



*Dragon's*  
**FIGHT**

Irresistible Dragons Book Three

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**NORA PHOENIX**

# Dragon's Fight

*Irresistible Dragons Book Three*

Nora Phoenix



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# Dragon's Fight

**Jermon thought he'd finally found his mates. Will fate now take them away?**

Just when alpha dragon Jermon thought he'd found the two men he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, everything came crashing down. Literally.

The guilt about bringing trouble to the Hightower pack is real, but Jermon has bigger problems. Wilmer has no recollection of Jermon and Riordan, and his recovery is slow. Meanwhile, Riordan is acting weird. Is it the stress that's getting to him? Or is something else going on?

When the Murphys aren't the saviors they appeared to be and Jermon learns more about his magic, he knows what to do.

He needs to fight for his men and for his pack.

*Dragon's Fight is the third book in the Irresistible Dragons series, which needs to be read in order. It continues the love story between Wilmer, Jermon, and Riordan and ends with a happily ever after for these three. The bigger plot will continue in the next book.*

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# Trigger Warnings

This book has trigger warnings for memory loss, strong emotions caused by brain damage, a discussion about abortion/terminating a pregnancy, the mention of the suicide of a very minor character (in the past, one-time mention), mentions of physical and sexual abuse (not described in detail), and mentions of rape (not described in detail).

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# Character List

## **The Doyle Clan**

**Erwan** - crown prince and alpha dragon

**Jermon** - Erwan's brother and alpha dragon

**Valdis** - Erwan's brother and alpha dragon

**Nadiv** - Erwan's brother and alpha dragon

**Cladhaire** - Erwan's father, the king, alpha dragon

**Grian** - Erwan's mother, omega dragon

**Baoth** - Erwan's uncle, brother of his father, alpha dragon

**Fiona** - Baoth's wife (deceased)

**Emma** - an omega dragon and the librarian

**Seamus** - Emma's grandfather (deceased)

**Cedric** - Emma's father (deceased)

**Blair** - an alpha dragon and one of the guards

**Finlay** - an omega dragon

**Gael** - an omega dragon

**Martin** - alpha, guard

## **The Hightower Pack**

**Rhene Hightower** - alpha, pack alpha

**Sivney Lowell** - omega, second in command of the pack. He's mated to Naran Watkins (alpha) and Lev Hopwell (fluid).

Daughter: Abigail.

**Isam** - alpha, guard. Mated to Mostyn (beta) and Servas (omega, in charge of construction crew)

**Maz Ahadi** - alpha, OB/gyn in the Hayes clinic. Mated to Lucan Whitefield (beta, office manager in the clinic), and Sando Melloni Ahadi (omega, scientific researcher into the Melloni gene)

**Adar** - alpha, guard

**Ori** - alpha, construction crew

**Quico** - alpha, pediatrician in the Hayes clinic

**Wilmer** - alpha, veterinarian

**Duer** - beta

**Delton** - beta, psychologist

**Taban** - beta

**Matthew McCain** - omega, gardening and agriculture

**Michael McCain** - omega, veterinary assistant

**Riordan** - omega

**Yitro** - omega

**The Hayes pack**

**Lidon Hayes** (alpha, pack alpha). Mated to Palani Hightower (beta, second-in-command), Enar Magnusson (beta, doctor in the Hayes Clinic), and Vieno Hayes-Kessler (omega). Kids: Hakon (alpha-heir) and Mahina (omega girl).

**Bray Whitefield** (alpha, Grayson's oldest son, head of security). Mated to Kean Hightower (beta, Rhene's older brother, in charge of all the animals on the ranch) and Ruari Wyndham Whitefield (omega, kitchen crew). Kids: Jax (alpha heir) and Kekona (omega girl).

**Grayson Whitefield** (alpha, storyteller). Mated to Lars Magnusson (beta, Enar's younger brother, in charge of agriculture) and Sven Whitefield-Magnusson (omega). Grayson is father to Bray, Lucan, and Dane from a previous marriage. He has a son with Sven, Kateb.

**Sean Lillienfield** (alpha, Lidon's former partner in the police corps, assistant head of security). Mated to Felix (beta, lawyer) and Gia (omega, runs the kitchen in the Hayes pack).

### **Other names**

**Jawon** - beta, Lidon's cousin, was killed during an attack on the ranch)

**Professor Melloni** - beta, researcher, discovered the Melloni gene. Sando's father.

**George York** - alpha, Prime Minister, assassinated

**General Armitage** - Army general, leader of a coup that led to a brief civil war in the capital, now imprisoned

### **The Murphy Clan**

**King Ennis** - alpha, king of the Murphys

**Alistair** - knight and commander, alpha

**Kerry** - knight and advisor to the king, alpha

**Dempsey** - knight and trainer, alpha

**Tynan** - senior advisor to the king, alpha

**Hubert** - alpha

**Fallon** - omega

**Oliver** - omega

**Graham** - omega

**Ross** - omega

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# Prologue

## 1 806 - Doyle Plantation

For the last two weeks, her eyes had never left the single, pearly egg, as if watching it would ensure its very survival. Aye, but she had to do what she could, now didn't she? She'd lost too much already. Too many eggs. Too many dreams. Her heart would not heal from yet another blow.

“Can I get you a drink, Your Majesty? Or something to eat, perhaps?”

Lucia, the omega who had served Grian for as long as she could remember, put a warm hand on her arm. She'd been by Grian's side ever since she'd been a little girl, one of noble birth, destined for greatness—or so her mother had kept assuring her. Grian had always felt the weight of those expectations on her shoulders, and without Lucia, Grian would not have had the fortitude to carry on. Over the years, they'd become friends, sisters. Grian might have become a queen through her marriage to King Cladhair, but her life in the Doyle clan was far from a fairy tale. Lucia had always been there for her.

“Some cold water, please. Thank you, Lucia.”

A brief squeeze on her hand. “My pleasure, Your Majesty.”

“I've told you countless times you should call me Grian when we're in my private quarters,” Grian said as Lucia

walked toward the door.

Lucia slowly turned around. “I would, if not for fear of the wrong person overhearing.”

Grian frowned. “What is it you fear?”

Lucia bit her lip and came closer. “This house has ears.”

“Ears?”

Lucia nodded. “People say the king and his brother know things, things that were spoken in private without anyone else present.”

A cold hand wrapped around Grian’s heart. “Magic?”

Another nod. “Seamus, the librarian, seems to think so.”

“He has the gift of magic.”

“Aye, he does, and it runs strong in his family. ’Tis a shame his son perished so young.”

Cedric, Seamus’s son, had drowned while trying to save his daughter, Emma, who had fallen into the river. A treacherous one it was, that river, full of swirling rapids and dark undercurrents. The babe—only two at the time—had survived, but Cedric had not. He had pushed his daughter onto shore with his last bit of strength and got caught in an eddy.

“Seamus said he thinks the king is employing magic?” Grian asked.

“Yes, Your Majesty. Others have dismissed him, saying he’s mad with grief.”

“But you disagree.”

“I’ve known him all my life, and that man is no more mad than you or me. ’Tis not grief that’s causing him to speak words of warning. ’Tis his gift.”

Grian didn’t doubt Lucia’s assessment. The woman had always been smarter and far more observant than she’d gotten credit for, but then again, that was the curse of every woman born into a man’s world, wasn’t it? Grian was never taken seriously, despite being better educated than most men in her



clan. Her parents had seen to that. And of course her gifts outshone those of most men as well, but no one knew. No one except Lucia.

“If this is true, you’re right to mind your words. We’d all do well to heed Seamus’s warning.”

Relief passed over Lucia’s face as if she hadn’t been sure Grian would believe her. “Yes, Your Majesty.”

Before Grian could say anything else, a tiny crackling sound had her spin her head toward the egg. Was that...? Gods, yes. It was time. “It’s hatching!”

Lucia was immediately by her side, taking her hand. “Should I warn the king?”

“No. Let’s wait and see if the hatchling survives.”

Her heart beat in her throat, her ears, her whole body as she watched. Every breath was a struggle as Grian willed the baby dragon to come out of his shell. She whispered blessings, one after the other, her mouth forming words her brain didn’t even recognize.

The crack in the shell grew bigger, and the tiniest little claw appeared, peeping through the shell, getting a first taste of the outside world.

“He’s strong,” Lucia said.

“We don’t know if it’s a he yet,” Grian said almost automatically.

“Aye, he is. He’s your firstborn, the alpha heir the king wanted, but he won’t be what the king expects. Over time, the king will regret the day his son was born.”

A chill ran down Grian’s spine. She didn’t think anything could’ve drawn her gaze away from the egg, but Lucia’s sharp words and solemn tone made her look sideways. Lucia’s eyes were glassy as if she wasn’t fully present, and her voice was hoarse when she spoke again.

“One day, he’ll stand up against his father and make right what was wrong. When the True Alpha rises, so will your son,

and he will bring justice and honor and peace, but it will come at a price.”

Grian’s heart raced, but deep inside, she recognized the truth of Lucia’s words. How she knew, she wasn’t sure, but she did. Her son would bring change, and she had to protect him at all costs.

“Don’t speak of this to anyone,” she told Lucia, who shook her head as if clearing it. Fear dawned in the maid’s eyes.

“Gods, what did I do?”

Grian took her hand. “You did nothing wrong, but swear to me you’ll keep this to yourself. I do not wish to bind you with a magic oath, but—”

“Bind me, Grian. I beg you. Don’t allow me to betray you or endanger your son. I will do whatever it takes to keep your son safe.”

She held out both her hands to Grian, who took them. She closed her eyes and called up the fire inside her. She had to act quickly, or her husband would pick up on the magic and investigate. She waited until the power surged through her veins. “*Glas ar do bheola, go deo agus go deo.*”

A lock on your lips, now and forever.

Lucia let out a deep breath and shuddered. “Don’t ever let the king know how strong your powers are. He’ll use them against you, against your children.”

“Aye, I know.”

They turned back to the egg, which cracked open at that exact time, revealing the cutest little baby dragon, who looked dazed and dizzy as he took his first gaze into the world. Tears formed in Grian’s eyes. She’d done it. The gods had blessed her with a child.

Her eyes dropped lower, and she gasped.

A son. She had a son.

And she would protect him with her life if she had to.

# Chapter One

The hospital bed creaked as Wilmer shifted his weight from one side to the other, moving limb by limb and not putting any pressure on his wounds. After spending a week in bed, he ached everywhere, and his muscles had weakened already. Even pushing himself up into a sitting position was an effort that left him exhausted.

He reached for the glass of water on his nightstand, lifted it, and managed to bring it to his mouth without spilling. A stupid thing to be proud of, and yet here he was. He took a few sips, the lukewarm water soothing his dry throat, then put the glass back. By the time he lay back against the pillows, he was panting, a painful reminder of the sorry condition he was in.

This room had become his whole world in the week since he'd gotten injured, and by now, he knew every nook and cranny. At least, the parts he could see from his bed. The pale yellow walls with an unidentified spider-shaped stain in one corner. The white-painted trims were scraped in a few places, maybe from banging the bed against them. A TV hung on the opposite wall, but he hadn't used it. Hell, even having his eyes open hurt half the time, so watching TV was out of the question.

The bed linens were refreshed every other day—and fuck, what an ordeal to get out of bed for that, even for those few minutes. But he always appreciated the smell of the new sheets, something floral and sunshiny, as well as how crisp they felt against his skin. Soft and yet a tad stiff, like how new sheets were supposed to feel.

The linoleum floor was shiny and squeaked under the Crocs or sneakers of the people who worked here. Every day, someone from the Hayes pack came by to clean his room, including the adjoining bathroom. Usually an omega—he couldn't remember their names, even if he tried, though they always introduced themselves to him—but a beta had stopped by for cleaning duty once as well. They were unfailingly kind, taking care to be as quiet as possible.

Little sun intruded into his world. The black-out curtains blocked the stinging beams that wreaked havoc on Wilmer's headaches. Lucan, a hardworking, kind beta, who was the office manager of the clinic, had meticulously hung them, even duct-taping the sides to the trim to keep out as much light as possible. Wilmer appreciated it more than he could say. Even without the harsh light, his headache was nauseating. His head hurt every day, all day, all the time.

“I see one of your supposed mates stopped by again?”

Wilmer turned his attention back to his mom, who was sitting next to his bed, holding his hand. He'd forgotten she was there, too deep in his pain and misery. She nudged her head at the slice of apple pie on his night table.

“Riordan popped in for a few minutes. He loves baking, and apparently, I loved his apple pie when he made it on a date we had.”

“You always had a fondness for apple pie.” His mother said it as if it cost her to get those words out.

“Mom...” How did he say this delicately? He didn't want to hurt her, but he also needed to make some things clear to her. “I know you don't agree with the concept of fated mates.”

“I'll say,” she huffed. “It's preposterous, especially in this day and age. People should be free to choose who they want as a partner.”

“I agree, Mom. But no one is forcing me to accept them as my mates.”

“I don't understand why you'd even want to consider the possibility. Honey, not only are you an alpha, but you're also

young, smart, good looking, and well educated. You could easily get a job as a veterinarian anywhere, and omegas would line up for you to have your alpha heir. Why would you want to stay here and settle for such an...unconventional relationship?"

*Unconventional.* Probably not the word she'd wanted to use. She'd met Jermon and Riordan and had been shocked to discover Jermon was a fellow alpha. And she didn't even know he was a dragon, though both she and Wilmer's father had looked at Jermon quizzically a few times, probably picking up on something different about him. Riordan had met with her approval—theoretically—since he was an omega, but she'd made her opinion on Wilmer being with two men crystal clear. That one of them was an alpha was adding insult to injury.

He flexed his hands under the covers, where she couldn't see it. "I'm not in a relationship with them right now, Mom. They understand I'm recovering."

"They'd better."

"Maria," his father said, his voice holding an edge. "Wilmer can make his own decisions."

"I'm only looking out for him," she defended herself.

"There's a fine line between taking care of him and smothering him. Make sure you stay on the right side."

His father's warning was clear, and Wilmer sent him a look of gratitude. The man tolerated a lot from his wife, but he drew clear boundaries she didn't dare cross. His father nodded back, then rose. "It's time for us to leave so you can get some rest."

His mother obediently got up as well. As an omega, she'd never publicly disobey her alpha husband. His parents loved each other, that much Wilmer was certain of, but theirs was a traditional marriage in many ways, with the expected role patterns.

"You make sure you get well soon, honey, you hear me?" She cupped his cheeks in her hands and kissed his forehead.

He closed his eyes for a moment, breathing in the lavender smell she emitted. It came from her hand lotion, the perfume she used, and even her clothes, courtesy of the little pouches with dried lavender she always placed between them in the closets. Home, that was what she smelled like, and what a comfort that was when so much was uncertain. Despite her attitude, Wilmer knew she loved him.

“They’re taking great care of me, Mom.”

Trying to reassure her was futile. Her conviction that no one could take care of her boy as well as she was too deeply ingrained in her.

“I know.”

A deep sigh, a last kiss on his cheek, and then she walked out. Wilmer’s father followed on her heels, saying good-bye with a brief nod. He’d always been a man of few words, but the concern in his eyes had spoken volumes. Since he’d gotten hurt, they’d stopped by every single day, no small feat, considering it was a forty-minute drive for them.

As soon as Wilmer was convinced they’d left, he sagged back, wincing in pain. Fuck, he was wiped. A week after his accident, his headaches had only gotten marginally better, much to his dismay. As if the constant confusion of not knowing what had happened wasn’t enough. Oh, his earlier memories had returned, and he had no issues recalling events from years ago. He remembered everything from his childhood, even his time in college.

But the last two years had been erased, and with it, all recollection of how he’d ended up in a pack. And more importantly, the fact that he apparently had two mates.

More than anything else, not being able to remember them frustrated him. If they were truly his mates—something his wolf kept reminding him of—how could he not have any memory of them and no idea how they had met? Every time they walked into his room, he got upset with himself for not recognizing who they were. The neurologist had said that reaction was counterproductive, but knowing he shouldn’t feel that way didn’t help at all.

As always since he'd gotten hurt, his head throbbed. The only difference was the amount of pain he was in. It could vary from a level that had him literally pulling the covers over his head—the first few days—to bearable and being able to have a conversation. Right now, it was somewhere in between. The pressure from the inside was too high, like his brains were too big for his skull, forcing their way out.

Firm footsteps in the hallway alerted him to Enar's impending arrival. Funny how after a week, he could identify people by the sound they made as they walked through the hallways. Sando's gait was slow and uneven, as if he was elsewhere with his thoughts. Maz's tread was loud and confident, a classic alpha. Lucan usually hurried, his feet much quicker and lighter. And Enar's was steady, as calming and reassuring as the man himself.

Seconds later, Enar popped his head around the open doorway. "You up for a brief visit? I know your parents left minutes ago, so let me know if it's too much for you right now."

"I can handle it."

Enar came inside, soundlessly lifted the chair, and put it closer to Wilmer's bed. Wilmer appreciated his care, as the squeak of the legs on the vinyl floor was a terror for his head.

"How are you feeling?"

If Wilmer was tempted to downplay his condition to anyone else, he never did so with Enar. "About the same, though my headache is worse after my parents visiting. Holding a conversation takes a lot of energy and effort."

"I can imagine. Are they understanding of your limitations?"

"My mom is worried I'm overdoing it. She's protective of me."

"You're an only child, right?"

"Yeah."

“That makes sense, then. Kind of hard for her to stand back and let others take care of her boy.”

It came so close to Wilmer’s thoughts he smiled. “Exactly.”

“How’s the pain from the burn wounds?”

Wilmer shrugged. “A little better, I guess. Then again, you’re still giving me pretty strong painkillers, so I can’t really say.”

Enar leaned forward, his blue eyes filled with concern. “I wanted to talk to you about slowly decreasing the amount of those meds, actually. Do you think you’re ready for that?”

He wanted to lower the dose already? After a week? God, that would send his headaches through the roof. Not exactly an appealing prospect. “Are you worried about me becoming dependent on them?”

“Not primarily, though that’s definitely a risk to keep in mind for the longer term. The neurologist is concerned about the effect opiates could have on your brain, considering how vulnerable it is right now. She reasoned you might be more susceptible to addiction but also that it might impede your recovery, especially your memory.”

Damn, those were hard arguments to refute. “Is there anything else I can take to make the headaches bearable? I’m not too concerned about the burn wounds, since I don’t have the energy to move around anyway, but the headaches are awful, even with the painkillers.”

“She promised to send me an email with some alternatives she has good experiences with, so I’ll let you know as soon as I get that.”

“Thank you.”

“If your recovery keeps progressing at this pace, we may be able to release you from the clinic in a week or so. We’d still keep an eye on you, obviously, but you wouldn’t have to stay here.”

“Already? That’s much sooner than I expected.”



“There’s no reason for you to be in the clinic, medically speaking. You’d still need help with practical things, but that doesn’t have to be here.”

Where would he go? His mom had made it clear she counted on Wilmer to move back in with his parents until he was fully recovered. That made the most sense, and yet... “Would I need to stay close to the clinic?”

Enar frowned, but then understanding filled his eyes. “We could transfer your care to any other hospital or doctor, for example, Dr. Breen, the neurologist we’ve been consulting. She works in the University Hospital in the city. Are you thinking about staying with your parents?”

“That’s what my mom would prefer.”

“If that’s what you want, you should do it.”

“Yet this pack is supposed to be my home.”

Enar’s face softened, his blue eyes full of with compassion. “This must all be so disorienting to you.”

“I expected my memory to be back by now. The neurologist said in most cases it was only temporary.”

Enar slowly nodded. “She did, but she didn’t put a timeline on the temporary part. It may take a few weeks or even months for snippets to return, and even then, there’s no guarantee you’ll get every single memory back. The longer it takes, the more likely the chance is you’ll lose some of it permanently.”

As an ob-gyn specialized in healthcare for omegas, Enar had ventured far outside of his field of expertise, yet he had devoted himself to providing Wilmer with the best care possible. He’d called neurologists, psychologists, and a whole slew of other medical professionals to get their opinion on Wilmer’s case. And he had kept Wilmer in the loop of everything he had learned, which was one of the main reasons Wilmer trusted him so much and could be completely honest with him. Enar had proved he had Wilmer’s interests at heart, and he needed the truth to be able to treat Wilmer in the best way possible.

“I can’t bear to think of that, to be honest. The idea of never gaining my memories back of the last two years is...” His throat tightened, and his chest seemed to shrink. “It makes it hard to breathe.”

“Then you’re not ready to consider that option yet, and that’s okay. For now, we’ll focus on the short term.”

“Thank you. And thank you again for going above and beyond in treating me.”

Enar waved his hand dismissively. “Of course. You’re pack, so you’re family.”

Family. Everyone he had encountered in the last week had assured him he was part of their pack, of their family. Not only his mates but everyone in the clinic as well. He might not know them or, more accurately, recognize them, but their genuine concern for him had been heartwarming. And his wolf had reaffirmed it every single time.

“Is there anything you’d like to bring up with me? Any questions you might have, concerns?”

Wilmer hesitated. Was this something he could discuss with Enar? Should he? It seemed like a violation of privacy, but it bothered him enough that it kept churning in his mind. But who else could he talk to? “I’m not quite sure how to put this.”

“Take your time. I’m not in a hurry.”

He never was. Enar exuded a soothing calmness.

“It’s about my... It’s about Jermon and Riordan.”

“I can’t even imagine how complicated that situation is for you.”

“It is, though I probably would’ve gone with frustrating, maybe even infuriating. It seems so ridiculous I can’t remember two men who apparently mean so much to me. What does that indicate?”

Enar put a gentle hand on top of Wilmer’s and squeezed it. “In itself, nothing. You lost all memories of the last two years, not only of them. The fact that you can’t remember Jermon

and Riordan doesn't disqualify the feelings you have for them. Or had."

Wilmer's throat got tight again. "How can I feel something for people I don't remember? I see how they look at me, and I know they genuinely care for me, but...I don't know what to do, how to treat them. I don't feel anything for them other than gratitude for showing up at my bedside. They're strangers to me."

"Nobody expects you to declare your love for them, including them. Memory loss is hard to understand for those not experiencing it, but they're trying. I promise you, the last thing Jermon and Riordan want is to put pressure on you or weigh you down with their expectations. All they long for is for you to get healthy."

A wave of nausea rolled over him, and his headache was blinding now. "The guilt is killing me. I want nothing more than to reassure them we're okay, but how can I say that when I know we're not?"

"You don't need to reassure them of anything. They'll wait until you're ready, no matter how long it takes."

