom could be trusted. Julie wore a golden dress, imitating Belle perfectly with her brown curly hair. At least her dress wasn’t as fluffy and big as the Disney princess, but still beautiful.

I spotted Declan again and caught him staring at where I held Julie’s arm in mine.

It was obvious that he didn’t like that we were close, likely thinking we were dating now from the angry scowl he sent me.

He’d never liked me in the first place, questioning why she was friends with one of her employees.

Like it was frowned upon to be friends since I worked for her.

With my black hair, ice-blue eyes, tattoos, and piercings, I was the exact opposite of Declan, with his light brown hair, brown eyes, and lack of any body art.

He was boring, nothing compared to how awesome I was. And he knew it.

“Thank you so much for coming with me, Xar. I don’t think I would be able to stay if I’d come alone.

” She tightened her hold on my arm as she wrote down her donation, then moved into the huge room where we would be eating and watching the speakers.

I’d been with her once before, and I liked how people here fought against diseases, something we didn’t deal with back home.

Could I really still consider it home? I did miss my mothers, but I was determined to return someday. Determined to get my revenge.

Remembering to reply I smiled at her, “I’ll be your date for the future ones, too,” I assured her, even though I had no idea if I could keep that promise.

My mother had told me I would need to help other magicless mages find their match, too, and I would, without a doubt.

But that also meant not being there for Julie anymore, even though I really hoped she would somehow remain in my life.

She was like a sister to me now, not just my best friend, or only friend really.

She just smiled back; her appreciation clear. “Hey,” she said pointing to my chest. “Is your phone ringing or something?” I looked down and then everything around me seemed to freeze. The locket had a dim glow.

My soulmatch had arrived on Sutiner.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Niam

“Seriously!?” I exclaimed indignantly. The portal had taken me to a forest and I had zero clue how far I was from civilization.

I guess it was safest to dump me somewhere no one would see a freaking portal appear.

But I was still angry at them. But mostly, I was resigned.

I would make a new life for myself here.

Find real friends and maybe start a family one day.

I started walking straight ahead, thinking it was best to start walking before it got dark.

The temperature was comfortable for now, which was at least something.

I went over my preplanned survival guide in my head.

Step one would be finding a place to work.

If I didn’t escape the forest before it got dark, I would have to sleep somewhere safe until the morning.

I really hoped there were no bears here...

The forest around me was filled with pine trees, huge, tall trees, making me feel even smaller and insignificant.

Had my father spoken with the council after I disappeared?

Were they talking about me now? Did they even care I was sent here?

I sighed. It didn't matter. I wasn't a part of their world anymore. I wasn't wanted there.

Please, please, let me be wanted here , I silently begged, urging my cheap sneakers to stay intact as I began what I could only hope was a short trek.

Ever since I'd turned fourteen my parents had stopped investing in me, which meant cheap clothes and shoes.

Because why would they waste their money on someone like me.

An hour later and I was over walking. There were no tall buildings or anything in the distance, only mountains and trees, so many fucking trees.

The mask of confidence I'd put on back in my home world was long gone.

I was lonely, afraid, and honestly, starting to get tired of it all.

I had used so much of my energy these past few days, mentally preparing myself for getting banished, that now, I had nothing left.

My stomach growled and I hugged my arms around my waist, willing the tears to retreat. I would not cry. Not yet. I refused to give into the tears. I was stronger than that. However, when the first tear escaped, I gave up the fight, allowing the rest to

follow as I continued walking.

I had no idea how long I'd walked when I could finally see past the trees.

A road was near and that had to mean I was getting close to civilization.

I hoped. Quickly erasing the distance, I reached the road.

It was a two lane and I started walking alongside the one where the cars would be coming towards me.

I liked seeing cars approach instead of them sneaking up on me from behind.

But maybe they did things differently here?

I shook my head. There was no time for worrying about that.

I finally had a road I could follow, and it looked like the sun would set soon.

I had maybe two hours, three if I was lucky, before it would get dark.

The road had forest on both sides, and I saw a few signs with deer on them, alerting drivers to be cautious when they drove past. Only five minutes of walking and the first car came into view, thankfully from the direction I was headed, allowing me to think about my possibilities.

Should I wave and ask for directions? Or just keep walking and hope to reach a town or a city soon?

The car slowed down as it approached and I started panicking.

Was I going to die? Stranger danger was likely a thing here, too, and I had nothing to defend myself with.

I realized it was a van, and it only made me more afraid for my life.

The driver rolled the window down. It was an old woman with grey hair and a kind smile.

“Hi there, hon, you need a ride to town?” Would a grandma want to kill me?

I wished I could say that all grandmas were sweet, but all serial killers grew old eventually, so maybe...

“You won’t be able to get there before it gets dark,” she informed me, looking slightly worried about me being out here.

I decided I could trust her enough to give me a ride.

I could likely defend myself against her if it came to that. Maybe.

“Thank you,” I said, walking around to the passenger side.

Once inside I offered her a smile and gave her the fake story I’d so masterfully come up with while I’d planned for this at home.

“I’m not from around here,” I started, hoping I sold the lie perfectly.

“My boyfriend wanted me to move in with him after having dated long distance, but then he broke up with me and left me on the side of the road, and I have no idea where I am.” I held my breath and begged for my lying skills to work.



“You poor thing,” she shook her head. “ Men ,” she muttered, and I tried not to get offended by that.

I’d never dated a man so I couldn’t really speak about that part, but I did know I was only into men.

“Oh dear,” she said, slamming her dashboard, then sighed.

“We need to stop at the gas station. I swear this thing is leaking or something. I had a full tank just yesterday!” I couldn’t help but smile at her.

I was glad she’d been the one to find me.

“My son works at the gas station so it won’t take long at all.

He’s also the one who gave me this van, so he’ll be the one who has to deal with it,” she muttered.

I could only smile at her, feeling more at ease having met my first person here.

I knew we spoke the same language but I feared I would end up somewhere I couldn’t be understood.

The council didn’t seem to care what happened to us anyway so why would they bother picking a good location.

But I was pleasantly surprised. For now.

“I’m Betty, by the way,” she said after a few seconds of silence. “What’s your name, hon? ”

“Niam,” I said, not bothering with the fake name I’d come up with.

It seemed so dumb now that I thought back on it.

I had this idea that I would need to change everything I was to be accepted here, but I was aching to just be myself and be good enough.

I didn’t think Betty deserved the fake me.

She hadn’t killed me, yet. So, I believed she deserved the real version.

She nodded. “I’m glad I found you, Niam.

Bears often stay clear of people, but many mama bears are with cubs, and they don’t deal well with anyone who gets too close.

” I swallowed. They’d dumped me in a bear infested forest. I must’ve done something right to survive the hours of trekking I’d done without spotting any.

Five minutes later we arrived at a gas station. There was forest on both sides, making the big parking lot secluded. Betty rolled up just in front of the store and honked the horn three times, then got out. I quickly followed, thinking that would be my best option right now.

A tall man came out, shaking his head. “Ma, again?” He wore a plaid shirt and worn jeans. His facial hair was a mixture of brown and grey, his hair mostly brown with a few greys in between.

“Don’t you Ma me! It’s leaking, I’m tellin’ you. Stupid thing,” she muttered .

He shook his head again, his shoulders slumped in defeat. “I’ll look at it,” he sighed. I

came into view then, not wanting to hide on the other side of the van. “Oh,” he said, looking between his mom and me.

“I’m Niam,” I said, quickly offering my hand in greeting.

“Jerry,” he replied, shaking my hand. He looked towards his mom with a questionable look.

She waved her hand. “Niam was dumped and left on the side of the road. He’s not from around here and I offered to take him into town.”

“I see,” Jerry said. “Would you mind watching the van while we grab my tools?” I had no idea why I should watch over it, or why it took two people to grab his tools, but I just nodded, grateful that I hadn’t been killed.

They went inside together, and I leaned against the van, looking around the empty parking lot, begging silently for the bears not to see me. I could hear their voices, and if I really focused, I would be able to hear clearly what they were saying. I listened in, not able to stop myself .

“He said it was his boyfriend,” Betty said, her voice filled with sympathy for my cover story. I should’ve felt guilty, but I really couldn’t tell her the truth.

“And he came from where?” Jerry questioned.

“I don’t know, just that they’d been seeing each other long distance. He’d moved here but was left on the road side.”

“So, the boy has nowhere to go?”

“I was going to drive him into town. Hopefully he can get a room at the motel and

return home in the morning.”

The rest was too muddled as they moved further away. They returned a few minutes later, both giving me kind smiles. I took that as Jerry’s approval of my fake story, too.

“So, where’re ya from?” Jerry asked as he opened the front of the van. I froze, not knowing their countries or anything. I decided to give the real town I had been from at home and hoped it would be answer enough.

“Prenins,” I said, grateful to finally tell something that wasn’t a lie. “So, I’m really far from home,” I tacked on, hoping they wouldn’t ask more questions about it .

They looked at one another but seemed to think it wasn’t worth asking more questions about it. “Does your family know you were left here alone?” Betty asked, still with a sympathetic look.

“My family disowned me,” I said, feeling a lump in my throat over that truth.

“Oh,” she said. “So, you have no one to return home to?” I knew she was asking because she was a good person and truly cared, but I’d been on my own for so long it was hard thinking anyone would care about me now, especially a stranger.

“No, I sold everything to come here,” I said, still feeling like that was the truth.

Everything I owned back in the Realm of Mages had been sold.

I had even asked my father if the money I got could be changed to the currency they used here, but he’d said that would be for my mother and him to use, having spent a lot of money raising me, only for me to amount to nothing in the end.

I hadn’t wanted to disagree, silently nodding and leaving my money behind.

“Oh, honey,” she said, holding her hand over her heart. Then she looked to her son, speaking with him with just a look shared between them. Something only people who truly loved and understood each other could do. Something I’d never had .

“I need an extra person helping me out here, if you’re looking for work,” Jerry offered, giving me a smile.

“I could work.... Here?” I asked, a little stunned. I had accomplished the first thing on my list! And it hadn’t even turned dark outside yet. He nodded with a smile.

“I would love that!” I answered happily. “Thank you!”

He laughed, “don’t thank me yet, I can be a strict boss.

” I could tell from the gleam in his eyes that he was teasing me.

It felt nice. They were nice. To me . “About your living arrangements,” he continued, and I felt the rush of getting a job take a back seat as the reality of not having a roof over my head hit.

“I’ll figure something out for tonight, so no need to worry about that right now.

” I breathed easier after hearing that. I did need a place to stay, but for now I had a job.

I chatted with Betty as Jerry worked. He swore and it sounded like he hit the car from where he was working. I had no idea how to fix cars, but it didn’t seem like it was going too well.

“Ma,” Jerry sighed and moved away from the van. “I think it’s done.”

“You fixed it?” She beamed, moving closer .

“No,” he sighed. “It’s not the amount of gas it had; the light indicated it was the motor. It can still drive but from the look of it, it’ll shut down any minute. I don’t want you driving it anymore.”

“Well, that sucks,” she muttered. “I had this whole thing planned with the flowers and everything.”

“I know, but I basically got it for free so we can’t be too mad about it.” Betty shrugged at his words, likely thinking he was right. “I’ll drive it over to the parking lot, then have it removed tomorrow.”

I had an idea, but I needed to see the inside first. “Can I, um, look in the back before you move it?” They looked confused but Jerry nodded. I opened the back doors and saw the inside was empty except for one cardboard box. This would work.

“Can I have it?” I asked. “I’ll pay for it with my first paycheck,” I quickly added.

“Why do you want it, hon? Do you know how to fix it?” Betty asked.

I shook my head. “No, if I did, I would’ve helped out before.

I was thinking of living in it.” I was smiling, getting more used to the idea as I pictured a mattress and some insulation.

I could get it done before the winter if I saved up all my money.

I could eat once a day and work on improving the van in my free time.

“Oh,” Jerry said, looking inside it, too. “I hadn’t even thought about that. I guess with

some changes it could be livable.” I smiled at them, feeling excited. I had a job and a home! And it was only my first day on Sutiner.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Xarius

It had taken all my willpower to stay at the charity event with Julie.

My soulmatch was on Sutiner and I was dying to meet them.

I still had no idea if it was a woman or man, having always been attracted to both.

The thought of my person being so close, but yet so far away, had me impatiently rocking in place as we sat through the tedious dinner.

Thankfully, Declan had left Julie alone and hadn't greeted us. She felt like it was rude, but I'd appreciated it. Everyone would've been uncomfortable and Julie didn't deserve any more pain caused by that spineless bastard.

Speaking of Julie... "You're going where?!" she asked, accusingly. I should've probably started this conversation differently, but I hadn't had my morning coffee yet and customers would start arriving soon.

"I have to find a friend," I continued. "And I don't know where they are exactly. So, I can't work until I've found them." She looked so confused and a little hurt.

"Why haven't you ever spoken about them?"

For five years I've been by your side, and I've never once heard you talk about any friends, and now you're planning on just leaving?



” I understood why she was hurt. She thought I had been keeping this “friend” from her, even though I actually hadn’t.

I tried to calm myself and say the closest thing to the truth as I could.

“I’ve been waiting for my friend to turn up.

And in all the time you and I have known each other, I’ve waited.

It wasn’t until yesterday that I knew they were close, or at least in the country.

” I couldn’t say on Sutiner, so country worked alright.

Fuck, what if my soulmatch wasn’t in this country?

I would have to get a passport made. We got birth certificates and other necessary things from the council when they booted us out of our home, but a passport I needed to get myself.

“So, they were the ones who called you yesterday at the charity event?” she asked. I’d just played along with her first question yesterday and said that yes, the glowing weird light was just my phone.

I nodded. “Yes, they said they were finally here, and now I have to find them.”

“No wonder you were so out of it afterwards,” she said, shaking her head. I’d run out of the room to watch the locket in private, needing to see the proof that my soulmatch truly was here. When I’d returned, I’d acted like nothing was amiss even though my insides were jittery with nerves.

She gave me an odd look. “You’re safe, right? This isn’t some kind of thing where

bad people are looking for you, so now you need to run , kind of thing?" I laughed, pleased that she wasn't mad but worried for me instead.

"I promise you; I'll be okay. The biggest problem is finding them and I have no clue how long that'll take," I admitted, glad I could share a little bit with her.

I'd been looking forward to them coming to Sutiner ever since I arrived myself, saving up for travelling to find them, and to give them a better start with more money between us.

Living in a van and using my money to make it a home, I'd been ready for years.

"It makes sense," Julie said. "Do you have anything to go on? Tracking or last known location? Are they in danger?"

I shook my head. "Not in danger as far as I know and I have some kind of tracking device I can use, but not a perfect one. I just know the sooner I get to them, the better for us both."

She nodded. "And I guess you can't tell me more about it than that?"

"If I could I would've told you years ago," I admitted. She softened further at hearing that. "You're my best friend Jules, always there to help me out. I wouldn't keep anything from you if I had the choice."

She hugged me then, tightly. "I know. Just stay safe and call me once in a while, okay? I need to hear your voice and know you're okay." I gave a quick nod. I could do that. I would do that.

I left Julie inside the shop and moved out back towards my van.

I wasn't working today, but I still felt guilty over leaving her without help on those days I usually worked.

She could easily hire someone new to take my place, and I'd told her to do that, unsure if I could get it back once I returned.

If I returned. I had a suspicion we would spend most of our time on the road, finding the other shunned mages and helping them out, too.

And once that was done... Sutiner wouldn't be my home anymore.

Shaking the thoughts of my future away, I unlocked my van and crawled inside looking through my things.

I would stock up on some food and shower in the back of the coffeeshop before leaving.

I wanted to get on the road as early as possible, but I still needed to refuel and stock up on that, too, just in case I found myself somewhere rural without gas stations nearby.

I had been dumped in a field of hay when I arrived. It hadn't been fun trying to find my way towards a town. I hoped to never do that again. Ever. I could feel the spiky hay rub against me sometimes, like a haunting memory from my past.

I picked out some fresh clothes and then walked back inside to shower. Then I would say my final goodbye to Julie and be on my way.

My locket wasn't helping. At. All.

I'd been driving for five hours in a random direction hoping to either see the light

grow brighter or dimmer.

It hadn't changed. Which meant I wasn't driving in the right or wrong direction.

I sat in my van outside a diner, contemplating which way to go now.

I wanted to drive for a few more hours before resting for the night.

The diner had been perfect for filling up my stomach and fueling my mood, but now I needed to move on.

Making a decision was proving to be harder than I thought it would be, though.

Closing my eyes I tried to envision where to go.

Holding the locket tight I tried to somehow let it guide me.

I looked into the soft glow, feeling myself relax further into my car seat aaaaaand nothing .

Nada. I got zero from it. Shaking my head I started to drive further north, hoping it would be the right direction.

Setting my phone alarm for one hour, I would then check to see if the locket had changed. I wouldn't let this ruin my mood.

I was coming for them .

One hour later, the glow changed. "Yes!" I exclaimed, looking at the slightly brighter glow, hoping I wasn't imagining things.

I could very well be seeing things. A nice old lady had been selling baked goods outside her house as I drove through a small town.

I was ninety-five percent sure they had weed in them.

That or the chocolate was just that good.

To be fair, chocolate had a way of making everyone feel better. Especially me.

Feeling like I finally had a true destination, I called up Julie, letting myself relax and enjoy the journey ahead. She picked up on the third ring. “Did you find them?” She seemed so eager and invested. I smiled, grateful she was my friend.

“Not yet,” I replied. Looking outside for a rest stop. I had a full bladder all of a sudden and I needed relief. “I know the direction at least, just not how far yet,” I explained, loving I could share that much.

“Hmm, at least you know you’re heading the right way.

” I could hear the smile in her voice. “I just hope you take a second to enjoy the scenery, too.” I had to admit that I hadn’t really done that, too focused on who my soulmate was and if we’d ever met before.

They would be five years younger than me, having just been shunned on their eighteenth birthday.

If they, like me, had been shunned the day after, I knew their birthday.

I quickly grabbed my journal and with one hand on the wheel, I wrote the date down for the future.

“I’ll try to enjoy it more,” I replied, satisfied with myself now that I knew their birthday. I couldn’t wait to learn more about them.

“You do that. Drive safely!”

“I will!” I said, then hung up.

I could enjoy the view, after I’d relieved my bladder.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Niam

It was my first official day working at the gas station.

Jerry had been a saint yesterday and gotten me a mattress and some pillows and a duvet.

I would need to insulate the van next, but right now the temperature outside was warm enough that I wasn't freezing.

My only concern had been bears. I feared they could easily break open my new home and have me as a tasty snack.

Jerry had laughed at that, shaking his head as he helped me get the mattress in.

He wouldn't have laughed if he found me dead this morning, but I didn't say that. I wouldn't want to jinx myself .

I'd started my morning with some coffee from a can.

It was lukewarm, but I needed the caffeine kick to get moving so early.

Jerry had knocked on the van when he arrived, bringing breakfast with him.

After we'd eaten, he told me he had an employee-only bathroom that was not available to customers.

To my delight it had a small shower inside, allowing me to shower before or after work as I pleased.

Working here was proving to be perfect for all my needs so far.

I stood behind the counter now and waited for customers to come in.

Jerry had said we got around five a day although sometimes none at all, so I knew it would be slow work, but I appreciated that.

The store had a layout that worked for easy access.

People could get in and immediately grab whatever they came for, bright lights overhead showing everything off.

We had a section for coffee that Jerry had a special fondness for.

Most of the customers needed a bathroom break and then they'd come in for coffee.

He said that was one of the most sold items we carried.

Other than gas and water, of course. It wasn't the biggest store, but seeing how far out in the countryside we were, it didn't seem to matter much.

We sold the most essential things and then some other fun stuff people didn't know they needed until they entered the store.

Betty came in each morning with food for the counter. Some sandwiches, skewers of meat, and according to Jerry, sometimes she baked stuff, too, that they would sell.

Because I didn't have a phone, Jerry had quickly shown me how his work phone



worked, giving me both his and Betty's numbers if anything were to happen while I was here on my own.

It was an older phone and was easy enough to use.

He'd told me he had it lying around the shop for emergencies and work-related calls.

Jerry came in from the back, wiping his hands on an oil-stained rag. "Did the shower work okay?" I knew he was fixing up another car for Betty, but from the curses and slamming of things from the garage just minutes ago, I didn't think it was going too well for him.

"It was great," I replied with a grateful smile.

"But why have a shower here?" It was something I'd thought about while showering.

It looked so clean that I thought he very rarely used it, if ever.

Not that I was complaining . Getting a shower this morning had been the ultimate luxury.

I hadn't thought about how cleansing it could be for the soul.

With each drop of water that cascaded down my body, more of my old world disappeared.

I had now rinsed away the last remnants of my old home, and that was a huge comfort.

Jerry scratched his beard. "You know we have that restroom that's accessible from outside?"

I nodded, “yes?”

He sighed, then said, “well, people are some nasty fuckers, okay, and after having dealt with their literal shit on the walls, I decided that I needed a place to shower if it ever happened again.” My face must’ve shown how truly disgusted and horrified I was.

“I know!” he exclaimed, his hands in the air.

“On the fucking walls, can you believe it?!” I shook my head, still horrified.

“I still think about it sometimes, like, were they aiming for them? Or did they fall and point by accident?” I hoped he wasn’t waiting for me to answer him.

I really didn’t want to talk about how people projectile shat on walls.

I was saved by the first customer of the day, a man coming inside to pay for his gas. I had Jerry help me with the customer and hoped the shit talk was over.

Around lunch time, Betty came by again. She had borrowed Jerry’s car and had driven him to work this morning, before he’d knocked on my van. When she came in with the food for the counter, she’d been in and out quickly, but now she seemed to have enough time to eat with us.

“What do you need the space for?” I asked, eating one of the chicken sandwiches she’d brought for Jerry and me. We were discussing the car Jerry was working on for her. She mentioned she’d been worried it wouldn’t have enough space.

