



CALUM

DESTINED PARANORMALS BOOK THREE

TAYLOR RYLAN

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SYNOPSIS

Can a globe-trotting fox alpha settle down with a fae omega?

Calum Ward is torn. He loves his job and discovering new things from times past, but after spending an extended vacation with his family in Montana, his desire for a mate and children of his own has become too strong to deny any longer. But can he give up the life he loves to settle down somewhere?

Asher Brooke wants nothing more than to feel like he's wanted. He desires more than what he has in the fae realm and wonders if there's ever going to be a possibility that he will find not only an amazing mate but adventure as well. When he's visited by the fates in his realm, he jumps at the chance for a new life in the shifter realm, despite not knowing what he might encounter.

Between an unusual storm, unexpected visitors knocking on the hotel room door, and complete lack of privacy, Calum and Asher wonder if they'll ever find a place to finally be able to claim each other. When the ideal house becomes an option, will Calum and Asher claim it and each other?

Calum is the third book in the Destined Paranormals series. It is a 40,000-word novella that focuses on fated mates and how they figure out those first few weeks together. This is

in an mpreg world, and there will be a baby or possibly two, but this story does not focus on or cover the pregnancy.

WELCOME TO THE UNIVERSE OF DESTINED PARANORMALS

The Universe of Destined Paranormals is a world of interconnected series set in one universe. Because of this, it is recommended that you read the books in chronological order.

[HONEY CREEK DEN Series](#) - When the child of the created warlock goes searching for his mate, a domino effect occurs and the den is blessed by the Fates.

[TIMBER VALLEY WOLF PACK Series](#) - Magic is changing and the wolf pack is next to be blessed by the Fates. Does Edison have something to do with it?

[WARLOCKS OF AMHERST SERIES](#) - EDISON'S warlocks have finally been blessed by the Fates and it's their turn to find their fated Ones.

[VAMPIRES of the Beloved Gem Series](#) - Master Nikolai's vampires aboard the *Beloved Gem* realized that their time has come to find their beloved ones.

[PARANORMAL COUNCIL ENFORCERS Series](#) - The magic has shifted and the Paranormal Council has been formed. Will the

chosen enforcers be next to find their forever mates?

[DESTINED Paranormals](#) - It's time to meet new fated mates, both close and far from the Paranormal Council. New as well as familiar faces will be seen in this series. You can expect lots of HEAs, and very low angst in this series. Basically, all the fluffy mate stories.

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CHAPTER I

CALUM



December

I stared out across the desert at the setting sun. In the far distance, I could make out the pyramids, and I should be in my element. But I missed my brother and his little mate. But what it really was, I missed my family. I sat down, wondering how long I was going to run from myself. I wanted a mate, but unlike Benjamin or Pierre, I couldn't protect my mate like they could. I was a fox shifter, an alpha at that, but I didn't have any type of magical powers. Not that I needed them. But if I had them, I...Dallas, might still be alive.

I heard noise behind me, and after a quick glance, I saw my crew were finally unwinding for the night. I didn't blame them. It wasn't exactly hot during the daytime in December, but the sun could still be relentless, and it easily took the energy right out of you. I knew I couldn't stay away for long. Eventually, one of them would come and drag me over to where they were all passing around snacks and sharing stories of their time visiting family recently. They'd ask about my own visit, and I just didn't feel like sharing this time.

How could I? I was the only paranormal in the group, and they would never understand that my brother had recently "married" and welcomed twins so quickly after. Things didn't happen that fast, normally, and not only was I not allowed to disclose our kind to humans, but it honestly wasn't my story to share. I was fairly private, and I was certainly protective of Benjamin and Eli's relationship and their adorable twins.

I smiled at the thought of my nephews. I pulled out my phone and opened the folder I had of them. They were growing like crazy and had gotten so big since I'd seen them last. I would love to go back to Montana, but I had commitments here.

Pierre was just as antisocial as always, but with Benjamin and our parents all settled in Montana, I had thought long and hard about possibly settling down closer to them. There were certainly digs that were through the universities that I could most likely get in on with my credentials, but I wasn't too stubborn to admit that I'd run away when I found myself longing for what my brother had.

I didn't want Eli. No, I liked him just fine, but he was my brother's One, and I had no desires toward him. But I found myself once again dreaming about finding my own mate and starting a family.

"Dr. Ward, are you going to join us?"

I looked over my shoulder at Lauren. She was new to the crew this time around, and she'd made it very clear early on that she was interested. I had to hide my smirks and eye rolls every time she made obvious advances toward me. I didn't get involved with those on my crew, and in all honesty, she had all of the wrong parts. Like my brothers and my father, I was gay. Most paranormals were bisexual leaning, but I fell strictly into the gay category.

"I'm not up for it tonight," I told her. She plopped down next to me, entirely too close, and my body stiffened. My fox didn't like that she was beside us—she certainly wasn't our mate.

"Oh, they're cute. Who are they?" she asked, reaching for my phone. I tightened my grip and turned the screen off.

"I'm turning in for the night. Enjoy your evening, Miss Summers." I stood easily and immediately started off toward my own tent. It certainly wasn't my favorite, but it was only for a week before we'd be heading back into Cairo and back to the hotel.

I glanced at the others as I walked by, waving to them but not stopping. I wasn't normally so distant with my crew, but my last visit with my family had really caused me to reflect on what I had in life and what I wanted. Now that I was here, I was realizing this wasn't what I wanted.

It was just after seven in the evening locally, and that meant it was just after ten in the morning in Montana. That improved my mood a bit as I made my way to my tent. I unzipped it, quickly stepping in and reziping it. I knew I would be in for several hours, so I went ahead and secured the lock on the zipper. Not that it would keep someone with a knife out. But it kept others from entering through the door, and that's what I wanted at the moment.

I sat and took off my boots, placing them by the opening before I walked across the space and sat on my sleeping cot. It wasn't the most comfortable bed, but I had the advantage of when it became too uncomfortable, I could shift and curl up in my fox form. That's where the lock on the inside of the zipper came in handy. It gave me enough time to shift if someone came snooping around my place.

I opened my laptop, and while it booted up, I moved to the floor and placed a pillow behind me to lean against. You would think that as someone well into their third century and getting close to knocking on their fourth I'd be past living like this. I reached for the lamp and turned it on, wondering how long the battery would last this evening. I didn't really need it to see in the dark, but I didn't care for staring at the laptop screen in the dark.

Immediately, I opened my email and clicked Compose to send today's notes back to the museum. They were funding this dig, and although I preferred to work for universities, I was suddenly rethinking my life choices.

I was in Egypt, one of my absolute favorite places of all time. The history was vast, and the architecture, as well as the artifacts, was fascinating. What the ancient Egyptians were able to accomplish for their time was truly beyond others. Not all, but some.

But I was living in a tent. Sure, I could stand up in the center of it. But it was about ten feet by ten feet, and in the center, it was six and a half feet tall. On the sides, it was only five feet. But living here was certainly roughing it. I'd spent close to a month in Montana with my family, and it had been nice. No, it was more than nice. It had been...I stared off into space, trying to think of the best word to describe my last visit. Not really nice, although it had been that. But it was more. It was...familiar? Not really. I'd not been to Montana before. But yet, when I was there, it felt like...well, home. Despite the fact that Pierre hadn't been there, it still felt like home. Wasn't that ironic?

Not really in the mood to make notes at the moment, I saved the draft and found what I was looking for in my inbox. It was an email from Dad. It never failed, actually. He was always so good about sending me an email shortly after Father went to work.

Calum,

We miss you. There. I've said it. Yes, I know it won't persuade you to move closer to us, and that hasn't ever been a requirement. Your last visit seems so long ago now. You left shortly after the twins were born, and that was ten months ago.

You should see them. They're crawling everywhere, and Benjamin and Eli have their hands full with those two. Eli has really come out of his shell more since he gave birth. Every day, he becomes more comfortable around others.

Don't feel I'm putting pressure on you. I'm not. But the university south of here in Missoula has an anthropology department. I realize it's not your exact field, but you know archeology is a subfield of anthropology and you could possibly consider it? They are hiring, and although it's not incredibly close, it's closer. If you should want to maybe move closer to us.

I chuckled at that. I loved my fathers. Both of them equally. Dad wouldn't flat-out say hey, move closer because we really miss you and enjoyed having you here when you visited last winter, but he would hint all day until he was blue in the face. I went back to the email to see what else he had to say.

Maybe think about it? No pressure though. I'm not even willing to try to suggest Pierre move closer. He won't even respond to emails, let alone answer any of our calls. I would have to send your father after him, and honestly, we would all be miserable if he came here and was his usual grumpy self. Not that I don't love him. I do. I love all three of you. But you know what I mean.

Maybe think about the university? If you're looking for a change? You seemed quite melancholy toward the end of your last visit. We would love to see you more, but we understand you are doing what your heart desires.

The council is growing, and Benjamin has started going out on more assignments. He was in Europe recently. There will be a smaller branch set up in Europe somewhere. They are still deciding the location as of now.

Your father has thought about requesting to transfer there. It would break my heart to leave Spencer and Maverick, but I go where your father goes, and he's thinking about trying to be more centrally located among the three of you. Not that it matters. He can travel with a thought.

I suppose I've talked your ear off by now. I miss you. I understand you are almost three centuries old, but I still miss you. You've always followed your heart, and that's all we ever wanted for any of you.

When you get the time and are back to civilization, give me a call if you can. It helps to hear your voice.

Your father says to tell you hello, and he will always help with travel if you wish.

Hope to hear from you soon!

Love,

Dad

I couldn't help but smile. Dad had attached a video that I couldn't get to open or play, but the pictures he sent were small enough that they came through. Spencer and Maverick were certainly getting big. They were crawling around on the floor, it looked like, and I wondered just how soon it would be before they were walking.

I loved how Dad hinted without hinting. I had actually already looked into the two larger universities in Montana. Both of them did have an anthropology program, but I wasn't aware the one closest was hiring. Not that I would get the position if I applied. I was halfway around the world. But it was certainly something to consider more.

I closed Dad's email and found one from Dr. White, who was running the current expedition.

Dr. Ward,

I hope this email finds you well and the field work is going well. I wanted to give you a heads-up that you will need to return early, unfortunately. They are predicting some unusual and intense haboobs over the next several days, so the site will need to be as secured as possible. The trucks will be there to bring you and your crew back tomorrow afternoon.

I understand this couldn't come at a worse time with the dig being so close to removal, but the safety of you and the team always comes first.

Call if you have any issues and I'll do what I can.

Dr. White

This. This was why I had spent so long in Montana last winter. I wasn't a fan of the storms over here, and I'd purposely avoided taking a dig in an environment that had the possibility of sandstorms. They made it difficult to breathe and put my fox on edge. I should have known better. I quickly typed a reply and sent it off, then went ahead and filled out my notes for the day and uploaded them to my online journal that Dr. White could access. He had no edit authority, but he could read the notes as I uploaded them, and in turn, he asked questions and made suggestions as needed.

He had absolutely no clue that I was quite a bit older than his own sixty-something years, but that was something I would never share with my colleague.

I finished today's notes, and after shutting down my laptop, I packed it up in my bag. I wouldn't need it again until we got back to Cairo, and I was safely ensconced in a hotel to ride out the storms. I would send Dad another email after we returned to the city, but I wouldn't be able to do much once the sand hit. All service ceased to work when the skies were filled with dirt. But in moments, I'd decided that I needed to look into their local university and get away from places that send me into sandstorms. The worst were in the spring, but it wasn't unheard of for them to decide to make an appearance in the middle of winter.

I knew I needed to let my crew know we would be securing the site first thing in the morning before we tore down camp and left for the safety of the city, but when I listened for them, it sounded as if they had all gone into their tents.

I decided to set my alarm for a bit earlier and would let them all know in the morning at breakfast. We had time; it wasn't as if a sandstorm was coming through tomorrow. But we would need to get to work and make sure everything was as secure as it could be before the trucks arrived to take us back to the city.

The thought of a long, hot shower and a soft bed with crisp sheets was entirely too tempting, and I couldn't ignore everything going on any longer. To me, things were pointing

to change. It was time for me to once more reinvent myself somewhat, I believed.

I changed out of my clothes and into sleep pants and the T-shirt I'd been sleeping in before I once more pulled out my laptop. I didn't think I would need it again until tomorrow, but now that the seed had been planted in my mind, I couldn't deny it any longer.

After the laptop was once again booted, I opened my email app and composed a long email to Dad.

Dad,

First, don't worry too much. We are returning early in the morning because there are storms predicted in the near future. I'll be safe, so please don't worry when you don't hear from me for a few days. You know how sandstorms can be.

I've been thinking about your email, and being completely transparent, I have been considering changing things up a bit since my last visit. I want what you and Father had and have. What Benjamin now has. You've known longer than I have just how much my fox and I long for a mate and family of our own. Sadly, I've not been able to find my mate. Maybe I'm one of the unlucky ones that won't ever find my mate. I hate to even consider that, but I have to accept that it is a possibility.

After I finish this expedition, I'll be returning home long enough to get things sorted. I would like to come for another extended visit. I miss you and Father, and Benjamin and his small family. I'll look for somewhere close by, but not so close that I feel as if I'm intruding on you all. Closer would be better, would it not?

I'll put out feelers and see if the university is looking for someone in my field. It has been some time since I was last in the classroom, but I always enjoyed it. There are always expeditions in the summer months,

and I'm sure those would be more than enough to satisfy my wander bug.

I make no promises to settle there permanently, but as of right now, an extended stay in the general area, Montana, is more than appealing.

I'll be in contact again once the storms pass. I'll be sure to keep you updated about my progress and where I am in my trip. For the first time in quite a while, my fox seems to be at peace. He is happy with what I've been thinking about and is more than ready to be in a place where I can let him out frequently.

I love you, Dad. And I want to say thank you for always being your amazing self. Your suggestive but not pushing email seemed to be that last little shove I need to take a step back and look at what I have in my life and where I want to be. I understand others don't find that special someone until they are even older than I am, and I can accept that. It isn't ideal, but it is what it is.

Thank you, Dad. For once again, always being you and seeming to know exactly what we need and when we need it. Now, maybe start working on the grouch. Although, I'm not sure Pierre will ever leave France and his books. His profession though, he could do it anywhere, so maybe you can work your magic on him next.

I'll be in touch. Tell Father I love him, and please give the twins hugs and kisses for me.

Love,

Calum

I hit Send without thinking twice. I knew if I hesitated even a little, I would backtrack on sending it and start second-guessing myself. Like I'd told Dad, now that I'd decided to start working on relocating closer to them, my fox was incredibly happy. I'd spent hours running through the forest in Treasure Ridge. It was freeing, something I'd not had in too

long. The only thing that would have made it perfect was if I had my own mate by my side.

I grinned at the email I'd just sent. Even a few years ago, we couldn't have spoken so freely through email. But now, with the new secured email as well as secured para-web as it were, we no longer had to worry about such things. The council had been incredibly good for the majority of the paranormal world. Well, the honest ones, that was.

With that out of the way, I finally felt settled enough to shut down for the night. I closed out my programs and shut down my laptop once again. After I had it packed up, I shut off the lamp before crawling into my too-small and uncomfortable cot. Tomorrow night, I told myself as I tried to get comfortable. Tomorrow, I'd be in a hotel and would have a comfortable bed and hot water.

CHAPTER 2

ASHER



“**A**sher! Stop playing in the dirt and come inside and wash the dishes!”

I cringed at the sound of my father’s voice. I wasn’t playing in the dirt. I was digging for a specific type of rock that I’d discovered could be polished up and traded for money. I was saving every coin I could get. I desperately wanted to get away from here. Even if it meant only going to the next village or the one beyond that, I still didn’t wish to live with my parents any longer. I was twenty-eight, almost twenty-nine, and I was still treated like I was nine sometimes.

My parents weren’t terrible, but they weren’t exactly great either. I was their youngest and, according to them, thankfully last child.

Sadly, I’d not had any luck with finding my own mate. I’d tried. I’d gone around our village frequently, and nothing. I’d only had the chance to visit a neighboring village once, and that had been some years ago. Since the portal to the human and shifter realm seemed to forever be locked now, that meant I would have to travel from village to village in search of my mate.

That thought made me a bit sad. Not that I would be completely upset if my mate was a fae alpha. I’d just always dreamed I’d end up with a shifter for some reason. Maybe it was because I longed for a different life, one that wasn’t here in our realm. I’d dreamed about being places where I could dig up fascinating things from the ground. I’d read a few books about giant fossils that were found underground. They were on

display in places that had giant collections of them. I dreamed about going to the shifter realm and experiencing snow. I knew it was a lot like what happened when we put water in our icebox, but it was different in many ways.

“Asher!”

I winced. Dad was really upset now. I looked down at the small pile of rocks I’d uncovered. There were many more in this hole, but they would have to wait. I shoved the ones I had found into my bag and collected my things. I had just stood and turned when I encountered two strangers. I fell backward, landing on my ass, and winced at the pain.

“Ouch,” I said under my breath.

“We apologize, Asher. Allow me to help you?”

I looked at the tall, dark-haired man who had friendly blue eyes. He was slender, much like the fae, but he was much taller than most of us. And his voice told me he wasn’t from here. But for whatever reason, I felt that I could trust him and took his outstretched hand, letting him pull me to my feet.

“Thanks,” I said as soon as I was back on my feet. “I have to go. My dad is calling for me because I didn’t clean up after breakfast.” It wasn’t as if he couldn’t wash the dishes. He was completely capable, but I couldn’t remember the last time I saw my father do any sort of house chore.

“A moment, please,” the tall man said. “Allow us to introduce ourselves.” He gestured to the very muscular man beside him. “This is Canyon, and I’m Thomas. We’re the fates, and we’ve been given the ability to reopen the portal.”

My eyes widened immediately. If these two were the fates and they were here talking to me, did that mean I had been chosen?

“No you’re not,” I said, suddenly disbelieving them. I glanced around, wondering where they actually came from. The fates didn’t talk to people individually. “If you were the fates, you would be in the village center. That’s how they’ve always done things in the past. They don’t come to our houses.”

I moved to go around them but suddenly found myself stuck to the ground. I looked down at my foot and glared. Why wasn't it moving? Why couldn't I lift it? I returned my gaze to the two men who claimed they were the fates.

"We just need a little bit of your time, Asher. It is true that we used to visit village centers and pull others from there to go to the human realm. We are doing things a little different this time around since it's been a while since we have been able to get into the fae realm. We are instead visiting those we'd like to send to the human realm individually. It keeps others from being disappointed, and we feel it'll overall go over more smoothly than if we were to randomly pick a few from the entire group."

"Are you for real?" I looked from Thomas to Canyon. "You're seriously the fates?"

"Two of them, yes," Canyon said, finally speaking up. His voice was completely different than the other, and I wondered if they were from different realms themselves.

"We have an alpha picked for you, Asher. His name is Calum, and he would love an omega to cherish and spoil."

I crossed my arms in front of my chest. "Don't all alphas feel that way about their omegas?"

Canyon laughed loudly, earning him a glare from Thomas.

"Yes, Asher. They do."

"What he speaks is the truth, Asher," Canyon told me. "But I find it comical because I, too, am an alpha. A wolf shifter alpha, and although Thomas isn't technically an omega, I still cherish my Chosen mate," Canyon said. He looked at Thomas, and I saw it for the first time. They were completely in love.

"Wait, you're mates?" I asked.

"Yes, we are," Thomas said. "And we would like to send you to yours. He is a perfect match for you. He will show you the world and will be able to teach you new and exciting things. He's an archeologist and is currently in Egypt, but that

isn't where he lives. All you have to do is agree, and we'll send you to him."

"That easily?" I asked. Surely I was dreaming. There was no way these two were for real.

"Yes, that easily," Canyon said. "You are welcome to tell your parents or not—that choice is completely yours. Also, if you don't wish to leave the fae realm, you don't have to. We can pair Calum with another omega."

"No, I want to," I said without a thought. It was true though. I absolutely wanted to leave here and find my alpha somewhere. "I'll tell them. They will most likely be happy they won't have to deal with me any longer. They were happy I was their last kid. Although—" I stopped and thought about my father for a moment. "—my father will most likely be upset I won't be here to cook and clean any longer."

Canyon and Thomas shared a look. I wasn't sure what that was about but didn't really care too much. I wasn't trying to be like that, and in all honesty, I wouldn't mind cooking and cleaning for my mate, because I knew he would appreciate it. But my father just didn't seem to like me much.

"Go pack a bag. We'll deal with your parents," Thomas said.

I slowly nodded. My foot had long since been freed, and I headed in the direction of my parents' house. I didn't know what all I needed to take, but I had heard from others to bring mostly clothing and anything that was small and sentimental to us.

I entered the house through the back door, immediately heading for the stairs instead of stopping in the kitchen. Father yelled something in my direction, but I didn't listen. Instead, I raced to my bedroom to pack a bag. I only had one, but it was a large knapsack-type bag, and I was able to stuff the majority of my clothes as well as two of my most treasured journals in it. I added my stash of money, as well as my rocks, and then went to the bathroom and threw in my other things. I was happy as could be when I went downstairs and was a bit surprised when I didn't see either of my parents.

“Did they take it poorly?” I asked Canyon and Thomas.

“Not exactly. Your father wasn’t exactly happy to be told to do his own dishes and cooking though,” Canyon told me.

“Are you ready, then?” Thomas asked.

“As ready as I think I’m going to be. Are you going to tell me any more about my mate?”

“We will,” Thomas said. He gestured to the door, and I followed them out, closing it behind me this time. I gave the only house I’d ever known one final look as we walked through the trees and away from home. A glowing door opened in front of us, and Canyon walked through it, disappearing out of sight. I stopped, but Thomas held out his arm, gesturing for me to walk through. “It’s safe. We will be making a quick stop in our realm first before sending you on to your mate. Canyon is waiting for you on the other side.”

That made sense. I figured I honestly had nothing to lose, so I stepped through the glowing door and found myself somewhere that was unlike any other place I had ever seen. My own realm was gorgeous, but this one...well, there were pink trees. *Pink trees*. And the grass was orange in spots and red in others.