"But you do think they're my mates?"

Enar didn't answer right away, his forehead crinkling. "I do, but I understand you might feel differently."

"Why do you think they're my mates? Have I ever expressed that I felt the same way?"

Enar slowly shook his head. "I'm sorry, but you have to understand that you and I were not that close. We're in different packs, and we had little to no contact on a day-to-day basis before you ended up in the clinic. So I don't know if you ever told anyone how you felt. But the reason I think the three of you are fated mates is that I've seen the bond you share. They sense your emotions, even your pain. When you're particularly struggling, they know before I inform them. You're connected, but that doesn't mean you should feel pressured to act on it. Take your time, Wilmer. I have faith that

your memory will come back and that over time, you will remember them.”

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## Chapter Two

Every time Riordan visited Wilmer in the clinic, he was full of hope. And every time he walked out of Wilmer's room, his heart was heavy. Why was his mate's memory not coming back? All the doctors had said it should be temporary, that permanent memory loss was rare. But why, then, was there no improvement after a week?

He'd woken up early that morning, unable to go back to sleep. His heart had hurt so deeply, the stinging ache of Wilmer's absence all but unbearable, and so he'd baked him an apple pie. Silly as it was, hope bloomed deep inside him that maybe tasting the treat would make Wilmer get his memory back. Ridiculous, of course, but Riordan couldn't squash that ember of positivity. It had already died down to little more than a smolder, and if it were extinguished completely, Riordan didn't know what he would do. He *needed* Wilmer. They needed him.

His steps were slow and weary as he embarked on the twenty-minute walk from the clinic back to the Hightower lands that led him past the Hayes fields.

"Good morning," he greeted Lars, who was weeding a vegetable bed.

The beta looked up. "Good morning. Any news on Wilmer?"

Riordan shook his head.

"I'm sorry. I'm sure his memory will come back."

"Thank you. Let's keep hoping for that."

With a raised hand, he continued. If even grumpy Lars was so kind, it spoke volumes of how worried everyone was about Wilmer's recovery. Was that a good or a bad sign? Riordan would take it as a positive one. The pack's care for him and Jermon meant a lot.

The comforting smell of the sheep hit him before he reached the pasture where they were grazing. He'd asked Wilmer once why sheep's wool had such a strong scent. Not that Riordan minded, since it always gave him homey, comforting vibes. Wilmer had explained it was lanolin, the wool wax that sheep secreted that made their coat waterproof. The pack had chosen a sheep breed that produced high amounts of lanolin, which was why the smell was so strong. Wilmer knew so many interesting facts like that—one of the many things Riordan missed about him.

Riordan lifted his face toward the sun as he walked, his steps growing a bit lighter. He always needed time to let go of the depressive weight on his heart after visiting Wilmer. At least working in the kitchen would distract him, though the routine tasks left too much time for his brain to churn. But before heading to the kitchen, he'd stop by the stalls first. Jermon would want an update, no matter how little news Riordan had for him.

The stall doors were open, the long wooden pathway with the stalls on either side neatly swept. Jermon and Michael had been hard at work already. To the side of the stalls was a pile of fresh manure, and the sharp sting mixed with the undeniable woody, dusty undertones of fresh straw and hay. Riordan's nose tickled, but the expected sneeze didn't come.

Jermon was in the middle of the stalls, brushing Pride. A blue rope tied Wilmer's horse loosely to an iron hook on the wall, and the animal stood quietly as Jermon took care of his grooming. He was murmuring encouraging words to the horse as he moved the brush in a steady rhythm across his flank. He must've hosed Pride down first, as the horse was still wet, and so was Jermon.

His torso was bare, and little droplets of either sweat or water trickled down his broad chest toward the waistband of

his jeans. They were Riordan's favorite ones, the faded, tight denim showing off his thick thighs and ass. Instead of his usual boots, he was wearing Wilmer's, and Riordan's heart did a little flutter. His mouth dry, he swallowed.

Was there anything sexier than a half-naked man at work, sweaty and dirty from doing his job? Riordan's cock hardened, and he licked his lips. God, he wanted to jump him. Wanted to wrap his legs around Jermon's waist and kiss him until Jermon was as wild for him as he was for Jermon. And more than anything, he wanted to feel that monster cock in his ass again. Even soft, it was clearly outlined in the tight jeans. That thing had wrecked him in the best way, and his hole clenched at the memory.

A flare of heat traveled through his body, and his fingers tingled. It had been too long since he'd had sex, way too long. But he shouldn't feel that way. With Wilmer in the hospital, his mate out of commission, Riordan shouldn't want sex.

Besides, it had only been eight days. Eight days wasn't long to go without. Hell, before Wilmer and Jermon, he'd rarely had sex between his heats. It was wrong on every level, and the guilt was real. He shoved his needs down hard and stepped toward Jermon.

Jermon looked up. "Hey." His lips curled up in a smile.

The evidence that Jermon was happy to see Riordan soothed his hurting soul a little. "Hi."

"Did you go see Wilmer?"

Riordan nodded. "I dropped off a slice of pie for him."

Jermon continued brushing, glancing sideways at Riordan. "Any change?"

"Nothing." He couldn't keep the sadness out of his voice. "He's the same as yesterday and the day before."

Jermon's hand halted for a moment, and his shoulders slumped. He took a deep breath and picked up the rhythmic movements. "That doesn't mean anything. It's way too early to give up hope."

“I know.” It got more difficult every day to remind himself of that truth, though. Seven days was nothing for a brain injury, apparently, so they’d have to wait. He let out a soft sigh. “His parents were with him. His mom hates me.”

“She doesn’t hate you. She doesn’t like the concept of fated mates, and if there’s anyone she hates, it’s me. I suppose the idea of her alpha son with another alpha is too hard for her to stomach.”

“His parents are traditional.”

“That’s easier for you to judge than for me, but I think you’re right. I doubt she would’ve had an issue with you alone. It’s me she can’t handle.”

If it had been Jermon’s goal to hide his pain from Riordan, he’d failed. His shrinking posture communicated his feelings so clearly too. Poor Jermon. Considering he’d already struggled with being with another alpha, the criticism and rejection of Wilmer’s mother had to hit him hard. Plus, his self-confidence hadn’t been that great to begin with.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what to do.”

Jermon blew out a breath. “There’s nothing you can do about this. And none of it is your fault. This is the reality we have to deal with.”

Riordan hopped onto two stacked bales of hay and leaned back against the stall door behind him. “It’s so awkward to visit him. I want to spend time with him, and yet it’s excruciating once I’m there. I don’t know what to say, what to do, and he doesn’t either. We’re strangers to each other, except we’re not, but I’m the only one who knows that.”

“I don’t know how to handle this either,” Jermon confessed. “I don’t want to push him or make him feel pressured, but it’s distressing to act like we’ve just met and are building up... I don’t know, something. A friendship.”

“Exactly. And I have all these feelings for him inside me I want to express, but I can’t.”

“I’m right there with you. I want to comfort him so badly, but I’m too scared of crossing a line, of doing something he



wouldn't be comfortable with."

Jermon put down the brush, then rose and stretched, extending his arms above his head. His jeans rode dangerously low, and another cascade of sparks settled in Riordan's cock and balls. Dammit, this burning ball of need inside him was becoming harder and harder to ignore.

"So how do we move past the awkwardness? What can we do to start building a relationship with him again?"

Jermon took a few steps in Riordan's direction. "Patience. That's all I have. We've got to be patient with him and give him the time to adjust to his new reality."

"That's easy for you to say. You survived being locked up in a castle for two hundred years. You've had the opportunity to learn and practice patience. I haven't, and I'm running out."

Jermon's face softened, and he closed the distance between them. He stepped between Riordan's legs and wrapped his arms around Riordan, pulling him against his clammy body. Riordan balanced on the edge of the hay bale as he nuzzled Jermon's neck, breathing in his musky sweat. He pressed a kiss on his skin, then another one. He moved in and brazenly took Jermon's mouth.

Jermon hesitated, but then he opened and let Riordan in, sinking into the kiss. Riordan plastered himself against that strong body. His heartbeat sped up. Hell, yes. He needed this. He kissed him frantically, snaking his arms around Jermon's ass and squeezing. Within seconds, the evidence of Jermon's arousal pressed against him, hard and demanding. That was more like it.

Riordan kept kissing him as he moved his hands to the front and fumbled with the belt buckle. Jermon halted, removing his hand from Riordan's shoulder and placing it on his hands.

"What?" Riordan snapped.

Jermon carefully untangled himself and stepped back. "We can't do this. Not without Wilmer."

His words were like an ice bath, dousing the fire that burned in Riordan's body. For now. He let out a groan of frustration. "I know, but..."

How did he explain this when it made no sense to him? "I have needs. I don't know if it was the heat I shared with you and Wilmer or because my body recognizes we're mates, but my body needs you."

Jermon furrowed his brows. "What do you mean?"

Sometimes, it was easy to forget how little experience Jermon had. Riordan would have to spell it out for him. "I need you physically. I need sex. Preferably with both of you, but since that's not an option, it'll have to be with you."

The frown on Jermon's face deepened. "No offense, but that sounds like I'm second choice, like you're settling for me."

Riordan sat down on his hands to prevent himself from balling them. Anger blazed through him, but he clamped down on it. "I'm not settling. I want you as much as I want Wilmer, but he's not available right now. You are. I need you, Jermon. You're my mate. I'm your omega, and your job is to take care of me."

God, the whine in his voice annoyed the crap out of him, but he couldn't stop it.

"I'm trying to understand where this is coming from, but I'm not sure I get it. You told us you usually didn't have sex between your heats, and that was never an issue for you. We had sex two days before the attack, so nine days ago, and now all of a sudden, you're desperate for sex? How come, if I may ask?"

Well, that was the one-million-dollar question, wasn't it? "If I knew, I'd tell you, but I don't. I feel differently since my heat, like something in my body has changed."

Jermon let out a sharp gasp. "You don't think you're...?"

Bless Jermon for having at least that awareness. "Pregnant? I can't be. I was on birth control, and besides, I'd have different symptoms."

“Oh. Okay. I was wondering, since it would’ve been the most logical explanation for your body feeling differently.”

As quickly as his arousal had flared, it faded, leaving Riordan drained, and his posture sagged. “Trust me, that was the first possibility that popped into my head, but it doesn’t add up.” He blew out a deep sigh, dropping his chin to his chest and rubbing his eyes. “I’m sorry. I’m putting you in a hard spot, and I didn’t mean to.”

His heart thudding dully, Riordan peeked at Jermon. Would he be upset with Riordan? He was so needy, always asking for attention. At least, that was what it felt to him, and he got so frustrated with his own behavior. But Jermon stepped closer again, holding his arms wide, and Riordan took him up on the wordless invitation and sank against his chest. Jermon’s arms came around him, and Riordan closed his burning eyes.

“No apology needed. We’re all under a crazy amount of stress, and I’m not surprised it manifests in different ways. If it helps, you have my wholehearted permission to do what you need to satisfy yourself. Sexually, I mean. But please understand I can’t help you. I would feel like I betrayed Wilmer, and I can’t do that to him. I have to believe that one day soon, the three of us will be together, and I don’t want to do anything to risk that.”

It couldn’t have been easy for Jermon to confess that, what with how sensitive a topic sex still was for him to talk about. Tears burned behind Riordan’s eyes, and he fought to hold them back. “You’re absolutely right, but making the right choice is all but impossible when this need gets so strong. It’s like my heat is about to start, except it isn’t, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

Jermon let go of him, then kissed the top of his head. “Maybe you should talk to Enar or Maz. I’m sure they’d be able to offer an explanation.”

Talking about this with someone else was the last thing Riordan wanted to do, but he couldn’t deny that Jermon made a good point. If anyone were able to help him, it would be one

of the two doctors, since they were both specialized in omega care. "I'll talk to Maz, see what he says."

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## Chapter Three

**J**ermon had avoided the blackened ruins of the farmhouse as much as possible. Every time he was confronted with the result of the attack and the fire that had blazed through the house, his heart grew heavy. Rhene hadn't said it in so many words, but the pack had lost much more than a house. With the destruction of the main house, a part of their identity had disappeared, a part of their history.

But Jermon couldn't stay away from it forever, and it was right on the way to the barn where Rhene and Erwan were staying. He'd expected to smell the sharp sting of smoke and burnt wood that had still hung in the air, but as he came closer, nothing but fresh air hit him. He rounded the corner and came to a full stop.

It was gone. The remnants of the farmhouse had been cleared away, probably by Servas and his crew, leaving an empty black spot. Jermon's chest constricted, making it painful to breathe. Gods, this was even worse than seeing what had been left, a pressing reminder of how much they had to rebuild.

The guilt weighed on him. If the dragons hadn't joined the wolves, this attack would never have happened. They had brought violence to the pack. That thought kept circling through his head. Was it ethical to stay here if they endangered the pack? Maybe they should leave. But every time he considered it, his throat clenched, and he had to force air into his lungs. He couldn't leave his mates behind. It would kill him...and them too, perhaps.

Footsteps behind him made him turn around.

“It’s not a pretty sight, is it?” Rhene put a hand on Jermon’s shoulder.

Jermon sighed. “No, it’s not. I thought seeing the ruins would be bad, but this is even worse. It’s so...empty.”

Rhene squeezed his shoulder, then let go. “It is, and every time I walk past it, I get pissed off again. But Servas said they’re starting construction tomorrow, so hopefully, something new will arise soon.”

“It will never replace what you lost, though.”

Rhene cocked his head, studying Jermon. “You lost something as well.”

“It wasn’t my farmhouse.”

“It wasn’t mine either. It belonged to the pack.”

Hard to argue with that, and a wave of warmth rolled through Jermon. His brother had chosen well with Rhene as his mate. “What are you building in its place?” Jermon asked as they set course for the barn.

“A much bigger main house. We figured we might as well take advantage and create something good and positive from a horrific situation. The new kitchen will be three times as big, offering a central place to eat for all pack members. And surrounding the kitchen, we’ll build four different living quarters. One will be wheelchair friendly for Sivney and his family. Your brother and I will take one, but we haven’t decided what to do with the other two yet.”

For the time being, everyone had a place to sleep, even if it meant bunking with multiple people in the same room. Jermon and Riordan were sharing Riordan’s old room, with Duer and the pregnant Yitro in the other rooms in their cabin. That had left Jermon’s old room and Wilmer’s available for others who had become homeless when their cabin had burned down.

“That’s good, then. At least something positive comes from this horrible event.”

Rhene nodded. “Trust me, that’s what I keep telling myself. I have to. Otherwise, it’s too easy to sink into a state of doom and gloom.”

“Is there a timetable for when Servas expect it to be ready?”

“Hopefully, within two weeks. That sounds ridiculously fast, but we’re pulling everyone from both packs to help with the construction.” Rhene shot a quick look sideways at Jermon. “Well, almost everyone.”

Jermon snorted. “Trust me, you do not want me swinging a hammer.”

“I was told as much, which explains why you’re not scheduled. But all kidding aside, you and Michael have your hands full with the animals anyway. How are you managing without Wilmer?”

Jermon shrugged. “We’re making it work, but it’s a lot for the two of us. I’m not that experienced yet, Michael doesn’t have the physical strength for some of the tasks, and neither of us has Wilmer’s knowledge. We’ve asked Kean for help a few times when we didn’t know what to do, and he’s been awesome.”

“Glad to hear it. If you run into any issues, let me or Sivney know. We have a lot on our plates right now, but that doesn’t mean we don’t have time for your problems.”

They’d reached the barn Rhene and Erwan were sharing with Sivney and his mates and daughter. With his wheelchair, Naran didn’t have many choices, and the barn doors were wide enough for him to maneuver through. They had created makeshift separations with drywall, but they didn’t come up all the way to the roof, so sound traveled through the barn, leaving them with little privacy.

“We can sit outside, behind the barn,” Rhene said. “That way, we won’t wake Abigail.”

When they walked around, they found Erwan already waiting for them. Three chairs were set up around a large chunk of wood that functioned as a table, holding some sodas

and a plate of chocolate chip cookies. Jermon widened his eyes when he spotted the snacks. “Did Yitro bake those?”

The main kitchen might be gone, but their cabin had one, albeit a little one with a small oven. Still, it was big enough to bake cookies.

“Obviously. You didn’t think I made them, right?” His brother chuckled.

Jermon made a beeline for the cookies and took two, then plopped down in a chair. “I was hoping not, but in this pack, one never knows.”

Erwan grinned. “Truth.”

Jermon devoured the two cookies, moaning in appreciation. Yitro always made them perfectly crispy, with just the right amount of chocolate chips without them becoming too overwhelming.

“How’s Wilmer doing?” Erwan asked.

Jermon brushed the cookie crumbs off his shirt and folded his hands as he met his brother’s gaze. “No change, which means no progress. He still doesn’t remember anything.”

“I’m so sorry.” Erwan’s eyes were full of compassion.

“We’ll have to be patient.”

“That shouldn’t be an issue for you, but how’s Riordan holding up?” Rhene asked.

Jermon hesitated. How much could he tell them? He didn’t want to reveal more than Riordan would be comfortable with, but at the same time, he longed to share his worries with someone. “He’s struggling.”

“With anything in particular?”

“It’s hard for him to be treated like a stranger whenever he’s visiting Wilmer. He doesn’t know how to handle that, and I can’t blame him.”

Rhene hummed. “I can’t even imagine how that feels. All I need to do is picture Erwan in that bed, not recognizing me. It would break my heart.”



“The two of you are much further in your relationship than we were, though.”

“Sure, but that doesn’t change the facts. You know he’s your mate.”

Jermon closed his eyes, rubbing his temples. Every time he thought of Wilmer, all alone in that hospital bed, his chest hurt. His heart clenched painfully, and his lungs grew tight, making it an effort to breathe. “Yes. Yes, he is.”

Happy birds sang their song in the distance, and close by, something rustled in the underbrush between the trees. A squirrel, probably. Or a rabbit that had ventured too close. It had better be careful, or it would be captured and eaten. The pack hunted and ate anything.

“This whole situation puts a lot of pressure on you,” his brother said, and Jermon opened his eyes again.

“What do you mean?”

“Riordan is leaning on you, but so is Michael, at least professionally speaking. And once he goes home, Wilmer will be too. That’s a heavy weight for you to carry.”

“I don’t know if Wilmer will be coming home to us when he’s released. His parents are putting pressure on him to move back in with them. Or I should say, his mom. She doesn’t really care for me and Riordan, though I suspect it’s more me than Riordan. Surely, she wouldn’t object to Wilmer finding himself a sweet, good-looking omega like Riordan. It’s the fellow alpha that’s the issue. Or maybe the two mates. I don’t know.”

Erwan’s eyebrows had risen while Jermon did his little ramble. “She wants him to move back home?”

“His home is here, with the pack. With his mates.” Rhene’s tone was sharp.

“Perhaps, but it’s hard for him to feel at home here when he doesn’t remember us and doesn’t recognize anything or anyone. We’re strangers to him, and so is the pack.”

Jermon had to force himself to get the words out, his throat almost too tight to speak. If Wilmer decided to go back with his parents, what would Riordan and Jermon do? Could they tolerate that much of a distance between them and their mates? He doubted it.

“You’re right. Fuck, what an impossible situation for you. I can’t give you advice because I wouldn’t know what to do either.”

Rhene’s honesty was comforting, strangely enough. At least he didn’t pretend he had all the answers. That made Jermon feel a little less alone.

“Riordan is really struggling with the whole situation. He’s...not himself. He’s acting differently.”

Rhene leaned forward in his chair. “Differently, how?”

“Impatient, demanding at times, and...” He cleared his throat. May Riordan forgive him, but he had to ask someone for advice. “He says he needs sex. Like, this morning, he stopped by the stalls, and he said his body felt like his heat was about to start. Which is impossible, of course, since he had one mere weeks ago.”

“Is he tired?” Rhene asked. “Nauseous?”

Jermon shook his head. “No, and my mind went there as well. Riordan doesn’t think he’s pregnant because the symptoms don’t fit. But I told him he should talk to Enar or Maz, and he said he would.”

Rhene sat back in his chair again, scratching his chin. “Maybe it’s the stress after the attack and the worries for Wilmer. He was already dealing with residual trauma after his stay in the castle, so this could have exacerbated it.”

As logical as that sounded, it didn’t ring true to Jermon. Something else was going on, but if Rhene and Erwan didn’t have a clue either, what else could he do? He had to encourage Riordan to talk to one of the doctors. That was all he could think of.

“God, if he were pregnant, it would be the worst timing ever. I hate saying that, but seriously, how on earth would you

cope with that on top of everything else?” Erwan said.

“Tell me about it,” Jermon muttered.

“Let us know if you have any updates,” Rhene said. “I have to admit I’m worried.”

“Trust me, so am I. Speaking of pregnancies, how’s Yitro doing?” If he didn’t change the subject to something more upbeat, he’d lose the fight against the overwhelming sadness that constantly hovered around him, threatening to swallow him.

He’d never thought it possible for a big-ass, tough alpha like Rhene to look sappy, but he managed it, his whole face lighting up. “He’s doing well. According to Enar, his pregnancy is progressing as expected, and the nausea has gotten better. He’s still tired, but that makes sense.”

“I’m so happy for you guys.”

Rhene made lovey-dovey eyes at Erwan. “So are we. We can’t wait to be parents.”

“You’ll make awesome dads.”

Rhene and Erwan shared a look. Rhene cleared his throat and focused on Jermon again. “There was something else we wanted to ask you. We have a meeting set up with the Murphy dragons, and we’d love it if you could accompany us. Blair is coming as well.”

Learning more about the dragons that had come to their aid? Hell, yes. Sign him up. “I’d love to come, but I’m not sure if I can get away from the animals.”

Rhene waved dismissively. “That’s not a concern. We can ask Kean to step in if needed.”

“In that case, I’d love to. Can I ask why you want me there, though?” He might be the second oldest of his brothers, but that didn’t mean he was the most logical choice.

“Honestly, you were the first who came to mind, even before Blair,” Erwan said. “You’ve changed, and you’ve shown in the last weeks how much. You’ve become

trustworthy and dependable, and when I'm facing something so uncertain, I want you by my side."

Wow. Jermon hadn't seen that coming. "Thank you. I don't know what to... Thank you," he stammered. "I'm honored, and I'd love to come with you."

"Good." Rhene nodded. "We have a lot of questions we want answers to, starting with who the fuck attacked us."

Jermon cringed. "It has to be related to our presence here," he said softly. "They were specifically aiming for us dragons."