“I own a flower shop in town,” she replied, taking a bite of her own food. “I need to drive them out for delivery and a van seems perfect for that.”

“Your new car will do just fine,” Jerry said kindly, clearly feeling somewhat guilty over not being able to fix the van he’d given her.

“Oh, it will, and the van has much more use now,” she replied easily, then looked at me. “Was it warm enough for you, hon?”

It warmed my heart how much she cared. They met me only yesterday and had already shown me more kindness than any other person had in over four years.

“It was perfect,” I replied. “But I will add some insulation before the season changes.” I thought about asking them about stores to buy it from, but I figured it would do me good to save up a little first. The currency here was different than in my world and it would take some time to get used to how much stuff was worth.

“I’ll help you out with that,” Jerry offered, swallowing the last of his sandwich, licking his fingers clean before wiping them on his jeans.

“Thank you,” I smiled, hoping I wouldn’t tear up. I had already cried once in this world and hoped I could at least last a few more days before leaking again. But it was hard not to. This had already been a perfect day, and it wasn’t even over yet.

We cleaned up after ourselves and waved Betty goodbye. She needed to return to her shop and would be back later to pick Jerry up. She’d told me not to worry about dinner tonight, stating firmly that she’d prepared something for me already. I’d smiled and thanked her before she left.

“Ready to tackle the next customer on your own?” Jerry asked, pointing to the approaching car. I nodded.

I was ready to be useful.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Xarius

I had been driving for three days, the locket glowing brighter as the hours passed.

I had to pay for a motel room yesterday, needing a shower and somewhere to wash my clothes.

They luckily had a laundromat I could use while I refreshed myself.

I'd decided to clean my sheets, too, not knowing when I would get the chance again.

After filling my belly with some quick take-out, I was on the road again, feeling my skin vibrate with excitement.

I was closing in on them .

Four hours later, the locket glowed so much I knew they were within a mile now.

Driving down a forested road, I turned and parked at a gas station, looking around at the cars curiously.

Could they be here? I couldn't see any other buildings nearby on the map, at least not in a mile radius.

Maybe they lived in the woods? Not daring to face civilization just yet.

I rubbed over my heart, desperate to find them, to help them.

I exited my van and walked inside the station.

An older man was behind the register so it couldn't have been him, my soulmatch would be eighteen.

I decided to browse as I watched the locket glow the same incessant brightness.

I was definitely at the right place. Deciding not to look like I was stealing, I grabbed some chips and a soda and went to pay.

I might as well fill up on gas, too, I thought as I paid the man.

I went outside feeling empty. I hadn't found them.

But they had to be close. I refueled my van and contemplated what to do.

I could stay and lay in wait. From the cover of my van, I could sit comfortably, and people watch for hours.

I parked my car so it faced the parking lot, and then sat and waited .

Fifteen minutes later, the man from inside came out.

He walked towards a parked van, likely grabbing something he needed.

He knocked on the van, a weird thing to do, but then it opened and a red headed guy appeared, smiling softly at the man.

It had to be him . He was my soulmatch, but just to be absolutely certain, I would stay and watch him a little while longer.

I couldn't just run up to him and tell him I was a shunned mage, too.

What if I were mistaken? No, I would sit here and simply observe him.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Niam

I had this weird buzzing feeling in my body like something was close to happening.

I almost felt drunk on it. A knock on the side of my van had me hurrying over to open it.

I knew it was Jerry; we'd come up with a special knock, just in case a bear would ever knock on it.

Jerry hadn't laughed, at least not while we practiced the secret knock.

He might have when we told Betty. I didn't care.

I was still alive to tell the tale so I must've done something right .

Jerry had to run into town and asked if I could man the station while he was gone. Nodding, I climbed out and walked inside. I felt eyes on me the whole way, likely from bears .

Inside I still felt someone watching me.

I looked outside and spotted a black van.

Not creepy at all, I thought to myself as I made sure the store phone was ready beside me.

I could easily call Jerry to return if someone sketchy appeared.

I tried looking inside of it, but it was hard to see from this distance.

I knew someone was in there, I could feel their eyes on me, I just didn't know who or how many there were.

Ignoring it for now, I decided to work on my latest sketch.

Betty had seen me work yesterday when she came in with lunch.

I'd started sketching when there wasn't anything to do, hoping to keep my skills fresh if I ever got the opportunity to work with my art.

Betty had asked if I wanted to draw some promotional things for her to use in her store, so I was sketching a few different flower designs for her to choose from.

We'd also talked about painting the inside of her store with a flower mural, something I would love to do.

The sound of a car door slamming had my attention again. I looked up and saw a young man with black hair and a leather jacket exit the van. When he caught me staring, he stopped his stride. Was he looking at me? He seemed to question himself and went back inside his van.

Okaaaay, Creepy Steve, you can just stay there.

I resumed my sketch, making sure the phone was still ready next to me. I wasn't about to deal with a Creepy Steve alone. But for now, he seemed determined to stay inside his van, so I would pretend to ignore him until Jerry came back.



Two hours later, Jerry returned with my insulation.

“How much do I owe you?” I asked as I helped him carry everything over to my van.

“Nothing, I got all this for cheap. I can’t have my best employee getting sick from the cold, now, can I?” He chuckled.

“You mean your only employee,” I teased him, glad to have found friends already.

The fact he’d already bought something I was planning on was so thoughtful, I didn’t really know how to act, afraid I wasn’t being grateful enough.

To be honest it’d been so long since people did things for me out of kindness that I’d forgotten how to act, too afraid now to seem ungrateful.

“The best,” he stated, raising an eyebrow, as I started to protest.

“Fiiine, the best,” I gave in.

“Good.” He gave me a beaming smile. “Now that we’ve settled that, let’s get this up for you.”

We spent the next few hours working, and alternating between helping customers. The black van was still there and I felt the dark-haired stranger’s eyes on me every time I moved outside my van. I just hoped he would move on soon.

Jerry and I stood and admired our finished work.

I finally had insulation! It was such a small thing, but it felt like a huge accomplishment.

This van was my home, and I was adding to it, making it better.

Jerry and Betty had been more than kind to me, if everyone on Sutiner were as kind hearted as them, this would be the perfect world to live in.

“I’m off to dinner with my wife tonight, but I need to do some shopping first, you want to come?” Jerry asked.

“To town?” I asked for clarification .

“Yeah, I’ll drop you off here before going home.

” He closed the doors to my van and looked back at me.

“I figured it was time you saw the town. Perhaps you’d like to buy some clothes or something, and I have two hours of free time to help ya out.

” It was kind of him, and I did need something new to wear.

It wasn’t easy having only two outfits that needed washing.

I hadn’t been here for more than a week, but I liked wearing clean clothes after a shower.

Maybe I could find something in a thrift store, I truly didn’t care what I wore, I just wanted it to be clean. Maybe pick up some more detergent.

“I would love that,” I answered, sending him a beaming smile.

“Do they have a thrift store or a discounted one maybe? I only have two outfits with me, and need something warmer for the next season,” I explained, locking my van

and following him to his car.

Ignoring the black van that was still parked, I entered the passenger side.

Jerry sat behind the wheel and looked over at me before starting it. “We do have a thrift store, but if you need something that’s more expensive, I can give you some of your pay ahead of time.”

“That’s kind of you, but I think I have enough for a few outfits, and I don’t care much about what I wear as long as it’s clean, warm, and comfortable.

” It seemed I had gotten what estimated to be a month’s pay, though I believed it differed from where one worked like in my home world.

But it seemed to be what Jerry would pay me monthly, and since I now had a job, I felt secure enough to spend it.

He nodded. “I think they’ll have that, hopefully in your size, too. Magda, who owns the store, loves helping, so she’ll likely follow your every move until we leave.”

I laughed. “I can’t wait to meet her.” I’d asked many questions about town, wanting to know more about the people and where Jerry and Betty lived.

It was a small town with a tight-knit community, if I were to trust Jerry’s word on it, which I did.

I actually found myself trusting them both completely.

I’d wanted to work with art in some kind of way, but now I was happy to be working at a gas station for as long as possible, finally being around people who treated me as an equal. As a friend.

Like I finally mattered.

Jerry parked the car behind a few small stores, pointing out the thrift store, and further down the road there was a general store where I could pick up some cleaning products .

“I think some lights inside the van would do you good, too,” Jerry said, pointing to another store.

“They have those fairy lights and other ones that run on batteries. And over there,” he pointed behind us.

“Is a small bookstore. The owner, Harry, has all sorts of genres, so if you like reading maybe check that out, too.” I nodded, hoping I had enough money for all of it.

I knew what stuff cost at the gas station, but not clothing or other things.

“I’ll start with the clothes,” I decided.

“Good choice. Do you want me to join you? I have a few errands myself, but I can start you out with a helping hand if needed.”

I shook my head, exiting the car. “I appreciate it, but maybe we can meet up once you’re done doing your thing, and you can help me with the rest then?”

“Sounds good.” He waved as he walked down the street towards a few other buildings.

I only knew the bookstore was in that direction but nothing else.

I didn’t want him to come with me in case I was lacking money.

I knew he would offer me some of his, and he'd already done plenty for me.

This way I would know what I had left and if I could afford lights and books.

I really wanted the books, but without light it wouldn't really matter.

I suppose I could sit in front and read, but I much preferred to be able to read on the mattress, propped up on some pillows and being all warm and cozy.

I took in the town as I got closer to Magda's store.

It was a cute, small town with lots of flower pots and trees planted in the open areas, making it even more adorable.

The door had a bell attached that chimed when I entered.

I spotted Magda right away. She was dressed in bright colors that didn't match at all, but somehow it worked on her.

She beamed my way and stood up to greet me.

"Oh my, aren't you a handsome young man," she gushed. "I'm Magda and you must be Niam."

"How did you-"

"Betty," she grinned. "She told all of us how sweet and adorable you are."

"Oh." Betty had been talking about me to her friends? My heart felt so full at that moment. Was this what it felt like to have true friends? I liked it .

“And don’t worry,” she continued, still smiling brightly. “She had only nice things to say.”

“I’m glad,” I smiled, hoping my eyes weren’t looking glassy. It was so weird being seen. Being cared for.

She clapped her hands, thankfully ignoring my nearly leaking eyes. “What are you looking for?”

“Um, clothes that’ll fit me,” I replied. “And maybe some for colder weather, too.”

“What’s your style?” she asked, already looking through the racks for something.

“Um, something that’ll fit and won’t be too uncomfortable,” I replied.

I had no idea what size I was in this world, so I just added I didn’t know my actual size.

She tutted around, making a pile of stuff for me to try on in the only changing room she had.

I felt eyes on me and let my gaze track where they came from.

Creepy Steve was staring at me from outside the store.

I had to admit he was handsome, and probably also dangerous ; I had to remember that part.

I hadn’t survived for a week just to be killed by tall, dark, and handsome, no thank you.

“Here you go, sweetheart. Many things for you to go through.” She waved me in and closed the curtain to give me some privacy. There had to be at least fifty items, but thankfully she’d started me out with just ten in here .

I began trying them on and looked at the price tag. I would be able to afford a lot of them, which made me giddy with excitement. She’d picked out a jacket, too, which made me realize I also needed shoes. These sneakers wouldn’t do in the cold.

I sorted the clothes that fit in one pile and the rest in another, then opened the curtain when I was back in my old clothes. “I like these ones,” I said, placing them on her counter. “Do you sell shoes, too?”

“I do,” she replied, heading in another direction as I began to pick out the next items to try on.

When she returned, she brought several pairs of boots in a cardboard box.

“These are the only ones I figured would fit you.” She put the box down and I began to look through it, trying on three pairs before I found one that fit me.

They were either real leather or fake, but I didn’t really care.

They fit perfectly and looked brand new.

I left with three bags full of clothes and my new shoes.

Magda had been wonderful and I promised to return again soon.

I still had some money left which I hoped would be enough for lights and one book.

Maybe they had a library here where I could borrow books; then I didn’t have to

worry about them taking up space in my van after finishing them.

I'd completely forgotten about my stalker, so when he appeared in front of me, smiling so big, I was momentarily stunned.

Nope! Not today, Satan! I spun around as fast as possible and ran for my life.

I might have overreacted a bit, running away from someone who hadn't even said anything.

But he'd been watching me all day, and I had this desire of really wanting to stay alive.

Jerry turned around the corner and I almost ran straight into him. He grabbed my arm and looked me over with concern. "You alright?"

I nodded quickly, thinking about telling him of the man, but decided against it.

I didn't want to seem weird or like I was making stuff up.

They'd been nothing but kind to me and I didn't want to push my luck.

Smiling, I said, "I forgot where the other stores were so I came looking for you. I got clothes and shoes." I held up the bags proudly.

"Oh, that's great!" He said, helping me carry the bags. "So, you need detergent, lights, and books?"

"Yes," I replied, glad to have him beside me for the rest of the shopping spree. "And in that order. If I can't afford books I'll wait till next time."



“There’s a book box in the center of town, you can take all the books you want from there and donate the ones you own but don’t want anymore. Maybe we should head there, too, since they’re free.”

That sounded amazing. The thrill of getting to own more stuff that would be just mine was almost enough to ignore the feeling of eyes on me.

Almost.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Xarius

So.... that hadn't worked out as I'd planned.

My soulmatch had run away, almost as if he was afraid of me. But why? I smiled, I wasn't able to stop smiling. Finally seeing him up close, he was gorgeous! The red hair and those beautiful brown innocent eyes. I wanted to protect him, not scare him off.

I'd kept my distance as he met up with his friend, watching from the shadows as he picked out stuff he needed. I could've helped him with that! I was pouting as I followed them around, making sure they wouldn't spot me as they did their thing .

They entered a bookstore and I was able to sneak all the way over there and listen in around the corner. When they walked out of there, I could overhear their conversation clearly.

"I'll drop you off now and return with breakfast in the morning. Are you fine on your own tonight?" the older man asked.

"I'll be fine. I bought some food at the store to eat and then I'll read until I fall asleep," my lovely soulmatch replied.

So that meant he would be alone soon. I could buy some stuff and then drive to the gas station and woo him there. It seemed like a perfect plan! Then he would have time to get his things put away, before I knocked on his van later.

With that plan in mind, I strode back towards the general store and bought some things to help me seduce my soulmatch. This was going to be perfect. I could feel it!

As I drove back towards the gas station, I called Julie. “Hey!” I greeted cheerily, my mood brightening further the closer I got to my soulmatch.

“Hi, yourself. Any news?” I’d told her that I knew where he was now but hadn’t met him yet .

“I met him today,” I announced, then got sad all over again as I recalled the scared look on his face.

“That’s great! What did he say?”

“He ran away from me,” I admitted, needing her advice before I disturbed him again.

“He, what? I thought you were friends?” I got her confusion; I hadn’t really explained what he was to me. “Is that why you kept referring to him as they? You didn’t know his gender before?”

“Yeah,” I replied. “I, it’s hard to explain. But we are friends, just friends that’ve never met.”

“Oh, you met online then? OMG! Have you been dating a guy you met online for years, only for him to run away from you?!”

“Dating?!” I’d made sure to let her know we were only friends.

“Well, you’ve never seen anyone that I know of in the time we’ve been friends, and you said you’d waited for him since then. But honestly dating someone you don’t even know the gender of is so you. You’re just attracted to their personality, and

that's so cute!"

"I guess that's kind of our situation," I replied, ignoring the cute part. I couldn't tell her that he was my soulmatch and together we would make magic .

"So, he's never seen your face before today, I take it?"

"Today was the first time, yes."

"And he ran?"

"Before I could even say a word."

"Well, you can be intimidating at first. Those piercings and tattoos. And the fact that you're tall."

"I was smiling!" I defended myself, pouting when she started to laugh.

"Then he must've been horrified!" she cackled.

I sighed. "Why did I call you again?"

"Oh, you love me! Maybe introduce yourself as soon as he sees you next time, then he'll know you aren't the tall and scary man he thinks you are." That was actually a good idea. I could rush out the words that would make him realize we were the same.

"Thank you!" I said, grinning from ear to ear as I parked near the gas station. It was getting dark and since they'd closed earlier today, the station was dark inside, meaning my man would be alone in his van.

"Good luck!" Julie said, then hung up .

I got out of the van and closed the door as quietly as possible, then made my way over to his van.

It was white while mine was black. Perfect opposites.

Relationship goals right there . I did the same knock I'd seen the man make before, and he quickly opened the door with a smile on his face, though it died instantly when he saw me standing there.

He bolted around me and ran for his life into the forest.

Well... Fuck.

I ran after him, chasing him between the trees.

I hated nature! There were rocks and bushes everywhere, making my pursuit harder than I wanted it to be.

I caught up with him, my long legs perfect for running.

When I had him in my arms he wiggled and fought me, then started screaming.

I held one arm around his waist and used one hand to silence him.

He knocked his head against my nose, making me drop him as I held my bleeding and likely broken nose.

I regretted having a nose piercing. Fuck that hurt.

I was about to yell out that I was a shunned mage, when I saw him passed out in front of a tree.

Did he run straight into it? I shook my head, wiping the blood off on my t-shirt, thankful it was the black one today, then checked his head.

A bruise was forming on his forehead and he whined when I poked it.

I kneeled and picked up his limp body, then held him tightly against me and walked back towards the parking lot.

I placed him in the passenger seat, locking the door so he couldn't escape if he woke up before I returned with his stuff.

I didn't want him to leave his belongings behind.

The clothes and books seemed important to him, and I understood that.

I took down the lights, too, and brought his pillows and duvet.

We could share my mattress but more to snuggle with would help in the winter.

He was still out of it when I returned so I stocked the back of the van, placing the lights on the ceiling and, once I was satisfied, I climbed into the front seat and began to drive further out. I needed him away from people until he'd heard everything I had to say to him.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Niam

My head was pounding, and I groaned at the bright light behind my eyelids.

Gently prying them open, I took in my current situation.

I was lying in a van, but not my van. This one was all pretty and decorated inside.

With wood panels on the sides and... was that my fairy lights on the ceiling?

I turned my throbbing head and saw my books on some shelves that had elastic on them to keep them in place while driving.

The back doors opened and there he was, my stalker. Everything came back to me. I backed further into the van, feeling like now was the part where I got killed. Before I could panic further, he held his hands up and rushed out, "I'm a shunned mage, too."

That had my attention. "What?" I asked, wanting the words to be true. Another one like me?

"I'm the first shunned mage," he replied, giving me a kind smile.

"You're Leah's son?" I asked, sitting up and allowing myself to hope I wasn't getting killed after all.

"I am," he nodded. "Can I come in? I don't want to scare you, I just need to talk to you."

“Well, it’s your van,” I said, not caring I was being sarcastic. He had kidnapped me after all.

He smiled brighter and sat down. He had the most gorgeous light blue eyes. I winced. “Was that me?” I pointed to his nose.

He nodded. “Don’t worry, I found it extremely sexy you were able to protect yourself.” His nose had dried blood around it and I couldn’t tell if it was broken or not.

“Uh, um, cool.” Was he into me? Or teasing me? Did he need anything from me? “What time is it?” The door was open, letting me peek outside and see the many trees and bright sunlight.

“Just after eight,” he replied .

“Jerry!” I said, getting ready to move outside but was hit with a burst of nausea. “He’ll worry,” I said, holding my head as the throbbing calmed down.

“I’ll call the gas station,” he said, likely knowing who Jerry was from his obsessive stalking. He used his phone to find the number easily. “Hi, I’m calling on behalf of... Wait, what’s your name?” he asked, holding the phone to his chest as he waited for my response.

“Niam,” I replied, hoping Jerry hadn’t been too worried.

“I have Niam here with me,” he said. I could hear Jerry on the other side, sounding relieved.

“Well, I found him unconscious in the parking lot, a big bruise on his head and drove him to the hospital. I’ll bring him back in a little bit.



” They shared a few more words and then they hung up.

“Jerry told me to apologize for him. He didn’t like leaving you there each night alone, but he’s glad you’re okay. ”

“Well, I wouldn’t have been knocked out if you hadn’t chased me,” I reminded him.

He gave me a guilty smile. “You kept running away from me, what else was I supposed to do?”

“Gee, I don’t know, maybe leave a written note? ”

“Huh, that would’ve been a great idea actually. But I couldn’t tell you I was a shunned mage in the note, and I doubt you’d want to talk to me if you saw a note with “ call me ” on it.”

I had to give him that. “Fine, your kidnapping was valid. Now can we please move on to the part where you tell me why you needed to talk to me?” I figured it was because we were both shunned from our world, and I would like a friend I could share that with.

He must’ve been lonely here all these years without anyone to talk to about our home world, or just magic in general.

He leaned back against the side and looked deep in thought. His teeth pulled on his bottom lip, making it impossible not to look at it. I wanted to straddle his lap and take over the biting.

Where the hell had that come from?!

I needed to reign myself in a bit. I might’ve truly hurt my head. Then I felt mortified.

I'd knocked myself out against a tree. This would be one of those things that would keep me up at night for the rest of my life.

"I was given a task before being shunned," he began.

I raised a brow. This was interesting . "My mothers had a suspicion of why I was being shunned, and they told me more mages would follow. In old legends of our world, the most powerful mages were born without magic and couldn't reach it without their soulmatch.

" I snorted. Fairytales had always been just that, fairytales .

He stopped talking and looked over at me. "You haven't even heard the rest yet."

I rolled my eyes. "If it sounds too good to be true, it likely is. We don't have magic and we need to just accept that and make the best life we can for ourselves here."

He shook his head and looked almost hurt that I wasn't as into the old legends as he apparently was.

Maybe he wasn't doing well here, hoping someday to get back to our old world.

Maybe he had friends, a loving family? But the fact his mom, Leah, had been in on his banishment didn't bode well for his home situation.

I hated my parents for their treatment of me, but at least mine weren't the ones who had kicked me through the portal.

