


MASKED  
DRAGON  
OF  
SNOWRIDGE



STONEFIRE DRAGONS UNIVERSE #4

JESSIE  
DONOVAN

# MASKED DRAGON OF SNOWRIDGE

Stonefire Dragons Universe

Book 4

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JESSIE DONOVAN

Mythical Lake Press, LLC

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## About the Author

**The Stonefire and Lochguard series intertwine with one another. (As well as with one Tahoe Dragon Mates book.) Since so many readers ask for the overall reading order, I've included it with this book. (This list is as of January 2024 and [you can view the most up-to-date version here on my website.](#))**

*Sacrificed to the Dragon* (Stonefire Dragons #1)

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**Short stories that lead up to *Persuading the Dragon* / *Treasured by the Dragon*:**

*Meeting the Humans* (Stonefire Dragons Shorts #1)  
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*Dragon's First Christmas* (Stonefire Dragons Shorts #4)

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*The Dragon's Choice* (Tahoe Dragon Mates #1)  
*The Dragon's Need* (Tahoe Dragon Mates #2)  
*The Dragon's Bidder* (Tahoe Dragon Mates #3)  
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*The Dragon's Find* (Tahoe Dragon Mates #6)  
*The Dragon's Surprise* (Tahoe Dragon Mates #7 / TBD)



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**Books in this series:**

**Stonefire Dragons Universe**

*Winning Skyhunter* (SDU #1)

*Transforming Snowridge* (SDU #2)

*Finding Dragon's Court* (SDU #3)

*Masked Dragon of Snowridge* (SDU #4)

***Masked Dragon of Snowridge Synopsis***

Kaylee MacDonald has been yearning to find her own happy ending since moving to Scotland, but hasn't had any luck. So when she finds out about a masked event where dragon-shifters and humans can hook-up for the night, she decides to go and have some fun. What she didn't expect was for a dragonman to accept her strip poker challenge and then give her not only the best steamy encounter of her life, but a little surprise as well—one that will appear nine months later.

Dr. Maelon Perry doesn't do relationships. As a child, love destroyed his family and he vowed to never let that happen to him again. But his inner dragon has needs and so he visits a masked event to find a female to take to bed. What he didn't expect was to be drawn to a human female dancing on a chair. Both man and beast want her, and claim her for one night only. But she shows up three months later, his scent entwined with hers, meaning she carries his child. He has no desire to be a father, but agrees she should come to Snowridge until the child is born, so he can give her shots of his dragon blood. But he makes it clear that after the birth, she should leave.

As the pair gets to know each other, Kaylee finds a way past Maelon's barriers and they start to think they have a future together. But then someone targets Kaylee, putting her in danger. Will Kaylee survive and finally have a dragonman of her own? Or, will the danger force her to flee and destroy any chance she has with Maelon?

## Chapter One

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*Nearly Four Months Earlier*

Kaylee MacDonald adjusted the half-mask on her face as she stood inside a grand house's entrance hall, complete with marble floors and a staircase that belonged in a movie. Just down the hall were a set of big double doors leading to a ballroom, one that would be full of both humans and dragon-shifters.

And not just any humans or dragon-shifters, but those looking for a one-night hookup and some fun.

Taking a deep breath, she smoothed her dress and willed her heart to stop racing. She'd been looking forward to this event for weeks, maybe even months, since she first heard about it from her former roommate, Emma MacAllister.

*"It's a bi-monthly event where humans and dragons can mingle, have fun, and admittance is only guaranteed via a password. I can share it if you want to go, aye?"*

And given how her hookup prospects were zero back home on Clan Lochguard, she'd decided to attend the masked event.

Although as she stood in the grand house, her feet unwilling to move, she plucked the material of her dress, unsure she could go through with it.

*Stop it, Kaylee. You've never been shy before, so don't you dare start now.*

It wasn't shyness that kept her feet rooted in place, though. No, she'd spent the last few weeks building up her hopes and dreams of finally finding someone who wanted her and wouldn't abandon her. Which, of course, was a tall order for an event meant for one-night stands.

She was basically doomed to fail. Did she really want to wake up with regrets?

*Don't think of that.* Even a teeny, tiny chance was enough to merit trying. No one on Lochguard had sparked anything inside her, and as much as she loved her sister Gina and in-laws, Kaylee wanted to find her own place, her own purpose, her own direction in life. Especially since she wasn't sure Clan Lochguard, nestled in the remote Scottish Highlands, was it.

After a few more deep breaths, she pushed aside her nervousness, put her shoulders back, and strode toward the giant doors. Two masked men opened them, and she was instantly bombarded by some low, sultry music.

Almost as if someone had picked it to encourage everyone to sneak into dark corners and get up to trouble.

Smiling at the thought, she entered the room and took a second to look around.

She barely paid any attention to the giant chandelier or fancy wooden panel walls, but gaped at all the people milling about. The tattooed upper arms of some of the women meant they were dragon-shifters, but there were plenty who were human. The men were harder to figure out because they all wore buttoned up shirts or jackets. But if she got close enough, flashing pupils would tell her if they were dragons.

And silly as it was, she wanted to spend a night with a dragonman. It might be her only chance, after all. Although the thought of never having a devoted mate like her sister had with her dragonman made her chest tighten.

Not wanting to look like an idiot standing there gawking, Kaylee did her best to imitate Dr. Layla McFarland, Lochguard's head doctor and a female who always looked confident and in control.

She strode in, her skirt swishing as she walked, and headed toward the bar at the back. After she ordered some wine and took a sip, she wondered how one went about approaching a man and maybe hooking up.

Because she'd never done this before. Any guys she'd had sex with in the past had first been friends or she'd met while with friends.

She gulped down her wine and asked for another. As warmth spread throughout her body, her nerves relaxed, and she smiled at the man who approached the bar. He smiled back but shook his head. "Sorry, love. Someone's waiting for me."

Doing her best not to feel disappointed, she nodded, took her wine, and walked toward a group of men and women in the corner who were laughing and all gathered around something.

When close enough, Kaylee saw that a man and woman were in the middle of a strip poker game. Definitely not something she thought she'd see at the edges of a fancy ballroom.

She smiled as the man cursed and took off his shirt. Kaylee did her best not to drool as he exposed a muscled chest and, yep, a dragon-shifter tattoo on his upper arm. His flashing pupils and a look of irritation topped the cake.

"Bloody hell, I swear you're cheating."

The woman with dark hair and dark brown eyes merely smiled. "No, you're just bloody awful at this. Or, maybe you want to lose."

He growled. "No fucking way."

The woman smirked. "Then try harder."

As Kaylee laughed and watched the pair play, she wondered if maybe she should challenge someone to a game. Poker wasn't her strong suit, but then again, she wasn't shy about showing some skin. She'd skinny dipped with her friends back in high school, in Virginia, long before she'd ever come to the UK.

The game progressed, and the guy ended up in his boxers before the woman stopped the play and they went off somewhere, probably to finish undressing in private.

Kaylee drained her latest glass of wine and stood up on one of the chairs, taking a second to find her balance. She shouted, “Who wants to challenge me to a game of strip poker?”

The crowd around the table cheered and she did a little dance on the chair, raising her hands, and moving in tune with the music, but careful not to topple over.

Yes, the wine had done the trick. With no responsibilities, no older sister looking on, and no clan leader to disappoint, Kaylee was free.

And she was determined to make the most of it.

Then she noticed a tall, dark-haired man with pale skin and dark eyes striding toward her. Even though he wore a mask, his every movement seemed to scream, “I see you and you’re mine.”

Which was ridiculous, of course.

But alcohol made her mind think silly things.

He stopped just in front of her, placed his hands on her waist, and heat shot through her, ending between her legs.

His voice was low, his accent something she couldn’t quite place, as he said, “I’ll challenge you, little bird.”

She frowned. “Little bird?”

“Yes, moving around, full of energy, chirping and inviting someone to watch you.”

“Chirping isn’t a compliment.”

His lips nearly twitched. “I think it is.”

For a beat, they stared at each other. His eyes were brown, and as his pupils flashed from slits to round again, it signaled he was a dragon-shifter.

Time seemed to slow as his heated gaze held hers, his fingers lightly stroking her waist.

Then he lifted her and placed her on the ground. “Ready to lose your clothes, little bird?”

She stood tall—well, as tall as she could, given this dragoman was at least a foot taller than her—and said, “More like I’m ready to see what you’re hiding under your clothes.”

He still didn’t smile, but his eyes twinkled.

Could a grumpy dragonman’s eyes twinkle? Well, she thought so.

Maybe he’d had some alcohol as well.

He squeezed her waist one last time, slowly removed his hands, and gestured toward the table. “Then let’s get to it. If I trounce you too well at first, then I might go easy on you later, aye?”

“Don’t even think about it.” She touched his arm—warm even through his shirt—and then added, “I’ll do just about anything to see that tattoo of yours.”

He leaned down to her ear. “And I’d do anything to see your hard little nipples begging for me to suck them.”

Her cheeks heated. Yes, this event’s purpose was finding someone to have sex with. Even so, no man had ever talked to her like that.

And she wanted more of it. A lot more.

*Focus, Kaylee.* It was going to be hard enough to concentrate after two glasses of wine without imagining what other dirty things he might say to her.

She pushed gently against his chest. “Then stop talking, sit down, and start playing.”

He smiled for a second before sitting down. He shuffled the cards, making a show of it, and Kaylee wondered if she’d be naked within five minutes.

Well, if so, then it happened.

One way or another, she wanted to get the dragonman alone. She'd picked her mark for the night. And she rather looked forward to poking fun at him a little along the way.



DR. MAELON PERRY had been to a number of these masked events. They were perfect for him because no one was looking for relationships, the number one rule was no kissing on the mouth—to make sure there were no sudden mate-claim frenzies for the dragon-shifters—and he could finally get some peace and quiet from his inner dragon.

Who grunted and spoke up. *No, this is for you, not me. I want to find our mate.*

*No mates. You know that.*

*There's more to life than work.*

He ignored his beast as he sipped his whiskey and surveyed the room.

Sometimes it was exhausting to look for a female to fuck and leave soon after. But love and attachments and mates weren't for him.

He'd learned as a child that love only brought pain.

His dragon grunted. *You can't use that excuse over and over again. It only makes you miserable.*

Maelon downed the rest of his drink, handed the empty glass to one of the workers who collected them, and ignored his dragon to survey the crowd.

It'd been more than six months since he'd been to one of these masquerades. Between work and research, there simply hadn't been time.

But he was close, so bloody close, to discovering a serum which would protect against most of the harmful drugs used in the past by the dragon-shifters' enemies—dragon hunters and Dragon Knights—to hurt his kind. If he could just get the last little bit right, then it would help not only his clan in Wales but

all of Snowridge's allies and maybe one day, all dragons worldwide.

His dragon sighed, but realized arguing right now was pointless.

*Good.* His eyes continued sweeping the room until he noticed a female climb atop a chair and begin dancing to the music.

She was short, with brown hair and pale skin brushed with freckles. Her black dress hugged her breasts before flowing out and stopping just above her knees.

The female was slighter than his usual taste, but as she moved and swayed to the music, smiling as the crowd encouraged her, all he wanted to do was cross the room, toss her over his shoulder, and take her somewhere private.

She was beautiful and carefree and so full of life.

A massive contrast to how he spent his days mostly inside the surgery or doing his research.

She would most definitely be fun in bed.

Without another thought, he strode toward her. Her movements entranced him, and he couldn't stop imagining what she'd look like if she danced naked.

Or what she'd look like as she cried out as she came around his cock.

During the walk over, he heard her challenge for strip poker. When he was close enough, he blurted, "I'll challenge you, little bird."

Her brown eyes met his, the shade almost golden.

As they talked—she was American, which was unusual for this event—and he teased her about sucking her hard nipples into his mouth, his heart raced and his cock turned to stone.

Maelon wasn't one to flirt, but something about this female called to him.

One way or another, he'd have her naked and under him tonight.



As they sat down and he shuffled the cards, she smiled at him. For a second, he stopped breathing. She was too bloody beautiful, so sweet looking, and a temptation he didn't know how he could resist.

His dragon finally spoke up. *Then don't resist her.*

*You're on board with this now?*

*I won't say no to sex. So, yes.*

He sensed there was more to it, but his head buzzed from the whiskey and he needed to focus on the game.

He won the first round, and the woman removed her shoe. Then another game, another shoe. In the third game, she removed her necklace. By the fourth game, she started to slide down the strap of her dress when he growled, "Enough. Come with me."

After standing, he put out a hand.

She raised an eyebrow. "But the game isn't finished yet."

He leaned down and whispered, "I want a private undressing."

It wasn't the smoothest line ever, but she smiled, shrugged, and picked up her shoes and necklace. "Why not?"

She placed her hand in his and electricity raced through his body, making his cock even harder.

Fuck, he couldn't wait to be inside her.

She tightened her hand around his and tugged. "Where to?"

No coyness, no artifice. Just honesty—she wanted to be fucked as much as he wanted to do it. "Come with me."

He tugged her along, doing his best to keep pace with her shorter strides. Once out of the ballroom, he went up the stairs and to the room he'd secured for the night. As soon as he opened the door, he released her hand, crossed the threshold, and said, "If you want me to strip you and make you wild with pleasure, step inside. If you don't want the same, walk away. It's your choice, little bird."

She smiled slowly. “Oh, I’m determined to see your tattoo, dragonman.”

With that, she entered the room and shut the door.

Within two strides, he stood in front of her, cupped her chin, and said, “Let me see your face.”

The female didn’t even hesitate. She tossed her shoes to the ground, undid her mask, and let it fall.

Both man and beast growled. He’d thought her pretty before, but now, she was fucking gorgeous. A pert nose and dark eyebrows that quirked at him in question, and combined with her golden eyes and kissable lips, he was a hairsbreadth away from tearing her clothes off, tossing her on the bed, and licking her pussy until she screamed.

A small part of him wanted to kiss her. But no, that was never going to happen. Not just because of the rules, but because the absolute last thing Maelon wanted to do was to find his true mate.

So he settled for tracing her cheek with the backs of his fingers, down the long column of her neck, and ran his fingers under the strap of her dress. “I think it’s time to claim my prize.”

She smiled slowly. “Then stop talking and start doing.”

His dragon hummed. *I like her.*

Ignoring his beast, he slowly, oh so slowly, slid the black strap down her shoulder. Then he leaned down and kissed her warm skin, the scent of woman and vanilla filling his nose.

Damn, she smelled good enough to eat.

Which he was most definitely going to do at some point tonight, no matter what it took.

Her hands went to his hair and to the back of his mask. Maelon stopped her and removed her hands from his head. “No, little bird. The mask stays on.”

“That’s unfair.”

He kissed her neck, then lightly nibbled, and she moaned. “I’d think you’d be more interested in what my mouth and hands can do.”

She tugged at his shirt. “I want this off first.”

Maelon wasted no time in stripping. Her hand went to his chest, ran across his dark chest hair, and then to his upper arms. As she traced the design of his tattoo, each brush and stroke made his heart race and dick harden.

Never in his life had a mere touch affected him this much.

His dragon growled. *Stop wasting time and get her to bed. Fuck her, make her scream.*

The human tilted her head and studied him. Usually, Maelon didn’t like to hold anyone’s gaze for long because it made him uncomfortable, but the combination of alcohol and her entrancing eyes made it impossible to look away.

She asked, “What’s your dragon saying? And yes, I know I’m not supposed to ask, but I still want to know.”

It was on the tip of his tongue to demand how she knew that fact. Was it because she lived with a dragon clan? Because most of the humans who came to the masquerade usually did, but not all of them.

Then he reminded himself this was for one night and one night only. No strings attached. So the details didn’t matter.

He leaned down, worried her earlobe between his teeth, and both man and beast reveled in her soft groan.

He moved a hand to the other dress strap and slid it down, down, down, until he could tug the material from her breasts.

Fuck, she was perfect. Maybe, as a doctor, he shouldn’t say such shite. But he didn’t care. He cupped one breast, the perfect handful, and rubbed his palm against her hard nipple.

She dug her fingers into his arms, as if her knees had gone weak and it was the only way she could remain upright.

As he nuzzled her neck, he said, “My dragon said he wants you naked and moaning on the bed.”

She leaned into his hand. “Yes, let’s do that.”

He chuckled. “Impatient, aren’t you?”

She moved a hand to his chest and lightly tweaked his nipple. “Aren’t you? I mean, that’s the point of this event, right? To get laid?”

He wondered if she’d blush and apologize for what she’d said. But no. The female merely quirked an eyebrow at him.

Her straightforwardness was so bloody refreshing.

His dragon spoke up. *Stop wasting time. Strip her, taste her, and then fuck her. We only have the night.*

For a beat, Maelon wondered if one night would be enough. But then he quickly pushed that thought aside. The whiskey was muddling his brain.

“Then let’s get started.”

He scooped her into his arms, and she laughed as she placed her hands at the back of his neck. “I can walk, you know. Your touch feels good, but not that good.”

The amusement dancing in her eyes nearly made him smile. “I think you’re going to regret those words.”

“Oh? And why is that?”

“Because I’ll have you begging before the night is over.”

Her smile widened. “And I look forward to you trying to make me.”

“You’re not the least bit intimidated by me being a dragon-shifter, are you?”

“Nope. Sorry. Growl all you like. Let your inner dragon out. Do your worst. Especially since I have to deal with children all day and they are way more difficult to handle than one mere dragonman.”

Maelon wanted to ask more but resisted. He didn’t want to know her better. He didn’t.

He laid her on the bed, crawled over her, and caged her body with his own without touching her. “I’m not a child, little

bird. Maybe you need reminding of that.”

Before she could say another word, he kissed her cheek, her neck, and then down between her breasts. He continued to nuzzle her belly and then spread her legs wide, the scent of her arousal making him growl.

He glanced up and saw her watching him. Good. “Keep your eyes on me as I devour you.”

Her cheeks flushed, and she nodded. “O-okay.”

Well, it seemed his bold American wasn’t quite as bold in bed.

He could have fun with that.

Maelon never took his gaze from hers as he nuzzled her pussy. It was time to taste her.

## Chapter Two

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Kaylee's entire body was on fire, in a good way. How she'd managed to talk coherently for the last ten minutes, she had no idea.

Because no man's touch had ever turned her on like this mysterious dragonman's. His lips, or fingers, or even just his teeth tugging on her earlobe made her want to say screw foreplay and jump him. Ride him like she'd never ridden a guy before and watch him fall apart under her.

But the dark-haired dragonman clearly had his own ideas. Ones she wasn't entirely against.

Namely, carrying her into the bedroom, laying her down on the bed, and then moving to settle between her legs.

And when he told her to keep her eyes on him, her pussy throbbed, wanting attention.

Kaylee had never slept with a dragon-shifter before, but she was starting to understand why her sister kept saying she should find her own. Because if they were all like this? Then holy moly, she'd never want to leave the bedroom.

As he nuzzled between her thighs, she clutched the bedspread with her fingers. Only one man had ever gone down on her, and it'd been a little disappointing. And since she'd never faked an orgasm just to soothe a guy's ego, she'd made him angry.

But the dragonman's dark brown eyes and flashing pupils, just barely visible behind his mask, made her forget about

everything but right here, right now, and the super sexy man between her legs.

His hot tongue flicked her clit, and she moved her hips toward him. He did it again, and then adjusted his rhythm until she was arching and squirming and asking for him to go faster.

Then he inserted a finger into her pussy, and she nearly closed her eyes. But he growled, like a reminder, and she watched him. His gaze was intense and focused and completely fixed on her.

Almost as if the rest of the world didn't matter.

A woman could get used to that look.

*Don't start that, Kaylee. It's for one night and one night only.*

He curled his finger up inside her, and she squirmed. "Please. I'm so close."

His eyes turned smug, but she didn't care. Then he suckled her clit and teased her with his tongue, and she screamed as lights danced before her eyes and her pussy convulsed around him.

On and on it went, the dragonman never stopping his torment on her clit, until she could do nothing but lay there, breathing heavily, trying to find the energy to say something.

He gave her one last proprietary lick—okay, the wine was still playing with her head because she wasn't his—and then he kissed up her body again until his lips brushed against her neck. "You begged, just like I said you would, little bird."

If she'd had more energy, Kaylee would've swatted him. But she was still high from her orgasm and could barely make a sound other than, "Mmmmm."

He chuckled. "I think I need to wake you up again so you can enjoy what comes next."

After running his hand down her thigh, he moved it to wrap around his waist. Up and down, he stroked her leg, his touch both soothing and arousing. The entire time his gaze

held hers, his pupils flashing, made all the more mysterious by the black half-mask on his face.

She reached up to touch his jaw, but he lowered his head and tugged her nipple with his teeth. She sucked in a breath, and he did the same to the other one.

Making her hot and achy all over again.

Kaylee ran her hands across his back, loving how hot and hard he was, and the dragonman eventually stopped his sweet torture to say, “I need to be inside you. Tell me I can.”

His voice almost sounded desperate. She arched her hips, her core brushing against his pants-clad cock, and he growled.

She smiled. “That was my way of saying yes.”

For a beat, he stared at her lips, almost as if he’d kiss her.

Part of her wanted to scream, “Yes, do it already!” And yet, she couldn’t break the rules.

Not even if the thought of never kissing this man caused sadness to rush through her.

*Stop it, Kaylee. You knew going in what this event entailed.*

Although it didn’t make her any less sad about never seeing his flashing eyes or listening to his dirty whisperings.

He slowly moved away from her to stand and undress. And as soon as he was naked, her lips parted. Because, damn, he was lean but muscled, his entire body saying he could defend her against anything, if he wanted.

And then his cock. Well, it was long and thick and jutting out proudly. She licked her lips, wondering how he’d taste.

Then he stroked himself with a groan, and the sight and sound shot straight to her pussy.

He growled. “Stay right there.”

After reaching into his pants and taking out a condom packet, he opened it and slid it on.

Kaylee nearly asked if he had several—they had the whole night, after all—but before she could, he was back on the bed,



hovering over her but not quite touching.

Her heart raced as he stared at her, almost as if he was taking time to memorize this moment. Then he pushed her legs wide before slowly lowering, until all of his hard, hot body touched hers.

The feel of his solid chest against her breasts was delicious.

His growly voice only made her hotter. “Time to claim you as mine, little bird. Let’s see how loud I can make you scream.”

Her mind couldn’t move past the “mine” part of his words. What would it be like to truly belong to someone as much as they belonged to her?

And why was it that when a person yearned for that more than anything, it always eluded them?

He frowned, stroked her cheek with a finger, and asked, “What’s wrong?”

Realizing that her emotions must’ve shown on her face—she wasn’t good at hiding them—she arched against him and rubbed. “Nothing. I’m waiting to see if you’re cocky or can really hold up to that promise.”

His pupils flashed rapidly, the words affecting his inner dragon, just as she knew they would.

There was something to be said about her time living on Lochguard, even if it’d been a struggle to truly find her place.

Then the dragonman ran a hand down her side, over her leg, and between her thighs. He stroked her slowly, and she gasped.

“Still sensitive, I see. Good. It’ll be that much easier to make you come hard.”

In the next second, he positioned his cock and slowly entered her. Kaylee grabbed his shoulders and did her best to keep her eyes open to watch the intense heat in the dragonman’s gaze turn into an inferno.

For her.

Before she could start thinking again, he finally entered her to the hilt and lowered his nose to her neck. As he nuzzled, he began to move. Kaylee missed seeing his eyes, missed watching the emotions play out on his face.

But soon he was moving faster, harder, and she could barely focus on anything but the sensation of him filling her, brushing against her in the right spot, and making her wild and hot and desperate enough to dig her nails into his back.

He growled, never ceasing his pace, and moved a hand so he could play with her clit. A few strokes was all it took before she cried out, louder than before, and everything faded but the pulsing and pleasure and feel of him inside her.

She barely noticed him still and shout as he came.

Eventually, they both relaxed, still twined together, and Kaylee inhaled deeply. The mixture of male and arousal and sweat was comforting. She had no idea why, but it was.

And soon she drifted off, the dragonman's weight still heavy on top of her, and dreamed of unmasking the dragon-shifter and seeing him again.



MAELON KNEW HE SHOULD MOVE, that he was probably squishing the human female, and yet he was both sated beyond measure and almost desperate to keep skin-to-skin contact.

His drowsy dragon spoke up. *We could see her again. I want to.*

*No.*

*Even you must realize this time was different. More. Better. I wish I could tell if she was our true mate.*

*That's why I drink alcohol at these bloody things. That way you won't know and be tempted.*

*I will never understand you.*

*I doubt anyone ever will.*

Since they'd had this conversation many times before, his dragon merely grunted and curled up to take a nap inside his mind.

It wasn't long before the human was asleep as well.

Slowly, oh so slowly, Maelon pulled out of her and rolled to the side. He should dash to the toilet, clean up, and never look back.

And yet, he couldn't help but gaze down at her sleeping face. The liveliness, playfulness, and backbone that shone when awake had vanished, leaving a content and almost vulnerable female in her place. She was so much frailer, and the thought of anyone hurting her didn't sit well with Maelon.

The image of seeing her again, maybe taking care of her, or her forcing him to have some fun for a change, flashed through his mind. He'd never felt so at ease around a female before, let alone thought of more than a night of hard fucking.

As he traced her cheek, he almost wanted more.

Then memories of his mother's grief and then finding her note after she died returned, reminding him that attachments were dangerous.

As if burned, he slipped from the bed and headed to the bathroom. After cleaning up, he dressed and stood next to the bed again.

The female still slept, her chest rising and falling, her breasts tempting him to crawl back in beside her.

But he turned away, exited the room, and went to retrieve his things from the front reception area.

Before long, he was in his dragon form, flying back to Snowridge, back to Wales, back to where his world made sense and wouldn't ever hurt him.

## Chapter Three

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### *Present Day*

**K**aylee's stomach roiled, and she breathed slowly for a few seconds, doing her best to keep her breakfast down. Some days it was a losing battle, but she needed to try.

Because she couldn't allow anyone to find out her secret. Well, at least until she knew what the hell to do about it.

She really shouldn't have come down from Scotland to Clan Stonefire in England, to help out at the dragon clan gathering and year-end celebrations. And yet, she hadn't been able to say no to her clan leader's request. Her clan duties included watching the children, and she had no real reason to refuse. Well, no reason she could share.

Her stomach churned again, and she focused on breathing.

She barely noticed the overpowering vanilla scent she wore any more. And the fact no one had commented on it, especially given how sensitive a dragon-shifter's nose could be, was a miracle.

But without it, any dragon-shifter would know she was pregnant with a half-dragon child because her scent would be intertwined with the guy in question.

The dragonman from the night of the masquerade. The one who'd left her in bed alone without so much as a goodbye.

Why she'd ever thought attending a clandestine, masked dragon-shifter party in the wilds of Scotland had been a good idea, she didn't know.

*You know why you went.* Yes, yes, she did. Although, as she nearly placed a hand over her lower belly, she hadn't bargained on getting pregnant.

Yes, he'd worn a condom. But now she wished she'd listened to her sister's advice about taking dragon-shifter-approved birth control before jumping between the sheets with one. Especially since all a man had to do was look at a MacDonald woman, and she'd end up pregnant.

She resisted a sigh. Too little, too late to heed her sister's advice now.

A cool breeze blew, and Kaylee zipped up her jacket a little higher. She surveyed the area—an empty, outdoor section of Stonefire—to count the children and make sure they were all accounted for.

Not long after confirming no one had wandered off, little dark-haired Annabel MacLeod rushed up to her. Her frown resembled that of her father, Tristan MacLeod, and she didn't look happy. Given how she was covered in mud, Kaylee couldn't blame her.

Annabel pointed at her brother. “Jack's chucking mud at everyone. You gotta stop him.”

Given what Kaylee knew of the twins, Annabel had probably started it. Still, she took a deep breath to calm her stomach and gestured for the little girl to lead her. “Okay, take me to where you all were playing and we'll go from there.”

After taking Annabel's hand to keep her from running off, Kaylee smiled over at Dawn Whitby-Chadwick, another human watching the kids with her, and Kaylee motioned with her head to say she was checking something out. The other woman nodded, and the little girl tugged to get them moving.

She and Annabel approached where Jack MacLeod, Rhys James, and Murray Moore-Llewellyn were all huddled together, clearly hiding something from view. Rhys was the

oldest in the group, and he looked up to see Annabel and narrowed his eyes. “You snitched!”

Annabel stood tall. “You’re not playing fair.”

“Then you shouldn’t have thrown the first mud ball.”

“I did not.”

Murray nodded. “Did too.”

Releasing Annabel’s hand, Kaylee said, “Since you’re all covered in mud, I think the odds were pretty fair, regardless of who started it. But you know what happens now, don’t you?”

Jack eyed her with suspicion, looking far too much like his dragonman father right then and there. But Kaylee was used to all kinds of intimidating dragon-shifter looks by now and didn’t miss a beat. “I’ll have to hose you off in someone’s backyard until you’re clean.”

“But it’s cold!”

“It might snow!”

“That’s mean!”

She shrugged, determined to tease them a little. “If you can stand throwing and wearing cold, wet mud, then you should be fine with a little water.”

Annabel grunted and said, “We can take off our clothes and shower inside instead.”

Kaylee tapped her chin, as if thinking about it. “That might work, although it’d be more fun to use the outside hose. Then you wouldn’t make a mess.”

Rhys sighed. “What if I clean up our dirty footprints after the shower? Will that work?”

Kaylee grinned. “That sounds like a plan. Now, let’s head to Rhys’s house, since it’s the closest.” Kaylee quickly sent a text to Dawn, letting her know she would be gone for a little while. Once she got a confirmation back, she herded the four children toward the house just down the pathway.

It was a sign of how cold and tired they were that the children barely argued on the way—the twins, in particular, always argued.

Soon enough, they all stood just inside the front door. Rhys's mom, Samira, appeared in the doorway and raised her brows. "Do I want to know?"

Kaylee laughed. "They need to wash off, and your place was the closest. Oh, and your son kindly offered to clean up any dirty footprints in the entryway after they're done."

Samira smiled and looked at the group of children. "Well, hurry up, then. I might just have some freshly baked biscuits for you, if there's time."

With that, the boys quickly stripped and dashed upstairs. Annabel lingered and sighed. "I don't want to share with them."

Samira gestured down the hall. "There's another shower down there, second door on the right."

Annabel undressed and streaked down the hallway. Once the door shut, Samira looked at Kaylee. "Come. You look like you could use a cup of tea."

When Kaylee first arrived in the UK from the US, she'd hated tea. However, over time, it'd grown on her. It would never replace coffee, but given how she was trying to limit caffeine because of her surprise pregnancy, it was the next best thing.

However, the second she reached the kitchen, a mixture of spices hit her nose and her stomach revolted. She barely made it to the sink before she threw up her breakfast.

By the time Kaylee finished, she was super embarrassed and a little lightheaded. After rinsing her mouth, she tried to stand up and toddled. Mentally, she cursed. She didn't know how much longer she could do this. Thanks to watching her sister's multiple pregnancies, Kaylee knew that women who carried and birthed a dragon-shifter's child needed shots of dragon's blood to feel better and lessen the risk of complications.

Because those who didn't get the shots had a fifty-fifty chance of dying in childbirth.

However, to get the dragon's blood meant sharing her secret. And spilling that would not only make her sister Gina concerned, worried, and maybe even disappointed in her, but Kaylee's brothers-in-law would probably go on some sort of manhunt—or would it be a dragonhunt?—to find the masked dragonman and do who the hell knew what to him.

Her in-laws, the MacKenzies, were a little over-the-top at times. Normally she loved them, but maybe not in this case.

Samira helped her to sit down and searched her gaze. After a beat, she asked softly, "Are you pregnant, Kaylee?"

Kaylee had done an amazing job of keeping herself together. But that one question broke down her walls. All the fear and worry and uncertainty crashed down on her, and as soon as she said, "Yes," she started sobbing.

She was vaguely aware of Samira rubbing her back and then pulling her into a hug. She had only met the woman during the clan-wide dinner the night before, and yet she was being so nice to her.

Eventually, Kaylee got herself under control and stopped crying. Once she was mostly composed, Samira asked, "Does anyone else know?"

She bit her lip and shook her head. "I don't even know who the father is."

Samira studied her intensely. "Were you assaulted?"

She blinked. "No, no, nothing like that. It was, well, a party where everyone wore masks. All I know is that he's a dragon-shifter with a strange accent."

She heard Samira suck in a breath, and she couldn't blame her. Having sex with a masked stranger wasn't exactly an everyday occurrence, especially when it was with a dragon-shifter.

Samira's tone was kind but firm. "You need to go to the surgery straightaway."



Trying not to cry again, she met Samira's brown-eyed gaze. "I can't."