Rhene hummed in agreement. "Yeah, they were, but the question is why."

Jermon hesitated, then asked, "You're not upset with us for causing this?"

Rhene seemed surprised by that question. "No, why would I be? You didn't ask for this."

"But it's our presence here that led them to attack. I can't help but feel guilty about that."

"Don't." Rhene's voice was firm and definitive. "You didn't cause this. You didn't ask to be attacked. You didn't choose violence. They, whoever they are, did. This is on them, not on you or any of the dragons. So please let go of that guilt. It's unproductive."

Well, that was crystal clear. And Jermon did appreciate Rhene's words, but they were easier said than done, weren't they? How did one let go of guilt?

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## Chapter Four

Erwan looked out the window at the landscape passing him by at alarming speed. Wow, driving a car wasn't for the faint of heart. And he wasn't even the one behind the wheel. He hadn't expected to be affected by it, since flying didn't bother him, but this was a whole different ballgame.

They were in Rhene's truck, one he hadn't used since before the troubles in the capital. He'd told Erwan as much as he'd lovingly caressed the outside of the Ford F150 with his fingertips. He'd clearly washed it, the paint black and shiny. Maybe his joy over being reunited with his truck was the reason he was driving so damn fast? He seemed in control of the vehicle, but that was a small consolation when every cell in Erwan's body protested against this form of transportation.

"You okay?" his mate checked, putting a hand on Erwan's knee.

"How about you keep both hands on the wheel? That would make me feel a heck of a lot better."

Rhene chuckled. "Sweetheart, I can drive with one hand, I guarantee you."

"Be that as it may, I'd very much appreciate your cooperation with my reasonable request."

Rhene pulled back his hand, still grinning. "I love it when you talk dirty to me."

When stressed, Erwan still fell back on the more formal English he'd learned, and Rhene never ceased to tease him with it. The two dragons in the back snorted, which was to be

expected. But Erwan took satisfaction from Blair's pale face. Jermon didn't seem as bothered by his first car ride, but Blair was definitely feeling it. Good. At least Erwan wasn't the only one.

"Next time we fly," Blair muttered between clenched teeth as Rhene left the highway, circling back in a sharp loop that had Erwan's stomach in knots.

"Amen to that," Erwan said.

"I don't know what you guys are complaining about. I'm loving this." Jermon had his nose practically pressed against the window. Fucker. He would probably reincarnate as a dog in a next life. From what Erwan understood, they loved hanging their heads out the windows during car rides.

Rhene turned into the parking lot of the hotel they were supposed to meet the Murphys, and Erwan let out a breath of relief as his mate parked and shut off the engine. Thank the gods that was over with. He got out of the truck, still a little unsteady, and smiled when Blair wobbled as well.

Rhene whistled between his teeth. "They got expensive taste."

Erwan took in the imposing tower the hotel was in. Modern and sleek, with blue-reflecting, massive windows and a steel construction, it appeared to be recently build. Not Erwan's taste, but he could see what Rhene meant. It looked pricey. "I suppose being alive for hundreds of years makes wealth accumulation a little easier, what with compound interest on investments and all."

Rhene grinned. "I bet."

They walked past the valet parking, through the automatic glass doors into the opulent lobby. Black leather couches encircled glass coffee tables that held intricate flower arrangements, and one wall had high desks with gray bar stools where several suit-clad men sat behind their laptops. Half of them were on their phones while others quietly tapped away on their computers. Hushed murmurs rising from different groups spread across the lobby intermingled with the

dings of elevators and the rattling of luggage carts pushed by bellboys. In the background, *Chopin's Piano Sonata No.2* attempted to rise above the noise. The hotel had clearly prioritized sumptuous style over coziness and comfort.

Before they could figure out where to go next, a giant of a man walked toward them. He had to be at least six foot three, with biceps the size of bowling balls and thighs like chopping blocks. His navy pinstripe suit looked somewhat comical on him, as if he'd dressed in his father's clothes.

Next to Erwan, Rhene tensed. The man stopped at a respectable five-foot distance, then briefly bowed. "Prince Erwan, Prince Jermon, it is an honor to meet you. I'm Alistair, Commander of the Murphy clan."

Ah. In human form, the alpha was almost as terrifying as in his dragon shape. Erwan briefly dipped his head. "Commander Alistair, it's a pleasure to meet you under better circumstances. Please allow me to introduce you to my mate, Rhene Hightower, pack alpha of the Hightower pack. And this is Blair, one of our security men."

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance in human shape," Alistair said with a respectful nod. "I remember you from that night. If you follow me, I'll bring you to King Ennis and the knights."

They still had knights? How big was their clan? One of the many questions Erwan wanted to ask the Murphys. Hopefully, they were in the mood to share.

Alistair led them through the lobby, then turned right and marched through a long hallway. The thick, gray carpet hushed their footsteps, and every feverish note of the first movement of Chopin's sonata was now clearly audible. Erwan's mom had loved Chopin and had often played it as she worked with her herbs. The familiar music was almost a comfort amid all the uncertainty he faced in meeting the Murphy clan.

Alistair took a left at the end, then gestured for them to enter a conference room. Rhene subtly held Erwan back and walked into the room first. Erwan's heart grew warm.

Protecting him came naturally to his mate, and Erwan loved him for it.

A group of men was seated around a horseshoe formation of tables covered with formal white tablecloths. They had coffee and snacks in front of them, and the faint smell of smoke hung in the room. Not from cigarettes or cigars but like a wood fire. Where was that coming from?

The king was easy to spot. He was occupying the seat at the head of the table, but he was also by far the oldest and had a regal air about him. Despite his frail appearance and abundance of white hair, his eyes were sharp as they took in Erwan.

Erwan bowed. “King Ennis. It’s an honor to meet you, Your Majesty.”

“Young Prince Erwan. The honor is mine, son. Who did you bring with you?” the old man croaked.

“My mate, Rhene Hightower, pack alpha of the Hightower pack. My oldest brother, Prince Jermon. And Blair, one of our best fighters and security men.”

Also their only one, but Erwan left that part out. Surely, Alistair and the other dragons had reported back to the king on how small the group of dragons was that Erwan led, but he still didn’t want to give him more information than was strictly necessary.

The king studied them, taking his time, then finally nodded. “Welcome to the Murphy clan.” He gestured at the man sitting to his right. “Tynan?”

The man rose. “My name is Tynan, and I’m the king’s senior adviser. Will you allow me to test you for the presence of dark magic or deceit?”

They could test for that? Wasn’t that handy? “What would that test entail?”

“Nothing invasive, Your Highness. I will simply scan you with my hands to determine whether you’re trying to cloak anything.”



Cloak? Probably a magic term Erwan wasn't familiar with. He shot a quick glance at Rhene, who nodded. "You have our permission."

They stood unmoving as Tynan approached, closed his eyes, and waved his hands alongside Blair's body without touching him. Tynan hummed. "A fighter. An honorable one. He's a credit to your clan, Your Highness."

Blair beamed, and Erwan couldn't fault him.

Tynan moved on to Jermon, submitting him to the same treatment. Only a few seconds in, the adviser took in a sharp breath, his eyes flying open. "The gift of magic. It's strong in you, Your Highness."

The men in the room murmured, and Erwan caught looks between Alistair and some of the others. They weren't happy with this news, but why?

Jermon cleared his throat, a blush creeping up his cheeks. "Thank you?"

Tynan hummed again. "With training, you will make a formidable ally."

Wasn't that nice to hear? Both for Jermon and for Erwan, even for Rhene and the whole clan.

Then it was Rhene's turn. "I've never scanned a wolf before, so please forgive me if I need a little more time."

"No problem." Rhene sounded relaxed enough, but the tension in his shoulders betrayed his alertness.

Tynan tracked his hands alongside Rhene's body, going much slower this time, and he made no sound. Finally, he nodded. "There's honor in you. Honor and power. You make your forefathers proud, alpha."

Damn. Erwan wasn't sure if this was an attempt to butter them up, but if it was, it was working. Rhene's eyes lit up, and a broad smile spread across his face. "Thank you."

Tynan stepped in front of Erwan. "The one I've been waiting for. Let's see if the rumors about you are true, Your Highness."

Rumors? What rumors? But Erwan didn't say anything and stood frozen as Tynan scanned him. As Tynan moved his hands downward, a soft hum traveled through his body, like the reverb of a low bass. Tynan did a quick intake of breath, stumbling back so hastily he almost tripped over his own feet. "It's true. The rumors are true."

"What rumors?" Rhene snapped, taking a step toward Erwan.

"He's a white dragon," Tynan whispered. A wave of gasps rolled through the room.

"We haven't seen a white dragon in over five hundred years," King Ennis said, his voice breaking.

"I told you he was a white dragon, Your Majesty." Alistair sounded downright smug. No wonder if he'd reported back and the others hadn't believed him. After all, he'd seen Erwan in dragon form that night, though perhaps not clearly under the cover of darkness.

But what the hell was so special about him being a white dragon? Erwan got they were rare, but so far, no one had been able to tell him why and what was supposed to be so unique about him. Not that he intended to share that with the Murphys. Not until he had a better idea of their intentions. And judging by the meaningful looks exchanged between the Murphy leaders, this news meant something to them.

"They have all passed the test," Tynan announced, sounding more confident now.

"I had no doubt," the king said. He gestured at four chairs on his left. "Please, friends, be seated."

As soon they had sat down, a young male omega hurried toward Erwan and bowed. "What can I serve you with, Your Highness?"

Serve him with? What did he mean? Rhene subtly tapped the empty coffee cup in front of him. Ah. "I'll have a coffee, please, and the same for my mate. Black. Jermon?"

"Same."

“Make that four,” Blair said.

The omega offered Erwan another bow. “Right away, Your Highness.” He rushed off.

“While we wait for your refreshments to arrive, let’s talk,” one of the men said.

“Excuse me, but we haven’t been introduced to everyone else,” Rhene said pleasantly. “Could you do the honors, please?”

The man’s jaw tightened as if he was displeased by that request, but he did point out the men in the room, rattling off their names. Erwan didn’t stand a chance in hell of remembering them, but the guy who had spoken was named Kerry, and he committed that one to memory. He’d also been one of the men who’d been exchanging nonverbal signals with Alistair.

“We’re knights of the Murphy clan,” Kerry said with pride, “and we serve at the pleasure of the king.”

“Cool,” Rhene said, sounding anything but impressed. “Please continue.”

Kerry looked taken aback, then frowned. “As I was saying, let’s start things off. We were surprised to sense a sign of life from you. From the Doyle clan, I mean. We had long since assumed you were all dead.”

As openings went, that one needed work. Erwan repressed a snicker. Or was that Rhene’s influence rubbing off on him? The man had a unique gift for seeing the humor and absurdity in things, even on supposedly solemn occasions. “I can assure you we’re very much alive.”

“What Kerry means is that the Doyle clan went silent for so long we reasoned something must’ve happened to you. Not until you all shifted did we become aware there were still Doyles alive.” Alistair looked pointedly at Erwan, who stared right back. If the man wanted to ask him a question, he would have to formulate it. Also something Erwan had picked up from his mate.

“What happened?” Alistair finally said, narrowing his eyes as if he was irritated. “How come we didn’t sense you for over two hundred years?”

Erwan waited to answer until the omega had served all of them coffee and a plate of cookies Erwan had no intention of eating. “Thank you,” he said, as did Rhene, Jermon, and Blair, and every time he was thanked, the omega looked more shocked.

“We stayed hidden, protected by a spell that sealed us off from the outside world,” Erwan said when the omega had left the room again, deliberately not mentioning any specifics or the role his father and uncle had played in this. He needed to know where the Murphys stood first.

“We traveled here as soon as we sensed the shift in magic,” one of the knights said.

“Where do you guys reside, if you don’t mind me asking?” Rhene asked.

“We’ve made our home in the Scottish Highlands,” Kerry said. “It took us a few days to make our way over here. Our king is no longer able to fly long distances, so we had to travel by plane.”

“Old age.” The king sighed heavily. “To put it colloquially, it sucks.”

Erwan could barely hold back a laugh. That was about the last thing he’d expected from the king, but good for him to show a sense of humor. “Why the Highlands?”

“We’re close enough to the old country we can keep an eye on what’s happening there while at the same time have sufficient thin places to sustain our magic,” Kerry explained.

Thin places? What the hell were those? “Are you the only other dragon clan alive?”

Kerry seemed surprised by that question. “No, the Fitzgeralds and O’Connors are still present as well. The Fitzgeralds have made their home in the north of Canada, and the O’Connors have settled in Norway. The three of us thought

we were the last three clans until we sensed your presence. So four it is.”

Fitzgerald, O’Connor, Murphy, and Doyle. Four clans left out of how many? Erwan had no trouble connecting the dots in his head. “The only clans remaining are the ones that swore allegiance to the pact with the wolves.”

Silence descended as the Murphys all checked in with each other as if to determine who would speak up. Oh, Erwan knew what was coming next.

“Speaking of the wolves...” Alistair shot a look at Rhene. “Care to enlighten us on why the Doyle clan changed course and abandoned the wolves and now live with said wolves?”

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## Chapter Five

When they had prepared their meeting with the Murphys, they'd expected this question to come up, and Rhene and Erwan had agreed on telling the truth. In fact, Erwan had insisted on it. He refused to add to the dishonor of the Doyle clan by lying. That didn't mean it was an easy topic to discuss.

"Allow me to give you a little back story of how I met Erwan." Rhene signaled Erwan he would go first.

King Ennis nodded. "Please, we'd love to hear it."

"A few months ago, at the end of the winter, one of the omegas in my pack went for a walk in the woods and got lost." Rhene explained how Riordan had gotten wounded, how Erwan had found him and had carried him back to the castle, and how Rhene had gone searching for him and discovered the castle.

"You're saying there was a protective spell around the castle?" Kerry leaned forward.

"Correct. Initially, I couldn't get through. I could see the castle, but it was like there was an invisible wall I couldn't pierce. Until I could."

The softest of gasps flew from Kerry's lips. "You broke through that spell? How? Dragon magic is far more powerful than that of wolves."

Rhene sat back in his chair. How would this audience react when he dropped that name? He still didn't understand the

magic behind it, but it was real. “I invoked the name of the True Alpha, Lidon Hayes.”

The power of that name rolled through the room like a gust of wind, leaving no one unaffected. Men shifted in their seats, looking at each other, and a shiver trickled down Rhene’s spine. They knew Lidon’s name without a doubt. Even the king leaned forward, his expression inquisitive. “The rumors were correct, then. The True Alpha has risen.”

“Yes.” Rhene didn’t think he needed to say anything more than that. As much as he wanted to ask about those rumors, curious what the dragons had heard, he didn’t. He still wasn’t sure where they stood with the Murphys, so he would tread carefully.

“The prophecy said he would bring new life to what was dead. Has that happened?” Kerry asked.

Rhene nodded. “My brother Palani, who is one of Lidon’s three mates, died of brain cancer. Lidon’s omega mate, Vieno, brought him back to life, using Lidon’s name and power.”

Soft murmurs filled the room. “Excuse me, did you say *omega*?” Alistair asked.

“Yes, I did.”

The Murphys looked at each other with utter bafflement as if they couldn’t believe that an omega had been able to do that. “That’s most unusual,” Kerry finally said. “Though if true, it does confirm the power of Lidon Hayes.”

“I assure you it’s true. I’ve watched my brother deteriorate before my own eyes and get healed. From one second to the next, he was completely healthy.” Rhene couldn’t keep the defensive tone out of his response, but seriously, what the hell? Did these guys think he would lie about something like that? About his brother dying? What kind of sick person would do that?

“It wasn’t our intention to question the veracity of your words, so please forgive us if that was how it came across,” the king said. He sent a warning look in Kerry’s direction. “We’d love for you to continue your story, please.”

At least someone was polite. Rhene took a deep breath and continued his tale of how he'd gotten into the castle and what had happened.

"The truth is that Erwan and his brothers had no idea what their father and uncle had done, and we're still not sure of their motives. We found proof of them denouncing the treaty with the wolves in the late eighteenth century, but so far, we haven't uncovered a reason."

"I have to admit that was one of the most baffling developments ever," King Ennis said. "And that's saying something, considering I was born in the thirteenth century. I've never been able to wrap my head around the why of changing allegiance so late in the game. The Doyle clan had been loyal to the wolves ever since the treaty had been established, so it made no sense to me. It still doesn't."

Kerry and Alistair shared a look Rhene couldn't interpret, but he didn't like it at all. As if they knew something others didn't. But what?

"We feel the same way," Erwan said softly. "And knowing how much suffering we could have prevented had we stood by the wolves in their time of need is a heavy burden."

"It wasn't just us, though, was it?" Jermon spoke up for the first time, and every head in the room turned his way. "From what you told us, there should've been three other clans to defend the wolves. Where were they? Where were you?"

Holy shit, he was right. Why hadn't that occurred to Rhene until now? If the other three clans, which included the Murphys, had sworn allegiance to the wolves, they should've come to their aid when the Hayes pack had been attacked. Why hadn't they?

A heavy silence descended in the room, and many of the dragons shrunk in their seats, avoiding looking at each other. So they knew.

"When we heard only us four clans were left, we agreed on a geographical division," the king said, his face tight. "We, the Murphys, would be responsible for Europe. The Fitzgeralds



would keep an eye on Russia and Asia, and the O'Connors on South America, Africa, and Australia. In all honesty, there weren't that many wolves left, and the packs who had survived were dying rapidly. The Doyles covered North America, which still had the strongest wolf population. Almost everywhere else, the wolves had mixed with humans too much, weakening their bloodlines, diluting their magic and power until little was left."

"But you thought the Doyles were gone, so didn't you think that meant someone had to take over from them in North America?" Rhene asked.

The king's shoulders slumped, and his dejected posture made him look even older. "We thought the end had come for the wolves, so what good would it do to come to their defense? They weren't taking care of their own, weren't fighting for their own survival, so why would we? At least, that was what we told ourselves. Besides, the wolves never asked us for help. If they had, we would've aided them."

"So you, too, abandoned us," Rhene said coolly. "You turned the other way so you wouldn't have to do anything. You looked away while we suffered and died."

"Not to be flippant about it, but you're still here, aren't you?" Alistair said.

"Not all of us. We lost people. Good people. Family. And others got wounded."

"That is unfortunate, and I'm sorry to hear that." The king's voice was soft, and while he sounded sincere, Rhene had a hard time accepting that statement as an apology.

"When we discovered what had happened, how my father and uncle had deserted the wolves, it became clear the Doyle clan had behaved dishonorably." Erwan's tone wasn't much warmer than Rhene's. "And because we stood by and did nothing, even when we suspected they were doing wrong, we have taken it upon ourselves to restore our honor and satisfy the demands of the ancient Code. We've pledged our servitude to the wolves for fifty months. For fifty months, I, my

brothers, and the members of my clan who chose to join us are serving the wolves to honor the Code.”

*What will you do?* Erwan didn't say the words, but they hung in the room nonetheless, and Rhene felt them as deeply as if they had been spoken.

“So you have formally left your clan?” Kerry asked Erwan, then looked at Jermon as well.

Erwan raised his chin. “No, but I've been informed my father has denounced us, which amounts to the same result.”

“So you no longer are the crown prince of the Doyle clan.” Was it Erwan's imagination, or did Kerry sound smug?

Before he or Erwan could say anything, Jermon rose to his feet. “As far as I'm concerned, my brother is the legitimate heir to the Doyle clan. My father and uncle have used dishonorable, illegal, and immoral ways to assert their power and achieve their position. They should be removed from power, and Erwan should be king.”

*Erwan should be king.* Wow. Those words hit Rhene hard. Of course he'd known his mate was the crown prince, but that hadn't made a huge impression, considering how small the clan was and the fact that he had left that world behind. Or so Rhene had thought. But Erwan hadn't, had he? He might've pledged allegiance to the wolves and sworn to serve them, but he was still a dragon. He was still the crown prince. And most of all, Jermon was right. Erwan should be king.

Erwan cleared his throat. “Thank you, Jermon, for your loyalty. I won't ever forget it. But rest assured, King Ennis. I have no desire to claim the throne. I'm much more concerned with regaining my honor and that of my clan than anything else. We will serve the wolves until we have satisfied the demands of the Code, and then we'll see what happens.”

The king's eyes softened, a new respect dawning on his face as he slowly nodded. “That's an admirable goal, Prince Erwan. I applaud you for attempting to live by the Code. Many dragons could take an example from you.”

That was such a direct barb that Rhene could barely keep himself from wincing. He wasn't sure to whom the king was directing this passive-aggressive reprimand, but his money was on someone in the room. Kerry, maybe? Alistair? Whoever it was, the uncomfortable silence that followed made it clear the king's words had found their target.

"Prince Jermon," the king said after a long pause. "You mentioned your father and uncle being dishonorable and immoral. The dishonorable part makes sense, but can you elaborate on what you mean by immoral?"

Jermon looked at Erwan, who nodded.

"We strongly suspect my father and uncle are using black magic," Jermon said.

Kerry's mouth dropped open. "That's a heavy accusation. What proof do you have?"

"They used black magic to torture Rhene," Erwan said. "My uncle used certain spells to make it impossible for him to breathe, and I'm confident they would have killed him had we not stopped them."

Kerry paled. "Torture? They used torture spells?" He looked at the king. "It's even worse than we feared, then, Your Majesty."

"Aye, it is." The king let out a long sigh. "I'm so sorry to hear that, Prince Erwan. For a dragon to resort to black magic is beyond immoral and dishonorable. It is despicable, and they have dammed their souls by doing so."

As far as Rhene was concerned, their eternal destination was a hell of a lot less important than the more immediate consequences. "With those powers at their disposal, what are they capable of?"

"I wish I knew." The king shook his head. "When they sink that low, I don't know where they will stop."

"We also suspect they killed their father," Jermon said. While Rhene wouldn't necessarily have chosen to share that with the dragons, he couldn't fault Jermon for bringing it up. It certainly seemed relevant in this discussion.

“King Niall was murdered? My god...” King Ennis buried his face in his hands, his body trembling. “We met several times, King Niall and I. I always considered him a friend, a brother even. He was a good and honorable man, and I have to admit I was surprised by his quick demise. But we’d heard he’d fallen ill, so I didn’t think anything of it.”

Rhene sat up straight. “The bottom line is that we don’t know what the end goal is for King Cladhair and his brother, but judging by their actions so far, it’s safe to say it won’t be good. Our problem is that we lack information. Erwan and his brothers have been raised without magic, without the knowledge you apparently all have, and it’s left them vulnerable. For example, we have no idea who attacked us that night you came to our aid, but I’m pretty sure you know exactly who they were.”