"I was given this." He held up a locket that was shining so brightly my head was aching from the impact. "I was given it to find my soulmatch," he explained.

I closed my eyes against the brightness and sighed. “And let me guess, you need me to help you find them on this heroic quest? ”

“No,” he said, surprising me. I looked over at him, trying to ignore the light. He looked me straight in the eyes, a vulnerable look on his face. “ You are my soulmatch.”

Xarius

Maybe I should've waited with that part. Niam looked pale, his eyes wide and worried. Then he laughed. "Oh, my God! You almost had me there!" he wheezed, wiping tears away from his eyes. "Ow!" he said, rubbing at his sore head.

"I'm not joking," I said sternly, taking the locket out and removing it from my neck, placing it over his heart. The light burst out filling the entire van with its glow and then the light seeped into us both, leaving the locket without any light, only a regular locket now .

Niam gaped at me. "How did you do that! You have magic?! How?! " For someone who seemed over not having magic, he wasn't dealing well with the thought of me suddenly getting it.

"I told you. The locket would find my soulmatch, and it led me to you."

He rubbed his temple, likely annoyed he was dealing with this so early in the morning, and with what had to be a massive headache. "And together we would get our magic?" That was as far as I'd gotten with the story before he'd snorted with amusement over my " fairytale ".

"Yes, and then we need to help the other shunned mages sent here and then we can fight back," I explained eagerly.

He sighed. "Look, I'm all for getting my magic, but the whole fighting the council of mages thing, that's just not me, okay? What I want is just to be accepted as me and

live a comfortable life without any drama.”

“So, you’d rather leave the mages that need our help and stay in your van forever while people suffer because you don’t want to deal with uncomfortable stuff?

” I knew I was being rude, but I’d waited five years for him, only to hear him dismiss it completely, choosing his own happiness over others who needed his help.

He shot me an angry look. “Drive me home. Now.”

“It’ll be my pleasure. People need you there to help them pay for their gas, and we can’t leave those poor people without your help.

” I slammed the back door before he could answer me, hoping he would stay back there as I drove us back to his van.

This wasn’t at all how I’d imagined this day would go.

Why did my soulmatch have to be so selfish?

I thought he, like myself, would do anything to help others, but maybe I had been wrong about that.

Maybe soulmatches weren’t compatible all the time, but simply existed to get their magic.

I shook my head, ignoring the heartache I felt over dropping my soulmatch off.

I should probably return to Julie. If Niam didn’t want to help then I was free to do whatever I wanted for the rest of my life.

Without him. Without magic. I would never be able to see my mothers again.

I'd promised them I would do what they asked of me.

I was letting them down. I wiped a tear away from my eye and focused on the road.

When I was parked next to his van, he tore out of it and ran inside the gas station, not even giving me as much as a little wave. I then waited five minutes before leaving the lot. I had to figure out what to do now, and I figured giving him some space would help.

I called Julie as soon as I got into my motel room. I would stay in town for a week, hoping to convince him to help me out, but the next two days I would leave him alone, letting him think I'd left for good, hoping he would be regretting his choice.

"Hi! How'd it go?" She sounded so happy and bright. I needed that. I smiled and sighed as I sucked in her happiness. I didn't care if that sounded weird, I needed some positivity to fuel my plummeting mood.

"I talked to him," I said, sighing before adding, "he wasn't interested in helping me out."

"With what?" she asked.

"I can't tell you what exactly, but he's the only one who can help me, and this thing is like my life mission. If I can't get him to help me out, I no longer have a purpose and that scares me. And that's without the people we would be helping out as well. I can't help them either without him."

"That was a lot of 'I can't's ". How about you figure out what you can do instead?" She was always so wise.

“This was why I called you. Thanks, Jules.”

“I’m always ready to help you out, Xar. But maybe give him some space before you try again?”

“I’m already planning on leaving him alone for two days, hoping that will be enough.”

“Hmm, and if it’s still not enough then maybe try to stick around and get to know him better.

Now that you’ve met up maybe friendship will help his decision to help you out.

I have no idea if you need help with something dangerous, but if it’s not, then maybe that’s all you can do and hope for the best.”

“Thank you. That seems like a good way to prove to him it’ll be worth it for him, too.”

“I know that I miss you around here, maybe he’ll decide to help so he won’t have to see you go. ”

I hoped she was right. Ever since the locket hit his chest and its light transferred to us, I’d felt this tug inside of me, begging me to get back to him. If he felt the same, he would be driven mad. I just hoped he wasn’t as stubborn as me.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Niam

This had to stop.

Jerry was fussing every time I touched my heart.

This annoying feeling of being pulled, like an invisible string was tugging at me.

Had the locket done something to bind us together?

Had he known? I didn't even get his name!

It had been two days and I knew he was long gone.

Hell, I'd stormed out of his van and stayed inside with a worried, but relieved Jerry, until I was certain he had left.

And now? Now I was fucking furious. He'd talked to me like I was a horrible person, just because I wanted to enjoy life for once.

It wasn't my fault he'd spent his time waiting for this legendary fairytale story to come true.

Had I believed him? Yes. But that didn't change the fact that I finally had friends who cared about me.

I wasn't ready to give that up. Not even for a man who was my supposed soulmatch.



No matter how gorgeous he was. If only this incessant tugging would stop!

“I really think you should see a doctor,” Jerry said, looking at where my hand was rubbing against my chest. He’d said the same thing yesterday.

I’d already assured him I’d been looked over and everything was fine.

I just needed rest and then my body would heal itself.

“I’ll be fine,” I said, giving him a smile.

I liked that he worried. It felt nice having people care.

This right here was why I couldn’t just leave.

I might be selfish in the handsome stranger’s eyes, but for once I wanted to be selfish.

I wanted to enjoy being alive. For once, I chose me .

“Fine, I won’t bring it up again, but I don’t want you working the next few days, alright?”

Ma’s sick so I need to drop by with some medicine for her.

I’m closing while I’m gone with a sign that I’ll be back in two hours.

You rest in your van.” It was the first real order he’d given me, and the first time he truly felt like my boss.

“Betty’s sick?” I asked, concerned. “Is it bad?” We had healers that dealt with sick people back home, so I had no idea how to react.

“Just a cold, but she needs to stay in bed and is out of medicine.” I nodded. Betty’s husband had died last year. I hadn’t asked how he’d died. That seemed like something they should tell me themselves when or if they wanted to. But that also meant that Betty was left alone while she was sick.

“Anything I can do?” I offered, walking outside the station with him as he locked up.

“Just rest. My wife is making some soup and we’ll both stay the night there.”

That helped calm me further, knowing Betty wouldn’t be alone.

“I’ll do that,” I assured him, then waved as he drove off.

I went to my van and began reading the only book he hadn’t taken.

I should’ve realized the easing in my chest meant he was getting closer, but I’d been too into my book to notice.

When the knocks began, I thought it was Jerry who had returned, but no, those blue eyes mixed with that sinful smile wasn’t Jerry .

I sighed. “What do you want?” I felt both pleased that he hadn’t left, but also pissed.

“I’m here to make a deal with you,” he replied, his eyes gleaming in the sunlight.

“A deal?”

“Yes. You want to live your life in this van, working here, and I respect that. So, I only ask for one year of your time. One year and then you can return.”

Was he for real? “You want me to go with you for a year, and then what?”

“Then you can do as you please, but hopefully by then we’ve managed to help at least some mages get their magic.” I narrowed my eyes at him.

“You think I’m just a selfish prick, right?”

He shrugged. “Had I pictured finding my soulmatch and we would be on common ground? Yes. Had I pictured you would share the same need to help others as me, yes. But I also realize that I can’t change who you are, and since it has to be you, then I’ll need to compromise. ”

“Why is it so important to you to get your magic? Aren’t you angry at it? Aren’t you feeling so done with it, and our world, that you want it as far away from you as possible?!” I was getting fired up, finally letting my suppressed feelings out.

“No,” he replied calmly. “My magic has never been the issue. The issue is that the council of mages saw us as a threat and decided to dump us down here, hoping we wouldn’t find each other so they could continue to rule.”

“What?”

He gave me a weird look. “Once we get our magic, we will be the most powerful mages alive, you and I.”

“ How? ” I breathed. It was too much to hope for. I would be powerful. I wouldn’t be the weird and weak one anymore.

“According to the legends, those born without magic get to be in the council of mages, having animals to help them out, too. But it’s been so long that it is seen as just a legend.

But my mother assured me that was the reason we got shunned.

The council of mages don't want to give up their positions. ”

That changed everything. I hadn't cared about payback, but knowing I would be stronger than them? I needed to see my father's face as I stood as leader of our people. I could almost feel the revenge and it tasted so sweet on my tongue.

“Okay,” I said, ready to get started. “So how do we do this soulmatch thing?” I asked, getting outside and feeling ready for battle.

“What?” he asked, almost breathless.

“You know, how do we get our magic?”

“Oh, we have to do a ritual,” he replied, frowning.

I sighed. “You have no idea how to do the ritual, do you?”

He gave me a sheepish smile.

Fantastic.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 am*

Xarius

“I’m already regretting this,” Niam muttered with an adorable frown on his face. “I mean, I don’t even know your name. What if the ritual is some kind of weird sex thing?” He seemed to be talking to himself as he kept muttering about blood play and other stuff I decided to ignore.

“My name is Xarius,” I said, interrupting his weird speech about a sacrificial virgin.

“Great, then I at least know your name before I’m sacrificed,” he sassed. I grinned at him; he was starting to grow on me .

“I doubt it has anything to do with blood and sacrifices,” I assured him. “Maybe it’s something as simple as just having sex,” I shrugged.

“What?!” he squeaked indignantly. “We are not having sex!”

I frowned. “Why not? We’re each other’s soulmatches.

That’s more binding than a normal binding ceremony.

Ours can’t even be broken like those can.

” In our world binding ceremonies were like weddings on Sutiner.

You combined your magic, but they could be broken, and the magic was severed between the couple.

“We’ve just met!” he stomped his foot in the cutest way, and it took all I had in me not to hug him.

“Fine, then we wait, but the longer we wait, the longer until we can get our magic, help the others, and get our revenge on the council of mages. Except my mom. She didn’t want me to get shunned.”

“Wait, she didn’t?”

“What? No! She’s my mother. Why would she want to get rid of me?” His eyes dimmed and I realized the horrible truth.

“Oh,” I said, hating myself. “Yours didn’t fight it?”

He shook his head. “They wanted me gone from the day I got the first letter. I was fourteen.” I couldn’t contain myself any longer.

I hugged his body against mine, letting the scent of cheap detergent and something entirely Niam, hit my nostrils as he tensed against me, before slumping into my arms, letting me comfort him.

When we parted, he looked at the ground. “That was my first hug in over four years,” he admitted, sounding so small I just wanted to hug him against me again and never let him go.

“You might as well get used to them,” I said, tipping his chin up with my hand.

“I love giving hugs. And when you’re ready for it, I will snuggle up to you every night and protect you as you sleep.

” He swallowed as he met my gaze. I’d been waiting for him for five years.

He had no idea how badly I wanted to love him, protect him, care for him.

I had all this love inside of me that was waiting just for him.

“I, um, I’ll look forward to it,” he replied, blushing, then looked away and cleared his throat. “We should try different things then, to, you know, try to bond ourselves.”

I smiled but just as I opened my mouth, he held his hand up. “Non-sexual things first.” I pouted, but he just rolled his eyes and pretended not to blush again.

“Fine, we’ll save the fun stuff for last then,” I amended .

“You had five years to get that out of your system,” he sassed back.

I looked at him confused. “You think I slept with someone while I waited for you?”

“Well, yeah?”

“I’ve been waiting for you, Niam. Why would I sleep with someone when I knew my soulmatch wasn’t them?”

He blinked. “You, you haven’t been with anyone? Really?” Was that excitement I heard in his voice? Was my man pleased I’d waited?

“No one,” I stated, preening inside when he fought a smile. My soulmatch was too precious. I couldn’t wait to unravel every part of him.

Niam had left a note for Jerry before we headed into the forest. We needed privacy and somewhere with space around us.

I was so glad he’d agreed to help me out, and a part of me hoped he truly was in this

for life.

I couldn't bear the thought of binding myself to him, only for him to leave me someday.

He might've acted like he was doing this just to get his power, but I liked to believe he wanted me, too, and he was just afraid to admit it. Too shy to admit it even to himself.

"This should do," Niam said, looking around the open space we'd found. "Do you see any signs of bears?"

"Bears?" I asked, looking around worriedly.

"Yeah, the mama bears are extra protective and I don't want to deal with those today." Great, now I had to worry about getting killed by bears, too.

"I'll keep an eye out," I assured him, pushing my chest out. I would protect him if it came to that. I just really hoped it wouldn't.

"First things first would be touch. We never use words so I highly doubt that'll be something we need. We should also be able to do it without using extra stuff," Niam continued.

"Extra stuff?" I questioned.

"Yeah, you know ingredients and such. A binding is always just between the two who want to bond, no other items needed." I was grateful he knew about this stuff. I had zero clue, since my mothers hadn't told me how to bond, so I would gladly let him pick what we needed .



“So, we just need the two of us. Would sunlight be a factor?” I asked. I knew some magic worked better with sunlight and moonlight. Water magic worked best infused with moonlight and earth best with sunlight.

“Hmm, I doubt it. Bindings would have to be made whenever and wherever.”

I just nodded, trusting his wisdom on this. “We already tried hugging,” I reminded him, mentally tucking that away.

He shook his head. “Maybe we need to do that but skin to skin.” I perked up. “But let’s save that for later,” he continued and I suppressed the urge to pout. I would get my hands on him some day. I could be patient.

“Let’s start with hands on heart,” Niam said, placing his hand over my heart.

I was getting giddy just by that small touch.

I placed my own hand over his heart and waited for something to happen.

Nothing changed. He looked disappointed.

“Maybe skin to skin,” he said, waiting for my permission before he snuck his hand under my shirt.

I nodded, stifling a groan as his hand trailed inside of my shirt.

Why was that so fucking hot? “Um, Xarius?” I realized I’d closed my eyes in pure bliss .

“Right.” I cleared my throat and let my own hand caress his stomach, touching him slowly because I wanted to savor the feel of him under my hand. He shivered at my

touch, likely just as affected as I was.

Our breathing was affected as we touched each other's chests, our eyes locked together. Nothing happened other than the pure need inside of me to kiss him. But before I could ask him if that was okay, his own lips crashed down on mine and he let out a whimper of need.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Niam

I had to have him.

Xarius had teased me with his touch, letting me believe he was some kind of succubus as he made my body come alive.

His eyes were so dark and hungry for me that I hadn't been able to stop myself.

Now I whimpered against his soft lips, never wanting to part from him ever again.

I silently begged this wouldn't be enough to bind us, wanting the excuse of doing more without having to admit just how badly I wanted to feel him inside of me .

A moan escaped him and I felt my legs weaken at the sound. Was there a sexier man alive? His tongue caressed my lips then, begging for entrance and I let him in, opening eagerly as we moaned together.

Was that...? I whimpered again, feeling my already hard dick leak inside my jeans. He had a fucking piercing on his tongue. I was gone for. My hand that had held his chest moved around his waist as my other hand held his neck. He would have to pry me off of him.

He held me around my waist and his other hand rested on my ass, squeezing as he rubbed his hard cock against my stomach.

It wouldn't take much more. I felt my spine tingle with pleasure and I pushed my

dick against his leg, not caring that I was basically humping him.

He swallowed all my sounds, taking them as his own, before he let out a long groan.

I followed and whispered his name against his lips as I came in my pants.

We stood there, panting for breath, holding on to one another, staring into each other's eyes as reality settled over us.

We truly were soulmates. This chemistry wasn't normal.

It was intoxicating, but I didn't care. I was happy to experience this with Xarius.

Happy knowing that no one would bring him the same kind of pleasure.

Knowing he was fully mine was a heady feeling and I reveled in it as the pleasure faded away.

Xarius had been my first kiss. And the first time I shared an orgasm with anyone. I wanted him to be my first for everything. I couldn't help smiling since I knew deep in my heart that he would be. And that I would be his.

"That was," he started.

"Perfect," I finished, hoping he agreed.

"Life changing," he said, smiling at me, then placed a soft kiss on my lips and hugged me against him. I let myself relax, feeling safe and sated.

"But it wasn't enough," I said, although I wasn't disappointed at all.

With fake despair, he said, “oh, no, we have to get naked? The horror!” I giggled, loving that things weren’t awkward between us after the kiss and the um, orgasms .

“And we should start now? Horrible!” he exclaimed and pulled me towards the parking lot.

We laughed together as I let him lead me back.

We both needed to clean up and whatever else we would have to do to bind ourselves wouldn’t be done in the forest .

It was like the kiss had done something. It wasn’t enough to bind us, but our connection had opened up. I felt like I’d always known him. I trusted him. Cared for him. Soulmates or not, we were bound together now, and I loved it.

Xarius left me to clean myself up, knowing I needed to do this bit alone, and I appreciated that.

I quickly cleaned off in my van with wet wipes and pulled on some fresh pants.

I didn’t have time to shower, and I preferred to do it at night anyway so the wet wipes would have to do for now.

I went over to his van and knocked, knowing we still had to discuss when we would try binding ourselves again. Not that I was eager or anything.

He opened the door wearing only boxers. I swallowed, ready to begin the rest of the binding right away.

“Come in,” he said, looking around, likely for some pants.

I got inside and closed the door behind me.

His van was cozy inside, like a tiny home.

I loved how hard he'd worked on making it a mobile home, likely thinking the same as I did.

I'd just wanted a roof over my head and then I would make it cozier.

"How long have you had the van for?" I asked, looking up at my fairy lights that still hung on his ceiling.

I should've asked for them back, along with all my clothes.

Jerry had brought me another bag yesterday with some from Magda that she'd figured I would like.

I hadn't told him about Xarius taking my clothes and books, not wanting to put him into a bad light, figuring I would need to come up with a story about them being stolen.

I was glad I didn't have to do that now.

"I bought it four years ago," he replied, sitting down on his mattress next to me. "I slept on the couch at a friend's place until I could pay for it."

"I got mine for free," I said. "But mine doesn't drive so it's strictly a home."

"Well, now mine is yours. I already got your things in here, plus I had all this space over here saved just for you." He opened a chest, and I saw the rest of my stuff packed away nicely in there.

“That’s why you took it? You want us to share?

” I asked, feeling warm inside. We hardly knew one another, but we were fated to be together, and I didn’t care about anything else other than being with him.

Like I’d told myself a few days ago, I was choosing me now, and choosing me meant also choosing Xarius.

I was totally fine with that.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Xarius

Niam needed to tell Jerry where he was going so he wouldn't worry.

While he was inside the station, I sat and waited in my van.

We would drive somewhere for the night and try the ritual.

I was getting less patient by the minute, wanting to bind him to me for eternity.

Making him mine fully. The kiss we'd shared had been the best moment of my life.

Nothing could compare to the way Niam made me feel, and I was greedy for more of it. More of him.

The door opened and I blinked at Niam as he sat next to me. I had been so far gone in my head, thinking of ideas for us to try, really, really fun ideas, that I hadn't even seen him approach.

"Where to?" he asked, blushing a little.

We both knew what we had to do tonight, and I wasn't even sorry about how much we were rushing this.

Niam was like a craving I was dying to satisfy, and I knew I would want him for the rest of my life, making it even better. I didn't mind getting addicted to him.



I began to drive out of the parking lot, and, pointing towards town, I said, “There’s a motel in town.

It’s clean and safe. I already bought lube a few days ago, so first thing would be dinner, anything you’d like?

” We wouldn’t need condoms, since neither of us would be able to catch or give each other anything.

He was blushing and I could tell he was trying to answer without his voice betraying him.

I waited for his response, not wanting to rush him.

“I um, I could eat some burgers,” he finally replied.

I loved how he could get so flustered but then other times have this confidence to him.

In time, I would learn what triggered the different responses. I wanted to learn .

“I love burgers,” I replied, shooting him a smile as we neared town.

I’d eaten at the diner and they had amazing burgers.

I wasn’t feeling us driving to another town tonight, and we would eat at many places, Niam and I, so tonight it would be local and then I would all but carry him back to the motel room.

We pulled up behind the diner and, being the gentleman that I was, I held my hand on his lower back as we entered the diner.

The owners were an old married couple called Sussi and Lee, both so sweet and welcoming.

I greeted them and waited for Niam to do the same, but when he simply waved, I figured he hadn't met them yet.

We got a booth next to the windows which I always preferred.

I loved looking outside as people walked past, going about their day.

Niam sat down across from me, so I tugged his legs between my own, somehow needing to touch him as we sat there.

Sussi came over with a menu. "Here you go, boys. Just holler when you're ready." I gave her a big smile and looked over the options, like I hadn't just been there two days ago. The cheeseburger had been mouthwateringly good, but now I saw there was an option to add bacon. Gamechanger .

I peeked over at Niam, watching him closely as he read over his options. He seemed confused, like he was doing complicated math in his mind as he read the menu.

"Is there something wrong?" I asked, looking closer at what he was reading.

"I'm still getting used to the currency and I'm trying to figure out how much money I have left to be able to afford something. My brain still wants to think back to how things were back home." I grabbed his hand, stroking it.

"I remember struggling with that, too, but I'm here now and I've been saving up for five years for us to live on the road.

My treat." I was glad I'd spent so much time working for Julie.

It wasn't a high-paying job, but the first year I'd lived for free at her place, and then I'd been living in my van the rest, making it easier to save up.

We were far from rich and if this search for mages took longer than expected, then we would need to figure out how to work while searching.

"Are you sure?"

I chuckled warmly. "You do realize we're about to be bound together, right? That's for life. What's mine is now yours and vice versa. "

He laughed then. "God, I hadn't even thought about that! Shit... we are." Was he having second thoughts? Damn me and my big mouth. I was not about to chase him down the street and demand he love me. But I would. Obviously.