I looked down at it as I was walking on it and heard chuckling behind me. I glanced back at Thomas, who was shaking his head.

“At least the sky isn’t purple today.”

“Purple?” I asked.

“Yes. Marian and Gwendolyn are the other two fates. Whereas Canyon and I ensure the happiness of paranormals by matching mates, Marian and Gwendolyn look after the health and happiness of the realms that everyone occupies.”

I could only nod my head. I had to take what he was saying as truth. Why would they lie? They had no reason to.

“Come in here, and we will talk,” Canyon said, opening a door. I entered the house, finding it quite cozy inside. There was a gorgeous wood table that shined in the sunlight coming

through the door and windows, as well as several chairs on either side. There was a shelf full of books on one wall, a well-stocked kitchen area with several pans hanging from hooks over the range, and a couch that looked incredibly cozy.

“Have a seat. We’ll get you some information about Calum, answer any questions you have.”

“Thank you,” I told Canyon as he pulled out a chair. I sat in it, dropping my bag beside me while Thomas and Canyon moved to the other side and sat.

“All right. Any questions for us first?”

Really? They were going to start with that? I was sure I had so many questions, but I was completely drawing a blank.

“I’m sure I have lots. But being put on the spot like this, I can’t think of any right at the moment. We’d all basically given up hope that it would be a possibility that we would be able to ever leave our realm ever again.”

“Understandable,” Thomas said. “Did you have questions from before? If you can’t remember them, that’s fine. We can let you know a little about Calum, and then if you have questions, you are free to ask them.”

I nodded again. “Is he nice? My mate?”

Thomas smiled. “He is. He’s from an older line, but yes, he’s nice. He has two brothers, and one is mated.”

That was nice. Maybe that meant we would be near others, and I could have a new family. One that enjoyed being around me. Possibly.

“Calum is an archeologist, as we’ve already told you. He has worked for both universities as well as museums. He travels quite a bit, but his home seems to be in France,” Thomas said.

I continued to nod but then realized something and held up my hand.

“Yes, Asher,” Canyon said.

“Does he know about me too? You’re telling me all of this, but did you tell him? Does he want a mate? What if he doesn’t want a fae mate?”

Thomas and Canyon both grinned. “We haven’t discussed anything with Calum, no. We were trying to reassure you a bit since you were the one that was leaving your own realm to come to your mate’s,” Thomas told me.

“You said he was nice. Does he want a mate? Will he be upset to be chosen for a mate?”

Canyon shook his head while Thomas answered. “No. He will be pleased to meet you. He is currently in Egypt. And unfortunately, we will need to get you there fairly soon. There is a rather large sandstorm that is headed toward the city, and it will keep you inside for a few days. But what better way to pass the time than getting to know your fated mate?”

“Sounds like a plan to me. How do I find him? How do I get there? I assume I’ll need money? I have some coins I’ve been saving. Is it possible for you to trade them out for me?” I knew how things worked there, but having never been to the shifter realm, I didn’t have any of the funds I would need. How would I be able to eat? I didn’t have a garden to grow food there. I would need to purchase it at a market.

“Everyone that leaves your realm and goes to the shifter realm is given a set amount of funds for things. You need not worry about any of that,” Canyon said.

“No, you don’t. And your mate will provide for you once he meets you. It is just how it works. He has had a long time to set up for his future, and he, like the others in his family, has done well for himself. It won’t be an issue.”

“All right. When can I meet him? If there is going to be a storm, should I get there before it? I should, right?”

Canyon and Thomas glanced at each other before they stood.

“Yes. We can send you now. He’s in room 918. When you enter the lobby, go straight back to the elevators and up to the ninth floor. His room is to the left when you exit,” Thomas

told me. “There is a letter for him in your pack if you should need it.”

“If I should need it?” I asked suddenly.

“It’s always a just-in-case thing. If you have problems convincing your mate that you are his mate, well, the letter will help. But he’s an alpha. He’ll be able to scent you.”

I nodded. That all made sense.

“Just be sure to not use your magic around non-paranormals. Because you won’t know them, you will have no way of knowing if they are aware of us or not,” Canyon said.

“All right. Anything else?” I asked.

Thomas and Canyon glanced at one another again and shook their heads.

“When you cross through, everything will be frozen for several seconds to give you time to get out of the way of anyone or anything. Time will resume, and everything around you will go on as if they were never frozen. Good luck,” Thomas said.

They were seriously making it sound a bit ominous, but this was what I wanted. Only, I hadn’t really known what to expect. We stepped outside, and once more, there was a glowing portal. I walked toward it, glancing over my shoulder as I did, and waved. Canyon and Thomas returned the gesture, and then I hurried through, hoping it wouldn’t close before I could get there.

I stepped through from one place to another that was incredibly different. It had been beautiful and mild in the fates’ realm, and although it wasn’t overly hot here, it was incredibly dry, and the winds were blowing harshly. I looked around, seeing buildings everywhere, a large river not far away, and a few people frozen along the walkways.

There were vehicles on the roadways, things that I knew and recognized from books I’d read when growing up. We all read about the human and shifter realm, most hoping we would someday be able to join it.

Exactly like the fates had said, the vehicles suddenly started moving, the people walking, and the noise of the place came back. It was loud and hectic.

I turned around in place, wondering exactly which building I was supposed to go into. They hadn't said, except that he was in room 918. I decided to take a chance and walked toward the doors that were just ahead of me on the walkway and entered. Inside was quieter, as well as calmer. This was much better.

I had no idea if I was even in the correct place, but I did what they said and walked toward the back of the hotel—at least, I thought I was in a hotel. I guess it could have been a fancy housing building. I couldn't remember what those were called off the top of my head because I was nervous and was really only thinking about finding my mate and hoping he understood what we were to one another.

I found the elevators and pressed the button, and when the doors opened, I entered after a group left. Again, I pressed the button for the ninth floor, and after the shiny doors in front of me closed, I almost fell when the thing started moving. I could feel it going upward, but it didn't take long before it stopped. The door chimed, and I glanced up and saw the number nine above the door, so when they opened again, I exited and went left.

It wasn't a far walk, but by the time I found myself standing in front of a door that said 918, I was shaking and having difficulty breathing. This was it. This was where my mate was. My alpha was here. He was on the other side of that door, and I was about to meet him.

I had to take several deep breaths in order to be able to raise my hand and knock on the door. I noticed my entire arm was shaking when I did. I wondered if I'd knocked loud enough because I stood there waiting, and nothing. I had just raised my arm again, this time determined to knock a little louder, when the door in front of me suddenly opened.

There stood the most gorgeous man I had ever seen. He had dark hair and eyes and the perfect amount of facial hair.

His skin was golden brown, and he was a lot taller than I was. So much so that I had to look way up to look at his face. When I did, I saw his perfectly shaped lips part and his nostrils flare. My body had started tingling and vibrating, exactly as we'd been told would happen when we met our mate. My body's aura was recognizing Calum's. This was definitely my mate standing in front of me.

“Uh, Ben, I'm going to have to call you back,” he said. He brought what I assumed was a phone in front of him and touched it before he dropped his hands. “Where did you...how did you get here?” he asked.

It took a lot for me to get my body to respond. I finally smiled—at least, I hoped that's what I did. When Calum smiled at me, I really hoped it was because I had smiled first. This was my mate. I was finally standing in front of him.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

I nodded. “Umm...I'm Asher,” I said. I glanced left, then right before I moved closer and whispered, “I'm from the fae realm, and the fates sent me here.”

Calum's eyes widened, and he reached for my shoulders, pulling me into the room before he closed the door behind me. He did something, a loud noise clicking, and then I found myself caught between my mate and the door. All in all, not a bad place to be as far as I was concerned.

CHAPTER 3

CALUM



I'd been talking to Ben about visiting next month once I had everything sorted out here in Egypt when I heard the quiet knock at the door. I'd ordered room service for dinner, but it shouldn't have been here yet. That was only five or so minutes ago. I went to the door, not sure what to expect when I opened it, but finding the most adorable man I'd ever seen standing on the other side wasn't it.

And he was most definitely adorable. He had blue eyes that stood out against his creamy skin and medium-brown hair. His hair was short on the sides and longer on top. Immediately, my thoughts went to grabbing ahold of it while I plowed into him from behind.

I vaguely remembered telling my brother I would call him back when that thought entered my mind. I didn't have thoughts like that. I didn't have sex with random people, and I certainly didn't suddenly think about how it would feel to knot someone.

I was an alpha, and I had a knot, but it would only come out when I met my mate. Needing the cutie to move on so I could get rid of these thoughts, I decided to ask about him.

“Are you all right?”

“Umm...I'm Asher,” he told me before he looked both ways down the hallway and then leaned forward a little. When he did, I was able to get a better scent of him, and as he said the next words, it hit me all at once. “I'm from the fae realm, and the fates sent me here.”

I reached for Asher's shoulders and pulled him into the room with me. I quickly closed and locked the door, throwing both the top and the bottom locks. I should have moved then. I had every intention of moving, but when I looked down, I found intense blue eyes staring back up at me.

Now that he was inside my space and I could feel the heat coming from him with how close we were standing to one another, there was absolutely no denying what my fox had screamed in my head just moments ago. This little fae was my mate.

It took an incredible amount of discipline to step back and give my mate some room. He said he was fae. That meant he'd obviously traveled, although I would imagine that wasn't much different than me traveling with my father or brother. Just a thought, a little bit of magic, and poof, you were now on the other side of the world.

But it also meant he'd left his home. He was no longer in his own realm, and he was now here. But I didn't live here. Not permanently, at least. This had been my room since I'd arrived, and I had to leave it for extended periods while out in the field on digs, but this wasn't my home. It was a hotel room.

"I have a letter for you if you want it. If you don't believe me. I was told it would explain things." Asher pulled a rather large bag from his back and started trying to dig through it.

"No," I said and held up my hands. He looked up at me, sadness in his eyes.

"No? You don't believe me? The letter will explain."

"That's not what I meant. Only that no, I don't need a letter. I can scent that you're my mate. I believe you." I moved to the side. "Do you want to come in? I have several questions, and we should probably talk."

Asher looked at me and nodded. He then moved to the side, dropping his bag by the bathroom door, and walked closer. He stopped beside me, waiting and staring up at me.

“It’s not much, but it’s only temporary. Come on in,” I said, holding out my arm as I started walking into the room. I’d been sitting at the table, working while I could. I’d seen the reports, had been watching the news. The storm was already moving across the desert and would be here by midday.

“It’s nice,” Asher said. “Our house was maybe twice this size.” He shrugged before he went to the small couch and sat down. His hands immediately went under his thighs, and I went back to the chair I’d been sitting at in front of my laptop.

“I’m not sure,” I said, trying to figure out how to start any type of conversation. “What...no. You said you’re fae.”

Asher nodded. “Yes. I’m twenty-eight, and I’m my parents’ youngest. I have four older siblings, and all of them are actually quite a bit older. Only one was still at home when I was born, but I don’t remember them much because she found her mate and moved out before I was of an age to really remember much.”

Asher continued to look around the room. I could tell he was nervous, not that I blamed him. I was as well, and I’d not been the one to leave my realm and go to a completely different one in order to find my mate.

“And you were looking for a mate? This is something you desire?” I asked.

“Oh yes.” Asher finally smiled, and it seemed genuine. “That’s what all paranormals want, is it not? To find our perfect match and have a family?” Asher’s eyes widened. “Do you not want those things? I was told you desired a mate.”

“I do,” I said quickly. “I want a mate and children. I have a younger brother who found his own fated One not too long ago. They have twins, and they are simply adorable. I was able to spend some time with them, but sadly, I had to return to work.”

Asher nodded. “I understand about work. I used to do the cooking and cleaning for my parents. I can do that for you,” Asher told me. He went back to looking around. “There’s no kitchen though.”

I shook my head. “There isn’t. I have a house in France that has a kitchen, but this is only a temporary place. I’m working for the museum that is across the street at the moment. We were out in the field until yesterday but had to return early because of the haboob that is coming. The news predicts it will be here shortly after lunch.”

There was another knock at the door, this one louder, and I could hear them call out that it was my room service order. I held up a finger and took off for the door to answer. When I did, I was met with a smile as the delivery attendant pushed in the cart.

“Thank you,” I said, signing the ticket he gave me.

“You’re very welcome. Leave the cart in the hallway, and we will collect it when you are finished.”

I nodded, and after I relocked the door, I pushed the cart into the room. I realized I didn’t have food for my mate, and my fox was grumbling at me about that. I shushed him because I’d had no way of knowing that my mate was suddenly going to knock on my hotel room door.

I pushed the cart up to the table before sitting back down. I ignored the food that I’d ordered for the moment, wondering how to go about explaining that I hadn’t intended to exclude him. Hopefully he was reasonable and understood that I had no way of knowing he would be here.

“You don’t have to wait for me to eat,” Asher said. “I actually had breakfast about an hour ago now, I think, and I’m not hungry.”

“It is rude to eat in front of you,” I told him.

I leaned back when the silver dome was suddenly in front of me, floating in the air. It carefully lowered to the table, and then the dome was gone, leaving behind the brunch I’d ordered. Fae. He had magic.

“You should eat. It’s not rude for you to continue on as you had planned when you had no idea that I would suddenly show up at your door.”

“Did you want something?” I asked. My stomach grumbled, protesting now that the scents were wafting up toward me.

“No. I’m not hungry as of now, and if I am, I can always use magic,” he said and held out his hand. In it, a shiny red apple suddenly appeared. “Did you wish for the apple as well?” Asher asked.

I stared at him, wondering about the sudden transformation. Gone was the shy and awkward man who had stood on the other side of my hotel room door.

“No, thank you though.” I picked up the utensils and started cutting into my eggs. “Did you wish to talk while I eat? Maybe ask me questions?”

Asher smiled and got up, joining me at the table. He took the other chair, and I moved my laptop aside so I could see him completely. Well, what wasn’t hidden by the small table.

“I have many. And hopefully you do as well?”

I nodded. “I know a little about fae. My sire and both of my brothers are warlocks. I know there are a lot of similarities between them, and I know of the history as well.”

“Yes. That’s also taught to us when we are young, although certain aspects of it have been changed recently. I would imagine that like any story, over time, it was embellished and fabricated somewhat.”

I nodded in agreement. After I swallowed my bite of food, I took a drink from my coffee mug and stared at my mate over the rim.

“You mentioned siblings. Are any of them here?”

“I have three. They were boy, girl, girl, me. But no, none are here except me. They found mates in other villages, except my oldest sister. She found hers in our village, but it was with an older fae once she was of age.”

That was interesting, I guess. “Do you have any preferences for where we live?” I asked, wondering if he would be willing to move with me to Montana. I would have

to rethink my plans from a couple of days ago because now I had a mate, and that meant I had to consider him before making plans.

“No. Just with you. I have some money. They told me I would need it for things like food and stuff. I’m from a village, and we mostly did trades and things like that. If we wanted a different bread, we would trade, say...tea leaves for it if they were wanting tea. We did have coins, but most things could be bartered for rather than purchased. But I do have some to help. And I can find a job. Are you going to be here long? You mentioned living elsewhere?”

I couldn’t help but chuckle. Asher was talkative now that that dam seemed to have been broken.

“I do. I have a house in France. But just a couple of days ago, I had been considering moving to Montana to be closer to my fathers and brother. The one that’s mated. He and my sire work for the paranormal council. My omega father had mentioned that the two larger universities in Montana have anthropology departments and are looking for professors. I could easily fill that role if I wanted and they were willing to accept me.”

Asher just sat there and nodded.

“Would you maybe wish to go there? Or did you want to go to France?”

Asher shrugged. “I don’t know the difference. As long as I can find somewhere to work so I can contribute, I’ll go wherever.”

How did one tell their newly found mate that they didn’t need for them to work? “You mentioned you were twenty-eight,” I said. Asher nodded. “I’m not. I’m almost three hundred.” Asher’s eyes widened, and I chuckled. “Yeah, I thought you might react that way. My brother Ben, he’s the youngest and is seven years younger than me, and his One I would say is around your age. Does the age difference bother you?” It would be an issue if it did. I couldn’t change my age, and I only got the one mate.

“No. I just...fae don't normally have to wait so long to find our mates. We usually find them by our midforties, fifties at the latest. Sometimes, in more rare instances, it can be longer, but for the most part, we find our mates pretty young.”

“Sadly, the same can't be said for those of us here in this realm.” I took another bite of food, wondering how it was still hot, but when I thought about it, maybe I already knew. “You won't have to work if you don't wish to. Neither will I, to be honest. I was only working because I didn't have much outside of work. I enjoy being outdoors, but I'm a shifter, and that isn't uncommon. But at my age, I've had a lot of time to work and build up a financial portfolio. Add in the fact that my family is from an older line, and really, we don't have to work. We just do because we become somewhat bored. My omega father doesn't work though.”

“You have an omega father?” I nodded while chewing my last bite of eggs. “You take after him, then? You said your other parent is a sire and a warlock.”

“Yes. I'm the only fox shifter that they had. I take after my dad, who is the most amazing and sweetest man you will possibly ever meet. He's going to love you, so I hope that won't be an issue.”

Asher seemed to perk up at that. “Yeah? I don't mind being near your family. I was raised without my siblings, and my parents weren't terrible, but they weren't great.” Asher sighed. “They just seemed old and worn out, to be honest. Which is crazy because they met young, and unless they had a whole other family that none of us know about, they are only in their sixties and seventies.”

“My own parents did not meet young, not really. But I'm not young either.”

“I don't mind. Your age isn't an issue for me. As long as mine isn't for you. I know not everyone wants a much younger mate.”

I shrugged and picked up my crumpet and held it for a moment. “I have no issues with your age. Nor do I expect you to work. I will stop going on expeditions so I can be home

with you, and yes, I hope to have children with you. How many will be your choice since you're the omega and will be carrying them."

Asher snorted. I took a bite of my crumpet and wished I hadn't because I started coughing at the next words that came out of his mouth. "At least six. Maybe more."

Six? He wanted half a dozen children?

After getting the bit of crumpet out of my throat, I took another drink of coffee and looked at my mate. He was giving me a serious look, and I could only nod in agreement. "If you so wish to have six, we will have six. It isn't an issue for me, Asher. I love children but had assumed that I wasn't going to find my mate and have a family of my own." I knew my brother and his One had decided they were good for the time being. They were happy with their twins, and there was nothing wrong with that. Nor was there anything bad about Asher wanting a fairly large family. A lot of paranormals tended to have larger numbers of children simply because they lived longer lives.

"You honestly don't have an issue with the number of children I want?"

I shook my head. "I don't, no. You might change your mind once we start having them, and I'll support that as well."

"And I don't have to work?"

Another shake of my head. "You won't be able to once you are pregnant and showing. Unless you decide to work for the council or some other paranormal-only business, you won't be able to work with humans. They don't know about us."

"I have the ability to hide my pregnancy. It can be draining on me, though, if I try to do it for longer periods of time."

"There is no need for that." I finished my brunch, and after pushing the plate to the side, I picked my mug back up and took the last drink of coffee.

"Do you have any questions for me?"

“What’s anthropology? The fates said you liked to dig stuff up and do things like that.” Asher got up suddenly and went to his bag. After finding what he was most likely looking for, he brought it back to the table and opened a soft drawstring pouch. When he dumped it out, there were several gorgeous rocks that poured out onto the table. “I only have a few rocks, but I found them. I’d dug one up, and after I cleaned and polished it, others saw it and started offering me coins for one of their own. It was always fun to go digging for them, but I’ve not ever done it to your level, I don’t believe.”

I shook my head. “No, probably not. After the storms pass, I’ll take you over to the museum, and you can see some of the finds that were discovered in the past few years.” I would certainly take Asher on digs with me if it was something he showed interest in. “The rocks are very pretty, Asher. When we settle somewhere, we’ll have to have them put into a shadow box, and we can display them if you wish. Then we can enjoy their beauty all the time.” I wasn’t sure what type of rocks they were, but they were unlike any I’d ever seen before.

“That is sweet of you. I accept,” Asher said. I chuckled, and he grinned. Yes, he was certainly showing a much more open side. I happened to like it. A lot.

“Good. Would you like to talk some more? Ask more questions?” I stood and placed my plate back on the cart to push into the hallway. “I should send my brother a message first though. I ended a call with him and don’t want him to worry.”

“I don’t mind,” Asher told me. He stood, and when he came around the table and grabbed the cart, I gave him a questioning look. “You said you needed to message your brother? You can do that, and I’ll put this in the hallway.”

I was torn, but Asher seemed to win because he somehow started pushing the cart that I was holding on to. I watched him for a second before I pulled my phone out of my pocket and texted Benjamin.

Me: I'll call you back in a few days after the storm. Something has come up, and it's going to require my attention for the next few days. And I won't have reliable service during the storms.

The reply came almost immediately.

Ben: Is everything all right?

Me: Fine. Just something unexpected, yet important. I'll let you know about it later. Give the twins hugs and kisses for me.

Ben: Will do. I hope you get things dealt with.

I grinned, and placed my phone on the table beside my laptop. Asher had already returned and was sitting on the couch once again, this time with a pillow on his lap and his feet tucked under him. A quick glance toward the door told me he'd removed his shoes. I smiled as I went over to join him. It was time to get to know everything about my mate that I could.

CHAPTER 4

ASHER



Already so considerate and nice. Would he stay that way? Would Calum remain nice and thoughtful for a long time? Would he act that way toward our children? I'd talked to my older siblings, and they had all said that our parents' attitude toward me was completely different than it was toward them. I was truly a surprise. Or an oops, it seemed. My parents were just uninterested. I really hoped that now that I was gone and they no longer had to worry about me, they would be happy.

"You mentioned getting a job," Calum said. "And you are perfectly welcome to, but it won't be necessary."

"I'm not sure how I should respond to that. I don't want to take advantage of you or our situation. I don't want you to think I'm only a mooch."