Alistair’s face tightened, his eyes spewing fire. “Oh, yes, we certainly do. Dragon slayers.” He spit out the last bit.

“Dragon slayers?” Erwan repeated weakly.

“They’re an ancient secret society, dating back to the old country, to the time when people decided dragons were in league with the devil.” Alistair bit out every word. “They used to be Christians who wanted us gone because of our magic. But the dragon slayers who have remained aren’t Christians anymore, and now they employ warlocks themselves. They utilize the very magic they once judged us for, and, worse, they’ve turned to dark magic, whereas we are sworn to only use magic for good. They have taken a vow to kill all dragons, every single one of us, until none of us remains.”

Dragon slayers. Rhene tried to wrap his head around that concept, but it almost seemed too hard to believe. Not that he doubted the Murphys. Alistair’s anger was too righteous to be fake.

“They must’ve thought the Doyles dead as well until you all shifted. That must’ve given them the shock of their lives,” Kerry said. “And now they won’t stop until they’ve killed each and every one of you.”

## Chapter Six

The sun was out in force, but luckily, it wasn't too warm anymore this late in the afternoon. Still, Riordan was sweating, and he dabbed his forehead with a handkerchief. Any illusion that cooking outside would be less hot than being packed into a too-small kitchen had long since evaporated. With the farmhouse gone, they'd had little choice but to resort to unconventional solutions, and one of them was to set up gas burners outside so they could at least do some cooking.

The good news was that spring had arrived in full swing, bringing enjoyable temperatures and sparse rain, the perfect weather to spend time outside. With a slight breeze caressing his cheeks and the warmth of the sun on his face, Riordan was as happy as could be under the circumstances. Under the guidance of Yitro, Riordan and the two dragon omegas were preparing dinner for the pack. A few members of the Hayes pack would be joining them as well after assisting the construction crew all day.

Even though he still had bouts of nausea, being pregnant agreed with Yitro, giving his skin a subtle glow. His belly was showing a soft, round curve that hadn't been there before. Every now and then, Riordan would catch Yitro rubbing it, staring into the distance, a look of utter bliss on his face. Riordan couldn't be happier for his best friend that he was finally realizing his lifelong dream to become a daddy.

Riordan stirred the massive pan of pasta sauce, making sure to scrape the bottom so nothing would stick to it. He

preferred baking to cooking, but he didn't mind making pasta sauce at all. The first step, gently simmering onions and garlic, always created a mouthwatering smell, and once he'd added the ground beef, tomatoes, and herbs, that only got better. Now all he had to do was ensure it heated evenly, which was a challenge, considering the size of the pot he was using.

Finlay had the even more difficult task of cooking pasta, not an easy feat in a pan that large. The normal cooking times were way off when you made so much pasta at the same time. To his left, Gael was shredding cheese and was already on his second container. They knew all too well that the cheese-sauce-pasta ratio in this pack was ridiculous. All the men preferred heaps of grated cheese on their plates.

He released the spoon for a moment, stretching his back. The gas burners were lower than the ones they had used in the kitchen, so even the omegas had to bend to stir, which was wreaking havoc on his muscles. He gently rubbed his lower back, putting his thumbs in the sore spots, wincing as a sharp pain lanced through him. Maybe he should see about getting a massage. Something was clearly out of whack. Then again, his whole body was feeling off.

“Your back bothering you?” Yitro came up next to him.

“Yeah, it's hurting. Maybe because I have to bend over so much?”

“Let me see if I can feel what the problem is.”

Riordan obediently turned his back toward Yitro, who lifted up his shirt and used his thumbs to walk down his spine, then moved sideways. It didn't take him long to find the source of the discomfort, and Riordan yelped in pain. “Right there.”

“You're lower back feels incredibly tight everywhere.” Yitro kneaded with his thumbs and fingers. “I'm not sure what you did, but all your muscles are tense and knotted.”

Of course they were. Just one more inexplicable physical issue. “I have no clue, but I'll add it to the list.”

Yitro let go of his back, dropping Riordan's shirt, and he turned around. His friend had a look of concern on his face. "You're still not feeling well?"

Riordan shrugged. "I'm sure it'll pass."

Yitro stepped a little closer. "What did Maz say?" He'd lowered his voice.

"Stress. That was all he could think of. He ran a blood test, which was normal, and we did a pregnancy test, just in case. It came back negative, and if I had been pregnant, it would've shown up by now."

Yitro slowly shook his head. "There has to be a reason other than stress. Your complaints are too physical to be explained away by that. Besides, I've never heard of anyone responding to stress by being horny. No offense."

"Me neither," Riordan whispered. "But I don't know what else to do. If Maz, who is a doctor, can't figure it out, then what chance do I have?"

"Other than the change in libido and the moodiness you mentioned, did you notice anything else?"

Riordan was about to shake his head, but he caught himself. "Well, there's the back pain. And I've definitely gained weight. I mean, look..."

He pulled his shirt tight across his belly, which had always been flat. He'd never been skinny, but he'd had soft curves at most. Now there was a definite bulge, for lack of a better word, exactly where it would've been had he been pregnant.

Yitro widened his eyes. "It really looks like..."

"I know! I even tested again this morning, but it was negative again. Unless I have some sort of weird pregnancy where my hormones are not showing up in my urine, I can't be pregnant."

"Excuse me."

Riordan startled and spun around. Finlay stood right behind him, his face tight.

“Something wrong?” Yitro asked. Apparently, he spotted the look on Finlay’s face as well.

“I didn’t mean to listen in on your conversation,” Finlay said, wringing his hands. “But I couldn’t help but overhear.”

“That’s okay.” Where was Finlay going with this? Honestly, Riordan didn’t even care that much about him hearing what Riordan was discussing with Yitro. That was par for the course among omegas. They all pretty much knew everything about each other.

“If you don’t mind me asking, can you repeat your symptoms to me? The ones you were describing to Yitro?”

Oh, maybe Finlay had an idea of what could be going on. “Of course. Ever since my last heat, my body has been off. I’ve gained some weight, and my belly is extended, and I’ve also been moody. Plus...” The next part would be awkward, but he’d have to push through it. “I’ve been craving sex. Like, a lot. Far more than before. My first thought was that I was pregnant, but I’ve tested twice now, and both tests came up negative. Also, I did use birth control, though that’s never one hundred percent effective.”

Finlay’s expression had tightened even more, and worry slivered through Riordan’s stomach. What was wrong?

“Can I try something?” Finlay asked. “I promise I won’t hurt you.”

The worry inside Riordan grew stronger. “Do you know what’s going on with me?”

Finlay bit his lip. “I have a suspicion, but I won’t tell you until I know for sure. Please allow me.”

Yitro put his hand on Riordan’s shoulder. “Let him do whatever he needs to do, honey.”

Riordan nodded.

“Can you close your eyes for me and lift your shirt so I can see your belly?”

Not what he had been expecting, but okay. He could do that. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and held up his



shirt. A soft shuffle indicated Finlay had stepped closer. What was he doing? What was the purpose of this? What could possibly be wrong with him that Finlay could diagnose it?

Finlay touched his belly with featherlight fingers. Riordan's eyes flew open, and he jumped back, almost knocking Yitro over, stumbling over his own feet and barely managing to stay upright. "Don't touch me."

He held up his hands defensively as if Finlay had been attacking him. Where had that come from?

"What happened?" Yitro took a few steps back, folding his arms protectively around his belly.

"He can't touch my belly," Riordan said. "I can't explain why, but he can't."

"Finlay? What is going on?" Gael joined their group, looking from Finlay to Riordan and back.

Finlay had grown as white as a sheet, and his right hand trembled as he dragged it through his hair. "Oh no," he whispered. "I didn't want to believe it, but..."

"Didn't want to believe what?" Gael asked the exact same question that was on Riordan's lips.

Finlay shook his head as if forcing himself out of his stupor, then turned to Gael. "An omega who is experiencing moodiness after his heats, combined with weight gain, a distended belly, a sore back, and an increased libido. Sound familiar?"

Gael gasped. "And you tried to..." He gestured at Riordan's belly, now covered by his shirt again.

Finlay nodded sharply. "He wouldn't let me. As soon as I touched him, he jumped back."

"Oh my god, he's..." Gael's face turned as white as Finlay's, and Riordan swayed. Something was wrong. Something was horribly, horribly wrong with him, and these two knew what it was. They recognized it, which meant that...

Oh god. It couldn't be. It was impossible. They weren't even the same species. How could he...? But it was the only

logical explanation, the only reason why no one could figure out what he had but these two. They knew. Because they were dragon omegas.

He swallowed, his throat as dry as sandpaper. “You think I’m pregnant with...”

Both dragons stepped close to him and put a hand on his shoulder. “You’re carrying Prince Jermon’s eggs. His first clutch,” Finlay said.

Riordan wavered, but Finlay and Gael had him, holding on to him and steadying him. “Eggs? I’m pregnant with eggs?”

“You display all the symptoms dragon omegas have when they’re carrying eggs.” Finlay sounded apologetic. “It all fits.”

“The not being allowed to touch him, that’s part of it?” Yitro asked. He’d come closer again, probably because he’d concluded the danger had passed.

Gael nodded. “We dragon omegas are protective of our eggs. No one else is allowed to touch them except our sire and, in some cases, very close friends, even when the eggs are still inside us. We have an innate instinct to protect our eggs at all costs, since they are fragile.”

Riordan grew light-headed. “I need to sit down.”

He lowered himself to the ground and sat down in the patch of grass where they had set up the outdoor kitchen. His head spun. Pregnant with eggs. How was that even possible? He was a wolf. Wolves were mammals, not reptiles. How could this even work? Would the eggs survive? Would he?

“Is there a way to medically confirm this?” Yitro asked as he crouched next to Riordan, putting a soft hand on his head.

“I don’t know,” Finlay said. “I’m sorry. We’re not familiar with modern techniques in medicine.”

“But you’re sure?” Yitro pressed.

“Yes. But if you want to be completely certain, Prince Jermon or Prince Erwan would be able to confirm. Jermon because he’s the sire and Erwan because he has the gift of healing. He’d be able to sense them,” Gael explained.

“How long...” Riordan cleared his throat. “How long does it take before they come out?”

“Four weeks. Which means you’d have a week left.”

One week. He was pregnant with dragon eggs, and one week from now, they were coming out. If he managed to get them out in one piece. The thought was like an ice-cold hand around his throat. He had to deliver them safely. They had to survive. They were his...his eggs. His babies?

“How many would I have?”

Finlay sat on the ground right next to him, and Riordan reached for his hand without thinking about it. Finlay took it and folded both of his own hands around it. On his other side, Gael did the same, and gratitude rolled through Riordan. Come what may, he wasn’t alone in this.

“Dragon omegas can produce a clutch every other year, and usually, it’s between one and five eggs. Eggs take four weeks to develop, but after that, nine months to hatch. In those nine months, omegas spent a lot of time with their eggs. They have a deep instinct to protect them, keep them warm, and the closer it gets to the hatching, the more reluctant they are to leave their eggs,” Gael said.

Nine months. Nine months and a week from now, he’d have...babies. Dragon babies? Between one and five little Jermons. Oh god. A wave of dizziness rolled over him, and then everything went black.

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## Chapter Seven

“I’ll see you guys tomorrow, okay?”

Jermon closed the gate of the pigpen behind him, double-checking it had locked. The last thing he wanted was for the pigs to get out. Wilmer had told him it had happened to him once, and the two that had escaped had damaged half the vegetable patch. Matthew had not been amused.

Okay, the pigs were taken care of. What was left? Right, a check on the chickens, making sure they were safe for the night so no predators could get to them, and then he was done. Finally. His day had started at five that morning, so he’d been at it for twelve hours. He’d passed the open-air kitchen a few times, and the smells that had drifted in the air had been amazing. He was ready to taste whatever the omegas had concocted.

He took a few steps in the direction of the chicken coop, then froze. Something was wrong. Something with...Riordan. Riordan needed him.

Jermon dropped the bucket he’d been holding, spun around, and broke out in a dead run. When he reached the area where the omegas had been cooking, he found them huddled on the floor, with Riordan in the middle, looking as white as a sheet. He sank to his knees next to him. “What’s wrong? What happened?”

Riordan took one look at him and burst into tears, holding his arms wide. Jermon clumsily picked him up and dragged

him onto his lap, pulling him close. What the hell was going on? “Sssh, I’m here. I’ve got you,” he whispered.

He looked over Riordan’s head at Yitro. “What happened?”

Yitro shook his head. “That’s not my news to tell. Riordan will have to make that decision.”

What could it be? It had to be connected to his different behavior. Ever since his heat, Riordan had been off, and Jermon had been worried. But Riordan had told him he’d been checked out by Maz and that the doctor hadn’t been able to find anything wrong with him. Plus, the pregnancy test had come back negative. So what could it be?

His heart raced as he patted Riordan’s back and caressed his hair, waiting for him to calm down enough to talk. “Please, baby, tell me what’s wrong. Talk to me.”

Finally, Riordan leaned back, his face a hot mess, though he still looked beautiful to Jermon. “I need to tell you something.”

“Anything. Whatever it is, I’m here.”

Riordan bit his lip, and the worry in Jermon’s belly increased tenfold. What could be possibly wrong that Riordan was so reluctant to tell him? It had to be something bad. If it had been good news, he wouldn’t have been so emotional and would’ve blurted it out by now.

“Finlay and Gael think I’m pregnant.”

Jermon blinked. Pregnant? But he’d tested negative. And how could Finlay and Gael think he was pregnant when Maz had said he wasn’t? What expertise did the two dragons...?

Oh, crap. No, that couldn’t be. Riordan was a wolf, not a dragon. He couldn’t be pregnant with...

Jermon looked at Finlay and Gael, whose faces were tight with concern. “He’s carrying eggs?”

Finlay nodded. “We think so. He’s displaying all the symptoms, and I’m not allowed to touch his belly.”

As in slow motion, Jermon's gaze slid down Riordan's body, resting on the gentle curve of his belly. He swallowed, lifted his right hand from Riordan's shoulder, and moved it downward. Riordan sucked in a breath, his body freezing as Jermon brought his hand closer and closer until he was able to slip it under his shirt. His hand shook as he placed it against Riordan's warm skin.

Sparks tickled his hand, and he had to swallow again. How many? He concentrated. One, two, three...four. Four eggs responded to his touch, sending electrical charges of life through his fingers. His eyes filled with tears.

"Jermon?" Riordan's voice wavered.

"They're right, baby. You're carrying eggs. My eggs. Four of them."

Riordan's lower lip trembled. "I can't believe it. How is this even possible? I'm a wolf. How can I have eggs?"

"I have no idea. I never even considered this possibility."

In hindsight, all the symptoms had been there, but he'd never put them together. In his defense, he didn't have much experience with pregnant dragon omegas, as he'd only seen two of them in his entire life. One had been his mom when she was pregnant with his younger brothers. But god, he should've seen this. He should've entertained at least the possibility.

Cold fear wrapped around his chest. Would Riordan be able to deliver the eggs? Was he at risk? His body wasn't made to carry eggs, let alone give birth to them. What if something went wrong?

And the eggs... What if they got damaged? Would they have to kill them to keep Riordan safe? Oh, he would. He would give permission in a heartbeat, if his permission was even required, considering it was Riordan's body, but the thought of losing his... They were his kids, weren't they? These tiny little eggs inside Riordan were *his*.

Wait, they weren't so tiny anymore. They were three weeks. Only one week before their delivery dates. They didn't have a whole lot of time to figure things out. They'd have to

talk to Enar and Maz, probably Erwan and his other brothers as well. Maybe even Blair. Between the lot of them, hopefully, they'd have enough knowledge to keep Riordan safe and deliver the eggs.

“Jermon? I'm scared.”

Tears dripped down Riordan's cheeks, and Jermon's heart warmed with love for him. He removed his hand from Riordan's belly, cupped both his cheeks, and tenderly kissed his forehead. “I know. But we'll get through this. I promise. I won't let anything happen to you.”

“You need to have Enar or Maz examine him,” Yitro said. “They may not be familiar with dragon anatomy, but I'm sure they can figure out some of it.”

“Gael and I would be happy to tell them everything we know about dragon pregnancies and what to expect,” Finlay said.

“And Erwan knows stuff as well. He assisted Queen Grian often enough,” Gael said.

Jermon held up his hand. “We'll get to all that, but before we do, there's someone else we need to talk to first.”

Riordan met his eyes, then slowly nodded. “Wilmer.”

“I refuse to do anything more without him.”

Riordan bit his lip again. “How will he react, you think?”

How would the wolf alpha react when he found out that the omega who claimed to be his was pregnant with dragon eggs? That the alpha who had submitted to him had fathered a child before him? As progressive as Wilmer might be, that one had to hit hard, especially on top of everything else. “I don't know, but we can't postpone talking to him. We need to head over to the clinic immediately. He might've even picked up on your distress.”

Usually, they walked over, but Jermon didn't think that was the smartest idea, considering Riordan's emotional state. Horseback riding wasn't an option either, not with Riordan

carrying eggs. So how would they get there the fastest while still being safe?

“I can drive you,” Yitro said as if he’d read Jermon’s mind.

Of course. Yitro would have a driver’s license. “Thank you. I appreciate it.”

Yitro was a much more careful driver than Rhene had been, but that could also be because they were taking back roads, not the main highway. As soon as they pulled up to the clinic, Lucan ran outside. “Is everything okay? Wilmer is in a fit, saying something is wrong with his mates.”

So he had felt it. Relief flooded Jermon. Wilmer might not remember, but hopefully, this would at least confirm to him they really were mates. “We’ll explain to him what happened.”

They hurried over to his room. Lucan hadn’t been exaggerating.

“You gotta find out what the hell is going on,” Wilmer snapped as they hurried into his room. He’d been talking to Enar, who looked worried.

“We’re here,” Jermon said, pulling Riordan with him. “We’re okay, I promise.”

Wilmer let out a shuddering breath. “Something was wrong. You were in distress. I could feel it.”

“I’ll leave you three alone.” Enar placed a brief hand on Jermon’s shoulder as he walked past them and left the room, closing the door behind him.

“What’s going on?” Wilmer asked. He looked flustered. Bright red splotches dotted his cheeks and forehead.

Gods, Jermon hated having to do this to him, especially when he was still recovering, but what choice did they have? They couldn’t keep this from him. “We got some news that shook us, which is what you must’ve felt through our fated mates’ bond.”

“What is it?”



Riordan's small hand slipped into Jermon's, and he took a deep breath. "We found out that Riordan is pregnant. With eggs. My eggs."

Wilmer's jaw went slack, and he blinked slowly. "Eggs?"

"Yeah."

"He's pregnant with eggs?" His voice had risen at the end.

"Yes."

Wilmer rubbed his forehead, wincing as if in pain. "I don't understand. He's a wolf omega. You're a dragon. How is this even possible?"

"We don't know."

"And you're sure?"

"A dragon sire can sense his eggs. They give off...sparks, for lack of a better word. Riordan is carrying four."

"Four?" Wilmer curled his fingers around the sheets. "When will he...deliver?"

"He is right here," Riordan said sharply. "Don't talk about me as if I'm not in the room."

"My apologies," Wilmer said stiffly. "I'm trying to wrap my head around this."

"That makes three of us, so maybe talk to me instead of about me."

Jermon squeezed Riordan's hand.

Riordan took a deep breath. "Anyway, according to Gael and Finlay, the eggs will come out in about a week."

Wilmer frowned. "Gael and Finlay?"

"The two dragon omegas," Jermon said. "They're the ones who recognized his symptoms."

"Right. So a week from now, you two will have four eggs. Then what?"

Jermon didn't miss the way Wilmer had worded that. *You two*. He wasn't including himself, but how could Jermon fault

him for that under these circumstances?

“It will take nine months for the eggs to hatch,” Riordan said. “But honestly, I don’t know more than that. We literally discovered this minutes ago.”

“We wanted to come straight to you,” Jermon said softly. “You’re a part of this, of us. I know it may not feel that way, but—”

“With all due respect, but you don’t know anything. You have no idea how this feels.”

Jermon swallowed back his frustration. “You’re right. I don’t. I don’t know what it feels like to lose your memory, or to have these constant headaches you suffer from, or to hear that the two men who are supposed to be your mates are now having something you’re not a part of, biologically speaking. But I can imagine. If I put myself in your shoes, if I try to see this situation through your eyes, I can damn well understand how you must feel. I’d be devastated and hurt and heartbroken and maybe even angry at us, at everything. Am I close?”

Wilmer deflated like a balloon, his posture slumped, and he let go of the sheets. “Yeah, like that. All of that.”

For the first time since the accident, Jermon took Wilmer’s hand, and his dragon surged forward with joy at touching his mate again. “I’m sorry. Words can’t express how sorry I am for all of it. For you getting hurt, for your memory loss and your pain, for you not knowing who we are, and for us putting pressure on you, even if we don’t mean to. I can’t even tell you how much I want to help you, to find the magic thing that will make this all better, but I can’t. All I can do is be there for you and hope that you’ll come to see and understand what you mean to us. To me. The last thing we want is to hurt you even more, and I’m so sorry that we did. This pregnancy wasn’t by choice, trust me.”

His chest heaved, and even if it did nothing for Wilmer, at least Jermon felt better for getting the words out. They needed to be said, and now the ball was in Wilmer’s court.

Wilmer studied Jermon, his eyes dropping to where Jermon was still holding Wilmer's hand. Then his gaze moved to Riordan, who was clinging to Jermon. Wilmer's jaw ticked, and he swallowed. "So if this whole thing is unplanned and inconvenient, wouldn't terminating the pregnancy be better?"

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## Chapter Eight

Riordan reeled back as if Wilmer had slapped him across the face, and Wilmer felt like a right bastard for his deliberate cruelty.

“That’s Riordan’s decision, not mine or yours,” Jermon said. His expression hardened as he let go of Wilmer’s hand. Funny how Wilmer immediately felt that loss, as if he’d let something valuable slip through his fingers.

“But you have an opinion, I’m sure. After all, we’re talking about your kids...alpha.”

“Not mine, *ours*. Riordan’s, yours, and mine.”

Wilmer scoffed as he gestured at Riordan’s belly. “There’s nothing of me in there.”

Riordan paled, and a sob escaped him. Before Wilmer could say anything, the omega spun around and hurried out of the room. He slammed the door behind him, but his cries were still audible until they faded away.