Sussi came over, done with waiting for us to call. "What're you having tonight then, boys," she held her notepad open, ready to jot our order down.

"I'll have the cheeseburger with two added pieces of bacon, and a large coke," I said, looking over at Niam for him to order.

"Um, I'll have the same but with onion rings on the side instead of french fries, please."

"You got it, boys. It'll be ten minutes tops." Then she was gone.

"I'm so glad I work at the gas station, otherwise I wouldn't know what any of those drink options were," Niam laughed lightly.

"It took me a long time to get used to everything, too. The good thing is that my mothers gave me extra money to use, something the other council weren't aware of."

“Do you know how they make the money?” he asked.

I shook my head. “I was just told they’d made it. I didn’t really question them, not wanting to embarrass my mom. I was the first so everything seemed like an experiment with me,” I admitted, recalling the horrible day I was kicked out of our home world.

“I can’t imagine how hard that must’ve been. I thought my banishment day was cruel, but you must’ve had a huge audience.” His voice was filled with empathy and I appreciated it. This was the first time I could share it with someone, someone who understood.

“Thousands came to watch. My poor mom was seen as this coldhearted parent by some and others felt sorry for her for birthing a defective mage.” It wasn’t easy talking about this part, feeling like I’d failed my mom.

Then I realized Niam had experienced the same but from what I’d heard of his past, his parents hadn’t been devastated to see him go.

Deciding to change the subject a bit, I asked, “how many have been shunned since I was?” It was a good thing to know, if it was raining with shunned mages then we needed to get our asses in gear and get to them.

“Two, if we aren’t counting us,” he replied. Sussi showed up with our food then, easing the souring mood and replacing it with the delicious scent of grilled meat, melted cheese, and French fries .

“Thank you,” we said in unison as she handed us our food and drinks.

“You boys enjoy yourselves,” she replied with a soft smile, then strolled back behind the counter to wipe it down.

We both descended on our food, almost inhaling it.

I'd skipped lunch and it seemed Niam had too.

We ate in silence; it was comfortable and I was grateful for it.

I kept waiting for things to get awkward or uncomfortable, but he was so easy to be around.

Maybe it was because we came from the same place, or the fact we were soulmates.

Niam stopped eating, looking sadly down at his half-eaten burger. "Is something wrong with it?" I asked, looking at his plate. It seemed fine.

"I, um," he muttered, then started blushing. "I figured, since we, you know, um." He took a deep breath. "I figured since we have plans for tonight, that maybe I shouldn't get too full."

The smile that spread across my face must've been feral. "Oh? What things are you planning for me to do to you?" I asked, loving how easy it was to tease a blush out of him .

He glared at me. "Oh, we're doing nothing now," he said, staring me straight in the eye as he took a huge bite of his burger. I groaned. Why was that so fucking sexy?

"You already have your magic," I accused.

"Fucking seduction magic." He giggled at my pout, and it warmed me up hearing him so happy.

“Eat until you’re full, we can always wait until the morning, but I am sleeping with you in my arms tonight,” I declared, not wanting to give that up.

I had been looking forward to sleeping with my person ever since my mother told me about the legends.

Now he was here, I was done sleeping without him.

He continued eating and even shared his onion rings with me. We were so cute together. I was tempted to take a picture of us together to show Julie, but I figured I could wait a little before showing him off.

“Where did you live before coming here?” Niam asked, and my mind returned to Julie.

“A few days drive away, south from here.”

“Hmm, did you like it there?”

I shrugged. “I have my best friend there, but otherwise it means very little to me.”

“Best friend?” he seemed a little shocked, and I might be hopeful now, but was that jealousy I detected?

Deciding not to tease him, because I was sweet like that, I replied honestly. “Her name is Julie and she’s also my boss. We met when her dog was close to choking to death and became instant friends. It was her place I lived at before getting my van.”

“And you and her never...?”

“No,” I shook my head. “I told you, I was waiting for you.”

The smile he gave me. I shivered. He was beautiful. I'd made him that happy. Me. I'd never felt so powerful before. I vowed to make him smile like that every day. I needed him to smile like that for the rest of our lives. And I needed to be the one causing them.

They were my smiles now.

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Niam

The motel wasn't far from the diner, and looking around it did seem like a nice place to rest. And to do the opposite of resting .

I was both excited and terrified. But Xarius took us shopping before we got here, telling me we needed to walk the burgers off a bit.

So, I'd grabbed some soap and other necessities so I felt prepared for later.

"I've had this room since we met," Xarius said as he unlocked the door.

He gestured for me to go in first and I felt giddy inside with excitement.

Every little thing he did just helped me fall more for him.

I knew we hadn't known one another for long, but we were fated.

Two halves of a soul or two souls that needed to become one, however you chose to interpret the legends.

The fact was that I kept getting surprised over how utterly adorable he was.

This tall handsome guy with piercings and tattoos was a lovable tiger.

He had claws but around me he never showed them.



He made me feel treasured, and for once I felt like I belonged.

With him I was finally the man I wanted to be, and I didn't have to worry about what to say or do, and it felt freeing.

"Let me get a towel ready for you," he said, then disappeared into the bathroom. I told him not so subtly that I wanted a shower before bed. He wanted one, too, and that helped me feel less alone. He would likely be just as nervous as I was. I kind of hoped he was.

The room had a big bed in the center, the pillows looked soft and new.

The duvet had been tidied up so you wouldn't have known Xarius had been sleeping there.

His stuff was around the room, not a lot, but bags of things from the general store and some clothes littered the space.

The cream carpet had stains on it that had likely been there longer than I'd been alive.

I tried not to guess what they were from and focused on the walls instead.

They had a flower pattern on them, making the design seem dated.

Our worlds were true mirrors of each other on that point.

Brand names and so on weren't, but it seemed fashion and décor were the same in both worlds.

Xarius came out holding two bottles of soap. "Which one do you prefer?" I took the light pink one and sniffed it. It smelled like cotton candy.

“This one,” I said, moving towards the bathroom with my new obsession in hand.

“Wait!” he rushed after me and took the soap from my hands. “I’ll do it.” He went back into the bathroom.

“You’ll do what?” I asked, walking after him. “Wash me?” I came to a stop when I spotted there was a tub currently filling with warm water. “Oh,” I breathed, looking around the room. He had planned this? There were lit candles and what looked like bubbles in two glasses.

How long had I been staring at the bed?

He turned to me and gave me a shy smile. I was speechless. He could get shy?! “I um, I thought we could bathe together. I want to share this with you before we go to bed.

I blinked, then I couldn’t help but reach up on my tippy toes and kiss him.

He kept surprising me in the best kind of way, proving he was the sort of man to put in the effort.

I had to remember to give something back, our relationship needed us both to put in the effort.

I was so used to just having myself to think about.

To protect. Now I was as good as what this world called married.

We were stuck together until we died, and I wouldn’t change a thing about that.

Ever since I gave in and decided to help, this calmness had come over me.

I now had a purpose and someone by my side.

“Thank you,” I said when we finally parted. “This is perfect.” He gave me his most charming smile yet, although I loved all his smiles equally.

He began undressing first, not taking his eyes off me as he removed his t-shirt. I took in everything. He had a full sleeve tattoo that ran up to his neck and... “Damn.” He had nipple piercings.

“You like?” he asked, flicking one of them. I might have moaned. Might have. He unbuttoned his jeans next. I was glad he wasn’t wearing leather today; it would take way too long to get those off of him.

The pants came off and then the boxers, and then... then I was left to just blatantly admire his hard cock. I couldn’t not look, there was a freaking piercing running through the head! Just how many piercings did he have? And more importantly, was I allowed to touch them?

Xarius smirked as he began undressing me. I wasn’t even trying to act like I wasn’t looking at his cock. It was right there! Hard, leaking, and pierced.

Then, I was naked, too. Standing there wearing nothing as Xarius returned the favor, taking in every inch of my skin and leaving goosebumps as if his eyes left a soft caress on my skin.

He turned off the tap, leaving just enough water for us both to get in without it overflowing.

I wasn’t sure we could sit in it comfortably, but I was determined to enjoy it.

He got in first and sat with his legs pushed to the sides, beckoning me to join him.

I stepped into the hot water and moaned.

I had only had showers since I was a child, never baths.

The warm water was soothing and with the hint of cotton candy I felt like a kid again, not counting the very naked man in the room who looked like he wanted to devour me.

I tried to sit right in front of Xarius, but he wasn't having that. He grabbed my hips and placed me on his lap, seemingly uncaring about his hard cock rubbing against my ass. This was the nicest torture I'd ever experienced .

He grabbed a loofa and poured soap over it, letting it foam up before gently washing my arms, then my chest, neck, back, and legs. I was lying against his warm chest, feeling so cared for that I never wanted this to end.

He whispered softly, breaking the silence in the room. "I was wondering if I could see all your drawings?" He kissed the top of my head and resumed cleaning my front, getting closer to where I really needed him.

"My sketches?" I asked, not recalling a time where he would've seen them.

"Hmm," he hummed, making me close my eyes again and lean further into him. "While I waited for you to wake up in my van, I looked through your things, trying to see what was important to you."

He still lacked the knowledge of personal boundaries, but I believed it was only with me he was like that.

Perhaps knowing I belonged to him had him seeing it differently than I did at first. In his mind we were as good as married already and he'd been ready for me to move

into his van.

I could lie and convince myself I wasn't loving it, but why would I bother lying to myself ?

"I don't mind you seeing them," I replied, sitting up while he began working on my hair, massaging my scalp and bringing my thoughts to a stop. I couldn't do anything other than relax and enjoy, thankful that I finally had someone to touch me like I'd been aching for.

As soon as I was declared clean, I moved over to the other end and rested while Xarius cleaned himself up.

He'd left my private parts alone, maybe because we'd decided to wait until the morning.

I couldn't be mad about that, too blissed out to demand he touched my dick.

I washed myself while I watched him do the same.

My dick that had been half-hard reached full hardness just watching this sexy man touch himself.

His blue eyes traced my movements as I started to finger myself, giving myself the excuse that I wanted to be fully clean before the morning.

"Niam," he whispered hoarsely. "I can't wait anymore." His confession had me leaving the tub in a hurry and grabbing both our towels.

"Bedroom," I said, moving around the room to find the lube.

I didn't think we would need condoms, and for a binding nothing should be between us anyway.

Xarius moved in behind me as I bent over, looking through his things, not caring that I was touching his stuff.

His hands rested on my hips and then I felt it.

His hard cock rubbed against my ass. I groaned and pushed back.

"Lube?" The question came out like a plea.

He pulled me back against him, moving so my back was against his front, trailing his hands down my chest and then he grabbed my dick, stroking it.

"Oh," I breathed, leaning my head back on his shoulder and closing my eyes.

I was fully giving myself over to him, knowing he was my other half. Knowing he would never hurt me.

He bit into my ear and rasped, "want me to fuck you?" I nodded, eager to get him inside me.

Eager to feel owned, wanted, desired. "Want me to come so deep inside of you, you'll be leaking for hours?"

Want my cock to stretch your pretty little hole?

" he kept stroking my dick while whispering filthy promises I couldn't reply to, too busy writhing against him and moaning in pleasure.

He spun me around, grabbed my waist and neck, then kissed me. His tongue was dominating my mouth and for a better word his tongue was fucking mine, showing me he was in charge, and I couldn't have been happier to submit to him. To let him have his way with me however he pleased .

We moved closer to the bed while still locked together in the hottest kiss ever.

Our naked bodies clung to each other as he pushed me down on the bed, and I went willingly, parting my legs in invitation, letting him have all of me.

His usual smiles had given way to the face of a predator, sizing up his prey before he attacked.

His dark eyes didn't blink once as he took in his fill.

"Xari," I begged quietly, needing him to touch me again, to make me feel alive.

He snapped out of his staring contest with my dick and grabbed the lube.

I knew he was just as nervous as I was, but since he'd been waiting for me for years, I decided to let him be in charge, trusting him completely with my body.

He kneeled on the bed between my legs, pushing them against my chest as he circled my hole with one finger before breaching it, allowing me to get used to it before adding another finger.

"Let me know when you're ready for the third, baby," he said, leaning over my body and placing his free hand beside my head. His fingers worked me open, pushing on my nerves amazingly. It had burned at first, a stinging feeling, but that was gone now as I only felt pleasure run through me .

I moaned, then tugged on his neck and kissed him, showing him just how much I was loving it.

He broke our kiss, resting his forehead against mine.

“Baby, please tell me you’re ready?” I nodded, because I had no idea how it would feel to be ready, but I was dying for him to fuck me already.

I felt his third finger enter me, making me fuller than before, starting the pleasure/pain feeling all over again.

“Fuck baby, the sounds you make when it’s just my fingers working your hole.

I can’t wait to hear how pretty you sound when it’s my cock fucking into you.

Claiming you. Filling you up with my cum. ”

I was going to come if he didn’t shut up with his words that hit me almost as perfectly as his fingers did. “Ready,” I whimpered, needing more of him. He didn’t waste any time, quickly slicking himself up and pushing into me.

“Fuck,” he groaned. “You’re exceeding all my dreams. How can you be this perfect inside, too?”

I was too busy feeling how hot and hard he was inside of me, how big, and then. “Oh!” I exclaimed, accidentally pushing him further into me. “Piercing,” I moaned, feeling it rub on my walls. It felt amazing .

“Baby, I’ll gladly add ten more to my cock just to hear you make more of those beautiful moans.” He picked up his speed, rolling his hips as he did so, making the piercing hit a spot inside of me that had me seeing stars.



I suddenly needed to be in control, wanting to chase that perfect feeling that had started inside of me. “Flip,” I said, groaning when he nibbled on my neck. “I want to ride you, please.”

Xarius listened to my plea and then I was on top, impaled on his hard cock as he lay on his back, his one hand behind his head and the other holding onto my waist. He looked so hot lying there, like he was relaxing while I worked for both our pleasure.

I shivered, then began to move, circling my hips and chasing the feeling I had before.

He didn’t stay down for long. Sitting up he placed his hand over my heart and I felt like I needed to do the same, placing my hand over his heart. And that’s when everything changed.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Xarius

Light came out of both our hands, burning us up from the inside.

It was the most unbelievable form of pleasure.

I knew we would never be able to experience the same feeling ever again, the feeling of being filled with magic.

Of getting our magic. How had I survived without it?

The light lit us both up from within, showing our magic swirling around inside us.

We were now connected through our bodies, our magic, our souls.

The light erupted, and we both moaned in pleasure as we came together. We were finally the men we were born to be. Powerful mages. Leaders.

I took in Niam's exhausted body, his face covered with sweat, his eyes dazed, but it was his smile that took my breath away. It was the smile of contentment. Of happiness. I was sure I gave him the same smile in return, finally having everything I'd ever dreamed of. Magic and my soulmatch.

"How are you feeling? I asked, rubbing his sides. He was still sitting on my lap, my softening cock slowly easing out of him. I could feel his release on my stomach, marking me as his. It was a heady feeling. Being claimed but also getting to claim. I couldn't wait to do it again.

He sighed and smiled down at me. “I feel amazing.” He leaned down and kissed me, making my cock slip out completely. I didn’t even care about the sheets as I felt my release following my cock. “Can you feel it, too?” he asked eagerly, like a child about to go out and play in the snow.

“I can,” I replied, pulling him down so he lay flat on me, squeezing him tight. My man. My bonded. “We probably won’t know how much magic we’ve got until tomorrow.” Magic needed recharging and having it unlocked likely meant it had to build before we could truly use it.”

“I figured the same. I had a friend who got hers when she turned eleven. She had to wait a few days before she felt like hers had reached its peak,” he explained, moving to the side so we lay facing each other.

I was glad to hear he’d at least had friends before he turned fourteen.

It seemed like the letter had ruined everything for him.

“I think it’s best that we don’t use it until we’re somewhere secluded. Just in case.” I really didn’t want to cause any trouble and I feared people wouldn’t take it kindly if we used magic out in the open.

“I agree. Maybe we need to camp out in the forest until we learn how to control it? We have the van so the bears can’t eat us.

” I knew he was trying to tease me about it, but I could literally feel his unease as he spoke about the bears.

I frowned, trying to see if I could feel him again, like his emotions were my own.

A rush of happiness, excitement, fear, and the most amazing feeling ever, love, all hit

me, and I knew instinctively they were Niam's emotions.

I figured it was a bonded thing between soulmatched pairs, so I tried to send love back to him, and he responded by showing me even more love in his emotions.

He gasped. "Are you doing that?"

"I think I am," I grinned, kissing his nose. "Can you feel my emotions, too?"

"What, no? I just felt so much love all of a sudden, it took over everything. It felt amazing."

"Wait, you can't sense my emotions at all?" He shook his head. "Hmm, try focusing on me and see if that works."

He looked at my body in concentration and I screamed. The worst kind of pain ever imagined rained through my body. I couldn't even explain what would be more painful. I would rather get punched in the nuts, but that was where my pain expertise ended.

"Xari!" he sat up and cupped my chin, worry filling his expression. I could sense his feelings, guilt, worry, fear, love. So much love.

The pain subsided as soon as I cried out, but it wasn't completely gone until now.

"It's over," I panted, touching my chest to see if I was still intact or if the pain was because a living thing had torn me to pieces from the inside out.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary so I took in a calming breath.

"I'm so sorry," Niam sobbed, tears trailing down his chin. "I think it was my magic,

but I wasn't trying to hurt you, I promise! I was just trying to do what you'd done with the emotions." I knew he was telling me the truth. Again I could sense everything he felt.

"I think," I began, still using calming breaths to relax my body, "That we've got other magic than elemental magic."

"Shit! Why didn't I think of that?!" he exclaimed and got up from the bed, cum leaking down his thighs as he paced in front of it.

"The classes from school taught us that some mages were born with special abilities, too, but it was extremely rare for that to happen. People who could speak with animals, control animals, control other mages, and so on." I remembered a little about that, but I hadn't been in school in many, many years, so the details were a little fuzzy.

"So, I can feel the emotions of others, or at least yours, and you can make someone hurt worse than they've ever been hurt before.

" He nodded, as a look of guilt took over his features from again being reminded that he'd hurt me.

"Wow, gotta say, I'm mad jealous." He burst out laughing and I could feel his emotions were filled with amusement, relief, and again so much love .

"I'm sorry I can hurt people," he winced, getting back on the bed to sit beside me. I wasn't planning on moving anytime soon. The adrenaline rush I went through when the pain hit had left me feeling exhausted beyond belief.

"It's okay. You can protect me if people are mean to me," I said, giving him my best smile. "And I'll pay you back by telling you if anyone is lying to you."

“Wait, you’d be able to tell if someone lied?” I hadn’t even thought about how we could use that going forward, but of course Niam would see the potential in my magic. “I, um, I believe I could. Like a lie detector I could sense you truly didn’t want to hurt me.”

“That’s amazing!” he cheered and I couldn’t help but share his enthusiasm. “That’ll make our job so much easier when we have to find the others!”

“How?” I questioned.

“Well, for starters, we would be able to know that they told us the truth and if they believed us when we tell them our story. You can literally read them and control the conversation so we can sway them faster.”

“I’m so lucky to be bonded to the smartest man alive.

” I could tell by his emotions that he loved that.

It was then that I realized I’d gotten the best power I could ever ask for.

Forever I would be able to know what made my bonded happy and what in turn made him sad.

I had the literal power to make sure he would be happy forever.

It was the greatest gift I’d ever received, other than my bonded, of course.

My power made it easier to ensure Niam’s happiness and that would be the best use of my magic I could ever have.

“I try,” he replied, blushing prettily as he said it. “I um, I think I need to tell Jerry I

quit tomorrow, before we leave to learn how to control our magic. He deserves to know I'm leaving." I could feel that made him sad, and that these people meant something to him.

"You don't have to say goodbye to them forever, baby. Remember we can return here when we're done—Oh."

"Yeah," he sighed. "When we're done, we're returning home and claiming the thrones."

I still want that," he rushed out. "But it still sucks saying goodbye." I hadn't even thought about that.

When I'd decided to only befriend Julie, it had been because I knew I had to find my soulmatch and then search for more mages.

I hadn't even thought about leaving her here.

"At least I never have to leave your side," I said, needing it to be said out loud. He wasn't getting away from me. Not ever. I'd waited too long for him and he was so much more than I'd ever anticipated, ever even dared hope for. Literally my soulmatch.

Amusement, love, and still a touch of sadness came from Niam, telling me he wasn't against the idea of staying with me forever.

I hadn't been worried—okay I had been a little worried he would change his mind.

It was hard getting what I'd dreamed about, fearing that it could be taken away was normal. It was human.

“We should get some sleep,” I said, swallowing a yawn. I was struggling to remain awake, my body needing even more rest now that the magic was recharging, and I knew Niam felt the same.

“I’ll grab a wet towel,” he said, disappearing into the bathroom. I was asleep before he even returned, smiling as I drifted off.



## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Niam

There was a heavy weight on top of me, almost suffocating me in my sleep.

Xarius? I blinked my eyes open and almost screamed.

A freaking snow leopard was asleep on top of me.

I wasn't kidding. I dared look to the side and saw Xarius was awake and if his huge eyes were any indication, he, too, hadn't seen this coming.

Movement from the other side had both our attention, and this time, I did scream.

A freaking ostrich. Yeah, an ostrich was standing beside the bed, staring at us.

My scream startled them both, and the leopard rushed down the bed and...

protected me? The ostrich ran around in what appeared to be circles. It wasn't the biggest room.

Xarius's arms wrapped around me, holding me close as we watched the animals calm down and realize that there wasn't any danger.

Then the leopard jumped back onto the bed and, like a small house cat, began circling the bed until he found a spot he deemed acceptable.

Which was basically most of the bed. His tail hit me in the face, the only clear proof I

wasn't dreaming this.