Calum's brow furrowed. "You...I would never call my mate a mooch. Even though I've only known you around an hour, not even, that's not how I would ever feel." Calum turned on the couch, raising one leg to rest on it so he was facing me. "Tell me something. In your realm, what do the couples do after they're mated? Do both continue to work? I'm not necessarily referring to your parents, but all couples there? Do they both work?"

I shook my head. "No. Most of the people that work are us younger people. There are older ones that are mated and have families, but they are usually the business owners. Does that make sense?"

Calum nodded. “And the newly mated couples. What do they do? Are they both working?”

He had me there. “Not usually. The village takes care of them. They help with foods and things needed for the baby. Until the baby is one, and then the alpha can go back to working.”

“So why would you expect it to be any different here?”

I tilted my head to the side and leaned it against the back of the couch. “Because there’s no village. I know that things are different here.”

“Yes. And we have more of a ‘village’ than you think. It’s true that I currently don’t live with mine. We are in Egypt because I was here for work.” Calum paused for a moment before he continued. “Our families are our villages. Our covens, packs, dens, prides. Things of that nature are our villages, and the good ones, they are much like you were describing your village. They will look out for the others.”

“Which do you belong to?” I asked.

Calum chuckled. “My sire is a warlock, and we grew up in a warlock coven. Dad and I are fox shifters, but we weren’t the only shifters in the coven. There were a few others, but it was mostly other warlocks.”

“So we will live near them?” I asked. He had mentioned he was considering moving closer to his parents.

“My parents don’t live with the coven any longer. They did when I was quite a bit younger, but we had moved away when I was certainly old enough to be on my own. That house I mentioned in France?”

I nodded. I remembered him mentioning it.

“It isn’t near a coven, or a skulk for that matter. It’s just a house that is near the university and museums. That made it easier for me to go to work, depending on where that was. For the most part, I’ve spent the majority of my career working for universities.”

“So you teach?”

Calum nodded. “Yes. And just a few days ago, I was discussing going back to that with my dad. They are in Montana, which is where the paranormal council is. There is a university there that has job openings for professors. I was going to look into applying.”

“All right. I’ll go to Montana. Is it nice there?”

Calum chuckled. I honestly didn’t care where I lived. I was here to be with my mate, and if he was going to take us to France, I’d go to France. If we were going to Montana, so be it.

“It’s certainly different than here. Montana is in the United States. Up by Canada. It’s incredibly cold in the winter and can get really hot in the summer.”

“The fae realm is always the same. Green and nice. It doesn’t get cold or hot. It’s just nice.”

Calum shook his head. “I’m not sure where that’s possible here. Tropical islands, most likely.”

I held up my hand. “I wasn’t saying I wanted to live somewhere like that. Just that the fae realm is always the same. I think it will be fun to live somewhere that is different throughout the year. You mentioned that it was cold. Does that mean it will have snow? We don’t have snow where I’m from, but it’s in the books that we have about the shifter realm where the humans live.”

Calum chuckled. “Yes. There is certainly snow. There’s snow on the ground right now, and my brother was talking about how they were expecting it to snow more tomorrow night. They’re celebrating the winter solstice with a festival up on the mountain and are hoping the heavy snow holds off until they are able to have the party.”

That sounded like fun. “We had gatherings like that. It was more of a big market gathering though. We would get booths and sell our things to others. Sometimes trades were done. It just really depended.”

“Perhaps we could go next year? This year, it won’t be possible, but if we are in Montana next year, I would love to

take you.”

“I would like that.” I honestly would. I loved to be around people. I wasn’t normally shy by nature, but I could be a bit hesitant when first meeting them. I quickly picked up on the fact that Calum’s aura was showing concern when I first entered his room. I was nervous, I would think understandably, and I had no idea if he would even be receptive to having a mate. “Do you have any questions for me?”

“What did you do in your village? You mentioned that it was the younger ones that did most of the jobs and such.”

I grinned. “Yes. I helped my parents, but I also worked in a bookstore. I know it’s not really that interesting, but I love to read. It’s where I found most of the different books that were about this realm. I’m not sure where they came from or how they got there, but some were really fascinating.”

“We’ll have to go to a bookstore here. And a library.”

“Do you like to read?” I asked.

Calum nodded. “Yes. It’s a large part of my job, really. I have to read for research for both expeditions and papers I write. It’s all part of being a professor.”

I sighed. “That sounds like fun.” I wouldn’t dare ask because I knew I had no right to ask if I could go to university like he’d mentioned. It was another thing that was briefly covered. I knew that when we came here, papers were created for us and were put with our things. I’d not looked in my bag yet, but I was sure my papers were in there with the money they’d mentioned.

“Would you like to go to college? It’s not an issue. Maybe we could flip things around, and I’ll stay home with the kids and you can go to college. You won’t be able to attend while pregnant though, unfortunately.”

“I could do that?”

Calum chuckled. “You can. We can get you some information on different programs, and you can pick one. I meant it when I said you wouldn’t have to work. I’ve made

more than enough funds in my lifetime already to support us for a very, very long time.”

I thought about it for a moment and shook my head. “I don’t know. I’m not sure I could do that. Leave my kids. I think I would want to be with them.”

Calum gave me a huge smile. “Well, eventually, they will need to go to school. If we’re planning on settling near my family, I know there is a shifter school in Timber Valley that all of the kids go to. There is also a childcare center on the pack’s lands. There are some couples that are still having children and both parents are working, so childcare is needed. It will ultimately be your choice though.”

I wanted to do both. “Do I have to decide now?” I also knew that once we started having kids, I might change my mind. There were a couple of friends my age who were already mated, and I loved spending time with their little ones.

“You don’t have to decide anything at the moment. Everything will be on your timeline, so we’ll do things how and when you want.”

I nodded and then realized what he’d said. “Wait. Everything? You mean if I said I wanted to wait a couple of months to claim each other, you’d be all right with that?” That would never happen because as a fae, we all knew that we only had about a week at most to claim our mates and be claimed by them once we met them. If we went beyond that amount of time, the tingles and vibrations in our bodies when our auras recognized our mates would become too painful to bear.

“If that is what you wish, absolutely. I will do whatever I can to romance you. I want you to accept me and our claim on each other,” Calum told me.

“I already do, and I would never make you wait that long.” I remembered something he’d said about his family. “Your sire is a warlock,” I stated.

Calum nodded. “Yes. As are my older and younger brothers.”

“Do they, too, not have the tingles?”

Calum looked confused. “The tingles?”

“Yes. The tingles. They are what our body experiences when our auras talk to our mate. Unlike you, I’m not a shifter. I don’t recognize my mate by scent. I recognize him by the tingles. When we are near our mate, those tingles increase. It’s like vibrations on our skin. As time goes on, they increase until they become painful.”

“I can’t say I remember any of them ever talking about it. Maybe they did and I just didn’t pay close enough attention because it didn’t really pertain to me. I’m not sure.” Calum seemed thoughtful for a moment. “So you’re telling me that if we don’t claim each other quick enough, you will be in pain?”

I nodded. “Not really fair, huh? Just like birth control not really working all that well for the first fertile period after mating. I’m not sure why things are the way they are, but there are several things that just make me scratch my head in question.”

Calum chuckled. “You and me both. I think that for a while at least, there was a bit of a lag in the mates being paired, and now they seem to be working overtime to make up for it. I’m not sure though, and I might be wrong, but you never know. Anyway, I want you to have a choice in things. We’re supposed to be partners. But it sounds like you’re not necessarily going to have that.”

I shrugged. “It’s just how it is. I won’t be able to control when my fertile period hits either. Nor if I get pregnant or not. It’s just how fate works. Will we be able to have some control over that next time? I think so, but I can’t be sure.”

“We discussed kids already.” Calum paused, looked like he was trying how best to continue. “Did you really want six? Not that I’m against it.”

I held up a hand and started laughing and shaking my head. “No.”

“No?”

I took a deep breath to calm myself. “Not unless you really do. I only said that to see if you would agree about having children. I know some people don’t want but one. I’d like at least two, honestly. But I’m open to more. But if at all possible, I don’t want them really far apart. I want our kids to grow up together and have each other there for one another.”

“I’d like that as well.”

We were suddenly interrupted by a beeping noise, and Calum stood to grab his phone off the table. When he sat there looking at it, I began to wonder.

“Is something wrong?”

“It is a weather alert from the museum. It’s letting us know that they are now closed because of the impending storm.”

I stood and went to the door that was not far from the couch. “I don’t see anything. I’ve read about storms, but shouldn’t we be able to see it?”

Calum was suddenly behind me, and he slid the door open. With his hands on my shoulders, he and I walked out onto the balcony. “The storm will be coming from that direction over there,” he said, pointing to the left. When I looked, it was just bright and sunny.

“What’s that river? I feel it’s important or something. There’s a lot of things here right next to it.”

“That’s the Nile. It has a vast history, and yes, it’s been incredibly important.” Calum took my hand and led me back into the room. Instead of going back to the couch though, he went over to the far wall and bent down. I hadn’t really seen the small bookcase that was there, but it had several books of various sizes and thicknesses on it. “Here it is,” he said as he stood. He held out a book, and I eagerly took it. “It’s about the history of Egypt, and there is a section in there about the Nile as well as the Mediterranean and Red Seas. We are not far from either, and I can take you to both before we leave.”

I grinned up at Calum. That sounded amazing. “Do they have rocks? Can I collect some?”

Calum chuckled. “Yes and yes. We should get you into a geology program, it sounds like.”

I looked back at the book, eager to start reading it.

“Let’s do this,” Calum said as he led me back to the couch. I sat when he indicated that I should. “You open that and start reading since I can tell you’re eager to do so. And while you do that, I’ll finish up my work and send off a couple of emails, and then I’ll be able to completely devote all of my time to you for the next several days.”

My mouth dropped open. “Why didn’t you say something? I can go elsewhere,” I said, starting to stand. “I didn’t even think that you could possibly have other things to do. I should have but didn’t. I apologize.”

Calum sighed. “Are you finished?”

“Umm...yes, I guess. I need to go and see about securing a room.”

Calum growled, and I froze. Did foxes growl? I thought that was, like, bears. Maybe wolves? “You aren’t going anywhere. I was planning on having my brunch, then finishing up my notes and replying to my emails that needed to be sent off. Then I was going to figure out what to do once the first storm hit.”

“First?”

“They are predicting them for up to three days in a row. The conditions are favorable for that period, and although it’s not exactly normal for this time of year, it can and does happen.”

“What do we do during the storm?” I asked, sitting back down and getting comfortable again.

Calum grinned and then winked. “We hang out in the hotel. There is a restaurant downstairs we can go to. Or we can order room service. We can watch movies on the television or play games on my laptop.” Calum pointed to the bookcase again. “There are books to read, and I have a tablet that has e-books on it as well.”

I nodded. I noticed that not once did he mention anything about claiming each other. I tried not to be disappointed. He was my mate, and he was the alpha, and I knew that he would have to be the one to do the claiming. “Plenty to do, then,” I told him and faked a smile. Calum nodded, and after he sat down, I opened the book and discovered it had a list at the beginning. I read down it, finding the section about the river and the seas he’d mentioned, and turned to that page. I would do my best to get completely immersed in the information about the place we currently were at.

I took a quick peek up at Calum, never moving my head, but instead of him working on his computer like he’d mentioned, I found him staring at me. I then raised my head and tilted it to the side.

“Is something wrong?”

Calum shook his head. “I’ve hurt you somehow. I’m not sure how, but your scent is telling me that you’re upset and hurt.”

I set the book down beside me before folding my hands and placing them in my lap. “I’m not hurt. I was getting ready to read about the river. And the seas. There’s a section about them. I want to know more about this place that you are currently living in. It seems as if it’s important to you, and I want to know more about it because of that.”

“That is the truth. I can scent that. But why did I hurt you? What did I do or say that upset you? We were talking about the storms.”

“It will be interesting to experience them. I’ve not been anywhere with storms before. But I know of them from books.”

Calum stood and came over to me, kneeling down in front of me. He took my hands and gave them a squeeze. My breath hitched when that contact happened because where his hands were touching mine, they once again tingled, just as they had when he walked me in from outside. Only this time, he seemed so much closer to me.

“I cannot fix what I do not know is broken. What upset you?”

“It’s nothing, seriously. We will have a grand time hanging out and finding things to do during the storm,” I told him. I wasn’t about to whine to my newly found mate that he’d not mentioned claiming me. I glanced over at the couch and decided that it was a good thing I was short because I knew I didn’t wish to share a bed with my mate if I had to behave. I was a twenty-eight-year-old virgin who had never even been kissed and wanted to do things to my mate. Well, actually, I wanted him to do them to me and show me how to please him. How did I tell him that though? I didn’t. I was the omega. He was the alpha. He was in control as to when those things happened. That’s just how it was.

Calum sighed. “Very well. Hopefully you will eventually feel comfortable enough to share with me what I’ve done to hurt you. I never wish to cause you pain, Asher. If I do, please let me know so I can correct whatever it is I’ve done.”

I looked up at Calum and, after a moment, nodded. He stared down at me until he sighed again and went to sit in front of his computer. I sat there, observing him for a moment before I picked the book back up and tried to focus enough to read. Instead, I found myself trying not to cry. How was it that I’d already somehow messed things up with my mate? I’d known him for only an hour. That must be a new record.

CHAPTER 5

CALUM



I kept going over our conversation. I couldn't pinpoint what it was that I had said or done to upset my adorable mate. He was currently pretending to be reading. I knew he wasn't actually reading, but I honestly didn't know him yet, so I wasn't going to call him out on it.

I would imagine it had to be both terrifying as well as exciting to leave the only place you'd ever known and travel to a completely different world in order to meet someone that you were going to spend the rest of your life with. I shook my head. The similarities of our situation and that of arranged marriages in the human species were uncanny.

"Asher?"

His head rose, and when his eyes met mine, I could tell his were full of tears.

"Oh, sweetheart, what's wrong?" I asked, getting up and immediately going to him. I didn't even think; I just picked him up, pulled him into my lap, and held him tightly. "Do you not want this? I realize you weren't given a choice, and I'm sure we can somehow get ahold of the fates and see about getting you a different mate. You must be terrified to be here all of a sudden."

Asher looked up at me, and a lone tear fell from his eye. He quickly swiped at it and lowered his head again. I wasn't going to have that. If he wanted out, I certainly wasn't going to force him to be here with me. I gently placed my hand under his chin and raised it until he was looking up at me.

“Talk to me. I can’t fix it if you clam up. Do you want a different mate? Want to go home?”

Asher swiped at his eye again and slowly shook his head. “I don’t. But if you don’t want me, I understand. I don’t have anything to offer, really.”

I was confused. “Why would you say that?”

“You were talking about all the things we were going to do to pass the time while we couldn’t leave the hotel. But you never mentioned claiming each other. If you don’t want me, I understand. Maybe someone older would be better for you.”

I narrowed my eyes. “Stop that,” I told him, and without thinking, I leaned down and pressed my lips to his. Asher made a noise that I wasn’t quite sure if it was one of pain, fear, or surprise, but I quickly pulled away and looked at him. “I apologize. I should have asked.”

Asher opened his eyes, and what I saw didn’t show fear, so at least it wasn’t that.

“Why?” he whispered.

“Why what?”

“Why would you ask?” Asher sighed and then seemed to deflate a little. “I don’t understand, Calum. Do you want me or not?”

“I thought I had already said that I did. We’ve been talking about moving to where my family lives. We discussed children. Am I missing something?”

Those blue eyes were once more staring back at me, and I realized they were the color of the sea. I needed to show him.

“You never mentioned claiming me. You talked about everything else but claiming. That’s what fae do when they meet their mate. They claim each other. I guess I don’t understand how shifters do it.”

I couldn’t help but grin. So that was it. Now we were getting somewhere.

“Asher, do you want me to take you to the bedroom and claim you right now?” I asked. I had thought of maybe romancing him a little first. I wanted to show him that he was already more to me than just someone to have sex with. He was my mate. He would be the other father to our children. He would be who I spent evenings cuddled up with. We would go for walks; I’d take him on digs with our kids. We would have an amazing life together, exploring the world.

“I mean...I’m fae.”

I nodded. “Yes. I’m aware of that.”

Asher took a deep breath. “Fae are usually virgins when they meet their mates, Calum. You just gave me my first kiss.”

My mouth parted in shock. Well, shit. I hadn’t known. If I had, I would have made that kiss so much more. Then again, now that I knew, I could fix that.

“I wish I would have known,” I told him. I carefully moved the book so it was no longer jabbing me in the stomach. Once it was beside us on the couch, I moved my hand up to his cheek, my thumb under his chin to help move him into the position I wanted. “I’ll make it up to you now if you want,” I whispered as I slowly moved closer to him.

Asher’s eyes closed, and I took that as him being on board with this, so I lowered my mouth to his once more. This time, he made a whimper sound, and I pressed my lips against his harder. I slid my hand around the back of his neck, holding his head in place while I slowly opened my mouth against his. He was so pliant that his mouth opened with mine, and when I gently touched my tongue to his, he whimpered again. I gently ran my tongue across the tip of his before I curled it and touched the roof of his mouth, and then I found a surprisingly sharp tooth. When I moved to the other side, I found its mate before I pulled my tongue back and then swiped it across his top lip. When I moved back enough to look at him, he seemed to be frozen in place. I couldn’t help but smile at my mate. He was simply adorable. And quite addictive already. I wanted to kiss him again, but first...I moved my hand back around his face, his eyes opening when my thumb touched his upper lip

and raised it gently. Sure enough, there were a pair of canines there.

“You have canines?”

It took a moment, but Asher finally seemed to understand what I’d just asked and nodded.

“But you’re not a shifter.” Granted, they weren’t nearly as large as mine, but he was essentially the equivalent of a warlock. They marked with a mating mark. I’d seen Dad’s, and I knew that Ben had marked Eli that way.

Asher shrugged. “I can’t explain it. When we mark, we bite. You’re right though. I’m not a shifter. I wonder if it’s an ancient thing?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, fae used to be here in this realm, right?”

It was my turn to shrug. “I’m not sure. I’ll have to ask around to see if anyone knows anything about your species.”

Asher shook his head. “No, we did. But a long time ago, we were sent to our own realm because of problems between the first fae and the first warlock.”

Master Edison? “I know Master Edison. But I’ll admit that sadly I don’t know about what you’re referring to.”

“I don’t know specifics. Over time, we were told stories about what happened, but like so many things, the story changed from generation to generation. There was a fight though? And the created fae was killed. As was his son or grandson? I’m not sure. But I wonder if it has something to do with that. From what I’ve read, it used to be that we used to be able to fly. Like, we had wings? But we don’t now. And again, I’m not sure it’s entirely true or not. There seem to be different kinds of fae.”

This was utterly fascinating, and I definitely was going to have Father reach out to Master Edison. I really wanted to know what exactly had happened.

“What do you mean, different kinds?”

Asher shrugged again. “Well, there are shorter fae, and we seem to have more rounded features except our ears.”

I looked at Asher’s ears. They looked completely normal. “Your ears don’t look any different than mine. Not really.”

Asher snorted. My eyes widened when suddenly his face rounded a bit more, but his ears became pointed on the top.

“May I touch them?”

Asher nodded. When I touched the top of his ear, it felt exactly like mine did. I wouldn’t say they were incredibly pointed, but they were definitely more pointed than they had been before.

“I don’t understand.”

“I was using a glamor. It’s a magical spell that will disguise my most fae-like features. I can’t go around letting people see my ears. They’ll stare.”

I wasn’t so sure about that. His ears didn’t look overly pointed, just a bit taller on top. And really, his hair flopped over the tips enough that you couldn’t really see them. Not really.

“I don’t think they’d be that noticeable. But what were you saying? Shorter fae?”

Asher nodded. “Yes. I’m obviously one of the shorter fae. So are both of my parents. But there are also taller fae. They’re taller and more slender than we are. Their features are usually more angular. They have amazing cheekbones, and their ears are definitely more pointed than ours are.”

“All right. So you have different types of fae. That’s not really unusual, is it? There are a lot of different types of shifters.”

“I’m not sure. I honestly think, with all of the reading I’ve done and some of the books I’d found that weren’t really supposed to have been read anymore, we used to be two species but both fae?”

“How so?”

“The taller fae were elven. The shorter, more sprites.” Asher shrugged. “At least, that’s what I read once.”

All right, that was actually incredibly fascinating. “We really need to see if we can get to the bottom of this, because honestly, I don’t mind either way what you are. You’re my mate, and my fox is very much on board with claiming you whenever you’re ready and willing. But now I want to ask my father to talk to Master Edison and see if he knows anything about the fae. You said Master Edison was the one that killed the created fae.”

“That’s what we’ve been told. There were issues with who was more powerful. I’m not sure what all happened. It was obviously way before my time.”

“Do you mind if we do a video call with my parents?”

“I’m not sure what that is exactly, but all right. How do we do that?”

I glanced at the clock on the wall. It was just after ten in the morning here, which meant it was just after one in the morning there. They were most likely fast asleep, and I couldn’t blame them even a little.

“All right. How about we shelve that for now. It’s the middle of the night in Montana.”

Asher chuckled, and I found it so damn adorable. “They’re sleeping. I mean, I guess you could wake them?”

I shook my head. “No, I’m not going to wake them. It can wait until we get a break between storms or until they pass completely. I can also send an email if we can’t get a video connection with them. But I would love to learn more about the fae and their origins. I’m a bit surprised yet not that you’re unsure about things. We don’t exactly know all of the old stories from our created ones and the original eight.”

“Original eight?”

I nodded. “Yes. Each created one was sent an original eight that were once humans that the goddess deemed worthy of such a gift of being changed into whatever she chose: warlock, fox, bear, wolf. All of them. The created ones then taught their

original eight how to be what they were. Warlocks, bears, foxes, wolves, and so on. After a time, they all set out and formed their own covens, packs, dens, and so forth.”

“Wow, that’s really interesting.”

I nodded. “It is. My family is from an original eight line from Master Edison’s original eight.”

Asher’s eyes widened. I chuckled again.