“He didn’t deserve that.” Jermon’s eyes flashed with anger. “If you want to be mad, be upset with me. Not with him. None of this is his fault.”

Wilmer buried his head in his hands, his heart aching. He’d lashed out on purpose, but now that he’d hit his target, he felt awful. How could he have done this to Riordan? The omega had been nothing but sweet to him, even baking Wilmer’s favorite pie in hopes that it would help him regain his memory. “I know. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“No, you shouldn’t have. You wanted to hurt him, and you did.”

Wilmer’s chest tightened, and a flare of discomfort shot through his body. He took a deep, pained breath, not daring to meet Jermon’s eyes. What would he see there? Anger? Or worse, contempt? If so, Wilmer deserved it. As an alpha, he couldn’t take out his frustrations on an omega. It was unfair, especially for someone as sweet as Riordan. He’d already been struggling with trauma from his involuntary stay in the castle and...

He gasped.

He remembered something.

“Wilmer?”

He looked up. “Did Riordan have nightmares from being briefly held in a castle?”

Jermon widened his eyes. “Yes! Yes, he did. That castle belonged to my family. My father held him there until Rhene showed up and demanded Riordan’s release.”

“I remembered.” Wilmer’s voice broke. “I remembered because I was telling myself I was an asshole to take it out on him, considering he was already vulnerable.”

Tears burned behind his eyelids for seconds, then spilled over, streaming down his cheeks. “I remembered.”

“Oh my god.” Jermon stepped toward the bed, hesitated for a moment, but then closed the distance between them and hugged Wilmer. That undeserved kindness broke him. He clung to Jermon, who awkwardly perched on the bed, probably trying not to hurt Wilmer. But Wilmer held on to him, soaking in his touch, his presence, his care, as heavy sobs racked his body.

The door opened, but he didn’t look up to see who it was. Jermon shifted, and the door closed again. Wilmer buried his head against Jermon’s shoulder. It felt so good not to have to be strong, to be able to lean on someone else and let go of all the emotions inside him.

“Let it all out,” Jermon whispered. “You don’t need to be strong with me. I’ve got you.”

Wasn’t it a miracle that this man still chose to be there for Wilmer, even after he’d behaved like that? He didn’t deserve him, and he absolutely didn’t deserve Riordan, though maybe that ship had sailed anyway after what he’d said. “I don’t want him to have an abortion,” he wailed. “I was being an asshole.”

“I know. I don’t want him to have one either, but ultimately, that’s not up to us. It’s his choice.”

Wilmer took a few steadying breaths, his body finally calming down. He wasn’t ready to leave his safe place against Jermon’s shoulder yet, though. “I don’t know how not to be jealous. I shouldn’t be, but I can’t stop feeling that way.”

Jermon kissed the top of his head, and that simple gesture sent a wave of warmth through Wilmer. “I understand, and if I were in your shoes, I’d be jealous too. You’re already struggling with so much, and then to be handed this on top of everything else is almost too much for any man to take. But you belong with us, and I’ll say that as often as I have to until you’re convinced.”

Wilmer had never doubted that he was deeply connected to Jermon and Riordan. How could he when his wolf had been so insistent from the get-go that those two were his mates? But any lingering concerns had evaporated now. He’d felt their emotions, their stress, before they’d shown up at the clinic. That meant they really were fated mates, connected on a level that couldn’t be explained any other way. “I know we’re supposed to be together.”

“You do?” Surprise laced Jermon’s voice.

“How could I doubt that after sensing your emotions?”

“True.” Jermon held him a little tighter. “It means a lot to me that you recognize that. Anything else we can deal with as long as you know you’re a part of us.”

“I’ll try to remember that. Though as we both know, remembering things is not my strong point at the moment.”

“Baby,” Jermon said. The word shook Wilmer. “You don’t need to remember. Just feel. Your wolf knows.”

It did, and Jermon was right. If Wilmer couldn’t rely on his brain, he’d have to trust his heart, no matter how hard that was. “I’ll try.”

“That’s all we ask.”

“Do you... Do I still stand a chance with Riordan?”

Wilmer finally dared to let go, but Jermon kept sitting on Wilmer’s bed, holding on to Wilmer’s hand. “He’s got a big heart, our omega.”

*Our:* God, he wanted that. “Will you ask him to come back so I can apologize to him?”

Jermon nodded. “We also need to talk to Enar, and we want to do that with you present. Can you handle that?”

“Emotionally or physically?”

“Both. If not, we’ll wait.”

“Riordan doesn’t have the time to wait.”

Jermon hesitated. “Sooner would be better, yes, but your recovery matters too.”

Jermon was in a tough spot, wasn’t he? He had to be strong for Riordan and take care of Wilmer at the same time. Balancing those two opposing needs couldn’t be easy. “When this is all over, remind me to properly thank you.”

A smile spread across Jermon’s face. “That would be my pleasure. What were you thinking of?”

He might not have meant it dirty, but that was where Wilmer’s mind went. “I’m sure we could think of some fun things, like me fucking you again.”

They both gasped. How had he known that? Another memory and when he closed his eyes, he saw it as clearly as if it had happened the day before. He’d worked his way inside Jermon, making sure to be slow and careful, while Riordan had distracted Jermon by sucking him off. “I fucked you, didn’t I?”

Jermon's eyes grew moist. "You did."

"You told me you were ready, that you'd had carrots up your ass."

Jermon laughed through his tears. "Of all the things you could remember, you had to recall that? You made fun of me, saying your cock was a hell of a lot bigger than a carrot."

"Was I right?"

Jermon's smile faded. "You were. It felt amazing."

"Two memories today. That has to mean something, right?" Hope bloomed inside him. Could this be the beginning of his memory coming back?"

"Let's tell Enar and see what he says."

"Yes. But I need to apologize to Riordan first."

Jermon bent in but froze with his lips an inch away from Wilmer's as if he only then remembered something had changed. Wilmer leaned forward and closed that last distance between them, kissing Jermon softly on his lips. He wasn't ready for more yet, but that one kiss had his wolf growling happily, and his whole body relaxed as if he'd come home. Maybe he had.

"I'll get Riordan and Enar."

What would he need to say to Riordan to get him to forgive Wilmer for his hurtful words? He wasn't sure, but some level of groveling would be required, probably. But when Riordan hurried into the room, the omega was smiling broadly despite his red-rimmed eyes and puffy cheeks. "You remembered something?"

Wilmer needed a second to switch gears. "Two things, actually. I knew you were struggling from your stay in the castle, and I also remembered the three of us in bed."

Riordan's face lit up. "That's wonderful!"

"Of course he had to remember that stupid remark I made about fucking myself with a carrot, not one of the much more profound statements I've made or something sweet. Nope,



carrots. That's what his brain chose to remember." Jermon rolled his eyes, chuckling.

"Well, look at it this way. At least you made enough of an impression for him to remember that first," Riordan teased him, and Wilmer laughed right along with them.

But then he sobered. Time to grovel. "I'm sorry for what I said earlier."

Riordan raised his chin. "That was really hurtful."

Wow, good for him for not letting Wilmer off the hook too easily. "It was, and I'm deeply sorry."

Riordan studied him, cocking his head. "I'm not getting an abortion."

Riordan's hand went to his belly. Did he even realize he was rubbing it? "That's your choice, and I fully support that."

"I'm scared because of all the unknowns, but even the thought of ending the pregnancy has me breaking out in a cold sweat. I can't. Even though it's the worst timing in the world, I can't."

Jermon put his arm around Riordan. "Dragon omegas bond with the eggs almost from day one. Deliberate terminations of a pregnancy are rare among dragons, and they were even before our birth rates declined so sharply. Omegas are too attached to their eggs."

"I feel that way too. It's stupid because up until two hours ago, I didn't even know I had them inside me, but now that I do, I can't think of anything else. They're mine. Ours."

Jealousy rolled over Wilmer, but he shoved it down ruthlessly. "If you'll allow me, I want to be a part of this as much as I can be."

Riordan opened his mouth, then closed it again. "I'd love that," he finally whispered. "I'd really, really love that."

"Does that mean you forgive me?"

Riordan nodded. "I knew you didn't mean it. It's your hurting brain lashing out, not you."

That was an interesting way of putting it, and gratitude filled Wilmer. “Thank you. I’ll try my hardest not to do it again.”

“I’m going to get Enar,” Jermon said. “Man, he’s in for the shock of his life.”

Indeed, he was, and when Jermon told Enar what was going on, he looked stunned. “Pregnant with eggs? But how...?” Then he caught himself. “Clearly, you have no clue either, or you would’ve discovered it sooner.”

“Can you examine him?” Jermon asked.

Enar looked at Riordan. “Are you okay with that? We can do it privately if you prefer.”

“No, I want them to see everything.”

“Okay. Why don’t we start with an ultrasound? Wait, would eggs even show up on an ultrasound?” Enar frowned, tapping his chin. “Eggshells are made of... I don’t know, but they are composed of calcium carbonate, and that will be visible, I suppose. I guess we’ll find out.”

“They will be,” Wilmer assured him. “I’ve seen ultrasounds of animal eggs before.”

A few minutes later, Riordan was lying on his back on a bed, his belly exposed, while Enar was setting up the ultrasound monitor so Wilmer could see it from his bed. “Okay, that should do it,” Enar said.

“Yup, works for me,” Wilmer confirmed.

Enar grabbed a bottle. “I’m going to squirt some gel onto your belly, Riordan, okay?”

“Wait,” Jermon said. “I’m not sure if that will work.”

Enar looked puzzled. “What do you mean?”

“Dragon omegas are very protective of their eggs. No one is allowed to touch them, not even when the eggs are still inside them. That’s how Finlay tested if Riordan was pregnant. He tried to touch his belly, but Riordan wouldn’t let him.

Also...” He hesitated, then sighed. “I’m not sure how I will react either. Apparently, the sire has the same instincts.”

“Wow, that’s interesting. So how could we work around that?” Enar asked.

“This is gonna sound really stupid, but bear with me. Introduce yourself to us all and state your purposes. Explain that you’re not gonna hurt him or his eggs but want to be certain they’re all okay.”

Us. Jermon could’ve easily said Riordan and me, but once again, he’d chosen to include Wilmer. He was trying so, so hard to make Wilmer feel a part of them.

“Okay.” Enar hesitated, but then he straightened his shoulders. “Got it.” He took a deep breath. “I’m Doctor Enar Magnusson, a beta wolf, and no threat to anyone in this room. All I want is to examine Riordan and the eggs and make sure that everything and everyone is okay. I promise I’ll be careful and gentle and that I won’t hurt him or the eggs.”

He checked in with Jermon, who nodded. “I think that should do it. I know it’s ridiculous, but—”

“No, it’s not. Every patient has their needs and preferences, and I will always do whatever I can to accommodate them,” Enar said kindly and turned to Riordan. “Can I put the gel on you now?”

Riordan bit his lip, then nodded. A squirting sound and Enar picked up the transducer and placed it onto Riordan’s belly. He spread the gel and moved the transducer to where his uterus was. Within seconds, they popped up. Eggs. Four eggs.

“Holy shit,” Enar whispered, and Wilmer couldn’t have worded it better himself.

Dragon eggs. How was that for a miracle?

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## Chapter Nine

Riordan raised his hand to knock on the door, but before he could, it opened. “Come on in,” Finlay said, stepping aside.

“Thank you.” Riordan kicked off his shoes and walked past him into the living room of the tiny cabin Finlay and Gael shared. They had opted for a rustic, cozy decor with lots of pillows, rugs, and candles.

“Can I make you some tea?” Gael offered.

“Yes, please.”

A few minutes later, they all had a steaming mug of tea in front of them as they settled in the living room. Riordan had chosen the couch, his legs pulled up, and the two dragon omegas had picked the loveseat. “Thank you so much for being willing to talk to me,” Riordan said.

“Of course. You must have so many questions,” Finlay said. “We may not have all the answers, but we’re happy to share whatever information we have with you.”

Where did he even start? Finlay had been right about Riordan having many questions. “Enar confirmed the pregnancy. He did an ultrasound, and we could see the four eggs.”

Finlay nodded. “That’s good, though I didn’t doubt it. Your reaction was so typical that it could only mean one thing.”

“I didn’t have any doubts either, but it was good to have it confirmed, if only for Wilmer.”

“How did he take it?” Gael asked carefully.

Even the memory of Wilmer’s harsh words made Riordan wince. “At first, not good. But then he apologized and said he wanted to be involved.”

“He did?” Gael widened his eyes. “That’s wonderful. I wasn’t sure if he’d be able to get past the fact that he wasn’t the biological father.”

“That and the fact that Jermon fathered kids before him. I mean, for an alpha, that’s gotta hurt,” Finlay added.

“It’s already hard for him because he’s stuck in that bed while we continue to live our lives. Plus, you know, the whole memory loss thing. He’s struggling with feeling connected to us, and this doesn’t help.”

Gael and Finlay shared a look. “Have you considered...not having the eggs?” Finlay asked.

“Rationally, yes. Emotionally, I can’t even think about it. Jermon explained that dragon omegas are very attached to their eggs emotionally and that abortions are rare.”

“He’s not wrong, but that’s also not the whole truth.” Finlay hesitated. “Do you want us to tell you more about that? Because if you don’t, then we’ll respect that. We’re here for whatever you need.”

Did he? Even the thought of terminating his pregnancy made him nauseous, but that didn’t mean he shouldn’t consider it. He had options, and he couldn’t make an informed decision without having all the facts. “I’d appreciate you telling me whatever you think I need to hear.”

Finlay looked at Gael. “You want me to tell him?”

Gael nodded.

Finlay took his hand, then refocused on Riordan. “I know things were different with the wolves until a few years ago, that your society was much more high hierarchal than it is now with alphas being in charge. It’s always been like that for us dragons, and if you want the real information, you should always ask a dragon omega. There’s a lot happening dragon

alphas are not aware of for the simple reason that they'd forbid it. They can't stop what they don't know."

Riordan chuckled. "Sounds familiar. It's not that different for us wolves, even now. We don't tell the alphas everything."

"Prince Jermon..." Finlay slapped his forehead. "I can't believe I'm calling him that again. It's such a deeply ingrained habit that it's hard to let go. Anyway, Jermon wasn't wrong about the special bond most dragon omegas have with their eggs. Despite that, some of us still choose to terminate our pregnancy for whatever reason. If we want to do it without a healer intervening, which is often the case if we don't want our alpha to know, we can use an herbal remedy. If you drink it, it will cause your body to expel the eggs without any harm to yourself. It tastes vile, not gonna lie, but it works with little to no risks. You're nauseous for a day or two, but that's it."

Finlay was explaining it as if he's taken it himself, and Riordan put two and two together. Jermon had said the Doyle clan only had thirty members, with a handful of omegas. What were the chances that Finlay was talking about an experience he'd had himself or maybe Gael? Not that Riordan would ask. If they wanted to share, they would, and if not, he wouldn't pry. They deserved their privacy.

"Does it have ingredients that are easy for me to get?"

Gael nodded. "We can make it for you within hours if you wanted us to."

Did he? The option that had been theoretical so far now became real. Of course he wouldn't need to use the herbal remedy. Enar might not be familiar with dragon eggs, but he'd stated he was willing to do an abortion if that was what Riordan wanted. He would have to do it the same way he would do a C-section, since he wasn't sure what meds or methods he could use otherwise.

This herbal remedy would make it a lot easier, and if the two dragon omegas were correct about it not having risks, it would be preferable over a C-section. But the question was if he wanted this. Did he want to become a daddy right now?

And not just a daddy but a daddy to baby dragons. He still couldn't wrap his head around the whole concept.

“So after nine months, the eggs hatch, right? And I'm assuming that what comes out is a tiny little dragon?”

“Correct,” Gael said. “And for the first year, human year, I mean, the hatchlings will stay in dragon form. After that, they'll shift to human form and go back and forth at will. Not until they're eight in human years do they get control over their shifts.”

A year? He would have to take care of tiny little dragons for a whole year? How would that even work? Babies, he could nurse, but what did baby dragons eat? “Do they drink milk as well? The hatchlings?”

“No, they eat a lot of soft fruit and once their teeth come in harder fruit. When they're six months old, we introduce chicken, and we go from there.”

“So no nursing.”

Gael smiled. “Trust me when I say that you do not want the sharp little teeth of hatchlings anywhere near your nipples. They'll chew it to pieces. For a few months, you even have to be careful with your fingers. For the most part, they nip, but every now and then, they can get vicious.”

Well, that certainly made it sound appealing, didn't it? “If you were in my shoes, would you keep them?”

Gael's head dropped to his chest, and Finlay squeezed his hand. “It's different for us,” Finlay said softly. “Dragons are not that fertile, not anymore at least. Egg mortality has increased rapidly, and the chances of having a healthy hatchling have diminished. So we'd have to make the choice to keep them, since we don't know if we'd get the chance again. But that's different for you. You could easily get pregnant with a wolf pup if you wanted to.”

He could. During a next heat, if Wilmer had recovered enough to help him, all Riordan would have to do is not take birth control, and he'd almost be guaranteed to be carrying Wilmer's alpha heir. And he wanted that, the warmth inside

him confirming what he already knew. He wanted to have Wilmer's baby. But did that mean he didn't want Jermon's?

"I never even considered the option before you guys told me what was going on with me. We had no clue I could get pregnant with eggs. Even now, I have trouble comprehending it."

Finlay made a sympathetic noise. "All I can offer is that our magic is strong. Or at least, it's supposed to be. Over the last two hundred years, we've lost a lot of our magic, what with being locked up and the king forbidding us to use it. But maybe Jermon's magic has already rebounded, increased now that he's free. I don't know. We could ask Nativ to check with Emma. See if she can find out anything about cross-species pregnancy between dragons and other species."

Riordan nodded. "Any information would be welcome at this point. It's like I'm walking around in the dark, feeling my way forward while trying not to trip over anything."

"Another option would be to ask the Murphy dragons," Gael suggested. "Erwan said their clan has got to be at least over a hundred dragons, so they're bound to have experience with pregnancies. Maybe they would have information that could help."

"It's certainly worth a try, though I'm not sure if Jermon and Erwan would want them to have that information about us, but that's for them to determine."

"If you decide to keep them, we'd be happy to help you take care of them."

Was it Riordan's imagination, or had Gael sounded eager? "Thank you for that amazing offer. Nine months seems like a long time."

"It's not longer than a human pregnancy," Finlay pointed out.

"Sure, but for us, it's only six months, and the baby is actually inside us. The idea of taking care of something so fragile and not being able to protect it with my body is a little scary, to be honest."



“A lot will be instinct. Just listen to what your heart is telling you about your eggs and what they need. And Jermon will be able to sense it as well.” Gael sent Riordan a soft smile.

“And Wilmer?”

Gael and Finlay checked in with each other. “Triads are not something I’ve ever heard of among dragons, so I honestly have no clue. Maybe he will because you’re fated mates?” Finlay looked uncertain.

Riordan couldn’t imagine how devastating it would be for Wilmer if he couldn’t connect with the eggs. If Jermon had that special bond with them but Wilmer didn’t, he would feel even more excluded. “I’m not looking forward to finding out.”

The three of them sipped their tea, which had cooled down enough to drink.

“How are you feeling otherwise?” Gael asked.

“I’m okay, especially now that I know what was causing the changes in my body. The most obvious symptom is still...” Cue awkwardness again. “Is it normal to have an increased libido when pregnant?”

Finlay and Gael both giggled. “Dragons have a high sex drive,” Finlay said. “I don’t know what it’s like for wolves, but most of us need to have sex at least every day, if not more.”

Oh, great. “I’m hoping that’ll change once I’ve delivered the eggs?”

“For us, it’s a constant, but for you, it might be related to your pregnancy. Then again, you’ll be close to your eggs for the next nine months, so who knows what effect that will have on you?” Finlay’s words weren’t exactly reassuring, but Riordan did appreciate his honesty.

“Not to be rude, but if you have such a high sex drive, how are you managing right now? It’s not like you have a whole lot of partners to choose from. I mean, Erwan and Jermon are mated, which leaves you with Blair, Valdis, and Nativ. Or with any of the wolf alphas, of course, and I suppose with the betas, but even the Hightower pack doesn’t have that many

single men anymore. Trust me, I know. I went through all of them with my heats the last year.”

Silence descended after his little ramble, and Riordan frowned. Had he said something wrong? He went over his own words in his head. Had any of it been offensive? All he said was that...

“Oh my god,” he said slowly. How had he missed this? It was so obvious now. “The two of you are together. You’re a couple.”

“We are.” Much to Riordan’s surprise, it wasn’t Finlay who confirmed it, but Gael. He looked Riordan straight in his eyes. “And we have been for years, but no one knew. It’s fascinating how no one even considers that two omegas can have sex with each other. Of course we can. We both have a dick and an ass, don’t we?”

As if on cue, they all burst out in a fit of giggles, and Riordan laughed until the tears streamed down his face, and then all of a sudden, he wasn’t laughing anymore. But Finlay and Gael were right beside him as the laughs turned into sobs, their slender arms wrapped around him from either side as they kept telling him everything would be okay. No matter what happened, he had friends who would be there for him, no questions asked. Amid the storm that swept through him, that was the anchor he clung to.

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## Chapter Ten

The sky was so crystal blue it was almost blinding, and the sun bathed Jermon and the other Doyle dragons in her warmth as they stood in the meadow, waiting for the Murphys to arrive. Around them, bees were happily buzzing, searching for the first blooming flowers, and birds darted back and forth, building their nests.

At the end of their first meeting with the Murphys, Erwan had requested the Murphys train them, and they had agreed. They would send their trainer, a guy named Dempsey, as well as a few other dragons with specific skills. Excitement blazed through Jermon's veins, mixed in with some apprehension.

Erwan had warned each of the Doyle dragons not to trust the Murphys yet, but Jermon had already decided that for himself, even before his brother's admonition. They still didn't have enough of the puzzle pieces to know what was going on, and until they did, he wouldn't put his faith in anyone else but his clan and his pack.

In the distance, a low hum traveled closer. Motorcycles. The Murphys. A few minutes later, they pulled up on dirt bikes, the roar of the engines scaring away the birds. Once the noise of the bikes had died down, the silence was almost deafening. One by one, the Murphys took off their helmets, hung them on the handlebars of their bikes, and walked up.

The tall, lean guy in the front had to be Dempsey, since he was clearly in charge. Erwan stepped forward to meet him, extending his hand. "Erwan Doyle, pleasure to meet you."