"You can and you will. I don't want you to go through the same difficulties and worries I did when I carried Rhys. Things are so much better now for humans. You need to let Dr. Sid and the others help you, Kaylee, especially if you plan to keep the child."

Samira was also human and had come to Stonefire years ago, before even Melanie Hall-MacLeod, and had ended up the true mate of a dragonman named Liam. Back then, doctors hadn't discovered the medical benefits of dragon's blood shots for pregnant humans, and she could only imagine how scary it must've been back then.

And given how Kaylee hadn't received any treatments to date, and she was nearly three months along, she really needed to see a doctor or she might find herself in trouble.

However, if she did that, she'd have to tell not only her sister and in-laws the truth, but Lochguard's clan leader as well. After everything Finlay Stewart had done to ensure Kaylee stayed in Scotland with her sister—despite not being mated to a dragon-shifter—she couldn't bear disappointing him.

And yet, facing the music was better than ending up dead. Maybe. By just a little.

Well, more than that, since she wanted to keep her baby. Part of the reason Kaylee had gone to the party in the first place was because she'd been a little jealous of all the happy couples and families on Lochguard, and she thought that maybe she'd be lucky enough to find her own dragon mate. Because more than her sister, Kaylee had always wanted to be a wife and a mom.

She hadn't planned on it happening this way, though.

Placing a hand on her lower belly, she knew she needed to step up. The longer she put it off, the more she put both of them at risk.

Taking a deep breath, Kaylee finally met Samira's gaze again. "Okay, I'll go."

"Come, I'll take you. Let me just tell my mate so he can keep an eye on the children." Samira went to the back door and let Liam know she was going out. And then they were soon bundled up and outside, walking toward Stonefire's little clinic.

Once inside, Samira guided her to the front desk and was just about to ask about seeing a doctor when Kaylee heard a voice she knew well—that of Dr. Layla McFarland, Clan Lochguard's head doctor. "Kaylee. Are you all right, lass?"

She met Layla's eyes and did her best to look healthy. However, she must've failed because Layla murmured, "Come with me. You look far too pale for my liking."

Samira smiled at Kaylee, giving her hand a reassuring squeeze as she said, "It'll be fine, Kaylee. But if you ever need to talk to someone, come find me anytime. Okay?"

She nodded, thanked Samira, and then allowed Layla to take her to a small examination room. The dragon-shifter doctor gestured for Kaylee to sit down and then asked, "What's wrong?"

Shifting in her seat, she debated how to answer. Layla would have to tell Finn, and Kaylee didn't know what the Lochguard leader would do.

The doctor leaned in closer and then gasped. Layla moved back so she could see Kaylee's eyes again. "You're pregnant with a dragon-shifter's bairn?"

She muttered, "I thought only male dragons could smell it."

Layla lifted a dark brow. "I'm a doctor, remember? We're trained to pick up the scent when most female dragons wouldn't notice it. At least, not right away." She crossed her arms over her chest and asked, "Who's the father?"

She sighed. "I don't know." Then she straightened, remembering she had someone else to fight for now. "But I'm keeping my child, regardless."

Layla frowned. “You don’t know who the father is?”

She bit her lip as she thought how best to reply, but there was a knock at the door, followed by Dr. Gregor Innes’s voice. “Can I come in?”

Layla replied, “Aye.”

Once the tall, older doctor was in the room, he shut the door and looked her over with concern. Even though Gregor lived on Stonefire now, Kaylee had known him back when he lived on Lochguard. He’d helped her sister and firstborn child before moving to Stonefire to mate Dr. Cassidy “Sid” Jackson.

Gregor asked, “What’s wrong, Kaylee?”

Layla didn’t miss a beat. “She’s pregnant and doesn’t know the father. But I scented dragon-shifter, so there’s that.”

Kaylee’s cheeks burned as Gregor approached her. “It’s a long shot, but if you’ll allow me, I might be able to identify the scent. If I’ve ever met him, I should be able to place it.”

She put her hands over her cheeks and closed her eyes, feeling beyond embarrassed. “Go for it.”

Gregor came closer, and after a moment, he blurted, “When did you meet Maelon?”

Kaylee opened her eyes. “Who?”

“Dr. Maelon Perry, Snowridge’s head doctor. It’s his scent mixed with yours. I know for sure it’s him because he’s here. Just like fingerprints, a dragon’s scent is unique.”

The blood drained from her face. “He’s here?”

Gregor nodded. “Shall I fetch him?”

Kaylee’s heart pounded in her chest as she tried to process Gregor’s words. Yes, she’d dreamed of seeing the dark-haired dragonman again. However, she hadn’t expected him to be here, of all places. And his weird accent made sense now—he was Welsh.

She was more than aware she hadn’t answered Gregor’s question, but her mind was a jumble. The whole point of the

masquerade had been to keep their identities secret. Would Maelon be angry? Aloof? Dismiss her as not his problem?

There was a small, very small, chance he might want to get to know her. And yet, if he rejected her, it would sting.

Kaylee looked at each doctor in turn, trying to figure out how to answer. However, Layla's gentle voice garnered her attention. "You should probably tell him, Kaylee. I don't know what you two will do, but sooner or later, the DDA will ask about it. And they'll require you to reveal the father. Wouldn't it be better to let him hear it from you first?"

She glanced down at her hands. Her sister had always cautioned that her rash behavior and reckless decisions would catch up with her. Kaylee had tried her best to be better in Scotland, but one slipup had undone everything.

She would disappoint Gina, and that was the worst thing since her sister's opinion mattered more to her than anyone else's.

Layla touched her arm, and Kaylee met her flashing dragon eyes. The doctor said softly, "Maelon's a nice enough bloke, and handsome as well. He won't hurt you, lass. If that's what you're afraid of."

Kaylee shook her head. "I never felt threatened by him. That's not it."

She'd felt comfortable in his presence, which was why she'd ended up having a one-night stand with the guy. As a rule, she didn't do that.

Now she understood why she shouldn't have.

Layla asked, "What is it, then?"

She blurted, "Will I be forced to mate him?"

"I honestly don't know, Kaylee. It's possible Finn can work out a deal with the DDA for you to live on Lochguard with your bairn. Unless..."

Her voice trailed off, and Kaylee asked, "Unless what?"

“Unless Maelon wants to claim his child. Then I’m not sure what will happen, lass. Almost always, the dragon-shifter parent is given precedence over the human one. Which means you’d have to mate him to stay with the wee one.”

The thought of having to mate a dragon-shifter just to have a claim on her child, like in the days of old, when men’s rights were always prioritized over women, made her angry.

*It’s just a taste of how the dragon-shifter world differs from the human one, Kaylee. You’d better get used to it, since you’ll have a little dragon baby of your own soon enough.*

She took a deep breath, trying to tame her anger. After all, she might be getting ahead of herself. The dragonman might not even want a child. If that was the case, she could live on Lochguard near her sister and their children could grow up together.

Except she didn’t know what this Dr. Maelon Perry would want. There was no way around it—she’d have to talk to him.

Before she could change her mind, she said, “I need to see him.”

There was no confusion about the him in question. Layla nodded and glanced at Gregor. The dragonman nodded. “Aye, I’ll fetch him. But are you sure you want to do this now? You might want to rest first. I’m not sure how Maelon will react to the news.”

Kaylee shook her head. “No, I want to do it now. If I wait, I’ll just keep thinking about what-ifs, and it’ll drive me crazy.”

Layla added, “Besides, Kaylee needs to get a shot of dragon’s blood as soon as possible. The father’s works best, aye?”

Kaylee jumped in, “But Gina didn’t have the father’s blood for her first pregnancy. And she was fine.”

Layla replied, “Aye, but I think that’s because Fergus was her true mate, and so his blood helped her more than normal.” She paused and then asked, “Did Maelon kiss you on the mouth?”

She mumbled, “No.”

Gregor went to the door. “Aye, well, then let’s talk to Maelon and go from there.”

Once the door shut, Kaylee asked Layla, “Do you like him?”

“Maelon? Aye, well enough. He’s come a long way, that’s for sure. He doubted Sid’s abilities at first, but I think having his clan leader mated to someone like Delaney has changed his mind about females quite a bit.” She opened her mouth to ask more questions, but Layla shook her head and beat her to it. “I think it’s best if you talk with him and make judgments for yourself, aye?”

With a sigh, Kaylee murmured her agreement. And as she waited, she shifted in her seat, wondering about the dragonman who had changed her life forever.

## Chapter Four

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Maelon sat inside the research section of Clan Stonefire's surgery, going over some of Dr. Trahern Lewis's research notes, when there was a knock on the door. Trahern sat next to him and frowned but didn't bother to go check who was there.

To some, the male's behavior would be strange, but Maelon had known Trahern nearly his whole life. Before moving to Stonefire, Trahern had lived on Snowridge in Wales, where they'd both grown up.

While odd at times, Trahern was clever and one of the few minds who kept up with Maelon's own. He didn't realize how much he'd missed the other dragonman—quirks and all—until he'd been gone.

The knocking increased in volume, and Maelon went to answer the door; on the other side of it stood Dr. Gregor Innes. Even if they hadn't known each other long—the clans had been a lot more isolated from each other in the past—the male was nice enough and competent. However, his eyes were flashing rapidly, full of emotions Maelon couldn't identify. "Yes?"

Gregor said, "I need you to come with me."

His tone was a bit sterner than normal. "Why?"

"Just come with me, aye? There's something I need to discuss with you."

He was about to say he was busy when Maelon's dragon spoke up. *Something is wrong. Don't argue for once.*

*I don't argue for the sake of it.*

*Yes, you do. Don't ruin our new friendships with the other doctors.*

His dragon had somehow ended up being one of the few in the world who cared about human-type rules and niceties. Probably out of necessity, since Maelon tended to be blunter and more honest than anyone liked.

He replied to his beast, *I don't understand you sometimes.*

His dragon huffed. *Good. Dragons should be mysterious.*

He nearly chuckled, but instead focused on Gregor. "Okay, but not for long. I'm helping Trahern with one of his formulas."

Gregor nodded and turned. "Let's go down the hall, aye?"

The Scottish dragonman's usual humor was absent. Had any of Maelon's suggestions for helping Jane Hartley—a human on Stonefire—made her condition worse?

No, that couldn't be it. He never gave suggestions unless they were sound, meaning the reward was greater than the risk.

They stopped in front of one of the smaller examination rooms. Gregor glanced at him and said, "Prepare yourself, lad."

He frowned at the cryptic remark, but then the Scot opened the door and walked inside. Maelon followed, but quickly stopped in his tracks as he noticed the human female in the room.

And not just any female, but *her*—the one with slightly wild, curly brown hair, pale skin dotted with freckles, and brown eyes that bordered on golden.

Eyes that had looked at him with heat and desire as she came around his cock.



She was just as beautiful as he remembered. Part of him itched to cross the room and touch her cheek.

But then his common sense returned. Her presence, combined with Gregor's tone, told him something was afoot. And he wanted answers. "What the bloody hell is going on here?"

The female flinched, and his dragon growled. *Stop being an arsehole and be nice.*

His dragon was usually right about these things, so Maelon cleared his throat and said, "Apologies. I'm surprised, is all, and a bit confused."

Even with his awkward social skills, he knew that blurting out they'd shagged at a masquerade three months ago probably wasn't the best idea.

Then he really looked at the female—they'd never exchanged names—and noticed her eyes were slightly puffy, she had circles under her eyes, and she was far too pale.

His doctor's instinct to help kicked in, and he walked over to her. He stopped right in front of her and was about to ask what was wrong when he was bombarded with something he'd hoped never to find—his scent intertwined with a female's.

She was pregnant.

With his child.

He took a few steps backward, trying to make sense of the situation. He'd worn a condom. This shouldn't have happened.

His dragon said, *It failed. And it only takes once.*

Gregor's voice kept Maelon from replying to his beast. "Aye, now you know what's going on—she's pregnant with your bairn. The question is—what do you plan to do about it?"

What was he going to do? He had no fucking idea, that was for sure.

His dragon growled. *You might not have wanted a child, but the deed is done. Will you abandon them? Really?*

*You're just saying that because you've always wanted children.*

*No, I'm thinking of the human female. Look at her, really look at her. She's having a hard time carrying our child. If we don't help, she could die.*

Maelon had never really had to worry about a human carrying a dragon-shifter's child before. Mostly because Snowridge hadn't had any human mates in a long time, until their clan leader, Rhydian, had mated the human female named Delaney. By then, they'd had the means and knowledge to make her pregnancies easier.

But it was true—before Dr. Sid's research and trials, human females hadn't had high survival rates. And if the human female looked this bad this early, she needed treatment.

Specifically, shots of his dragon's blood.

Maelon may never have wanted to be a father, but he had a deep-seated need to save lives. He couldn't willingly let her suffer. Which meant his life was about to change forever. Because he'd at least make sure she survived the pregnancy and the birth.

After that? Well, he tried not to think about it.

He cleared his throat. "I'll shift and need someone to draw some blood. She'll need it right away." He turned toward the door, but the female's American accent reached his ears. "Wait a second."

Frowning, he turned his head over his shoulder. "Yes?"

She bit her bottom lip, but Maelon forced himself not to think of the last time she'd done it, as he'd stroked between her thighs.

She said, "Don't you even want to know my name?"

"I suppose."

Fire flickered in her gaze. "Never mind. Just go away."

Impatience raced through him. "Excuse me for wanting to heal you. By all means, let's chat a bit."

Gregor growled, “Maelon.”

“What? Every second we waste on niceties, the higher the chance her health will go from bad to worse. I’ll help her first, and we can talk later. I’ll be behind the surgery, so send someone to draw my blood.”

As he walked down the hall and toward the back door, his dragon grunted. *You were rude to her.*

*I don’t care. I’d rather be brusque than watch her suffer.*

*What do you plan to do about her and the baby?*

Maelon didn’t answer. Dragon hunters had murdered his father, and his mother had been so grief-stricken that she’d committed suicide soon after. In the end, her love for her mate had been greater than that for her son.

He’d vowed never to take a mate or have children. That way, he’d never have to worry about disappointing or abandoning them.

Now, he didn’t know what the fuck he was going to do.

Regardless, he would focus on the most pressing issues for the moment. Once he shucked his clothes, he focused on wings sprouting from his back, his nose elongating into a snout, and his arms and legs growing into limbs. When he stood in his blue dragon form, he stretched his wings, itching to jump into the air, return to Snowridge, and back to his ordered life.

Except as Gregor came out with the necessary supplies to draw his blood, Maelon knew he couldn’t do that.

Bloody hell, he’d have to talk to Rhydian about this.

His dragon asked, *And what about the female?*

*I need to think on it.*

*Stop being an asshole.*

Maelon ignored his beast and waited for Gregor to finish. However, the dragonman kept the needle in place, even after completing the blood draw, knowing full well Maelon couldn’t move until he removed it.

Gregor eyed him as he said, “Her name is Kaylee MacDonald. And if you hurt her, you’ll be dealing with not only her clan of Lochguard, but Stonefire as well. So tread carefully, aye?”

Gregor’s usual friendliness was gone, replaced with a steely gaze.

*Fuck.* The complications to his life had already begun.

Not wanting to burn bridges, Maelon nodded. Satisfied, Gregor left and allowed Maelon to shift back into his human form. Once dressed, he went looking for his clan leader.

His dragon sighed. *And the female?*

*Later. I need to make sure Snowridge will be a safe place for her before I make any kind of decision.*

*Maybe she doesn’t want to come to Snowridge. If you talked to her, you could find out.*

*I won’t propose anything I can’t follow through on. Now, hush. I see Rhydian just up ahead.*

The Welsh leader was, in fact, with his human mate. Delaney noticed him first and started to raise a hand in greeting when her eyebrows came together. As soon as he stopped in front of him, Delaney asked, “What the bloody hell is wrong with you?”

When Delaney had first arrived on Snowridge, Maelon hadn’t known what to expect of the human. But over time, he’d come to appreciate her manner. She’d also learned to trust him, after he’d helped with her pregnancies.

He cleared his throat. “Can I chat with you both for a second?”

Rhydian’s brows shot up at that. “You better start talking.”

Maelon told them the main points about meeting the human at a party, sleeping with her, and just now finding out that she was pregnant. When he finished, Delaney asked, “She isn’t your true mate, then?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. Between the alcohol dulling my senses and no kissing on the mouth, I couldn’t tell.”

Rhydian stared at him. Hard. “And this is why dragon-shifters shouldn’t drink, aye? Now that she’s pregnant, you won’t be able to tell if she’s your true mate unless you kiss her since your dragon will be drawn to the child over any true mate pull. But putting that aside for a moment, what does she want to do?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t ask her.”

Delaney narrowed her eyes. “You didn’t ask her? Are you serious?”

His dragon sat up, smugly, but didn’t say anything. His posture alone said, “I told you so.”

Ignoring his beast, he replied, “My first concern was for her health. Besides, I didn’t know what to say or do. She should probably live with Snowridge until the baby is born, at least, so I can give her my dragon’s blood. But is the clan safe for her?”

Even though Delaney was human and lived on Snowridge, she was a former professional boxer who could take care of herself. The human female—Kaylee, he reminded himself—was far more delicate. She was kind, funny, and full of life, and probably tried to always see the best in people. That was what had drawn him to her in the first place.

However, she was also young, probably naïve, and wouldn’t be able to knock out someone who tried to hurt her, like Delaney could do. And even if he didn’t know Kaylee, he wouldn’t risk her life unnecessarily.

Rhydian crossed his arms over his chest. “It should be safe for her. The rogue Protectors who tried to hurt Delaney were handed over to the Department of Dragon Affairs, and I’ve slowly ‘retired’ the most vocal of the older clan members to the outlying homes bordering the farms.”

Unlike most dragon clans, Snowridge was situated mostly inside a set of mountains. They had a series of outlying farms

to help feed the clan, though. And Rhydian had built small cottages in the most unproductive areas for those who mistrusted humans even a little—it was easier to monitor them that way.

Maelon nodded. “Then she should move to Snowridge until the child is born. I’ll make sure she survives.”

Delaney asked drolly, “Have you considered the fact that she might not want to move to Snowridge and be away from her family? She’s only on Lochguard because of her sister. That much I know. Which probably means she’s close to her.”

Maelon shrugged. “It’s not forever. And I would think she wants her best chance at survival.”

Delaney rolled her eyes. “You’re brilliant when it comes to medicine, but sometimes you’re a bloody eejit, Maelon.” She glanced at her mate. “You can deal with him. I’m going to talk to Kaylee and see what she wants to do.”

Maelon was about to protest, but Rhydian said, “Let her go, Maelon. You and I need to talk to Finn. Even if she doesn’t want to move to Snowridge, he needs to know about this. Especially if the human wants to stay with us for a bit.”

He knew better than to argue with his clan leader, and so they headed toward the cottage where Finn and his mate were staying.

Then he remembered Finn’s mate was close to birthing their fourth child. *Bloody fantastic*. That meant Finn would be less congenial than normal, no doubt.

His dragon spoke up. *Maybe try to be nice and follow social niceties for once.*

Maelon merely grunted in reply.

Rhydian knocked, and Finn opened the door shortly thereafter. As the Scottish clan leader glanced between him and Rhydian, he asked, “What’s happened?”

Gesturing toward Maelon, Rhydian answered, “He’s the father of Kaylee MacDonald’s child.”

Finn's eyes widened, his pupils flashing rapidly. "What? Kaylee's pregnant?"

Rhydian frowned. "You didn't know?"

Finn eyed Maelon closely, his tone steely as he asked, "Did you take advantage of her?"

"No," he replied.

Finn looked unconvinced—maybe there was a story there that he didn't know—and stepped back. "You two had better come inside. We'll chat before I send for Kaylee."

Soon, they sat and discussed the events. Eventually, Kaylee arrived with Delaney. Since her coloring was better, she must've received her first shot of dragon's blood.

The human female never looked at him, though. No, she merely sat, fixed her gaze on Finn, and waited, as if expecting a scolding.

However, Finn merely softened his expression and said, "No worries, lass. I'll help you in any way that I can."

Maelon nearly said he'd help her, but bit his tongue. He said to his dragon, *Stop it.*

*I didn't do anything.*

*You did. You want to protect her.*

*Yes, I do. But maybe you do too.*

With a mental grunt, he didn't say anything else while he waited to see what came next.

## Chapter Five

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Kaylee's jaw had dropped when Dr. Maelon Perry had left the examination room, not even caring about what her name was.

Gone was the intense, sexy dragonman from a few months ago. In his place was a man too highhanded and cocky for his own good.

Layla tried to calm her down. But Kaylee's mind raced, barely registering anything until Dr. Innes returned with a vial of dark red dragon's blood. Within seconds of it being injected, her dizziness faded, and she felt a little stronger. Time would tell if it helped with her nausea or not.

Soon there was a knock, and the dark-haired form of Delaney Griffiths, the mate of Snowridge's leader, walked in. Delaney shook her head as she said, "Sorry about Maelon. His manners are shite, but he's a brilliant doctor." The woman stared at her a second before asking, "How are you?"

Kaylee's eyes heated, but she forced herself not to cry. She'd held it together this long, and she could do it a little longer.

Something must've shown on her face, however, because Delaney placed a hand over hers and squeezed. "Rhydian won't make you do anything that you don't want to do, Kaylee."

"I'm not worried about him. But..."

"But what?"



“But, he—Maelon—he’s just so...different from before.”

“Different how?”

She shrugged. “He was almost charming. Among other things.”

Such as whispering dirty words into her ear and making her come hard not long after.

Or holding her close as she fell asleep.

*But he also left you without a word, Kaylee. Remember that.*

Delaney tilted her head. “Well, Maelon is a somewhat private person. So if he let down his guard around you a wee bit, then he must’ve felt comfortable around you. That says something, aye?”

“Maybe,” she mumbled. The alcohol had probably been a bigger influence on his behavior, though. Not that she’d mention it.

Delaney’s cell phone beeped, and she checked it. “Come on, Kaylee. Rhydian and Maelon are with Finn. It’s best to get this over with now. I’m sure keeping it a secret has taken its toll, aye?”

She gave a wobbly smile. “I guess.”

Delaney gently squeezed her shoulder. “Well, the secret is out, and you have people to lean on now. You may not know me, but I promise you that Rhydian and I will help you in any way that we can.”

Kaylee was about to ask why they’d do that, but decided not to. The dragon’s blood had helped, but she was still tired, so very tired, and the meeting with Finn and Maelon would take all her remaining energy.

She waved goodbye to Layla and was grateful that Delaney didn’t make small talk. The woman was a lot older than Kaylee, and taller, too. She definitely looked like the type of person who could stand up to a dragon-shifter in a physical fight and win.

They arrived at Finn's cottage, and a very pregnant Arabella opened the door. She smiled at Kaylee and said, "Finn has your back, Kaylee. Don't worry."

She nodded, her throat tightening with emotion. "I know I should've said something to you before."

Arabella pulled her in for a hug—well as best she could, given how pregnant she was. "Don't worry about it." She pulled back. "Besides, Finn owes you for how much you've helped me out. You're brilliant with the triplets."

Kaylee had grown closer with Arabella over the last six months or so, once she'd started regularly watching her children. It was a far cry from the first time she'd met Arabella, when the dragonwoman had seemed distant and a little intimidating because of the scars on her face and healed burns on her neck.

But Arabella was kind at heart and loved Lochguard nearly as much as her own family. Not to mention she helped keep Finn balanced and sane, which many people probably didn't realize.

Just the thought of not seeing the triplets several times a week brought back the stupid stinging to her eyes. But since nothing had been decided yet, Kaylee swallowed and composed herself. "I'm ready to see Finn."

Arabella gestured down the hall. "You'd best go in. I'll stay in the kitchen, otherwise Finn will be distracted. I'm always here if you need to talk."

"Thanks, Ara."

After smiling at the dragonwoman, Kaylee took a deep breath and went to the door indicated and knocked. Finn answered, his eyes kind.

She instantly felt awful for hiding anything from him.

From the corner of her eye, she noticed Maelon and Rhydian. Deliberately not looking at the doctor, she focused on Finn.

He said softly, “No worries, lass. I’ll help you in any way that you need.”

A tear escaped her eye, and Kaylee brushed it away. “I’m sorry, Finn.”

Finn handed her a tissue, and she took it. He said, “No more apologies, lass. Now, we need to discuss your future. You have two choices at this point—stay on Lochguard and we’ll find dragon’s blood donors to help you. The other option is to go to Snowridge for the duration of your pregnancy and Maelon will provide you with dragon’s blood. The latter is slightly better for you and the bairn, but only by a little.”

Still not looking at Maelon, Kaylee asked, “Will I be able to keep the baby? Or will *he* try to take him or her away?”

Maelon spoke up. “I have no desire to raise children, but I’ll help support you, if you need it. And I won’t fight for custody.”

Kaylee finally looked at the Welsh doctor. His face was unreadable, although his pupils flashed rapidly. Before she could think better of it, she blurted, “What’s your dragon saying?”

It was bad manners to ask, but she didn’t care. Given how he’d been an asshole earlier, he couldn’t expect her to be all kindness and politeness, pretending as if nothing had happened.

Her sister might say she should try to be nice to avoid conflict until she had all the facts. But when Kaylee’s temper showed, it usually didn’t bode well for anyone.

And given how Maelon glanced away from her, it definitely stoked her temper.

He looked at the wall as he replied, “That’s private.”

Rhydian growled. “Bloody hell, Maelon. What’s wrong with you? I know you don’t care for social niceties, but this female carries your child. You could try a little harder.”

Finn’s steely voice made Kaylee blink since her clan leader rarely lost his good humor. “I’m not sure I want Kaylee to go

anywhere if this is how you're going to treat her.”

The tension in the room was thick and having lived with dragon-shifters for a while now, Kaylee knew that if she didn't do something, the situation would go downhill. Fast.

She stood, grateful that she was steady on her feet, and stated, “I have a question for you, Dr. Perry.”

His eyes finally met hers, his gaze intent, and it reminded her of when they'd first met.

Not wanting to go down that road, she continued, “Why me? Of all the people there that night, why did you pick me?”

For a second, she thought he wouldn't answer. Then he said quietly, “You're so full of life. I couldn't resist it.”

His answer made her pause. Normally, when not struggling with nausea and carrying a dragon's baby, she was more carefree and playful. She was the one asking to slide down a dragon's side like a slide, or picking flowers to make into a crown, or even laying in the grass to stare up at the stars and make up her own constellations, complete with new stories.

The fact he'd noticed that made her blurt, “Why couldn't you resist it?”

Maelon still stared at her, his pupils flashing to slits and back, before he said, “My childhood ended early, and I had to grow up quickly. That night, you made me feel as if I could let go and have fun, uncaring about any responsibilities for once. That's why.”

For a few beats, there was no one else in the room but the two of them. She wanted to ask him what had happened, why he didn't let go sometimes, or why he'd turned into the current icicle of a man compared to before.

But then Maelon cleared his throat and looked away quickly, as if burned.

Maybe it was stupid, and she would come to regret it. However, she wanted the chance to get to know him better. For the sake of her baby, of course. That's what mattered.

Okay, and maybe a teeny, tiny bit for herself.

“I want to go to Snowridge until the baby is born, provided you agree to two conditions.”

Rhydian asked, “Which are?”

“Dr. Perry is required to have two meals with me each week, at the place of my choosing.”

Rhydian frowned. “As long as it’s cleared with my Protectors, that should be fine. What’s the other?”

“I want to work with the children on Snowridge while I’m there. I need to keep busy, or I’ll go crazy.”

Rhydian frowned, but Delaney—who currently sat in his lap—answered before her mate, “I think that’s brilliant. The more humans the kids are exposed to, the better.”

Since the doctor hadn’t said anything, Kaylee tested out his first name. “Maelon? Do you agree?”

He glanced at her and then away. “Yes.”

Kaylee had been upset before at Maelon looking away. But she’d noticed something—he didn’t really look anyone in the eye, and if so, then not for long.

So why had he been staring at her every chance he got the night of the masquerade?

Was there a reason for his change in behavior?

Crap, now she really did want to talk with him more and find out the answers. Her curiosity was going to get the better of her someday, that was for sure.

She looked at Rhydian and then Finn. “Is that okay?”

Finn nodded. “I’ll add regular check-ins with me to the requirements, as well as some visits from Lochguard clan members to also check on your health.”

Rhydian grunted. “Aye, that’s fine with me. When?”

Kaylee took a deep breath and then answered, “I’ll go to Snowridge not long after the gathering is over. I just need enough time to pack and convince my sister and her mate not to follow me to Wales.”

Finn chuckled. “Good luck with that. Gina is protective of you, which means so is Fergus. But don’t worry—I’ll help where I can. Even if it means I’m losing the best part-time nanny in the world for my triplets.”

Kaylee smiled at Finn. “There are a few people I know of who could help you.”

“You and I will chat some more later, Kaylee. For now, we all need to rest and get ready for the celebration tomorrow.” He stood. “Should I let you and your mate have this room alone for a bit, Rhydian? You seem quite cozy in that chair, aye?”

Rhydian glared, but Delaney laughed. “We can have sex in a chair some other time. For now, we need to check on our children and feed those wee rascals, too.”

She stood, along with Rhydian. They both nodded at her, mentioning they’d talk soon, and left. Finn looked between her and Maelon before moving to the door. “I can leave you two alone for a bit, aye?”

The burst of energy she’d received from the dragon’s blood was fading. She simply didn’t have the energy to deal with the dragon doctor right now. So she shook her head. “I’ll talk to him on Snowridge. I need some time to prepare.”

With that, she left, unaware of Maelon’s gaze following her every movement.

## Chapter Six

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**T**wo weeks later, Kaylee stared up at the giant gates with “Snowridge” entwined among the metal and took a few deep breaths. This was really happening. She was going to live in Wales.

As she placed a hand over her ever-growing belly, she hoped she’d made the right choice. Her sister hadn’t been so sure but, in the end, Kaylee had convinced Gina and her mate to stay back in Scotland and let her figure this out on her own.

Finn Stewart sat in the driver’s seat of the car they were in and asked, “Are you okay, lass?”

She forced a smile. “I’m just a little nervous.”

“You can change your mind at any time and come home.”

While she’d lived on Lochguard for a while now, she didn’t think of it as home. Hell, no place had felt like home since her sister had fled Virginia and then later her parents had gone into the Witness Protection Program, never to be seen again.

Of course, trying to find her person, trying to find a place to belong, had gotten her into this mess in the first place. So maybe she needed to stop imagining some perfect place that would suit her and be content living near her sister.

Especially since Maelon hadn’t even bothered to talk with her back on Stonefire, or even cared about her name. He certainly wasn’t going to be her fairytale ending.

No, she just had to make it through the next how many months and then she could focus on her baby and their future in Scotland.

“Lass?”

She looked over at Finn, his brown eyes concerned and pupils flashing. She hated worrying both man and beast. “It’s fine, Finn. For my baby’s sake, I need to be here and at least try to get to know the father.”

“Aye, but if he doesn’t treat you well, let me know. You’re still part of our clan, Kaylee, no matter where you are.”

His words made her throat close up. Finn had been nothing but kind and supportive from the first time she’d set foot on Lochguard.

She would miss him and everyone else, but she’d made her decision and would stick with it. “I know. But give me some credit. If I can charm and get your children to behave, I can handle just about anything.”

“Aye, maybe.”

“Finn—“

“I know, lass. I know. I just worry. Keep in touch as promised, aye?”

“Of course.”

The metal gates opened, and Finn drove inside. Because of her pregnancy, Finn hadn’t allowed Kaylee to fly to the remote location of Clan Snowridge.

Once he parked, they exited the car and headed toward the giant main entrance doors. Clan Snowridge differed from Lochguard in so many ways, but the biggest was the fact the Welsh dragon clan was mostly situated inside the mountains. The idea of living inside a mountain was daunting, even with the Welsh leader’s human mate saying it was cozier than one would expect.

Speaking of the woman, Delaney’s tall, dark-haired form walked out alongside her mate, Rhydian, with a smile on her face.



There was no sign of Kaylee's baby daddy, though.

Doing her best not to let his absence sting, she forced a smile. Delaney spoke before her mate. "Nice to see you again, Kaylee. It's going to be fantastic having another human around, aye?"

Despite the number of humans living on Lochguard—or even Clan Stonefire in England—the other dragon clans in the UK were having a harder time getting human mates.

Not that she was going to end up a mate. Maelon had barely given her a second glance when he'd discovered her identity and found out she was pregnant with his child.

Rhydian nodded at her, the three scars across his pale cheek still a little intimidating. "Welcome to Snowridge, Kaylee. Everything's been prepared for you, like we discussed. Did you want to settle in before the paperwork or any kind of tour?"

Even though she was tired—sitting still in a car for so long was difficult for her—she shook her head. "I'd rather get all the details figured out so Finn can get back to his clan and family."

Finn said, "It's all right, lass. You can rest first."