“It’s not that big of a deal. At least not to our family. We’re just us. My father is Rainier, and my dad is Étienne. Father is the warlock,” I said, nodding my head. “And Dad is the red fox shifter. Pierre is a warlock, I’m a fox, and Benjamin is a warlock. Elias, or Eli, who is Ben’s fated One, is also a red fox shifter.”

Asher smiled. “So we’re the odd couple?”

I gave Asher a confused look. “How so?”

“I’m not a warlock. Not really. I do have magical powers, but I’m no warlock.”

“I wouldn’t necessarily call us the odd couple.” I leaned in and kissed Asher’s forehead. “I understand that in my family, there are a lot of warlock-and-fox-shifter pairings, but not all.”

“There are more?” Asher asked, surprise in his voice.

I couldn’t help but chuckle and pull him closer for a tighter hug. “My grandparents are Frederick and Oliver, both warlocks, and both are Master Edison’s original eight. They are the only two that ended up together. The other six found mates elsewhere. But my grandparents had eight children themselves, and my father Rainier was one of them.”

Asher’s eyes continued to widen as I told more of my family’s background.

“That’s a lot of kids. But I’ve known fae couples that have more. It can be really crazy. We’re highly sexual beings, and, well, things happen when you can’t seem to keep your hands off of your mate. That usually leads to lots of pregnancies. Some couples only have a few, others, lots. It doesn’t seem to be much by way of in-between in my village, but other

villages, I've seen people with a dozen or more kids trailing behind them.”

“Yeah, I mean...I would have a dozen with you if it's what you really wanted, but—”

Asher silenced me with a hand on my mouth, and when he looked at me, it was with wide eyes. “No. A few. Seriously. I was honestly joking when I said six. I mean, maybe? But not all at once, you know? Maybe we'll have a few, and when they grow up and leave, we'll decide to have a few more. I'm not sure.”

I pulled his hand away and held it in mine. “That sounds like a good plan.” I thought about what he'd said just a bit ago. “So fae are highly sexual, huh?”

Asher's cheeks turned pink, and he suddenly became interested in either my neck or the collar of my shirt.

“Asher?” I raised his face again so he was looking at me.

Asher shrugged and took a deep breath. “I mean, usually. I've never had sex before though, so maybe I won't be. I have no way of knowing. Some fae don't wait for their mates, but those are the ones who are usually in their sixties or older.” Asher offered a lopsided smile. “I'm sorry to say that I'm not going to know how to please you. I hope you understand and are willing to teach me.”

“Oh, sweetheart, you not having had any experience isn't an issue for me. I promise you that. And I will always be understanding and patient. We'll start slow, and I'll do to you what I like to have done to me, and we'll explore together what you like and don't like. Always feel open to speaking out if you don't enjoy something I do. I never want you to be uncomfortable.”

“I don't know what I like or don't like. Sitting close to you like this is pleasant. I'm enjoying that.”

I tightened my arms around Asher again. “I like it too. And I love that you're small enough to do it and it not be awkward.”

Asher laughed at that. It was such a beautiful sound, in my opinion. It was safe to say that I was most certainly smitten by my mate already.

“I also liked your kisses. Both of them. And the one on my forehead. It felt different but still special, just in a different way.”

I leaned down and kissed Asher’s forehead again. “Forehead kisses are a way of showing affection anywhere. They are sweet, show that you are with a person and they are with you, and can be given anywhere. Some places don’t really like more affectionate displays of affection, and forehead kisses are a way that we can show affection and how much we care no matter where we are.”

“You care for me already?”

I couldn’t help but smile. “Of course I do. I understand why you ask though. We’ve only known each other a very short time. Not even a few hours yet. But you are my mate. I’m completely wired to love, protect, and care for my mate. That’s how shifters work. In return, we hope the same happens with our mate. I’ve known a few who didn’t have a returned bond, and it wasn’t a pretty relationship.”

Asher looked thoughtful for a little bit before he finally nodded. “You mentioned places not liking affection.”

I winced. “Yes. Some places aren’t accepting of male-male pairings or female-female pairings.” I sighed. “Unfortunately, where we are currently at can be a hit-or-miss place. Some locations are safe, like our hotel room. Others, not so much. I have worked with Dr. White for a long time. He and his office would be what I would consider a safe space. But he’s not from here—just happens to be living and working here. He’s actually from England, which is where I was born.”

“What about where your family lives?”

“Well, Pierre still lives in France. France is safe. So is England, although I no longer have a house there because I sold it. As for Montana, yes, very safe. My father works for the paranormal council. They are obviously safe. There is a

den, a pride, and a pack in the immediate area, and they, too, are safe places. Unfortunately, the towns themselves do have some humans in them as it's a touristy area. That means that when you are pregnant, you cannot be seen out in town."

"But when I'm not? We could be together there?"

I grinned at my mate. "Absolutely."

He nodded once. "Good. I like the idea of Montana more and more. Do you know, are there any other fae in that area?" Asher asked as he laid his head on my shoulder.

"I'm not sure. I can ask Father, and he can find out for us. I've only visited the once, and although I did go for several runs while there, I didn't spend a lot of time with anyone other than my parents and Ben and Eli. Their twins were newly born, and I happened to be there because of the babies."

Asher sighed. "That sounds lovely. I hope to meet them someday. If your brother is anything like you, I'm sure he's nice."

I smiled again as I rested my chin on Asher's head. "Yes, Benjamin is nice. Eli is sweet, and despite everything he's been through, he's open and friendly."

Asher moved, raising his head to look at me. "Been through?"

"All I will say was he was kidnapped, and it wasn't a good time. It's not really my story to tell. Just know that he was held by very bad people, and he had to work through a lot of things because of it."

Asher's scent turned to sadness. "That's terrible. I'm sorry he went through something like that. We have bad apples in our realm as well. You never truly know how someone will turn out."

Asher laid his head back down on my shoulder, and I snuggled him a little tighter. "No, you don't. I didn't mean to upset you."

"You didn't." He sighed. "This is so nice. I know you have things to do, and I should let you do them, but can we cuddle

like this for a little longer?”

I smiled and then kissed the top of his head. “We can cuddle as long as you’d like.” I would hold him all day and night if that was what he wished.

CHAPTER 6

ASHER



Calum was comfort. He was security. He was somewhere to feel safe. He made me tingle in ways that weren't sexual but relaxing. So much so I felt my body growing heavy with sleep, and I knew I needed to move, or I would fall asleep in his lap.

I sat up, and Calum seemed reluctant to let me go. But he had things to do, and I didn't wish to be the reason he didn't finish his work. I wanted to have that time with him that he'd mentioned. There was nothing wrong with that, was there?

"What's wrong?" Calum asked.

"I'm just moving. You're warm and comfortable, and if I stay there much longer, I'm going to fall asleep."

"Are you tired? Would you like to lie down and take a nap? The bedroom is just through that door right there," he said, pointing to the door that was open. I had figured it was a bedroom or washroom.

"No. I just...you're my mate, and when you're holding me, the tingles in my body smooth out and aren't as intense."

"Are they causing you pain?"

I walked right into that one and smiled nervously. "When you kissed me, they started to intensify. But when you were holding me, they calmed down. It'll be all right. I have several days before they become unbearable. I'm not too worried about it."

"What does unbearable mean? What it implies?"

I nodded. “Yes. It will become too painful to function. A lot of times, if a mate is rejected, the rejected mate will need to be ended. Sometimes the one doing the rejecting as well. It’s not pretty. But I’ve just met you. We have days yet.”

Calum shook his head. “It won’t get to that. I’m not waiting to claim you. Not because of that, but because I’ve been waiting for you for a very long time. I am ready to commit now, if that’s what you want.”

I did. I was absolutely ready now. But he’d mentioned he had some things to take care of, and I didn’t want that to be bugging me in the background. Because despite my inexperienced status, even I knew what would happen if and when we finally claimed each other. We’d spend days in bed. It was simply what happened. And if he had work to do, it might not be finished in time. I didn’t wish to start our mating like that.

“You do your work first. The stuff you mentioned? That way, it’s out of the way, and we can spend all the time together after. I’m not really going anywhere unless you tell me to,” I said. I moved to the side, sliding off Calum’s lap. My legs were still on his, and he wrapped a hand around them while staring at me.

“Are you sure?”

“I am. What if we claim each other, and then shortly after, I go into my fertile period? I have no idea how it’s going to go. What if I’m one that has super-long ones?”

“Wait, you haven’t had a fertile period yet? That’s the equivalent of a heat, yes?”

I nodded. “It is. And no, I haven’t had one yet.”

“Is that normal?”

I shrugged. “I think so. None of my friends have had one that I’m aware of. Except those that are mated.”

Calum seemed to think about that for a moment before he, too, nodded.

“All right. You bring up a very valid point.” He patted my legs, then handed me the book. “You read about the Nile River, and I’ll finish my work so it’s not subconsciously hanging around in the back of my mind. I’ll finish that all up, send my parents an email letting them know I’ll message them in a few days, and then it’ll be nothing but us until we’re ready to leave this room.”

Calum lifted my legs, sliding out from under them once I pulled them up close to me. He stood and offered a smile that I eagerly returned.

“Can I ask you a question?”

“You may always ask anything. What is it?” Calum knelt down to where he was closer to my level. Even with me on the couch and him down on one knee, he was still taller than I was, but not much.

“I’m not complaining, so don’t feel that I am. But how much longer do you have here? You mentioned that you didn’t live here and it was temporary?”

Calum nodded. “My contract here is finished. The only reason I’m still here is because of the storms that are incoming. I’ve chosen to not fly out ahead of them. We weren’t finished with our dig, but we were incredibly close, and I’d already decided I was most likely going to go to Montana while out there. When we first got back yesterday, I talked to Dr. White, the director of the museum, and he already had someone to replace me. I’m not required to do more than submit my final notes and findings. The dig will resume next week without me and with my replacement in place.”

“Just like that?”

“Yes. I’m not sure what happened,” Calum said. He sat down on the floor, crossing his legs in front of him, and moved closer to the couch. “When I was out there this last time, I just felt incomplete. Of course, part of that was not having my mate, but honestly, it was more than that. It has been months since I’ve visited my parents and brother. I miss them, and after messaging with my dad, I’d seriously considered moving

to that area. It will be quite a bit different, but I was willing to experience different in order to be around my family.”

“What about your other brother? You said he lives in France too?”

Calum nodded. “Yes. Pierre is...” Calum sighed. “How to describe my oldest brother. He’s a bit cranky, he doesn’t really like people, and he can and often goes months without ever leaving his house.”

“How? Doesn’t he need things?”

Calum chuckled. “He’s a warlock. And sure he needs things, but he just uses magic, and poof, there they are.”

“That makes sense.” I nodded as I thought about it more. It really did. If I’d been working on something or searching for a particular book I couldn’t find, I would do the same. Magic had been given to me, so why not use it? Sure, I could do everything without it, but why? Once I hit puberty and started coming into my magic, I’d used it at every opportunity that I could. “You go work,” I told Calum. “If you don’t, I’ll just keep chatting with you, and then you’ll never get your things accomplished. I’ll still be here, reading.”

Calum smiled before he stood and went the short distance to the table. He sat down and quickly started typing on his computer. We didn’t have computers in our realm, but we didn’t need them either. We didn’t have cell phones—again, something that we didn’t really need. We all knew what they were, but there wasn’t a reason for us to need those things. One could say our realm lived in times past, and they’d be correct.

I watched Calum for a moment before I opened the book again to the section I had been in before. This time though, I started reading about the river and the seas, finding both fascinating. I had always loved reading about new things. I already knew there would be many things to learn about here, things that hadn’t been in the books that we had in our realm. I was thankful that we at least were taught about the basics and we weren’t just dropped here without any knowledge at all.

I heard Calum typing on his computer while I continued to read about the history of not only the Nile River but Egypt in general. I wondered if I'd be able to go see the pyramids at some point. Calum had mentioned traveling and showing me and our children the world, so I had to think that yes, at some point, he'd take me to see all of these fascinating places.

I wasn't sure how long we'd spent with him typing on his computer and me reading, but the room suddenly became dimmer, and the wind outside could be heard hissing.

I looked up from the book at Calum. "The storm is here." He stood and went to the wall, flipping the switch to turn on the lights. The room was suddenly brighter, but I was too curious to not get up and go look. I set the book aside and walked over to the door that we'd gone out earlier. Gone was the blue sky. In its place was nothing but brownish-orange everything.

"That's the sandstorm?"

"It is. They are normally unpredictable and just pop up, but this one has been tracked moving across the desert. It subsided, then grew again. The air currents are what causes them, and right now, they are favorable for this," Calum said, pointing at the darkness that was outside.

"It doesn't look nice," I told him.

Calum wrapped an arm around my chest and pulled me back into his. I stood there with him behind me as we stared out at the ugliness that was outside. "It's not nice. It's difficult to breathe during them, and if you're exposed to them for prolonged periods, they can cause lasting negative effects. I'm not sure how that would impact us, to be honest. We heal different than humans, but there are nasty things in the sand."

I shook my head. "No, thanks. Can I just have the snow in Montana instead?"

Calum chuckled, and when he did, my head bounced a little because it was leaning against his chest. "Yes, you can. I messaged my dad. He's still asleep, most likely, and the storm will make connections difficult, but I asked him to send me

some places to live. I'm looking to purchase, so I don't necessarily want something that is on pack or den lands."

"Can you do that?" I asked. I tilted my head and looked up at Calum. He moved enough to where he could kiss my nose and did. I couldn't help but smile at that.

"I can. Did you wish to live with the pack or the den?"

I shrugged. "I don't have much of an opinion on it either way, to be honest. I'll live wherever you are most comfortable. You're the shifter, so where you want to live so you can shift is good with me."

Calum smiled. "You're so sweet. But I don't have to have the ability to shift and run wherever I live. Even as an alpha, I'm not that large when shifted. I can shift in the house and run around in there."

"Oh. Yeah, I guess you could, couldn't you?"

Calum nodded. "But when I visited, I just went up to Treasure Ridge and shifted there. It's where the council is, and with Benjamin being an enforcer, he lives up there in enforcer housing."

"And that's a safe space, right?" There was so much to learn, and I was trying to remember everything so my mate wouldn't have to keep repeating himself.

"It is. Treasure Ridge is a mountain. The council has settled there, and what was once a small thunder of dragons is now a growing town on top of a mountain. It's warded by Master Edison and his warlocks and is completely hidden from humans that know nothing about us."

That was incredibly fascinating. "So much information. I'm trying to absorb it all, but I'm sure I'll ask about things at least one more time."

Calum chuckled and shook his head. "You can ask all you need. Now, I'm finished with work, and I know that it's been a while since you have had anything to eat. Would you like to order room service?"

I glanced at the storm outside once more before I turned and looked up at my mate, my hands resting on his chest. “I would. I’m not sure what they have, or what I’ve had or will know what everything is, but I trust you and your judgment. You’ve been in this realm your entire life, and you have eaten here before.”

Calum leaned down and gave me another one of those forehead kisses. I closed my eyes and sighed a little. Yes, those were actually really nice. He was right about them being innocent.

“Well, room service is available twenty-four hours a day, and we can get it from any of the hotel dining, so it’s just a matter of what you want to try. There’s a fairly authentic English pub, and it has your typical pub food. There’s Indian cuisine, as well as Asian foods.” Calum walked across the room and picked up a thin book. He took it to the table and gestured for me to join him. When he held out the chair, I sat and discovered it was a booklet with the dining choices.

Immediately, I knew there was no way I was going to know what I wanted. I looked up at my mate and shook my head. “Just order two of whatever you’re having. Or something that you’ve had before and loved. This is...” I glanced at the booklet and shook my head again. “This is a lot. I’ll never be able to decide, but I don’t have reactions to any foods that I know of, and I’m not a picky eater as far as I know.”

Calum nodded. “All right. I can do that.” Calum turned the thick pages until he found what he was looking for. He then went back to the small table that the booklet had been on and picked up the phone. This one wasn’t a cell phone though. He pressed a number and, after a moment, started talking about food. He requested fish and chips and shepherd’s pie, and he mentioned something about two pieces of cake. I wasn’t sure what all that was, but I was completely trusting my mate not to steer me wrong.

“It will be here within thirty minutes. Would you like to maybe move your bag into the bedroom?” Calum asked as he walked back over toward me.

I glanced at where I'd dropped it by the door. "Yeah, I can do that," I told him. I closed the book, placing it back on the couch, and went over to where my bag was and picked it up. It was bulky, and I probably should have packed lighter, but I wasn't going to get to return to get my things. This was all that I had now. Everything that I owned was in this bag, and that honestly wasn't a whole lot.

I followed Calum into the other room, and my breath caught at the sight. The bed was neatly made and was in the middle of the far wall. But the wall to our right was nothing but windows. It was a wall of glass, and I would guess if we could see, it had an amazing view of the river and the city beyond. Right now, it was just brownish in color outside.

"It's gorgeous at night," Calum said.

"I'll take your word for it. Maybe I'll see it before we leave?"

He nodded as he reached for the bag. "You will. We won't be able to leave for several days. Especially not if you end up in a fertile period."

I thought about that and suddenly realized that we couldn't do that here. I frantically started shaking my head, but Calum was turned away from me and couldn't see. When he turned back my way, he could tell something was wrong. Or maybe he'd sensed it before he turned?

"What's wrong?"

"I can't have a fertile period in a hotel. There are other people here, are there not?"

Calum nodded. "Yes. It's a hotel."

I shook my head again. "What if I'm loud? What if you are? Won't they hear? And if we are at it for days, what then? How do we explain that situation? And are you going to be able to order food when needed? There's no kitchen."

Calum looked serious for a moment before he nodded. "You're right. Well, we're stuck here for the time being. I'll send an email to my fathers and ask them to come and get us somewhere else." Calum tilted his head to the side. "Unless

you can use your magic to move us from one place to another?”

I bit my lower lip. “I can if I know where I’m going. But this is the only place I’ve ever been since being in this realm. I won’t know where to take us.”

Calum crossed the room and pulled me into his arms again. His hugs were just as good as his forehead kisses. “It’s all right. We’ll be fine. I’ll send the message now, and hopefully, it’ll get through. The storm might last a few hours, or it could be a day or two. Or three.”

That caught my attention, and I looked up at Calum. “Three might be pushing it. Especially if we claim each other.”

Calum sighed. “Yes, well, I’ll go send that now and hope for the best.”

I nodded. It wasn’t ideal, I understood that, but having a fae’s first-ever fertile period in a hotel...so much could go wrong. I could only hope that it wouldn’t be an issue and Calum would be able to get ahold of his family and they’d be able to get to us here and then take us elsewhere for everything.

I gave the wall of windows one last glance before I left the bedroom and followed my mate out into the other room. He was on his computer again, typing. I stood in the doorway and watched as he sent the message to his fathers. If his father was a warlock, then he’d be able to take us places with his magic. I could do it, but not until after I’d been there. I had been so excited about meeting my mate earlier that I’d not even thought about what could happen if things progressed here. That certainly presented challenges. Hopefully my mate wouldn’t hold any of it against me. He didn’t seem like the type that would though.

“Done,” he said as he tapped on the computer once more and then looked up at me. “Now we wait to hear back from them. I had already mentioned that I’d met my mate very recently, so that won’t be a surprise now that I’m asking for Father’s help to get us from here to the house in France. Although, I’ve been away for some time, and there isn’t a

whole lot of food there either. At least, not anything that would be helpful for someone going through a fertile period.”

I shrugged. “One thing at a time.” I stood from where I was and moved toward my mate. “What would you like to do before the food arrives?”

“I have an idea. Come here,” Calum said, holding out his hand. I placed mine in his and found myself tugged toward the couch. When he sat and then pulled me down with him, I wasn’t going to protest. I’d enjoyed sitting with him a great deal earlier. This time though, he had me sitting facing him, which put things into a completely different category.

“Oh,” I said when he pulled my hips forward and there was most definitely an excited member saying hello inside Calum’s pants.

“We won’t do much, but I’d like to get to know you a little better,” he said seconds before he moved in to kiss me but stopped short. I didn’t say a word. Instead, I placed a hand on the back of his head and pulled him toward me. That was all of the permission that Calum seemed to need. Seconds later, his tongue was pushing into my mouth, and I couldn’t help but moan at the feeling of him kissing me as if his entire existence revolved around me. His kisses were definitely something I’d want many more of.

CHAPTER 7

CALUM



My mate was going to be addictive. But I was certain everyone thought the same of their mates. We were wired to be all about them, and already, my fox wanted to do any and everything we could to please Asher. The fact that he seemed so willing to learn how to please me in return didn't hurt either.

I knew we couldn't claim each other right at the moment. We'd ordered food, and it would be here before we could get through all of that. But a little bit of exploring wouldn't hurt, and it would give me a little bit of insight as to what Asher liked and didn't.

I was thrilled he seemed willing and involved. When he pulled my head down closer to his, I took that as willingness, and I went in for a kiss. I tilted my head slightly, allowing me to cover his mouth completely. When I swiped at his lips, he opened, this time without hesitation because he knew what to expect. Our tongues met, and Asher was a more-than-willing participant this time. He pushed his back against mine, pulling a moan from me.

I felt him smile and pulled back to see his face. Unfortunately, that seemed to give him the wrong idea because his eyes immediately opened, and the smile fell from his face. "No, I only wanted to see your smile."

Asher blinked at me for a moment, and then the smile was back. I grinned as well and was just leaning in to go back to kissing him when there was a knock on my door. I glared at it

because I knew there was no way it had been thirty minutes yet.

Asher cleared his throat, climbed off my lap, and sat on the couch beside me. “You should probably see who that is,” he said.

I nodded. It could be anyone, I guess. Housekeeping, the food came early, someone looking for another room. I wouldn’t know until I went and opened the door. I stood, wanting nothing more than to either remain on the couch with Asher or to take him with me to the door. Instead, I crossed the room, and as I got closer to the door, I could hear voices outside. I groaned. They were not supposed to be here.

I glanced back at Asher once before I unlocked the door so I could open it. Sure enough, there were three of my former team. One of them being Lauren, who simply would not take a hint that I wasn’t interested in starting something with her. Even before I’d met Asher earlier, I wasn’t interested in her.