“I’m Dempsey, as you probably expected. I’ve brought several dragons with me so we can get a solid start on your magical training. From what I understand, we have to start from scratch.”

He wasn’t wrong, and yet something about that statement rubbed Jermon the wrong way. Maybe it was the hint of contempt he heard, or was that his imagination?

“That’s correct,” Erwan said. He looked over his shoulder and gestured at the Doyles. “Please meet our dragons. My brothers Jermon, Nadiv, and Valdis. Our fighter dragon, Blair. And our two omega dragons, Finlay and Gael.”

Dempsey raised his eyebrows so high they practically disappeared in his hairline. “Omega dragons? That’s a joke, right?”

Erwan’s face tightened. “Excuse me?”

Dempsey pointed at Finlay and Gael. “You can’t be serious about them training with us.”

“I assure you, I am.”

Erwan didn’t often use the icy, arrogant tone he’d copied from their father, but when he did, it made an impact. Combined with his raised chin and narrowed eyes, it left no doubt as to his intentions.

“With all respect, but they’re omegas. Why on earth would you want to include them? Their skills lie in different areas.”

Different areas. That was probably a euphemism for domestic tasks, maybe even sexual ones. For a long time—too long, in fact—Jermon had been blind and deaf to such codewords, but now he picked up on each and every one of them.

“You have no idea where their skills lie, now do you? You’ve never met them.”

Dempsey looked surprised. “No, but why would I need to? They’re omegas. They’ll never have the same skills as us.”

Erwan crossed his arms. “In our clan and in our pack, omegas have an equal status to alphas and betas. They will be

trained alongside everyone else.”

Jermon could barely resist pumping his fist in the air and yelling his agreement with that statement.

“I have to object, Your Highness.”

“Your objection has been noted. I stand by my point. Either Finlay and Gael train with us, or we leave right now.”

A gasp traveled through the group of Murphy dragons. “You’d deny yourselves the chance at learning about magic for the sake of two omegas?”

“Absolutely. In fact, I would’ve done it for the sake of one omega. Now, Dempsey, please make it clear whether you’re willing to continue. If not, we walk away right now, and that’s it.”

“Prince Erwan,” Finlay whispered, looking anguished.

Erwan looked at him over his shoulder. “No, Finlay. This is not up for debate. You’re part of our clan, a crucial, indispensable part. We need you, and that means you should be trained in the same way as us.”

This time, Jermon couldn’t keep himself from reacting. “Damn straight.”

Seconds later, his younger brothers voiced their agreement as well.

Dempsey held up both of his hands, his expression thunderous. “I see I have no choice, but please note my protest.”

“Protest noted. Please proceed.”

Damn, Erwan could sound so snobby and regal if he wanted to.

“Let’s start,” Dempsey snapped. They all found a spot in the meadow and sat down in the soft grass. “Colin, why don’t you start with the basics?”

“Right.” Colin was on the small side for an alpha, his build slender, and his face was a hell of a lot friendlier than Dempsey’s had been. “Just to help me know what to cover,

can you give me an indication of the magical training you have received?"

"None. Consider us absolute newbies." Erwan's tone was firm.

Colin widened his eyes, but then he caught himself. "Okay, then. Let me see. Well, every dragon has magic from birth. It's in our DNA. We're born with it. And we all have certain magical skills, like telepathy, energy, fire, boosting, and wiping memories, to name a few. But they're weak. Once we're eight, we're supposed to start our magical training. Every clan has at least one trainer, and they teach all the kids."

Strike one for the Doyles, then. Not only had they never learned anything about magic other than what they had witnessed their father and uncle do, but Jermon didn't think they even had a trainer. The only people who seemed to know anything about magic hadn't been willing to share.

"On a dragon's twenty-first birthday, they go through a ceremony where they shift, and their colors will reveal their magic ability. Though usually, the clan has a pretty good idea of their gifts before that, especially the trainer, since he would've had the opportunity to observe the dragons and see what talents they display. Anyway, twenty-one is when the official training starts, meaning that another dragon with that same gift will train and mentor them in using their specific talents."

Wow. Something else they hadn't known, and that certainly had never happened.

"So the training only happens one-on-one?" Erwan asked. "There's no handbook or something?"

Colin sharply shook his head. "Nothing may ever be written down out of fear it will fall into the hands of dragons slayers or humans. And every dragon is protected by a spell that will prevent them from revealing anything about their magic, even when tortured. That spell is baked into our DNA, and it's unbreakable, even with black magic."

That explained how the dragons had managed to keep things a secret. It also made it clear why they had only found vague, general references to magic in all the books they had researched and no specific information.

“So there’s good magic and bad magic?” Blair asked.

“Correct. Good magic is also called white magic, as opposed to bad magic, which is referred to as dark or black. Black magic is much stronger and more powerful, but because of that, it requires more energy, and it can’t be sustained as long. You can compare it to a sprint versus a marathon. If you want to keep black magic up longer, you’d need a lot of booster dragons and energy dragons.”

“Is it true that black magic has a shimmer?” Jermon asked.

Colin quirked an eyebrow. “It does, but how did you know?”

“Oh, I once overheard someone say that,” he smoothly lied. No way in hell was he telling the Murphys about Matt Brown, that visitor. In hindsight, he had most likely been part of the band of dragons slayers that had attacked them, but until they knew that for certain, Jermon wasn’t revealing anything to the Murphys.

“You have the gift of magic, correct?” Colin asked him. “Alistair said you were a purple dragon.”

Jermon looked at Erwan, who nodded at him. “Yes, I’m purple. My brother Valdis is orange, so a fire dragon, Nativ is an influencer, Finlay is a booster, Gael is an energy dragon, and as you know, Blair is a red fighter dragon.”

Colin whistled between his teeth. “That’s a nice variety of gifts. And you, Your Highness?”

A heavy, pregnant silence descended as if everyone was holding their breaths. It made no sense because the Murphys knew Erwan was a white dragon. Hell, Tynan had scanned him at their first meeting and had confirmed it. Why did they need him to say it again?

“I’m a white dragon,” Erwan said calmly.

And there it was, a wave of... Jermon didn't even know how to describe it. The Murphys weren't gasping, but he felt the energy ripple through them, like a collective sense of... awe? Or was it something else? He couldn't put his finger on it.

"That's wonderful," Colin said, his voice surprisingly flat. Jermon frowned. That wasn't the reaction he had been expecting, especially considering the emotions from the Murphys he'd picked up on. What was going on here?

"And you haven't received any training either?" Dempsey asked Erwan. All Jermon's alarm bells were going off. Loudly. They were blaring, in fact, flashing like orange beacons in his brain. Erwan had already stated they hadn't had any training, so why this question? And why after they had once again confirmed his gifts? Something was up.

"My brother is well aware of how special his gifts are and of how powerful he is," Jermon said before Erwan could answer. Technically, that wasn't a lie, since Erwan had been told repeatedly how special white dragons were. They had no specifics, but the Murphys didn't need to know that.

Erwan never looked at Jermon, apparently playing along with his game. Good. Something was off here, and Jermon was following his instincts.

"Good," Colin said, and something passed between him and Dempsey. "I'm glad to hear that. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask them."

*As if*, but Jermon didn't say that out loud.

"Okay, let's break into twos so everyone can receive tailored training for their gift. Prince Erwan, you'll be with Dempsey. Prince Jermon, I'll be your training partner," Colin announced. He rattled off the names of the Murphy dragons who would be training them. All of them were alphas, of course. Within seconds, everyone had gotten up and had found their partners.

The two Murphy dragons who had been paired with Finlay and Gael shared a look with each other. Jermon narrowed his



eyes. What was that about? It had almost seemed like happiness at first glance, but that couldn't be, because there was no way in hell these big alpha dudes would be happy to train an omega they considered far beneath them. So why would they...? His eyes fell on Finlay and Gael, who had both paled, and it clicked. Oh, hell no.

"Excuse me," Jermon said loudly, and everyone hushed. "Before we start, we'll need to get two alpha wolves to stay with our omegas."

"Why?" Dempsey made it sound like a challenge.

Jermon straightened his shoulders. "Because it's my job as an alpha to protect the omegas in our pack, and I'm not comfortable with them spending one-on-one time with your alphas."

Dempsey took a few steps toward him, his expression thunderous. "That's an affront to our honor."

"What is?"

"You suggesting that our alphas would sexually assault your omegas?"

"Interesting. I didn't mention that, so I wonder why that's the first thing you thought of."

"Your implication was clear," Dempsey said between gritted teeth.

"Was it? All I said was that I wasn't comfortable with them spending one-on-one time with your alphas. However you choose to interpret that says more about you than it does about me, I'm afraid. But regardless, my point stands. Either they will be accompanied by an alpha wolf, or we won't be trained."

"Another ultimatum?" Dempsey scoffed. "I don't think you realize the position you're in. You need us, so you're not the one dictating the terms. We are."

"And yet here we are, and you haven't walked away yet, which tells me that you need us as much as we need you. You acquiesced to our demand to train our omegas as well, so

clearly, you have a vested interest in getting us up to speed. I'd estimate our power balance as pretty even, wouldn't you agree?"

Dempsey pressed his lips together in a thin line of fury, his body practically vibrating. "And you're okay with letting your younger brother speak like that on behalf of your clan?" he addressed Erwan.

Erwan merely shrugged. "Jermon is doing a fine job of making it clear where we stand as a clan and as a pack, so I see no reason to intervene."

"I should've known that would be your standpoint," Dempsey sneered. "After all, what else can we expect from a dragon who betrays his own species and submits to a wolf? You should be ashamed of yourself. You're not worthy to call yourself an alpha dragon, let alone the crown prince of a clan. You're a dragon, for god's sake, not a wolf, and you're in charge of a clan, not a pack. If you're so comfortable letting your brother speak for you, maybe you should let him become king in your place. I'm sure he would do a better job, what with him not being a wolf's bitch."

Erwan froze, and hot fury unfurled inside Jermon. How dare this asshole insult his brother like that? Who did he think he was to judge Erwan for the choices he had made, for whom he loved, for how he was wired? At least he had shown his true colors.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't solve the problem at all," Jermon said, his voice trembling with contained anger. "Because you see, I'm mated to a wolf as well. To two of them, in fact, and one of them is an alpha. Moreover, I don't give two fucks how you feel about that, and neither does my brother or anyone else in our clan. And if you have an issue with that, I suggest you get back on your bikes and get the fuck out of here."

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## Chapter Eleven

“**A**nd then I told him I have two mates who are both wolves, and that one of them is an alpha, and that if he had a problem with that, he could get back on his bike and get the fuck out of there.”

Wilmer’s mouth dropped open as Jermon finished his story about what had happened at the meeting with the Murphys. He couldn’t believe Jermon had been that bold. “You really said that?”

Jermon nodded. “That Dempsey guy was being a total dick to Erwan, basically telling him he was less of a man for being with another alpha, and it pissed me off.”

“I’ll say. Remind me never to make you angry.”

Jermon chuckled and sank lower in the chair he had pulled up right next to Wilmer’s bed. The faint smell of the stalls drifted into Wilmer’s nose, even over the fruity soap Jermon had used to wash. Hay, a hint of manure, and the dark, rooty, and earthy smell of the horses mixed in with a little sweat. Jermon had probably spent time with them, maybe brushing them, cleaning their hooves. That unique scent always lingered. It made Wilmer nostalgic, longing for the day when he could hang out with the animals again.

“I doubt you could ever make me that upset,” Jermon said. “But they were being arrogant assholes, and someone needed to set them straight. It just so happened it was me.”

“So what did they do? Did they leave?”

“Nope, they decided to stay, which only confirms that they need us for some reason. Erwan and I talked about it, and neither of us can figure out what the Murphys want from us, but we agreed we’re not in as weak a bargaining position as we initially thought.”

“And the two dragon omegas. How did it go with them?”

“We asked Adar and Ori to stay with them, and after some more grumbling, the Murphys accepted that.”

Wilmer might have a problem remembering things from the last two years, but his brain had no trouble retaining new information, and according to Enar and the specialists he had consulted, that was a good sign. So every time Jermon had visited, he caught Wilmer up on what had been happening with the attack and the Murphys, which not only provided a welcome distraction but also helped Wilmer feel a part of the pack. Plus, Jermon had made him a handy list of all the pack members in both packs, including their status and jobs.

“So after this, what’s next?”

Jermon let out a long sigh, rubbing his neck. “They’ve agreed to come back for a second training session, which we absolutely need, but Erwan and I feel uncomfortable not knowing what their agenda is. They’re up to something, and we have no idea what.”

“That’s why you lied that your brother knew what being a white dragon was about.”

“Exactly. The problem is that we really need to know what the importance is of that, but we have no clue how. Emma has gone incommunicado again, so she’s no help either.”

“Did that first training session at least help you figure out how to use your gift?”

Jermon shrugged. “A little. From what I understand, my gift mainly consists of being able to tell when magic is being used and what magic specifically. That scanning thing Tynan from the Murphys did? Apparently, I can do that too with a little training.”

“That’s pretty cool.”

“Yeah, but how useful is that? I mean, yes, it would come in handy when meeting new dragons, but with so few of us left, what’s the point? It doesn’t seem like the most useful gift.”

“Perhaps here, too, the Murphys aren’t sharing everything they know with you.”

“You think they’re holding back information about my gift?”

“It would fit the pattern. It’s not like they’ve been completely forthcoming with you guys about anything, so maybe they’re not telling you stuff on purpose. Something that, I don’t know, could endanger them? That would give you too much power? Just a thought.”

Jermon leaned forward. “I hadn’t thought of that, but that would make total sense. And you’re right. It would fit the pattern. Definitely something I’ll take up with Erwan and see what he thinks.”

“And the others, did they pick up things from the training?”

“Yeah, but everyone felt a little underwhelmed. I think we were all expecting more, but I guess we’re being impatient. One of the Murphys did ask Erwan to take him to the clinic, and he learned some cool new healing spells, so there’s that.”

A firm knock on the door interrupted Wilmer in whatever he wanted to say, and he closed his mouth again. Seconds later, the door opened, and his parents stepped into the room. Wilmer’s mom was wearing a big smile, but as soon as she spotted Jermon, it faded. “Oh. I wasn’t expecting to see *you* here.”

Wilmer’s stomach soured. He hated confrontations in general, but the passive-aggressive way his mom fought her battles was even worse. She was the queen of barbs, some subtle and others not quite so subtle. But her delivery made it hard to call her out on it, since she usually made sure she had deniability.

“Yes, ma’am. I’m visiting with my mate,” Jermon said calmly, and a flash of heat shot through Wilmer at the way Jermon claimed him all over again with that simple word.

“Well, I’m sure Wilmer appreciated it, but we’re here now, so feel free to leave.”

“Thank you, but I’m good. Unless you want me to leave?” Jermon made eye contact with Wilmer.

The easiest thing would be to give in to his mother’s demand and send Jermon away. He would go, that much Wilmer knew, but did he want him to? Jermon had only been there for what, fifteen minutes? It didn’t feel like enough. As conflicted as Wilmer was about the whole situation, he loved it when his mates visited. He hated it in equal measure, courtesy of the jealousy and confusion it inevitably brought, but he couldn’t deny how much he enjoyed spending time with them.

“No, I want you to stay,” he said softly. The sweet smile on Jermon’s face was all the reward he needed.

His mother made a sound of disapproval, but one look from his father had her rein it in. They each grabbed a chair but had to settle for sitting a little farther away than usual because Jermon was right next to his bed.

“Any updates on a possible release date?” his father asked.

“Enar says I should be able to leave the clinic in a day or three.” Wilmer mentally braced himself. He knew what was coming.

“That’s wonderful news,” his mom said, her smile forced. “I’ve already cleaned your room, and everything is ready for your arrival.”

Yup, there it was. Her expectation was crystal clear, and she wasn’t being unreasonable. Wilmer would need extra help and care after his release from the clinic, and who better to provide that than his mother? The problem was that he didn’t want to be that far away from his mates. It felt wrong, and his wolf agreed.

“I haven’t made up my mind yet on where I’ll go,” he said.

His mom frowned. “Honey, surely you’re not planning on staying here. You will need round-the-clock care. Who would be able to provide that here?”

“Riordan and I.” Jermon’s voice was soft but firm. “It would be our pleasure to take care of him.”

The battle lines were drawn.

“You, another alpha? No offense, but that can’t be what you want.”

“I can assure you it is, ma’am. Riordan and I are devoted to making sure Wilmer has the best care possible, as well as everything he needs. That’s not merely our job as his mates but also our privilege.”

What made it all the more complicated was that his parents didn’t know Jermon was a dragon. As a consequence, Wilmer couldn’t tell them about Riordan being pregnant with eggs. Hell, down the line, if everything between him and Jermon and Riordan worked out, he wouldn’t even be able to introduce his parents to his...his kids? Would they feel like his, though? He’d never considered himself the type of alpha who would insist on fathering a child, but thinking of tiny little dragons as his offspring was hard.

“Wilmer, I really think you should come home with us. Once you’re recovered, you can decide whether you want to stay in the city, maybe find a better-paying job, or return here. I know you appreciate the sense of community that this group of people has given you, but we’re your family. Surely that counts for something.”

“But it’s your choice, son, and we’ll respect whatever decision you make,” his father added with a sharp look at his mom, who shrunk in her seat.

The time to decide had come. If he didn’t make the choice now, he’d have this back-and-forth ping-pong for the next few days, and it would drive him crazy. He closed his eyes. What did he want? If he was honest with himself, what did he really want? He only needed seconds before he had his answer. It wasn’t merely his wolf who was making his wishes clear.

Even thinking of not being near Jermon and Riordan was suffocating. They were his mates. Whatever might come, they were tied to each other.

He opened his eyes again. “Mom, I love you, and I can’t tell you how much it means to me you and Dad were here every single day to visit me.”

“Of course,” she said stiffly, maybe sensing the direction things were taking. “You’re my son. I would do anything for you.”

“I know, Mom, and what I need you to do for me is let me go. I can’t move back in with you, not even temporarily. My place is here, with the pack and with my mates.”

She inhaled sharply, but Wilmer’s father put a hand on her knee before she could say anything, and she let out her breath again. “I don’t understand, but if that’s what you think is best for you, then we’ll accept that,” she finally said. Her voice broke at the end, and she rose from her seat abruptly. “Excuse me.”

Within seconds, she’d left the room. Wilmer’s father sighed, shaking his head. “I’m sorry for your mom’s behavior.”

“It’s okay, Dad.”

“No, it’s not. I know you don’t remember, but the uprising in the capital has had an effect on her. A traumatizing effect, one could say. Do you remember our neighbors, Fred and Sara?”

Wilmer nodded. They were his parents’ age and had lived next door for as long as Wilmer could remember.

“Their two sons both died during that time. The oldest, Ben, was an alpha and a doctor, and he got assaulted while working in the hospital by people looting the place. Horrific. And Mason, a beta, accidentally ended up in the wrong neighborhood and was attacked by a street mob. It’s hard for your mom to forget about that, and as a result, she worries. Even more now that you too have been the victim of such



senseless violence. She's scared to lose you, son...and so am I."

What could he possibly say to make them feel better? Nothing. It *had* been senseless violence, and worse, he couldn't even explain to them why it had happened, since they weren't supposed to know about the dragons. "I don't know what that feels like, Dad, because I don't have kids, but if I try to put myself in your shoes, it's easy to understand why Mom is acting like this. I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault. None of it is. But I thought you should know." He rose from his chair. "If you'll excuse me, I'll take your mom home."

"Thank you, Dad. I love you."

And his father, his proud, tough alpha father, hesitated for a moment but then came over and kissed Wilmer on his cheek. "I love you too, son. More than I can put into words."

He extended his hand to Jermon. "Take good care of him for us."

Jermon sprung to his feet and accepted the handshake. "Yes, sir. You have my word."

When his dad had left, Wilmer met Jermon's gaze. "That was unexpected."

Jermon nodded and sat down again, taking Wilmer's hand in a gentle gesture. "I feel so bad for your mom. No wonder she's so worried after all that. That must've been horrible for her."

"I had no idea, obviously, but I'm not sure if they told me before my accident. Did I ever mention it?"

"You only said you were very close with your parents and that they had a hard time with you joining the pack but that they understood."

Maybe he had known, then, but hadn't told Jermon to protect his parents? That didn't sound unreasonable. "So I guess I'm coming home with you and Riordan."

Jermon's face broke open in a wide smile. "That means so much to me, and Riordan will be over the moon."

Wilmer had to ask. "Even with the eggs coming?"

"Especially now. He wants you there, I promise."

"But how will he manage both? I mean, taking care of the eggs and looking after me?"

Jermon squeezed his hand. "I'll be there too. Together, we got this."

The hope that blossomed in Wilmer's heart was impossible to squash down, even if it felt dangerous and risky. How could he know he wouldn't get hurt? He couldn't. All he could do was trust his wolf's instincts. "You said the cabin bedrooms are small. How will we handle that?"

He hadn't even realized he'd used *we* until Jermon's eyes widened. "They've cleared out a cabin for the three of us. Just us. That means you could have your own bedroom if you wanted, or we could knock down a wall and create a bigger bedroom. And we'd have a room for the eggs, which is perfect."

"They wouldn't be in our room?"

"Our room? Are you saying that...?"

"That I want to share a bedroom with you? Yes."

"I'm sorry, but are you sure? Not too long ago, you seemed not so convinced of us being together."

"I wasn't, but my wolf has been persistent in telling me we belong. And it's hard to argue with that after the way I sensed your emotions."

Jermon lifted Wilmer's hand to his mouth and kissed it. "You take all the time you need to process, and we'll go at your pace. Just having you with us will be such a comfort. It's been hard not to have you close."

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## Chapter Twelve

“I still can’t wrap my head around it,” Erwan said, holding hands with Rhene as they strolled back from the clinic to the Hightower lands. “My brother will be a dad.”

Jermon had asked Erwan and Rhene to meet him and Riordan in Wilmer’s room, and so they had, curious what was going on. Erwan wasn’t sure what he had expected, but a pregnancy hadn’t been it. How was it possible that Jermon, who had been such a brat until mere months ago, would now become a father?

“I’m more shocked about Riordan being pregnant with eggs.” Rhene shook his head. “Biologically, that seems impossible.”

Erwan shrugged. “Shifting itself is biologically impossible, so to me, this is just another expression of the magic that’s in us. Besides, your brother came back from the dead. Pretty sure that trumps being pregnant with eggs.”

Rhene snorted. “True.” He shot a quick look sideways. “What did it feel like when you touched Riordan? I know you instantly felt the eggs.”