"No." She smiled. "I won't be able to sleep anyway, wondering what Ara and the triplets are doing. Especially with Ara's due date so close."

It was exactly the right thing to say because worry crossed Finn's expression.

She added, "I'll be fine, Finn. Delaney and Rhydian will look after me."

After a beat, he sighed. "Okay. Then let's get everything sorted. But remember that I'm only a call away."

She bobbed her head. "I know." She looked at Delaney and Rhydian. "I know there's some last-minute paperwork to sign. Once all that's finished, I either need to visit a grocery store or a restaurant because I'm starving."

It was weird to be hungry after so many weeks of constantly throwing up. But ever since she'd received a shot of dragon's blood, her stomach had behaved.

And now she couldn't stop eating.

Delaney gestured down the hallway. "We'll get a takeaway, and you can settle in for the night. Tomorrow we'll meet again, to discuss your place within the clan."

Every clan member contributed in some way. It'd been like that on Lochguard, so she'd expected it for Snowridge. "Then let's get going."

Finn talked with the mated couple as Kaylee followed, mesmerized by the tapestries lining the walls. They displayed all kinds of stories, from battles to kings and queens to even a large gathering of dragons. The decorations were never-ending, and she wondered if the entire cave system was the same.

Well, given how it was a lot better than staring at rock day in and day out, she could see how it had motivated Snowridge to make them.

Soon she was distracted with paperwork. After saying goodbye to Finn and Delaney buying her dinner, Kaylee retreated to her room with a burger and fries.

Her apartment was a one-bedroom, with a small kitchen and living area and a normal-sized bathroom. The only window was in the living room, overlooking the valley below.

Also, wooden panels and fabric wallpaper covered the stone walls. It was very old-style England, or rather old-style Wales. Similar to what she'd seen in some of the big fancy houses in the countryside. Estates, or whatever they were called, like the big house in *Pride and Prejudice*.

It wasn't really her style, though, and once she had a job and some income, Kaylee was determined to make her temporary home a little more welcoming.

As she sat on the couch and ate her french fries, she couldn't stand the silence. The fanciful part of her wished Maelon was here, answering her questions about the clan, and

maybe even showing a bit of the charm she'd seen the night they'd met.

However, given how Rhydian had said he was in the middle of an experiment and wouldn't be seen for days, she wouldn't hold her breath.

No, what she needed to do was stop believing in fairy tales or happy endings or romance novels. She was here for her health, to help her child, and nothing else. Oh, she had plans to help the clan too, for taking her in.

But there would be no men, no romance, and no fanciful ideas of finding her true mate like her sister had done.

Kaylee had made her bed, and now she had to make the best of it.

## Chapter Seven

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**M**aelon woke up with a start at his desk, a crick in his neck, and he groaned.

His dragon huffed. *That's what you get for not going to bed when I told you.*

*Stuff it, dragon. I was on the verge of a breakthrough, and I couldn't risk it.*

*You weren't, not really. It's just an excuse.*

*What's that supposed to mean?*

*You know what it means. Stop being a coward and go find her. You may fool everyone else, but not me. You dreamed of her for months, learned she carries our child, and then completely ignore her. Why?*

Not wanting to answer his dragon, Maelon headed into his bedroom and then his bathroom to shower. As the hot water helped to clear his mind, he did his best *not* to think of Kaylee MacDonald wandering the halls of Snowridge.

Rhydian had told him of Kaylee's arrival, but hadn't pestered him beyond that. Well, at least not yet. Knowing his clan leader—one of his few friends in the world—Rhydian would do it soon enough. Especially if Maelon tried to back out of the agreement he'd made with the human female to have dinner with her twice a week.

His dragon grunted. *You shouldn't make her find us. We should go after her.*

*Leave me alone.*

*One day, your belief that loving anyone will only hurt you is going to make you a lonely, miserable old codger.*

He didn't reply.

Instead, Maelon checked his mobile phone and saw Rhydian's message about Kaylee's first doctor visit. Everything had gone well.

*We should've been there.*

*If I go see her now, will you stop pestering me?*

*Not forever. But maybe for today.*

*Fine. I'll meet her for dinner tonight. It'll knock off one of my weekly requirements and make you shut it. Double win.*

*Fuck off.*

Some people's inner dragons were friendly or funny or always supportive. More often than not, his beast was angry or disappointed in him.

After getting ready, Maelon exited his flat and headed toward Rhydian's office. The door was open, and he strode inside.

His clan leader glanced up, raised an eyebrow, and then leaned back in his chair. "Finally decided to show your face, aye?"

He sunk into the chair in front of Rhydian's desk and studied the giant whiteboard on the wall, where his clan leader wrote out upcoming events and meetings. Quite a few of them were related to Kaylee, and at one in particular, he frowned. "You're going to have a clan gathering for her?"

"Yes. I don't want rumors flying and would rather tackle it head on. You should accompany her."

He dared a glance at Rhydian. "You being with her would be more effective."

Rhydian stared at him and Maelon's skin felt prickly, to the point he looked away. Not because he was afraid, but he often

had trouble holding gazes for long.

His dragon murmured, *Except with her.*

Maelon asked, “Why should I accompany her?”

“Well, if you mean to claim the baby and take care of him or her, then it would show your claim and support to the others.” Rhydian paused, waiting for an answer, but Maelon remained silent. Rhydian continued, “However, if you want her to try and find a dragonman who’ll mate her, then maybe you should stay away.”

The thought of anyone else seeing Kaylee’s pale, soft skin or hearing her cries as she came made him clench his fingers into a fist.

But he quickly relaxed his hand. “If she wants to find a mate, then she can. It won’t be me.”

His beast growled, but Rhydian spoke before his dragon could. “You still haven’t told me how you met the female. If she’s pregnant with your child, then you liked her at one point.”

The memory of Kaylee dancing and later teasing him sent an ache of longing through him.

But then he remembered his mother’s note, the one she’d left after killing herself, and he banished the feeling. “There’s a difference between wanting to fuck someone and wanting to mate them.”

“Aye. But Delaney likes her, as do I. Plus, we both think Kaylee would help balance out your seriousness, which you desperately need.”

“I’m fine. I’m not a child.”

“Sometimes you could fool me.”

The biting remark stung, and he glared at his clan leader. “Can I still tell you to fuck off? Or did that privilege vanish when you became clan leader?”

“We’ve been friends a long time, Maelon. Don’t pretend otherwise.” He grunted, and Rhydian added, “No matter

what's going on inside that head of yours, you need to see her. You made the bargain, and I won't allow you to back out of it."

"I was going to visit her after seeing you. I may not want a mate, but I don't lie and break vows."

"Good. Then go and see her. She doesn't know many people here, and even if you're acting like a grumpy bastard, you're still a friendly face. Try to play nice with her."

"I won't upset a pregnant female. I'm a doctor, after all."

Rhydian grunted, as if unconvinced.

He stood. "Nice to see you, too. I've got stuff to do."

"Then have fun. And oh, Maelon?"

"Yes?"

"Hurt this female, and our friendship is over. Even if it ends up being unintentional, I won't care."

He glanced at his friend. Rhydian's mate had been ill recently, which always made him more protective. "I won't do anything to hurt her, if I can help it."

After a beat, Rhydian sighed. "That's the best I can hope for. Now, go. I have a pile of paperwork to finish for the Department of Dragon Affairs."

With a nod, Maelon left.

But he had no peace because his dragon spoke up. *Are you really going to let other males try to woo her?*

*Why not? She wants a future I can't provide.*

His dragon fell silent, which wasn't a good sign.

Regardless, he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth and ask his dragon why he was sulking. So Maelon swung by one of the clan shops, picked up a few things for Kaylee, and then headed to her flat. He might not want to keep her, but he could try being a little nicer to her.

For the sake of the baby, of course. Not because her hurt expression from their meeting on Stonefire still ate at him.



KAYLEE WAS LOOKING through her list of prospective jobs when someone knocked on her front door. Since only Rhydian, Delaney, and a few of her neighbors had stopped by over the last two days, she frowned and went to answer it. Looking through the peephole, her eyes widened.

It was *him*.

Yes, he was still sexy, with his dark hair and rugged jaw. But her irritation and anger at being ignored over the last two days rose to the surface, banishing any nicer thoughts.

Maybe she should be more diplomatic, but as soon as she opened the door, she blurted, “Finally showed your face, did you?”

He raised an eyebrow. “I was working.”

Silence fell.

“Really? That’s your entire explanation?”

He looked past her into the apartment. “Can I come in?”

With a sigh, she stepped aside, and he strode in, all confident and handsome. Then she turned away to lock the door—Rhydian had suggested she always do that for her safety.

A few deep breaths calmed her temper a little, and she turned back to face Maelon. It was only then that she noticed he carried a potted plant and a bag.

He placed the green thing in a clay ceramic pot on her kitchen counter. “I thought you might like some nature to brighten up your flat. It’s quite a bit different living in a cave compared to living in the Scottish Highlands.”

While the rational part of her mind knew it was a nice gesture, the pregnant and pissed off side merely grunted. “What do you want?”

If he was surprised at her tone, he didn’t show it.



Where oh where was the dragonman who'd whispered dirty things into her ear?

He held up the canvas tote bag. "I brought you a few things to help you settle in. It can be chilly, so there's an electric blanket and some tea. None with caffeine, because that's bad for the baby. Oh, and some hot chocolate."

Maelon almost...rambled. Was he nervous?

Then he met her gaze and said, "I also wanted to have dinner with you tonight, at the clan's best restaurant."

Her anger eased a fraction. Not completely, but a guy bringing presents soothed her hurt feelings a little.

She walked over, took the bag from him, and looked through it. "What's the restaurant?"

"It's called Heart of the Mountain. It's a rather fanciful name, but no one asked my opinion."

She glanced up. His pupils flashed, and she itched to ask what his dragon was saying. However, whatever ease she'd felt at the masquerade had vanished, so she didn't. "There's nothing wrong with a little fantasy. I mean, you live inside a bunch of mountains. The tapestries are a start, but without a little beauty or magic or art, well, it'd be super dreary and would probably make people unhappy or depressed."

"It's never bothered me."

"Of course it hasn't." She sighed and went to put away the tea and hot chocolate. "As for dinner, it depends. Are you going to go AWOL again once it's over and say nothing to me until it's time for one of your required meals again?"

"Some of us have jobs and can't make plans on a whim."

She whipped around and narrowed her eyes. "Did you just accuse me of being lazy?"

"Er."

Taking a step toward him, she pointed a finger at him. "I just fucking arrived here, uprooted from everything I know, and I'm still finding my place. Oh, all while being pregnant,

my emotions out of control, and I'm getting fat. So excuse me if it takes a few days before I become useful and worthy in your eyes."

*Crap.* Maybe she shouldn't have said that. But she wasn't about to put up with his judgmental bullshit. Ever.

He blinked, clearly confused or startled. After another second, he said, "You're not fat."

She raised her eyebrows. "So the rest is true, then, huh?"

"No. I mean, some of it, yes. But I know it'll change with time."

"Keep digging that hole, buddy."

He stood a little straighter. "I agreed to give you dragon's blood and eat with you for meals. I don't have to coddle you or lie just to make you feel better."

She moved even closer to him, hating how she had to look up to meet his gaze. "Who are you and what have you done with the masked dragonman who charmed me into bed?"

He searched her eyes a for second before looking away. "Do you still want to eat dinner together or not? Because if you're just going to shout at me again, I'll make sure to bring earplugs."

Kaylee nearly stomped her foot in frustration. "Are you trying to be the biggest asshole of all time, or does it just come naturally?"

He said nothing for nearly a minute. Just as she was about to tell him to leave, he murmured, "I can't be charming."

She blinked at his word choice—can't. Not that he didn't want to, or wouldn't. But can't.

"Why?"

Maelon's brown eyes finally met hers again. "Because it leads to pain."

As she wondered how to answer that, he cleared his throat and went to stand by the door. "I'll be at the restaurant at seven this evening. Come if you want, or don't. It's your

choice.” He gestured toward the tote bag. “There’s a clan map in there, with the location marked, in case you need it.”

With that, he left, and Kaylee stared after him.

One minute the man was insulting her, the next he was saying something about pain, and then he’d ended with more useful gifts for her time on Snowridge.

Dr. Maelon Perry was complicated, to say the least.

Now she just needed to decide if she wanted to put up with his less-than-stellar personality to figure him out. Because somewhere inside of him was the masked dragonman she’d slept with. The only question was whether he only came out under the influence of alcohol, or if he’d return with a little patience.

Gah, sometimes Kaylee hated her curiosity and tendency to want to help people. It worked well when she looked after children, but it might cause all kinds of havoc with Maelon and her time on Snowridge.

Which was why she knew she’d meet him for dinner tonight. Maybe being in public would make him behave a little better. At least enough so they could have an honest conversation, one where he wouldn’t insult her again. And if she were lucky, he might even reveal a little more about why he thought being charming led to pain.

## Chapter Eight

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**M**aelon rearranged the cutlery on the table until it was in a perfect line, perpendicular to the edge.

He refused to look at the time again. Because it was already ten past seven.

His dragon spoke up. *If you hadn't insulted her, she might've shown up on time. Bloody hell, she might not come at all.*

It was true that he'd crossed a line, even by his own standards of honesty. And yet, he found it hard to restrain himself around the human female. Things just came out before he could stop them.

And that never, ever happened. Control was everything to him, because it was the only way to protect himself.

His beast sighed. *I want you to be more open, but know you won't do it. So maybe try to be nicer to the female. Even if you somehow resist her and part ways with our child, as a doctor, you know it's not good to upset her unnecessarily whilst pregnant.*

Of course he knew that. But from the first, Kaylee MacDonald had made his common sense go out the window.

His dragon perked up. *She's here.*

Lifting his head, he scanned the room. He saw her and promptly stopped breathing.

She wore the same black dress from when he'd first met her at the masquerade. It was a bit tighter across her breasts and hips than before, but it highlighted every curve and valley burned into his memory.

There was no mask this time, though. Just her hair piled atop her head and a simple necklace around her neck.

She met his gaze and frowned.

That wasn't a good sign.

His dragon snorted. *Don't mention how the dress is tight, or she might hit us over the head with her bag.*

Ignoring his dragon, he stood as Kaylee approached. Before she could say a word, he pulled out her chair. She glanced at him but sat down.

Standing above her, he had a magnificent view of her cleavage. Breasts he remembered caressing before taking her taut nipple into his mouth to torture her.

*Stop it.* She wasn't for him. Never again.

He sat back down and said, "You came."

"I have no idea why, but yes, I came. Although if you brought earplugs, then I'm leaving right now."

He nearly smiled. "No earplugs, I promise." He cleared his throat. "You look nice."

She blinked. "Um, thanks?"

"It's the dress from when we first met."

"I didn't think you'd notice."

It was on the tip of his tongue to say he'd always notice her, whether he wanted to or not. Because she was quite possibly the most beautiful woman in the world.

Wait, where the fuck had that come from?

Kaylee picked up the menu. "I thought maybe we could start over. You promise not to insult me, and I'll do my best not to lose my temper." She glanced up. "It's going to be hard, but somehow I'll manage."

He put out a hand to shake. “Hello. I’m Maelon. Nice to meet you.”

She smiled. As soon as her palm touched his, heat shot through his body and made his dragon growl.

“Nice to meet you, too. I’m Kaylee, your baby mama.”

He blinked, and she shook her head. “It’s called humor. Although, technically, it’s just the truth. But I find it hard to imagine you using the term ‘baby mama.’”

*How am I supposed to respond to that?* he asked his dragon.

*Maybe smile.*

Maelon cleared his throat. “How about we look at the menu and decide what to eat before discussing anything else?”

She picked up the menu, and her mouth parted in surprise. “They have taco salads here? I thought those didn’t exist in the UK.”

“Of course they do. But it’s a recent addition to this restaurant.”

She glanced up. “What, does this restaurant take suggestions and sometimes implement them?”

“Something like that.”

She waited, but he said nothing else, and she didn’t press him.

Good. Because he’d never share how he’d read her bio and likes after their blow-up earlier and then put in a request for her favorite foods. Rhydian might have had something to do with it happening so fast. He owed him.

But he could at least give her a taste of home. America was an ocean away from northern Wales.

The server approached—a dragonman in his mid-twenties who had a reputation of wooing females easily. Maelon only knew him from his previous broken arm several years ago; the server’s name was Aled.

Aled smiled at Kaylee, perfect teeth on display, and said, “What can I get you, lovely one?”

Maelon narrowed his eyes at the male. Was he flirting with Kaylee?

His dragon sniffed. *What if he is? It shouldn't matter. You don't want her.*

*It's highly inappropriate. She's new to the clan and pregnant.*

*So? Just because she's pregnant doesn't mean she's dead. Some women get randy during pregnancy. She might need to find a male or two to help her out.*

The image of Kaylee moaning as Aled thrust into her flashed into his mind, and Maelon clenched the menu in his hand, crumbling it.

Even though it was made of sturdy cardboard.

Kaylee met his gaze. “Is something wrong?”

“Nothing.”

She frowned, but then smiled up at Aled.

Maelon nearly growled.

Kaylee said, “I'll have the taco salad and a sparkling water. Oh, and lots of extra salsa. And cheese. And chicken.”

Aled chuckled. “How about just extra everything? I can even put it on the side, if you like.”

She beamed up at the male. “Perfect.” She put out a hand. “I'm Kaylee, by the way. And you are?”

“Aled.” He shook and released her hand. “You're the new human. You're not another boxer like Delaney, are you? I mean, don't get me wrong, she's brilliant. But it'd be nice to have a different kind of human around. We don't get many here.”

“Nope, I'm not a boxer. I've mostly watched kids in the past—I think you guys call it a childminder instead of daycare?—but I'm still figuring things out here.”

“Well, welcome to Snowridge. If you’re looking for something to do, my friends and I meet up at the little café every Saturday evening. Maybe you can join us one night.”

“I’d like that.”

Maelon growled, and both of them looked at him. “I want the shepherd’s pie and a pint of lager.” He held out the crumpled menu, a clear sign of dismissal.

Aled blinked and then took it. “Of course. And I won’t bother your mate-to-be any longer.”

“She’s not my mate-to-be.”

“He’s not my mate-to-be.”

They’d spoken at the same time.

Aled cleared his throat. “Is that so? At any rate, I’ll put in your orders and be back with your drinks.”

Once the male hurried off, Kaylee stared at him and tilted her head. “I thought dragon-shifters didn’t drink alcohol that often.”

“We don’t. But we’re allowed a pint a day, if we want. More than that can impair our dragons too much.”

“But you drank more than that the night of the masquerade, didn’t you?”

He lowered his voice. “Dragon-shifters sometimes can drink more under controlled circumstances. But we don’t talk about that event in public.”

“Okay, then.” She hitched a thumb toward where Aled had gone. “Why were you rude to him? He was nice.”

“Too nice.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“You’re pregnant with my child, and he was flirting with you.”

“So? You’ve made it clear that you don’t want anything to do with me. But it’d be nice to find a decent dragonman and have a role model for my child.”



It was their child, and yet he couldn't say that out loud.

Hell, he shouldn't care if Aled flirted with Kaylee.

And yet, for some reason, it fucking irritated him.

His dragon spoke up. *I'll be here when you figure it out.*

*I don't know why you're so smug. Since she already carries our child, you can tell if she's our true mate.*

*Only if you kiss her.*

*Which isn't going to happen.*

Kaylee sighed and rubbed her forehead. "Can we just go back to being nice to each other for the rest of the meal? I'm hungry, my head hurts, and I feel as if I've just run a marathon and then climbed a mountain."

His protective instincts kicked in. "Have you felt that way for long? Have you been drinking enough water? Getting enough food? Sleep?"

She waved a hand in dismissal. "It's just the different climate and all the drastic changes in my life. No biggie."

"Don't be so cavalier about it."

"I'm not. I saw the doctor yesterday, anyway. Dr. Hughes."

Rhydian had forbidden Maelon from being Kaylee's primary doctor, which irked him. Especially since Dr. Hughes had been in retirement before being called back into duty for Kaylee. But as much as Maelon trusted his colleague, ensuring Kaylee and the baby were healthy was one thing he vowed to do. "After dinner, I can check your vitals just to be sure."

She looked about ready to argue, but he put up a hand. "Please."

Her expression softened. "Okay."

Aled returned with their drinks and left quickly, probably because of Maelon's glare.

If Kaylee noticed it, she didn't say anything. But as they waited for their meals to arrive, he tried to figure out what to ask her. Small talk wasn't his strong point.

His dragon spoke up. *Then ask about her family. You know she's close to her sister.*

Before he could do so, Kaylee blurted, "How many times have you been to *that* event?"

So much for not discussing it in public.

He didn't have to answer. And yet, he did. "Six times, I believe." He paused and then added, "Since I have no desire to find my true mate, it's the only safe place I can go."

*Fuck.* Why had he blurted that out?

And how was he going to dissuade her from asking for more details?



KAYLEE HAD NEVER MET anyone as unpredictable as Maelon. He could be nice one minute, jealous the next, and then come out of nowhere to say he didn't want to find his true mate.

That was extremely unusual for a dragon-shifter, too. Most of them wanted to find a mate, often their true mate, and have families. Children were super important, as she'd learned on Lochguard, especially since until recently, birth rates had been really low.

Thinking of children caused a wash of homesickness to rush forth—she missed the triplets, her nephews, and the daughters of Faye and Fraser MacKenzie. But she pushed it aside, determined to learn *something* about the father of her baby. "Why don't you want to find your true mate?"

He sipped his beer and then finally replied, "I just don't."

"That's not much of an answer."

"It's all you're going to get."

She wanted to scream. Her sister's mate could be on the quieter side—especially compared to his twin brother—but even Fergus was doting and talked about anything and everything with his mate.

Why would Maelon want to avoid finding his person, the one he could share his life with? Hell, Kaylee had been longing for that kind of closeness ever since she'd first noticed boys.

She tapped the table with her fingers. "The point of these dinners is to get to know each other. And yes, I know you want to basically be a blood and sperm donor and then walk away. But even if that's the choice you ultimately make, my baby will grow up asking about his or her father, and I want to be able to tell them something. Anything. So, please, won't you talk to me? I won't expect anything to come from it, I promise."

Even if Maelon didn't want her, if Kaylee was lucky, another dragonman on Snowridge might.

Although why that thought put a bad taste in her mouth, she couldn't fathom.

Maelon's pupils flashed rapidly before remaining round, denoting that the human half was in charge.

He shrugged. "I'm a doctor. I have no family. And I've lived my whole life on Snowridge. What else is there to say?"

"You have no family at all?"

"None."

His tone was final.

*Hmm.* Well, she could try something that sometimes worked with kids—namely she'd talk about herself to build trust and maybe he'd open up eventually as well.

Not that Maelon was a child—far from it. His rugged jaw and firm lips made her want to lean over, run her fingers over his late-day stubble, and kiss him.

*Nope, not going to happen.*

She took a drink and then said, "I only have my sister left. My parents went into hiding, away from some angry dragon-shifters who might want to hurt my family, and I'll probably never hear from them again."

It still hurt that rather than go live with Gina on Lochguard, her parents had chosen to have secret identities and cut all contact with their daughters.

But then again, her parents had never cared for dragon-shifters. Still, it stung. Nobody liked being abandoned.

Maelon asked, “If your parents went into hiding, then why didn’t you go with them?”

“Because I love my sister too much. Our parents had already thrown her out, and I couldn’t leave her to the wolves.”

“But your sister is mated to a dragon-shifter.”

“Yes. But she’s still my sister and best friend.”

He studied her for a beat. “I’m surprised she didn’t accompany you here.”

“Oh, she wanted to. But I needed to come alone, at least at first, to figure out my place here. I’ve been hiding, in a way, on Lochguard because it was easy. Since I’m going to be a mom soon, I need to really figure some stuff out. I can’t rely on others to help me forever.”

He studied her, pupils flashing, and she swore there was curiosity in his gaze.

However, their food arrived, and the conversation switched to a question-and-answer session about Snowridge. While it was helpful to learn about which parts she should avoid or where she could buy things, as well as directions to Maelon’s apartment in case of emergencies, she yearned for more.

For more about the dragonman sitting across from her.

Once the dishes were cleared and Maelon paid the bill—he’d refused to let her—they headed toward the exit. He’d mentioned checking her vitals and what not, but she didn’t know if he would remember now.

Part of her didn’t want to say goodbye just yet. However, him doing an exam meant touching her.

Which would probably make her do something rash.

Maelon followed her out of the restaurant and gestured to the left. “The surgery isn’t far, if you’re not too tired.”

So he had remembered. “I’m tired, but I’ll manage.”

“Do you want me to carry you?”

She blinked. “What?”

“I can carry you, if you want.”

She should say no. And yet she blurted, “Please.”

He stared at her with flashing dragon eyes a second before scooping her into his arms. The position put her against his warm, hard chest, his heart beating against her side, and she instantly hooked an arm around his neck.

She stared up at him, but Maelon only looked ahead. “Hold on tight.”

Kaylee did. And maybe, just maybe, she brushed her fingers against the back of his neck. And played with the edges of his hairline. And leaned in close to inhale his scent of man and something woody.

His scent was so comforting that she laid her head on his shoulder, lulled by his steady walk. It took every bit of strength she had to stay awake.

She’d already fallen asleep in his presence once before and woken up to find him gone. She didn’t want to ever do that again.



MAELON HELD Kaylee against his body and ignored how she fit perfectly in his arms. The combination of her heat, scent, and steady heartbeat only made him want to hug her even tighter against him. Almost as if he could keep her and protect her always.

Which could never happen. He’d watched his parents, true mates in love, and had thought they had the perfect life. However, that love and closeness had destroyed his life. He

would never risk it for any child of his. Much better for Kaylee to raise him or her by herself. That way, the child would be her sole focus and never be neglected.

Because despite their short acquaintance, he couldn't imagine the human ever doing that. Everything he'd read and heard about her said she loved working with children, loved helping others, and could be sweet and kind and all-around brilliant.

Well, unless he was a grumpy arsehole. And then he couldn't blame her for losing her temper.

His dragon sighed. *Why do you keep trying to rationalize things away? She feels good in our arms. She carries our child. She might even be our true mate. Why do you want to throw such a gift away?*

They reached the surgery, so he didn't reply. Maelon nodded to the nighttime reception staff and carried Kaylee into an empty room. He gently sat her on the bed—taking his time to let her go, savoring every touch—and closed the door. He then rolled up his sleeves and faced her.

She watched him closely, almost as if she could figure him out if she looked hard enough.

He spoke first. "Tell me how you've been feeling today, every detail, and don't try to hide anything."

She raised her brows. "Is that your bedside manner?" He grunted. Before he could reply, she added, "Fine, whatever. I'm tired all the time, I always want to eat, and one minute I want to throw something and the next I want to burst into tears."

He remembered how exhausted she'd been on Stonefire, before she'd received any dragon's blood shots. "Is it worse than before your dragon's blood treatments?"

"No, just different." She bit her bottom lip—which he most definitely didn't imagine doing himself—and continued, "The mood swings drive me crazy. I'm usually a pretty positive person and only cry if movies are really good."

He moved until he stood right in front of her. “That’s fairly normal. Your hormones will fluctuate, especially since you’re human and carrying a half-dragon child.”

Maelon took her wrist to check her pulse, and at the first touch of her soft, warm skin, he wanted to lift it to his mouth and kiss the spot. Then work his way up her arm to her neck, and finally taste her sweet lips.

Scowling, he focused on the beat beneath his fingers. He released her as quickly as he could, and Kaylee looked up at him.

This close, he noticed the golden ring around the center of her pupils, slightly lighter than her light brown eyes. Eyes that were both innocent and curious, ones he’d seen burn with desire as he’d looked up from between her legs.

Her cheeks flushed pink, almost as if she was remembering the same thing.

Kaylee asked, “Is my pulse okay?”

Resisting the urge to brush the stray hairs off her cheek, he nodded. “Yes, it’s within the acceptable range.” He wouldn’t mention how it’d spiked when he touched her. “I’d like to draw some blood though, just so I can confirm everything is fine tomorrow.”

“Dr. Hughes did that already.”

“I hold him in the highest regard and learned most of what I know from him. But I’m more up-to-date with current research. Let me take a look as well.” She searched his gaze, and he added, “Please.”

She smiled. “How can I say no to that?”

Before he could tell himself not to, he blurted, “So all it takes is saying ‘please’ to get anything I want from you?”

“Well, that depends. If you add my weakness to the pot, then I’ll be in real trouble.”

“What’s your weakness?”

She grinned. “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

Her beauty hit him, making him speechless. Any male who saw her grins would fall at her feet.

For a beat, he wanted to toss away any male who dared to try.

But then he cleared his throat and focused. “Are you okay with the blood draw?”

“You can switch into work mode that easily?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sticking to grumpy, one-word answers now?”

“Maybe.”

She sighed. “Fine, draw my blood. I’m tired and don’t have the strength to be extra cheery right now.”

“You don’t have to be cheery. Be yourself.”

*Fuck.* Why had he said that?

She tilted her head. “Be careful. You’ve seen glimpses of my temper. You might not want to experience it at full force.”

“I can handle anything.”

“Maybe. But you haven’t had to deal with an irate, pregnant American before.”

“Yes, Americans can be over-the-top. But I can handle it.”

She rolled her eyes. “Please, give me all the stereotypes now. Maybe I should start shouting at you to make sure you can understand me.”

“I can understand you perfectly.”

“I know,” she muttered. Then gestured toward her arm. “Just get it over with.”

His dragon sighed. *What happened to not insulting her?*

*Shut it, dragon. I need to concentrate.*

Maelon went to work tying a tourniquet around her upper arm and doing the fastest blood draw in history. Once he placed gauze over the puncture site and wrapped it with the



adhesive, he moved away. “I’ll let you know about the results tomorrow. Come visit me at the surgery in the afternoon.”

“And here I thought you’d tell me over the phone or email or something.”

Yes, maybe he should’ve done that. But he needed to keep an eye on her health. Which meant seeing her in person.

It had nothing to do with the fact her presence made him a little less indifferent to the world. Or that she was so bloody beautiful that he wanted to memorize the fullness of her breasts or the roundness of her cheeks or any of the other ways her body had slightly changed because of her pregnancy.

He really was a bastard at times, wasn’t he?

His dragon snorted. *You won’t hear any arguments from me.*

“If you wake up more lethargic than you are now, contact me and I’ll pay you a visit.”

She searched his gaze before shrugging. “Fine. Can I go home now?”

He moved to pick her up again, but she put up a hand. “I can walk, thank you.”

“Are you sure?”

She jumped off the little bed. “Yes, thank you. And I’ll let you know how I feel tomorrow.”

He held open the door and followed Kaylee until she left the surgery. The urge to see her home was strong.

Which was a huge fucking red flag. He didn’t want to dote on her or take care of her too much. Because then she might find a way past the barriers around his heart.

So he went to conduct the blood tests. Work was important, his everything, and it was time he remembered that.

## Chapter Nine

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In the end, Kaylee chickened out the next afternoon with Maelon and said she needed to rest. Her blood results were fine anyway, so it wasn't as if avoiding him would put her at death's door.

But she'd dreamed of him carrying her. And not to the clinic, but to the bedroom at the masquerade. Where he then used his wicked tongue on her before taking her and holding her throughout the night.

The main difference was that he'd still been beside her when she woke up.

*Wishing for things won't make them reality.* She knew that. But it was hard not to when she got glimpses of the dragonman who'd intrigued her all those months ago.

Well, enough was enough. His mood swings gave her whiplash, and she wasn't going to pine away for something that wouldn't happen.

Nope. It was time to figure out her life and role on Snowridge. Whether it would be for the next five or six months or a lifetime, she didn't know. But she could make an effort to get to know the clan and discover what small hole existed that she could fill. Something to do with the children, as she'd already made that bargain with Rhydian. However, the details were fuzzy.

Two days after the dinner date, Kaylee got ready, ate breakfast, and headed out of her apartment toward Delaney

and Rhydian's place.

Delaney had offered to take her to the local school, which was a good place to get to know the children of Snowridge. Maybe she'd be lucky and figure out what she wanted to do with her life straight away. Because as much as she'd loved watching Finn and Ara's triplets and helping out with the other clan members' children, she needed something more. Something bigger.

Kaylee knocked, and Delaney opened the door, her youngest perched on her hip. She smiled. "Kaylee, there you are, lass. I was wondering when you'd get here. Come in, come in. Rhydian should be here soon to watch the kids whilst we go out."

Kaylee entered and then leaned over to smile at the little boy. "Hello, there. Someone's in a good mood."

He gave a toothless grin, and she tickled his cheek. When the baby laughed, Kaylee did the same. "I hope mine is this happy."

"Oh, he has his moments, I assure you. But yes, wee Damien is good-natured. I can only hope my future children will be too."