“Roland, Lauren, Michael. What can I do for you?”

“Can we come in?” Lauren asked and took a step forward as if she was automatically going to be invited in.

“Now isn’t necessarily a good time,” I told them. Roland and Michael smirked, and Lauren looked confused. “My partner is here, and we were getting ready to have a late lunch as soon as it arrives.” There was absolutely no reason to lie to them. My partner was here. He was so much more than that, but they were all human and wouldn’t understand it if I said my mate was here. That would bring so many more questions, things I wasn’t willing to discuss, even if I was allowed to.

“You never mentioned you had a girlfriend,” Lauren said huffily.

“I wouldn’t really say I’m a girl,” Asher said as he came up behind me. I moved slightly to accommodate him, and he easily tucked into my side. “Hi. I’m Asher,” he said with a little wave.

“Called it,” Roland said. “You and Henry owe me twenty bucks each.”

“Aw, man. How did you do that?” Michael asked.

“I have my ways,” Roland said.

“Seriously? You’re into guys? He’s young enough to be your kid,” Lauren said.

I turned a glare toward her. “Who I am spending my life with is nobody’s business but my own. Asher is not young enough to be my child, and you are now warned, Lauren.” I looked to the other two, who were no longer smiling, before I refocused on Lauren. “I never showed interest. In fact, I turned you down at every opportunity you presented. Dr. White is still very much in charge of your expedition and in control of who does and doesn’t continue with the dig. You’ve shown me that you are not to be trusted, and you are not accepting of boundaries.” I once more looked at the other two. “I was the lead on this dig. I’m no longer it as I will be returning home with Asher. Think long and hard and be ready to explain your actions to Dr. White when he is ready for you to return to the site with Dr. Eris. You all need this experience for your degrees. Maybe use your time off to think about that.”

I shook my head, and when I stepped back, Asher came with me. I quietly closed the door, flipping the lock once I had. I took a deep breath before looking down at Asher. He gave me a lopsided smile before he moved out from under my arm and left the doorway. I followed, and when he sat on the couch, he pulled his legs up with him and tucked them under. He very much had the unapproachable look to him at the moment.

“I’m not upset with you for anything,” I said.

“I shouldn’t have come over. I heard voices, and when she said the word ‘girlfriend,’ I heard the bitterness in her voice, and I used magic to put me over behind you. I shouldn’t have. I apologize.”

I sat beside him and held out my hand, hoping he’d take it. When he placed his in mine, I immediately closed my larger hand around his and gave it a gentle squeeze before bringing it to my mouth and kissing the back.

“You did nothing wrong, and there is no need for you to apologize for anything. You are indeed my partner. There will never be another for me, nor for you. We haven’t claimed each other yet, but that will change later on. I’m going to message Dr. White at the museum. I will let him know of my notes about them and what their actions are saying. They are students who are working on degrees. I was never going to finish this dig with them, but we had hoped to get further than we did. Weather can be unpredictable.”

“What are you going to say? Will you have issues because of me? They mentioned I’m young enough to be your kid.”

I snorted. “True, you are. But they all believe I’m forty-two. That’s not exactly old enough to be a twenty-eight-year-old’s father. You would have had to have been born when I was fourteen. That’s a little young for most people. I’m not saying it doesn’t happen, but you and I both know that’s not the case for us.”

Asher nodded.

“There will be a third lead on this dig before they are finished, so me leaving has nothing to do with you. I simply decided to pull out a little earlier than planned, but I had all but made that decision before I met you.”

There was another knock on the door, and I sighed as I looked toward it.

“That’s probably the food. It’s been close to thirty minutes, according to the clock on the wall,” Asher said. I nodded and went to open the door again. When I did, sure enough, there was a cart with several silver domes on top of plates. This time, there were also items on the second shelf of the cart, and I stepped back to let the delivery attendant in. He pushed the cart into the suite and stopped beside the table. Immediately, I noticed that Asher wasn’t in the room.

“If you would sign here.”

I nodded, signed the ticket again, and handed it and the pen back to the attendant.

He glanced and nodded. “Thank you. If you would leave the cart in the hallway when you are finished, please.”

“Will do. Thank you,” I told him. I walked him out of the suite again, closing and locking the door behind him. When I came back into the room, Asher was standing in the doorway that led to the bedroom.

“I didn’t know if I should be seen or not.”

My heart broke. “Sweetheart, they know I’m not going to eat all of this food. They know at least one other person is in here with me.”

Asher shrugged. “But it could have been a girl. Or a few other people. I heard you when you ordered. You ordered enough for three or four people.”

I sighed but nodded. It seemed we were going to have to have a long conversation before we took things further. I was not ever going to hide my mate. Never. And as soon as I could, I would be checking out of the hotel, and I’d have my father get us from here to somewhere. Most likely France. I could claim my mate in my house in France. Father would have time to help with things we would need for Asher’s fertile period.

“All right. Let’s eat,” I told him. I held out my arm, hoping he’d come to me. When he did, I was thankful that he wasn’t too upset with me.

I held out a chair for him, then went to the cart and pulled off the domes. Fish and chips. Lucky guess because although I could smell the food, they were all combined at the moment, and I had no idea which was what until I removed the covers. I placed it in front of Asher, wondering if he’d love fish and chips as much as I did.

“What is it?” he asked, leaning down and taking a deep breath.

“Fish and chips. Did you want malt for it?” I asked, holding up the bottle.

“I’m not sure. Maybe?”

I grabbed the ale that was on the second shelf and opened it for him with the opener. “Now, usually these are on tap, but since we aren’t in an actual pub, we get the bottled version.”

Asher took the bottle, and after giving it a smell, he wrinkled his nose and shook his head. “Would you be terribly upset if I opted for tea?”

I took the bottle and couldn’t help but chuckle.

“No, except I didn’t order tea.”

“No issues with that,” he told me, and a mug of steaming brown liquid suddenly appeared in front of him. He picked up the fork and knife and started cutting the fish.

I watched as he took his first bite, and when he chewed a little, I could tell that he wasn’t necessarily a fan.

“Is something wrong? Does it taste bad?”

“I’ve had fish before, but this is different.”

He took a drink of his tea and then picked up a chip. That he seemed to really like and quickly ate the rest of it. I took a deep pull from the bottle before setting it on the table and grabbing my own plate of fish and chips. I started with the fish and immediately shook my head. “No. That’s not quite right. I don’t recommend eating it. It’s always been really good so far, so I don’t know what happened this time.”

Asher shrugged. “The chips are good.” He shoved another in his mouth and happily chewed. I grabbed the shepherd’s pie, and after giving it a taste, I found that it was perfectly fine. We could split it, and I’d give a larger portion to Asher since I’d eaten earlier and he hadn’t.

“Would you like to try this instead?” I asked, holding it out to him.

“What is it?”

“Shepherd’s pie. It’s minced meat with vegetables and potatoes. It’s quite good, and we could share it.”

Asher stood, dunked his fork into the ramekin, and brought a bite to his mouth. I watched as he got his first taste and

nodded.

“Oh, that’s pleasant.” He sat back down and grabbed another chip. “We don’t need to share though,” he told me. In a blink, another ramekin appeared in front of him, and I could only stare at my mate in disbelief.

“How did you do that?”

“You said it was in the hotel, correct? Well, that it came from a hotel eatery?”

I nodded.

“I know what it tastes like, and I just used magic to hone in on it, and now here we have another. Did you want fruit? I sensed fruit down there as well. I can also alter your ticket to add the things so we’re honest.”

“That would be acceptable, yes,” I told him. I didn’t wish for anyone to have something go missing and get into trouble. But on the other hand, there was definitely something off about the fish. It could be that it wasn’t cooked quite long enough, or it was a day or two past its prime. Either way, it shouldn’t be eaten, and if the shepherd’s pie was something he was willing to have, then we would eat it.

Once Asher had eaten all of his chips, he pushed that plate to the side and started in on his shepherd’s pie. I figured that was probably the best time to bring up certain subjects.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Why couldn’t you? Earlier, you said I could always ask you questions, no matter what. Wouldn’t it be unfair if I didn’t allow the same?”

He had me there. “Very well. My question is, why did you feel it necessary to hide when the food arrived? I’m not ashamed to be with you, and I never will be. Yet you seemed hesitant and nervous.”

Asher shrugged. “You mentioned that there might be places that weren’t necessarily as safe as others here. What if the person bringing the food isn’t someone who is all right

with us being together? They could get others involved, couldn't they?"

I thought about it for a moment. He had a point.

"All right. Valid point. But for future reference, I don't want you to hide, ever. I am not ashamed of you or us. We will claim one another soon, and once my message gets through to my father, he can come collect us and take us to my place in France. I don't have anywhere in Montana yet. That will have to wait until a little later."

"I'm all right with that. I would really rather not go through a fertile period here in the hotel." Asher placed his fork down and moved his hands to his lap. "I'm not saying this will happen to me, but I'll say that there have been other fae that while experiencing a fertile period, it's possible that magic can sometimes escape."

This was a bit surprising. Did warlocks have the same issues?

"How so?"

"Well, maybe fireworks will go off? Or things will start floating around them. But it's not necessarily limited to just the room they're in. We've seen things floating outside of a house before in our village. There have been instances of small, colorful explosions in the sky. There have been things that just blink in and out of existence. I'm not sure it will happen with me, but it's a possibility."

Yep, we needed to get to France as fast as we could. I reached for my phone, and when I looked, I was sad to see it had no service. I wouldn't be able to get a message out to them, but I could work on sending them a message later.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. There's just no service, so I can't get ahold of my father. He will be up now, and I did message my dad before we lost the cell service." I glanced at my computer. "I wonder if the hotel still has Wi-Fi. They will be wired, but my phone is cellular, so the storm is interfering with it."

I woke my laptop up, and after I clicked on the internet icon, I was pleasantly surprised to see that I did have connection through the computer.

“All right. I might be able to get something through to my fathers. Are you ready to leave soon?”

“How soon is soon?”

“Well, whenever Father can get here to take us to France.”

Asher seemed surprised. “He can do that?”

I chuckled. “Yes. But he’s been both places. I arrived here via warlock magic. He brought me here, and I checked in at the lobby, but I was always going to leave with my father’s help. I can fly, but I don’t necessarily enjoy it a whole lot.”

“Can he do that during a storm?”

I nodded. “Yes. Are you concerned that you couldn’t?”

Asher shrugged. “I’m not sure. I haven’t ever been around a storm, so I’ve not tried. And I don’t know where I’m going to take us somewhere.”

“We’ll get out of here and tucked away at my place in France. Give me a minute to message them, and then we can finish our lunch.” I looked to Asher for a moment. He had gone back to eating, but he seemed to be picking at his food at this point. That wasn’t what I wanted. “I’m sorry things aren’t turning out how I’d hoped. You’ve brought up some very valid points though, and I agree that a private residence would be best for us for the next week or two.”

“What of your neighbors though? You mentioned you lived close to universities and museums.”

I froze. Yes, that was true. Well, what did others do when they met their mates? I sighed. I didn’t know what to do in this situation, to be honest. He was right. I did live in a populated area. I had neighbors on both sides, and they weren’t far from me. We all lived within walking distance of cozy cafés and delicious bakeries.

“We’ll discuss it with my father once he arrives. There has to be a solution that is acceptable.”

I saw that there was a reply from Dad from my earlier message, but there seemed to be a long lag between messages. I wasn't sure what all either of them had received or not, so I opted to message Father separately in hopes that something got through to one of them.

Instead of replying to Dad again, I instead opened an email to Father.

Father,

I have found myself with the best news one could ever hope for. But with it comes a bit of a conundrum. My mate showed up at my hotel room door not long ago. That is the wonderful news. He's absolutely a delight and just the sweetest. I can tell he will have plenty of sass to throw at me, so I know I will always be kept on my toes around him.

But the challenge. Asher is fae. And, well, he cannot use his magic to get us out of here because he has never been anywhere but here. He wouldn't know where to magick us to. That also presents another possible issue. His upcoming fertile period and his magic. He obviously shouldn't go through his fertile period in a hotel. But my house in France isn't necessarily the best place either. He has mentioned that it is a possibility that his magic could become an issue during this time.

Suggestions? I am open to any and all, and I ask that you please help us to leave Cairo at your earliest convenience. We will be packed shortly and ready to go whenever it is that you can arrive to help. The storm is currently raging outside, so that limits what we can do by way of getting out of the hotel on our own. But again, we are hoping you can assist in this.

I cannot wait for you and Dad to meet Asher. He truly is a treasure, and I can see him and Eli getting along quite well. I hope to hear from you soon.

Calum

I watched the email leave, and when it went to the sent box, I double-checked there to make sure. I figured it would take a little while, even with it being email and completely digital, but it had to go through one channel to another, and those things took time.

I set the laptop to the side and looked up to find Asher staring out the window and biting his lower lip.

“Hey,” I said quietly. He looked my way and gave me a hesitant smile. “It’ll be all right.”

“I didn’t mean to cause so much trouble.”

I shook my head. “There’s no trouble at all. Seriously.” It was going to take time. I knew it. He had been here only hours, and already things were changing because he needed them to. He needed a safe place to have his fertile period, and a hotel or a house on a busy street wasn’t them.

Asher sighed. “I still feel bad,” he said.

I needed to do something to distract him. “I’m going to pack. Did you want to come and sit with me while I do? You’re not eating any longer.”

When my mate stood, he nodded. At least we could do that and be ready if and when my father was able to get to us. I quickly placed my food on the cart, and Asher did the same. Once that was finished, I pushed it into the hallway and left it there to be collected. I would see about finding something more suitable for us to eat later. Once we were somewhere entirely different. But for now, I needed to pack. More importantly though, I needed to find a way to reassure my mate that he’d done absolutely nothing wrong and us leaving suddenly wasn’t an inconvenience in the least.

CHAPTER 8

ASHER



I wasn't trying to be a hassle, but things had been going well, and then they weren't. I knew it wasn't in any way Calum's fault, nor was it mine. Not really. But how would we explain things if at some point while I was a bit out of it during a fertile period and my magic became a bit off? They may or may not be able to pinpoint it to here, but it was possible that they would have no clue as to where the issues were coming from.

I waited for Calum to push the cart into the hallway and then followed him into the bedroom. He pulled out a bag that was a flat cube and put it on the bed.

"Your pack is different," I mentioned.

"Yes. It's a suitcase. If we decide to travel extensively, we can get you one if you wish. It holds a great deal of things."

I nodded. "I've not really traveled. Just to other villages when looking for my mate. But that was several years ago. I didn't find him, so I had to return home and move back in with my parents."

"Are you going to miss them?" Calum asked as he started to pull clothing from the bag in the closet.

"I won't. They weren't terrible parents, but we weren't really close. They won't miss me, so why waste time and energy on missing them?"

Calum stopped for a moment before he moved close enough to put the clothing on the bed. I figured out what he was going to do with them and, with a little bit of magic, had

the clothes folded and placed in the suitcase. I wasn't sure it was packed properly, but the things were in there. Calum turned back from the closet with more things and froze. "You packed my bag."

"Did you want me not to? It was only a little bit of magic to do it."

"No, I appreciate your help." He laid the clothes he had in his hands down on the bed and then went to the bathroom. I'd discovered it earlier when I was in here when the food arrived.

I used more magic and had the rest of his clothing put in the suitcase, and when Calum returned from the bathroom, he had a plastic bag with him.

"What's that?"

"Dirty clothing. I haven't had time to send them to the wash. I'll take care of it when we get to wherever we're going to end up. I would think most likely Montana somewhere."

"That works. I can wash those for you," I said, holding out my hand for the clothing.

"I don't need you to. I can wash them in a washing machine when we get somewhere."

"It's not an inconvenience. But I understand." I dropped my arm and continued sitting on the bed beside the suitcase. Calum placed the bag in the bottom of the suitcase, and as he turned to go back to the bathroom again, we both heard a loud knock from the door.

Calum looked at me, and I shrugged. "You're popular today," I told him. I figured it was most likely his father, but it could be anyone from the hotel or even the students from earlier.

Calum left the bedroom, and with a quick thought, I washed his dirty clothing and had it folded with the others in the bag. I had just slid off the bed when I heard voices. New voices. And these ones sounded a whole lot like Calum.

I slowly crept toward the door to see if I could peek out into the room without being seen. I could always use magic to

make myself invisible, but Calum's sire was a warlock. He would know I was there. His aura would no doubt be able to sense mine.

"You cannot simply say I met my mate and he's adorable and then give us no more information, Calum."

I grinned.

"We might not have let you have enough time to pack, but as soon as I read your email, I let Étienne know, and he insisted we come as soon as possible. We sent Master Edison a message with regards to a place for the two of you to stay for the time being. We understand you'll want somewhere permanent, but anywhere on pack or den lands will be safe for a fertile period."

"Thank you, Father. I really appreciate your help."

"Really, Calum. Where is he? You said he was adorable. I can scent him, but are you hiding him?"

I bit my lower lip to keep from laughing. I figured I'd walk out of the bedroom to let Calum off the hook. These were my mate's fathers. They would be in my life from here on out. And they really did sound amazing.

I slowly crept forward, wondering who I was going to encounter.

I quickly realized that Calum looked a whole lot like his sire. My aura immediately recognized which man was which, and Calum certainly took after his warlock father. His omega dad though, he just looked welcoming. He spotted me shortly after I appeared around the corner, and his hands went to his face to cover his mouth while his eyes grew exponentially.

"Oh, Calum," Étienne said. I smiled a little and took another step forward.

"Asher," Calum said, holding out his arm. "I promise they won't bite. No, Dad might hug you until you can't breathe, but he's just friendly like that."

I grinned as I came closer and immediately glued myself to Calum's side. These were his parents, and I wanted to make

the best impression I could. As it was, I felt I was already causing a huge inconvenience.

“Hello,” I said to both of them. “It’s a pleasure to meet you both.”

“You were right. He’s adorable,” Étienne said. “I’m Étienne. You’re welcome to call me dad if you so wish, but I won’t push.” Étienne grabbed ahold of his mate’s arm, and if I’d not been staring at them, I would have missed Calum’s sire roll his eyes.

“I’m Rainier, and as my One said, it is very nice to meet you, Asher.”

“Thank you.”

“Welcome to the family. We understand you two might need some assistance to get to Montana,” Rainier said.

My eyes dropped, and immediately, Calum’s arm tightened around my shoulders. “Hey,” he said, using a hand on my cheek to move my face up to meet his gaze. “You’ve done nothing wrong.”

I sighed. “But you said you wanted to show me places and we would be here for a few days. Now I’m ruining it because even if we don’t claim each other for days yet, I still might have a fertile period, and then we’ll still be in the same situation.”

“Fertile periods, although a bit of a frustration in the beginning,” Rainier said, “they are easier to control when they happen after the first one after claiming.”

I deflated and nodded. “I understand. I just feel inadequate because I can’t take us where we need to go. The two of you have taken time out of your day to help us.”

Rainier chuckled. “Well, if you were a shifter, we’d have to do the same for the pair of you. The fact that you have magic and are not able to use it because you are unaware of where to go shouldn’t be any different. We’re here to help. That’s what family does.”

I nodded and then chanced a look up at Calum. He was grinning down at me.

“I just need to finish packing my bathroom things,” Calum said. He took a step toward the bedroom but stopped. “Did you want to come back with me? You’re welcome to stay out here with my parents though.”

I glanced between Calum’s fathers and my mate, but it was Étienne’s face that was begging for me to stay with him and Rainier that won.

“I’ll stay here. You’re not far, and it will be nice to get to know your parents a little.”

Calum grinned. He bent down, quickly kissed my forehead, and then went back to the bedroom to finish packing.

Étienne seemed to be at the end of his ability to hold himself in check, and he made a little bit of a squeak, and then he held out his arms seconds before I was pulled into a tight hug. He quickly started swaying back and forth at a somewhat quick pace, and I could just sense the happiness coming from him. I happened to look up at Rainier to make sure he wasn’t upset at his mate holding me as he was, but there was only a smile on Rainier’s face.

“He was right. You are adorable,” Étienne said. “You two will make such beautiful babies together.”

Rainier sighed. “Love, what if they don’t wish for children.”

Étienne quickly turned a glare toward his mate. “You know Calum wants children. And I can just tell that Asher does as well.”

Étienne turned me slightly, wrapped his arm around my shoulders, and started walking me toward the couch.

“Tell me, you do want children, no?”

I chuckled. “Yes. A few would be nice. I’m the youngest of four.” We sat on the couch, and Rainier pointed over his shoulder toward the bedroom before he turned and walked in

the direction Calum had gone. I got it. He was probably going to ask his son all of the fatherly questions that needed to be asked. Étienne would distract me, and I'd do my best to make a good impression on my mate's omega father.

"Youngest of four. Not a bad place or number. I'm sure you know Calum is the middle of three. We'd hoped for a few more, but it simply wasn't meant to be."

"I'm sorry," I told him. I had seen fae couples that were torn apart because they only ever were able to have just one child. They'd wanted more, but fate hadn't blessed them with more than their first.

"Thank you, but it's not anything to truly be upset about. I have three amazing sons." Étienne sighed. "Yes, even the grouchy firstborn is amazing. He just likes to keep to himself, and we've let him be that way for too long now. That is in part our fault."

"I really am sorry to cause all of this."

"Nonsense. This is nothing. We are beyond happy that Calum has been gifted a mate. And I understand it will take time, but we are more than ready to welcome you into the family." Étienne took my hand and gave it a squeeze. "Benjamin is going to be just as happy for the two of you. And Eli, I'm sure the two of you will become fast friends. He's twenty-nine, so I'm not sure how close in age the two of you are."

"I'm twenty-eight. So very close in age." I glanced toward the bedroom, wondering how long Calum would be. Not that I felt overly uncomfortable with his omega dad. "Calum mentioned they have twins."

Étienne's face lit up. "Yes. Spencer and Maverick. They were born in February this year. They're crawling everywhere, and Eli loves every minute of it. He's gotten used to Benjamin having to go out on assignments now, but Rainier and I help as much as we can. We don't want to overstep. But we're always available to help with anything if needed."