"Um, did you?" Xarius asked behind me while I stared at the ostrich as it looked around the room calmly.

"Why would I have anything to do with them?!" I whisper-shouted.

"Well, it wasn't me!" he whispered back, holding onto me tighter. "Wait... I remember something my mom said about familiars, strong animals that protected the mages and helped them fight, too."

We both looked at the animals. "So, they belong to us?" I asked, getting weirdly giddy over the thought of getting a familiar.

"I believe so, yes."

"How the fuck are we going to get them in the van?" I asked, finally realizing the situation we were in .

"Um, maybe they can be summoned, like those mages that learn to call upon small animals." It wasn't hard to learn and the animal would need to be summoned to the mages side every week.

They were made entirely of magic, making them self-sufficient.

I knew if they ate, they could stay for longer before being resummoned, and the same happened if they slept like a normal pet did.

If we could figure out how to make them disappear and reappear at will, then it would make our life on the road much easier.

“We need to practice our summoning magic before we can leave this hotel room.” I was starving, my new magic taking whatever it could to fuel itself, and that meant the burger from yesterday was long gone.

“And here I thought we would have plenty of morning sex,” Xarius grumbled. He was too adorable.

Getting out of bed was hard with the big cat taking up all the space, but I managed to get out from the warm covers. I searched the floor, still wary of the huge bird that was staring intently at me as I looked around the room, bare assed, after some clean clothes.

“You know,” he began, blatantly ogling me as I continued my search. “This isn’t helping the no morning sex situation for me.”

I huffed. “Then stop looking at me!”

“I can’t! Your dick is waving at me!” he whined.

I sighed and turned my back on him instead, feeling no shame whatsoever. I guess this was what being bonded was like.

“Not helping, baby. Your ass is beckoning me, too.” Damn him. I wasn’t about to have a boner with a bird watching me. That was just weird.

Reaching the bag that had my clothes in it, I quickly donned a pair of boxers.

Feeling much better now that I was somewhat dressed, I looked over my options and put on some comfy pants and a soft long-sleeved t-shirt.

We wouldn’t be leaving the room before our familiars had left, which meant I just

needed to be comfortable.

Xarius had begun dressing as well, pouting once again over the lack of sex.

“Which one do you think is mine?” he asked, walking over to where I stood.

“No idea,” I replied, looking over both animals. “Maybe we share them?”

“Hmm,” he said, moving to the other end of the room. The ostrich followed. I walked into the bathroom, trying to see if it followed me, too. It didn’t. The snow leopard came in behind me, and sitting down it looked up at me with beautiful blue eyes, awaiting my command.

“So, that answers that,” I said, mostly to myself as I looked closer at the snow leopard. He was stunning. I had to name him something, but I found that I wanted to name them with Xarius. In my mind, they were our familiars, and even if they each answered to one of us, we still shared them.

I tried to walk around him, wanting to get back to Xarius, but to my surprise he didn’t move, which honestly wasn’t a surprise. He’d stolen most of the bed and was now stealing my space to escape, too.

“Hi, um, kitty cat, can you move away? I need to get back to Xari.” I felt stupid calling the snow leopard a kitty cat, but I still hadn’t thought of a name and needed to get back to Xarius. He nodded and moved back into the bedroom, like he understood me perfectly.

Xarius came over to me, grabbing onto my waist as we stood there and watched our familiars. “I think they understand us,” I whispered, like I was afraid they would hear me now .

He whispered back, both of us not taking our gazes away from them, “Oh, they for sure can.”

“I think we should name them, you know before we make them leave for now.” I felt him nod beside me. “So, I was thinking maybe something with snow for mine, or is that too cliché?”

He tore his gaze away from our familiars and looked at me, smiling his easy smile. “You want him to be named Snowflake, right?” blushing, I nodded. How did he know?!

“I’ve called him that in my mind since we saw him,” he laughed. Well, that had to be a sign.

“Then he’s Snowflake,” I announced, feeling like a proud parent.

“Leon,” he then said, looking over at his ostrich. “He looks like a Leon.” I couldn’t really disagree and calling him birdie wouldn’t be fair to this majestic creature either.

“Leon it is,” I agreed.

We stood there, side-hugging and looking over at our familiars proudly. I had a family now.

“Now we just need to figure out how to unsummon them.”

An hour later, and I finally figured it out. I looked at Snowflake and said, “take a rest, Snowflake, and I’ll call for you when I need you to return.”

And Snowflake disappeared.

“Snowflake, return,” I said, hoping it would work.

Snowflake reappeared, rubbing against my face like he’d been gone for hours. It felt weird being touched by him, but also like a big hug. He was mine. Ours.

“It seems so simple now that you’ve done it,” Xari said, rubbing his growling stomach. “Of course, we just need to ask them to leave, they can understand us. All those weird sentences made zero sense to me either.”

We’d gone over “ I unsummon you ”, and “ be gone ”, then we’d showered and it might’ve turned into a bit more, before we sat down and it clicked.

We unsummoned them and moved out for breakfast. We decided to drive back to the diner because according to Xarius they had “ banging waffles” .

I wanted banging waffles, so off we went.

I was still getting used to feeling the magic under my skin, the power I now held so comfortably.

To think I was ready to live my life without it.

If it hadn’t been for Xarius, I wouldn’t have known I could get magic, that I would be one of the most powerful mages.

It made sort of sense if genetics were at play, which they often were with power.

Both my parents were strong mages, and Xarius’s mom belonged to the council of mages.

Maybe the rest of the council members would send their children off, too, although

only one other had a child, that I knew of, and they were still a toddler.

It was normal for the council to offer their positions to their children when they retired, and if no one fought them for the position, they would get it simply because they were the child of a former leader.

Sometimes people challenged them and won, making them the new leader no matter their upbringing.

Our home world was all about power. Why hadn't I questioned the shunning of non-magical mages?

I had been too busy trying to figure out how to live in another world to care about the council playing me.

Xarius had changed everything for me. It was one thing knowing I could get magic, when he'd said it, a longing and a want had started, but I didn't want magic if it meant remaining here and having to hide it.

When Xari had said we would be the most powerful mages, even if he was proven to be wrong, that couldn't be ignored.

The hunger for revenge had awoken inside of me.

The former resigned shunned mage that I had been, had been given a chance to fight back, to become what I had only dreamed of becoming.

Giving in and joining Xarius had been the easiest thing to do after that.

After our first kiss, it had been clear we truly were meant to be. I simply didn't want to question it. I trusted him. And that trust had given me my bonded, Snowflake,

Leon, and my magic. I had a family of my own now. I had a purpose that didn't just involve survival.

"Everything okay?" Xari asked. We'd just parked behind the diner, and I hadn't even realized it until now. "Your emotions are all over the place, not too many bad ones, but still."

I smiled at him. "I just thought about how much my life has changed in these few days. I came here just wanting to survive, hoping I could get a job doing something creative with my art, and now... now I've got a family.

I've got you." He must've felt the love that poured out of me, since he kissed my cheek tenderly and returned my smile .

"I found out about the council of mages' deceit the day before I got shunned.

My mom was against it, but three against one left her powerless to do anything, and she could be killed for allowing my mother to tell me their plan, something she worked out herself.

I promised her I would return, that we would see each other again someday.

You are the reason I'll have a chance to do that someday. So, thank you."

I was crying now. I hadn't even thought about how badly he wanted to return.

He had parents who loved him, maybe friends, though I doubted that from the sound of it.

If I'd continued to reject him, he would've never been able to see his mothers again.



I truly had been selfish. “You don’t have to thank me.

Being with you is what I want, too, not just for power and revenge.

I want everything you’re offering, but mostly, I want you.

I know in my soul you’ll offer me the kind of love I’ve only dreamt of. ”

“Neither of us are alone anymore,” he said, then kissed me. “Let’s get some waffles.”

Xarius

Before I could exit the car, Julie called. Niam stopped his movements, too, and waited for me to answer it. “Hi, Jules,” I greeted her.

“You’re alive!” she exclaimed sarcastically.

I rolled my eyes. “I’m sorry I didn’t call you for two days,” I replied, not the least sorry. I hadn’t wanted to waste any of my time with Niam, no matter how much I loved my best friend.

“Three,” she corrected. “But since you aren’t dead, I guess that means you’ve finally spoken to him? ”

Niam gave me a curious look from his side of the car. He could hear everything she said clearly. “I have. We’ve come to an agreement and are working together now.” I mouthed to Niam that I would explain later when I felt unease from his emotions, and that seemed to help ease them somewhat.

“That’s great! So, when are you coming home?”

I grimaced. “We have no idea how long this will take, it could be years.”

She sighed, “And you still can’t tell me what it is?”

“No, sadly not. But it’s nothing illegal, so no need to worry about bailing me out of jail,” I teased, hoping it would ease the mood.

“Ha! Like I would use my hard-earned money to save your ass,” she cackled. She so would.

“I promise to keep you updated, but I might only call once a week.”

“Fiiiiine, I guess I’ll just get a cat or something.” After her dog, Vaps, had passed away two years ago, she swore she wouldn’t get another dog, too busy working to give a dog what they needed. I wasn’t going to tell her that cats could be demanding, too .

“Send me pics!” I ordered, then we hung up.

“So, that was Julie?” Niam asked.

“Yes. I haven’t told her exactly what we’re doing, but she knew I left to find you because we needed to do something together.

I plan on telling her we fell in love on the road since telling the truth isn’t an option.

” I felt relief from him. Had he been jealous?

I needed to focus more on his emotions in the future.

I never wanted him to doubt his place as my bonded.

“I’m fine with that,” he smiled. “Now let’s get some ‘banging waffles’ .”

Sussi gave us a window table again, pleased to see us back already. I ordered mine with chocolate drizzle and hazelnuts on top and Niam picked fresh strawberries and whipped cream. We both eyed each other’s waffles, so we decided to share. Again, we proved to be perfect for one another.

“I’m thinking that we drive by the gas station after this so you can say goodbye. But remember we can always return in the future. This doesn’t have to be the final goodbye.” I could feel his sadness, but he also seemed determined .

“I think we should tell them that you are a friend from my home town who came and got me. I don’t want them to worry about me leaving with a stranger.

” I nodded, whatever he thought was best; he was the one who knew them.

“We still have no idea how to even get back home, so yeah, it could take years.”

“I have a suspicion we won’t be able to return before all the mages have their power,” I said, knowing it would take a lot to bring us all back. We hadn’t learned how to make portals, or how to find our world.

“I believe so, too,” he said then added with a sigh, “I don’t even want to leave until all the mages are with us.

That would feel wrong.” I gave him a tender smile.

It seemed we were on the same page when it came to the others.

“Do you even know how we start searching? There’re two here, unless others have been shunned after I was. ”

I frowned, “no, I actually don’t. I’ve been too focused on getting you, I haven’t thought about what to do after that.

Maybe my locket?” I was about to take it out from my shirt, but Niam shook his head and I got what he meant.

No magic around people. I tugged it back under my shirt and nodded in understanding .

“We’ll drive by the gas station and then we leave town. When we’re far enough away, we stop and check the locket.”

“Agreed,” he said, taking the last bite of waffle. “We should call upon our pets, too, while we figure out the locket, get them used to us whenever we’re able.”

“Pets?” I asked with a laugh.

“I don’t want to risk them appearing by saying their names out loud, do you?” That had me shutting up. Yeah, I didn’t want that either.

We paid for our food and told Sussi that we hoped we would be back in town again someday soon, making sure the locals knew we were leaving, making it less hasty and weird for Niam, especially since he told me how sweet everyone had been to him here.

Back in my van, I took Niam’s hand in mine, knowing he needed the comfort. He really didn’t like saying goodbye, but we needed to. “I’ll be with you,” I reminded him, stroking his hand as I began driving.

“Thank you,” he said, staring out the window, looking small and innocent.

“I brought lunch!” an older lady announced as she came through the door to the gas station. Niam had just told Jerry that he was leaving with me.

“You’re leaving?” Jerry frowned and I could feel his sadness pouring out. I didn’t even have to try to feel his emotions, I was being fed everything. In the diner I had felt a little of what everyone felt whenever I looked at them and focused, but I guess

heightened emotions worked differently.

“Who’s leaving?” the older woman asked, setting down the bag of amazing smelling food.

We’d been late to breakfast because of the animal situation, but even so, I could feel my stomach growling as the scent wafted out of the bag.

It had been an hour since we ate, but with our magic still recharging, I was already aching for more.

“Niam,” Jerry explained.

“What?! Why? Because of this handsome fella?” she pointed at me and I gave her my most charming smile.

I offered her my hand, “Xarius, nice to meet you. ”

She shook it, “Betty. Are you a friend of Niam’s?”

I nodded. “I am. I came searching for him.” I would let Niam decide on how many details were needed for our cover story, not knowing what he’d told them.

“But I thought—?” Betty began, but then stopped herself.

Niam smiled kindly at her. “I thought all my friends hated me when I left, but Xari hadn’t been there when I said my goodbyes. He came all this way here to make sure I was okay.”

“Oh,” she said, holding a hand over her heart. “We all need friends like that.” She gave me a look that said the same as her emotions did. She was grateful and happy.

“I was leaving our home town myself, so we decided to travel the world together, spend some time doing what we want to do while we’re young,” I tacked on, hoping it would work for our story.

“I think that’s healthy,” Jerry said, scratching his stubble. “I wish I’d done that myself back in my youth.”

“Oh, you stop that,” Betty chided. “You’re only fifty-one, not dying.”

I laughed with Niam, understanding clearly why he had trouble saying goodbye. They were good people. “I’m glad Niam found you. I can’t imagine what he would’ve done had he not had your kindness to help him out.” I really wanted to thank them for looking out for my bonded, but that wouldn’t do.

“Oh, that was entirely our pleasure,” Betty chuckled while a blush formed on her cheeks. “Niam has been nothing but a sweetheart to us.” She patted him on the arm, “I hope you’ll return to us with many stories of your adventures, but remember to have fun. We’ll still be here when you come back.”

He swiped his tears away, moved by having people care for him. I let him have his moment with them as I filled the van up with gas. I made it my personal mission to see them again before we returned home. I just hoped I would get the same chance with Julie.

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Niam

We drove until Xari reached the same place he'd taken me after our chase in the woods, at least that's what he told me.

It was deep in the forest and we drove on a cleared road until we reached our destination.

I figured it was some sort of campsite, not that there was anything other than nature, but the cleared space where you could drive indicated that cars had been there before.

The space we stopped at was like a parking lot, a big circle with dried mud on the ground and trees surrounding it.

We were the only ones here, free to practice our magic and let out our familiars .

"I was thinking we let our pets out while we work on the locket," I said, jumping out of the van.

Xari followed. "Sounds good to me. Maybe we'll get lucky and get a direction we can follow.

" I really hoped so. If the two mages that we knew were here weren't soulmatches, then we had to wait for who knew how long before the others arrived.

I wasn't dying to return, but I also didn't like living in limbo and since Xari had already lived like that for five years, I wished he wouldn't have to experience that



again.

“Leon come back,” he ordered, and the ostrich came into view, cocking his head as he took in Xari.

“Snowflake,” I said, hoping the name would be enough. He appeared and bumped his head against my waist, purring happily.

“So, you were right not to say their name at the diner,” Xari grinned.

“You’ll find that I usually am right,” I sassed, scratching Snowflake behind the ear.

“Do you need to hunt for food?” I asked, waiting for Snowflake to indicate he’d understood me.

“If you’re hungry you can hunt, we’re staying here for a while, and I’ll call for you if that changes.

” He licked my hand and ran deeper into the forest.

“I guess that meant yes,” Xari laughed, then asked Leon to do the same. Once Leon disappeared into the woods, too, not to hunt exactly, but likely to find something he could eat, we opened the van and sat down on the back between the open backdoors.

Taking the locket out, he handed it over to me. “Do you see any opening?” I examined it, surprised by the weight of it.

“No, but I think we need our combined magic to open it. Look.” I pointed to the two different metals that surrounded it. I took that as a sign two were needed.

“I hadn’t even thought about what they meant.”

I took his hand in mine, guiding it over to my other hand that held the locket. “We need to somehow use magic without me accidentally causing you pain again.” I wasn’t sure how I’d done it yesterday, and I really didn’t want to hurt him again.

“I think our magic will be easier to control now that our bodies aren’t new to it, besides, we have our familiars now, too, and I bet they couldn’t be summoned if we didn’t have enough control.

” His words helped reassure me, somewhat.

I still feared hurting him, but I needed to at least try.

“Think about wanting to open it,” he guided, then closed his eyes.

I followed his lead and with my own eyes closed, I began to think about wanting it open.

It began growing hotter to the touch, warming between our hands. Then we heard it, a soft click.

Opening our eyes, we looked down at the now open locket. “There’s a note!” Xari exclaimed. He quickly grabbed the note and unfolded it. There was a lot written down, and both sides were filled out. “I’ll read it out loud.”

“Our dearest boy.

Congratulations on finding your soulmatch!

We are so happy for you both. With your new magic at your hands many things will be easier.

The locket is your guide to finding the others.

There will be two other soulmatched pairs.

The legends had six members in the council of mages, three bonded pairs, all ruling together.

You are bound to the others, not in the same way the two of you are together, but through the bond of your past. You are the reincarnated souls of the legends, we know this might sound crazy, but according to legend, you'll keep being reborn to lead the mages.

As we write this, we already know the final mages will be there within six years.

We have no idea when your soulmatch arrives on Sutiner, or how long you've been there before reading this, but know they will all join you when you've been there for six years, we hope that helps.

We need to warn you and your bonded. The council will know when you receive your magic and will likely send someone to.

.. deal with you. You must fight back! Practice your magic and train your familiars.

Do whatever you can to succeed. We'll be waiting at home for you to return and take your rightful place.

When all of you have your magic, then you'll be able to return.

How, we sadly do not know, but we trust you'll figure it out.

To find the other mages using the locket, you need to think about their names and beg

the locket to guide you. We infused it with our magic, too, hoping it would help guide you.

We already know the names of the next two who'll be shunned after you.

Silver Whitestone can't exactly get naked and use magic there."

That was true. I shrugged, "we'll deal with that when the time comes. For now, I think some food would be good."

Xarius

My beautiful bonded had looked sexy as hell as he owned that fire and water, making it do whatever he wanted it to. I quickly realized that whatever Niam did was sexy to me, the man was just seduction incarnate. I couldn't stop getting hard around him.

When the locket showed us the letter from my mothers, I'd been surprised, not even thinking something had been locked away in there for years.

I hadn't realized how much I'd needed to read those words.

They were waiting for me and my bonded to come home, but at least they knew they wouldn't see me for at least a few years, making me less guilty over taking my time, not that I could do anything about it.

Niam had been perfect, like he seemed to always be, comforting me as I let my heart ache with the loss it felt from being away from my mothers.

It wasn't until my mind had remembered we were being hunted that I'd pulled out of it, determined to get stronger. Determined to protect my bonded.

Said bonded was looking at me with a soft smile.

He wasn't the same shy guy I'd met a week ago.

With our bonding complete, we now had the pleasure of being together without fear holding us back.

I was one hundred percent myself around him and if his comment earlier about taking my dick out was any indication, then he wasn't holding back either, demanding what he wanted from me without fear of sounding too bold or demanding.

I loved that for us, almost as much as I'd loved taking my dick out for him.

We'd decided to dismiss our familiars and hit the road, stopping at the first fast food drive through we would find, and eating in the van before following the locket's direction.

The glow would dim if we made a wrong turn, quickly alerting us of our mistake and would then glow brighter once we were back on course .

"Here," I said, handing Niam the locket to hold for us. "I'll be too busy driving to look at it."

He took it and pulled it around his neck, tugging it inside his shirt as we drove into the drive through lane.

We were both starving, our magic had been used plenty so we needed to gain some energy back.

I ordered way too much, but Niam seemed excited when we were handed our food and I pulled us over to devour it.

We shared some nuggets and fries while having ten different burgers to pick from and both a coke and a milkshake, because we were adults who couldn't decide on what to drink.

"Do you think Silver will trust us?" Niam asked while he ate some fries.

“Hmm, I haven’t really thought about it. You clearly didn’t like me at first,” I said, remembering back to our first meeting.

“That’s because you stalked me before that!” he snapped, his cute brown eyes glaring at me.

“Aww, did you watch me as much as I watched you?” I asked teasingly. “Did you think I was handsome? Strong? I bet you thought I was really sexy, right?” I grinned .

He calmly informed me, “I named you Creepy Steve, you take that information and do what you want with it.”

“Creepy Steve?!” I exclaimed, feeling awfully indignant.

I could feel his immense joy, but he was doing his best not to show it on his face, acting unbothered while his emotions were filling with mirth. “Want to hand me the chicken burger?” he asked, changing the subject before he cracked and laughed, I was sure of it.

“Sure.” I gave in and handed him the burger, licking the bun demonstratively first. He wrinkled his nose, then proceeded to scarf it down, humming with satisfaction. My life would never be boring again with him in it.

We hit the road again, and since it was getting darker, we used my phone to bring us to a campsite where we could sleep for the night. It would take us an hour and a half to get there, which was perfect for us.

“I was thinking of letting our familiars out while we sleep, you know, for added protection,” Niam said, breaking the silence. We were both exhausted and looked forward to catching some much-needed sleep .

“I think that’s a good idea. But outside the van,” I quickly added. It was a comfortable home for Niam and me, but no animals were allowed.

“Completely agree,” he said, sighing as he laid his head back.

“You can rest now if you want to. The locket is getting brighter, so I know the direction we’re heading in is the right one.

” Niam didn’t have a driver’s license, so I would be doing all the driving for us, not that I minded.

I rather liked driving. But there was no reason we both had to stay awake for it.

“Are you sure?” he asked on a yawn.

“I’m sure,” I smiled, taking his hand in mine and stroking his thumb.

“Mm... k,” he said, already drifting off to sleep. I still had some miles to go, but I was glad to do it since with each minute we got closer to Silver.