“They sent out little sparks of energy, not sure how else to describe it, and I felt all four of them. They’re strong, almost ready to come out.”

“And you want to be there?”

Rhene’s hesitant tone made it clear he had some thoughts on that. “I need to be there. It’s my job as leader of this part of

my clan, but also... I don't think I could stay away, even if I wanted to. When a dragon omega gives birth to eggs, all the dragons gather. They're irresistibly drawn to the event, like a biological drive to be there."

Rhene made a noncommittal sound, and Erwan halted. "What's wrong?"

Rhene faced him, taking Erwan's other hand as well. "I have to admit I'm a little concerned."

Erwan frowned. "About the birth? Or the eggs?"

"About you."

What was Rhene talking about? "I'm not the one who's pregnant with them, so what do you mean?"

"It doesn't affect you?"

"What?"

"That your brother will have biological offspring before you do? I know we've talked about the theoretical possibility for you to ask either Finlay or Gael to be your surrogate, but we don't even know if they'd be willing to do that. And now your younger brother will have kids before you. Doesn't that make you sad? Jealous, maybe?"

Ah, like that. Erwan shook his head. "Not even a little bit. Why, I can't explain, but I don't. It feels right somehow, like this is how it should be. It doesn't bother me at all."

"Oh." Rhene blew out a breath, relaxing his shoulders. "And just out of curiosity, it wouldn't affect the chances of your possible kids for the throne?"

"If I end up having kids, no. Unless they're all women or omegas. Unfortunately, the way things stand now, an omega or a woman cannot lead a clan. If I were to produce only those, Jermon's kids would be next in line. But even then, that'd be fine with me."

How did he explain this without sounding ungrateful? He'd only recently come to some new conclusions himself, partially inspired by the meeting with the Murphys and partially by watching his mate run the pack.

“I have no ambition to be king. I’ll do it if it turns out it’s how it should be, but if someone else wants it more and is more qualified, I’ll happily step aside. I happened to be born first. Doesn’t mean that out of the four of us, I’m the best candidate.”

Rhene’s eyes widened. “That’s... I didn’t realize you felt that way.”

“That’s because it’s something I’ve only come to slowly understand. Watching you was what changed my opinion, to be honest. That and some of the remarks the Murphys made.”

“Me? I’m not sure I understand.”

“You’re such a natural leader. People look up to you and follow you. You’re calm in a crisis, you always put the pack first, and you work so hard to make sure everyone is okay.”

Rhene seemed taken aback. “Are you implying you’re not a leader?”

“Not like you.”

“But you don’t have to be. Lidon and I have very different styles. He delegates far more to Palani than I ever could or would to Sivney, no matter how amazing he is. I’m much more hands on. Well, in all fairness, that’s also because his pack is much bigger, and he’s, you know, Lidon and all, but still. There’s no one right way to be a leader.”

Erwan started walking again, and after a brief pause, Rhene picked up his pace as well. Was Rhene right that Erwan was a leader, just a different kind? Maybe, but that still didn’t explain all that Erwan felt. “I know that, but don’t leaders have in common that they want to lead?”

“Are you saying you don’t?”

“I do it because I felt I had to, because after we left the castle, everyone was looking at me. But I’m not sure that I want to lead.” His cheeks heated. “I’m always happy when you take over and not only in the bedroom.”

Rhene stopped him again. “You know that’s okay, right, to feel that way?”

Erwan nodded. “That’s what had been percolating in my brain, the deep realization that just because I’m the crown prince doesn’t mean I should be. I don’t think it’s my calling. I’m... I’m a follower, not a leader, and I’m okay with that.”

Rhene’s eyes were warm and kind. “That can’t have been an easy conclusion to reach.”

“Easier than I had expected. It feels right. And in a strange way, Jermon fathering kids before me only confirms it.”

Rhene leaned in and softly kissed him. “As long as your heart is at peace with it.”

“It is.” He bit his lip.

Rhene brushed his cheek with his thumb. “Something else is on your mind. What is it, my love?”

My love. How had Erwan gotten this lucky to find a mate who not only loved him deeply but was unafraid to show it and express it? He never doubted Rhene’s feelings for him. “You asked me once if I would want you to alpha claim me.”

Rhene’s thumb stopped near Erwan’s lips. “You said someday.”

“Today is that day. I need you to claim me. I want everyone to see I’m yours and that I’m not ashamed of it.”

“Darling...” Rhene’s voice was hoarse. “Are you sure? You heard what the Murphys said.”

“That’s exactly why I want it. They judged me for it, made me feel like I should be embarrassed and ashamed to be mated to another alpha. I’m not. I’m proud to be by your side, and I want everyone to know that. Claim me, alpha. Make me yours officially.”

Rhene’s eyes darkened. “With pleasure. Tonight? It’ll be a full moon.”

Erwan shook his head. “Right fucking now.”

“Here?” Rhene gestured at the road they were on, midway between both pack lands.

Erwan nudged his head at the soft grass to the side of the road. "Right here, right now."

He'd never been more certain of anything in his life, and now that he'd said the words, his whole body buzzed with anticipation. Just in case Rhene wasn't convinced yet, Erwan raised his hands, pulled his shirt over his head, and carelessly dropped it on the dirt path. Within seconds, he'd kicked off his shoes and was unbuckling his belt.

"Mine," Rhene growled, pushing Erwan's hands away. "You're mine."

"Yes, alpha."

Rhene took his mouth in a fierce kiss that sent fire throughout Erwan's body. He was already hard, even the thought of Rhene claiming him enough to be aroused. And the way Rhene kissed him, invading Erwan's mouth with his tongue, plundering and taking what he wanted, what he craved, only pushed Erwan's desire higher.

"It's such a thrill when you call me alpha," Rhene whispered against his lips, his hand curled around Erwan's throat, making his breath hitch. "It shouldn't matter, but it does."

Erwan's heart pulsed in his veins, beating against Rhene's thumb, which rested on his carotid. What else could he say but the truth in that moment? Rhene was his alpha and had been from the moment they had met. And now that Erwan had come to terms with it, all he wanted to do was submit and let Rhene take the lead. Peace washed over him at the rightness of it. "I'm yours, alpha."

"Mine," Rhene confirmed. "Forever."

"Forever."

Rhene pushed him back, and they stumbled into the grass, Rhene breaking Erwan's fall. Their lips found each other again, and they kept kissing as their clothes seemed to melt away until they were naked, their hard bodies pressed against each other. The soft grass was like a plushy blanket underneath them, all the insects chased away by their presence.

Rhene had grabbed lube from his pockets before discarding his jeans and pressed his slick fingers against Erwan's hole.

"Don't prep too much," Erwan said. "I want to feel you."

Taking Rhene had become much easier, probably because they had sex almost every day, and he was proud that he needed less prep. He liked the sting after a good, hard fuck, almost like it grounded him the rest of the day. If someone had told him that a few months before, he would've laughed them out of the room.

Rhene sank two fingers inside Erwan. "That's for me to decide."

"But I can take you."

Rhene quirked an eyebrow. "You really wanna argue with me now?"

No, he didn't, but he couldn't help being impatient. "I need you."

Rhene's expression softened. "I need you too, darling. Hold on a little longer."

Distracting Erwan with deep, sensual kisses, Rhene worked him open wide, taking far more time and care than Erwan had expected. "Rhene," he whined, surprising himself with the neediness in his voice.

"Hush." Rhene kissed him again. "We're not done until I say so."

Was he exerting his dominance over Erwan this way? Did he somehow need to prove he was in charge? Erwan wasn't sure, but did it matter? If he wanted Rhene to be in charge, he should stop trying to top from the bottom. And so he gave in and relaxed, allowing Rhene to take the lead.

"That's better, my darling," Rhene praised him. "Look at you, taking four of my fingers."

Four? He was taking four fingers? How had that happened? And more importantly, why would Rhene take the



time to prep him so well now? Then it hit. “You’re gonna give me your knot.”

Rhene stilled. “Only with your permission. But I’m not sure I can prevent myself from knotting you when I claim you. It’s a deeply ingrained need, and I’ve been fighting it since we got together.”

Being knotted. It was the ultimate experience for every omega, wasn’t it? Not all betas wanted it, as it had deeply submissive connotations. More than any other act, it signaled being at the alpha’s mercy. You were helpless until the knot came down, unable to get away. Erwan swallowed. “Yes. I want you to knot me.”

“Are you sure? There’s no pressure.”

“Yes, one hundred percent sure.”

Rhene pulled back his fingers. “Fuck, I’m already on edge. You make me so, so hard, darling. So fucking needy and horny, like a teenager who’s just discovered sex. And if I’m not careful, it will be over way too soon.”

“So we’ll do another round. It’s okay.”

Rhene softly shook his head, his eyes lighting up. “I love you so much.”

Erwan’s whole heart went mushy. “I love you more than I could ever express.”

Rhene nudged Erwan’s legs until he spread them wide, lying on his back. Rhene covered him, holding the base of his cock as he pressed against him. Erwan took a deep breath, then pushed out. Rhene slipped inside him like he’d done so many times before, and yet this time felt different. Their movements had a weight to them, an almost solemn undertone, everything taking on so much more meaning.

Rhene went slow, filling him until he bottomed out, their bodies as close as they could get. Rhene leaned on his elbows, meeting Erwan’s eyes. “This is very close to the spot where Bray alpha claimed Kean and Ruari. Did you know?”

Erwan shook his head.

“We all watched, the whole pack. It was a little absurd at first, especially for me. I mean, I love my brother, but I do not need to see him get fucked. But then the whole atmosphere changed, and power hung in the air. We all felt something magical was about to happen.”

Erwan swallowed. “That’s how I feel now.”

“Me too.”

Rhene’s eyes burned into Erwan’s, his wolf’s presence showing. “Erwan, my love, do you accept my alpha as your mate for life, sealing our unbreakable bond as long as we both shall live?”

His voice was steady and clear, every word echoing inside Erwan’s head.

“Yes, my alpha.” Joy surged through Erwan. “Do you accept my alpha as your mate for life, sealing our unbreakable bond as long as we both shall live?”

“Yes, now and forever,” Rhene answered him.

His lips peeled back, yellow flashing in his eyes as he bared his teeth. Erwan wasn’t scared, not even a little bit. He held his breath as Rhene came at him, then bit him, sinking his teeth into Erwan’s shoulder as he thrust hard inside him. Rhene’s power slammed into Erwan like a freight train, stronger than he’d ever felt, and he gasped. The pain of the bite was blinding, but so was the pleasure. Pure ecstasy shot through him, every cell lighting up in pleasure.

Rhene made an animalistic sound, and then his whole body shook as he unloaded inside Erwan. His seed somehow felt hotter, almost as warm as Erwan’s was, all but burning inside him. Rhene thrust a second time, and Erwan lost it, coming without touching himself, before even realizing he was that close. His vision went white hot, his body shook, and everything else was pushed to the background.

“We are two and we are one, alpha and alpha. Two hearts, one soul. Two bodies, one mind. What we bind together, no man will ever break apart.”

Rhene's voice came from far away as if Erwan heard him through a shell, and yet every word rang crystal clear inside him, settling deep into his soul. They were one. Forever.

They were in a daze, a red mist of lust and need that thundered through him, demanding release. He opened up wide, meeting Rhene as his mate slammed into him again and again, his cock as hard as if he'd never even come. But he had, and the sensation of his cum being forced out only added to Erwan's pleasure. It was dirty, raunchy, and so fucking perfect.

His shoulder stung, but when Rhene put his tongue against the wound, licking up the blood, flares spread straight to Erwan's cock. "Harder," he begged. "Please, alpha, fuck me harder."

All shame was gone. He needed his mate, needed his cock. And Rhene gave, battering into Erwan's body with powerful strokes. Erwan felt nothing else but his mate, the joy of being claimed fueling his passion. His body shook, his balls were painfully tight, and yet he refused to touch himself. Somehow, it wasn't his right. His alpha would provide.

And he did. Rhene threw his head back and roared, the sound so deafening both packs must've been able to hear it. Goose bumps pebbled Erwan's skin as another surge of power blazed through him. He might have magic, but so did his mate.

"Mine," Rhene grunted, and then he came again. His second load was as hot as his first had been. But this time, he folded his arms around Erwan and rolled them over, pulling Erwan on top of him. Why would he do that?

Then he felt it. Oh.

Rhene's cock swelled at the base, growing bigger and bigger inside Erwan. The burn took his breath away, and tears formed in his eyes. "I'm good," he whispered, catching a worried glance from his mate. "It's... I'm good. Please."

What was he even begging for at this point? He had no clue, but Rhene seemed to understand. He pulled Erwan's head against his shoulder, his touch gentle. "Take my knot, darling. You were born for this."

He was. He might be an alpha, but he was born to be this man's mate, to take this man's cock, including his knot. And that didn't make him any less of an alpha. His eyes grew heavy, even though his cock was still rock hard. But the pressure inside him brought peace, and when Rhene's knot was complete, tears trickled down Erwan's cheeks. This was heaven.

Just before he fell asleep in Rhene's arms, right there in the meadow, his release washed over him like a soft breeze, and his soul floated right along with his body.

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## Chapter Thirteen

Their mate was home. Riordan studied the sleeping Wilmer, whose dark eyelashes were a stark contrast against his pale face. He'd been exhausted after coming home from the clinic and was now in his third hour of sleeping. Enar had warned them Wilmer would take a hit from the transfer and would be resting a lot, but Riordan didn't care. Having Wilmer home with them was the best feeling in the world.

Jermon had been there to receive Wilmer, but as soon as Wilmer had fallen asleep, he'd left, needing get back to the animals. Riordan understood, and besides, he was there to take care of Wilmer, wasn't he? He'd been excused from kitchen duty without any complaint from the other omegas, who were fully supporting him. After some pack members had helped Jermon and Riordan move into their own little cabin, Riordan had cleaned it from top to bottom until it was sparkling. He'd washed all the bed linens, and he'd brought fresh flowers he'd picked in the meadows. Of course he'd baked an apple pie, and the whole house smelled heavenly.

In short, he'd done everything he could to make Wilmer feel welcome, and now all there was left to do was wait for him to wake up. Was it creepy he'd been staring at him for the last half hour, just drinking in his presence? He wasn't sure, but he didn't care. He needed Wilmer there, and Riordan's wolf wasn't satisfied yet, apparently catching up on lost time. Maybe he'd missed Wilmer more than he'd even realized.

Riordan sank a little lower in the reading chair they'd put in their bedroom. With the extra big king-size bed in the room, little else had fit. Even their closet had to be put into the spare bedroom, but that was fine. At least they had a bathroom with a double sink and a shower large enough for three men. Priorities.

The one other thing they'd placed in the bedroom was the bassinet, a gift from the Hayes pack. Riordan wasn't sure who had built it, but it looked amazing, painted in a soft yellow and decorated with white lace accents. In a few days, it would become the home for his eggs until they were ready to hatch.

His eggs. No matter how often he said those words to himself, they still gave him a jolt. Becoming a daddy was one thing, but delivering eggs? Fathering baby dragons? He couldn't wrap his head around it, but he'd have to because they were coming, whether he was ready or not.

"Are you gonna keep staring at me?" Wilmer rumbled, his voice low and sleepy, and opened his eyes.

Riordan smiled. "How did you know if you still had your eyes closed?"

"I could feel your presence... That and you sighed really loud."

"I was thinking of the eggs." Shit, should he have said that? It was so hard to figure out what to say and what not when it came to his pregnancy.

"You can talk about them," Wilmer said softly. He carefully changed position, wincing for a moment.

"It doesn't bother you?"

Wilmer took a deep breath. "I'm not gonna lie. It does, but that shouldn't stop you. I don't want to spoil your joy with my worries and doubts."

Riordan bit his lip. "Do you feel excluded?"

"No." Wilmer's answer came fast, much to Riordan's relief. That was something at least. "You've gone out of your

way to include me. But I have a lot on my plate, and this is one more thing.”

“I know the timing is awful.”

“Not awful. Just not ideal.”

Riordan’s smile came back at that classic Wilmer answer. “You always were a realist.”

Wilmer turned onto his side and propped his head up on his left hand. “It’s strange that you know me so well, whereas I’m still trying to get to know you.”

“You can ask me anything,” Riordan promised him. “Anything.”

Wilmer’s smile was so sweet it took Riordan’s breath away. “Thank you. How did we meet?”

“We’d both been in the pack for a while, but we’d never had much contact until Jermon arrived on the scene. He and his fellow dragons gave me a bit of a scare in the kitchen, and Delton, our psychologist, recommended a supervised meeting between me and one of the dragons. I picked Jermon, and because he was working for you, I asked you to supervise.”

Wilmer’s smile faded, and he narrowed his eyes, his forehead wrinkling. “You had an anxiety attack,” he said slowly.

Oh my god, he remembered! Riordan nodded. “I did. You remember?”

Wilmer’s frown grew deeper. “I was surprised you asked me.”

“Yeah, ’cause we never had much interaction before.”

“So why did you pick me?”

Riordan’s cheeks heated. He had to live through this embarrassment twice? “Erm, because I thought you were hot?”

Wilmer looked confused for a moment but then grinned. It was so good to see him laugh. “That’s nice to hear, but I’m not quite sure I’m following.”

Riordan shuffled his feet, averting his eyes. "I'd been with the other alphas in the pack for my heats, so I already knew they wouldn't be a good fit..."

"A good fit?"

Riordan peeked at Wilmer from under his eyelashes as understanding lit up his mate's face. "Ah, you were thinking ahead, of a possible mate."

"Yes."

"That's okay, Riordan. I don't blame you for that."

Riordan lifted his head. "No?"

"Why would I? I don't know how I felt the last two years, but I'm certainly at an age when it's time to settle down and start thinking about a family, so how could I fault you for doing the same? You didn't have a connection with any of the other alphas?"

He seemed to take the news in stride, thank god. "Not really. I mean, they were nice and all, and the sex was decent, but..."

Wilmer's laugh rang out. "Please tell me the sex we had was better than decent because that's not exactly a glowing endorsement."

"It was fantastic," Riordan said. "Best sex I ever had. And it was the same for Jermon, although..."

"...it was his first time." Wilmer closed his eyes, pinching his eyebrows as if thinking hurt his head. "He was a virgin, and you were worried about his first time being with you in heat."

This had to be a good sign, right, that more and more memories were coming back? Riordan had to cling to the hope that someday soon, Wilmer would remember everything. "I was, but he assured me he wanted it."

Wilmer carefully pushed himself up into a sitting position. Riordan was ready to help him, but Enar had drilled into him that he should only help when asked or when needed and should let Wilmer do as much as possible himself.



“Fuck, my head hurts.” Wilmer groaned as he turned sideways, dangling his legs off the side of the bed. “It’s like digging out these memories causes physical pain.”

“I’m sorry. Is there anything I can do?”

Wilmer took his time answering, but Riordan waited patiently. Emotions flashed over the alpha’s face as if he was battling with himself. Maybe he was. Asking for help wasn’t easy and probably even less so for an alpha.

“Would you help me shower? It means you’d have to dress my wounds after, so if you’re not comfortable with that, that’s okay.”

“Enar showed us how, so I can do that. And if I can’t, he said I can always ask him or Maz, and they’ll help.”

“Would you be willing, then?” Wilmer looked so hopeful and uncertain it crushed Riordan’s heart.

“Of course.”

“I have to warn you. I look...different.”

Yeah, no shit. Even wearing a loose T-shirt and jogging pants, Wilmer appeared thinner and frail, clearly having lost weight. And he had the burn wounds, of course. But his eyes were the same as before, and so was his smile. Underneath, he was the same Wilmer Riordan had fallen for.

Riordan squared his shoulders and got up from the chair. “You’re my mate, and you’ll always be beautiful to me.”

Wilmer swallowed. “That means a lot to me, even if it’s a little strange to hear at the same time because I feel like we only met two weeks ago.”

That would never not sting, but Riordan bit back his hurt. Not Wilmer’s fault. “I understand. Just let me know what you’re comfortable with.”

Wilmer let out a humorless laugh. “I don’t have much of a choice in this case. If I want to shower, I’ll have to get naked in front of you, no matter how that makes me feel.”

“What can I do to make it easier for you?”

Wilmer's shoulders slumped. "I wish I knew."

Riordan had never seen him this raw and vulnerable, and his whole heart went out to him. "Let's get you clean," he said softly.

He helped Wilmer take off his shirt, swallowing back a gasp as his mate's body was revealed. He'd lost muscle definition, and his skin was pale and unhealthy, even aside from the various bandages. "Let me wash my hands before I take those off," he said, remembering Enar's instructions.

He rushed into the bathroom, where he checked to make sure the chair Enar had delivered was in the shower for Wilmer to use. He wouldn't be able to stay standing while showering. Riordan thoroughly washed his hands and put hand sanitizer on them to be safe. When he hurried back into the bedroom, Wilmer was where Riordan had left him, panting slightly. "I tried to get up by myself. Not a good idea."

Riordan gave him his sternest look. "You're supposed to wait for help."

"I know."

"Let me take off your pants first, okay?" Riordan kneeled at his feet, stumbling a little as his balance was thrown off by his slightly rounded belly. So weird to see that curve there rather than his usual flat stomach. He took off Wilmer's socks, then gestured him to stand up. Leaning on Riordan's shoulders, Wilmer managed, and Riordan pulled his pants and underwear down. He tried to be all businesslike, but when Wilmer's cock all but slapped him in the face, he had to fight to stay composed.

"Oops, sorry." Wilmer blushed.

Good god, how adorable was that? "No worries."

Riordan took his time removing the bandages from Wilmer's body. The blistered skin already looked a hell of a lot better than two weeks prior. Wilmer's shoulders were the worst, probably where the burning beam had hit him. "Does it still hurt?"

“Not as bad as in the beginning, but yes, it’s a hot and throbbing pain.”

Dealing with that on top of his headaches had to be pure torture.

“There, done.” Riordan threw the dirty bandages into the trash and quickly washed his hands again.

Wilmer leaned heavily on Riordan as they shuffled to the bathroom, where Wilmer lowered himself onto the shower chair with a loud groan. “Fuck, I feel like I’m eighty years old.”

“You look pretty damn hot for a man that age,” Riordan quipped. He turned on the water and aimed the spray at the wall until it was at the right temperature.

Hmm, if he was going to help Wilmer shower, he was bound to get soaking wet himself. He’d better strip down to his underwear. He handed Wilmer the showerhead. “I’ll be right back.”