“Thank you. I’m the youngest of my siblings, and I’m quite a bit younger than my next oldest. I honestly think I might have been a bit of a surprise.” I shrugged, and Étienne gave my hand another squeeze. He had nothing but understanding on his face, which was actually more of a relief than I would have thought. “I’ve never been around children. Not really. I have friends that found their mates, and of course, they have families, but I’ve not been around babies or younger children for longer than just a passing moment.”

“Well, we’ll figure it all out together. I know that the doctor at the council has books for omega pregnancies that he was given by a colleague. Benjamin and Eli could answer any questions and, of course, Calum. He helped quite a bit when he was visiting earlier in the year.”

Just then, Calum and Rainier came out of the hotel bedroom, talking about houses. Yes, it was all becoming so very real right now.

“Are we ready?” Rainier asked. Étienne stood, and I did the same. I glanced around Calum, looking for my bag, but didn’t see it.

“I just need to get my bag and put my shoes on,” I said.

“The bags have already been sent to our house in Montana,” Rainier said.

“Your house?” I asked.

“Just for the time being,” Calum said. “We have to go and see if we can find somewhere to stay.”

I nodded. That made sense. I was normally not quite so... overwhelmed. But I could feel myself starting to shut down a bit because there had just been so much in such a short amount of time. Maybe the fates should have waited a month or two before sending me here. Until Calum wasn’t stuck in the middle of a different country with a nasty sandstorm swirling and hissing around outside.

Instead of sitting and pulling on my shoes, I chose to use magic and had them on my feet with a thought. That was certainly helpful.

Calum came to my side and tilted his head while looking at me. “Are you all right?”

I nodded. I wasn’t. Not really. I needed some time alone, in a quiet place without knocks on doors, new people to be introduced to, and so many new changes were happening before I fully processed the previous ones.

“We’re ready,” Calum said. He placed his hand on my back, and seconds later, we were in a completely different place.

It not only smelled different, but it felt different. This place was cool but cozy. Gone was the brown noise from outside. In its place was a bright light. I pulled away from my mate and walked toward a window and stared in wonder. There was snow outside. I didn’t even think about it for a second; I simply willed myself to be out in it, and before I could blink, I was standing knee-deep in snow. I knelt down and touched it, finding it incredibly cold, but then again, so was the air around me. I looked up at the sky, and it was filled with gray clouds, but the sun was shining behind them.

“Asher, you need a coat,” Calum said as he came rushing toward me.

I turned at the sound of his voice and smiled. “It’s snow, Calum.” I scooped some up and tossed it into the air. It was like a powder and fell down around me. I blinked when some of it landed on my lashes, but I really didn’t care. I was standing in snow.

Calum’s arms wrapped around me at the same time something heavy suddenly appeared on me. I looked down at my arms and chest, noticing I was now wearing a thick jacket.

“Where...did your father do this?” I asked. I held up a foot, seeing that my shoes were now gone, and in their place were some rather nice leather boots.

“You can’t be outside in the cold without at least a coat, sweetheart. You aren’t a shifter. You’ll get cold if you’re out here too long.”

I looked up at Calum, my happiness of being in the snow suddenly gone.

“I apologize. I won’t do this again.”

I started to pull away from my mate, but he held me tightly while growling. I froze and looked up at him.

“I’m not upset, simply worried. You are not used to the cold. It’s in the teens, and that’s drastically different than what you said the fae realm was like.”

I looked around the place and saw the house just ten or so yards away. “I apologize. I was simply excited to see it.”

Calum cupped my face and slowly lowered his mouth to mine. He pressed our lips together briefly before he moved back enough so I could focus on his face.

“You can be excited to see it. We can run and play in it. But you have to have a coat and boots. You should probably have a hat and gloves as well at these temperatures, but the coat and boots are really important.”

I nodded. “How do I get a hat and gloves?” I shook my head immediately. “I should actually go inside and apologize to your parents. I was rude to just pop out and into the snow. Especially after everything they’ve done already.”

“They understand.”

I suddenly felt something on my head. I looked up with my eyes but couldn’t see it. When I reached up, there was something that was soft on my head. I pulled it off and looked at the bright blue wool cap with a big pompom on it.

“That’s your hat,” Calum told me. He took it and slowly put it back on my head. “You need to wear it, though, to keep you warm. Your body will lose a lot of heat from the top of your head.”

I nodded, and when I reached back up, there were things on my hands. I held them up. “Gloves?”

Calum shook his head. “Mittens. Father most likely didn’t know exactly which size of gloves you need. They’ll keep your hands and fingers warm. You don’t want to get frostbite.”

I thought about it for a moment and nodded.

“Can we play now?”

Calum chuckled. “Absolutely. You run, I’ll chase you.”

I didn’t need to be told twice. I took off running. I found it more difficult to run in the snow than expected, and it didn’t take long for Calum to catch me. When he did, I squealed as we fell. We landed on our sides in the snow, and when it touched my face, I understood what he’d meant when he said it was cold. I sat up and looked over at my mate, who was lying in the snow, looking up at me.

“Can we do that again?” I asked. I didn’t wait for a response though. Instead, I used magic to give me more of a head start, and I took off running toward the back of the house.

“No fair! You cheated by using your magic!”

I laughed. Still, even with the head start, Calum caught up with me, and he once again pulled me down into the snow with him. This time though, he rolled me to my back and then leaned down, covering my mouth with his.

I reached up, grabbing his coat with my mittened hands and holding on as my mate kissed me. When his tongue swiped on my lips, I opened for him, the heat from his lips feeling drastically different from mine, which had cooled considerably. I moaned when Calum’s tongue touched mine, and then whimpered when he suddenly pulled away.

“Soon, sweetheart. I promise I’ll start soon, and we’ll not stop until the morning. But we have to go look at houses in a bit, and outside in the snow is not somewhere that we should really get frisky at.”

I sighed and pouted a bit, but even I knew he was right. “Can we play in the snow again? Once we find our own house?”

“As often as you want,” Calum said, then leaned down and gave me another quick kiss before he stood and pulled me to my feet with ease.

I used magic to clean the snow off us, and we walked hand in hand back toward the house. It was time to go find our own place.

CHAPTER 9

CALUM



Apparently, we had a few options when it came to housing. There were houses available in the pack and others in the den. But there were several houses that were for sale in between Timber Valley and Honey Creek. I had a feeling that the council had something to do with them because it was simply too convenient that there was more than one house that was empty without someone having snatched it up already.

Since I didn't belong to the pack or the den and I had plenty of funds to outright purchase a house, I chose to take Asher to look at the houses that were available for purchase. We were being met at the first one to be shown around. Father had insisted on me borrowing his SUV, something that I was grateful for. I would have to get one for us if I chose to continue working. In all honesty, I was actually leaning more toward taking some time off. I had a new mate and hoped to claim him in a very short time, and we would be starting a family. I wanted to spend time with Asher and our children without having to leave him home while I spent hours at work.

“Do you think we'll be able to find someplace that we like?”

I glanced at Asher and grinned. It had started to lightly snow in the last hour, and I wanted to be sure to be as careful as possible on the drive.

“I do. If you fall in love with a place, just speak up, and we'll make an offer on the place. I think it's a council thing though, honestly.”

“How so?”

I turned onto the road that we needed, wondering which house it was. There weren't many, only about five; they all seemed to have very large lots, the neighbors were plenty far enough away, and each individual lot was secluded with trees. It was nice.

“It's in the council's interest to have the area filled with more paranormals than humans that don't know we exist.”

“Right. But what does that have to do with the houses?”

“The council has either bought up empty places, or they've built them. Looking at these houses, I'd say they were new builds, and they did it with the intent of filling them with most likely council employees who choose not to live on the mountain.”

My phone said we had arrived at our destination, and I stopped in front of a gorgeous log-and-stone house.

“Whoa. That's it?”

I grinned. “According to the phone, this is the address.” I turned the SUV into the drive and started down it. When we arrived at the house, there was a truck parked there, and I wondered who exactly we were about to meet. It didn't matter—as long as they didn't try to harm my mate, I wouldn't have issue with them.

I slid from the SUV and was on my way around to help Asher out when he slid from it on his own. I didn't mind him being independent, but I also wanted him to enjoy me spoiling him at times as well. It would take time, that much I knew.

We walked up the front walk and found the front door slightly open. Asher and I shared a look before I pulled him slightly behind me as we entered. When we started walking through the house, I heard a noise in the back room and went in that direction. I never expected Master Edison's One to be the one to be kneeling at the fireplace and starting it.

“There ye are. I was told ye needed a house.”

I grinned and held out my hand. "It's good to see you again, Wallace."

"Likewise. And ye have a mate now, I see."

I pulled Asher from behind me and wrapped an arm around him. "I have. This is Asher. He showed up at my hotel room in Cairo this morning."

"Did he now?" Wallace asked. He glanced down at Asher, who was staring up at Wallace with a bit of shock and awe on his face.

"Asher, this is Wallace. He's Master Edison's fated One. Apparently, he's playing Realtor this morning."

"It's nice to meet you," Asher said. He held out his hand, and Wallace took it, gently shaking his hand.

"'Tis nice to meet ye as well. I'm told for ya to have a look around the place. Let me know if ye like it, and I'll let Edison know."

Asher glanced up at me and then around the place quickly before looking back at me. "Is he serious?"

I nodded. "Why don't we start upstairs and work our way down. We can count the bedrooms up there and see if there are enough for those six kids you wanted."

Wallace threw his head back and laughed. I couldn't help but chuckle with him. After a moment, he sobered and shook his head. "Sorry to say that this one has only four bedrooms. The main and three large kiddie rooms. There are three bathrooms upstairs and one down here. There is an office down here that could be another bedroom if ye don't need a home office."

I nodded. I would need an office because I had too many books to bring from France. Actually, I had quite a bit of things that I would need to bring over.

"Four bedrooms is enough," Asher said, looking up at me hopefully.

"Sweetheart, I've already said if you like it, we'll make an offer."

Asher nodded. At Wallace's insistence, we went upstairs and started our tour. I knew as soon as we entered the main bedroom that this was our house. We wouldn't need to look any further. Asher's eyes were wide in wonder, and he spun around in slow circles, taking in the bedroom. When he went to the bathroom, he squealed.

"It's a pool."

I chuckled as I joined him in the bathroom. "I can certainly see how you could view it as one. But it's a jetted tub. Those are amazing-feeling, and we will definitely have to try them out soon."

"Seriously? We could live here?"

I nodded. "If you wish. Didn't you want to look at the other bedrooms though?"

Asher nodded, and we went to look at the other three bedrooms. There were two bathrooms in the hallway, both of them directly across from each other. The bedrooms were incredibly close to each other in size and could certainly accommodate at least two children in each, but I knew that Asher really only wanted two or three kids at a time. This house was more than large enough for us and a growing family.

"Let's check out the kitchen. We could cook meals together in it," I said, thinking about all of the fun we could have in the kitchen I'd gotten a glimpse of on the way in.

"I like to cook. But maybe some nights we could use magic to make the meals?"

I grinned. "Of course. If you're not feeling up to it, we can certainly have a magical meal." There were also restaurants I could take him to, as well as family dinners that I knew Dad was most likely already planning.

Wallace was in the kitchen, sitting on the center island, most likely having a conversation with Master Edison when we made it to the kitchen.

"What did ye think about the bedrooms?"

“They’re huge,” Asher said. “Just like this kitchen.” He looked around, once more turning in a slow circle to take it all in.

I covertly nodded at Wallace, letting him know this was the place for us. I wasn’t even bonded to Asher and could feel his excitement for the place already. We would be putting down roots and growing a family here in this house.

“It’s so nice. This house is probably four times the size of any of the houses in my village.”

“Sounds like the village I grew up in. Houses were small and not verra nice. I miss me parents and brother, but I donna miss the primitive house.”

I knew Wallace was old but didn’t know exactly how old. “We really like this one,” I told him.

“Enough to claim it?” Wallace asked. He looked at Asher in question.

“I mean, if we can, yes. It’s amazing here. Can you imagine what it’ll be like filled with your things?”

I grinned. “We’ll go shopping and pick out things together,” I told him. I knew that everything Asher owned was in his pack at my parents’ house, and that wasn’t much. He needed things, and I’d see to it that he would get them.

“Verra good. I’ll let Edison know. We’ll get the paperwork signed for legalities and such, but here’s the keys. ’Tis all yours to do with what you wish.”

“Thank you, Wallace,” I said as I took the keys from him. There were several, and if not for the tags on them, I wouldn’t know what went where.

“Have fun, but maybe wait until your da can get your stuff here from France.” Wallace looked over at Asher, who was opening cabinets. He’d found the walk-in pantry, and I wasn’t sure his eyes could grow more.

“Asher, ’twas verra nice to meet ye. I’m sure we’ll be seeing ya around.”

“You too, Wallace. Thank you for showing us this place.”

“My pleasure.”

Wallace nodded once and then left the kitchen, heading for the front door. I stood there, leaning against the counter while Asher continued to explore.

“I can’t believe this could be ours.”

I chuckled. “Believe it. I have the keys. All we have to do is get some things and move in.”

“Really?”

I nodded. Asher shrieked at the same time he jumped toward me. My fast reflexes kept him from falling, but I was definitely going to need to work on them if I had a mate who liked to jump into my arms. Not that I’d ever complain about that. Only a fool would do such a thing.

I grinned at my mate. “Let’s call Father and let him know. He can work on getting our things here and also provide us with the basics, and we can figure out how to spend the rest of the day.”

Asher’s eyebrows rose. “Could we spend it in bed?”

I nodded as I leaned in and started kissing just below Asher’s ear. “That was the hope,” I whispered.

“I can’t believe this is ours. It’s really ours? We can live here and raise a family here?”

“We can. There’s a fireplace over there, and Wallace lit it for us. Why don’t you go use some magic to put a big fluffy rug in front of it, and I’ll give Father a call and then join you?”

Asher moaned as I kissed down his neck. “Will you continue on with what you’re doing?”

“I will.”

“All right.”

Asher dropped his legs and then slid away from me. I wanted to kick myself because I was rather enjoying our little time together here, but it was truly my fault. I’d been the one that had brought it up. I looked up and saw him sitting on a very nice-looking rug in front of the fireplace as I slid my

phone out of my pocket. I opened the messaging app and pulled up Father's name.

Me: It was an easy sell. The first house he fell in love with. Wallace gave us the keys already and we'll be signing the paperwork at a later date. The address is 380 Maple Lane.

I waited for a moment and saw the message was read. Father must have been waiting to hear from us because his reply came quickly.

Father: I'll send your bags over in a bit. After I have the location of the house, I'll also give you the foodstuffs you will need for the next week. Furniture. Is it furnished?

I chuckled as I looked around the empty house.

Me: No. It's completely empty. But I think my little fae could help with some of that. Probably food things as well if he knows where to get them from.

Father: I'll take care of food this time. He can provide the two of you with a bed. Enjoy your time with your mate. We look forward to getting to know him better soon.

I smiled as I placed my phone down on the counter. I looked up at Asher and found him staring out the windows toward the backyard.

"What are you thinking about?"

Asher looked up at me. "That we could play in the snow out there."

I nodded. "We can. Did you want to go back outside?"

"No. I want you to claim me, right here on this rug. And then later, maybe you can shift, and we can go out in the snow and run around and play. Doesn't your fox like the snow?"

I froze where I was. "Are you sure?" I knelt down and reached for Asher. "We don't have anything here except the rug."

Asher tilted his head to the side. “What else do we need?”

I glanced around. “I don’t know. Pillows? Cleaning supplies like soap and towels.”

Asher gave me an unamused look. “Really? I can do that for you. Are you not wanting to claim me? Is there something wrong?”

“What? No. I want to.” I nodded as I reached for my mate. “You’ll have slick, right? So we won’t need lube?”

Asher nodded.

“All right, then. I would absolutely love to finally claim you as mine. It’s been a long day already, and it’s early morning here, but evening where we started our day.”

Asher smiled at me. I gently pushed on his shoulder to lay him back. As he did, a small pillow appeared behind his head. I couldn’t help but stare down at my mate in wonder. He was chosen for me. We still had a lot to learn about each other, but our bond once we’d claimed each other would help with that a great deal.

“Asher?” I said, looking down at my mate and getting his full attention. “Do you want to be my mate? Are you absolutely sure?”

“I am, Calum. I want to be yours. To live here with you and make a family with you.”

I grinned. That was all I needed to hear. I quickly undid the buttons on my shirt, pulling it off and watching Asher’s eyes widen as he got a look at me without a shirt. I glanced down at my chest and worried a bit. “I have hair on my chest. I can shave it if you don’t like it.”

Asher reached for it, and as he rubbed his hand over it, he shook his head. “I like it. I don’t have body hair. Just so you know. It’s how fae are. I’ll have hair on the top of my head, but that’s it.”

“None?” I asked, a bit surprised.

“Yeah. I can use magic for some if you want, but no body hair.”

I shook my head. “No. Just as you are,” I told him. “I want you just as you are. Completely. No glammers, no magic, just you and me.”

Asher grinned up at me, and I watched as the glamour fell and his ears became a bit longer and slightly pointier, and his face rounded a bit more. There was my precious mate. I smiled back and slowly lowered down onto my elbow beside him. I touched the front of his shirt and wondered just how at ease he would be at being naked in front of me.

When his shirt was suddenly gone, I found myself touching smooth skin. “That’s quite useful,” I whispered before I leaned down and kissed the middle of his chest. Asher’s fingers immediately went to my hair, and I smiled against his skin when they tightened in my hair. His breathing picked up as I moved to the side, closer to the pink disk that was his nipple. I heard his breath hitch when I was hovering above it, and when I closed my lips around it, he gasped and then moaned as his fingers tightened in my hair even more. Asher pushed his chest up into me, giving me the encouragement I needed.

I flicked my tongue over it and earned a loud gasp followed by a shudder. He really seemed to like that. I raised my head to look up at my mate and found him with half-closed eyes that looked glassy. The blue of his irises had darkened to almost black, and as he stared at me with parted lips, I could see his little canines peeking out at me, and that just made me want him more. Just from such a seemingly innocent thing.

“You like that, I take it.”

Asher nodded.

I moved over him, straddling my mate, and quickly worried about our size difference and the hard floor beneath us. I grabbed Asher’s hips and quickly rolled us, placing him on top of me. Now I was grinning up at him, and that was so much better, actually.

His mouth was open, forming an O, and I chuckled as I reached for him and pulled him up on me a bit more. He came easily, and when I latched on to the other nipple, I earned

many more of those wonderfully sexy sounds that settled in my balls and caused them to start to tingle.

Asher started wiggling on me, telling me that he not only liked what I was doing but would most likely be up for more, so I slid my hands around his smooth body and settled them on the front of his pants. They had a bunch of buttons there, but I managed to get them open, and when I did, I was gifted with a hot, hard, and leaking cock that I desperately wanted to suck. Would he be willing?

I pulled my lips from his nipple I'd been sucking on and gave it a quick kiss before glancing down at what I thought was the most perfect cock I'd ever seen.

"Asher," I said, my voice a bit hoarse. "Get rid of your pants, sweetheart," I said. Asher lifted up a little and then looked down at me. His eyes were definitely dark with need, his body telling me exactly what he needed. I was about to give him everything, but first, we needed to get rid of the rest of our clothes. "Pants, Asher," I said again, this time pulling on the open waist of his pants. They suddenly disappeared from my grasp, and seconds later, I felt my own pants gone. My cock, which had been trapped downward, flopped up and slapped my stomach, and I sighed in relief. I hadn't been worried about me, but I certainly wanted to focus on my mate. "Perfect," I said. I tugged on his hips again. "Come here," I told him. He seemed hesitant, but I kept tugging, and when he moved enough, I opened my mouth and with one hand directed his dripping cock into it.

Asher gasped and froze. I did for a second as well, unsure if he was up for this or not. When I took a chance and sucked on the head of his cock, Asher moaned loudly, and his hips seemed to push forward of their own accord. I moaned, causing Asher to gasp as a small burst of salty fluid filled my mouth. I slid my hands around his body, sliding one hand down the crack of his behind and finding a very slick hole. I swirled my finger around, getting it wet with his slick before I pressed it against his opening. Asher froze again, and I held as still as I possibly could. I didn't wish to make him uncomfortable, but I needed to stretch him so we could claim

each other. How did I explain that without pulling his cock out of my mouth?

CHAPTER 10

ASHER



I was experiencing the most amazing and intense feelings of my life. Only, I didn't exactly know what to do. My body was telling me to move my hips, but Calum's fingers were back there. I knew he needed to stretch me. I'd gotten a peek at his cock, and it was a lot bigger than mine, and I knew it wouldn't fit without some help.

"Calum?" I managed to get out. My voice didn't sound like my own, and I wondered if it would always be like this.

Calum moved his head to the side, pulling my cock out of that wonderfully warm and amazing mouth of his.

"Rock your hips back and forth, sweetheart. I need you to let go and just let it happen, all right? Relax if you can?"

I nodded. I could do that. I knew what needed to happen, and when Calum once again sucked my cock into his mouth, I closed my eyes and moaned loudly. It was difficult to get my body to react how I wanted it to. It wanted to stay put and never move because of the amazing suction on my cock.

I managed to move my hips back, pulling my cock out of Calum's mouth a bit, and when I did, his finger pushed into me slightly. I expected pain, but all I felt was pleasure, and I pulled my hips back farther. Suddenly, my body heated, and it needed more. It needed to be filled.

"More, Cal," I said as I pushed my hips forward. Calum moved his hands with me, keeping his finger buried in me as I filled his mouth with my cock. He sucked hard, and I felt a tingle go through my body and center in my groin.

I pulled my hips back some, and when I did, I felt more fingers entering me. I whimpered and pushed myself up on my knees and off my arms where I'd been hovering above my mate. Calum lifted his head, and I reached down, grabbing his hair while using magic to move the pillow behind his head.