She glanced at Delaney. "I've heard how you want a big family. "

"Aye. Both Rhydian and I don't have much of one left, and we want to have as many children as I safely can. Which is only possible because of doctors like Dr. Cassidy Jackson on Stonefire and others." She paused and added, "Maelon is doing some important research himself."

She tried to sound nonchalant. "Oh, is he?"

Delaney snorted. "Just say you're curious. But aye, if he's successful, it'll help with our fight against the dragon hunters and others who hate dragon-shifters." Delaney nodded toward her son. "Want to hold him whilst I make some tea?"

Kaylee took the little boy and readjusted him on her hip. After making a few silly faces at him, she said to Delaney, "At

least things are better here. The situation between humans and dragon-shifters in the US is still a huge mess.”

The other woman put the kettle on and went about fixing mugs and tea bags. “Well, America is massive, with loads more dragon clans than we have here. It’ll take some time, for sure. Sort of like Europe. Or even Ireland.”

“But they all have new clan leaders in Ireland now, apart from Teagan’s, so it should get better. Or so Finn says.”

Delaney smiled at her. “It should, aye. Once it’s safe, I’d like to take Rian back to visit his old home.”

Rian was technically Delaney’s nephew, but she and Rhydian had adopted him after the death of his parents, once Delaney had mated Rhydian.

Kaylee said, “I hope to go to Ireland one day, too. I’ve always wanted to see the Cliffs of Moher. Especially with dragons flying about.”

The other woman leaned against the counter. “Have you seen Maelon’s dragon yet?”

“No.”

“You should ask him to show you.”

She scrunched her nose. “I doubt he’d say yes. He can be nice and thoughtful sometimes, don’t get me wrong. But as soon as he realizes what he’s doing, he gets grumpy and rude and shuts down again.”

Delaney paused, her eyes debating something, before she finally spoke again. “Has he told you about his parents?”

“No. I know they passed away, but nothing else.”

“I wish I could just tell you because it’d explain so much about the man, but I promised Rhydian I wouldn’t meddle. So find a way to ask Maelon about his parents. His answer will probably help you in slipping past his inner barriers.”

“Who said anything about wanting to get to know him better, let alone want to break through his barriers at all?”

Delaney looked pointedly at her slightly rounded stomach and back again. “You enjoyed when that happened, didn’t you? Don’t you want to do it again?”

Her cheeks heated. “Why are you asking me that?”

“I’m not exactly diplomatic. I leave that to my mate. Honesty works faster, especially as a human living amongst dragon-shifters. Besides, I’ve seen the way he looks at you. Maelon isn’t one to make frequent eye contact, but he does with you.”

It was true. She’d noticed he didn’t always look at others, but always did with her.

And with such intensity that she sometimes didn’t know if she should jump into his arms or run far, far away.

She cleared her throat. “We’ll see. For now, I’d like to go visit the school.”

“Of course. But maybe whilst we wait for Rhydian to get here, you can tell me what you love doing best and we can start thinking about your role on Snowridge.”

“That’s the problem. I never went to college but instead followed my sister to Scotland. And ever since, I’ve mostly babysat or been a kind of part-time nanny. And yes, I love working with children. But I want to do more, help humans and dragon-shifters in some small way. But I’m at a loss for how to start.”

Delaney tapped her chin. “Hmm. Well, we’ve been trying to find ways for the children on Snowridge to interact with human ones. But Rhydian’s been extremely busy with clan matters, our teachers have been massively reworking the curriculum to include more human-dragon history, and it’s sort of been overlooked. Maybe you could do something to help.”

“Lochguard and Stonefire have made some progress on that front, both with summer camps and joint plays. Maybe we could try something like that here. Yes, Snowridge is more remote. But still, there has to be a place between here and the nearest human city or town where they could meet and interact.”

Delaney smiled. “Given how your face just lit up, Kaylee, I think we’ve found what you want to do. I think maybe you should talk to the teachers a wee bit and learn what you can. If you come up with a few ideas and a solid plan, you’ll have Rhydian’s and my support.”

Kaylee blinked. “Just like that? Why? You barely know me.”

She shrugged one shoulder. “I trust my mate, and he trusts Finn. And Finn trusts you. That’s why you were allowed to stay here in the first place. Well, that and we need to prove to the Department of Dragon Affairs that it’s safe for humans to live here, once and for all.”

“Oh, that’s right. Rhydian’s been trying to get some human mate candidates here for a while.”

“Aye. So make sure to tell us if anyone treats you poorly, or worse.”

“So far, everyone’s been nice enough. And actually, a dragonman named Aled invited me to a weekly get-together with his friends.”

“Did he, now?”

“Should I not go?”

“No, no, Aled’s a nice enough bloke. Too charming by half, sometimes. But it’ll be nice to meet up with some people your own age. You should go.”

Kaylee nodded. “I think I will. Maelon won’t like it, but too bad.”

“Why do you say that?”

And so she explained about their dinner the night before and his grumpiness. Once done, Delaney smiled. “Ask to see his dragon, lass. Trust me on this.”

Kaylee didn’t know what to say, and soon had to change a diaper, anyway.

But maybe she would ask Maelon the next time she saw him. It couldn’t hurt.

Although the likelihood of him letting her slide down his side in his dragon form—something she'd enjoyed back in Scotland—was slim to none.

But soon she was out the door with a child-free Delaney, heading toward the school, and pushed all thoughts of Maelon and his dragon form out of her head.

## Chapter Ten

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**M**aelon didn't love doing the twice-a-year medical examinations at the school, but for once, he was glad for the distraction.

He'd spent yet another restless night dreaming of what he couldn't have. Namely, him claiming Kaylee's pussy and feeling her come around his cock.

His dragon grunted. *I think she likes us. And if you're not careful, she'll find someone else.*

*Good. Let her.*

*I don't understand you. You're more at ease around her than anyone.*

*Just drop it. I don't want to miss anything if one of the children is ill, okay?*

*Fine.*

His dragon grumbled before curling into a ball and falling asleep inside his head.

Maelon nodded a greeting at the school's receptionist and headed toward the large space used as a school gymnasium.

Unlike the maze of tunnels inside the mountain, the school had painted murals instead of tapestries. Oh, the walls were covered in wood paneling to help keep the chill out but painted over. Some of the artwork was barely recognizable. But some showed various young dragons learning to shift or fly or hunt.



There were even a few sections from his time at school, with Maelon's barely-a-dragon blob off in the corner.

He smiled, remembering how proud his mother had been of that blob. Back when she'd been happy and doting, and his father had still been alive.

Taking a deep breath, he banished the memories. Just in time, too, as he reached the large space partitioned into rooms with standing frames and curtains.

The children hadn't arrived yet, so it was fairly quiet. Maelon nodded at the nurses who'd come ahead of time to set things up, and then turned a corner, coming face-to-face with Kaylee MacDonald.

"Oh, you're here," she said.

He frowned. "Why the bloody hell are you here?"

She stood a little taller. "I was invited, so no need to get snippy."

Delaney appeared at Kaylee's side. "Hello, Maelon. Did you skip your coffee this morning?"

At the amusement dancing in the female's eyes, he wanted to growl.

His dragon's sleepy voice spoke up. *Don't you dare upset her. Rhydian won't like it.*

He grunted. "I'm just tired and on a schedule. So, if you'll excuse me."

Delaney put out an arm, keeping him from walking forward. "Oh, not so fast, Dr. Perry. Kaylee's going to help with the children today. I think she should stand with the ones about to have their examinations, or those who are a wee bit afraid of doctors, before sending them in to you."

Kaylee replied, "What? I thought I was going to visit the classrooms."

The corner of Delaney's mouth twitched. "With Maelon needing to see so many today, anyone who can keep the

children entertained and help ease their anxiety, the better, I say. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Anxiety? About what? Maelon isn't going to stick them full of needles today, is he?"

He said, "No, not a lot. However, I will be drawing their blood so I can monitor dragon hormone levels, amongst other things."

Kaylee sighed. "I wish I'd known about that. I didn't bring anything to entertain them."

Delaney patted her shoulder. "It'll be fine. One of the teachers, Bowen, will help you."

Bowen was one of the most sought-after dragonmen on Snowridge. No one had caught his attention yet, but given how cheery and beautiful Kaylee was, she might just be able to do it.

His dragon whispered, *And that's a problem for you, why?*

He grunted. "As long as the children aren't crying when they enter, I'll consider it a job well done."

Kaylee snorted. "Such low standards. But if they're crying when they leave, you're going to help me calm them down."

"That's not my job."

"But it should be. Otherwise, they might develop a fear of doctors. And you don't want to give them that lifelong aversion, do you?"

Delaney jumped in. "She's right. You're a brilliant researcher, Maelon, but you need some help with handling patients. So learn from Kaylee."

"If I refuse, you'll just call Rhydian, won't you?"

Delaney raised an eyebrow. "Do I need to?"

He grunted. "No."

Kaylee smiled and lightly hit his arm. "See? Was that so hard?"

"Yes."

She laughed, the sound light and full of life, and he nearly smiled.

His dragon spoke up. *She's good for you.*

*Enough, dragon.*

He motioned with his hand. "Come with me, then. The students will arrive soon, and there's still a lot to do."

Kaylee followed him, but never quite caught up. Mostly because he was tall and didn't measure his strides.

It was a bastard thing to do, but any and all distance he could keep from her, the better.



KAYLEE WISHED she had some peanuts or candy or something she could pelt at Maelon's back. She wasn't about to shout or get angry, because she thought that was what he wanted.

The better route was to tease and annoy him. One, it'd help her vent her frustration in less embarrassing ways to a clan she was still getting to know. And two, she liked poking the bear. Or, rather, dragon.

Besides, she swore he'd been about to smile a few minutes ago. And if there was a man who needed more smiles in his life, it was Dr. Maelon Perry.

Not wanting to think about why she was so focused on getting Maelon to reveal more of his true self, she nearly crashed into a tall dragonman emerging from a door on the right. He put his hand out to steady her, and she looked up. And up.

Damn, he was tall.

He had blue eyes that were almost teal, and thick, dark hair that curled just a touch. He frowned. "Are you all right, Kaylee? I didn't see you there."

Him knowing her name was strange. Well, maybe not. She was the only human besides Delaney on Snowridge, after all.

She smiled. “I’m fine. I get distracted and lost in my head sometimes. It was totally my fault.”

When the dragon man returned her smile, her heart skipped a beat. Hell, he was attractive.

“I don’t want to waste time arguing about whose fault it is. I’m Bowen Kemble, by the way, and I’m one of the teachers here. I’m to be your sort of helper for the day.”

Before she could reply, Maelon tugged her from behind until her back was against his front. For a beat, she reveled in his warm, strong presence.

Then he spoke and ruined the moment. “Watch where you’re going, Bowen. If you know her name, then you know she’s pregnant with my child.”

Kaylee blinked. “Um.”

The dragonmen ignored her.

Bowen frowned. “Aye, I know that. But Rhydian also said you have no intention of mating her, so why are you growling at me?”

“Rhydian did what?” Both Kaylee and Maelon said at the same time.

“Was he wrong?” Bowen asked.

As Kaylee tried to get her mouth to work again, Maelon replied, “No. But just be careful. I won’t have her harmed.”

Okay, that was a huge-ass mixed message, if there ever was one.

As the two guys continued to stare at each other, she walked out of Maelon’s arms and placed her hands on her hips. “Hello, remember me?” They both looked at her. “Yes, nice to see you again. I don’t know what’s going on here, but it can wait. The students will arrive soon, and I need to know what to expect. Because if you give a child an inch, they will take a mile, and I’m not about to let that happen.”

The corner of Bowen’s mouth kicked up. “Right you are, Kaylee. I’ll give you the information you need and help you

with the students.”

Maelon grunted. “Fine, you do that. Now, I need to go and set up my examination space.”

He walked away, and Kaylee felt a headache coming on.

Because it seemed as if Maelon was jealous. But why?

After so many months of lamenting a lack of interest on Lochguard, now she had too much. And it was damned confusing.

*Think about it later.* Taking a deep breath, she forced a smile on her face and looked up at Bowen. “Thanks in advance for your help.”

“No worries. Now, let me tell you a few things about the students...”

She did her best to listen to Bowen’s tips as they walked to the main room, where Maelon would conduct his wellness checks.

All the while, she thought about cornering Maelon later. He may not like conversing with people, but he was going to talk with her, no matter what it took. Because she was done with his weird attitudes and conflicting behaviors. The next time they were alone, she would get some answers.



BOTH MAN and beast wanted to exit the partitioned room, tell Bowen to sod off, and keep Kaylee close.

Which was bloody ridiculous. Rhydian had been right—he had no intention of claiming her.

His dragon spoke up. *And yet it wouldn't take much prodding from me for you to drag her in here and growl at any male who comes near her.*

*Shut it, dragon.*

*No. You saw how admiration flared when Kaylee looked at Bowen. He's the most eligible dragonman inside the clan. He's*

*also a nice guy and would be a good mate. Kaylee might want him.*

Maelon gritted his teeth, counted to ten, and finally replied, *She's not my concern.*

*That's a fucking lie, and you know it.*

*I'm done discussing this.*

He quickly constructed a mental maze inside his head and tossed his dragon inside. Maelon rarely had to do it, but right now, he needed some peace and quiet.

Except the quiet only amplified the laughter coming from right outside the door—Kaylee's laughter.

*Not my problem.* He repeated the words over and over again, until the students arrived. They required his focus, and he acted on autopilot.

And by the end, he didn't even make anyone cry. Although as he saw the very last student, a half-human and half-dragon named Cora Price, he wasn't sure how it would go.

Cora entered the room with Kaylee right behind her. The little girl looked around with wide eyes, her tight, black curls bouncing around her head as she took it all in.

Even he felt a pang of pity for the little one. Her human father had been killed saving his dragon-shifter lover. Cora's mother had suffered afterward for loving a human, at least until Rhydian and Delaney had banished the human-haters inside Snowridge.

Kaylee whispered something into Cora's ear, but Maelon heard it thanks to his supersensitive dragon-shifter hearing.

"It'll be okay, I promise. I know you heard about the children who were abused by those bad doctors, but Dr. Perry isn't one of them."

"B-but Rian said those doctors made the other kids scream and cry and hurt."

Rian had indeed been kidnapped and held inside an illegal facility that experimented on dragon-shifters. The lad had

managed to escape unscathed, but not all the others had been as lucky.

Maelon worked with some of them, and others had been sent to special facilities run by the Department of Dragon Affairs.

Kaylee asked, “Did you want me to stay with you?” Cora nodded, and Kaylee smiled as she gave the girl’s shoulder a squeeze. “Okay, then I will. But we need to let Dr. Perry do his checks so you can go back to class. I know you like story time, and it’ll start soon.”

After Kaylee raised her gaze to his, she conveyed without words he needed to help with the little girl’s anxiety.

He cleared his throat. “Hello, Cora.”

The little girl met his gaze. She wasn’t old enough for her inner dragon to talk to her just yet, so her pupils remained round.

He remembered what had worked to calm down Cora the last time he’d seen her. So he crouched down and smiled, while still keeping his distance. “Did your mother teach you the rest of the song I sang the last time you visited me?”

He could feel Kaylee’s gaze on him, but he focused on the child’s dark brown eyes.

She bobbed her head. “The funny one about the young dragon who gets caught in the wind.”

“Yes, and when he finally wakes up, he’s in a world where he’s a tiny dragon. Shall we sing it together?”

Cora hesitated and then nodded.

He counted down, and they both sang the first verse.

The song was one he’d loved as a child. There was something about finding yourself in a different world, one where you were special and everyone wanted to get to know you, that had spoken to him.

Much like it spoke to Cora, no doubt.

By the time they finished, Cora had moved closer to him and was no longer tense. He smiled at her again. “Perfect. I think you sing it better than me now.”

Cora smiled shyly. “Thank you.”

He finally risked a glance at Kaylee, and a mixture of amazement and approval danced in her eyes.

They also said she would ask about his singing later.

Focusing back on Cora, he stood and motioned toward the little table. “Can I help you up?”

She nodded, and Maelon got the examination under way. By the end, Cora was smiling and chatting, as if she’d never been afraid at all.

He also sensed she would be more at ease when seeing him in the future.

Kaylee’s words about helping children to avoid dreading doctors and hospital visits came back, and he had to admit she’d been right.

He’d always dreaded putting patients at ease. His first love had been research, and only through coaxing from his mentor Dr. Hughes had he agreed to practice medicine, too.

But as Cora waved goodbye with a smile, he thought maybe he could enjoy working with patients, if he gave it a chance.

Once Kaylee escorted Cora to Bowen and then came back inside the room, she shut the curtain door and tilted her head. “So, you can sing. And not just sing, but you’re amazing at it.”

It wasn’t a question, and yet he knew she wanted an explanation.

His dragon knocked against the mental maze, and Maelon finally let him out.

The beast didn’t waste time saying, *Don’t you fucking dare push her away again.*

Maelon debated what to do. Because he had a feeling that if he opened up to Kaylee this time, it would shift things



between them.

And he wasn't sure if he wanted that.



KAYLEE HAD ENJOYED TEASING and chatting with the students, getting them more relaxed and also answering some questions they had about humans. In the lull between classes arriving, Bowen had explained that while everyone loved Delaney, she was the clan leader's mate. That made her intimidating, no matter how welcoming she was.

So for them to chat with Kaylee had been the chance of a lifetime.

Delaney's earlier suggestion of Kaylee being a type of children's coordinator between Snowridge and humans kept coming back to her. And the more she thought about it, the more she wanted to try.

But then the last student of the day had lingered by herself, not wanting to see the doctor. Little Cora Price had been afraid of what he might do to her, despite the fact Bowen said she'd seen Maelon many times before.

Some coaxing and soothing had finally gotten the girl into the room with Maelon.

And then he'd completely stunned Kaylee by crouching down and singing a song with the little girl.

Watching the pair belt out the catchy tune, telling the story of a dragon going from their world to one with only humans, where the dragon was little more than the size of a bird, had enthralled her.

By the end, she imagined Maelon singing to their child as he rocked the baby to sleep.

And yearning hit her hard.

It'd taken everything she had not to cry. Because as much as she enjoyed Bowen's flirtations, he didn't draw her like Maelon did.

Once alone with the dragon doctor, she mentioned his singing and waited to see if he'd tell her about it.

Seconds passed, and she wondered if he would keep up his walls.

But then he turned to tidy up and replied, "My mother taught me to sing when I was young, and that song was one of our favorites. Few people know it these days, but it's the only children's song I remember. That's why I sang it the last time I saw Cora."

He never mentioned his parents. And since she instinctively knew asking about them would turn him icy again, she decided to change the subject and take Delaney's advice. "What color is your dragon? I've always wondered."

"Blue."

The one-word answer gave her the courage to ask, "Will you let me see your dragon form?"

For a second, she thought he hadn't heard her. But then he met her gaze again, his pupils flashing, and said, "After you've eaten something."

"Then have lunch with me. That way, you can show me your dragon as soon as I'm finished."

His pupils flashed faster. That usually meant the human half was talking with the dragon one.

Eventually, he sighed. "Fine. Help me get everything sorted here, and then I'll make you lunch at my flat."

She wanted to do a little dance at him inviting her to his apartment, but restrained herself. Instead, she asked, "You can cook?"

"A little."

"Well, then let's get to work!"

His lips twitched. "I've never seen someone so excited to clean up a mess."

"Hey, if it means someone will make me food and then show me his dragon form, I'm going to be pretty damn happy

about it.” She flexed her arms. “Tell me what to do.”

Maelon finally smiled, and she nearly stumbled. She loved how his eyes crinkled at the corners, making him look so much lighter, as if he weren't carrying the weight of his past around.

“How about if you use that energy to sweep up and I'll put the medical supplies away? The nurses and school staff will handle the rest.”

Maelon pointed to the broom. As she went to work, she did her best to whistle, which wasn't very good. However, she was in too good a mood to stay silent. And unlike Maelon, her singing made her sister's cat run away in terror.

## Chapter Eleven

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**M**aelon's inner beast had won the argument about showing Kaylee their dragon form.

But in reality, he wasn't entirely upset about losing.

As a doctor, he didn't get many chances to fly and stretch his wings. Especially with the clan mostly being situated inside the mountains.

Although the chance to shift wasn't the only reason excitement hummed through him.

His dragon spoke up. *You want to feel her scratch behind our ears as much as me.*

*Maybe.*

*Let me gasp and clutch my chest at you being honest.*

*Shut it, dragon.*

His beast laughed. *But seriously, why did you give in so easily?*

He debated keeping secrets, but he'd grown tired of it. *I wanted to please her.*

His dragon fell silent before replying, *Good.*

The remark was bloody cryptic, but Kaylee had finished sweeping, and he was done, too. So he picked up his doctor's bag, walked to the door, and opened it. "Shall we?"

She smiled. "Someone's being polite."

“Would you rather I scowl, grunt, and bark at you?”

“Maybe later.”

He shook his head, and she laughed.

A male could get used to that laugh.

Before he could get any more bloody romantic thoughts, he followed her out and gave directions on how to exit the school. Once they were in the corridor that led to his quarters, she spoke again. “Does your clan still make tapestries? Or did you stop because all the walls are covered?”

He glanced at the nearest tapestry scene, one that showed dragons taking part in a clan leader trial from centuries ago. “I’ve never really thought about it. The wall hangings have just always been there. And if they’ve ever changed, I didn’t notice.”

“Hmm. Well, maybe we could rotate them and add some new ones. You know, ones with more recent history and using the brighter colors available in twenty-first century.”

“Maybe wait until you’ve been here at least a month before suggesting big changes,” he drawled.

She stuck her tongue out at him and the urge to bring her close, tickle her until she was breathless, and then kiss her flashed inside his mind.

Kaylee thankfully spoke before his dragon could. “But seriously, some changes are good. It’s worked well on Lochguard, for the most part. And adding a bit of the familiar—events they might actually recognize—could help human visitors feel a little less intimidated. Especially if they’re future mate candidates.”

She did have a point. “You should bring up your suggestion to Rhydian.”

She bit her bottom lip a second. Her very full and lickable bottom lip.

“He’s been nothing but nice to me, but he’s still a little scary to me. I think I’ll give it two weeks, three tops, before I suggest any major changes.”

He smiled. “In some ways, you’re like Delaney. And in others, you’re quite different.”

“Well, we are two different people. The only common threads, really, are we’re both human and we can both stand up to dragon-shifters. And I have a lot of experience with that now, after living on Lochguard for so long.”

He watched her face. “Has anyone caused you pain or distress? Made you feel unwelcome?”

“Um, not really. I mean, there were a few old biddies on Lochguard that took some sweet-talking to win over. But as word spread from their grandkids about how awesome I am, things started to change.”

“That’s almost like a general directing their troops in unexpected ways.”

“I’m not sure I’m *that* strategic. But I just try to treat people how I wish to be treated. It’s not always easy, and sometimes I scream into a pillow. However, it usually works with adults and kids, human or dragon-shifter.”

He growled, “If anyone ever makes you scream into a pillow, you tell me.”

She raised an eyebrow. “The only one so far who’s nearly done so was you.”

Pain lanced his chest, and he nearly staggered. “Me?”

She nodded and moved her gaze to the tapestries again. “Even though it’s stupid, since the whole point of the masquerade was to have a night of fun, it hurt to find you gone when I woke up. No note, or anything. And then...”

Her voice trailed off. “And then?”

She took a deep breath and let it out. “Then you barely said hello at Stonefire, when you found out about the pregnancy, and then rushed off. I know it wasn’t planned, and you were no doubt in shock. But still, I’d been keeping the pregnancy a secret from everyone for nearly three months. All the fear and worry and uncertainty—I couldn’t share it. Then it was out in

the open, and the one person I needed to talk with about the future, about what would happen, basically rejected me.”

He studied Kaylee’s profile. She wasn’t crying. At least, not yet.

But the flash of vulnerability he noticed in her eyes shot straight to his heart.

His dragon spoke up. *She’s right. You need to make it up to her. Especially now.*

*Why now?*

*Because I don’t think she’ll take much more rejection from you. She’s hurting and alone and she needs us.*

He wanted to say that was rubbish. She had Delaney and Rhydian, plus her sister called her constantly, from what he’d heard.

And yet, she was in a foreign country, far from any friends or family, and struggling with her surprise pregnancy as much as he was. No, scratch that—more than him.

She’d carried that burden alone for three months.

He might not have wanted to be a father, but now he was on that path and needed to step up. His first act was to make the mother of his child a little happier and less stressed.

Doing that didn’t mean he’d have to mate her, or anything. Because that was something he still couldn’t fathom.

Could he?

*Focus on Kaylee.* He reached out and touched her upper arm. Her head swiveled around to meet his gaze. “I’m sorry.”

Her brows came together in confusion, and he added, “I mean it. I’m sorry for being a bastard. It was a surprise, yes. But I didn’t handle it well. It’s just that...”

“Just what?”

Before he could think of all the reasons why he should hold back, he continued, “It’s just that I never wanted to be a parent.”

“Why? Because of your career?”

“No.”

She fell silent, and Maelon struggled to find the courage to tell her more.



KAYLEE HAD NEARLY BURST into tears when explaining how she'd been hurt by Maelon. But she'd kept herself together, not wanting to derail this very rare and honest conversation.

Then he said, “It's just that I never wanted to be a parent,” and he had her full attention.

After asking why, she waited. Even if he was a grown man, she'd learned patience from working with children—especially with Finn and Arabella's triplets.

Then he let out a heavy sigh, and she knew he was going to share something important with her.

Maelon stopped walking and stared at the nearest tapestry, one of a pair of dragons playing in the air. He pointed toward them. “My parents used to be like that. When I was little, sometimes they'd let me watch as they danced and dove and had fun in the sky. They were true mates, and very much in love.”

She sensed a “but” and waited.

His gaze never left the pair of flying dragons. “My dad oversaw the nearby farms. Every few days he'd fly out to check on those clan members, ensuring everything was well, and gathered any concerning news to take back to the clan Protectors.”

Protectors were the dragon equivalent of a security team meshed with the Navy SEALs. Each clan had their own.

Maelon continued, “Then one day, after a string of recent attacks nearby, a farmer pleaded with my father to come and help with his mate, who was ill. And my dad went, despite my



mother begging him to let the Protectors handle it. And he never came home.”

“Oh, Maelon.”

“The dragon hunters caught him. Not that we knew about it at first. No, because they’d knocked him unconscious, drained him of blood, and left him in the middle of nowhere. And in northern Wales, that means you could be lost forever, given the vast wilderness.”

She itched to touch him, but his tense shoulders and jaw told her it probably wasn’t a good idea. But she wondered what Maelon had been like before tragedy struck his family. She ached for the little boy who’d lost his innocence far too soon.

Maelon studied the dragons on the wall for a few seconds before saying, “After my father’s death, my mother fell into despair and pretty much stopped functioning. My great-aunt was the only family I had besides my parents, and she took care of me. She tried to get me to live with her, but I didn’t want to leave my mum. I wanted to see her eyes light up again when my dad returned.

“Except he never did. And when the Protectors found his body and returned to tell my mother, she became hysterical. The doctors had to sedate her, and my great-aunt took me to live with her.

“I visited as often as I could, but my mother became unresponsive and fell into what I now know was a deep depression. Still, as a child, I didn’t understand what was going on. I tried to cheer her up, sing our favorite songs, and even tried to get her to eat. But it was always as if I wasn’t there. And then one day…”

Maelon’s voice trailed off as he became lost in his memories. Even though it was impossible, Kaylee wished she could hug that little dragon boy.

She wanted to hug the man, but before she could do so, he blurted, “My mother killed herself. She didn’t love me enough to live.” He met her gaze briefly. “And that’s why I had never

wanted children. Because if they didn't exist, I would never abandon or hurt them. They'd never have to go through what I did."

Kaylee sucked in a breath. She couldn't even imagine dealing with a parent's suicide as a kid, or even trying to understand it. Especially so soon after his father's murder, too.

Although his past made her better understand the dragonman in the present.

Maelon started walking again, and she struggled to keep up. She sensed he wanted to close off, put distance back between them, and not allow her to comfort him.

But she wasn't going to let him retreat. "Maelon."

"No, Kaylee. I don't want to talk about it. Either drop it, or I won't show you my dragon."

Right now, she didn't care about his damn dragon form. She wanted to reach that hurt little boy still inside Maelon and convince him that just because his mother had left him didn't mean he would abandon his own child, too.

Hell, it probably meant he'd try even harder to be there as much as possible.

Still, she had to pick her battles. So she reached out a hand, wrapped her fingers around his, and squeezed.

Maelon frowned down at their hands, but he didn't pull away.

Kaylee counted it as a victory. She said, "I still want to see your dragon. Maybe even slide down his side."

He blinked, but she'd wanted to throw him off. "What? Why?"

She shrugged one shoulder. "Because it's fun?"

Maelon opened his mouth, paused, and closed it.

But at least his jaw and his hand relaxed a little as they walked.

And the whole time, Kaylee reveled in the feel of his strong hand in hers.

## Chapter Twelve

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Maelon hadn't told anyone about his parents' deaths in years.

In fact, he did his best to forget about his past whenever possible.

However, singing his mother's favorite song with Cora had probably brought up the memories. That had to be the reason he'd shared so much with Kaylee.

His dragon sighed. *You wanted to share with her. And now she's holding our hand.*

Maelon's first instinct was to rip his hand away, just to prove a point.

But her soft, warm fingers around his felt nice. Even if she was shorter and slighter than him, her touch was strong and reassuring.

Almost as if he could lean on her, and she could help shoulder any burdens.

Which was ridiculous.

Thankfully, they reached his quarters so he could remove his hand from Kaylee's. Ignoring the sense of loss, he unlocked the door and ushered her inside.

He watched her survey the room. It was sparse, with a sofa, a comfortable armchair, a few side tables, a fireplace, and doors leading to the kitchen, his bedroom, his office, and the bathroom.

She turned and pointed to the pictures on the wall. “Where did you get those?”

The framed artwork displayed imaginative renderings of various DNA sequences. Unlike the sterile, to-the-point versions used in scientific research, the artist—someone inside Snowridge—had used an array of colors and even hidden some surprise elements inside the spirals.

“I had them commissioned by a clan member. Each one represents a breakthrough moment in my work.”

“What, exactly, is your work? I know you’re a doctor and do research, but not much else.”

Since talking about his career was far safer than his past, he ushered her toward the kitchen and the little dining nook. “Sit down and I’ll tell you as I make lunch.”

After she sat, he gathered items for sandwiches and answered her. “I’m trying to create a serum that will protect against harmful drugs the dragon hunters and former Dragon Knights have used against my kind.”

“And are you close?”

“Nearly there. A few more months, and I might have it.”

“Hmm. And before that? What did you do?”

He glanced over at her. Kaylee had her chin propped on her hand and looked truly interested. Not the I’m-just-being-polite type of interest, either.

His dragon said, *In general, Kaylee seems genuine. Stop looking for reasons to doubt her.*

Ignoring his beast, he said, “Various things. I assisted Dr. Cassidy Jackson and Dr. Trahern Lewis with some of their research on humans carrying dragon-shifter babies.”

“Which means in a roundabout way, you helped me before you ever met me.”

“Er, I suppose so.”

She smiled. “Well, I can assure you the dragon’s blood shots have made me feel a thousand percent better, for sure.

Before, it was a struggle, and I can't even imagine how difficult it would've been before Dr. Sid's research. In the past, the danger of dying probably kept women from trying to snag a dragon-shifter of their own."

As he assembled the ham sandwiches, he asked, "Why would they want to?"

"Well, for the most part, dragonmen take care of their mates. Protect them, love them, and also listen to them, treating them as a partner. At least that's what I've seen on Lochguard. While my sister's mate would stifle me, Fergus is exactly what Gina needed and still needs—someone to really look out for her, protect her, and put her first. My parents kicked her out of the house, you see, and she had to flee to Scotland and go into hiding."

He'd done a little background research before Kaylee's arrival and knew the basics of her sister's story. "Because your grandmother was Scottish and had a cottage there, I believe."

Her eyes widened. "Yes, that's right. Which means you checked up on me before I arrived."

He grunted. "Perhaps."

She laughed. "That's as good as someone else shouting, 'Hell, yeah.'" He rolled his eyes, and she laughed again. "Fine. Getting back to your statement, yes, Granny MacDonald was Scottish. Unfortunately, she died, and Gina was left to fend for herself. If our granny had lived, I might've found a way to come to Scotland sooner. But I was barely eighteen, my parents weren't going to help me, and I didn't even have a passport."

He added the sandwich toppings. "You wanted to follow your sister right away? Did that upset your parents?"

She glanced down at the table and traced shapes with her forefinger. "Gina had always been their favorite. Oh, I know parents aren't supposed to have them, but they totally did. I was never as good in school, I talked too much, and I had trouble sitting still. I think my parents asked Gina to watch me so often because they didn't know how to handle me."