I woke Niam up as soon as I’d parked at the camping site. No one was around where I’d placed us, and it didn’t seem like the most popular area this time of year. Their website warned campers that the mama bears were out and apparently this park had several.

“Snowflake won’t get eaten by a bear,” I promised as we brushed our teeth outside the van.

Snowflake and Leon had been tasked with protection duty and were told to go invisible if humans neared the van.



And yes, they could go invisible, something we found out by accident when Niam got nervous that people would see them.

Snowflake had turned invisible and purred loudly so we could hear him.

“I just worry,” he sighed. “We should order them to stay invisible no matter what, at least until we say otherwise.” I couldn’t see the harm in that.

“Leon, go invisible until I tell you otherwise, stay at the van and protect us if anyone wants to get to us.” My big bird just blinked. I guessed that meant “yes, master, your word is my command!”

We relieved ourselves and climbed inside the van, then closed the back doors and the roof window. I had some curtains that could black out all-natural light and I felt better knowing no one could look inside on our sleeping bodies.

I changed out of my clothes, so I was only in my boxers, before lying down on our mattress.

I was glad I’d gotten a queen from the beginning, wanting our home to be ready for when Niam joined me.

The mattress was all the way in the back and I’d closed off the window to the front seats with a little curtain so people wouldn’t be able to look in.

The rest I had done so it looked like a bedroom/living room, lots of shelves and now I had the fairy lights, too.

I had yet to show Niam the books I’d bought for him.

I’d had those two days where I’d been determined to keep my distance and what had I

spent them doing? Buying Niam books.

Niam snuggled into me as soon as he was in his boxers, too, eager to get some more sleep.

“I really hope Silver and Wilston are soulmatches,” Niam whispered into my neck. He was snuggled against me, our limbs tangled together. It was everything I’d imagined it would be.

“I hope so, too,” I said. “We know two others will also join us, but Silver and Wilston came before you did. Maybe they don’t want their magic.

” Niam had fought me on it, wanting to be at peace for once and enjoy life.

Maybe they did, too. But if the legends were true, we would be six in total. Three pairs.

“We won’t know until we reach him.” He kissed my neck and I sighed, feeling so full of love I was afraid I could burst from it. “How long of a drive do you think we have left?”

“Hmm, it’s hard to know for certain, but it’s dimmer than it was when I searched for you, so maybe a week? Maybe more. Not quite sure yet.”

“That’s okay. We can enjoy the adventure while it lasts.”

I was sure every minute spent with Niam would be enjoyable, but I didn’t say that. Sensing his breathing change I knew he was already asleep. I kissed his temple and fell asleep with a smile on my face, something I figured would be a new night routine for me.

Niam

I woke to shouting. Sitting up, I quickly roused Xari, wanting him to be alert if we were in danger. I crawled over to the window and tried to peek out. It was still dark, likely just after midnight. Several men were fighting against the air.

“Our familiars,” I whispered shakily. They were out there protecting us. “We need to get out there!” I whisper-shouted at Xari who was behind me, one arm protectively around my waist.

“You can inflict pain. Can you do it from in here?” he whispered back.

I focused on the one that seemed to be the most powerful.

The next second, he was writhing around on the ground, screaming in pain.

The others backed up and looked around frantically for whoever caused it.

They wouldn’t be able to see us in the shadows, or at least I hoped not.

“Good job, baby. Now try to see if you can reach more of them at once.” His hand began stroking my belly, helping me stay grounded as I mentally spread my magic to the others, too.

I needed them to remain in my line of sight for it to keep working.

But the idiots that they were, they bunched closer together, not knowing they were

helping me out.

“We need to end them,” I said, surprising us both. But we did. They wouldn’t stop coming for us, and I couldn’t keep them in pain forever. “Are there others?” I asked, not wanting to take my eyes off the five men I had on the ground.

“Hmm, I can sense fear with no pain nearby, but only from one.” So the mage had to be close enough for Xari to sense them.

“Can you heighten their fear? Maybe add some loneliness so we can make them run to the others?”

“I’ll try.”

A few seconds later a man came running from the other side, falling into the men I still had writhing in pain together.

I added him to the cluster, too, finding myself smiling.

I had power enough to make six men scream.

I should probably, and I meant probably, have felt somewhat disgusted with myself over having that thought, but in reality, I fucking loved it.

“Snowflake,” I called calmly, knowing he would hear me wherever he was. “End them.”

There were so many screams. So many. If the camping site wasn’t deserted before, it was now.

Snowflake and Leon were visible as they took care of the men.

Thankfully for us, it looked exactly like the men had been killed by animals.

Which they had. When whoever came here next saw their bodies, they would blame the mama bears.

“Shit,” I said, realizing something. “We need to check their pockets.”

“Shit,” Xari agreed.

“We can remove our footprints with magic,” I said, getting into my shoes. We only had our boxers on, but we wouldn’t be out there for long.

Xari jumped out before me, looking around for signs of further danger. When he deemed it safe enough, I got out and joined him. I grimaced at the sight before us. There was so much blood. But we had a job to do.

I moved closer, seeing Snowflake approach us to watch over me while I was out of the van.

His white fur was now red and pink. How he could still look so cute covered in blood was a mystery, but maybe it came with the magic.

You got power and a higher tolerance to seeing blood. Honestly, I hoped that was the case.

Xari and I started at either end of them, looking them over for anything they carried.

They had phones but nothing else that would prove them to be not of this world.

We placed all of the phones on the ground and then I burned them with my fire.

We couldn't access them anyway and feared they had some kind of tracking device on them.

Burning them seemed to be our best option.

With Xari's earth magic, he opened the ground, buried the phones deep down, placing lots of greenery on top to conceal the newly filled hole. We couldn't be reckless and get arrested for murder.

"We should clean up," Xari said, looking down at his bloody hands. I used my water magic to remove the blood from our hands and shoes. Then we dried off using his wind and my fire magic .

I turned to our familiars. "Thank you for protecting us. You can go now and we'll call upon you when we're at a new campsite." They both disappeared. "Guess that answers if we can command someone else's familiar, too," I grinned.

He smiled at me, took my hand in his, and led me back into our van.

"We need to change clothes and get on the road again. I'd like to drive further than the closest campsite, just to be sure.

Please sleep while I drive." I nodded. It would likely take me a while to relax enough to sleep, still running high on adrenaline.

But I understood that we needed sleep and since he couldn't while driving, I at least should.

"I'll sleep next to you." I didn't want to be in the back with no way to reach him if anything happened.

“Like I would let you out of my sight,” he said, looking at me with those ice-blue eyes, full of seriousness and love.

Once we were on the road again, with the GPS set to a campsite five hours away, I dozed off. My last thought was that I hoped wherever we ended up next, Xari would be able to get some rest.

I was shaken awake gently and blinked my eyes open to see morning sunlight. We were parked in a forest again, but this time there were other campers.

“I couldn’t get completely away from other people, so this will have to do,” Xari said, jumping out of the van. I followed his steps, yawning as I joined him behind it.

“We need to call our familiars, but we can’t do it here with people watching,” I whispered. “Maybe we should go further into the forest and call them there? Then, when they’re invisible, we can move back so you can get some rest.”

“I like that plan,” he answered, taking my hand in his as he locked the van behind us. We didn’t follow a trail, wanting to steer clear from the usually used trails. When we were far enough away from other people, we called them. They were clean and blood free when they came back.

“Can you return invisible every time we call you?” I asked, knowing it would help us out immensely in the future.

Snowflake nodded his head and I scratched behind his ear.

I knew they could understand us, but it was super helpful to get a sort of answer back.

“Please do that from now on, both of you.”

As soon as they were invisible, we moved back towards our van.

I could do with some more sleep, too, but we hadn't eaten and after using that much magic, we would also need food.

Xari climbed in and began sleeping while I sat outside with the back open so Xari and I could see one another if needed.

I had a one-use grill that I lit up and then took out some chicken sausages and buns.

The sausages were from a can, not the most delicious treat, but we didn't always have burgers and banging waffles nearby.

I looked through our stuff and realized we only had mustard, which would have to do for now.

I filled a water bottle with my water magic, knowing it would be the best water we could get out here.

Definitely the cleanest. When the sausages were done and the buns lightly toasted, I woke Xari up.

The smell of grilled meat made it easier to get him to leave our warm bed.

He pulled a blanket around his nearly naked body as we sat at the end of the van and swallowed the food, not really tasting it, but needing the energy it gave us .

I sighed with contentment, leaning against the wall as I felt how tired I was.

Xari must've been exhausted if I was still feeling this sleepy.



“Go back to sleep. I’ll clean this up and join you.

” Xari gave me a quick thank you kiss and snuggled back into bed.

I put the trash away in the trash cans and returned the few steps back to the van.

As soon as I was inside and the door locked, I crawled into bed next to Xari and fell asleep, knowing our familiars were protecting us outside.

Xarius

We woke up a few hours later. A gathering of people were drinking and having fun outside, blasting music and grilling, if the wonderful scent of cooked meat was any indication.

“Sleep well, baby?” I asked, using a finger to remove Niam’s hair from his forehead.

He yawned and stretched. “I did, what about you?”

“I did, but to be honest, I feel like I could sleep for days and it still wouldn’t be enough.”

He sighed. “I feel the same way. But can you imagine getting stronger than this? I already feel crazy powerful, and I know my magic isn’t even close to full capacity yet.”

“I know, it still baffles me that we got rid of those guys that easily. I mean, they never once saw us! How crazy is that?”

He hummed, trailing a finger down my chest. “I think we should find somewhere we can bathe.” Oh , what did my sexy bonded have in mind? I couldn’t wait to find out.

“Bathe, huh? So a motel or another forest but more secluded?”

“Motel, please, if we can afford it.”

“We have plenty of money for motels now that we can grab most things without paying.”

“Wait, you want us to steal?” he sounded so scandalized that the excited emotions I felt from him were hilarious.

“If we need to, yes.” I wasn’t above stealing. We would try our best not to steal, but we needed food. “Maybe when we get the other mages to join us, they’ll have powers that make stealing easier,” I pondered aloud. “Maybe we’ll be able to make money.

“Wait?” he said sitting up. “Wouldn’t you be able to make gold?”

“Um, I guess so? But coins aren’t worth much. ”

He rolled his eyes, that sexy minx . “I meant, you could make gold that we could sell.” Oh. OH!

“Baby, you’re a genius!”

“I know,” he grinned, then kissed me. “But let’s get dressed, then drive to a motel and find some amazing breakfast. And then we’ll bathe and get some money before moving on our journey.” I could only nod, his plan sounded perfect to me.

We got dressed and went outside to thank our invisible familiars before sending them off. The drive to the motel we picked only took an hour, the locket getting brighter the further we got.

Niam stabbed into his stack of pancakes, eyes glinting as he took his first bite.

I’d yet to taste my own, too busy drowning in his pleasure filled eyes and the soft moans he emitted.

Fuck, maybe we needed a longer rest here before hitting the road again.

I'd always known I would be the obsessive type as soon as my soulmatch was near me, but I was surprising myself with how badly I wanted Niam.

It was all the time. Even when fighting mages, he'd been sexy as hell, making them crumble in pain.

The shy guy who had accepted his fate was nowhere to be seen now.

The man stabbing through his pancakes was so much more than that.

“Are you just going to suck all the taste out of my food with your eyes, or do you plan on eating your own pancakes?” he asked, raising a brow.

I shook my head, smiling. I loved how easy things were between us.

If we had to deal with mages trying to kill us and relationship drama, too, I think I would throw a hissy fit.

I liked that we were a team. No words needed to be said.

No one was in charge. It was fucking perfect.

I hoped we worked this well with the other mages, too, but somehow, I doubted it.

I thought this thing I shared with Niam was just between us.

And I would readily admit that I selfishly wanted it to remain that way.

We were still in the countryside, but this time in a slightly bigger town.

It was easier for us to move through the country by driving on roads and through forested areas, and somehow the locket seemed to choose that, too.

The other mages would've been dumped in a deserted area as well, which meant they would likely be in small towns somewhere.

Fuck, I hoped that was the case. Fighting against mages in the city wasn't appealing at all.

I was a country boy myself, not going to the city unless I really needed to, like with the charity event I attended with Julie.

"I want to bathe after this and maybe wash some clothes in the bathroom, too," Niam said, drinking some orange juice. I'd started on my pancakes while deep in thought, and they were just what I needed. The dough was soft and pillowy inside and drenched in sirup.

Swallowing, I answered, "Sounds good. Maybe we can get you another pair of sneakers before we hit the road, too."

"Why? I already have a pair." He was too cute.

"I was thinking that we needed you to wear something you could run in." His sneakers had zero cushion, and had he been at my weight his feet would've suffered already. And I wasn't even going to start on his thrift store boots.

"Running shoes?" he questioned.

"Or just shoes of a better quality. I want you to be fast on your feet and with those so low on the ground and the half-ruined laces, you need something better. "

“Well, how am I supposed to say no to that,” he grinned, not at all offended that I didn’t like his shoes.

In fact, I hated them. I knew he got them from home, and that made it even worse.

The fact that those were the best shoes he chose to take with him.

I couldn’t wait until the day I saw his parents.

I would make them cry harder than they ever had before.

Not because I planned on laying a hand on them.

No, I would simply use my powers on them.

I was mentally rubbing my hands and cackling with delight at the thought.

The cafe we’d picked out was only a five-minute walk from the motel we were staying at, preferring that over a hotel for an easier escape route. We walked back, hand in hand, alert to our surroundings.

Niam didn’t seem to like being out in the open without our familiars near, so he’d called them. We knew they were with us even though we couldn’t see them. How they moved around people, we had no idea. We had to stay alert and that meant our invisible familiars had to deal with people themselves.

When we reached our motel room, we dismissed our familiars and walked in.

We’d dumped our stuff there before going to breakfast, so everything was ready for us when we came inside.

The yellow wallpaper was likely not yellow, but white, a nicotine layer coating the outside.

The red carpet was a choice. Either too many murders happened, or there was a sale on red wall to wall carpet, no other options existed, it was one or the other.

“God, I can’t wait to have a real shower,” Niam said, looking through our stuff for clean clothes.

I couldn’t either. We hadn’t cleaned up, truly cleaned up, after the mages had attacked, and even though life on the road was like that, I still preferred to always smell fantastic for my bonded.

I wasn’t about to be cockblocked for smelling like ass. No thank you.

“We might as well use your favorite soap,” I said, handing him the cotton candy scented one.

He smiled as he grabbed it, clearly feeling even more excited now.

I loved how easy it was to make him happy.

Niam wasn’t a difficult guy, just some love and attention to his wants and needs and he bloomed so prettily.

He winked at me and headed for the bathroom, saying casually over his shoulder, “Want to help me save water?”

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Niam

I was all for helping out the environment, and it seemed Xarius was, too.

We both rushed out of our clothes and met under the warm water in the too-small-for-two-men shower.

I'd had this hunger under my skin ever since we kissed for the first time.

A hunger only he could help me with. I was totally fine with being addicted to my bonded, to his touch, his kisses, and, of course, to his cock.

I would have him multiple times a day if it were possible.

For now, I had to be happy with a few stolen moments here and there.

"Mmm, you taste so good," he rasped, licking a line down my neck, nibbling at my shoulder and then returning to my neck. I bared my throat to him, surrendering my body as I leaned back against his front. He held me close, like he always did, reassuring my body and mind that I was no longer alone.

"I want you to fuck me," I whispered, needing to experience it again. We hadn't had sex since our first time together, and we had no idea when we would get the chance again.

He didn't answer but reached his hand between my butt cheeks. "I'll need to go grab the lube," he whispered, but he still didn't move away.



“Don’t need it. We can make an oil together.” I held my hands out like a bowl in front of me, filling it with water. “Add coconut oil or whatever oil you can make with your earth magic.

“I can make all of them,” he replied, holding his hands around mine.

Our magic worked together and we were left with a very liquid version of coconut oil.

He created a bowl out of stone and helped me transfer the concoction into it.

We placed it on a shelf and then he scooped out a healthy amount before reaching for my hole .

I arched my back further, spreading my legs as I bent over and opened myself up to him. He teased me open with his finger, slowly.

“Give me two,” I ordered, pushing back against him.

“Are you sure? I don’t want to-”

“Yes!” I interrupted. He inserted another finger and I removed the sting with my magic, confirming that I could take pain away, too. Perfect . “Three.”

“Three?! I just got started!”

“Trust me,” I begged. I needed to know for sure before telling him.

He inserted another finger and the sting came and went.

I moaned. This changed everything for us.

We could have all the sex, when clean enough to do so.

We didn't have to worry about prep. I would need to use magic all the time to keep my pain down during and after, but it was worth it.

We lived a dangerous life now, and I wasn't about to lose out on having my bonded's cock inside of me every chance I got.

"Need your cock," I begged. "Feel no pain. Can. Control it." I stammered out the last part as he circled his fingers inside of me, hitting the spot perfectly .

"I can feel that," he whispered, almost like he was in awe.

"It's intoxicating feeling what you feel, baby.

I can feel just how much pleasure I'm giving you.

I can't wait to feel how much you love taking my cock.

" Then he removed his fingers and breached me.

I had the pain under control, the feeling I got was all pleasure.

We groaned as he worked himself further into me, neither of us caring about how rough he was, knowing I could take it.

It sounded like his powers were evolving, too, being able to feel what I felt and not just sense emotions.

I placed both hands against the tiles while his hands held firmly onto my hips.

He thrust into me with abandon, slapping our skin together as we shared my pleasure, as he made my pleasure his own.

It was glorious. He felt everything I did, making me see stars behind my closed lids as he fucked me so perfectly my legs threatened to weaken under me.

If it wasn't for the shower wall and his tight grip on me, I would've fallen down, too shaken up with pleasure to do anything else than just exist and take it.

He groaned into my neck, his hips shaking as he came inside of me.

I carefully removed one hand off the tiles and moved it to my dick, wanting to come so badly, too.

Before I'd made contact, I was turned around and then Xari was there, on his knees, swallowing my dick, groaning loudly as he took all of me down his throat.

I felt his cum leak out of my used hole as he held my hips firmly, all while sucking my orgasm out of me.

It peaked and I shouted his name, falling down, knowing he would catch me.

The only thing I was sure to hold on to was my magic.

I didn't want this to end in pain, so I let Xari take care of me while I focused on that.

With my eyes closed, he washed my body and hair, holding me up while doing so. He stepped out with me in his arms and gently let me down to stand on the ground where we'd put a towel before getting in the shower.

He dried me off with a big fluffy towel, much nicer than the previous motel had, and

while he did his thing, I thought about how much easier my life would've been, had I met him before we were shunned.

There was the five-year age gap between us, but maybe we could've been friends and when I was an adult it could've turned into more.

Just to have a friend would've been nice, but then I remembered that I was thirteen when he got shunned, and back then I still had friends.

In the time he'd been here on Sutiner waiting for me, I'd been a world away, no friends, and no loving family.

I hated the council of mages even more when I realized that they'd not only stolen him from me, they'd done it knowingly.

Yes, they likely didn't know who our soulmatches were, but still.

They knowingly kept us away from one another, all because of power.

"We'll get our revenge," Xari said, his tone soothing my spiking anger. I loved that he could read my emotions. It meant I didn't have to always explain them. He was getting better at it, too, already knowing I was angry at the council and wanting revenge.

"I just wished we'd known each other earlier," I admitted and stepped away from him now that I was dry enough. "I feel like they robbed us of that."

He shook his head and smiled softly. "Baby, we wouldn't have known we were soulmatches until you turned eighteen, and we met shortly after that. This pull between us wouldn't have been there then."

“But you would still be the most amazing person ever, and I needed you, I just didn’t know it then.

” He hugged me close, letting me work through my emotions.

Everything had happened so quickly since I’d gotten shunned and I knew that even if our mission somehow failed, I would never regret choosing Xarius.

If I only got to live for a few days with him then I would gladly take it.

The fear of someone attacking at any moment was getting to me, and even though I logically knew I was one of the most powerful mages alive now, I still doubted myself.

How could I not? I’d been the weak one, the strange one , my entire life.

I’d only had magic for a few days, and I was nowhere good enough to protect Xari and myself forever.

We needed the other mages and we needed them now.

Too bad the rest wouldn’t be here for a few months (if we were lucky).

“I think we should head out and buy some shoes,” Xari said, holding out my clean boxers for me. I stepped into them and smiled when he stroked my cheek. “We got this,” he said, placing a soft kiss on my lips.

I nodded, not really able to speak, too raw and emotional. I knew our magic would take its toll on us, and I still felt it.

“We should wash our clothes and then stock the van before shoe shopping, though,”

he said, drying himself with the same towel. “If we need to make a hasty escape, I want the van at the ready.”

I nodded again and went in to collect all our dirty clothes.

We should be able to clean and dry them in only a few minutes, and this time we could use the detergent.

I got the clothes out in the bathroom and together we cleaned everything and then returned to our van.

We had our familiars out, watching over us as we placed our stuff back where it belonged.

“Maybe we should buy some meat, too? And maybe a small portable grill instead of those one-use ones,” I said, speaking for the first time since we had sex.

I wasn’t giving him the silent treatment, I was just feeling everything hitting me suddenly.

It left me in a sort of depressive state.

I felt a warm rush of emotions inside of me, all hitting differently at once so I couldn’t place what they were, before a calm came over me. I felt happy again, hopeful, even.

I shot a look over my shoulder at Xari, raising a brow in question. “Yes, that was me,” he replied, hugging me from behind. “I can help with your emotions when they get out of control. But I’ll stop if you don’t like it.”

“Don’t like it? I didn’t like feeling so down before.

I appreciate you clearing my mind for me.

These emotions and feelings are natural, I know that, but I need to be ready to protect us, and I can't do that if I'm too lost in my own head.

I couldn't get out myself, so thank you for bringing me back. ”

He hugged me tighter. “Now, let's go buy you some shoes.”