Calum moaned around my cock, the vibrations on it causing another, stronger course of tingles to run through my body. I groaned at the sensation, and when Calum touched something inside me, something completely magical, my hips thrust forward, and I looked up at the ceiling as my body seemed to lose all sense of control. I wasn't sure how or why, but I felt as if I was no longer in control of myself. I thrust forward over and over while impaling Calum's fingers inside me when I pulled back. The sensations combined were just too much, and I screamed as I felt a burst of tingles go through me and center in my cock, and suddenly, it was filling Calum's mouth, and I felt my body clamp down on his fingers inside me.

Calum groaned, his free hand grabbing ahold of my hip tightly and holding me in place. I felt wave after wave of intense pleasure course through me as I came in my mate's mouth, and he increased my pleasure every time he rubbed over that magical spot inside me.

When it became too much, I pulled on his hair gently and held his head in place when he tried to follow my retreating cock.

"Too much. It's really sensitive." I looked down at Calum, and suddenly, what I'd just done to my mate, my alpha, hit me, and I felt a wave of embarrassment. He was the alpha. I was supposed to bring him pleasure, was I not?

"I have no idea what you're thinking, but we did exactly what I wanted," Calum said. He slowly pulled his fingers from me, and I felt the loss immediately. Calum held me in place for a moment, and after several seconds, his other hand touched my hip, and he slowly moved me down his body. When I felt his cock bump against my backside, Calum sat up and wrapped one arm tightly around my waist. "We're going to go slowly at first. This time around is going to be fairly quick, but

I promise that once my knot goes down, I'll make you soar again. We have all day and night to explore each other."

I nodded in agreement. I leaned in, pressing my lips against Calum's, tasting my release on his tongue when he pushed his into my mouth.

I felt the head of his cock pressing at my opening, and I took a deep breath through my nose. When I slowly let it out, I thought every thought to relax. Calum's hand wrapped around my cock and held on gently, stroking it toward the base but avoiding the sensitive head. His tongue swirled around mine, and when his moved to my canines, I felt the tip of his cock slide in. We both froze for a moment, but my body decided it needed more still, and I rolled my hips forward. When I did, Calum moaned, and his arm tightened around my waist.

I rolled my hips back some, his cock sliding deeper into me, and the thick head was suddenly pushing against that magical spot inside me. I moaned at the sensation and continued to roll my hips back and forth gently, each time rolling them deeper and pushing onto his cock more.

Before I knew it, Calum was grabbing ahold of both of my hips and holding me in place, not letting me move. I opened my eyes and looked at my mate in question.

"Just a minute." Calum took several deep breaths. "Did you use magic or something? You accepted me easier than I expected."

I bit my lower lip. "Maybe," I whispered after a moment.

Calum smiled and shook his head. "I won't ever complain about you doing that." Calum took another deep breath. "The base of my cock is tingling, and that tells me my knot is starting to expand. I'm trying to calm down a bit."

I grinned. "Didn't you say we had all day? We can get this first round over, and then we can go again." I would probably regret this next part, but I winked up at my mate and bit my lower lip again. "That is, unless you're too old to go again and again." I did my best to give Calum the sassiest look I could, and it definitely worked because he growled, and then I

squealed when I was suddenly lifted and then pulled back down onto his cock with a snap.

My head fell back on my shoulders as Calum growled while he continued to lift and drop me back down on his cock. I felt that familiar tingle in my own balls that I'd experienced not long ago. I lifted my head, looking at Calum and trying to plead with him that I needed more. He grunted every time he dropped me on his cock, and when it started to feel as if he was stuck when he lifted me, I whimpered.

Calum let out one loud growl and pushed me down onto his cock and held me to him tightly. I felt his knot expanding, pressing against that spot inside me. That was what my body seemed to need, and an intense wave of tingles went through my body, once again settling in my groin. I felt my own cock expand and then pulse as my release filled the space between our bodies.

Calum groaned, and then his lips were on my neck seconds before I felt a sharp pain. I gasped at the pain, until it morphed into more pleasure, and I leaned forward, resting my face on Calum's collarbone. I felt Calum licking my neck, but shortly after, his lips started trailing up and down it. His hand went to the back of my head, and he pulled on my hair, raising my head. Instinctively, I licked the front of his shoulder before opening my mouth and biting down. My mouth was flooded with the metallic flavor of my mate's blood, but I didn't find it repulsive in the least. I quickly pulled my teeth from his shoulder and licked over the bite, focusing enough to watch it heal before my eyes.

I felt the instant our bond formed, and now I could feel what Calum was experiencing. My own cock tingled at the base, and I felt pulse after pulse of cum as it filled me. Calum moaned, wrapped both arms around me tightly, and then carefully lay back on the rug.

I sighed as I lay on top of my mate, grinning what I was sure was a silly smile. I couldn't help it—I was mated, and my mate was the sexiest man I'd ever seen.

“You're just as hot, sweetheart,” Calum said.

“Huh?”

“You said I was the sexiest man you’d ever seen. I appreciate that. But you’re just as hot. Your tight little body is going to be so much fun, you have no idea.”

I raised my head enough to look at my mate. “I didn’t say anything.”

Calum raised an eyebrow. “No?”

I shook my head. With a gentle hand, he pushed my head back down onto his chest, and I sighed. This was absolutely the best way to spend the day.

“How often do you think we can do this?” I asked.

Calum’s chest started vibrating, and seconds later, I heard his laughter. I raised my head again and glared at my mate.

“Don’t be like that. I might be old, but I’m not incapable of keeping you extremely satisfied. We can do this multiple times a day if you wish.”

I pushed up a little more, crossing my arms on Calum’s chest and resting my chin on them so I could look at my mate. “Well, unless you’re at work.”

Calum shook his head. “That is something we need to discuss.”

That worried me. “What’s wrong?” I raised my head, but Calum shook his and pressed mine back down.

“Relax. Enjoy this time together. We just claimed each other, sweetheart.”

“Yes, but you mentioned needing to talk about things. That makes me worry.”

Calum sighed. “Don’t. There is nothing wrong. I was only thinking about taking some time off.” Calum raised his hand and ran it through my hair. “Would you like for me to be home all the time? We could spend our days together, not just our evenings and nights. I’d be here all the time to help you with the children. Would you be upset about that?”

Was he kidding? “Why would that disappoint me in any way?” I thought about what he was saying though. “But what about your job? Can you just take time off like that?”

“I can. I’ve been working for a very long time. Even after I purchase this house for us, it’s not going to put a dent in my funds. We won’t have to work if we don’t want to. I’d like to spend several years with you and our children. We could travel with them. Explore the world together.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “That sounds wonderful. Can we really do that?”

Calum nodded. “The first place I want to take you is back to Egypt. I want to show you the river and the seas. You need to see the pyramids and the Sphinx.”

“I read about those in that book there in the hotel. That sounds like a good trip.” I laid my head down on my arms and closed my eyes. “Where else should we go?”

“Anywhere you want. We’ll explore all of the places, experience all of the different cultures together.”

That seriously sounded amazing, and I couldn’t wait. I wanted to do all of that. I wanted to read about places in books and then plan a trip with Calum, exploring them together.

I moved my arms, letting them fall to the sides, and rested my head on his chest. I could hear his heart beating, and it relaxed me even more than I already was.

“Asher?”

“Hmm?” I asked, somewhat sleepy all of a sudden.

“Why does my bite on my shoulder tingle? It’s not painful, but it’s tingling and throbbing. Is it like a warlock’s claiming mark?”

I shrugged. “I’m not sure. I know that your claiming bite will pulse and tingle with my aura. The sensation will increase when I become aroused, when I’m scared or excited. It’ll probably pulse and feel a bit angry when I’m upset. I’m not really sure how else to explain it.”

“That works perfectly.” Calum’s arms tightened around me briefly, and I smiled against his chest. “Are you warm enough?”

I was. “Yes. Did you need a blanket?” The fire was giving off more than enough heat, and although we were on the floor, it wasn’t exactly cold down here.

“Are you comfortable? I’m lying on you, and the floor is hard.”

“That is why I asked if you were warm enough. We’re on the floor.”

I used magic to put several more blankets under us, making the rug much softer. I also covered us with one, sighing when I felt it covering my back.

“Where did you get the blankets from?”

I shrugged. “I’m not really sure. I’ll put them back when we’re finished with them though. I just thought about blankets, and here they are.”

Calum chuckled again.

“Well, as long as nobody is going to be missing them.”

I shook my head again and sighed. I was really warm now. Calum was a hot, sexy heater, and my body was incredibly satisfied. Well, except for the itchiness that I was feeling on my stomach. I knew what was causing it, so I used magic and cleaned up my cum from between us. I also cleaned up other areas, but there wasn’t a whole lot I could do until Calum’s knot went down and we could separate.

Another wave of heat went through me, and I turned my head toward the fireplace to see if the flames had somehow increased. When I saw they were the same as they had been, I lowered the blanket. It had to be Calum just being as warm as he was. He had mentioned it several times—how he was warmer than I was, and I needed to be sure to dress for the cold weather because I didn’t have a fox half. I was understanding that now.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes, just getting warm.”

Calum seemed concerned because his hand moved up my back and to my face. “Your cheeks are flushed.” Calum sat up, one arm behind me holding me to his chest while the other ran through my hair, pushing it off my forehead. “Are we too close to the fireplace?”

I shook my head. “I don’t think so. You’re just incredibly warm. We’ll need to have a very light blanket on our bed if we’re going to sleep close together.” I sighed. “I’m tired. I’m sorry, but I am. My body feels amazing and relaxed, and now all I want to do is cuddle with you and maybe take a nap. It’s been an overwhelming day.”

“It has certainly been eventful. I’m sorry you’ve had an overwhelming day though. What can I do to keep you from having such a day again?”

He was seriously the sweetest. “It won’t be. There was just a lot going on. I was digging in the backyard, and all of a sudden, the fates showed up. Then I was in their realm, and then I was on the sidewalk outside of your hotel.” I moved my head and placed my chin on my arm again. “I went through the lobby and into the elevators like they’d said to, and, well, you know everything that’s happened since. It’s been a lot, and I’m pretty sure it’s already past my bedtime, but it’s still morning here?”

Calum chuckled again. “That it is. We can take a nap, but maybe we should move away from the fire some so you’re not so warm.”

I was about to agree when I felt Calum’s knot release. When it did, there was a gush of fluid that came out with it. I knew some of it was cum, but some was also slick. I sighed.

“Well then, I guess we can get up now,” I said with a laugh. I sat up on my mate, another gush of fluid rushing out. I winced. “I’ll clean that. But I should probably find the toilet. Did you happen to see it down here?”

“Yes, it’s the door just to the left of the office door.” Calum pointed, and I looked over my shoulder at the direction he’d

indicated.

I nodded and stood, and instead of trying to rush across the house while not having a mess end up everywhere, I used magic and put myself in that area. I entered the bathroom and saw that it had everything in it: toilet, sink, and a shower. I sighed in relief as I sat on the toilet. I had been expecting this because we had been educated about how things worked with shifter alphas with knots. Well, Calum most definitely had a knot, and there was a lot of cum because his shifter side wanted nothing more than to ensure he was able to have children with me.

I smiled at that thought. I wanted to give him a child. Thinking about that, I remembered I'd left my mate on the rug with a huge mess on him. I used magic to clean him up, as well as the mess that I knew was on the rug. I sighed in relief again after I finished my business in the bathroom. I looked around and was happy to see that someone, despite the place having nothing in it, had thought enough to put tissue in the bathroom for us. I used some to quickly wipe up, then decided that nope, I needed to be cleaned a little better, and I used some magic to take care of that.

I flushed the toilet and went to the sink. There was soap there, and after washing my hands, I splashed cool water on my face. Calum was right. My cheeks were flushed. As I stared at myself in the mirror, I felt another wave of heat go through my body. I wasn't with Calum under the blanket any longer. I looked down my body and saw that my chest was now flushed red. I knew what that meant, but how? He had claimed me just minutes ago. Not even an hour ago? How could I possibly be starting my fertile period already?

I left the bathroom and realized that not only was I feeling warmer, but there was a sudden wave of need. Sexual need. I grabbed ahold of the wall near the doorway and looked out into the empty room. Calum was sitting on the rug, but it was obvious that he'd moved it away from the fireplace some.

"Thanks for helping with the cleanup. Did you get everything taken care of?" he asked as he started to stand.

“Calum?” I said quietly. I’m not sure if it was my tone or if Calum could sense my fertile period starting through our bond. Either way, he came rushing toward me, and I felt him catch me as I started to fall. That was the last thing I remembered, other than being carried to the makeshift bed we’d created in our new home and Calum gently running his fingers through my hair.

CHAPTER II

CALUM



I never knew love until Asher. Not an all-consuming love like I felt for him. Sure, I loved my parents and brothers, and I cared a great deal for Eli and the twins. But none of that compared to what I felt for Asher. I honestly wasn't expecting him that morning, but I wouldn't change the fact that he'd been sent to me.

We'd been mated for an entire eight days now. Ironically, after we had claimed each other, his fertile period had hit almost immediately, and I'd spent the next six days taking care of his constant need. When I wasn't knotted inside of him, I was using washcloths to clean us and feeding him fruit, yogurt, and energy drinks. Anything I could get down him in order to keep his energy up. I would forever be grateful for my father and his help with providing not only furniture for the house but also food and drinks that would be ideal for a fertile period.

When Asher's heat broke almost two days ago, I was relieved. Not because I didn't want to take care of him any longer but because I'd become incredibly concerned for him. I wasn't sure how long his fertile period would last, but I'd been sent messages from my father when I'd asked questions in concern. I'd been reassured that this was all very much a possibility, but now I had new worries. Asher was sleeping. Deeply. I could still very much feel him through our bond, and I'd spent some time getting to know him through it. But my fox was beginning to worry he wouldn't wake. He seemed perfectly fine, except for the fact that he was still sleeping, and it had been two days now.

I'd done everything I could to keep myself occupied. Granted, I'd fallen asleep beside him for a good twelve hours, possibly a little more. But when I finally woke, my mate continued to sleep. I went upstairs to the main bedroom, finding a nice bed and other furniture in it. On the bed were our bags, and beside those were multiple shopping bags that were filled with any and everything we could need in the bathroom.

I took care of personal needs, then went about unpacking everything and putting it away. A long, hot shower later, I emerged feeling better than I had in a while. I dressed and went back downstairs, wondering if Asher was awake yet. I found him exactly where I'd left him—on his stomach, sound asleep on the makeshift bed in front of the fireplace.

I knew my fathers had both been here at least once—their scents lingered slightly in the air. I wasn't upset about that, even a little. I knew they would have been respectful of us, and what Asher and I were going through was completely natural for paranormals. My phone was plugged in and fully charged, and there happened to be a now fully stocked pantry, refrigerator, and freezer. My stomach was complaining about the lack of a solid meal in such a long time that I couldn't help but give in and eat. I knew that no matter what, I needed to be strong enough to take care of my mate. I found frozen pizzas in the freezer, and after setting the oven temperature to where it needed to be, I located a pan and tossed a pizza in the oven before setting the timer. That was the first meal in several days, and I'd had so many alone since. I was beginning to become worried as Asher continued to sleep away on the blankets in front of the fireplace.

I was currently waiting on the coffee maker, wondering if today would be the day that Asher would finally wake. I'd had several conversations with Father over the past two days. It wasn't uncommon for omegas to rest for extended periods of time after a fertile period. And with Asher being fae, we didn't really know what to expect. Father had asked around, and there were a couple of other fae in the area, but one was an alpha and was new to the area. There was another, but he, too, was an alpha. His mother was also fae, but she was female,

and their bodies and cycles were completely different, much like the difference between shifter male and female omegas. I was simply out of luck when it came to asking anyone if this was normal.

The coffeepot gurgled, signaling the end of the brew cycle, and I grabbed a mug, adding cream to the bottom before I set it on the counter to wait for the coffee to stop dripping. Suddenly, I heard the most beautiful sound ever.

“Calum?”

I was thankful I’d not been holding anything still. I rushed out of the kitchen and around the couch and over to where Asher was now sitting up.

“Hello, sweetheart. How are you feeling?” I asked, kneeling down beside him. Beautiful blue eyes looked up at me.

“Honestly, crummy. I feel yucky.”

I grinned. “I did give you sponge baths, but there was only so much I could do. Let me help you to the bathroom, and you can take care of things while I run you a bath.”

I reached for Asher, easily picking him up in my arms. He had lost a lot of weight, but hopefully, a few really good meals and his weight would be back up to where it had been before we mated.

I hurried up the stairs, my mate not a burden in my arms. Once in our bedroom, he gasped, and I froze in place. “What’s wrong?”

“There’s furniture.”

I looked around the room. “Oh, yeah. Father helped with furnishing the house.”

I continued on to the bathroom and placed Asher on his feet in front of the toilet. I went to the tub, plugging the drain and turning on the hot water with about half as much cold. There was a bottle of healing oil that Father had left, and I poured half into the tub as I’d been instructed. When I stood

back up, Asher was still sitting on the toilet. “Do you need me to leave? I can give you privacy if you need.”

Asher shook his head. “I’m actually finished already. I just...my legs don’t really want to work too well. They feel like bread dough.”

I chuckled. “I understand that.” I glanced at the water in the tub. There were only a few inches, and it would likely take a while longer to fill. “Did you want help brushing your teeth? I can hold you up while you do that.”

Asher shook his head. “I’ll do that after the soak. I understand my breath is most likely incredibly foul. My mouth tastes terrible. But I know I’ll feel more up to standing once I soak for a bit.”

I nodded and then glanced back at the tub again. “Unfortunately, it’s probably going to be a while before the tub is full enough.”

“I can help with that.”

I glanced back at the tub when the sound of the water running could no longer be heard. I looked back to the toilet, but Asher was gone. I heard water moving, and there he was—in the tub.

“Ahh, this is incredibly nice. It has a little bit of a tingle to it.”

“I think that’s the oil. Father left a bunch of different ones. That one said healing oil, and the note said to have you bathe in it for a time after your fertile period ended.”

Asher grinned up at me. “Well, it’s really nice.” Asher slid down in the tub, the water now coming up to his chin. I could only stand there and stare down at my gorgeous mate.

“Unless you want me to stay, I’ll leave you to soak in peace.”

Asher’s eyes opened, and he grinned up at me. “If you have things to do, I won’t keep you. But I would love to talk to you.”

I returned the smile. I wanted nothing more than to spend time with my mate. He'd been out of it for six days, and two more after that, he'd spent in a deep sleep.

"I'll be right back. I'm going to run to the kitchen for my coffee. Would you like something to drink?"

"Mmm, yes, please. Anything. If there's juice, I'd love some."

We had plenty of juice. "I'll be back in just a few minutes," I told him. I hurried back down the stairs and into the kitchen. First, Asher's juice. We had orange juice as well as mixed fruit juice. I opted for that and poured it into a large glass. I was thankful for the insight of my fathers and placed the glass on a tray. I'd been warned that it was a very real possibility that I'd be serving Asher a lot of meals in bed or on the couch if he ended up feeling poorly during pregnancy. Well, now was a good time to start using it as far as I was concerned.

I added a plate of baked goods that Father had sent over with a little bit of magical help this morning. He'd stopped at the bakery next to the council building, and when a box appeared on our counter with a note, I quickly texted him a thanks.

I pulled off a paper towel just in case, and after placing my coffee on the tray, I headed back to my finally awake mate. He was exactly where I'd left him. Not that I expected him to have moved in the few minutes it had taken me to retrieve a small breakfast for him. A snack, if you would.

"I brought mixed fruit juice. I'm a fan of it, but if you find you don't like it, I'll get you some orange juice."

"Oh, I've not had mixed fruit. Is it good?" Asher asked, sitting up. I placed the tray on the corner of the tub, thankful it was secure there.

"It's one of my favorites. And there are fresh pastries from the bakery on Treasure Ridge. Father sent them this morning with well-wishes from him and Dad. They have been

reassuring me that you sleeping for two days after your heat broke was actually normal in some cases.”

“Two days?”

I nodded.

Asher took a drink of his juice, and when his eyes widened, I watched as he tipped the glass and drank down half of it in one go.

“I take it you approve.”

“That is good. I’m glad I went ahead and brushed my teeth. I’m sure nothing would have tasted good until I had.”

I chuckled. “It’s understandable. Here, do you like sweet or savory?” I asked, my hand hovering over the pastries.

“Yes,” he told me.

I chuckled again and handed him a cheese danish and took the glass of juice in turn. “How are you feeling? Legs still bread dough?”

Asher kicked his legs up and down in the water and shook his head. He took a bit of the danish, and apparently, it was also a win because after he swallowed his first bite, the rest of the danish disappeared in a hurry. When it was gone, I handed his juice back to him, and when he’d had a couple more drinks, I traded it for another pastry, this one a chocolate croissant. Yet another winner if you were to go by his smile and the quiet moans as he ate it.

“I’ll have to tell Father that you most certainly approve of the pastries.”

“Is this place far? Can we go?”

“It’s on Treasure Ridge. I have to get permission to go on the mountain again, and you as well. But since we are related to my father, there shouldn’t be an issue with that. I had a free pass for the month that I was here before when Eli was pregnant and after he gave birth.”

I took a drink of my coffee, enjoying the taste. I’d missed good coffee. That was something that I missed when traveling.

“Are there any more pastries?” Asher asked.

“There are two more here, but there are more down in the box. I only brought four up. I didn’t know if you’d like them or not.”

“I enjoy bread things. All bread things. These taste different than any that we had in our realm though. But these are so good. Of course, I can’t remember the last meal I had.” Asher took a plain croissant, and I watched as it quickly disappeared and he snatched up the last pastry. This one was an apple scone with cinnamon glaze. He gave it a sniff and then a big bite before moaning. “Oh, that’s definitely a bite of bliss right there. What is this amazing treat?”

I chuckled. “An apple scone. I’ll make sure we get more. And as for a meal, it was sadly the horrible fish and chips and shepherd’s pie in Egypt. That was eight days ago.”

Asher froze. “Eight?”

I nodded. “Yes, sweetheart. You do remember your heat hitting basically the minute after we claimed each other, don’t you?”