Frowning, he turned toward her. “Are you saying your sister mostly raised you?”

“As far back as I can remember, yes. Gina has more patience than I ever will. Well, at least back then. Working with children has definitely taught me patience. Plus, they have more energy than me, so I never get bored, and I love how they always keep me on my toes.”

He quickly cut the sandwiches, grabbed the bag of crisps, and placed her lunch in front of her. After pouring some sparkling water into two glasses, he put them down and joined her at the table. “Do you want to keep working with children? Or is it just something you’re doing until you figure something out?”

She quickly took a bite. Once she swallowed, Kaylee replied, “I think I want to keep working with children, even after I have my own. But not as a nanny or babysitter.” She quickly explained Delaney’s idea of coordinating between human and dragon children before adding, “I want to try, even knowing it’s going to be a lot of work. But I’m not sure if I’ll be able to really give it a go until after my baby is a little older.”

Despite how often Maelon had told himself he wanted nothing to do with the child, hearing Kaylee say “my baby” instead of “our baby” felt wrong.

His dragon grunted but remained silent.

“I’m sure you’ll do a brilliant job, no matter when you take up the reins.” He gestured toward her sandwich and crisps. “Now, eat. I have some appointments at the surgery this afternoon. So if you still want to see my dragon form, we can’t dawdle.”

“Aye, aye, captain.”

She winked, and his lips twitched.

They ate quickly in silence, but it wasn’t strained. No, it felt sort of comfortable, almost familiar.

Like they’d always done this.

And he rather liked it.

Once he finished his sandwich, Maelon stood abruptly and put his dishes in the sink. Kaylee followed him and then leaned against the counter. His gaze darted to her belly, wanting to place a protective hand there, but he forced himself to look away.

Her voice garnered his attention. “So, do you have to wait an hour after eating to shift? Like if I went swimming?”

He raised an eyebrow and glanced at her. The amusement dancing in her eyes told him she was being ridiculous on purpose.

“No.” He picked up one of his extra coats and held it out to her. “Have you been to the secondary landing area?”

She shrugged into his coat, which dwarfed her but would keep her warm. “I haven’t been to any landing area. Finn had to drive here. Something about it being so damn cold here and not safe for me and the baby.”

“Yes, he made the right choice.”

“I guess. Although one day I’d love to ride in one of those little baskets dragons hold in their back talons again. It’s the closest I can get to flying myself.”

As they wound their way through the corridors, he replied, “That won’t be for a long while, if ever. Because of all the peaks, it’s a lot more dangerous to carry humans around here.”

“Well, I’m sure I can experience it again when visiting my sister. If I bug her mate enough, Fergus will do it.”

It was on the tip of Maelon’s tongue to say he was the only one whom she should trust to carry her by dragonwing.

But he didn’t.

His dragon spoke up. *I will never understand you.*

*Well, we need some secrets between us. You’re still going to shift for Kaylee, aren’t you?*

*Of course. Maybe she’ll like my form better than yours.*



They reached the door leading to the secondary landing area, and he ushered her outside.

He pointed to the edge of the large, open space. “Stay here.”

“Do I need to turn my back too? Even though I’ve seen you naked before?”

He imagined Kaylee’s eyes roaming his body with appreciation, and his cock started to harden. “Turn your back. That was different.”

Shaking her head, she did as he said.

His dragon grumbled. *I want her to see us again. Maybe she’ll take initiative and kiss us. Then you wouldn’t stand a chance.*

*Why? Since she carries our child, there wouldn’t be a mate-claim frenzy.*

*I’m not talking about that. I think if you kiss her, she’ll end up naked and under us.*

*Are you finished?*

*Not really.*

*Too bad. I don’t want to keep Kaylee out in the cold, so let’s hurry up and shift.*

After shucking his clothes, Maelon closed his eyes and imagined his nose elongating into a snout, wings sprouting from his back, and his limbs growing until he stood in blue dragon form. He gave a soft roar, and Kaylee spun around.

Her eyes wide, she rushed toward him. As soon as she stroked his snout, his beast began to hum.



KAYLEE HAD SEEN a lot of dragons during her time on Lochguard. But even so, she’d never gotten over the initial beauty of seeing one up close.

Maelon's dragon form was no exception. He was muscled and majestic and impressive. His scales reflected the weak winter sunlight, and they were a darker blue compared to other dragons she'd seen. And as soon as she touched his snout—the scales under her fingertips smooth, hard, and warm—tears pricked her eyes.

Her child might look like this one day too.

Because much like how human children took after their parents, dragon-shifters in their dragon forms often shared similar characteristics. Oh, the colors weren't always the same. Kind of like how parents with brown eyes and blue ones could still have a child with green eyes. However, she wondered if her child's eventual snout would be just as long, or the eyes just as dark, or the horns just as pronounced as the ones curving from Maelon's head.

Maelon grunted, and she met his large eye facing her. Concern danced there, and she did her best to smile. "I'm fine, I promise."

He tilted his head, as if calling her out.

She gave a weak laugh. "Okay, I'm just wondering what my baby will look like in their dragon form." She patted his snout. "I like the color of yours. So I'm hoping for the same dark blue for little junior."

Even though she knew dragons couldn't speak in this form, she wondered what Maelon would say. Maybe he'd go into a scientific lecture about the likelihood of the colors being the same or different.

Or maybe he'd ask about junior and start calling her little bean by the same name.

*Don't be silly, Kaylee. Keep a clear head on your shoulders, not one full of dreams.*

Clearing her throat, she raised her hand toward Maelon. He lowered his head, as if reading her thoughts, so she could scratch the small patch of hide with no scales behind his ears.

His dragon's hum grew louder, and she couldn't help but grin. "Dragons always kind of remind me of cats."

He grunted, and she grinned. “Hey, it’s true. You’re just as graceful, you hum like a cat’s purr, and it takes more work to earn your trust, but once you have it, you have it forever.”

Maelon huffed and lightly butted her shoulder, gentle enough so she didn’t stumble.

“If you want me to stop talking about the similarities between dragons and cats, you could always let me slide down your side.”

She wagged her eyebrows. And if dragons could roll their eyes, Maelon would have.

His giant eye stared at her and then finally his tail came forward, gently wrapped around her chest, and he waited.

A thrill rushed through her. “Yes, please. Yes!”

Gently, he lifted her and placed her on his back. Kaylee took a second to rub his hide and admire his magnificent wings, folded behind him. She could still see the thinner membrane between the wing bones and wondered how much it’d shine in the sunlight.

His tail tapped against his side, as if telling her to hurry.

“You ready?”

His head had swiveled around so he could see. She positioned herself in the right spot—about two-thirds the way from the front of his body, and counted out, “Three, two, one!”

She slid down, the smoothness of his scales making it quick. But his tail was there to help her keep her balance at the bottom.

Grinning, she patted his tail. “Again?” He narrowed his eyes. “Please?”

After a huff, he lifted her again. And again.

Until the cold seeped into her bones and she couldn’t help but shiver.

Maelon placed her at the edge of the landing area, pointed with his front talons toward the door, and remained motionless

until she moved toward the entrance. “Fine, fine. But I’ll wait for you just inside.”

He grunted, and she entered the much warmer corridor inside the mountains, wishing she could watch him shift back.

Not just because she’d like to see him naked again. She wanted him to feel comfortable enough around her to not think twice about changing forms.

*He’s not going to be your mate, Kaylee. Stop wishing for the impossible.*

It was easier said than done, however. Because the more time she spent with Maelon, the more she wanted to kiss him and see where things went.

But once he entered the corridor fully clothed, Maelon guided her back to her apartment in silence, their earlier camaraderie gone.

Which made her heart squeeze and her eyes heat with tears. It seemed every step forward was followed by several steps back.

She did her best to calm down on the walk, too tired to attempt yet another battle with the dragonman. So she didn’t talk, either.

And once at her place, he rushed off with barely a wave goodbye.

Things were back to normal, apparently. Which was for the best, given her overactive imagination at times.

*Focus on what you can do for the future.*

So for the rest of the day, Kaylee studied the information she’d received about Snowridge. The more she knew, the sooner she could make plans on how to get dragon and human children to interact with each other.

Because it was better to focus on a future she could have than one of fantasy.

## Chapter Thirteen

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Whenever Maelon tried to concentrate on his research, his mind drifted back to Kaylee sliding down his side and laughing. She'd been so carefree and joyful—a huge contrast to his own life.

And the more he was exposed to her fun-loving nature, the more he wanted to hold on and never let her go.

Probably because he'd been forced to grow up too quickly and had never had a friend who pushed him to have fun, not even when he and Rhydian had been younger. After all, they'd both had their fair share of tragedy.

His dragon spoke up. *Which is why we need to convince her to stay.*

Part of him wanted that. Badly.

But if she stayed, she might expect more from him. Maybe even expect him to love her. And love had only ever brought him pain.

His dragon said, *Don't think of forever, just right now. You could start by not pushing her away at every turn, but try to get to know her.*

*And you'd be okay with that?*

*I'm not going to lie—I want her. All of her. Especially naked. But spending time with the mother of our child shouldn't be a hardship. Because are you really going to be able to walk away once the child is born?*

He was starting to think he couldn't.

As Maelon contemplated merely giving it a go with Kaylee, without any long-term plans, one of the nurses walked into his office.

Efa nodded at him and said, "Sorry that I'm back a little late. I got chatting with the new human and couldn't get away. And since Rhydian said we should try to get to know her, I didn't want to be rude and leave abruptly."

"You mean Kaylee?"

The nurse hesitated, as if unsure how to discuss the female who carried his child but wasn't his mate. "Aye."

Before he could think better of it, he asked, "What did you learn?"

She cleared her throat. "Begging your pardon, Dr. Perry, but I'm not a spy."

His dragon chuckled, and Maelon ignored him. "Of course not. But it must've been interesting if you risked being late to work."

The dragonwoman hesitated. He was clearly being an arsehole, but when it came to Kaylee, he wanted to know everything.

His dragon sighed. *Then just go find her and talk.*

He stood. "Sorry. Don't feel obliged to answer that. But do you know where I can find her?"

"She should still be at the coffee shop, with Bowen."

At the other male's name, Maelon growled. "I'm taking my lunch break now."

"Um, sure."

Maelon shut down his computer and left the surgery. It didn't take long to reach the coffee place, and he entered. He found Kaylee, and his gaze zeroed in on her hand resting on Bowen's arm.

His dragon growled. *She shouldn't touch other males. Are you going to do anything about it?*

When Kaylee laughed, his remaining excuses faded away. He might not be able to think of forever, but he was going to try his bloody best to have her for the near future.

His dragon all but cheered, but Maelon barely paid attention. He reached their table, and the conversation died. Kaylee frowned. "Maelon? Why are you here?"

He put out a hand. "Come with me. I need to talk to you."

"Maybe later. Right now, I'm busy."

Bowen smirked at him, and Maelon narrowed his eyes.

He didn't get jealous. He just didn't.

And yet, right now, he wanted nothing more than to punch the dragonman in the face, cart off his female, and let the clan know she was off limits.

His dragon spoke up. *Then you'd better start working on that. It might already be too late.*

No. He refused to believe that.

He'd been a stupid bastard, but no longer.

"Kaylee, please."

Her expression softened as curiosity filled her gaze.

A few seconds of silence felt like a lifetime.

She turned toward Bowen. "I really should talk to him, Bowen. But I'll be here for the meet-up next week."

The male frowned at Maelon before replying, "Okay. But remember, you can call me anytime, Kaylee. I'll come running."

She smiled. "Of course." She stood, walked over, and placed her hand in Maelon's.

He instantly wrapped his fingers around hers and tugged lightly. "Thank you."

After waving goodbye to Bowen, Kaylee matched his pace and whispered, “If you’re just going to order me to stay away from everyone and then walk away, I’m probably going to lose my temper.”

He shook his head. “No. I really want to talk to you.”

Because he was done trying to stay away from her. At least for the duration of her pregnancy, he’d be there for her.

His dragon sighed. *It’s a start.*

Soon they reached his quarters. He never released his hold on Kaylee, and as soon as they were inside, he pulled her closer. Not close enough that their bodies touched, but enough he could feel her heat and be surrounded by her scent.

She searched his gaze. “What is it you want, Maelon? Tell me.”

His gaze darted to her lips before meeting her gaze again. “It’s complicated.”

She raised a hand slowly, almost as if she were afraid he’d bolt, until she could trace his jaw. The light brush of her fingers made both man and beast hum.

She murmured, “Just try explaining it to me.”

He raised his free hand and placed it over hers. He gently lifted her hand, moved his head, and kissed her palm.

She sucked in a breath, and he did it again.

The feel of his lips against her skin brought back memories of their night together. The heat and passion and sense of completeness.

Of how right they’d fit.

Her voice garnered his attention. “If in the next minute you push me away, grunt, and tell me to leave, I won’t let you do this again. No kissing, no holding hands. It’ll be civil and cordial, but nothing else between us. I mean it, Maelon.”

His eyes darted to hers. At the mixture of steel and vulnerability, he finally pulled her against his body and wrapped an arm around her waist.



The feel of her soft, smaller body against him made his heart race and cock harden.

His dragon hummed. *Finally. If you kiss her, then we'll know.*

After brushing the hair off her cheek, he cupped it. “I tried to keep away from you, tried to save us both. But I can’t do it anymore.”

“Save us from what?”

“From a lifetime of pain.”

Her expression softened. “Oh, Maelon. For all your grumpy ways, I don’t think you’d hurt me that deeply. I’m sure we’ll both lose our tempers or argue, or sometimes want to throw things at each other. But despite your hard exterior, I’ve seen glimpses of the man beneath. One I hope wants to get to know me better and let me in even more.”

She was so optimistic. It was on the tip of his tongue to be honest and really lay his cards on the table. But then she leaned against him, her soft breasts pressing against his chest, and he forgot about everything but the female in his arms.

The longer he held her, the more his heart pounded and blood rushed south.

His gaze focused on her mouth again—it would be so easy to lean down and kiss her for the first time. No doubt she’d be sweet and hot and irresistible.

His dragon growled. *Just kiss her already. Let her know we want her. That we want a chance with her.*

Kaylee moved a hand to the back of his neck and lightly played with the hair at his nape.

Being surrounded by her heat and scent and the dance of her fingers was too much. So he lowered his head and kissed her.

It was gentle at first, but his dragon urged him on. *More. Take it deeper. Harder.*

His resolve shattered. Maelon pulled her tighter against his body, ran his tongue along the seam of her lips, and moaned when she opened for him.

Soon he was lost in her heat and taste, every stroke of his tongue against hers making him burn in a good way, but it wasn't enough. Not nearly enough.

Maybe if he wasn't kissing the female who'd haunted his dreams for months, he'd ask his dragon the most important question of all—was she their true mate?

But after so many nights of trying to remember how Kaylee tasted, or the sound of her moans, or how deliciously she'd gripped his cock, he could only think of kissing her harder and holding her tighter against him. He gripped her arse and rocked her against his trouser-clad cock. She cried out, and he broke the kiss to growl, "I want more. I need to taste you again, little bird. Tell me I can."

Kaylee rubbed her breasts against him, her hard nipples making him want to rip off her clothes and claim her without another word.

"Only if you promise not to run away right after, Maelon."

"I won't."

"Then I'm yours. Do whatever you want with me."

He kissed her as he walked her backward to the sofa. Breaking the kiss, he pushed until she sat on the sofa. "Raise your dress for me."

She didn't hesitate to inch the material up, up, until it was at her waist, displaying her pretty blue lace underwear. When she spread her legs wide, he groaned and fell to his knees. "Fuck, I can't believe you're real. I've wanted this for months."

"Me too. So don't make me wait any longer."

He smiled, loving how she didn't try to hide what she wanted.

Maelon ran his hands up her thighs, stopping near the top, where he stroked the soft skin of her inner legs with his

thumbs. With each pass, the scent of her arousal grew stronger.

His dragon growled. *Why are you taking your time? Claim her with our mouth and make her scream.*

*I don't want her to forget this. Ever.*

*Just get on with it.*

He moved his fingers to the edge of the lace and slowly ran a finger underneath the material. As soon as he found her heat, he grunted. "Fuck, you're so wet for me already."

She ran her fingers through his hair, down his cheek, and then to his jaw. "I'm remembering all the dreams I've had of you, Maelon."

"Then it's time to replace those dreams with reality."

Heat flared in her eyes, and he shredded her lace panties. As soon as he exposed her pussy, he growled. "Fuck, just as perfect as I remember."

He ran a finger through her center, loving how she widened her legs even more, and lightly teased her opening. Yes, he wanted to lean down and feast on her until she screamed. But if he was to start ruining her for other males, he needed to make sure she came harder than she ever had in her life.

After pressing her legs wider, he leaned down and gave a cursory lick. The taste of her sweet honey turned his cock to stone.

He looked up and saw her eyes were closed. "Remember, eyes on me."

Her eyelids fluttered open, and the desire there snapped the last of his control.

He licked and lapped and teased everywhere but where she wanted him most.

Kaylee threaded her fingers into his hair and kept him in place, almost as if she were afraid he'd leave.

No fucking way that would happen.

He finally licked at her clit, slowly at first, until he reached the speed that made her hips arch toward him. She dug her nails into his scalp and moaned, “Maelon, please.”

Unable to deny her any longer, to deny himself, he suckled her clit between his teeth and lightly nibbled.

As she cried out, he thrust a finger into her pussy, loving how she clenched and released him. On and on she went, and he never stopped sweetly torturing her, until she finally relaxed back against the sofa cushions.

Even if he wanted to stay and make her come again, she gently tugged on his hair. “Maelon, I can’t take any more right now.”

His beast growled. But before he could say anything, Kaylee asked, “Won’t you hold me this time?”

Just like that, some of his desire faded, replaced with guilt.

After one more lick, he sat next to her on the sofa and pulled her against his side. She melted against him, wrapping her arms around his chest, and they sat, their heavy breathing and pounding hearts the only sounds in the room.

Even though his cock was painfully hard, Kaylee’s soft form against his side calmed him. Relaxed him, even.

It was strange how making her orgasm made him feel complete somehow.

His dragon said, *We should be the only ones to ever make her come, ever taste her pussy.*

He nearly agreed.

Kaylee yawned. “This isn’t fair. I want to stay awake. I want a turn to tease and torture you, too.”

He smiled. “As much as I want to see you swallow my cock between those pretty lips of yours, you need your sleep, little bird.” Maelon placed his hand over her lower belly. “For this one.”

She slowly placed her hand over his and sniffled. He leaned back and saw tears trailing down her cheeks. “What’s

wrong?”

“Nothing. These are happy tears. I promise.”

She still refused to meet his gaze, but she tightened her grip on his hand under hers. “Just stay like this for a little while longer, Maelon. I’m going to play the pregnancy card and say that I need a little comforting right now.”

The urge to take care of his female rushed through him.

Not that Kaylee was his.

His dragon sighed but remained silent.

Kaylee lifted her head and searched his gaze. After a second, she nodded. “Yes, hold me close. That’s all.”

She plopped her head back on his shoulder and snuggled closer, if that was possible.

He hugged her tighter against him while also keeping his hand over her lower abdomen.

Over their baby.

Could he see himself as a father? For so many years, he’d kept that door firmly closed, had never even imagined what it might be like.

And yet, he pictured a little boy with wild, curly hair like his mother, smiling and rushing off to play with his cousins during a visit to Lochguard. Her family would no doubt welcome Maelon. He’d be included, and he’d finally have the home he’d always wanted.

Not a place, but a person. Or rather persons—Kaylee and their child.

His dragon spoke softly, *Just give her a chance.*

Kaylee yawned, and he couldn’t resist doing the same. As she drifted off and her body went slack, he laid his head against hers and closed his eyes.

He was too tired to think of the future. But for now, he wanted to enjoy having his female in his arms and pretend she belonged there always.

## Chapter Fourteen

---

Kaylee woke up slowly, warm and comfy, and snuggled into the hot, solid presence at her side. One that rose and lowered ever so slightly in a steady rhythm.

Opening her eyes, she found herself in a bed, her head on Maelon's chest, and his arm wrapped around her.

She didn't remember getting into bed, which meant he must've carried her. Not only that, she'd slept the entire way.

Closing her eyes again, she memorized how she felt right now—safe, warm, and wanted. Almost like she'd found the place where she belonged.

Which was crazy, given how a little oral sex didn't mean they'd bonded for life.

But since he'd kissed her, Maelon had to know if she was his true mate or not.

It shouldn't matter, given how the future was anything but certain when it came to the dragonman. And yet, if she was his true mate, she burned to know.

A grunt rumbled under her ear on his chest, and his deep voice filled the room. "Good morning, little bird."

The nickname made her heart skip a beat. Did this mean he wasn't going to push her away again?

Not wanting to rock the boat, she kept her tone casual as she replied, "Morning to you, too."

He moved his hand up and played with her hair. “You didn’t even blink when I moved you from the couch last night. I need to be more careful in the future.”

She propped her chin on his chest and looked at his face. “Why?”

“Because if you fall asleep every time I make you come, then you’ll be sleeping all the time.”

Her breath hitched. “So you want to do it again?”

“Why don’t you find out for yourself if I’m ready now?”

Her lips twitched. “Is that a sly way of asking for a hand job?”

His pupils flashed to slits and back. “I’ll take your hand, but I’d love your mouth. Your pussy even more.”

At the thought of making this often stoic dragonman moan, wetness rushed between her thighs. “Hmm. I am starving.” She sat up, tossed the blanket aside, and found a very naked dragonman.

But as much as she wanted to explore his magnificent chest, her eyes zeroed in on his dick. Hard and thick and laying across his lower belly. Kaylee ran a finger up his length and lightly teased the slit at the top.

Maelon groaned. “Fuck, yes. Keep touching me, little bird. I ache for you.”

Kaylee moved downward until she settled between his thighs. Taking a hold of his cock, she pumped a few times and he let out a bead of precum. Leaning down, she licked him clean.

The salty and musky taste made her groan, and she took him into her mouth. Inch by inch, slowly, until he nearly hit the back of her throat. She took a second to breathe through her nose and then hummed.

Maelon’s hand went to her hair as he arched toward her. “Fuck, that feels so bloody good. More, Kaylee. Give me more.”

Tightening her grip at the base of his cock, she moved her head and hand in tandem. A little faster here, a little slower there. Taking her time to lick and nibble, loving how Maelon's grip tightened in her hair.

“Fuck, that's perfect. You're perfect.”

She kept up her torture, watching him as she did so. His eyes never left hers, his pupils flashing rapidly. At the heat blazing in his gaze, she put her free hand between her legs.

“That's right, little bird. Make yourself come as I watch you swallow my dick.”

She moaned and moved her fingers faster against her clit, all while she continued to bob on his cock.

The smell and taste and heat of him, combined with his possessive gaze, tipped her over the edge. She cried out just as Maelon pulled out of her mouth and came in hot jets on his stomach.

When they both finished orgasming, she breathed heavily and braced her hands on his thighs. “While amazing, I wanted you to come in my mouth.”

He frowned. “I hadn't asked you, so I didn't want to force you to.”

Even in the throes of passion, Maelon cared about her wishes and choices. Kaylee softened a little more toward him.

She crawled up to his face, leaned down, and kissed him. It was gentle, but it soon turned heated. His tongue caressing hers, exploring her mouth, and she started to get turned on all over again.

Eventually, he broke the kiss and stared directly at her, his pupils flashing. It was on the tip of her tongue to ask if she was his true mate, but he spoke first. “Come on. Let's clean up and I'll make you something to eat.”

He started to get up, but at the uneasiness in her stomach—at the fear he regretted spending the night with her—she pushed against his shoulder. “You aren't just stalling before you tell me that while this was nice, I should stay away from



you, or that you should stay away, or some such bullshit, are you?”

“No.”

The swift reply made her blink. “Okay.”

He smiled and touched her cheek. “Let’s clean up and then we’ll talk, okay, little bird? It’s hard to have a serious conversation when I’m covered in semen.”

She glanced down and laughed. “True. Although maybe I have a dragon-shifter far up in my family tree because I rather like seeing how I made you lose your mind.”

He snorted. “Dragon-shifter genes are always dominant, so, no, that’s impossible.”

She rolled her eyes. “I know that. We’re going to have to work on your sense of humor. I’ve seen bits and pieces of it, but it definitely needs to come out more.”

He tickled her side, and she laughed, moving away from him until she was out of reach.

“Well, if you want to clean up together, then you’d better hurry up before I take all the hot water.”

Kaylee crawled off the bed and raced into the bathroom. She’d barely gotten naked—Maelon had left her dress on when he put her to bed—before a warm hand lightly swatted her butt. She giggled and looked behind her. “Is that supposed to be a punishment?”

His pupils flashed rapidly. “Do you like that?”

“Maybe.”

He swatted her again, and she hummed.

“Well, well, you’re full of surprises, aren’t you?”

She raised an eyebrow. “You’re just figuring this out now?” She reached back, took his hand, and tugged toward the shower. “Come on. Let’s clean up and have some fun along the way. Then we’ll eat breakfast.”

Maelon took his time washing her, slowly, just as she did him. And by the end, he even braced her against the wall and fucked her until they both cried out. Except when he came inside her, she orgasmed right away a second time.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, she knew that meant something. And yet, he kissed her, distracted her, and eventually carried her to the kitchen. As he went about making some food, she watched him, wondering if this was all a dream and that soon she'd wake up to find the cool, grumpy Maelon who only pushed her away.



MAELON HUMMED a tune as he took out some bacon and eggs from the refrigerator.

His dragon spoke up. *Someone's happy. Now, if you'd only tell her the truth, it'd make the day even better.*

His good mood dampened a little. *I'm not about to blurt that she's our true mate. Not when the future is so uncertain.*

*She's ours. We should claim her, protect her, mate her. Not only does she brighten our day, her pussy grips us just right.*

He had no argument there. Her mouth had felt bloody fantastic, too.

And while he was trying his best not to sabotage something before it'd barely begun, he couldn't quite embrace finding his true mate. Not after what had happened with his parents.

Kaylee's voice prevented his dragon from replying. "What did that bacon ever do to you?"

He realized he'd been stabbing a piece repeatedly with a knife. After putting it down, he rubbed his face. How was he supposed to handle this? He didn't want to lie to her, but he also couldn't tell her the full truth.

"You can talk to me, you know. I can keep a secret or a confidence."

He turned toward her. Seeing the worry in her gaze made his beast unhappy.

Ignoring him, Maelon focused on the human. Whether she referred to keeping her pregnancy a secret or not, he didn't know. "I'm not used to being open with anyone."

"What about with friends?"

He turned back around to finish making breakfast. "Mainly there's just Rhydian and Trahern. Rhydian's busy with the clan and his mate, and Trahern moved away."

"It must be hard to have one of your oldest friends move away like that. But surely you made a friend or two with the other doctors when you attended the doctor meetings on Stonefire?"

"No."

"That's it? That's all you're going to tell me?"

His beast spoke up. *If you won't tell her about being our true mate, then at least talk about this. Give her something.*

Even though his every instinct cried out for him to remain quiet, his dragon was right. "I don't do well in large groups. I'm not overly friendly to strangers, and..."

"And what?"

After taking a deep breath, he replied, "If I look someone in the eye too long, mostly if they're unfamiliar to me, my skin starts to feel too tight. So I have to look away, and people think I'm being arrogant or that I look down on them or some other such rubbish."

"But you look at me all the time. Why?"

He turned and met her golden gaze. "Because your gaze makes me feel comfortable."

She smiled. "I'm glad. When you let down your guard, your gaze makes me feel the same way."

As they stared at each other, he debated crossing the room to kiss her. But then her stomach rumbled, and he turned back to the pans on the stove. "Anyway, my awkwardness just

makes people uncomfortable or angry. So I tend to keep to myself.”

His dragon spoke up. *That’s not the only reason.*

*Not going there today, dragon.*

Maybe not ever. But the more time he spent with Kaylee, the less he liked to outright deny he’d do anything with her.

She’d probably get tired of him, or irritated, or angry. Eventually.

Kaylee said, “Well, is there anything that helps you relax in front of other people?”

*You.* “I’m not sure.”

“Hmm. Well, you’re fine with me. So that’s a start. And I’d like to think I’m your friend, right?”

“Aye.”

His dragon sighed, but didn’t say anything.

He heard Kaylee get up and walk over. She laid her head on his back and wrapped her arms around his waist. Without thinking, he placed a hand over hers around his middle.

“What do you want to do today?” she asked.

“Pardon?”

“Well, it’s the weekend. And I know doctors don’t have the usual nine-to-five jobs, or whatever the British equivalent is. But Delaney mentioned how you don’t work most Saturdays, so I thought maybe we could spend it together.”

The walls around his heart wanted to say something sharp, maybe accuse her of being needy. Anything to keep his distance.

But right here, right now, in her embrace, he didn’t want to push her away.

*Good,* his beast said.

“I have the day off. And we can do anything you like.”

“Anything?”

“Within reason, little bird. I’m not going to take you up in a basket, maybe not ever.”

She tightened her arms around him. “No, nothing too crazy.” She released him and he nearly yanked her back. But she moved to stand beside him and continued, “I’ll give you two choices. One, you take me on a tour of the clan and show me all your favorite spots, and we have a nice lunch somewhere. Or two, we can have a lazy day in and then go to karaoke tonight. I know you have it on Snowridge because Bowen mentioned it.”

At the other male’s name, he growled. But keeping his jealousy in check, he said, “The first. I’ll take you on a tour, provided you’re strong enough.”

“After I eat, I’ll be fine.” She clapped her hands. “I can’t wait! I’ve seen most of Snowridge’s public spaces, but people have only told me surface-level information. I want to know about the charming hidden spots, or where to see the best views, that kind of stuff.”

“I can do that. Although, some areas are off-limits to all but a few, and we can’t go to those places.”

She shrugged. “I figured as much. But that’s fine. I don’t need to see any top-secret bunkers or anything.”

He snorted. “You could say that all of Snowridge is a bunker.”

“Ha, you’re right. Then top-secret labs, or test areas, or maybe an old-fashioned speakeasy.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Speakeasy? You’re in the wrong century, little bird. Not to mention the wrong country. Only the Americans would try to outlaw alcohol.”

She stuck out her tongue. “Only the British would try to make Christmas celebrations illegal.”

He blinked. “That was nearly four hundred years ago.”

She shrugged. “Hey, I use what I can.”

His dragon laughed. *If I didn’t like her already, I’d be charmed now.*

“Well, that was the humans’ doing, and I’m not one. So you’ll have to think of something else.” He removed some bacon from the pan and put it on a plate.

Kaylee gingerly picked up a piece with her fork and blew on it before taking a bite. “It took me forever to get used to British bacon—it’s more like ham to me. But right now, I don’t care. I’ll eat anything.”

*Get American-style streaky bacon,* he said to himself.

“Breakfast is nearly ready. Make some tea while I finish up.”

As Kaylee turned the kettle on and fetched some mugs, he kept stealing glances at her. He’d never thought of his morning routine as anything special—just a way to eat and start the day. However, he rather liked having someone to keep him company.

His dragon spoke up. *She could be here every morning, if you tried harder.*

Maelon didn’t argue back. Because after spending an entire day with Kaylee MacDonald, would he be able to resist her at all?

## Chapter Fifteen

---

**K**aylee somehow managed to keep the conversation light during breakfast. Which was no mean feat considering how she burned to know if she was Maelon's true mate.

Still, she learned about how he mostly worked and didn't spend a lot of time with other people. Not because he wanted to work so much, but rather he was uncomfortable in social situations.

That was something she'd never really thought about. Kaylee just found chatting to people easy. She didn't mind small talk or having to lead a conversation. It was part of the reason she'd done so well with the children on Lochguard—she could keep them occupied when their attention spans wandered.

But Maelon was a different case. And later, after she exited her apartment in clean clothes and headed toward their meeting spot, she was determined to make the most of the day. Maybe they could have some fun during the tour.

Her dragonman waited at the end of the corridor and watched her as she drew nearer. She shivered at his intense, almost possessive gaze. A woman could get used to that look.

Mentally, she sighed. She hated not knowing about the future. Things seemed fine at the moment, but he could bolt at the first sign of trouble.

*Focus on today and you can figure out forever later.*

She smiled and stopped in front of Maelon. He'd changed clothes as well, and somehow the sweater with the shirt collar peeking out paired with jeans made him extra sexy, and a lot more approachable. "So, where are we headed? You said it'd be a surprise."

He motioned with his head and started walking. Kaylee didn't miss a beat and took his hand in hers.

For a second, she wondered if he'd pull away. Then he threaded his fingers through hers and squeezed.

The gesture made her heart soar.

He replied, "You mentioned wanting to see good views, so I thought I'd take to you to one of the best from inside the mountain."

"Are there lookout points outside, too?"