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Xarius

We got the shoes for Niam and then made a quick stop at a jeweler.

I'd made raw gold, stating that I'd found it myself in nature on our travels and we now needed some money for the rest of our adventure.

The kind owner was an older woman who loved getting raw gold she could melt and turn into something beautiful.

We probably didn't get the highest amount possible for it, but since I'd literally made it out of magic, I wasn't too picky about helping her out by not asking for more.

She'd been interested in hearing about our adventure and when we told her we lived in the van, she gave us a few tips if we ever wanted to add a kitchen in there while still having space enough to sleep in.

I hadn't told Niam, but I planned on buying a camper once we'd found Silver, knowing we would soon be three on the road, and I wasn't letting anyone else snuggle up next to my man.

We drove by a larger town next and Niam wanted to see their jewelers, too.

I'd quickly made us some more raw gold and we got rejected at the first store, they didn't make the jewelry themselves so it meant nothing to them, but the next was eager to buy from us.



Gold was apparently getting rarer to come by, especially raw gold.

The owner had bought everything and thanked us after testing it was all real gold.

He was desperate for more, saying married couples wanted to design their own rings but it was hard for him to come by any gold that didn't have to be remelted, and he hated ruining an already made design.

I told him we had more we were saving for the future but I would grab it for him.

We'd sat in the van while I made the new gold and sold that, too.

Just more money towards the camper, I thought as we drove away from the jeweler.

Our next destination was another campsite.

We hadn't felt watched once and we took that as a good sign.

Perhaps the council of mages wouldn't send someone after us right away.

We could only hope . When the mages we'd killed were determined to be missing or dead, we would be the ones they blamed.

Niam held up the locket which glowed brighter as we kept getting closer to Silver.

It was a sign of hope. A sign we were getting closer each day.

I hoped Silver was doing okay. He'd been here for around two years according to Niam.

Whatever he'd done to survive in this world had worked, the locket wouldn't glow if

he was dead.

“The weather app shows a storm is coming,” Niam said, looking at my phone.

We’d decided he didn’t need his own for now.

We wouldn’t be apart, so there really wasn’t any use for it.

I would happily share mine with him. The phones here were a little different than the ones from our world, but Niam was a quick learner.

“Rain? Thunder?” I asked, bending my head to look further up the sky, which was getting darker, a looming presence over the van as we drove down the dirt road. We were once again on country roads, away from any big towns, and driving further into the wilderness to the campsite.

“Both,” he grimaced. “It should last a day at least. ”

I looked at the GPS. It was old, but worked as intended so we kept using it, knowing we could switch to the phone when needed.

Estimated arrival time was thirty minutes.

“Do you think our familiars will mind sleeping in the rain?” We didn’t have any other choice, but maybe I could park near somewhere sturdy enough that we didn’t have to worry about the storm.

“I have no idea. We haven’t spent enough time with them to truly bond. Maybe once we have a rest, we should bond with them a little?”

I liked that plan. “We could use some rest, too, but we should wait until we reach

Silver. It could be a few days before he'll decide to come with us."

He sighed. "You're right, and it seems foolish to stop now that we're this close."

"Especially if the mages know where Silver is. He could be in danger now that they know we've gotten our magic."

"I hadn't even thought about that! What about Wilston then?"

He could be on the other side of the globe!

"I could feel his panic and fear. Placing my hand on his thigh I did my best to calm his emotions, while keeping my eyes firmly on the road ahead.

We needed to reach the site before the storm began.

Twenty-two minutes later, and we arrived.

I may have broken the speed limit, but if any cop dared stop me when a storm was coming, then that was on them.

I parked near the facilities building. It was a small house that held bathrooms and showers.

This site wasn't as primitive as the others were, with options to stay under cover and eat.

There was a fire pit surrounded by tables for eating, each table had coverings built out of wood, shielding people from the sun and the rain when they ate.

The storm was going to hit any minute now, so we jumped out of the van to make

sure our bladders were empty before we headed into the back.

After having peed first, I waited with our familiars for Niam to return.

I was right beside the door that led into the building, so I wasn't worried about him being separated from me.

We needed space for some things to keep the romance alive, or that's what Niam had said when he demanded I leave him alone the last time he had to pee.

I knew when I wasn't wanted, so I kept watch and thought about the empty bottles we had for emergencies inside the van.

No way was either of us leaving the van in the middle of a thunderstorm to pee .

I felt Leon and Snowflake at my side, guarding the door protecting me.

They were always invisible now, something we would need to change when we left this site.

Even with the storm here there were at least seven other cars, all parked around the middle like us, too afraid to be up against the trees.

"Hi, there, handsome," a female voice said from my left. I looked over and saw a woman with long braided hair. She looked to be in her early thirties and had a friendly smile on her face.

"Good evening," I greeted, not wanting to appear rude. She was likely looking for supplies to help her through the storm.

"Is that van yours?" she asked, confirming my suspicion.

“It is,” I replied, not offering more information.

“Any lady with you?” she asked, leaning against the wall confidently. She wasn’t batting her lashes or giving me doe eyes, no, she oozed confidence in a cool way. I wasn’t interested, but I was impressed.

Not wanting to offer more information, I simply answered, “no.”

“Then let me keep you warm tonight,” she grinned, proving again to be truly confident.

If me and Niam ever had any girls, I hoped they’d be this confident.

Small girl bosses. Oh my god, how adorable would that be?

! A tiny girl version of Niam bossing us around.

I would need to talk to Niam about kids.

Not that I was desperate to share him with anyone else just yet, but damn, did I want to make him a daddy.

Before I could kindly tell her no, she flew back and landed hard on her back, her nose bleeding out of nowhere.

“What happened?!” I asked, looking around, then I heard Leon make a sound and I swear it sounded like a hiss. Damn. Leon had karate kicked her straight in the face.

The woman looked terrified as she looked around. I was glad that I was too far away to have done this myself, so she wouldn’t suspect me.

Niam chose that moment to appear, taking in the sight of the bleeding girl and the still hissing Leon. He raised a brow, looking pointedly at me. “What did she do?”

I decided to answer, because the woman didn’t seem in any hurry to get up, and I wasn’t about to face Leon’s wrath and help her. “She offered to keep me warm during the storm. ”

He threw his hands up in the air. “I can’t even shit in peace without people hitting on you!

” I just shrugged. It wasn’t my fault that he hadn’t allowed me to come in with him.

He just shook his head at me. “Well, at least Leon fights for my honor,” he huffed and turned for the van.

If the intended push against my side was to be trusted, Snowflake had followed right behind him.

I sighed and hung my head. Somehow it was now my fault she’d hit on me.

I waved goodbye to her and hoped she would find someone else she could keep warm.

She was still sitting on the ground when I closed the van doors and locked them.

Two minutes later, the storm hit, and pebbling raindrops hit the roof, a comforting sound as we snuggled up together on our mattress, enjoying this moment of peace while it lasted.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Niam

We left the campsite at the break of dawn.

The storm was still roaring, making the roads leading out of the campsite muddy, but we needed to get out of there.

There were fifteen cars when we woke up, and even if it seemed paranoid of us, we simply didn't feel safe with so many people around our van.

We were in search of a restaurant, or any place really, that offered breakfast.

"According to the map, there aren't any restaurants in the area," I said, pouting. I really wanted waffles, or pancakes, I wasn't picky, either would do. But with the rain coming down in waves and empty roads ahead, it seemed like it wasn't in my near future. Sadly.

"Maybe we should camp in the forest and wait for the rain to stop?" Xari suggested.

I sighed and slumped back in my seat. "Yeah, it seems like the best option right now. It just sucks. Silver is out there, and maybe in danger because of what we've started.

" I hated thinking about him being ambushed without having done anything wrong.

I couldn't help comparing myself to him.

Had he been lonely before being shunned, too?

Had his start here been awful? Was he happy now?

“Check the weather app.” I did as he asked and saw the storm should clear in four hours’ time.

I told him and placed the phone back between us.

“Then let’s park for three hours before hitting the road again.

” I nodded and we drove until an opening came to our right, just a small space for parking, but it was better than nothing.

I would use the time wisely, by reading.

“That was amazing,” I sighed, slumping back in the seat. We’d stayed in the van during the storm, just reading and snuggling up together, and as soon as the three hours were up, we’d driven an hour to the nearest town.

“I completely agree,” Xari said, starting the van. We’d just eaten a late lunch at a pizza place, stuffing our faces with the amazing cheese coated dough. Now, we were determined to close the last miles between us and Silver.

We drove in silence, both of us tired of being on the road and trying to stay awake even if we both desperately wanted an after food nap. I knew I could doze off, but it still didn’t feel right leaving Xari alone.

“Can I see the locket?” he asked. I took it out and showed him the glow. “I think we’re only hours away now.” He sounded so elated, so relieved. I was, too, feeling the need to protect another shunned mage.

“There’s a lake coming up in an hours’ time,” he said, pointing to the GPS screen.



“Want us to camp there for the night? ”

“Yeah, I think Snowflake would love to catch some fish.” I longed to have a sweet moment with our familiars. Little did I know, it would turn bloody.

We left the van and called our familiars out, this time allowing them to be seen. I’d forgotten just how big Leon was.

“Lake’s this way!” Xari called, walking ahead while I walked next to Snowflake, pleased to see him again.

The lake was beautiful. Surrounded by trees, it looked like a fairy tale, with ripples in the water from the wind and birds swimming around in it.

Snowflake was gone in a flash, chasing said birds and ruining the calm vibe the place held before.

Xari stripped off his clothes and suddenly I felt the peace and beauty of the place again. I stripped, too, and together we jumped into the water, giggling like we were doing something naughty .

We stayed in the water for over an hour practicing our magic. I made waves and Xari created some boards out of wood so we could surf, helping me with the waves by adding his wind magic. I’d never laughed so hard in my life. I’d also never surfed on a lake before, or ever actually.

It wasn’t until we heard a feral hiss from Snowflake that we knew something bad was happening.

The water around us started to rise, moving over us like it intended on drowning us.

I quickly got control of it and had it push us to the shore.

Six mages stood before us, battling our familiars and throwing magic our way.

I grabbed Xari's hand, shouting, "fire wind!" He seemed to understand what I meant, and together we created a circle of fire that with his wind flew around the mages, forcing them together and away from our familiars.

I used my pain on them, but I'd missed one, someone who'd stayed behind on purpose. That mistake cost me. Suddenly, something heavy hit me in the head out of nowhere, and everything went black.

## Page 26

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Xarius

The fire disappeared as soon as Niam got hit.

I hadn't even seen the female mage before she threw the rock, using wind magic to throw it at such a high speed it hit harder than it would've without magic.

I made a wounded noise when Niam fell to the ground.

We were both naked, not that I cared, but he was so vulnerable lying there naked and hurt.

Snowflake went feral when he saw his master was down, tearing into the woman, killing her in seconds.

I still had the others caught in my wind, but without the fire it wasn't hurting them anymore.

I made a quick decision and tried something I knew was possible, but it was difficult and only the most powerful wind mages could do it.

I took hold of the air in their lungs, and pulled.

Thirty seconds later, they were all dead.

Leon was hurt, too, laying on the ground with a torn-up wing.

Snowflake was covered in blood and his one eye was torn through.

I couldn't dismiss them yet though. Not that I didn't want them to heal, which they would as soon as they were dismissed, I knew as much, didn't know how I knew, I just did.

It could take hours, yes, but they would heal.

I was just afraid to dismiss them until I had Niam back in the van.

Crouching beside him, I looked over his injuries.

He had a huge bump on his head, and blood oozed out where he'd been hit.

But he was alive. With my magic, I quickly opened up the ground where the mages lay dead, burying them on the spot.

I didn't have time to search them, so this would have to do.

I buried the lone woman after, since she'd died further away from the others.

When the ground was filled with bushes above them, I picked Niam up and ran towards the van .

I found one of our towels and placed it at the head of our mattress, placing Niam down gently on it.

Then I put his boxers on and then pants, not wanting my bonded to be in such a vulnerable state.

I tugged him in with the covers and did something we'd said we wouldn't do, but

desperate times and all that.

“Snowflake, turn invisible and stay with him. Make sure he stays in bed.” Snowflake jumped in and turned invisible as soon as he snuggled in next to Niam.

I hoped Niam wouldn't be too mad about the “ no familiars in the van rule ” being broken.

“Leon, go rest, I'll call you to us when we're somewhere safe.

” He disappeared and I quickly pulled on some clothes myself before rushing into the front of the van, starting it up, and driving towards the nearest hospital or doctor's office.

I drove past two parked cars on the way out of the forest, which meant the mages had followed our trail somehow.

I had feared they were using portals to show up wherever we were, but if they drove it seemed like there was something they could track us down with.

I shook my head; I couldn't think about that right now.

Not while my bonded, my precious bonded , lay unconscious and hurt.

I winced, remembering the sound the rock made when it hit him and then the sound of Niam hitting the ground.

My fingers tightened around the steering wheel.

I'd failed in protecting him. We needed the others, and until we found them, we would be vulnerable.

Today was proof of that. We might be powerful, but we weren't used to fighting or thinking about strategies.

We'd not even noticed someone was stalking us from behind, waiting to do a stealthy attack on us.

We needed to be better. We needed to practice.

It took twenty minutes before I reached a town, and luckily, they had a doctor who took in emergency patients, too.

Niam had stayed where I left him, Snowflake right beside him.

I sent Snowflake away to heal and carried Niam inside for the doctor to look at.

When I carried him inside the clinic, the calm atmosphere erupted into full panic, and two nurses or doctors, I could never tell the difference, helped me into a room.

"What happened?" one of the medical professionals asked, while the other checked his vitals.

"We got ambushed while camping," I said, not lying. "Someone threw a rock or something, and it hit him hard."

She nodded. "Any vomiting? "

I shook my head. "No, he was knocked out right as it hit him and has been unconscious since. So maybe forty to fifty minutes now."

I could tell by their emotions that they felt sympathy and something I would describe as the feeling of dread, which really didn't help my state of mind.

They took him to another room and had me wait out in the waiting room with the non-urgent patients who were waiting for their appointments.

I had no idea how bad it was, normally mages healed quicker because our magic mended us together, but if the damage was severe enough, his magic wouldn't have been able to stop the damage the hit had caused.

Which meant brain damage couldn't be ruled out.

Oh god, what would I do if he were in a coma?

Or was so injured I would never be able to speak to him again.

There were so many things I'd yet to talk to him about.

Like what he wanted our future to look like. Did he ever want kids?

The door opened and instantly all my thoughts evaporated.

All I could focus on was the doctor's emotions.

She was tired. Relieved. Sympathetic. Angry.

All her emotions were mixing together, likely meaning she was too tired to control them.

No one would be able to tell from her calm facade as she walked over to me, but I knew the chaos that inhabited her body.

She stopped right beside me and I stood up, ready to bolt in there and get my man.

It was torture being apart from him like this.

“He’s going to be just fine,” she informed me.

“You can come in and see him now.” I exhaled in relief and followed her down the hallway past the exam rooms, and wondered briefly how long I’d waited.

It felt like hours. It likely was hours.

My needs had taken a back seat so I wasn’t even sure if I needed anything. What was food when my bonded was hurt?

She entered a room to the left and I followed, trying, but failing to walk at a normal speed. And there was my bonded. Niam was lying down on a hospital bed with tubes connected to his arm. Maybe fluids or something for the pain. They couldn’t know he didn’t need that.

“Baby,” I choked out. His eyes opened and he gave me a weak smile when his unfocused eyes met mine. I sat down on the chair next to him, taking his tube-free hand in mine and stroking it gently.

“I’ll give you both a status on your situation, Niam,” the doctor began.

“Your body protected you from further harm by having you faint. Sometimes our bodies do that to protect themselves, and in your case, it worked. There’s no damage to your brain, and no signs of a concussion either.

You were truly lucky to have a brain that acted that fast to protect you.

” She smiled kindly at Niam, her emotions showed no ill will towards him, easing my worry that she knew we were somehow mages and that was the reason he’d healed so



well.

“How long until he can come home?” I asked, knowing we’d need to trust their judgement. No way was I risking him further, magic or no magic.

“Since it seems his body only shut down in order to protect him against trauma, I would say in an hour if he’s able to focus properly. I’ll come back in half an hour to do some tests and then we’ll see.”

“Thank you,” Niam said, smiling softly. I could tell from the doctor’s emotions that she liked Niam.

The story about how we got attacked must’ve really affected her.

Or maybe she was just an amazing person who had empathy in spades.

Either way, she liked my bonded and I was glad. It meant he was well looked after.

She left the room and as soon as she was gone, Niam whispered, “did you deal with them?”

I nodded. “All of them are buried, too. ”

He sighed with relief. “Ever since I woke up, I’ve been so worried you were hurt, too. I even asked the nurse if you were okay.”

I smiled at him and kissed his cheek. “I was so scared, baby. I made the mistake of thinking I was untouchable, letting the power we’ve gotten affect my judgement on what we can handle.”

He squeezed my hand. “I made the same mistake. After the first attack I still felt like

I was playing pretend, but as the days went on, I stopped feeling like that, too busy thinking about how powerful we were and our mission. I guess I liked feeling powerful for once and as we stood there fighting them... I forgot to be careful. Untouchable, like you said. We need to train harder for next time.”

“And find Silver. If they could get one of us down, then he’s in real trouble.”

“And Wilston, too,” he reminded me.

“Wilston, too. I was thinking about getting a camper, so as soon as we come by a town or a city that sells them, we should get one. You know, one of those you can drive and live in.”

“So Silver and Wilston can have room to live with us. I’ve thought about the same thing. I just doubt our abilities to get enough money for it. ”

“We can check if someone is selling a used one, it’ll be cheaper and we can likely pay in cash,” I suggested, telling him about my plan.

“Let’s find Silver and then we can find a camper while we look for Wilston. I don’t want to risk anything happening to Silver while we take our sweet time, basically guiding them directly to him.” Damn, he had a point.

“Deal. Now we just gotta wait for them to discharge you.”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “How’re our familiars?”

“Both are dismissed and healing. They should be fine in a few hours, but we’ll summon them when we leave this room. I will not have you vulnerable at any time. They can heal while we drive.”

“Sounds good to me. Food after this?” his voice was strained and weak. Had it been that long since we’d eaten? And again, I thought about how long I’d waited here. My own stomach growled. Shit. It had been hours if my stomach told me the truth. My poor bonded needed some food.

The doctor came in, smiling brightly as she began checking him. “You’re fine to leave, no need to stay the whole hour.”

We took the bill and since it was way more than we could afford with our goal of getting a camper as soon as possible, we decided a little debt wouldn’t hurt us. We would simply wait with the payment, or take a loan. It wasn’t like we were staying here either way.

As soon as we sat in the parking lot of a fast-food place, scarfing down burgers and fries, Niam spoke up, “why don’t we just get an expensive camper, like an RV or something, with room for six and make a payment deal or loan for it.

What’s the difference between my medical debt and that?

We will leave Sutiner, hopefully next year or the year after that.

So shouldn’t we get the best and know it won’t die on us? ”

How was he able to think about stuff with a damaged head, when I couldn’t even do it with my non-damaged one.

“I’m so glad your brain is fine and still able to think of things that are so much better than whatever I come up with,” I said, pecking a kiss on his lips, not caring his mouth was stuffed with fries, just needing to kiss him.

He gave me a big smile as he chewed his fries.

“I’ll look for a place that sells brand-new campers,” he said, his excitement obvious as he scrolled my phone.

“Okay, so in order to not diverge too much from our current destination, aka Silver, we could check out this one.” He handed me the phone.

“They don’t have many options, but they do have two different models available, and one of them seems to fit our needs perfectly.

” I nodded as I looked over the pictures.

It was new and seemed very high tech and pretty.

“We should definitely get an RV before the last two mages arrive,” I said, looking at the one RV. “It would help immensely to have a kitchen and a bathroom. Especially since we still have no idea how to get home.”

“That would be amazing,” he agreed. “But an RV seems too big for now, and besides, the others need to agree with this stuff, too. We will start with a camper and then, once Silver and Wilston join us, we can figure out what works best for all of us. Maybe if they’re soulmatched, they’ll want their own van?

Maybe they aren’t and each will want their own private space. We can’t know.”

“So damn smart,” I sighed dreamily. I truly got lucky when fate made Niam mine.

Niam

We decided to buy the camper first thing in the morning, opting for a night at a motel with our familiars surrounding us.

We slept peacefully and since Snowflake and Leon had fully healed, they weren't in danger of messing up the carpet, which was a creamy beige this time.

Snowflake was asleep on the foot of the bed, happy to snuggle up with our toes as we slept.

Sleep found us quickly, the fight and me being injured exhausting us both.

My wound was now just a small ache in my head, which I easily removed with my magic .

We woke up to hissing and as soon as my brain was back to functioning, I sprang up and noticed the door handle was rattling.

Xari was out of bed, and, quickly moving over there, he held up three fingers, telling me there were three mages trying to get in.

“Snowflake and Leon,” I whispered, “guard the door.”

I joined Xari behind where the door would open and got ready to unleash a world of pain on them.

Xari had made several locks with his magic, all in different metals to ensure our safety as we slept, but now the mages were melting them and trying to break in as silently as possible.

When they were able to turn the handle successfully, they almost fell inside, not expecting the door to give way already.

I suspected Xari was tired of waiting and had removed the locks.

He could do it faster since he'd made them.

I quickly made them writhe in pain, while Xari took their oxygen. We'd already made the mistake of thinking we were untouchable. It wasn't happening again. This time we took them out before they could do anything.

They fell dead on the floor. All suffocated and lifeless.

"How are we supposed to dispose of them?" I asked, feeling panicked over getting caught killing people.

I hadn't even once felt bad about killing someone, and I believed with my power not only came a better tolerance of blood, but also of killing.