“Sort of. I remember having a whole lot of fun on the rug in front of the fireplace but then getting hot. I thought it was because you are so warm and the blanket on us was too much. I went to the bathroom and then came back out. I remember you touching me, giving me cool things to drink. There was a lot of pleasure and a lot of need.”

I nodded. Asher finished his scone, and I gave him back the glass of juice. He finished it in a hurry, and then after I placed the glass back on the tray, he sunk back down in the water. Asher looked at me with worried eyes.

“What’s wrong, sweetheart? Why are you worried?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Why? You did nothing wrong. You had a fertile period. It happens. We were expecting it. We’d already discussed children. We weren’t going to try to prevent them. We’re now living in Montana, and we’ll raise our family here near my parents and my brother and his family.” I moved the tray to the

floor, placed my now empty coffee mug on it, and then got to my knees so I could more easily reach Asher. I pushed the sleeve of my long-sleeve henley up and reached into the tub. I ran my fingers through his tousled hair, carefully tugging through the tangles. I moved down to his cheek and was fascinated by the fact that his skin was still as smooth as it was eight days ago. I'd have a bushy beard if I'd gone eight days without trimming or shaving. But I wasn't fae.

"I didn't mean to leave you like that," Asher said, his eyes meeting mine.

"You had no control over it. I've had a few days to think about it since I woke up and you continued to get the rest you needed. I would imagine that all of the changes caused you to go into a fertile period so quickly. You had spent the better part of a day with me by the time we actually were able to get around to claiming each other. Once we did, your body was completely in, and now here we are several days later."

Asher brought his hands up to his face and rubbed water on it. He swiped at his eyes a few times before he sat up again. "Did I lose control of my powers? Did I set off explosions? Make things float?"

I chuckled. I knew that was a serious worry for him. "No, you didn't. You did, in fact, get a little loud at times though, but I also know for a fact that I wasn't exactly quiet either. But we were completely alone in our own house, and there was no need or reason to censor ourselves."

Asher sighed, relief coursing through his body and, in turn, mine as well.

"I think I'm ready for a shower. I'm actually still hungry, and although I can shower with magic, I really want to stand under the spray."

"Then I'll help you to the shower. Did you want me to join you? Or would you like me to go fix you something more substantial to eat?"

"That's not a fair question, Cal. I want both."

I chuckled. I stood up, picked up the tray, and set it on the large counter that was between the two sinks. I then turned on the water in the shower before I pulled my shirt off over my head. I tossed it onto the floor and then pushed down the sweats I'd been wearing. I was now as naked as Asher. I walked back to the tub and held out my hand. "Then you get both. I'll shower with you, help you get clean, and then we'll go fix something to eat together."

Asher's eyes lit up, and after he turned the knob to open the drain, he took my hand and stood. I helped him out of the tub and carefully into the shower. He immediately went to the spray and moaned as the water hit the top of his head. I reached for the bottle of shampoo and poured a generous amount into the palm of my hand. After Asher had stood in the water for several minutes, I reached out to him through our bond.

"Take a step forward, sweetheart."

Asher's eyes opened, and he did as I'd asked. I brought my hands up to his hair and started rubbing the shampoo through his hair, making sure my fingers massaged his scalp.

"You talked to me in my mind."

"I did. Just as you had when we first claimed each other. You might not remember it, but I answered you out loud, and you mentioned how you didn't say anything."

"I remember that. Do you think I can do it again?"

"You never know until you try."

I continued to massage Asher's scalp, making sure I got the soap everywhere. He'd spent several days a sweaty mess, and I knew that after the shower and he was finally in clean clothes, he might very well be ready for a nap. I knew I was more than ready to spend a night in our bed with him. I'd not slept in it yet. I'd spent nights either beside Asher on the rug or on the couch not far from him.

"What's your favorite food, and can we have that?" Asher asked suddenly through our bond. My fingers froze for a fraction of a second before I continued the movement.

“Hmm, I don’t know if I really have a favorite. I like so many different things,” I told him. “Step back into the water.” Asher took a step back and tilted his head upward. I helped him rinse his hair, and once all of the suds were gone from his hair, I grabbed the bottle of conditioner and applied it next.

“All right. What is one of your favorites,” Asher asked as I rubbed the conditioner in his hair.

“Pizza. I loved my time in Italy and Sicily, and although American pizza is nowhere near as amazing or good, it’s still one of my favorite go-to meals. It’s easy, it’s tasty, and you can get so many things on it in various combinations.”

“Pizza?” Asher asked.

“Yep. Do you want pizza? There are some frozen ones in the freezer. We can put one in the oven, and you can try it. There’s a pizza place in Timber Valley, and we can order pizza some night and bring it home.”

“I would like to try it. I’m not sure I’ve read about it. Maybe? It sounds familiar? Maybe?”

I chuckled. “Then we will try pizza,” I told him as I picked up a loofah and poured bodywash onto it. I placed the bottle back on the shelf and started scrubbing Asher’s body. By the time I deemed him clean, I was presented with a beautifully erect cock, and just the sight and scent of my mate had the same effect on me. I didn’t want to assume though.

“Asher?”

I looked up at my mate from where I was on my knees in front of him. I’d been washing his legs and his cute little feet, but now, my thoughts weren’t necessarily on washing any longer.

“I...can we?”

I nodded and gently pushed my mate back under the spray of water. We would definitely need to rinse the soap and the conditioner before anything happened.

I stood and helped rinse his hair and ran my hands all over his body, making sure the soap was completely rinsed from his

skin. When he was clean and soap-free, I dropped back to my knees and pulled him to me. I swallowed his cock to the base in one go, and Asher's fingers immediately threaded into my hair.

He wasted no time rocking his hips, moving his cock in and out of my mouth. I wrapped a hand around my own cock, stroking it to the same tempo as Asher took his own pleasure in my mouth.

His fingers tightened and loosened over and over, and when his moans turned to more frustration than pleasure, I slid my free hand around his thigh and up to his ass. I moved two fingers into his crack, and when I found a slick opening, I didn't even hesitate to push my fingers in. I found his prostate immediately, and Asher moaned loudly at the same time his fingers tightened in my hair.

He thrust his hips three more times before he screamed my name and my mouth was flooded with his cum. I moaned at the taste, and that, combined with everything else, made my own orgasm slam through me, and I came on the floor between us. Moments later, Asher pulled his hips back and his cock free from my mouth. I looked up at my mate, meeting dark blue eyes that were filled with both desire and satisfaction. I gently pulled my fingers free and then carefully stood in front of my mate.

On my way up, our cocks bumped, and Asher seemed to realize that I'd come already, and he looked up at me in question.

"I took care of myself the same time I pleased you."

"But...we...I would have liked to have done that to you."

I leaned down and kissed first his forehead, then his nose, followed by a quick peck on his lips. "You are more than welcome to do that to me anytime. Let's feed you first, and then we can break in our new bed. Does that sound good?"

Asher's eyes lit up in agreement. We quickly washed parts that needed to be cleaned and then left the shower to dry off. Once our bodies were dry and we were dressed in comfortable

clothes, we set off for the kitchen. It was time to introduce my mate to pizza.

CHAPTER 12

ASHER



April

I rubbed my rounded stomach as I waddled—yes, waddled—through the house. Calum and I were supposed to be going to his dad’s house for a family dinner, but I wasn’t so sure I was going to make it. I was restless, and my omega line was most definitely opening. I just needed to find my mate. He was here somewhere, but where?

I reached out through our bond and had to smile. He was in his fox form, running outside. I couldn’t believe he did that while I was napping on the couch, but sure enough, he was outside.

“Calum?”

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“I’m in labor.”

I gasped and covered my mouth, even though he couldn’t actually see me. But I knew he had just stumbled and rolled over on himself when I’d told him that.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. My omega line is opening, and I’m in labor. Are you far away? Do you need me to bring you back?”

“I’m just down the street. I’ll be there within a couple of minutes.”

“Perfect. I’ll sit and wait.”

To be honest, what else was I supposed to do? My mate was out running around in his fox form. My omega line was opening, and I was most certainly experiencing contractions. They weren't bad yet, but they had pretty much just started. I wasn't sure how long I'd be in labor, but I was curious to know when our little fox kit would be here. I was thrilled to be giving my mate a little fox, and he was beyond excited to be having a daughter.

"Sweetheart? Are you all right? I'm coming up to the house now. I'll be on the back deck in seconds."

"I'm fine. Truly."

I rubbed my stomach again and started toward the back door.

"I shouldn't have left you. You seemed so at peace for a change. I guess that should have been my indicator that something was about to happen."

I rolled my eyes as I saw a blur of red leap up onto the back deck. I opened the door, and in came Calum. I carefully knelt down and reached for my mate. I loved it when he was in his fox form. He was soft and fluffy, and his tail was extra bushy. He'd told me more than once that it was actually called a bush and not a tail, but to me, it was still a tail.

"You're so handsome in this form. I prefer you in the other one, but this one is nice to cuddle and nap with too."

Calum humored me for a moment, and I rubbed behind his ears like he enjoyed so much, but after what felt like too short of a time, he moved away, and I watched as he shifted back to his human half.

"You shouldn't be on the floor, sweetheart," he said, reaching for me. I was about to argue, but when he started to help me stand, a huge gush of fluid rushed down my legs, soaking my sweatpants and leaving a puddle on the floor.

"Yeah, maybe you're right. Should we call Dr. King?"

"You haven't called him yet?"

I shook my head.

“I need clothes,” Calum said and quickly rushed over to the hearth and grabbed his jeans that I hadn’t noticed were there. He then pulled on a shirt and hastily buttoned it. I couldn’t help but chuckle when I noticed that it was buttoned crooked. He’d missed a bottom one, and when Calum looked down at his shirt, he grumbled and reached for the buttons.

I helped with the shirt and then looked down at the puddle on the floor and cleaned it up with a little bit of magic. I started toward the stairs, wondering if I’d be able to actually get myself up them while it felt like our daughter was already trying to push her way out of my body.

“Calum, I think your daughter is coming now,” I said, grabbing my stomach as I lowered myself to my knees.

“What? No. Your water just broke. You can’t be having her yet.” Calum rushed to me and carefully helped me lie down. I’d made it to in front of the fireplace, and when my mate carefully pulled on the front of my pants, his eyes widened. “Oh, sweetheart, she’s right there.” He pulled my pants all the way off and tossed them to the side. “Do you want me to call Dr. King? He might be able to make it here in time, but her head is already pushing out.”

I shook my head and crunched up on myself, bracing my body up on my elbows. “Just get ready to catch her,” I told him as I bore down and pushed as hard as I could. Calum seemed to search for something but then instead reached for my stomach. I felt movement, and then he looked up at me.

“Relax, Asher. That was an amazing push, but now I need you to relax for a minute. I don’t have anything here, sweetheart. Nothing to deliver her. Can you hold off long enough for me to at least get a towel? You don’t have anything but the rug under you. I have nothing to wrap her in.”

I chuckled. “It’s fitting, isn’t it?” I asked while breathing deeply. “She was conceived on this rug; it’s only right she’s born on it,” I said before I sat back up and braced myself on my elbows again and pushed. I grunted and screamed through the pressure and pain, wanting nothing more than to deliver our little girl into this world.

“Good, sweetheart,” Calum said. “You’re doing so good. Probably two or three more big pushes like that and she will be here.”

I panted and fell backward onto the rug. I took several deep breaths, trying to get my mind to focus on what I needed to do. I reached out to my left and felt what I’d hoped I’d be able to use magic for. While giving birth wasn’t necessarily the best time to be trying to use magic, grabbing a towel from the bathroom, as well as the suction ball and Calum’s phone, wasn’t too difficult.

“There,” I said, pointing to everything.

Calum’s eyes widened, and he reached for the phone, and after touching it twice, he dropped it back on the floor beside us. I heard it ringing just as another contraction hit, and I sat up, needing to push. Back on my elbows I went, and I grunted and pushed as I heard a familiar voice on the other end of the line.

“Calum? Is everything all right?”

“Dr. King, no. Asher is in labor, and he’s already pushing. It just happened. His water broke, and then she was coming out. Please help. What do I do?”

“Arrrgggg!” I shouted and then fell back onto my back.

“You go help your mate sit up and support him, and I’ll take over from here,” Dr. King said as he suddenly appeared in the room with us. It was good to have a warlock doctor around. He knew all about delivering babies, and he had magical powers that were quite useful.

“Oh, thank the fates,” Calum said. He crawled over to me, carefully lifting my shoulders and placing my head in his lap.

“All right, Asher. You’ve almost delivered her without me. Let me help just a little, and with the next push, your baby girl will be here, all right?”

I nodded as I panted. I was tired, and my body was covered in a sheen of sweat. I didn’t know it would be so difficult to deliver a baby, but here I was, lying on the floor of our house and pushing her out.

“Calum, during the next contraction, help him sit up and support his back while he pushes, all right?”

“I can do that.” Calum’s hands were busy rubbing my shoulders, and I was trying to get the energy to sit up and push again.

“Whenever you’re ready, Asher,” Dr. King said.

I just panted, trying to breathe and regain some energy. “I skipped it. I’m not ready.”

“That’s all right. There will be another contraction soon. Whenever you feel like you can push, I want you to nod, and Calum will help you sit.”

I took several more deep breaths, and as I felt the contraction building, I nodded. Calum lifted me, his strong arms holding my shoulders and back up, and I pushed with every last ounce of energy I had in me. I screamed toward the end, and I felt another gush of fluid and then instant relief.

“She’s here,” Dr. King said seconds before I heard the beautiful sound of our daughter’s cry as she took her first breaths.

I was still panting, trying to catch my breath, but I looked toward Dr. King as he held our daughter in his hands.

“She’s here,” I whispered as I reached up for Calum’s hand that was now on my shoulder. He had somehow moved, and I was resting between his legs, and my back was now against his chest.

“She is, and she’s absolutely beautiful,” Calum said.

Dr. King ran his hand down her body, his palm glowing green as he did so. Almost instantly, our baby girl stopped crying, and when Dr. King held her out, she was now wrapped up in a purple blanket.

“She’s ready for you to hold her. I need to take care of everything else.”

I reached for our daughter, and when she was gently placed in my arms, the room started to spin, and my eyes filled with tears.

“We have a baby,” I said. I wasn’t really talking to anyone, just stating that we had a baby. I was blinking, trying to focus on her, but my eyes were too full of tears to be able to see.

“We do,” Calum said. He leaned down and kissed my temple and then moved his arms so they wrapped around my arms as I held our daughter. “You have given me so much, sweetheart. I fell in love with you months ago, and today, you’ve given me another piece of you to love. Thank you.”

I couldn’t help it; I started crying in earnest then. I held our daughter to my chest and cried as my mate held me against his.

“I love you too,” I said in between gasps for breath.

“Asher, I’m sorry, but I need you to give me a little push, all right? Just a little one. I need you to help deliver the placenta, and then your omega line can close.”

I did as requested; I crunched my stomach a little and pushed. It felt weird, and I suddenly felt a warm blob come out of my omega line. Dr. King’s hand was glowing green again for a brief moment, and then the blob and the umbilical cord that was attached to it were suddenly gone.

“Very good. It’s complete, and now your omega line can start closing,” he said. I felt him touch my stomach gently, and then suddenly, I was wearing a pair of thin pants.

“Thank you, Doctor,” I told him. Not only for the pants but for his help on very short notice.

“You’re very welcome. Now, would you like to be somewhere more comfortable? Perhaps upstairs in your bed?” Dr. King asked before chuckling.

“It would be wonderful,” Calum said. “But his water broke over there.” He pointed to just in front of the doors. “And he managed to make it to here before he fell to his knees and said it felt like she was coming out.”

“Well, I’d say he was spot-on with that assumption. You both did amazing. And it was good thinking to call me when you did. But perhaps if you should have a second, maybe call me when the contractions start to give me a heads-up?”

I looked at Dr. King, completely horrified. “I’m sorry,” I said, tears filling my eyes again. “I was napping, and pain woke me up. I didn’t really think too much of it until I started walking around looking for Calum.”

“I wasn’t scolding you in any way, Asher. You did everything perfectly. But you certainly would have been more comfortable in your bed,” Dr. King said.

I nodded. I would have, but I wouldn’t ever be upset about our daughter being born where she was.

“Would you like for me to help the two of you upstairs?”

“Would you, please?” Calum said. I felt a familiar feeling when moving from one place to another and suddenly found myself sitting on our bed, my back leaning against pillows that were stacked behind me against the headboard.

“Thank you,” Calum said.

“Yes, thank you,” I echoed.

“You’re very welcome. I’ll be around for a bit if you need me. Enjoy your time getting to know your little girl. She’s a perfectly healthy little fox shifter. She’s six pounds, nine ounces, and twenty-one and a half inches long. She’s a very nice size for a little fox kit.”

“Dr. King?” Calum said suddenly.

“Yes?”

“Is it possible you could help with my phone? I left it down...stairs.”

The phone was suddenly floating in the air in front of us, and Calum reached out and took it. “Thanks again.”

“No issue at all. Call out if you need anything or have questions.”

Dr. King left the room, leaving me and Calum alone with our new little bundle.

“Can you believe she’s here?” I asked as I stared down at our daughter. She had the most adorable pink lips that were

pouty, and her nose was somewhat flat, but I figured that was just because she had just been born.

“Well, you were due next week, so I’m not really surprised she’s here. Maybe about how fast she decided to come, but I’m both thrilled and relieved that she’s here and you are both doing well.” Calum looked at me. “You are doing all right, aren’t you? Are you in any pain?”

I grinned at my mate. “I had quite a bit, actually, but Dr. King did something, and a lot of it dulled once he took over. I’m not feeling much of anything at the moment. Well, except tired. And relief.”

“Both are understandable and expected even.”

I turned my head and looked over at Calum as he sat beside me, my shoulder touching his arm.

“Do you think your family would be upset if we don’t make dinner tonight? I’m not really feeling up for it at the moment.”

Calum looked at me for a moment before he snorted and then started chuckling. “No, sweetheart. I don’t think they will be upset at all. In fact, let’s let them know why we’re not going to be there this week and most likely not next week either. We’re going to be too busy falling more in love with our little one to make the trek to their place to have dinner.”

“They won’t be disappointed, will they?”

“No, sweetheart, they won’t. Here, let’s do this,” Calum said. He picked me up and pulled me onto his lap before he picked up his phone and held it out. I watched as he took several pictures of the three of us, and when he was finished, he brought the phone closer to show them to me. “Which one do you think?”

He thumbed through the pictures, and we agreed on the next to last one. I relaxed on Calum’s lap while he wrapped his arms around me and our daughter. He held his phone in front of us and typed out a message to his parents, brother, and brother-in-law.

Calum: It is with great joy that we get to inform you that little miss Isla Raine has decided to make a rapid and somewhat unexpected entrance into the world. She was born today at 2:47, weighing 6 pounds, 9 ounces, and is 21.5 inches long. Daddy and baby girl are doing amazing and I've never been prouder of Asher. He was a true hero and had started to deliver her even before Dr. King could arrive. Unfortunately, we won't be able to make the family dinner. We do apologize, but we wish to spend our evening with our new precious little girl. <photo attached>

“What do you think?”

“I think it's perfect. I also think that within minutes of you sending that, your phone is going to start buzzing like crazy, and I give it less than twenty-four hours before Étienne is asking to come meet her.”

Calum kissed the top of my head again, and I felt him nod in agreement. “You're right, of course, but if you wish for a few days or even weeks with just the three of us, they will all respect that and stay away until we're ready.”

I sighed. “Just today, okay? Can we have the rest of today and tonight just the three of us?”

“We can have as long as you want, sweetheart.” Calum kissed my temple again, and I watched as he hit Send on the group message. He then tossed his phone onto the bed beside him and wrapped both arms around us.

“I love you,” I told him. I did. I'd fallen for him almost immediately. From the moment I saw him on the other side of that hotel room door, I knew I would fall hard and fast. And I had. We'd shared our first I love yous the day after I woke from my fertile period recovery. The past four months had been nothing but amazing, and I knew that it was all because of Calum and how incredible he was. Not only as a person but as a mate. He was selfless and always put my needs and desires ahead of his, and I truly couldn't have asked for a more perfect mate.

The phone started vibrating, and I couldn't help but chuckle. We both knew it was going to happen, and sure

enough, the phone just kept buzzing and buzzing with more messages.

I snuggled against Calum's chest, Isla against mine, and closed my eyes.

"Are you happy, Asher?"

I sighed, completely content in the life I'd been blessed with. "I couldn't be happier, Cal. Seriously. You are the absolute most amazing mate that anyone could ask for. I think Eli and I both lucked out when it comes to mates. Although, I think I'm the luckier of the two of us."

I felt Calum's chest shake next to my head and smiled as my mate chuckled at my comment. I adored Benjamin and Eli and their twins. I also knew it was Rainier and Étienne's guidance that helped make their sons the amazing men they were.

The phone buzzed again. I sighed at the noise. "Are you going to respond to them?" I asked.

"Naw. I already let them know she's here and we'd be skipping dinner."

I felt Calum kiss me again, and my body suddenly became heavy. "Cal? Take Isla. I need a nap. You're all warm and safe, and I just pushed a baby out. My body is suddenly tired."

I felt Calum carefully take Isla from my arms, and when he did, I slid from his lap and lay down beside him. I wrapped my arm around his legs and snuggled into the side of them.

"Love you," I whispered. Seconds later, I felt fingers running through my hair.

"I love you too. Rest, my mate."

That sounded like the perfect suggestion. I knew Calum would watch over and protect us both.

HAVE you ever wondered about that new bartender on the *Beloved Gem*? Well, Stefan gets his own little fae in their story. And of course Master Nikolai wonders if there will ever be a moment of peace with both Montgomery and Kyle now to cause mischief at the casino. Be sure to grab [Stefan](#) and find out what they're all up to!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After I wrote Benjamin's book, I knew I needed to give his brother Calum his own HEA. I hope you enjoyed their little novella. You'll get a glimpse of them here and there again in future stories. They will make appearances in future Council Enforcer as well as Destined Paranormals series book! I can't say thank you enough for all of your continued love and support. I truly couldn't do this without you.

xx

Taylor

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