"Not really. There were at one time. But some children discovered them and nearly fell off the mountain, so Rhydian shut them down as soon as he became Snowridge's clan leader."

"What was he like before becoming clan leader? Rhydian seems serious, more so than Finn, but I know sometimes with dragon-shifters, you have to put up a strong facade to the world."

He glanced at her. "Have you also made a study of clan leaders?"

"Not on purpose. But I learn better by watching and doing instead of reading. So even though I got a ton of books to study when I first moved to Lochguard, I had trouble concentrating. So I went out to watch, ask questions, and get up to speed."

"You don't read at all?"

"I didn't say that. I like audiobooks while I do other things. And I can read print books, but it takes longer."

He smiled. "I'm the opposite. Listening just goes in one ear and out the other."



“Well, it’s just another way we complement each other, don’t you think? That makes things fun. I wouldn’t want to date a carbon copy of myself.”

As soon as she said the word, “date,” she mentally kicked herself and waited for Maelon to freak out.

However, he didn’t so much as blink before replying, “While I don’t go out and observe on purpose, I see a lot of things with my patients. And some people do end up suiting better when they’re more alike. I’ve never really understood how it all works.”

“What don’t you understand? Love?”

He bobbed his head. “It’s supposed to be this great thing. Songs, movies, you name it, all shout about it from the rooftops. But it’s also messy, dangerous, and can cause pain.”

“Sometimes, yes. But it can also be amazing, comforting, and makes you feel better.”

He grunted, and she bit her bottom lip. How could she get through to him that what happened with his parents was an extreme situation and not the norm?

While that would take more than a simple conversation, Kaylee wasn’t about to waste this opportunity with Maelon. Maybe sharing some of her own memories would help him understand her a little better.

So she said, “The painful aspects of love are awful, for sure. When my parents picked safety with new identities over ever seeing their daughters again, it hurt. So much so, I cried every night for a week. But even so, I have a lot of good memories with them, especially from Christmas and Halloween. Even now, despite how it can hurt, I still remember those days fondly.”

And while her sister had tried her hardest to make every Christmas and Halloween special since moving to Scotland, it hadn’t been the same. Not just because Gina had been busy with her own family, either.

It was almost as if her parents had been the key ingredient for making those holidays special. Despite their abandonment,

she still wanted to have just one more holiday season with them and Gina, as a kind of goodbye.

A tear slipped down her cheek, and she quickly brushed it away.

Maelon stopped walking and touched her cheek. “What’s wrong, little bird?”

She looked up at him, the concern in his eyes making another tear fall. The more time she spent with Maelon Perry, the more she knew he was a good man.

It wouldn’t be hard to fall for him.

Not wanting to go down that road, she answered, “I miss my parents, is all. Even knowing they turned their backs on me and Gina, I miss the good times.”

“I can’t replicate Christmas or Halloween in January. But what is something they did that you miss?”

She shook her head. “You don’t have to do something special for me, Maelon, just because I cried. I cry watching ads sometimes now. Or if I drop a tea bag. Pregnancy makes me a little weepy.”

He cupped her cheek, and his thumb wiped away the remaining wetness on her skin. “I want to do something for you, little bird. I don’t like seeing you unhappy.”

“Because I’m carrying your child?”

He paused before saying, “Because your tears are like a stab to my heart. And no, I’m not talking about every female’s tears, but yours.” After leaning down, he kissed her gently. “So tell me. I’ve shared a lot with you, so share more with me.”

As she searched his brown-eyed gaze, his pupils flashing between slits and round, she only saw sincerity there.

Despite all his hesitations and earlier attempts to resist her, he was trying. For her.

Her heart warmed, and she tried to think of something. Then she snapped her fingers. “For my birthday every year,

we'd wear matching things, like hats or shirts. I got to pick the theme and have fun with it." She smiled at a memory. "One year, when I was younger, I loved everything unicorn and wanted to wear matching shirts. My parents didn't even blink and when we went out for dinner, we all wore pink shirts with prancing unicorns."

She'd mostly forgotten about that memory because once Gina had fled to Scotland, any sort of normalcy had faded at home.

Maelon grunted. "Well, I don't have anything unicorn. But I have an idea. Come with me."

He tugged her hand, and she followed. "You're not going to tell me where we're going, are you?"

"No."

She swung their clasped hands, her tears forgotten. She loved surprises. "Well, I can't wait! Now you have to tell me something you used to do as a kid, too. It's only fair." He raised a dark eyebrow, and she grinned. "Oh, come on. You know you want to."

After sighing, he replied, "For my birthday, when I was a child, I helped decorate my cake every year. It often looked like someone had dropped it by the end, but I enjoyed trying to create something with different colors of frosting."

"That's adorable! Was it because you liked painting, even if you were bad at it?"

"Not really. But it was the one time a year I could pretend to be creative. Plus, I liked making my mum laugh as she tried to guess what I'd made. She never got it right."

Kaylee wished she could've met his mother. "Well, I think we should try that, too. I'm okay at cake decorating, but nothing fancy. That can be one of our date nights for the week."

"I'd like that."

And as they smiled at each other, Kaylee's heart warmed. Maybe, just maybe, things could work out with Maelon.

Oh, she was trying not to get her hopes up. And yet, she wasn't against wishing for a future together.



MAELON KEPT STEALING glances at Kaylee as they walked toward the clan's community center. For a male who'd never felt comfortable around many people, it still amazed him how easily the human could get him to talk about his past.

His dragon spoke up. *A true mate is our best chance at happiness. It makes sense to me.*

*I won't put it down to that. She's just...special.*

*She is. Which is why we need to claim her as our mate.*

As Kaylee made up a story about one of the tapestries, he watched excitement fill her eyes and her free hand wave about. Her talkative nature didn't bother him, but rather the opposite—for a male who didn't like to share much with anyone, he liked how she could fill the silence. And not just with nonsense, but wonderful stories of dragons long past, or stories of the children she'd watched, or even her culture shock on moving to Scotland from America.

And when she smiled at him again, her cheeks flushed from her storytelling, he stopped breathing. She was so fucking beautiful.

*Take her home and claim her again,* his dragon said.

Kaylee tilted her head. "How can you listen to me and your dragon at the same time?"

"Practice."

She raised her brows. "That's all you're going to give me?"

He shrugged. "We learn early on how to carry on two conversations at once. Sometimes we can't, if the dragon is being demanding or saying something important. However, it's like any skill—you get better with practice."

“I sometimes wished I had an inner dragon.”

“Not everyone can be so lucky.”

He winked, and she stuck her tongue out at him. “Meanie.”

He laughed. “I wish I could easily talk to strangers like you. We always want what we don’t have, little bird.”

“I suppose.” She noticed the sign denoting the community center. “I haven’t seen inside this place yet. I’m curious how it’s different from Lochguard. We have a great hall there, and that’s where most of the events take place.”

He opened the door and debated releasing Kaylee’s hand so she could enter before him. But she walked, tugging him along, and Maelon had no choice but to follow.

The entrance area was a small room with a front desk. The male at the desk looked up and blinked. “Dr. Perry? I didn’t think you had any clan-wide medical talks scheduled.”

“I don’t. I’m taking Kaylee on a tour and wanted to show her the event space and the backstage areas, if that’s all right?”

“That should be fine, since you’ve used the areas before and know the rules.” The male smiled at Kaylee. “Hello, I’m Emyr.”

“Hi, Emyr! I’m Kaylee MacDonald. Nice to meet you. Do a lot of events take place here?”

“A fair bit. More in the winter than the summer.”

“And what about children’s events?”

The male frowned. “A few, but not so many in recent years.”

“Later, I might come back and pick your brain on how to book events and put them together. I might be putting some on in the future.”

Emyr nodded. “Aye, that’s fine.” He held out a card. “This is how you can get in touch with the community center. Anyone working will have the information you need.”

Kaylee took the card. “Thanks so much, Emyr. I appreciate it.”

The male behind the desk was in his twenties, probably about the same age as Kaylee, and currently looked at her like he wanted to eat her up.

Maelon grunted, Emyr looked at him, and the younger male cleared his throat. “You can go in, Dr. Perry. See you later, Kaylee.”

She waved goodbye as Maelon guided her through a door, down a corridor, and stopped in front of the double doors at the end. “Close your eyes.”

After studying him a second, she obeyed.

The fact she trusted him so easily made him want to claim her as his female even more.

His dragon grunted but remained silent.

Maelon reluctantly released Kaylee’s hand. “Stand here and keep your eyes closed whilst I switch on the lights.”

She stayed put as he flipped on the lights. Just as he’d thought, it was still mostly decorated from the New Year celebrations.

Going back to Kaylee, he went behind her and placed his hands on her shoulders. She didn’t even jump, but merely leaned back against him. “Can I open my eyes now?”

“Not yet. Let me guide you inside first.”

He moved his hands from her shoulders, down her sides, until they rested on her hips. His first instinct was to pull her more against him, but he resisted and instead murmured, “Walk until I tell you to stop.”

She did, and once they were in the center of the room, he said, “Okay, open your eyes.”

He waited to see her reaction.



AS SOON AS Kaylee opened her eyes, she gasped. She stood in a giant open space, mostly empty in the center, with all the furniture pushed to the edges. But that wasn't what garnered her attention. No, everywhere gold stars hung from the ceiling, white string lights draped between them, and silver material draped around the edges, gathered every so often with more stars and even a few crescent moons.

“It's beautiful.”

She turned toward Maelon, and he cleared his throat. “It's from our New Year's events. Usually, the clan likes the decorations so much that they stay up for at least a month. I thought with all the talk of unicorns and Christmas, you might like it.”

Turning in a circle, Kaylee tried to take in all the decorations, and noticed little details she'd missed before. “There are little dragons flying in the air, among the stars!”

They were only slightly bigger than the stars and hung nearer to the ceiling, which was why she'd missed them at first. The tiny dragons were in different colors, too—gold, black, red, green, blue, and purple. The main dragon-shifter colors.

Maelon moved to stand beside her. “Every year there's a theme, but the little dragons always have to be included somewhere. One time, when I was a little boy, they were swimming among the seaweed and fish hanging from the ceiling.”

“Maybe next year you could have Pegasuses flying with the dragons. That would be cute.”

“They always ask for volunteers and ideas toward the end of the year for both the Winter Solstice and the New Year celebrations. It's worth a shot voicing yours.”

If she stuck around, was left unsaid.

“I'll have to keep that in mind.” She glanced around the room. “This space would do great for events with the kids. Although it is pretty deep inside the mountain, and that might freak out some humans.”

“There are a few outdoor spaces that could work in the summer or early autumn, if you want to test the waters first.”

“Thanks. I might have to see those too. Especially since I have my own personal tour guide for the day.”

He smiled. “You do. Although this wasn’t the main surprise.”

She bounced on her feet. “What else is there?”

Maelon brushed some hair off her face and tucked it behind her ear. “You like surprises, don’t you?”

“Yes. And no, I’m not going to pretend I don’t to be modest.”

He leaned down and kissed her. “Good. I like honesty.”

It was on the tip of her tongue to ask about being his true mate, but he took her hand again and tugged. “Come on. I’ll show you the rest of the space and then reveal your surprise.”

“Oh, now you’re just being mean.”

He grinned. “You’re the one who said I needed to work on teasing and humor. I’m pretty good at teasing you when you’re naked, but I still have to work on it for when you’re dressed.”

Her cheeks heated as she remembered him licking slowly between her thighs. She blurted, “Is there a private space we could use here?”

He blinked. “Pardon?”

She stood a little taller. “I want a proper kiss without worrying if others might see us.”

After leaning down, Maelon’s hot breath danced across her lips. “If I start kissing you in private, we’ll never get to the tour.”

“Like that’s a bad thing?”

“Stop trying to tempt me, little bird. I already know you like me when I make you come. We need to spend some time together out and about, in public, too.”



Kaylee searched his gaze. Now was the time to ask. “So, is it because you want to get to know me for yourself? Or because you feel you should because I’m your true mate?”

He frowned. “How did you know...”

“I didn’t, but you just told me that I was. So, which is it?”

## Chapter Sixteen

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**M**aelon couldn't be mad about Kaylee tricking him into revealing the truth. He rather admired her for it.

But now he had to actually talk about it.

His dragon sighed. *I want her. And I know you do too. So just tell her and don't you fucking dare push her away.*

As he searched Kaylee's eyes, he remembered her tears from earlier and how it'd felt like a stab to his heart. He didn't want to be the male who did that to her.

So even if he should say something to drive her away, he replied, "I want to spend time with you because I want to know you better, not just because a kiss told me you were my true mate. I was drawn to you long before that." He traced her cheek. "I'm tired of trying to resist you, little bird. I'm still unsure about forever, but I'm at least trying to keep an open mind. Because you're so bloody special, and I've never felt such a strong pull toward another female before."

For a beat, Kaylee remained silent, and he wondered if he'd said the wrong thing. Then she stepped closer and wrapped her arms around his neck. At the feel of her fingers against his skin, both man and beast hummed.

His dragon spoke up. *Kiss her.*

Before he could do just that, Kaylee said, "I've been drawn to you, too. You're my opposite in so many ways, and yet we seem to fit. So for now, I'm going to call you my boyfriend."

It's less formal or permanent than my mate, but it does something very important."

"Which is?"

"Let everyone know that you're mine and I'm yours."

With a growl, he kissed her. His beautiful, kind, strong-willed female.

Kaylee opened her mouth, and he plundered, tasting her, claiming her, letting her know just how much he wanted her. He even moved his hands to her arse and pulled her closer, groaning when her belly pressed against his already hard cock.

She laughed and broke the kiss. "So, about that private room?"

He nipped her bottom lip. "You really do have a one-track mind today, don't you?"

"Oh, I want to spend time with you while still dressed. Later. For right now, I'm in the mood to celebrate. Aren't you?"

His dragon hummed. *Yes, yes. Find somewhere private. We can talk more later. Fuck her now.*

He reluctantly released her, took her hand, and said, "This way."

She kept up with his hurried steps, and soon he had them inside one of the storage rooms. He placed her on a table to the side, putting her at the perfect height. "Tell me you're wet for me, little bird."

She widened her legs and lifted her skirt. "Why don't you find out for yourself?"

Damn, he loved how playful his female was.

Maelon ran a hand up her thigh until he could trace the edge of her underwear. "You shouldn't wear these around me."

"Why?"

He ripped them off and tossed them away. "Because I'll do that."

She laughed. But as soon as he ran a finger through her center, she sucked in a breath.

As he lightly played with her entrance, he growled. “So fucking wet and swollen for me. My female wants me.”

Kaylee placed her hands on his chest, up to his shoulders, and pulled him closer. “Hurry up and claim me, Maelon. I want to feel you inside me.”

His dragon spoke up. *Hurry, hurry. Claim her as ours.*

Maelon didn't waste time in undoing his jeans and taking out his cock. He positioned at her entrance and thrust in to the hilt.

Kaylee cried out as he groaned. She was so hot and tight and, most importantly, his to claim.

She wrapped her arms around him. “Maelon, please. Start moving.”

He pulled out slowly and thrust in again. Hard.

He repeated the motion until Kaylee was clawing at his back and arching to meet his every thrust. It wouldn't take much more to push him over the edge, but his female needed to come first.

So he reached between them and rubbed her clit.

“Yes, oh yes. Just like that.”

He loved watching as she made little noises, as her cheeks flushed, and her eyes burned hotter with desire.

After a few more little whimpers, Kaylee cried out his name and convulsed around his dick. Every squeeze was a claim, and soon he followed. As he spent inside her, she orgasmed again, nearly crying by the end, from the intense pleasure.

Maelon rested his forehead on Kaylee's shoulder as he caught his breath. Sex was great, but he couldn't resist hugging her close and breathing in her scent.

The one mixed with his.

The fact she carried his child didn't scare him as much as before. More and more, he wanted to be at her side and watch the little one grow up.

His knee-jerk reaction was that he could end up causing his son or daughter harm.

But his dragon spoke up. *We could cause harm at any moment, even unintentionally. Life is uncertain. It's time to stop living in fear and embrace the warm, kind, beautiful female in our arms and never let go.*

He tightened his hold on Kaylee. Could he do it? Could he really let down his guard and let her in?

Given how his protective walls already had some holes in it from spending time with her, Maelon thought he just might be able to.

He kissed the side of her neck, her jaw, and finally took her lips in a slow, possessive kiss. When he finished, he rested his forehead against hers and couldn't stop smiling.

Kaylee smiled back. "It doesn't take much to put you in a good mood, does it?"

"With you, never."

Her expression softened. "Maelon."

"My surprise is going to seem awful after this."

After searching his eyes for a second, she said, "I doubt it. Although two orgasms in a row is pretty amazing. I'll admit, dragon-shifters know how to keep a mate around."

He chuckled. "It's definitely a plus in our favor over human males."

She stroked his cheek, and his dragon hummed at the contact. "I'm glad you accepted my strip poker challenge."

He kissed her. "Me too, little bird. Me, too."

After a few more lingering kisses, he reluctantly pulled out and looked around to find a clean towel. Once he did, he tidied her up and then placed it into the laundry bin.

She snorted. “Let’s hope they don’t open it up and realize it’s stuck together.”

“If someone is going to investigate a soiled towel, then they deserve what they find. We’re not the first to sneak into this room for sex.” He helped her off the table. Once he picked up her underwear and tucked them into his pocket, he took her hand. “For my surprise, we just need to go across the hall.”

He guided them out and then into the other room. Kaylee gasped at the display of props and costumes. “Look at it all!” She twirled around. “And I’m sure a lot of this can be tweaked for the children, too. It definitely gives me some more ideas to propose to Rhydian.”

He loved how she thought of the children, even now.

His dragon spoke up. *She will be a fantastic mother.*

*She will.*

*And?*

*And nothing else right now. Let me make her happy.*

His beast fell silent, and he walked over to a shelf, pulled out a large container, and put it down in front of Kaylee. “Open it.”

She took off the lid, revealing an array of masks. Some were like the half masks from the masquerade, but others covered the entire face—some were dragons, some were foxes, and some were cats, among other animals.

After picking up a purple dragon mask, she put it on and curled her fingers. “Roar!”

He laughed. “You sound like a lion, not a dragon.”

“Well, that’s the best I can do.” She moved to take off the mask, but he shook his head. “We’re going to both wear whatever you want as I walk you around the clan for the tour.”

She tilted her head, and with the dragon mask on, he thought she looked rather adorable.

“Well, let me take this off to see what else there is. I want to find the best ones.”

He moved behind her, undid the tie, and took it off. After kissing her cheek, he whispered, “The dragon hoard is yours, little bird.”

“Dragon-shifters hoard masks in Wales? That’s kind of sad. I mean, just about anything else would be better.”

He lightly swatted her arse. “Cheeky female. Just pick out the mask you want. Because the faster you do, the faster I can show you around and get you back to my flat and my bed.”

“Someone’s pretty sure of himself.”

“Aye, I am.”

She met his gaze, her eyes full of heat, and it took everything he had not to prop her up on something and fuck her again.

He cleared his throat. “Pick out our masks, Kaylee.”

She sighed dramatically. “Fine.”

He watched as she went through the container, her face lighting up at some of the more elaborate ones.

In the end, she held up two simple black half-masks.

He asked, “That’s what you want us to wear?”

“Yes, we’ll look like bandits.”

“Any bandit who only uses this to disguise themselves is an idiot.”

“Stop being a spoilsport. There’s another reason, too.” He raised his brows, and she continued, “It reminds me of how we met. And by wearing them, it’s kind of like we’re continuing that night all these months later.”

His dragon spoke up. *I want to keep her forever.*

Maelon ignored his beast and put the half-mask on his face. “As my lady wishes.”

As Kaylee tied hers on, Maelon put away the container. Once he returned, she took his hand, moved close, and stood on her tiptoes to kiss him. “Thank you.”

“For the orgasms?”

She rolled her eyes. “For giving me back a little of what I lost with my parents.”

Caressing her cheek, he replied, “Seeing you happy makes me happy, little bird. That’s all that matters.”

“Oh, it’s not going to be one-sided. We’ll be doing some cake decorating together later this week, for sure.”

“About that.”

“You’re not backing out, are you?”

“No. But maybe you could stay with me some nights? I want to see you for more than just two dinners a week.”

She placed a hand on his chest, over his heart. “I’d love that, Maelon Perry. As your girlfriend, I have to do my best to keep others away.”

He frowned. “Other what?”

“Women. You’re mine now.”

He nearly said she was his, too. For always.

But he couldn’t quite bring himself to say it aloud. No, so many things could still go wrong.

His dragon spoke up. *Between me and her, by the end, you won’t stand a chance.*

He probably didn’t. But for now, he didn’t want to think of the future and what could go wrong. So, after kissing his female, he took her to the best viewpoint from within Snowridge and later back to his flat.

Where he made her happy three more times, each with her screaming his name as she came.



## Chapter Seventeen

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The next six weeks flew by for Kaylee. Between spending time with Maelon and crafting a few plans for some children's events later in the year, she kept busy and didn't think much about the future.

Specifically, about what it would entail if she stayed with a certain dragonman and became his mate.

While Maelon continued surprising her with gifts, activities, and even sharing more about his past, there was always a lingering distance. One she was afraid she'd never be able to close.

And if he didn't drop his walls, she didn't think she could stay with him forever, no matter how much he was coming to mean to her.

Currently, Kaylee sat on her sofa, her hand over her belly, doing her best just to stay awake. She was nearly six months along now, and while the vomiting hadn't returned, she was tired all the time. Merely making a cup of tea sometimes made her want to take a nap.

Just as she was about to doze, something kicked against her hand. She immediately woke up. "Junior, is that you?"

Another kick, and she laughed. Her baby had never done that before.

Immediately, she longed for Maelon. Should she call him? Looking down at her stomach, she asked, "Do you want your daddy to come over?"

Another kick.

She tried calling Maelon, but he didn't pick up. She sent a text but didn't get a reply.

She did her best to push down her disappointment. He was busy and had a vital role within the clan. Of course he couldn't always come at the drop of a hat.

Although tears still pricked her eyes. Maybe she'd imagined the closeness over the last weeks, and Maelon still didn't want to be a father.

But then someone rang the doorbell. Since dragon-shifters had exceptional hearing, the door was soundproofed, and she couldn't shout for anyone to enter. With a sigh, she wiped her face and slowly hefted to her feet. She'd just barely made it upright when a key turned in the lock and Maelon burst in.

He rushed over to her and immediately took her shoulders. "What's wrong? Why were you crying?"

"I..." She sniffled, trying her best to get herself together.

One thing she wouldn't miss from being pregnant—losing control of her emotions when it was the least convenient.

He cupped her cheek. "Little bird, please tell me why you're crying."

She shook her head, trying to figure out how to explain that she'd overreacted when her baby kicked again.

Grabbing Maelon's free hand, she moved it to her stomach. When the baby kicked again, Maelon lightly stroked her belly and said, "Hello, little one. Is it getting cramped in there?"

Another kick.

Kaylee laughed. "I think he or she reacts to our voices, no matter what we say. Let me try—Junior, do you want to grow up and run away to the circus?"

Another kick.

She grinned up at Maelon and he shook his head as he said, "Of all the things to ask—running away to the circus?"

Since Maelon still had his hand on her cheek, she leaned into his touch and became a little more grounded with her emotions. “If you think I’m going to be the serious parent out of the two of us, then you don’t know me at all.”

Kaylee mentally cursed. She’d tried her best not to push or tell Maelon he’d be a good father to their child. It was his decision.

But he didn’t miss a beat as he said, “If you became the serious one, I probably wouldn’t want to do this.” He kissed her gently. “I like you exactly as you are, Kaylee MacDonald.”

She stared into his dark eyes and saw nothing but sincerity and warmth.

Part of her wanted to believe there was love there too, but she didn’t want to get her hopes up. Even if she was falling more and more for her dragonman with each passing day.

Falling for the serious man, who loosened up bit by bit. The one who could also balance out her reckless impulses when she desperately needed it.

Not to mention the one who knew exactly how to make her come harder than any man before him.

But she wasn’t about to tell him that. So she kept it light instead. “So, that means you like the part of me that smashes cupcakes into your face because you criticized my dragon made of icing, right?”

He smiled. “If I recall, I then smashed one into your face as well. And I rather enjoyed licking you clean.”

Their baby kicked again, and Kaylee snorted. “I think Junior is jealous and wants the chance to smash a cupcake into your face.”

He kissed her briefly. “Well, they have a few months yet before that could happen, with your help, of course. No, for now, you’re all mine, and the baby will just have to wait to be born.”

She saw his flashing dragon eyes, and she knew what he wanted.

But before she could lean in and say she wanted the same, dizziness came over her and she teetered a bit. Maelon caught her before she fell.

After guiding her to the couch, he took her face between his hands. “Tell me what’s wrong, Kaylee.”

She shook her head, trying to clear the sudden fog. “I’m just tired and got a little dizzy. I’ll be fine.”

He searched her gaze. “I’m going to carry you to the surgery and make sure.”

“Maelon...”

“No. You’re pale, too. I’m not taking any chances with my female.”

At any other time, her heart would soar at being called his. But right now, she merely closed her eyes and tried to stay awake. “Okay. Although I might fall asleep on the way.”

He carefully picked her up into his arms. “Try to stay awake, little bird. Tell me another story about Finn and Arabella’s triplets.”

She smiled and laid her head on his shoulder. It took far longer than it should have to answer him, but eventually she did. “This one time, they tried to dig a tunnel from the backyard to beyond the fence...”

As she told the story of how the triplets had tried to orchestrate a breakout—so they could find the hidden treasure their dad had told them about in a story—Kaylee struggled to stay awake. She was tired, lightheaded, and it grew harder and harder to concentrate.

But in Maelon’s arms, she didn’t panic. Her dragonman would do whatever he could to help her. She trusted him. Hell, she loved him, even if she hadn’t told him yet.

That was the last thought she had before she slipped into darkness.



WHEN KAYLEE STOPPED MID-SENTENCE, toward the end of her story, and slackened in his arms, panic surged through him. Something was wrong.

His dragon spoke up. *Hurry! We need to help her.*

Rather than argue—because of course he wanted to help their female—Maelon ran and burst into the surgery. He shouted to the receptionist, “Find Dr. Hughes and Beca. Now.”

The dragonman nodded and picked up the phone as Maelon headed into the back area, to the first empty examination room he could find.

After gently laying Kaylee on the bed, he placed his fingers on her carotid artery to check her pulse and swore. It was fast. Far too fast.

He quickly checked her blood pressure, which was also too high.

Maelon was about to shout for some help when one of the nurses, Steffan, burst into the room with Snowridge’s trainee doctor, Beca Morgan, right behind him.

He barked at them, “I need to give her some of my dragon’s blood right away.” He repeated her vital signs and continued, “I need her hooked up to the machines to keep monitoring her signs. Also, prepare a dragon-shifter hormone drip. I can’t be sure, but her body might be rejecting the child because of an imbalance.”

The trainee doctor nodded. “I’ll find someone to draw your blood and then I’ll bring back the IV drip.”

She left just as the nurse started hooking Kaylee up, and Maelon wished he could stay and offer support. All he could do was whisper, “I’ll be right back, little bird. Don’t you dare go anywhere.”

After one last caress, he did his best to push aside his emotions and ran down the corridor, out of the surgery, and as fast as he could toward the nearest outdoor area to shift.

His dragon didn’t say a word, but merely helped them change from a man into a dragon as fast as possible.

As he waited for someone to come draw his blood, he scratched at the ground with his talons. Every second was precious, so where were they?

Another nurse rushed out and immediately performed the blood draw. While it was only a minute, each second felt like hours.

Because as a doctor, he knew there was a real possibility he could lose Kaylee, their child, or both of them.

*No.* As her future mate, he refused to think of it. He would do whatever it took to save the female who'd not only broken through his inner walls and captured his heart, but had given him a future to hope for.

He loved Kaylee MacDonald. And there was no fucking way he would let her go now.

Maelon shifted back into his human form. Without getting dressed, he rushed back inside. All that mattered was saving his future mate and their child.

## Chapter Eighteen

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Three days later, Maelon sat next to Kaylee's bed, holding her hand, and doing his best not to glance yet again at the monitor displaying her vital signs.

She'd improved a little and was out of the immediate danger zone, but only just. And to give her the best chance of survival, they'd had to induce a coma.

His dragon spoke up. *She's strong. She won't give up that easily.*

As he tried to think of how to respond to that, someone knocked and then entered before he could say a word.

Dr. Cassidy "Sid" Jackson, Clan Stonefire's head doctor, waltzed in, her usual ponytail swinging as she did so. She went straight to where Kaylee's chart was stored, took it out, and said, "Tell me everything I need to know."

He rubbed his face, trying to decide if this was a dream. Considering how he'd barely slept the past three days, hallucinations were a distinct possibility.

Dr. Sid's gaze met his. Maelon was far too tired and worried about Kaylee, and so maintaining eye contact didn't make him uncomfortable, like usual.

The dragonwoman raised an eyebrow. "Rhydian was right, you look like shite. You should've called me sooner."

"I never called you at all."

“Your first mistake.” She scanned the chart. “But we can talk about that later. Rhydian sent over Kaylee’s latest blood results before I flew here, as well as the notes about what’s been done so far. The dragon-shifter hormones helped more than your dragon’s blood. Is that still the case?”

“Aye. And we ruled out preeclampsia too. But I’m still unsure if her body is rejecting the baby or not.”

Dr. Sid put the chart back. “There’s something we can try, something I used with Jane Hartley. That might work. Even though Kaylee is compatible with dragon-shifters—unlike Jane—the treatment is worth a try. And no, it won’t harm her or the child, either. For humans, it’s safe.”

“Anything. I’ll try anything.”

His voice broke on the last word, and Dr. Sid’s expression softened. She walked over and placed a hand on his shoulder. “Let me take care of her for a little while, Maelon. You need to eat and get some sleep.”

“I can’t—“

“You can and you will. I’m pulling dragon doctor rank. And before you say I’m not Snowridge’s doctor, Rhydian temporarily put me in charge until you’re fit to serve again.”

He should feel betrayed. And yet, he was a little relieved. Dr. Arwel Hughes was older and struggling to keep up. Especially since their trainee doctor was still only halfway through her program and couldn’t take charge fully.

His dragon spoke up. *Dr. Sid’s brilliant and knows what she’s doing, especially when it comes to humans carrying dragon-shifter babies. If we’re exhausted, we can’t help Kaylee and the baby. Try being a doctor right now and not a male in love.*

Maelon was too fucking tired to even put up a half-hearted denial. He said to Dr. Sid, “Two hours.”

“Four.”

She raised her brows, and he sighed. “Fine. Four hours. But if anything happens, anything at all, you bloody well



better wake me up.”

“I don’t appreciate the threat, but yes, I’ll let you know. Now, kiss your mate goodbye and get some rest.” Dr. Sid went to the door and paused. “I’ll be back in two minutes. And I will literally kick your arse if you still haven’t left by the time I return.”

The dragonwoman exited the room, and Maelon stood. After kissing Kaylee’s forehead, he whispered, “I’ll be back soon, little bird. Don’t you dare leave me whilst I’m gone.”

He smoothed some hair off her forehead, caressed her cheek, and finally forced himself to walk away.

To distract from everything that could go wrong, he focused on what Dr. Sid had called Kaylee—his mate. And even if she wasn’t legally his yet, he was done making excuses. He’d had a brief glimpse of what his life would be without her, and he didn’t like it.

Would there be pain at some point? Probably. But he didn’t care. Maelon loved Kaylee, wanted her by his side always. More than that, he wanted to watch their child grow up and do everything within his power to support them and make them happy, too.

He’d thought that after his mother had abandoned him, he’d never have a family again. But he’d been wrong.

Kaylee and their child were his future. And as soon as she was well again—because she *would* get well again—he’d tell her so.

## Chapter Nineteen

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**K**aylee's entire body ached. Even though she was lying down, she hurt everywhere. She moved a finger to test, and she grunted.

Someone took her hand and touched her cheek. "Kaylee? Little bird? Are you awake?"

*Maelon.* She remembered not feeling well and him carrying her, but then nothing else.

"If you're too tired, that's okay, little bird. But just know that I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere. I'll be here whenever you're strong enough to wake up."

His voice was low and scratchy, almost like he wanted to cry.

That made her frown. Then it hit her—maybe she'd lost their baby.

*No, no, no. Please don't let it be true.*

Doing her best not to cry, she tried opening her eyes. The first blink blinded her, but she burned to see Maelon's face, to learn what had happened, and she did it again and again, until she could keep her eyelids open.

Maelon's face came into view. With dark circles under his eyes and some stubble on his face, he looked like he hadn't slept in days.

*Oh no.* Maybe the worst had happened.

She croaked, “Baby?”

He laid a hand over her belly. “He’s fine. And yes, it’s a he. We had to do scans to check on his health, and I noticed.”