Xari closed the door, grimacing at me. "I have an idea. It'll be messy, but effective."

An hour later we were on the road again, my stomach churning with what we'd had to do.

It involved stripping them and placing their clothes in the trash.

There was zero blood and since they weren't from here, they wouldn't be considered

missing, and their clothes then held no value or risk to us.

We'd melted their phones and thrown them in the trash, too.

The next part was what had my stomach in turmoil.

Removing all towels and any kind of fabric from the bathroom, we'd placed them all inside and then Snowflake was sent in there to... yeah.

Something we would need to examine further was the fucking glow that emitted from Snowflake once he was done... doing his thing. We simply hadn't had the time to focus on it, needing to flee the scene and get a move on.

We had dismissed them both and were now parked at the car dealership to look at the camper we'd seen online.

Long story short, we were now the proud owners of a small teardrop trailer that was now secured behind our van.

It was large enough to house two men for sleeping.

We deemed it good enough for now. The camper we'd had our eyes on, had been sold yesterday and the smaller one they had hadn't been available for over a week; they'd just forgotten to take it off their site.

Since we were in a hurry, we'd decided the teardrop trailer was better than nothing, plus it was cheap enough that we could pay for it in cash without taking on any debt.

We'd just bought a mattress and some pillows and a duvet, so when Silver joined us, he would have his own place to sleep.

If we planned on having him stay in the back of the van whenever we drove around, maybe we could offer to have Snowflake there to help protect him so he wasn't alone.

There was a window separating us from the back to the front, but it still felt better not leaving Silver entirely alone in the back .

“Can you take out the locket?” Xari said, jumping back behind the wheel. The mattress was now fully in place and we'd made it cozy enough.

I took it out. “Much brighter,” I said, showing him just how much it shone now.

“I think we're less than an hour away,” he grinned, the relief evident in his tone.

We drove into a town much bigger than the others we'd visited so far. The locket dimmed noticeably whenever we steered off course, making it easy to track him down to the strip club that we were now parked behind.

We got out and called our familiars. Thank God, the glow wasn't noticeable when Snowflake was invisible. “So, a strip club,” I said, looking around, trying to gauge just how seedy of a place it was.

Xari shrugged. “It's one way of staying alive, hell even I'd thought about it at first. No former job experience and no one to vouch for you? Yeah, stripping was likely his only choice.”

“He could be a bartender, or a bouncer,” I offered, thinking about just how different my life would've turned if I'd never met Betty and Jerry .

We walked inside hand in hand, and I instantly knew this was the sort of seedy I didn't like.



I tried peeking at the locket, which rested against my chest, the chain comfortable around my neck.

I led us while Xari helped steer me out of the way so I could focus on how the locket behaved.

I stopped outside a door labeled “Employees only.” I ignored it and walked inside with Xari right behind me.

The door took a little too long shutting behind us, Snowflake and Leon battling it as they followed us.

We entered a hallway with several doors on either side. The music from the club was still loud, the bass more noticeable than the actual music. I watched the locket as it guided us to a door on the right. I knocked and when a cheery “come in!” sounded, we entered.

And there sat Silver. He was beautiful, with wavy hair that went to his shoulders, and was, of course, silver. Not that I believed that was his true hair color, not with his young age. Though it did look natural. His green eyes watched us warily as we entered. “Um, can I help you?”

Xari quickly shut and locked the door, making Silver look tense. I didn’t want to scare him, so I quickly blurted, “we’re shunned mages, too! ”

His eyes widened and then he smiled with relief. “I’d hoped to one day meet some of you, not that I believe the council would want that, with the weird place they decided to dump me in,” he said, and his irritation with the council matched my own.

“I was dumped in a forest, several hours away from any road and with protective mama bears surrounding it,” I said, hoping we could bond a little before getting into

things.

“I was dumped in a hayfield,” Xari said. “I swear I can still feel the hay against my skin some days.” Silver and I laughed at that. This was good! We would get along perfectly.

“I was dumped into the ocean,” Silver said. “At night, the only thing guiding me to shore was a lighthouse.”

“Those assholes!” I exclaimed, not caring that Xari’s mother was one of them, because that was just plain cruel.

Silver shrugged, “well, I did tell them exactly what I thought of them, not my fault they couldn’t take constructive criticism.” I was pretty sure Silver and I were platonic soulmates. “How did you find me?” he finally asked.

I decided to start with the most important part first. “It’s a rather long story, so let’s start with the most pressing thing first. We’re being chased and attacked by mages from our world trying to kill us.

” His eyes widened as he looked between us both.

“We got our magic, which they tried to keep us from getting, and now they want us dead.”

“Wait,” he said, holding up a hand that had pretty nails with glitter on them. “You were born without magic like me, right?”

We nodded. “Or we thought so, but we just needed our soulmatch to unlock our powers,” I explained, then realized it sounded ridiculous.

“Mmmhmm sure,” he said, totally not believing a word we said.

I sighed. “Snowflake, you can be visible now.” My beautiful snow leopard was still glowing. “We need to check out why he’s glowing,” I reminded Xari, then looked at Silver who was understandably startled. “This is my familiar Snowflake. I got him after we unlocked our magic.”

He shook his head, then took in a deep breath. “Okay, so let’s just say I believe you. Why would they try to kill you? They sent us here because we were ‘ defect mages ’ so shouldn’t they be fucking pleased we were deemed good enough for their fancy world? ”

Xari spoke up now. “Because we’re more powerful than the council of mages.

The legends of old spoke about six men who ruled our world, all born without magic until they met their soulmatch and unlocked their magic, getting familiars to help fight and protect them.

We were shunned because they didn’t want us to get our powers and steal the throne.  
”

“Umm,” Silver said, and we decided through eye contact to tell him the whole story. Sitting down on a worn couch, we got into it, telling him everything.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:24 am*

Xarius

After telling our entire story to Silver, he looked wrecked.

I could sense all of his emotions as we went through everything, and now, he was left with two.

Anger and fear. I could tell he wasn't entirely sold yet, and I guess it was wise not to immediately trust two strangers, but he was at least not completely shut off.

He even showed sympathy in his emotions when he looked at Niam.

And Niam seemed to have a fondness for Silver, too, his emotions showing that he cared for him already .

“Okay,” Silver sighed. “You need the rest of us shunned mages to get our magic, too, and Wilston is another shunned mage we know is here on Sutiner. But what about after? How are we supposed to find the others without their names?” He made a good point, but my mothers seemed to believe we could search for their souls and that would be enough.

I shrugged, “we don't know yet, exactly. We know it should work because our souls are connected, and I trust we can figure it out together. If Wilston is your soulmatch, then maybe we can combine all our powers and that'll be enough for the locket to work.”

Silver nodded, accepting we didn't have an answer for everything. “Can I think about

it?” he asked. “I like it here and have made a life for myself. I have friends who care about me.”

I looked at Niam and we both nodded. We could give him a few days before we needed to move on to Wilston. I had no idea what we would do if he didn’t come with us, but I didn’t want to worry about that at the moment.

“I’m off from my shift,” Silver said, packing his stuff away. “I was removing my makeup when you came in. ”

“Oh, um, is it okay if we escort you home? With the attacks we’ve dealt with we don’t want you out there on your own,” Niam said, giving Silver a soft smile.

Silver nodded, “I guess that’ll be okay.”

We followed him out, Snowflake turning invisible before we left the room.

We acted like we belonged there, and I guess we sort of did now that we were with Silver.

Once we hit the main club area, Silver left us momentarily to hug a few of his coworkers, pecking kisses on their cheeks before he returned to our side.

It seemed to be a strip club that had both female and male strippers and Silver seemed friendly with all of them, his emotions showing fondness and safety.

I was glad he had that and that it wasn’t just a way for him to get money.

No matter how hard that was to believe, I could see it clearly in his emotions.

“Ready to go?” I asked Silver, trying not to rush him.

He nodded and waved to all his friends and blew kisses.

“ Now , I’m ready,” he grinned, leaving the club with us following behind him.

The air outside was a relief. The humidity from the club had left my skin slightly clammy, not that the people inside seemed to mind, too busy ogling the strippers .

It was getting dark outside, meaning we had to find a secure place to sleep for the night. I hoped we would be able to convince Silver to share a motel room with us, but I wasn’t sure how much he would like that idea.

“Where’s your car?” Silver asked once we arrived at the parking lot behind the strip club.

Niam pointed to our van, “that one’s ours.” Silver nodded and moved towards it. I shared a look with Niam. I didn’t think Silver had a car, so how he’d travelled to and from work was a mystery.

“Is there room enough in the front for my fabulous ass?” Silver asked over his shoulder.

I shrugged, “only one way to find out.”

We sat with Silver in the middle, both of us thinking he needed the safest place in the van. “So, where to?” I asked, gesturing to the GPS. I had no idea how far away he lived, but since he wanted to drive there, it didn’t seem to be close.

Silver quickly tapped the screen and the GPS showed us it would take eight minutes. How long would that take on foot? Thirty minutes? I shook my head, it wasn’t my place to worry about him, but we were connected and since our souls had been friends before, my worry was understandable, I decided.

We drove in silence, and while it wasn't exactly comfortable, it wasn't too awkward either.

We'd told him everything and now we left him to work through it all, not wanting to seem too pushy.

Niam had told me he was very firm on the no-kidnapping rule here, and that I was under no circumstance allowed to kidnap Silver.

Right. I knew it wasn't a good thing I'd done it with Niam, but that was different.

Niam was mine ; Silver wasn't. I wouldn't kidnap a man I had no claim on anyway.

I didn't want to. Kidnapping was apparently only doing it for me when it was Niam.

Hmm, I seemed to keep learning about what had my blood pumping when it came to my bonded.

We came to a stop at a trailer park and Silver sighed, then gestured to the view in front of us.

"Welcome to my home," he said. We left the van and followed him over to his trailer.

It was dark here, no street lights or anything.

The other trailers seemed either empty or the people living there were asleep.

He stopped just outside his front door. "You can come back in the morning and I'll have an answer ready for you then.

But don't you dare bang on my door before nine, I need my beauty sleep.

” He waved his hand down his body, likely to show what he meant with beauty.

He was a handsome man, but I was so besotted with my bonded that he was doing nothing to me.

I opened my mouth to agree with the time, but a hiss from Niam told me we were being attacked. “Snowflake! Leon!” I called. I turned around and took in the scene. Twenty mages were surrounding us. Twenty!

Instantly, we were beside Silver, both of us pushing him back to guard him. I wanted to protect Niam, too, since I’d already failed him once. I wasn’t about to do that again. But this time I also had Silver to protect. A mage without his magic.

I used my wind to target the ten on one side, battling their attempts at attacking.

I had fire thrown at me that Niam brushed off with his water magic easily, then the earth tried to swallow us and the trailer, but my earth magic was stronger, making my fight against it easy.

You could cancel another’s magic completely if your own was stronger.

I kept hold of the ten I had targeted and they turned red as I pulled the air from their lungs while they struggled against my wind magic, but I knew mine was stronger so I wasn’t too worried.

I kept firm control over them while I helped Niam deal with the other ten.

His pain magic shot out and affected the ones in the middle, causing the others to back away slowly, likely sensing something was going on that didn’t just involve elemental magic.



“Oh god,” Silver whispered behind us when Snowflake came into view, sprinting through the carnage and swiping his claws— claws that had freaking fire on them!

— at three people at once, killing them instantly.

Leon pecked a mage on the nose, taking said nose from the mage and proceeded to prance around showing the nose off like it was a trophy he’d earned.

“Baby,” I whispered. “Pain on the other two.” He nodded quickly and switched his focus to the last two mages we hadn’t attacked with magic, leaving Snowflake to deal with the ones who were trying to stand now that the pain had vanished.

The ten I had strangled were now dead, leaving me to focus on the rest. I didn’t trust my own senses after last time, so I did a quick emotion sweep, seeing if anyone was hiding this time, too.

There wasn’t. I sighed with relief. When it was all over, we were panting, exerting ourselves to the furthest we’d ever done before.

“Everyone okay?” I asked, my hand finding Niam’s easily as we took stock of our surroundings.

The trailer park still seemed empty and if someone had seen anything, I hoped they were too tired or confused to believe it was real.

“I’m fine,” Niam answered, squeezing my hand with his. Leon was still prancing around with the damn nose like he was waiting for our praises.

“Leon, you did good,” I said, giving in and offering him what he so desperately needed to hear. The nose was then forgotten, dumped on the ground as he moved over to us.

“So, you got an ostrich, too?” Silver asked, reminding me he was here, too.

“He’s my familiar,” I responded, petting Leon’s feathers like he deserved. Snowflake was still glowing, but his claws weren’t on fire anymore. Thank fuck.

“We need to get on the road again,” Niam said, looking over the many dead bodies littering the space in front of the trailer. I nodded, using my magic to bury them under the dirt, glad that there wasn’t any gravel there, just flattened mud.

“I just need to pack quickly!” Silver said, unlocking his door and running inside, leaving the door wide open as he flew around his space, or rather floated. He seemed to have a grace to him as he located the stuff he couldn’t live without.

Niam and I smiled at one another. Silver was coming with us. Now we just needed Wilston.

Shortly after, Silver arrived with a few bags. “Now, I don’t do road life well if I don’t get regular showers, so I hope that’ll be a luxury I won’t have to give up.” I grinned at him; glad he wasn’t afraid to be himself around us.

“We got that covered. How about some food? Then we’ll find a place to park and sleep for the night,” I offered, waiting for both to agree. They nodded and together we moved to the van, dismissing our familiars for now.

Niam

We'd parked by a Chinese restaurant an hour's drive away, because we all hungered for some fried rice. I was simply pleased to try more food as we travelled. We had no idea how long we would remain on Sutiner, so I wanted to try as much as possible while we were here.

Silver looked exhausted as he shimmied into the booth. Xari and I sat next to each other with Silver on the other side, our view was of the door, always watching out for possible threats.

"We need to figure out how they're tracking us," I whispered, loudly enough for both to hear. "We can't keep getting attacked while searching for Wilston."

Xari shook his head. "And the other mages have yet to get here. If it takes them a year, then we'll have to fight, what, every other day? We'll be exhausted beyond belief."

"If Wilston is Silver's soulmatch, they'll be able to help," I reminded him.

"If Wilston wants to come with us," Silver reminded us. "He might've found a family here and wants nothing to do with other mages."

I hadn't thought about that. "But surely if he's your soulmatch that won't matter?"

He shrugged. "How did you know you two were "meant to be"?"

“Umm, well, Xari knew I was his soulmatch because of the locket, so we knew right away because of that,” I said, hating I couldn’t say something romantic about the first time I saw him.

“Niam thought I was stalking him,” Xari said, not caring at all how badly that painted him. He even sounded fond of the memory now. “And when he refused to speak with me, I chased him down and kidnapped him.”

Silver’s eyes widened and shot over to do a quick scan of my body. Was he checking if I was mentally unstable, or was he impressed by the fact it had worked for us? I couldn’t tell.

“So, no love at first sight?” Silver questioned, looking pointedly at me.

“Hmm, I remember finding him attractive.” Xari beamed at that. “But because he’d been stalking me, I didn’t feel anything other than scared when he popped up and wanted to chat.”

Xari sighed. “I smiled! Teeth and everything!”

I shook my head, “that made it worse!”

“Still worked in the end,” he muttered, looking over his menu.

“And I’m glad it did,” I said, taking his free hand in mine.

“But it wasn’t love at first sight, it might have been if I hadn’t been wary of Xari.

” I looked at Silver when I said the next words, “if Wilston is your soulmatch, then you’ll find out eventually, but try to befriend him and see how it goes.

I remember that after the whole kidnapping thing, we were drawn to each other rather

quickly, lust driven almost.” I blushed, but kept talking, “if you can’t keep your hands off of him, then maybe that’s proof enough. ”

He nodded, looking deep in thought. I would be confused and tired, too, if I were him.

We ate in silence, all of us ordering the same thing and eating it quickly. We weren’t safe anywhere, but since we couldn’t have our familiars inside the restaurant, we felt even more vulnerable.

Back in the van, we took the locket and focused on Wilston.

It didn’t seem to work, though. “It’s still focusing on Silver.

How did we shut it off before?” I asked, racking my brain.

“Oh!” I said, taking the locket and placing it over Silver’s heart.

He startled a bit, not expecting to be attacked with a locket, but then the light burst from it and Silver glowed from the inside out.

“If Wilston is your soulmatch, then maybe he’s glowing, too? We both glowed when it happened to us,” Xari explained.

“Then let’s hope he’s not around other people,” Silver grimaced. “But it’s late so it’s probably the best time we could’ve done this.” He handed us the locket and this time, it warmed in our hands as we thought about Wilston .

“We should be a week’s drive away, if the glow is to be trusted,” Xari said, smiling kindly at Silver. He looked so drained, sitting there squished between us.

“Let’s find a safe place for the night,” I suggested. “We can get a motel room with a

separate room for Silver.”

“Sounds perfect,” Silver agreed. “Then I’ll get to enjoy a shower before we get on the road.”

As soon as we’d gotten our suite, we barricaded the door and windows with our magic. We were lucky enough to get a suite with separate bedrooms for privacy.

“Why don’t you try making tungsten with your magic instead of metals that are easily meltable?” Silver questioned Xari as he watched him work.

“I haven’t thought about that,” Xari admitted. “I guess I got used to the normal metals and just stuck with that.” I smiled at them, our teamwork was already starting, Silver helping us out by thinking of things we hadn’t.

“And why not make the front of the door sticky, too? Or slippery? Anything to mess with them.”

While they talked all things magic, I left them and jumped onto our bed, snuggling with Snowflake.

We still hadn’t figured out what had happened with his glow or the fire claws, but I believed him dealing with the mages’ bodies might’ve given him magic, too.

I could be mistaken, though. But it happened right after that.

He purred and soaked up all my attention, loving he was getting petted and scratched.

I was, too. I couldn’t wait for this whole thing to be over and for us to live a normal life.

Snowflake would get his own kitty bed and Leon would...

Well, he'd get whatever an ostrich would like for a bed, maybe not inside though, we'd see when the time came.

Xari came into our room, leaning over the bed to give me a kiss.

Snowflake batted him away, not wanting to give up my full attention.

Xari laughed, "you need to sleep with Silver tonight, protect him for us, okay?" Snowflake looked at him for a few seconds and then admitted defeat, prowling out of the room to join Silver .

Xari closed the door and walked over to where I was lying on the bed. "Now I have you all to myself, look how that turned out," Xari grinned, stripping off his clothes and leaving only his boxers on.

I quickly followed, removing my own clothes sans boxers and joined him under the covers.

We had no idea when we would get some alone time at night again.

Silver had the teardrop trailer to sleep in with Snowflake when we slept on the road, but if he wasn't comfortable sleeping in there, he would need to sleep with us in the van, meaning no sexy fun times for us anytime soon.

Leon was sleeping in front of the main door, protecting us all while we slept, and since the hallway turned into three separate rooms, including the bathroom, this would be the best opportunity for us to enjoy each other.

I ducked under the covers and slid down his body, taking his boxers with me.

I didn't waste any time, wanting to do this.

Finally. I'd yet to taste him, so I got to licking and teasing as his cock grew under my attention.

He groaned, clearly loving this as much as I was.

I licked around his tip, tasting his saltiness and testing out my skills as I swirled my tongue around the head, slowly taking more of his length .

I started bobbing up and down, getting a rhythm going. Xari held one hand on the covers and the other gripped tightly in my hair, controlling my movement. I loved it.

"So good, baby," he moaned, easing his hold on my hair a little.

"Your mouth is perfect." I doubled my efforts, his praise really doing it for me.

"I've dreamed of fucking your throat," he rasped.

"To fill those perfect lips with my cock." I took myself in hand, not able to continue without touching myself.

Xari came with a loud groan, alerting Silver what we were up to, not that I cared.

All I wanted in this exact moment was to come myself.

I swallowed and fell to the side, working my dick over, chasing my own release.

I was still under the covers, the air hot and humid, but I didn't care.

I was too worked up to care about something as ridiculous as air.

Then the covers were removed, and I took in a gulping breath of fresh air.



Xari took over and stroked my dick instead, trailing kisses down my neck while he did so.

I surrendered to him, letting him do whatever he wanted.

“So. Damn. Perfect,” he whispered between his kisses.

“So. Hot.” I melted further into the mattress, feeling so worshipped and loved.

“And all mine .” I came, the room spinning as I felt my body twitch with pleasure.

I was so exhausted that I didn’t even register Xari cleaning up my mess.

The next thing I knew, I was being pulled against his body, him holding me tight as he stroked my waist.

He'd somehow gotten us both dressed, too, while I was in my fully satiated state of pleasure. “I love you,” I said, needing to remind him every chance I got. Xarius had been the one I never knew I needed, but since he’d stalked his way into my life, I finally found myself, too.

He didn’t just complete me, he complimented the parts of me that I didn’t even know I had.

“I love you, too,” he said, kissing my neck. “When all of this is over and done with, I want to spend all my time loving you.”

“I want that, too,” I whispered, a little afraid of speaking about the future.

What if we jinxed ourselves by doing so?

“Maybe get a kid or two?” I couldn’t stop myself.

I needed to know if children were something he wanted or not.

It'd never been for me, but maybe that was because my future had been too grey and dark to think about things like that.

No way a child would fit into that kind of darkness.

But apparently, the fear of jinxing us wasn't enough to stop myself from pouring out my wishes for our future.

"Or five," he smiled against my neck .

"Or five," I agreed, smiling as well.

No mages attacked us, allowing us this night of amazing sleep and morning showers before we hit the road. We'd decided on breakfast on the road, not wanting to tempt fate. We sat huddled together in the front of the van, Silver in the middle again, and scarfed down donuts and to-go coffee.

The road ahead was long, but with the locket glowing with promise we knew things would be okay, or we hoped they would. A week and then we would reach Wilston.

I smiled at them both and then began to drive.

The End