*A little boy.* She and Maelon were going to have a son.

Tears leaked out of her eyes, and Maelon gently wiped them away. “Shh, little bird. Don’t cry. Everything will be fine now that you’re awake, I promise. But you need to conserve your strength.”

He kissed her cheek, then laid his against hers as he said, “I thought I might lose you, Kaylee. And it hurt. So much.”

She tried lifting a hand but couldn’t raise it more than a few inches before giving up. “Maelon.”

He moved his head until she could see his flashing pupils. He said, “I love you, Kaylee MacDonald. And once you’re better, I’m going to surprise you with the best proposal of all time.”

She smiled as warmth flooded her body. She didn’t hesitate to say, “Love you, too. And it better be amazing.”

He cupped her cheek. “I know how you like surprises, so I’ll just have to do my best to impress you.”

She laughed and immediately groaned as it made everything hurt.

Maelon kissed her cheek. “Let me fetch Dr. Sid, and once you’ve had some medication and water, we can talk a bit more.” He sat up, but then leaned down again. “I love you.”

“You too.”

His expression softened, and he kissed her lips.

Once he finally dashed out to find Dr. Sid, Kaylee couldn’t stop smiling. She might feel like she’d been hit by a bus, but her dragonman loved her. Their son was safe. And with Dr. Sid here too, Kaylee was confident she and her son would survive this.

Although it probably wasn’t going to be easy. Some humans carrying dragon-shifter babies had to go on bedrest for

part—or even all—of their pregnancy. For Kaylee, remaining in one place that long would be pure hell. But for her child, she'd do it.

Dr. Sid walked in and smiled at her. “It’s good to see you awake, Kaylee. Let me examine you and ask some questions. Then I’ll tell you what I think the next three months are going to be like.”

She looked at Dr. Sid. “Is Maelon coming?”

“Soon. I wanted to talk to you alone first. As you can imagine, he’s a bit of a wreck right now. And I find hovering, protective mates tend to get in the way.”

She nearly said he wasn’t her mate yet, but held back. The sooner she could get the examination over, the better.

By the end, Kaylee struggled to stay awake. Still, she asked, “So? What happens now?”

Dr. Sid placed her hands inside the pockets of her lab coat. “Well, currently you’re on a trial medication. It seems to work much better on you than another patient of mine, but that’s probably because you’re compatible with dragon-shifters and the other patient isn’t.”

Kaylee frowned. “I’m not sure I follow.”

“In simple terms, I think your body was rejecting your child because of his dragon half. From my observations, this tends to happen to humans compatible with dragon-shifters in the last trimester or so.”

If Dr. Sid hadn’t started her research years ago, hadn’t been invested in helping humans carry dragon-shifter babies to term without dying, Kaylee or her son might not still be here.

“Thank you.”

“No need to thank me, Kaylee.”

She’d always been a little afraid of the Stonefire doctor before. But now? As Dr. Sid’s face softened and she smiled at her, Kaylee just wanted to hug the dragonwoman.

However, she most definitely didn't have the energy for that. So she asked, "What will I need to do until my son is born?"

"Well, you'll need regular blood work and to be brutally honest with how you're feeling when asked. I'm not sure yet if you'll need constant bedrest or not. But given how quickly you responded to the medication, I suspect you'll be able to do light activity. However, nothing too strenuous. Maelon knows about all this, and is going to be overprotective, no matter what I say. So I hope you can handle him."

"I learned a thing or two during my time on Lochguard, so I think so."

Dr. Sid smiled. "Given the clan members I've met so far, I suspect you'll do fine." She removed her hands from her pockets. "But I'm deadly serious—if Maelon says to take it easy, you need to listen. I'll visit when I can, and Dr. Hughes will assist, but Maelon is still a doctor and will know what's best. Most of the time. If he suggests wrapping you in bubble wrap or locking you in your flat, you can tell him to sod off, per my orders."

She laughed softly. "You're awesome, Dr. Sid."

The dragonwoman snorted. "Too bad not everyone recognizes that as quickly as you."

As they grinned at each other, some of Kaylee's tension eased. If Dr. Sid could smile and tease, then her situation couldn't be too dire.

Still, she wanted Maelon. She needed to feel his arms around her.

Dr. Sid clicked her tongue. "I see that look. I'll fetch your male, and you can spend some quality time together. But absolutely no sexual activity until we're more sure of your condition."

"Um, okay."

The other woman raised an eyebrow. "Make sure Maelon understands that. The non-doctor part of him will want to

claim you as many times as possible.” She nodded, and Dr. Sid moved to the door. “I’ll be back to check on you later.”

With that, the dragonwoman left, and Kaylee yawned. She was so damn tired again.

But then Maelon strode into the room, sat down next to her, and as soon as he cupped her cheek, she became more alert.

He murmured, “I love you, Kaylee.”

He’d said it before, but she didn’t think she’d ever tire of hearing it. “I love you, too. But before you kiss me, I’m thirsty.”

After Maelon put a cup and straw to her lips and she drank some water, he settled back beside her and engulfed her in his arms. With a contented sigh, she snuggled against him. She wanted to talk about their son, about the future, but she didn’t know how to broach the topic. He said he loved her, but did that also mean he wanted to be a father, too?

He stroked her hair and asked, “What’s on your mind, little bird? And yes, I can tell from the sudden tensing of your muscles.”

“Well...”

He kissed her forehead. “Tell me.”

“I was thinking about our son.”

Maelon didn’t respond right away, so Kaylee waited. Because no matter how she felt about Maelon, if he didn’t want to be a father, then they didn’t have a future together.



AS MAELON HELD Kaylee in his arms, both man and beast settled for the first time in three days. Their female was awake, alive, and loved him.

Then she asked about their son, and Maelon tried to think of how to answer. He wanted to be there, to be a father, but

saying it out loud terrified him.

His dragon spoke up. *This is our mate. We can tell her anything.*

*I know.*

Taking a deep breath, he finally replied, "I've been thinking about him, too."

"And?"

Her one-word question quavered a bit. He didn't like it.

Maelon leaned back until he could meet Kaylee's gaze. "I know what I said before, about never wanting to be a father. But..."

"But what?"

"But now, I want to be there, little bird. When I thought I might lose you, him, or both, I was terrified. Terrified of never getting to mate you, of never watching you hold our son, and of never watching him grow up. I want to help him learn to be a dragon-shifter, through all the highs and lows. Not to mention I can't wait to see you teach him how to enjoy life to the fullest, to be kind, and to be a good male."

Kaylee's eyes turned wet. "Maelon. Are you sure you want to be a father and you're not just saying this because you got scared and are telling me what I want to hear?"

He caressed her cheek. "I'm more sure than anything, except for maybe my love for you. I know there might be pain, and I even experienced some of it over the last few days. But a future without you and our child? One where I go back to being alone most of the time, always working, and never wearing half-masks through the clan with you? Or get to decorate cupcakes, only to smash them into each other's faces? That's a lonely, bleak life. One I don't want." He took her face between his hands. "I want a future with you, with our son, full of laughter and love. One where we're stronger together and can face anything."

She placed a hand over his. "I want that too."

“Good. Because you’re mine, and I’m never letting you go.”

He kissed her—gently, even if he wanted to do more—and finally pulled away to say, “Then hurry up and get well again, little bird, so I can surprise you with a mating proposal.”

She smiled. “You could do it now.”

He shook his head. “No. I want to make it special, and maybe be able to celebrate with you afterward. Alone. When naked.”

She laughed. “Only if Dr. Sid says it’s okay.”

“I know. But I promise once you’re well, I’m going to make up for lost time. It may take days.”

“You say that as if it’s a bad thing.”

He shook his head. “Insatiable human.”

She grinned. “Hey, I still think there must be a dragon-shifter in my family tree somewhere.”

It was on the tip of his tongue to say again how that was impossible, but then settled for nipping her earlobe. “I look forward to testing that theory of yours.”

Kaylee yawned, and he pulled back again. “Time to sleep, little bird.”

She tightened her arms around him. “Only if you stay with me.”

“Always, Kaylee. I’ll be here always.”

And as his female fell asleep in his arms, both man and beast finally settled for the first time in days, thinking of the future and how lucky he was.



## Chapter Twenty

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**A**fter one of the longest weeks of her life, Kaylee finally sat down on the sofa inside Maelon's apartment—their apartment, he kept saying—and watched as her dragonman made her some hot chocolate.

It was weird how something so small could mean so much to her. And yet, as Maelon came with a mug in hand, it was secretly what she'd always wanted—a quiet, cozy life with someone she loved.

Once she carefully took the hot chocolate, Maelon sat next to her. "Are you sure that's all you want, little bird?"

She hated the concern in his gaze and took one of his hands in hers. "Yes, that's it for now. I'm not sure how many more times I have to promise you that I'll speak up if I need or want something."

He squeezed her hand in his. "Just be glad my dragon isn't fully in charge because he would carry you everywhere, never letting you so much as think of walking on your own."

"Most of the time, I love your dragon half. But if he tries to keep me cocooned in a bubble, I may have to knee you in the balls."

Maelon snorted. "He doesn't like that idea."

"Good."

She sipped her hot chocolate and moaned. "How did you know I wanted peppermint in my hot chocolate?"

“You mentioned it in your sleep once, about how your sister would make it for you as a child to cheer you up.”

Hearing about her sister made Kaylee’s heart squeeze. “I miss her.”

“I know. But I’ve kept Finn updated with everything, and I’m sure she’ll reach out to you soon.”

She hadn’t heard anything from her sister, not even a reply to her texts, which was unusual. Maybe something had gone wrong with one of her children, or Fergus, or maybe dragon hunters had attacked the clan.

Maelon squeezed her hand again. “Stop worrying, little bird. Nothing bad has happened on Lochguard, or Rhydian would’ve told you.”

“That’s almost worse, though. Maybe Gina’s glad I’m gone, so she doesn’t have to look after me.”

“Look at me, Kaylee.” She met his flashing dragon eyes. “There’s no way I believe that.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re too bloody lovable to think of as a burden. Besides, you said you even had your own place on Lochguard, right?” She bobbed her head. “Then she wasn’t taking care of you in Scotland, not like when you were younger.”

The alternative wasn’t any better, though. That her sister was too busy to think of her.

Maelon kissed her cheek. “Once you’re a little stronger, I can reach out and see if your sister and her family want to visit, okay?”

“I suppose. But I don’t want to force her.”

He searched her gaze. “Where is this coming from?”

She stared at her mug. “Well, my parents abandoned me after eighteen years, and I’m afraid my sister will be next.”

Maelon gently placed a finger under her chin and made her look at him. “No. If your sister moved heaven and earth to get

you to live with her on a dragon clan, that won't be it."

"How are you so certain?"

"Because I know you, Kaylee MacDonald. And if your sister hasn't reached out, there's a good reason."

As she tried to think of how to reply—she was being a bit of a downer, for sure—the doorbell rang. But Maelon didn't so much as move a finger. He only clutched her hand closer.

It rang again. "Aren't you going to get that?"

"You need me more right now."

"Maelon, you're a lot sweeter than people give you credit for." He grunted and she bit back a smile. When the doorbell rang repeatedly, she said, "Go answer it. I'll be fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Because if I have to hear that sound on repeat much longer, I'm going to go crazy."

"We can't have that, can we?" He kissed her gently and went to answer the door.

She heard it open behind her and slowly turned around. Only to find her dark auburn-haired sister rushing toward her. "Gina?"

Gina sat next to her and pulled her into a hug. "Kaylee, oh, Kaylee. I was so worried, and we got here as quickly as we could via car. But getting the kids settled with Aunt Lorna and Ross took some time, and then the damn DDA paperwork had to be filled out, and—"

"Gina." Her sister stopped talking and retreated to meet her eyes again. "Why are you here? Not that I'm not thrilled to see you. But you could've called and let a girl know you were coming."

"There really wasn't time, and I wasn't sure if I could deliver on what I was trying to do."

Kaylee frowned. "Which is?"

"Why, arranging to take you home, of course."

She blinked. “Home?”

“Lochguard. We all miss you, and if it’s true that the rest of your pregnancy might be difficult, I want to be there to take care of you.”

Kaylee frowned. Before she could ask Gina what had brought this on, she noticed Maelon turn and leave the apartment. The door clicked behind him.

What the hell?

She disentangled herself from Gina and stood. “I’m sorry, Gina, but I’ll be right back.”

Her sister called her name, but Kaylee ignored it and went out the door. Right away, she spotted Maelon fading into the distance. “Maelon!”

He stopped but didn’t turn around.

Well, then. “Either you get your butt back here and talk to me, or I’m going to have to come after you. And I won’t hesitate to make you feel guilty if I pass out along the way.”

He finally turned and headed back toward her, but kept his eyes averted. Even when he stopped about five feet away, he refused to look at her.

She closed the distance to touch his arm. When he flinched, she asked, “What’s wrong? Talk to me. Please.”

He looked up at her, but didn’t say anything. And Kaylee willed for Maelon to answer. If she had to fight for them, she would. But only if he wanted a future with her.



MAELON HAD BARELY REGISTERED the female at his door before she barged into his flat and went over to Kaylee. He’d seen pictures and knew it was Gina MacDonald-MacKenzie.

But then she’d pretty much said she was taking Kaylee home, and Kaylee hadn’t protested.

That had sent him fleeing before he did something stupid, like toss Gina out and declare Kaylee wasn't leaving. Ever.

His dragon spoke up. *She's our true mate. Ours. She belongs with us.*

*This isn't the Middle Ages, where men took women they wanted against their will. If she doesn't want to stay, I won't force her.*

*But how will you know if she wants to be with us if you run away?*

*I want her to have an honest conversation with her sister. Our presence will only make her hold back.*

*Rubbish. Kaylee isn't just going to blink and tell her sister, "Why yes, let's go!" without talking to us.*

*Maybe. But I want to give her a bit of space.*

Then he heard Kaylee's voice and her threats to chase after him.

He turned slowly and noticed her breathing heavily. Why was she risking her health?

Not wanting his female to have a relapse, he rushed back toward her but stopped far enough away so he couldn't reach out and pull her close.

However, she moved toward him and touched his arm before she asked, "What's wrong? Talk to me. Please."

Her voice wavered, and his gaze snapped to hers. She looked about ready to cry.

All he wanted to do was hold her in his arms, but he didn't want to use tricks to make her feel guilty or obligated to stay.

Finally, he couldn't stay silent any longer. "I wanted to give you time with your sister."

"By rushing out of the room and nearly running away?"

"I wasn't running away."

"I call bullshit. Something made you flee. But what?" She searched his gaze. "Did you change your mind about us?"

“No.” He finally placed his hands on her waist. “Never.”

“Then what is it?”

As she stroked his chest, it eased some of his tension. “She wanted to take you home. And I know how much you’ve missed your sister, so I wanted to give you a chance to talk without me hovering. That way, you could make your decision.”

“I made the decision as soon as she asked me to go.”

“Oh.”

She took his shirt in her hands and tugged him closer. “This is my home, Maelon. With you.”

A sense of rightness coursed through his body, and he pulled her closer, until Kaylee’s body pressed against his. “Are you sure?”

She rolled her eyes. “Of course I’m sure. Here on Snowridge, I have you, the man I love. Not only that, I’m working with Rhydian on so many plans for this summer, too. And after drifting for so long, I feel like I finally have a place to belong.”

He squeezed her hip. “Good, because wherever you are is where I belong.”

She tilted her head up. “I feel the same way. I love you, Maelon. Even when you jump to conclusions that are stupid.”

“Are we doing declarations of love followed by pointing out faults?”

She narrowed her eyes. “Don’t even think about it.”

He smiled and kissed the furrow between her brows. “I love you, little bird. Even when you get a little bit bossy.”

She lightly smacked his chest. “Hey!”

Chuckling, he nuzzled her cheek. “Fair’s fair.”

She grumbled something unintelligible, and he pulled back to cup her cheek. “I love you, Kaylee MacDonald. You’re kind and beautiful and stubborn—in a good way. You’ve been able

to help me live life more, to enjoy it, and to find a better balance between work and spending time with those I care about. And most importantly, you taught me that love can be painful, but it can also be our greatest strength. If I hadn't already promised you a surprise mating proposal, I'd ask you to be my mate right now."

"Maelon. Do it. Ask me."

His dragon grunted. *I agree. Do it. Now.*

He took her face between his hands. "I love you, Kaylee MacDonald. Will you do me the greatest honor and be my mate?"

"Yes! Yes, a million times, yes."

He kissed her, letting her know without words how much his little human meant to him. By the time he finally broke the kiss, he noticed Gina standing a few feet behind Kaylee.

The human spoke up. "I guess that answers my question."

Kaylee turned around, but he pulled her back to his front and kept his arms around her. She didn't fight to get away, but merely settled against him as she replied, "I would've told you if my dragonman hadn't rushed out. But I love Maelon, and I want to stay with him. I love you too, but you have your family and place on Lochguard. This is where I think I belong. I hope that makes sense and you understand."

Gina came closer and took one of her sister's hands. "Of course I do. All I ever wanted was for you to find your happy ending, Kaylee. And given how your dragonman looks at you, there's no doubt in my mind that he loves you. But I do have one important request I'd like to make."

"What?" Kaylee asked.

"Will you have the mating ceremony before I have to go back home to my boys?"

Kaylee turned in his arms and hooked her arms around his neck. "What do you think? Can we do that?"

"As long as you don't need a fancy ceremony, then I don't see why not."

She kissed him, and his dragon spoke up. *Yes. I want a quick ceremony too. Kaylee should've been ours since the first night we met her.*

*Don't start. She's going to be our mate soon enough.*

His beast grunted but fell silent.

Kaylee broke the kiss and whispered, "I'm going to visit with my sister for a little while. We have a mating ceremony to plan. So maybe you should go talk to Rhydian in the meantime?"

"Only if you promise not to talk crap about me behind my back."

Humor danced in Kaylee's eyes. "I'm not sure I can do that."

He lightly swatted her arse. "Cheeky female."

She laughed. "Yep, and that's never going to change."

"Good. Because your cheekiness is just one of the many, many things I love about you."

"Do you know one of things I love about you?"

"What?"

"Your kisses. So give me a good one before you leave."

And Maelon did exactly that, taking his time to claim and explore and merely revel in his female's taste and scent and heat.

By the time he let her up for air, her cheeks were flushed and her lips swollen.

Both man and beast stood tall at the sight.

And even though he never wanted to let her go, Maelon eventually went to talk to Rhydian about mating the love of his life.

He only hoped the clan would welcome Kaylee as one of their own.



## Chapter Twenty-One

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**K**aylee stood in front of the mirror, her sister at her side fixing her hair, and she couldn't help but smile. She was finally going to mate a dragonman.

Her sister smoothed the dark blue fabric of her dress—the color of Lochguard—and then stood next to her. “Perfect. And the best part of these traditional dresses is that you can still fit into them when you're pregnant.”

Placing a hand on her growing belly, she glanced over at her sister. “A shot-gun wedding, dragon style.”

Gina snorted. “Dragon-shifters can threaten with something way scarier than a gun—dragon forms, talons, and sharp teeth.”

She looked back at the mirror, taking in the flowing dress tied over one shoulder. Soon enough, she'd have a silver mating cuff over her upper arm. “No, this will be a peaceful wedding. Hopefully. There have been a few grumbles about another human living here full time, but Rhydian and his Protectors have done their best to smooth things over.”

Gina frowned. “I don't know why they're still resisting. Stonefire and Lochguard are full of humans by now.”

“Yes, but Lochguard had their own troubles with Holly at first, remember? And then you. I suspect that by the time a third human mates a dragon here, it'll be smooth sailing.”

Gina stepped in front of her and searched her gaze. “You're safe here, right? You'd tell me if you weren't?”

“I’m fine, Gina. Truly. I can handle a few muttered comments and half-hearted glares.”

“As long as that’s all it is.”

It should be. Only one person had whispered a threat, but he’d vanished before she’d turned around.

*No.* This event should be fine. And once she was mated to Maelon, anyone who tried to hurt her would face the full wrath of Rhydian. Oh, he had her back even before she mated Maelon. But legally, once she became a Snowridge clan member, she became Rhydian’s responsibility.

There was a knock and then Fergus poked his head into the room. “They’re ready for you, Kaylee.”

She nodded. “Then take Gina, and I’ll follow shortly.”

Her brother-in-law frowned, his dark auburn eyebrows nearly touching. “Are you sure you’ll be fine on your own, lass? I can walk you to the grand event room.”

She went over, stood on her tiptoes, and kissed Fergus on the cheek. “I’ll be fine, Fergus. Between the moves you and Faye taught me, as well as the tiny stash of mandrake root I have in my bra, I should be okay if the worst happens.”

“Aye, but you shouldn’t even need to be prepared for that.”

She looked at her sister. “Take Fergus and sit with the others. Dragon-shifter mating ceremonies are between two people, and I don’t want to upset anyone by entering the room with an escort. It gives off the wrong message, you know?”

Her sister replied, “Okay, but if you don’t come out in five minutes, I’m coming back to check on you.”

She hugged her sister. “I’ll be fine.” She leaned back. “Now, claim your seats and remember to get some good pictures.”

Gina left with her mate, and Kaylee faced the mirror. She took a deep breath and then whispered, “Time to finally get the dream you always wanted.”

Her son kicked, as if to say hurry up, and she murmured words of love to him.

The door clicked behind her, and she spun around. An unfamiliar middle-aged male with salt-and-pepper hair and blue eyes stood in front of the door. His pupils flashed rapidly, which meant he was a dragon-shifter.

His accent told her he was Welsh. “I thought they’d never leave.” He drew a knife from his boot and stepped toward her. “Now, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. It’s your choice.”

Kaylee retreated until her back hit the mirror. She placed a hand over her belly, as if she could shield her child. “What do you want?”

He waved his knife toward her abdomen. “That mongrel will fetch a hefty price, aye?”

Her heart pounded, but Kaylee did her best to try and keep it together. She wasn’t completely helpless—she had skills and the mandrake root—but she wouldn’t have a chance if she didn’t remain calm.

After two deep breaths, she replied, “Money won’t protect you from Rhydian’s punishment.”

He spit on the ground. “I don’t care about that human lapdog. With the money I’ll get from selling your baby, I can join my brother and help fund the cause against the likes of you bitches invading the dragon clans.”

She placed a hand on her breast, as if to be startled. But she could feel the small pill container of ground mandrake root. If she could just get it out and toss it in this guy’s face, she could get away.

*Keep him talking, Kaylee.* “Fund what cause? If you’re working with the dragon hunters, then they’ll just capture you and use you, too.”

He snorted. “Right, as if I’m going to tell you my plans. Don’t worry your little head about me, ducky. I’ll be just fine.”

As he took another step toward her, Kaylee blurted, “Maybe you think you’re safe from the hunters, but what about the DDA? Not to mention my in-laws and most—if not all—of the dragon clan leaders in the UK.”

“Human-loving pigs, the lot of them. They’ll be getting their comeuppance soon enough.” He moved closer and took out a pair of handcuffs from his back pocket. He held them up. “Put these on and maybe I won’t stab you.”

She eyed the glinting metal. If she did as he said, her chances of escaping pretty much vanished.

Her hand slowly moved the little pill container under her dress up closer to the edge of her neckline. The mandrake root was still her best bet.

A knock on the door startled the dragonman, and he turned toward it. Kaylee saw her chance.

She took out the pill container, opened it, and rushed the dragonman. Just as she tossed the ground mandrake root at his face, he slapped her face, knocking her over.

Her head smacked against something, pain exploded through her body, and then the world went dark.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

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**M**aelon paced the room connected to the main event space, doing his best not to panic. Kaylee was late, and he didn't like it.

His dragon spoke up. *Maybe she needed a minute to rest. She is pregnant.*

*Maybe. But when I looked into the ceremony room, I saw her sister sit down with her mate. There's no way Gina would leave Kaylee if she didn't feel well.*

What he wouldn't give to have pockets right now, because then he'd have his mobile phone. But he wore the traditional dragon-shifter garb, which was like a kilt gathered around his waist and a length of the bright red cloth tossed over one shoulder.

He went back to the door, cracked it, and noticed Gina was no longer in the crowd.

Had something happened?

He was about to go out and demand answers when Gina rushed back into the room, tears streaming down her face. Maelon dashed from the room and reached Gina just as she said, "Kaylee's unconscious and her head's bleeding so much."

Maelon barked, "Is she in the small dressing room?"

"Yes."

He didn't wait for a reply, but rushed out of the big room and down the corridor. Rhydian's voice came from behind him. "Wait, Maelon. You don't know what you're getting into."

"I don't bloody care."

He reached the door, which was propped open, but Rhydian grabbed his arm and pulled him to a halt.

Maelon growled. "Let me the fuck go."

"Not until I check it out first."

Rhydian released him and rushed into the room. Two males murmured and Maelon said fuck it, and went inside.

An unconscious male lay on the floor, his hands tied behind his back. But Maelon focused on Fergus, who held Kaylee. She was limp in his arms, blood trailing down the side of her head.

Rationally, as a doctor, he knew head wounds bled a lot.

But as a male looking at his female, his gut clenched as he dashed to Kaylee and gently took her from Fergus. As he caressed her cheek, he asked, "What happened?"

Fergus replied, "Gina saw Kaylee toss something at the male, he slapped her, and she dropped like a rock."

He growled. "He's a dead male."

Rhydian spoke up. "I'll take care of Sawel. Tell me what you need, Maelon, to help your female."

He quickly placed his fingers to check her pulse and focused on using his medical training. Otherwise, he might start worrying about what-ifs and that wouldn't be good for anyone. "I need two nurses to help transport her. And Dr. Hughes and Beca to assist me as well."

Rhydian grunted and picked up the unconscious dragonman. Fergus went to help him.

His clan leader nodded. "You have it. They'll be here as soon as possible."

The two males took away the fucking bastard who'd hurt his female, and Maelon focused on Kaylee.

He kissed her cheek and then held her close, breathing in her comforting scent of female and something flowery. "You're strong, little bird. Hold on, okay? You and our son both need to hold on."

Maelon didn't know how long he held his female, willing her to take some of his strength, when Arwel's voice filled the room. "Let me take a look at her, Maelon."

He felt a gentle touch on his shoulder. And for a second, he merely held Kaylee closer.

But once the older doctor squeezed his shoulder, he released Kaylee and laid her gently on the floor. As soon as he got out of the way, Arwel began his examination.

Maelon watched, itching to push Arwel out of the way. But his emotions were high, and he could end up doing his mate more harm than good.

His dragon spoke up. *Arwel can help her.*

*You're being calm.*

*I want to find Sawel and rip him into small pieces. But if I do that, we'll be thrown into prison. Then we wouldn't be able to protect our female and son. They're more important.*

*This is one of the few times I'm glad you reason more like a human than a dragon.*

His beast sniffed. *You'll owe me more time with Kaylee once she's better and naked in our bed again.*

*Fine.*

Two nurses and Beca arrived next, with Gina and Fergus right behind them. Gina moved next to him and asked, "How is she?"

"Alive."

"And you?"

He managed to tear his eyes off Kaylee for a second to look at her sister. The concern in her eyes nearly broke his self-control. But he kept it together as he replied, “Not great. But I’d trust Arwel with my life.”

Gina nodded. “Fergus and I are staying for as long as you need us.”

Fergus moved next to his mate and wrapped an arm around her waist. “Aye. Kaylee’s my sister, and soon you’ll be my brother. And something you’ll learn about the MacKenzies is that we stick together, no matter what.”

Arwel stood and allowed the two nurses to maneuver Kaylee onto a stretcher.

Maelon blurted, “Well?”

The other doctor replied, “I need to run more tests, as well as conduct a more thorough check at the surgery. But her heart is strong, your son is moving around and kicking, and the bleeding is solely from her scalp.”

Maelon understood what he didn’t say. “But you can’t fully assess the extent of her head injury until after she wakes up.”

*If she wakes up.* No. He refused to believe that.

Arwel bobbed his head. “Aye. As soon as we get back to the surgery, I need you to stay out of my way, lad. Whilst you’re normally a bloody good doctor, right now you’re a worried and overprotective mate and father-to-be. If I have to ban you from her room, I’ll do it.”

“I know.” He watched as the nurses lifted Kaylee. Maelon followed them, wishing he could take Kaylee’s hand. However, the corridors were too narrow.

So he trailed behind, glimpsing his mate’s pale face, and wished he could repeatedly punch the male who’d done this.

Because any dragonman who hurt a pregnant female wasn’t a real male at all.

His dragon spoke up. *Rhydian will deal with him. He didn’t tolerate those who tried to hurt Delaney. He certainly won’t be*



*any softer on Sawel.*

*I still don't know why he did it. Rhydian and the Protectors did a thorough investigation after the incident with Delaney.*

*Some people are just natural born liars.*

Maelon clenched his fingers into a fist. *Maybe the DDA will allow us to punish him.*

*Even if they gave the okay, you can't.*

*Why the fuck would you say that? Don't you think he deserves it?*

*Of course. But you're the clan's head doctor. You're supposed to save lives, no matter who it is. If you go against that, some may not trust you any longer.*

He bloody well hated the standard, but it was true—doctors who started causing harm outside of self-defense quickly lost the respect of their clan members.

His dragon spoke again. *Don't worry, though. Rhydian has more leeway when it comes to punishments, and he won't hold back.*

Knowing his clan leader and friend had his back, Maelon tamped down his murderous thoughts and soon they arrived at the clinic. He was escorted to a waiting room with Gina and Fergus.

Maelon paced, not in the mood to chat.

This was the second time his female had been in a perilous situation in such a short time. The first one, at least, had been medical. This one, though, had been caused by his own clan.

Once Kaylee was better, Maelon needed to think of how he could protect her and their son. Because he refused to allow something like this to happen ever again.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

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**M**aelon finally wore himself out and sat down on the couch. He propped his head in his hands, doing his best not to think of everything that could go wrong. Head injuries were tricky, and they sometimes could go from fine to deadly in the blink of an eye.

His dragon spoke up. *We have to believe she'll be fine.*

*I want to. I do.*

And yet, he'd seen the best and worst happen over the years.

The door opened, and Maelon raised his head. Dr. Arwel Hughes came in. "Kaylee woke up and is asking for you."

He stood, but before he could exit the room, Arwel put out a hand to stop him. "She's tired, so don't keep her awake too long. Her and the baby are fine, but I'll continue to monitor them both, just in case."

He closed his eyes for a second to get his emotions under control. His female and son were alive and should recover.

Later, he'd ask for the details of what Arwel had found. For now, he nodded at his mentor and rushed out of the room and down the hall to Kaylee's room.

He took a deep breath and opened the door slowly. Kaylee's head moved toward him, and she smiled.

Relief rushed through him as he went to her bedside. He gingerly took her hand and kissed it. "Kaylee."

His voice cracked, and she lifted a hand to cup his cheek. “I should be okay. My sister always said I had a thick skull, and it finally helped me out for once.”

“You’re here with me, and that’s the most important thing.” He leaned into her touch. “I hate that I couldn’t protect you when it mattered most, little bird.”

“Don’t be silly. You couldn’t have known that there was a human-hater still in the clan, Maelon. Especially since...”

He searched her eyes. “Since what?”

She blew out a breath. “Someone threatened me about a week ago and I never told you.”

“What?”

“It was a whisper, and the person was gone before I could turn around. I should’ve said something, but I didn’t want you to worry.”

He stroked her cheek with the back of his fingers. “You need to tell me things like this, little bird. We can’t fight as a team if you insist on doing it alone.”

For a second, he thought Kaylee might cry. But she sniffed and then said, “I know. But I’ve been doing things on my own for a while now, trying to prove to my sister that I’m not a little girl any longer. Oh, Gina would do anything for me, if I asked. But I felt guilty enough for intruding into her new life at first, before I got my own place. So I got into the habit of just trying to solve everything alone.”

“You don’t have to do that any longer, little bird. I love you, you’ll soon be my mate, and we need to have each other’s backs. Promise me you’ll share your concerns and burdens, no matter how small.”

“I will, I promise. But you need to do the same, Maelon.” He frowned, but she continued before he could speak. “I know you sometimes keep to yourself and stew. If you have a bad day at the clinic, you sometimes get grumpy or quiet. But I’m here too for you, my love. So promise you’ll share your burdens with me as well.”

He kissed her gently. “I’ll try my best, but it won’t happen overnight.”

“That’s a start.” She yawned. “I’m getting tired again, but Dr. Hughes said to stay awake for a certain amount of time, to monitor a few things I can’t remember. So tell me a story, Maelon, and keep me awake.”

He smiled and sat down beside her on the bed, careful not to jostle his female. “So no long, detailed medical explanations, then?”

She stuck out her tongue. “I said keep me awake, not put me to sleep.”

“But they can be fascinating, little bird.” She scrunched her nose, and he laughed. “Fine, fine. Although imagination isn’t my forte.”

“Well, then just tell me some of the things you’ll teach our son once his inner dragon starts talking to him.”

And as Maelon settled against his female and told her about the early days of a dragon-shifter interacting with their inner dragon, he started imagining all the years ahead, full of life, love, and his family.

He couldn’t wait to get started, which made mating Kaylee as soon as possible his top priority.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

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The next day, Kaylee sat on the hospital bed as her sister tried to tame her hair. She blew out a breath and said, “I’ll admit, being mated in a hospital gown with my butt hanging out wasn’t the dream ceremony I’d imagined.”

Gina twisted her hair up, and Kaylee did her best not to flinch. Gina replied, “You can have a big party later. You need to mate Maelon as soon as possible so he and Rhydian can protect you.”

“I know, and I can’t wait to be Maelon’s mate. I’m just a little cranky.”

“Being confined to a bed is like a punishment for you, so I get it. But you and the baby need to rest.”

“I know, I know.”

Gina finished and came around to stand in front of Kaylee again. As she looked up at her big sister, she noticed tears in Gina’s eyes. “What’s wrong?”

She wiped her eyes. “I’m happy for you, Kaylee, that’s all. Seeing Maelon fuss over you has shown me how much he truly cares. I know you told me he loved you, but the big sister part of me wanted to see how he would take care of you.”

“And he passed the test?”

“With flying colors.” She hugged Kaylee gently and then added, “I love you, Kaylee. And you’d better not forget me during your honeymoon period of constant sex.”

“Gina!”

Her sister leaned back and grinned. “Hey, it’s the truth. And while Maelon will never be as sexy as Fergus, he’s not too shabby.”

“You can have Fergus and I’ll keep my Welsh dragonman, thank you very much.”

Gina chuckled. “Scotland and Wales will be overrun with half-MacDonald babies soon enough, I’m sure of it.”

Before she could ask her sister just how many children she wanted, a knock sounded and then Fergus entered, carrying a small wooden box. “Are you ready, Kaylee?”

“I still say I could stand long enough for a mating ceremony, but otherwise, yes, I’m ready.”

Fergus said, “I’d rather not face your male’s wrath, aye?” He set the box on the bed beside Kaylee. “These are for the ceremony. Go ahead and open it.”

She did and traced the lovely designs etched into the silver—her and Maelon’s names written in the old dragon language of Mersae.

Actually, seeing the mating bands made it all the more real.

Maelon’s voice came from the doorway. “You aren’t having second thoughts, are you, little bird?”

She looked up. “Of course not. Although it’s not fair that you look all sexy and I’m wearing this white and blue gown thing.”

He reached her bed and kissed her cheek. “You always look beautiful.”

“Charmer.”

Rhydian snorted from the doorway. “That’s not a word I’ve ever used to describe Maelon. But aye, with you, he is one.”

Maelon cleared his throat, and Kaylee took his hand. “You are charming to me.”

“If you say so, little bird.”

She glanced over at Rhydian and Delaney, who were to be witnesses alongside Gina and Fergus. Rhydian asked, “You ready, Kaylee?”

She nodded and sat up a little taller. “More than ready.”

Maelon sat next to her on the bed, and she snuggled a little closer to her dragonman. He asked, “Do you want me to go first?”

“Yes. I’ve seen mating ceremonies before, but I don’t want to ramble too long. I’ll follow your lead.”

He tucked some stray hairs behind her ear. “I love how you ramble.” She raised an eyebrow. “Most of the time.”

She tapped his chin. “Still, go first, Maelon. I’m more than ready to be your mate.”

His pupils flashed rapidly before remaining round. “My dragon agrees.” He took one of her hands and stared into her eyes. Love and warmth and excitement filled his gaze.

She’d never, ever tire of that look.

Finally he said, “Kaylee MacDonald, when I first spotted you dancing on top of a chair, there was something about you that called to me. You’re beautiful, of course, but it’s more than skin deep—you’re gorgeous inside and out. Your laughter, spirit, and sense of fun only add to your kindness and dedication to those you care about. Even when I thought it would only be for one night, I treasured each and every moment with you. And whilst I was surprised to learn you were pregnant and subsequently didn’t handle it well, a small part of me was happy that you’d come back to me. You even helped me learn that love didn’t always lead to pain. And no matter what the future may hold for us, we will face it together, fight together, love together. I love you, Kaylee MacDonald. You and our son. I want to wake up next to you every day, and to be there with you through all the ups and downs. I want to claim you as my mate. Will you accept my mate claim?”

Tears had already started running down her cheeks, and Kaylee wiped them away. Maelon could be romantic when he wanted. “Yes, I accept your claim.”

He smiled, reached for the smaller silver arm cuff, and placed it on her upper arm. After tracing his name in the old language, he mouthed, “Your turn.”

Gina gave her a tissue, and she wiped her tears and running nose. “Stupid pregnancy hormones.”

Maelon whispered, “You’re always beautiful to me, little bird, even now.”

His words made her less self-conscious. “If you say so.” He raised his brows, and she bit back a smile. Maelon brooked no argument when it came to his compliments.

Taking a deep breath, she steadied herself. Time to claim her dragonman. “Dr. Maelon Perry, I had no idea when you took up my offer to play strip poker that I’d found the love of my life. And while the beginning was rocky, I think we’ve slowly found where we belong—with each other. I’ve had a lot of upheavals in my life in the last few years, and I really struggled to find my place. But now I understand I was feeling unsettled and restless because I was waiting for you. You’re kind and smart and sexy, and you know just when I need to stand on my own two feet and when I need a little help. You’re my home, Maelon. Together we fit, and I can’t wait for us to meet our son. I love you, want to spend the rest of my life with you, and I want you as my mate. Will you accept my mate claim?”

“I do.”

She took the larger arm cuff and placed it on Maelon’s upper arm. He then leaned down, kissed her gently, and whispered, “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

They smiled at each other for a few beats, as if no one else existed in the world. Maelon was her mate, her baby daddy, and her future. Maelon placed his hand over her belly. She put



hers over his, and their son moved around, as if giving his approval too.

Rhydian cleared his throat. “Normally, I’d take the hint and leave. However, we need to sign the DDA paperwork as soon as possible. It’ll make my case against Sawel stronger.”

Against Kaylee’s attacker, he meant.

Maelon whispered into her ear, “This will all be over soon, little bird.”

“I know.”

After Maelon kissed her again, he moved away so Rhydian could give them the necessary forms to sign. Once done—making her officially a dragon’s mate—Gina hugged her. “Congrats, Kaylee, and welcome to the dragon mate club.”

“Thanks, Gina. I bet neither of us thought we’d end up here once you fled to Scotland.”

“Maybe not, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Me, either.”

Fergus took Gina’s hand. “Come, love. Let’s give them some privacy.”

After Rhydian and Delaney welcomed Kaylee to Clan Snowridge, they left.

Maelon sat beside her, and Kaylee had her head on his chest.

She said, “This isn’t exactly how most new mates celebrate their mating ceremony.”

“Thirteen days until you should be well enough for me to claim you.”

“You’re counting, huh?”

“Bloody too right I am. Because both man and beast want to claim our mate properly.”

She looked up at Maelon. “I want that, too. But for now, I like cuddling with my mate.”

His pupils flashed. “I like being yours.”

“I enjoy being yours, too.” She laid her head against his chest again, and Maelon tightened his arms around her. “You haven’t updated me on what they’re doing to Sawel.”

He sighed. “I didn’t want to ruin the day.”

“I’ll sleep better if you tell me.”

He grunted. “Fine. Attacking a human is a bad enough offense, but a pregnant one carrying a dragon-shifter child on dragon land is even worse. Rhydian thinks he’ll get life imprisonment.”

“And what about his allusion to more dragon-shifters who don’t want humans to be able to mate their kind?”

“That I don’t know. Rhydian said it’ll take time to get to the bottom of it all. But Sawel might have been talking about the clan-less dragon-shifters, the ones who left when given the choice to accept humans or not.”

A large group of human haters had left Lochguard before Kaylee ever moved to Scotland. Fergus said they did their best to monitor the dragons with no clan, but sometimes they were harder to pinpoint. Since Fergus gathered intelligence for Lochguard, he knew what was going on and wouldn’t try to hide the truth from her or Gina.

Maybe one day, none of the clans would have to worry about that group. One day, but not quite yet.

She hugged Maelon tighter. “Did Rhydian decide if we have to move away for a little while until he could assure the clan was safe or not?”

“It’s looking like we can stay.”

“How can you be so certain?”

He laid his cheek atop her head. “The clan has taken the attack personally. Snowridge has waited a long time for the DDA’s approval for humans to visit. And to say they’re angry about Sawel’s actions delaying the chance to meet potential true mates is an understatement. They’ve started making watch schedules to patrol the corridors and empty areas of the clan, to ensure no one else is trying to plan anything.”

“Like a neighborhood watch?”

“I suppose.”

“Do you think they hate me for bringing trouble back?”

“No, little bird. Many of them love your ideas for bringing together the human and dragon children this summer. And you being you has won many of them over as well. They’re angry at Sawel for lying to them for so long.”

She snuggled closer against him. “I hope this is a new beginning for us and Snowridge, but for real this time. I’ve seen firsthand what can happen when a dragon clan welcomes humans with open arms, and I want that for our home, too.”

He leaned back until she could see his eyes again. “Do you think you’ll truly be happy here, little bird?”

“Of course. As long as I’m with you, I’ll be happy.”

He kissed her. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

She couldn’t hold back a yawn.

“I think you need to rest now.”

“If I wasn’t so damned tired, I might argue about wanting to spend time with my new mate. But I’m so, so sleepy.”

He maneuvered down to the bed, and she laid against him. “Sleep, little bird. I’ll be here to watch over you. Always.”

She murmured something about being the luckiest woman in the world. But it didn’t take long for Maelon’s heat and scent to lull her to sleep.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

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**K**aylee felt as big as a barge in her free-flowing dress. She whispered, “I can’t wait for you to get here, Junior. Both because I want to hold you, but also because I’m tired of waddling as I walk.”

Maelon’s voice came from behind her. “You don’t waddle.”

She turned toward her mate—it was still weird sometimes to think she had one—and raised an eyebrow. “I don’t know what the fancy term is, but it’s definitely not graceful.”

He stopped right in front of her, handsome as ever in his black dress pants and light blue dress shirt. “I offered to carry you, but you declined.”

“Tonight is the first clan-wide celebration since I arrived. I’m not going to have everyone think I’m super delicate and about to faint. One overprotective dragonman is more than enough.”

“Just be glad your sister and her mate returned to Scotland, or it’d be even worse.”

“As much as I love my sister and Fergus, it’s nice to take a little bit of a break. The three of you together nearly drove me crazy.”

He pulled her close, kissed her gently, and murmured, “I have something for you. A present to wear for tonight.”

“If you’re trying to distract me, it might be working.”

He chuckled, and she couldn't help but smile. Her often serious dragonman didn't hesitate to let down his guard around her.

After stepping back, he took out a rectangular box from his pocket. "Here."

She gingerly took it, removed the lid, and gasped. A gold butterfly pendant hung from a gold chain. "It's beautiful!"

"You mentioned once about how much you love butterflies, to the point you'd wanted to get a tattoo before you got pregnant and your world was turned upside down. So I thought I'd give you another way to have one close." He removed it from the box. "Let me put it on."

She turned around to let him fasten the chain. Once the butterfly nestled against her upper chest, she touched it. "It's more than just my favorite. It also kind of represents our story."

He turned her back around and pulled her close again. "Tell me."

"Well, we were both inching along, surviving day to day, but struggling to find true joy in it. Then we met, slowly transformed, until we emerged as butterflies, our love giving us the freedom to fly anywhere."

"While I enjoy the story, I could fly before I met you."

She frowned. "Maelon!"

He chuckled and kissed her nose. "I'm joking. I could literally fly, but only as a dragon. With you, I can fly through life."

She cupped his cheek and kissed him, taking her time to explore his mouth and tangle her tongue with his. When he finally let her up for air, Maelon laid his forehead against hers. "I love you, little bird. And now I want to show you off to our clan."

"I love you too, even when you're mean. And I want to show you off, too."

He lightly slapped her ass. “I plan on being mean later, when we’re alone. I’ll be extremely mean and keep you on the edge until you beg.”

Heat rushed through her body. Dr. Hughes had cleared her earlier in the day. Maelon had wanted to celebrate right after her appointment, but Kaylee said they needed to save their strength for the clan celebration first.

“It works both ways, Dr. Perry. Maybe I’ll just dust off my vibrator and make you watch.”

His pupils flashed rapidly. “Any other time, I’d say yes. But tonight, you’re mine.”

Her mate’s deep voice rolled over her. “Yes. Yes, I am.”

After they kissed again—until they were both breathless—Kaylee took Maelon’s hand and tugged. “Come on. Everyone’s probably waiting for us already.”

He grunted. “They can keep waiting.”

“Now, now, don’t say that. They’ve all been so supportive of us, and they won’t truly start the event until we arrive. I don’t want to make them grumpy or upset.”

“You could just blame me. I can take it.”

“Stop pouting. Your cock can wait a little longer.”

Maelon sighed dramatically, and she laughed. “Oh, stop it. Let’s go.”

Soon they were out the door of their apartment, hand in hand, and Kaylee’s heart raced. Time to be officially welcomed by Clan Snowridge and start her life as a dragon’s mate.



WHILE MAELON WAS pleased Kaylee had liked his gift, he’d wanted to celebrate privately before the clan gathering.

As they walked toward the big event space, his dragon spoke up. *This is important for her. Kaylee has always been a*

*guest—first on Lochguard and then on Snowridge. But this time, she’s an actual member of a dragon clan.*

*I know that. But being a few minutes late wouldn’t have mattered.*

*A few minutes wouldn’t have been enough for either of us, and you know it.*

*Since when is a dragon okay with delaying sex?*

*When something means so much to our mate.*

They reached the main door to the community center, and Maelon focused on Kaylee. She stopped just outside the door and looked up at him. “Ready, Dr. Perry?”

“Always, Mrs. Perry.”

Kaylee touched her butterfly necklace and nodded. “Then let’s go.”

Maelon guided Kaylee through the front room and on toward the large event space.

Inside it, he noticed first the large crowd, and second, the decorations were different. The little dragons still hung from the ceiling, but now there were little hearts everywhere and gold material draping along the walls.

Kaylee clutched his arm. “Oh, Maelon. It’s so pretty! It’s as if the dragons are flying around, getting hit with love. Maybe it’s a sign of the future for Snowridge.”

He smiled. “We’ll see, little bird. We’ll see.”

Before Kaylee could go on about how it would happen, Rhydian and Delaney were in front of them. Rhydian shook his hand and then Kaylee’s. “Congratulations.”

Kaylee beamed. “Thanks, Rhydian. Let me guess—you decided on the decorations?”

Rhydian frowned as Delaney laughed. The latter replied, “No, the children voted in the school. Despite knowing them for a short time, you’ve already won them over. They clearly want you two to be happy.”

Kaylee said, “It’s lovely. And I can’t wait to show you what we plan to do in the summer.”

Delaney nodded. “We look forward to it.” She turned to Rhydian. “Let’s give them their surprise.”

Maelon grunted. “What surprise?”

Rhydian patted him on the back. “You’ll see. Stand here and wait for my instructions.”

His clan leader and his mate left. Kaylee leaned over and whispered, “What do you think he has planned?”

“I have no bloody idea. Which worries me.”

“Oh, come on. It can’t be that bad.”

Rhydian’s voice came over the speakers and the room quieted. “Thank you all for coming. Tonight we’re celebrating Kaylee and Maelon’s mating. Not only is finding love special, but Kaylee is our second human to live here, and hopefully not the last. Despite recent troubles, I think it’s time we showed Kaylee just how much we want her here. So, let’s give the happy couple a round of applause and then watch as they dance the first dance of the evening. I hope everyone will join in to show their support.”

Dancing wasn’t his favorite thing to do, not even a little. Yet as Kaylee’s eyes lit up and she tugged on his arm in excitement, he suddenly wanted to dance more than anything.

His dragon laughed. *She’s going to get you to do all kinds of things, isn’t she?*

*And I look forward to it.*

The music played, and Maelon put out a hand. “Shall we?”

“Yes!”

As soon as Kaylee’s hand was in his, he led her to the dance floor. The music was for a traditional dragon-shifter dance, simple but slow, and he didn’t even have to explain what to do. “You’ve done this before.”

“Oh, of course. I love dancing, especially the group ones, kind of like the Scottish reels. Or, those dance scenes you see



in historical movies.” She searched his gaze. “But I’m guessing you don’t like to dance?”

“Before I met you? No.” He pulled her closer. “But now, I find I rather like it. I get to hold my mate close and stare into her beautiful eyes.”

“Maelon,” she breathed.

He kissed her gently. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” She glanced around, finally noticing everyone around them. “The entire clan is dancing, even the older children!”

It was true. And as Maelon met some of their gazes, he didn’t instantly glance away, but nodded in greeting.

Soon the song ended, but Kaylee wrangled one more dance from him before dinner. He lost track of time, loving how most of his clan members were so welcoming to his mate.

But eventually, as festivities wound down and everyone was snacking on yet more dessert, he placed a hand on Kaylee’s leg under the table and squeezed. Her gaze met his, and he murmured, “Ready to celebrate alone, little bird?”

She smiled. “Yes.”

As soon as she stood, he picked her up, and the clan cheered. He didn’t pay attention to the teasing and never took his gaze from Kaylee’s as he exited the room.

She played with the hairs on his neck. “Aren’t you afraid the clan will think I’m worn out and kind of weak still?”

“Of course not. If a dragon-shifter carries their mate out of a celebration, there’s usually only one reason.”

Humor danced in her eyes. “And what would that be?”

“To claim their mate and make them cry out in pleasure.”

“Kiss me, Maelon.”

He did briefly. And it wasn’t long before he arrived home, carried her to their bedroom, and made her cry out. Three

times. So loudly, he was glad the clan was still at the celebration.

As he held his human in his arms, Maelon knew he was the luckiest male in the world. And he fell asleep to dreams of many more years dancing with Kaylee.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

---

*Two Months Later*

Kaylee smiled down at the wiggling bundle in her arms, her mate's cheek against hers, and said, "I can't believe he's finally here."

Maelon cupped their son's head. "He's going to be a mummy's boy, isn't he?"

"Just because he was a week late doesn't mean that. You're the doctor and should know better."

He kissed her cheek. "Aye, I know, little bird. But someone taught me how to tease. A certain female of mine. So you can blame her."

Kaylee snorted. "True."

They fell silent, staring at their son again.

His mate had been on bedrest for the last month, and it'd been pure hell for her. But he'd done his best to entertain her, carry her around as much as possible, and encourage her work. Over the last few weeks, Kaylee had been working with other dragon clans to coordinate not only human and dragon understanding events, as she put them, but to also foster cross-clan events.

It'd only been after her questions that Maelon realized he'd never met a dragon-shifter outside of Snowridge until he was an adult.

Leave it to his clever mate to find something she could not only do, but was also brilliant at. Kaylee Perry had found her place—with him, with Snowridge, and with children across the UK and Ireland.

And given how Sawel had been sent to a DDA prison for life a few weeks ago, the future truly was wide open for them.

Kaylee sighed and leaned more against him. “I want to stare at him all day, but I’m so tired.”

He kissed her forehead. “Did you finally pick a name for him?”

“I told you—we should do it together.”

“Whatever you pick will be fine.”

Her lips twitched. “That’s dangerous, for sure.”

He chuckled quietly, so as to not disturb his son. “I know, little bird. I know.”

Kaylee rearranged the blanket around her son. “I think Aidan suits him.”

“You’re determined to have something fire-related to him, no matter if dragons can’t breathe fire.”

“The name means born of fire or fiery one, yes. But in Welsh, it can also be Aeddán, too.”

He traced his son’s cheek. “Aidan Perry. Nice to meet you.”

Aidan yawned, and Maelon couldn’t take his gaze from his son. He didn’t want to miss a second.

His dragon spoke up. *We’ll make a good father.*

*I know that now. I’d do anything for Kaylee and Aidan.*

*Me, too.*

Kaylee yawned, and Maelon gently picked up their son. “Lay down, little bird. You need some sleep.”

She touched his arm. “Don’t leave, though, Maelon.”

He sat next to the bed, his son cradled in one arm and his free one taking Kaylee's hand. "Never. Now, get some sleep. Your sister and her family will be here soon, and you'll need your strength."

Kaylee laced her fingers through his. "Love you both."

He raised her hand and kissed the back of it. "Get some sleep, little bird. We'll watch over you. Always."

She smiled as her eyes fluttered closed. And as his mate's breathing slowed, he looked back at his son. Who was now wiggling and awake. Maelon whispered, "Be a good lad and let your mother sleep. I know it's addicting to want her attention, her love, and her smile, but trust me—you don't want her to lose her temper. That won't be good for either of us."

His son scrunched his nose, and he chuckled.

But soon he sang the song about the dragon getting carried away by the wind, and Aidan fell asleep.

When his mate woke up and her family—extended family, which included far too many MacKenzies and children—barged in, Maelon didn't mind their fussing. At one point, he'd had no idea how to act around strangers and had hidden himself away. But thanks to his mate, he had a large family, knew he was loved and loved in return, and could tackle almost anything with her at his side.

## Epilogue

*Years Later*

**K**aylee walked alongside her children—her son Aidan and her daughter Eiriana—to where her sister and her mate had arrived with their kids. Maelon was delivering a last-minute baby but would join them soon as he could.

When they were about ten feet away, Aidan asked, “Can I run over to Jamie, Ellis, Leo, and Blaine, Mama?”

She leaned down and picked up Eiriana, who at three years old didn’t run as fast as her brother, and Kaylee knew Eiri would have a breakdown if she couldn’t keep up. “Go on, then. But stay near your Auntie and Uncle.”

Aidan nodded and dashed over toward his cousins. Her daughter leaned against her shoulder and asked, “When will Freya get here?”

“Soon, love. Soon. The children visiting from all the UK dragon clans should be here within the next few hours.”

“And then the games begin?”

She kissed her daughter’s cheek. “Yes, then we start all the games and competitions and celebrations. But first, aren’t you happy to see your Auntie Gina?”

Gina walked up with a smile and put her arms out. “Give your auntie a hug, Eiri.”

Eiri nearly jumped into her aunt's arms. Kaylee said, "You're still intent on spoiling her as she gets older, aren't you?"

"Hey, I have all boys. I love them dearly, but sometimes, I want a little girly-ness."

Kaylee glanced over at where Fergus was playing with his sons and Aidan. "Jamie gets taller by the day."

"Tell me about it. I swear he'll be taller than Fergus someday."

More familiar faces came from around the corner, which was the direction of the landing area. Asher King and Honor Wakeham walked with their son between them. Right behind them, Killian and Brenna O'Shea emerged with their two children. As soon as they were near enough, the kids ran over to where Fergus was with his sons and Aidan.

Honorica waved. "Hey, Kaylee. Please tell me everything is on schedule. If Julian asks me one more time when he can play tag with everyone, I might go a bit mad."

Kaylee laughed. "Mine do the same, even though I have a schedule posted on the wall at home. But yes, as far as I know, everyone will arrive on time. The human-dragon games won't start until tomorrow, though. I didn't want to risk cranky kids from all the traveling and figured a good night's sleep would help."

Brenna nodded. "I agree. My youngest really needs a nap, but he refuses."

Yet more familiar faces rounded the corner—the Whitby-Chadwicks.

The eldest, Daisy, was nearly an adult now, but she still ran over and gave Kaylee a hug. "Hey, Kaylee. I still get to be a referee, right? I've looked up every rule for every game, and I'm ready. I promise."

"Of course. You're the best of the best, Daisy."

One of Daisy's younger brothers, Jasper, frowned. "Don't tell her that. It'll go to her head."

Jasper's twin brother, Theo, nodded. "She's already top of her class, and Daisy doesn't need to think she's even more special."

The twins' father and Daisy's stepfather, Blake Whitby, grunted. "Remember the contract we all signed?"

Kaylee blinked. "Contract?"

Daisy replied, "Yes, a contract. Because if we don't do that, my brothers not only complain all the time, they cheat. At everything."

"Do not!"

"Do too!"

Dawn sighed and looked at her youngest child, a daughter named Marigold but everyone called Goldie. "Maybe you can take Jasper over to the other kids?"

Goldie shrugged. "Sure, Mum." She whispered something to her brother, and the pair left. Theo followed reluctantly.

Dawn explained, "Goldie has a way with her brothers. I call her the Twin Whisperer."

Daisy opened her mouth, but more arrivals walked up, and she went to talk to Rhys James from Stonefire.

Kaylee smiled. "There's some tea and cookies over there while you wait."

Everyone but her sister left. Once alone, Gina gave Kaylee a one-armed hug. "Getting so many kids from so many dragon clans in one place is just amazing. And once the humans arrive too? It'll be the biggest and best event yet."

A familiar male voice came from behind her. "And according to Kaylee, it's only the beginning."

Maelon stopped next to her, kissed her gently, and then put an arm around her waist.

She asked, "Did the delivery go okay?"

"Aye. She had a girl."



Kaylee snuggled against her mate's side. "I'm glad. Cora always wanted a little sister."

"Gwen's doing well, and her human mate refused to ever leave her side."

"Of course he wouldn't leave. He's like me and must have a dragon-shifter way up in his family tree."

Maelon shook his head, and Kaylee leaned more against him. "You know it's true."

Someone started crying, and Kaylee spotted it was Brenna and Killian's youngest. She made to check on him, but Gina put up a hand. "I'll go. Enjoy a moment of quiet with your mate before the madness begins."

Her sister rushed off, and Maelon murmured, "Remember, if you get too tired, you have to tell me, little bird."

Kaylee placed a hand over her belly. "I know. But it's early days yet."

It'd taken them longer this time around to conceive, and it would probably be their last. But as much as Kaylee looked forward to being a mom again, this event was too important to give it up.

She looked up at her mate. "Besides, you volunteered to be my assistant, remember? I could sit in a lounge chair and never have to lift a finger."

Maelon's brows rose. "As if you could do that. I'm your mate, remember? You can barely sit through an entire film without getting antsy."

She stuck out her tongue before turning toward Maelon, and he put his arms around her waist. "Even if you're being mean, I still love you. I couldn't have done any of this without your support, Maelon."

"I'm sure you could do anything, little bird. And I love you more."

Her mate kissed her, and she sighed in happiness. All too soon another problem cropped up, and she had to address it.

But as much as kids could be unpredictable, Kaylee loved her job. She'd found a way to help the clans grow closer, had helped a lot of humans better understand dragon-shifters, and even the dragon-shifter adults had formed stronger friendships with people from other clans. She might not be able to invent serums to protect against drugs like her mate could. But Kaylee's work had been just as important.

And as she later fell asleep in Maelon's arms, his heart beating beneath her ear, she dreamed of the very first night she'd met him and how it'd changed her life forever.



Thanks for reading Kaylee and Maelon's story! The next Stonefire Dragons Universe book will probably be about Adrian Conroy and Elsie Day (he burned her letter without reading it a while ago). I'm unsure of the release date, but the next book in the overall dragon reading order is *Charming the Dragon* (Stonefire Dragons #16). Hayley Beckett is a human lawyer who always gets into trouble, and Nathan Woodhouse is a grumpy dragonman who just wants to do his job. When they're thrown together for a project and end up trapped in a secret room, things get interesting...

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Turn the page for the synopsis of *Charming the Dragon* and an Author's Note...

## Author's Note

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I hope you enjoyed Kaylee and Maelon's story! When I first wrote both of these characters, I never thought I'd have actual stories for them. But a lot of people asked me for Kaylee's story, and eventually it came to me (while writing *Winter at Stonefire*). There was a teeny tiny problem, though, as originally Maelon had a mate in *Transforming Snowridge*. It was one mention in one line, and I've since fixed that line and removed his mate. Yep, just like that! This is my world, so I say it's fine. ;) In truth, I have a massive cast of characters and sometimes I mess up and have to fix it. Thankfully this was a minor one.

Another loose end that's been dangling for a while is Adrian Conroy and Elsie Day's story. Years ago, she gave him a letter and he burned it without reading it. People have asked about this story a lot, but I needed the right time for it to happen. Namely, I needed Adrain to become clan leader of Northcastle. That happened in *Summer at Lochguard*, and once he's adjusted (a little) to being in charge, I should be able to finally share his tale! There are probably a few more loose ends I need to tie up (the Skyhunter doctor you met in *Winter at Stonefire* is one I want to write about, for example) and they will end up in this series. I'm not talking about clearly Lochguard or Stonefire stories. Just stories that don't fit into either of those ones!

As always, I have a lot of people who helped me along the way. I'd like to thank:

- My betas: Iliana, Sabrina, Ash, and Amy. They catch the lingering typos and point out minor inconsistencies. (I had Maelon be a gold dragon in the beginning and a blue one at later on, lol.) These ladies are truly amazing.

- A special shoutout to Iliana G., who demanded the epilogue Kaylee and Maelon deserved (and I agreed with her)

- My readers and fans. You all make my dream job possible, and I couldn't do it without you!

Before I go, if you would like to keep up-to-date on the latest information, [then make sure to join my newsletter at:](#)

[mlakepress.com/newsletter](https://mlakepress.com/newsletter)

Thanks again for reading, and I can't wait to see you again at the end of the next dragon story, *Charming the Dragon* (Stonefire Dragons #16), out in Summer 2024.

# Charming the Dragon

**A grumpy dragonman and a flighty but brilliant human female lawyer end up locked together in a secret room...**

Hayley Beckett's sister desperately needs a shot of dragon's blood to save her life. She's a lawyer who helps dragon-shifters and refuses to buy it on the black market, nor can she join the sacrifice program because of the importance of her job. However, after helping Clan Stonefire with a recent case, she hatches a plan. In exchange for her help in creating a more centralized law and case database for the dragon-shifters, they'll give her sister the much needed treatment. What she didn't plan on was being paired with a grumpy yet sexy dragonman who sees everything she does as a nuisance.

Nathan Woodhouse is used to dealing with the alpha Protectors on Stonefire. He does his job, they leave him alone. It's perfect. Then the clan leader and head of security assign him a job to design a legal database for a human female. He'd much prefer working alone and communicating through email, but she insists on working inside the clan because it gives her access to their records. When she accidentally triggers an old mechanism that locks them in a rarely used area of the clan, he can't ignore her. And then his dragon decides he wants her.

As they tackle their project and the mishaps along the way, word gets out of what they're doing and a familiar enemy causes some trouble. Will Nathan and Hayley be able to admit their feelings and be together? Or, will Hayley have to flee Stonefire and possibly the UK for her safety?



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*Treasured by the Dragon* (SD #13)

*Trusting the Dragon* (SD #14)

*Taught by the Dragon* (SD #15)

*Charming the Dragon* / Hayley & Nathan (SD #16 / 2024)

### **Stonefire Dragons Shorts**

*Meeting the Humans* (SDS #1)

*The Dragon Camp* (SDS #2)

*The Dragon Play* (SDS #3)

*Dragon's First Christmas* (SDS #4)

### **Stonefire Dragons Universe**

*Winning Skyhunter* (SDU #1)

*Transforming Snowridge* (SDU #2)

*Finding Dragon's Court* (SDU #3)

*Masked Dragon of Snowridge* (SDU #4)

### **Tahoe Dragon Mates**

*The Dragon's Choice* (TDM #1)

*The Dragon's Need* (TDM #2)

*The Dragon's Bidder* (TDM #3)

*The Dragon's Charge* (TDM #4)

*The Dragon's Weakness* (TDM #5)

*The Dragon's Find* (TDM #6)

*The Dragon's Surprise* / Dr. Kyle Baker & Alexis (TDM #7 / TBD)

### **Asylums for Magical Threats**

*Blaze of Secrets* (AMT #1)

*Frozen Desires* (AMT #2)

*Shadow of Temptation* (AMT #3)

*Flare of Promise* (AMT #4)

### **Cascade Shifters**

*Convincing the Cougar* (CS #0.5)

*Reclaiming the Wolf* (CS #1)

*Cougar's First Christmas* (CS #2)

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## About the Author

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Jessie Donovan has sold over half a million books, has given away hundreds of thousands more to readers for free, and has even hit the *NY Times* and *USA Today* bestseller lists. She is best known for her dragon-shifter series, but also writes about vampires, fae witches, aliens, and even has a crazy romantic comedy series set in Scotland. When not reading a book, attempting to tame her yard, or traipsing around some foreign country on a shoestring, she can often be found interacting with her readers on Facebook or TikTok. She lives near Seattle, where, yes, it rains a lot but it also makes everything green.

Visit her website at: [www.JessieDonovan.com](http://www.JessieDonovan.com)

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the writer's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

*Masked Dragon of Snowridge*

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