He whipped off his shirt and dragged down his pants, almost falling when he attempted to take off his socks at the same time. Damn, he had to be more careful. He had precious cargo on board. Dressed in his underwear, he popped back into the bathroom.

Wilmer’s eyes grew wide. “That’s a nice view.”

Oh. Riordan hadn’t even considered how Wilmer would take him stripping down. “I’m sorry. I should’ve checked with you. Should I put my clothes back on?”

As Wilmer opened his mouth to answer, his cock slowly filled, and both their gazes were drawn to it. Wilmer chuckled dryly. “I guess that answers that question. At least that part of my body still works, so there’s that.”

Riordan giggled. “I’ll take that as a no.”

“Yeah, I’m not objecting to the view.” Wilmer aimed the showerhead at Riordan for two seconds, drenching him. “And now it’s even better.”

Riordan looked down. His wet white cotton briefs stuck to his skin, not hiding anything anymore. He burst out laughing. This was the first time he'd felt so much joy since the night of the attack. "I might as well take them off, no?"

"I'm not gonna object to that." Wilmer's voice was hoarse, and as Riordan pulled down the soaking-wet underwear, his mate's eyes darkened. "Did you and Jermon...? I know I have no right to ask, but I can't help but wonder."

It only took Riordan a second to catch on. "No, we didn't have sex since the attack. Not without you. Not even a hand job."

Wilmer choked. "But you said you were so horny."

"I was, but Jermon hit the brakes." Riordan wasn't gonna claim the credit, since he wouldn't have had the power to stop had Jermon not broken things off.

"I can't tell you how much that means to me, that you've been waiting for me in that sense as well."

Jermon stepped into the bathroom, and Wilmer and Riordan both startled. "We would've waited for you forever if we had to."

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## Chapter Fourteen

When he'd made the time to pop in and check on Wilmer, Jermon hadn't expected to come home and find his two mates naked in the shower. Not that he had any issues with it, but he hadn't seen that one coming. Then again, he also hadn't planned to stumble across his brother and Rhene having sex out in the fields, and yet that had happened too. God, he needed to have his brain bleached after that. Though if he were honest, it had also been incredibly hot to see Rhene alpha claim Erwan, and Jermon had definitely watched them for longer than he should have.

"You would?" Wilmer asked, and it took Jermon a second to refocus on the conversation. What was Wilmer replying to? Oh, right. Jermon's remark that they would've waited forever for him.

"You're our mate," he said simply. "You belong with us, and you can take all the time in the world to figure that out."

"Thank you." It came out choked.

"Please, don't thank us for that. As far as I'm concerned, it's how you deserve to be treated, not something special."

"It's gonna take me a little time to let that sink in, but I suppose you're right."

"For now, why don't you focus on the lovely view in front of you and let Riordan help you get clean?" Jermon suggested.

Wilmer turned his attention back to Riordan, and he licked his lips. "I can certainly do that."

Jermon leaned against the door frame, watching with a soft swirl in his belly as Riordan squeezed out shower gel onto a washcloth. Wilmer closed his eyes as Riordan washed him, gently scrubbing his back first, then walked around him to do his front, skipping the areas where Wilmer had burn wounds. He was so tender with him, so careful not to hurt him.

And he was beautiful, the curves of his body even more alluring now that he'd gained a little weight. His belly showed a little bump, like a hill that rose slightly above the surrounding flats. For Jermon, it only added to Riordan's appeal. And knowing what was in Riordan's belly, that at that moment, his kids were growing inside him, well, if he thought about that for too long, he could hardly breathe.

Riordan knelt in front of Wilmer, who widened his legs. Sitting on his knees, Riordan pushed back his ass, and Jermon bit back a moan. God, what a sight, those luscious globes all spread out, teasing a peek of that pink hole. How he wanted to be inside him again, to experience that indescribable thrill of filling him. For so long, he'd been worried he'd never find anyone willing and able to take his cock, but Riordan had, and he'd loved every second of it. How could Jermon not want a repeat of that?

He pressed the back of his hand against his erection, attempting to be subtle as he rearranged himself, but when he looked up, Wilmer's gaze was trained on him. Trained on his cock, to be exact.

The alpha's eyes widened, and he swallowed. "Wow, you're..." He froze, frowned, then gazed up at Jermon. "Eggplant. That's what we called your dick, isn't it?"

"Yes." Jermon struggled to keep the emotion out of his voice. "You came up with that name because I was insecure about my size."

"I remember."

Riordan looked over his shoulder at Jermon. "He remembered other things as well, like me having that anxiety attack in the kitchen and that he was surprised I asked him to supervise my meeting with you. That's a good sign, right?"

Jermon agreed, but even if he hadn't, he wouldn't have the heart to crush the hope that bloomed on Riordan's face. "Absolutely."

"It's strange to remember some things but not everything else, like when you have a nightmare and you can only remember fragments, seconds out of what felt like an hour-long dream. I can't connect them yet."

Frustration laced Wilmer's voice, and Jermon could understand why. "It must be so hard for you, but remember what Enar said. It's important to try and be relaxed about it. You can't make your brain remember, no matter how hard you try."

Wilmer deflated like a balloon, his shoulders dropping. "Rationally, I know that, but I can't help but try. I want to remember so desperately."

"I know. Or at least, I can imagine."

Riordan had resumed washing Wilmer's legs and feet. When he was done, he draped the washcloth over his shoulder, took the showerhead from Wilmer's hand, and rinsed him off. He never put the full force of the water spray on Wilmer's wounds, which still looked red and angry. They formed a sharp contrast with his pale skin, and Jermon's stomach clenched. Wilmer looked so frail. Two weeks of bed rest had done a number on Wilmer's body. That much was clear.

Throughout Riordan's care for him, Wilmer's cock had remained hard. Riordan pointed at it. "Would you like me to take care of that for you? Or would you prefer to do it yourself?"

Jermon held his breath. To him, the underlying offer was crystal clear, but would Wilmer pick up on it? And if he did, would he accept it?

Wilmer cleared his throat, a pink blush creeping up his cheeks. "Are you asking me if I want you to clean it or if I would like you to pleasure me?"

He might suffer from a brain injury, but he was still himself, and Jermon breathed out with relief.

“Either. Both?” Riordan bit his lip. “Whatever you want. I won’t be offended if you say no.”

“Are you offering because you feel sorry for me?”

Riordan shook his head. “No, that has nothing to do with it.”

He glanced at Jermon, who nodded, encouraging him to be honest.

“You’re aroused,” Riordan softly said and pointed at his own cock, which stood at half-mast. “But so am I. I like pleasuring you both. It makes me feel good, and of course, I usually get an orgasm out of it as well.”

“And you’re okay with it, even though you know I can’t reciprocate your feelings? I like you, both of you. I like you a lot, but...it’s not more than that. Yet. I’m only asking because I don’t want you to feel used.”

*He likes to feel used.* It was on the tip of Jermon’s tongue, but he held back. He couldn’t make this decision for Riordan, especially not in front of Wilmer. Wilmer had to understand how the dynamics between them worked.

“I don’t mind that at all. I just want to make you feel good.”

How could Wilmer possibly refuse that sweet offer? Jermon knew Wilmer would accept it, even before Wilmer opened his mouth and said, “In that case, yes, please.”

Riordan sank to his knees again, settling between Wilmer’s legs. Jermon needed a better view than the one he had from the doorway. He walked farther into the bathroom and took position against the opposite wall so he could watch them.

Wilmer looked up at him. “I forgot to ask, but you’re okay with this, right?”

“More than okay. He’s really good at this.”

As an afterthought, Jermon turned off the water. The bathroom had filled with enough steam to keep it warm for a while, and they didn’t need to waste water. Jermon’s socks



were dripping wet now, since he'd forgotten to take them off, but who cared at this point?

Riordan curled his right hand around the base of Wilmer's cock, then leaned in and licked the drop of precum off the tip. With water sliding down his smooth skin all over his body, he made for an erotic picture, especially combined with the eager look in his eyes and the hungry way he went about his task.

He suckled on the tip first, looking up at Wilmer as if making sure he was doing okay. But Wilmer had his eyes closed, leaning his head backward, surrendering to the pleasure. Jermon knew from experience how much erotic ecstasy that hot mouth could bring, and his cock grew even harder.

Riordan licked a stripe from the base of Wilmer's cock to the tip, then another one and another one, until he had covered every inch of that velvety skin with his tongue and lips. He cradled Wilmer's balls in his left hand, moving from one to the other, rolling them in his palm.

Then he went in for the kill, opening his mouth wide and taking him in as far as he could. Wilmer's loud moan reverberated through the bathroom, the sound settling low in Jermon's balls.

"Fuck, that feels good," Wilmer moaned.

Slurping and sucking sounds filled the room. Riordan sucked in that cock with enthusiasm, his eyes watering as he let it slide in all the way so that his nose hit Wilmer's pubes. What a sight. Jermon could barely hold back a moan himself, and he slipped his hand under the waistband of his jeans and underwear, taking his cock into his hand. It had been too long, and watching his two mates had gotten him too horny.

Wilmer must've heard him because he rolled his head sideways and opened his eyes. His look grew heated as he spotted what Jermon was doing. "Show me," he commanded. "Show me your eggplant."

Jermon laughed, even as tears filled his eyes at that all-too-familiar expression. Just for a moment, they could forget what

had happened and pretend everything was okay, that everything was normal. He unzipped his jeans and freed his cock, his eyes focused on Wilmer.

“Jesus, you’re big. Wow.”

It was said with admiration, without a trace of apprehension or, worse, disgust, and Jermon gave himself a good squeeze. “Thank you.”

“That must’ve felt fantastic,” Wilmer said to Riordan, who was taking a breather, his chin covered in drool and his eyes all teary from the pressure.

“It did. But so did your knot.” Riordan’s voice was throaty and sexy.

“Mmm, I bet. I’m sorry I can’t remember.”

“That’s okay. You’ll get the chance to make new memories.”

Riordan sucked Wilmer back in, and the alpha threaded his fingers through Riordan’s curls. “Fuck yes, like that. Can you take it if I thrust a little?”

Riordan nodded, but Wilmer still checked in with Jermon, who was jacking himself off, his balls already tingling. How could he not when he was treated to that erotic spectacle?

“He can,” Jermon assured Wilmer.

Wilmer watched Riordan as he carefully thrust his hips, driving into Riordan’s mouth all the way. “So good. Goddamn, your mouth is heaven, precious.”

Did he realize he’d called him *precious*? It had been his pet name for Riordan. Jermon filed it away as another sign that Wilmer’s memory was returning, albeit slowly.

Wilmer retreated for a moment, and Riordan sucked in a raspy breath. His cheeks were wet with tears, and Wilmer wiped them off with his thumb. “You’re so beautiful you take my breath away,” he said softly. “The sight of you on your knees with my cock in your throat is the most erotic thing I’ve ever seen.”

He sank back into Riordan's mouth and started fucking him in earnest. His movements were slow, probably because it hurt, but his thrusts were deep, and the sounds were deliciously dirty. Jermon set the same pace as he jacked himself off, content to slow down, since he was already so on edge.

With anyone else, Jermon might've worried that the occasional gagging and gurgling was a sign it was too much, but not with Riordan. The omega attacked Wilmer's dick again and again, happy to let his mate use his mouth until finally, Wilmer let out a deafening roar and came, pulling back in time to prevent Riordan from choking on his load.

It spilled over, dripping down Riordan's lips, his chin. He looked thoroughly debauched. Jermon grunted and came himself, unloading all over his hand and arm. Gods, that had been a good one. He'd needed that. Tension already seeped out of his body.

Riordan slumped over, sagging back against the shower wall, and only then did Jermon see the omega's cock was soft. Had he come just from blowing Wilmer? The white glob on Wilmer's shin was the proof that indeed, he had. Damn. Jermon hadn't even noticed, too caught up in the show. He cleared his throat. "I hate to point it out, but we all need a shower now."

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## Chapter Fifteen

**A**fter that amazing blow job and another brief shower, Wilmer had been exhausted. Jermon and Riordan had helped him back in bed, and he'd fallen asleep while they'd been redressing his wounds. Three hours later, he woke up, needing a few moments to realize where he was. Right. With his mates. Home, whatever that meant. His mates had tucked him into bed. A very comfortable bed, in fact, and one that smelled amazing.

At some point, Erwan had been there too, he thought, but the memory was vague. Something with Erwan putting his hands on Wilmer, speaking Irish. Maybe he'd dreamed it? Wait, how had he known that had been Irish? Had he heard it before? He must have.

He blinked, but the expected pain in his head didn't surface like it always did when he concentrated this hard. No headache? Carefully, he turned his head toward the window, where soft light spilled in between the curtains. Usually, even that little bit of sunshine would be sufficient to make his brain stab. But nope, nothing. It felt...quiet. A little dull, not quite sharp and fresh, but it wasn't hurting. Strange.

His gaze fell on a small handbell on his nightstand, a folded white paper tucked underneath. "Ring when you're awake! J&R," he read out loud.

Aw, how sweet was that? They were definitely making good on their promise to take care of him. The blow job had certainly been above and beyond and not something he would've gotten had he stayed at his parents' house. Oh god,

no, why had his mind gone there? Ew, no, all the nopes that ever noped. He shivered.

Okay, time to change tracks. He lifted the bell and rang it softly. Muffled voices sounded. The door opened silently, and Riordan stuck his head around the corner. “You’re awake!”

His face broke open in a wide smile that hit Wilmer deep. How could someone be that happy just because of Wilmer’s presence? “I slept like a baby.”

“Good. You were wiped.”

Riordan came into the room, and seconds later, Jermon followed him.

“Pretty sure you had something to do with how well I slept,” Wilmer teased Riordan, who giggled.

“My pleasure. I’m glad it helped you relax.”

“How are you feeling?” Jermon asked.

Wilmer checked himself to be sure. Nope, still nothing. “Surprisingly good, actually. No headache, which is a first.”

Jermon quirked an eyebrow. “No headache? At all?”

“Nope. I have no idea how that’s even possible because it’s been bad ever since the accident, and Enar said I’d probably have headaches for weeks, if not months.”

“Strange. I mean, it’s awesome but a tad weird.”

“My feelings exactly. By the way, did I remember correctly that your brother stopped by, or was that a dream?”

“He did. He performed a healing ritual on you that he learned from one of the Murphys.”

A healing ritual. That would explain the Irish, then. “Were you there when he did it?”

Jermon looked puzzled for a moment. “Yeah, I was holding your hand. Not that you noticed, since you were asleep, but I didn’t want you to be scared should you wake up. And you did seem to be present for at least some of it.”

So Erwan had done a healing ritual, and now Wilmer's headache was gone. Coincidence? "Was this the first time Erwan had done this?"

"You think...?" Jermon pursed his lips. "Interesting theory. He'd done it once before but a different one."

"Were you there for that one?"

"No, Enar was. I had to work."

"So the difference this time was either the ritual or your presence."

"It would seem so, yes. What are you getting at?"

Wilmer pushed himself up into a sitting position, waving off Riordan and Jermon when they both stepped forward to help him. It put some strain on his wounds, but dammit, he had to breathe through that. He refused to be dependent and helpless when he didn't need to be. He needed a few beats to bring his heart rate down, but at least he'd kept his pride. He did, however, allow Riordan to prop some pillows in his back so he could lean against them.

"It's interesting that I have no headache when I'm pretty sure I should have one. I can't help but think the healing ritual had something to do with that."

Jermon sat down on the edge of the bed, then gestured Riordan over, who crawled onto the bed and stretched out next to Wilmer. "So why did it work now and not the previous time? It had to be the new ritual."

"I think it was you." The more Wilmer thought about it, the more logical it sounded. "You have the gift of magic. Would it make sense, then, that you can boost other's magic?"

Jermon blinked. "I thought only booster dragons could do that."

"Didn't you tell me when you first met with the Murphys that the guy who scanned you said you had a powerful gift? That would explain why they're not properly teaching you how to use it. If by training your gift of magic you could grow more powerful than them, of course they wouldn't encourage

that. But that's exactly what I think happened. Your brother did his healing thing, and you were touching me, somehow amplifying what he did."

"If that's true, you need to figure out how to use that gift," Riordan said. "And not just you, but Erwan as well. You guys still don't know what the significance is of a white dragon, other than that they're rare."

"I know." Jermon sighed. "It's so frustrating that the only allies we thought we had seem to have their own agenda. Until they come clean about their true intentions, we can't give them too much information. And we still haven't heard from Emma. She said she could be out of reach for as long as thirty days and not to worry, but we're now past that. I'm getting super concerned about her, and Nadiv is about to embark on some rogue quest to check in on her. The only thing stopping him is Erwan, who keeps telling him he can't."

"Would your father and uncle really harm her?" Wilmer asked, even though he could guess the answer.

"If they discover how much she kept from them, including her abilities? Hell yes. They wouldn't even hesitate."

"So what's the argument against rescuing her?"

"They're far more powerful than we are. They proved that when they tortured Rhene. If they turn against us, as we expect them to, we wouldn't stand a chance."

"Hmm." Jermon made a good point, but still, something about it bothered Wilmer. Maybe because the whole idea of leaving a female omega in such a dangerous situation ran against everything he believed in. At the core, everything kept coming back to that one problem: The Doyles didn't know how to use the gifts and abilities they had. But when the Murphys were not true allies, what other option did the Doyles have?

"There are three more clans," Wilmer said slowly, meeting Jermon's eyes. "The Murphys might have shown up, but they're not the only clan. Why haven't the others contacted you? Wouldn't they have felt the burst in magic of your

collective shift as well, let alone the magic during the attack? Why haven't they come forward?"

"Fuck," Jermon said. "You're right. What are the Murphys not telling us?"

"Maybe it's time to stop relying on them and find other sources. If the info you're getting from them is unreliable, get your own."

Jermon nodded, a look of determination on his face. "And maybe that begins with finding out where Emma is because she knows far more than she's shared with us. I wish I knew where to start other than knocking on the castle's door and asking my father."

"Maybe it's a really dumb question," Riordan said, sounding apologetic. "And if it is, you can tell me, but how exactly did the Murphys find you? I mean, they said they sensed the burst in magic, and Emma had predicted they would, but how could they pinpoint your location? Wouldn't that suggest that you can do the same with Emma if and when she uses magic?"

Jermon's mouth dropped open. "That's not a dumb question at all. In fact, you raise an excellent point. I'll have to discuss this with the others and see what they think."

Riordan's smile was so wide he was practically glowing. "I'm glad. And you should talk about this with the others. Whatever answers you need, you're not gonna find them on your own. If nothing else, I learned that from being part of this pack. The collective is always much stronger than the sum of the individuals."

"Damn," Wilmer said with a sigh. "You're sweet, pretty, and smart. That's a powerful combination, precious."

Precious. It had come out so naturally, as if he'd said it plenty of times. Hadn't he called him that during the blow job as well?

"You called him that before the accident," Jermon answered Wilmer's unspoken question. "It was your nickname for him."



“I’m so happy you’re remembering more and more,” Riordan said, and Wilmer reached for him. He needed to hold him, connect with him, though why, he couldn’t explain. Riordan came willingly, carefully snuggling close to Wilmer.

Wilmer kissed the top of his head, and a deep, warm contentment filled him. These men were his mates. He might not remember details, but he couldn’t question that truth anymore. “I’m happy too. I still have a long way to go, but they’re hopeful signs.”

“I’m also a really good cocksucker,” Riordan said, and Wilmer almost choked on his own breath.

“What now?”

Riordan’s pretty blue eyes were deliberately innocent, belying the naughtiness of his previous comment. “You called me sweet, pretty, and smart, but you forgot great in bed.”

Jermon snorted. “And so modest.”

Wilmer laughed. “I stand corrected. Sweet, pretty, smart, and the best little cocksucker on the planet.”

“Hey, now, that’s not fair,” Jermon protested. “I haven’t had a chance to show you my skills yet. I might be new at this, but what I lack in experience, I make up for in enthusiasm.”

Riordan’s giggle was one of pure delight. “I’ll admit that you do try really hard.”

That had them all in stitches, and Wilmer laughed until his body hurt. God, he’d needed that. He was already convinced he’d made the right call, coming home with Jermon and Riordan. Being with them made him feel better. Maybe the distance while he was in the clinic had bothered him more than he’d realized.

Riordan rolled onto his back and popped open the buttons on his jeans. “Pff, these are really getting way too tight.”

“Wear something looser,” Jermon said. “You shouldn’t be uncomfortable.”

“I wore jogging pants yesterday, but they make me look so much bigger. They’re not very flattering.”

“It’s impossible for you not to be beautiful.” Jermon said it with such an honest expression that Wilmer knew he meant every word. “And your comfort matters much more to me.”

He stretched out his arm to Riordan’s belly, hovering as he sought permission with his eyes. As soon as Riordan nodded, Jermon put his hand on his belly and closed his eyes. Almost immediately, his lips curled up in a smile. “All four are checking in,” he said softly. “They’re almost ready to come out.”

Wilmer didn’t even think but placed his hand next to Jermon’s. Jermon gasped, and Wilmer froze. Shit, had he done something wrong? Should he have asked too?

But when he pulled back, Jermon stopped him. “No, don’t. It’s...” His voice cracked. “You’re touching his belly.”

“Yeah?” Wilmer wasn’t sure what the problem was. Or maybe not so much a problem, considering the emotions that played on Jermon’s face.

“Oh,” Riordan said, his face lighting up. Clearly, he understood too. What were they referring to?

Then it sank in. “No one else was allowed to touch him,” Wilmer whispered, remembering what Jermon and Riordan had told him. That was how one of the dragon omegas had concluded he was pregnant in the first place.

“Usually, only the sire and healers can touch. Doctors, maybe, if they make it clear they’re not a threat, like Enar did. But you didn’t. You reached out, and it was okay,” Jermon said.

“What does that mean?” Wilmer asked.

“It means that the eggs recognize you as Riordan’s mate, even if you’re not their sire.” Jermon’s voice cracked. “It means that you truly belong with us and you’ll be as much a dad as Riordan and me.”

When the truth of that statement sank in, Wilmer’s eyes grew teary. “I’ll be damned.”

## Chapter Sixteen

Riordan woke up early in the morning, his belly cramping. The discomfort was bearable, more uncomfortable than painful, but it had still pulled him out of his sleep. What was going on? Was it time?

To his right, Jermon stirred, then rolled onto his side and opened his eyes. “Are you okay?” he whispered.

“I don’t know. I’m having cramps.”

“Can I?” Jermon reached out his hand.

Riordan nodded.

Jermon put his warm hand on Riordan’s stomach. His lips curled up in a sweet smile. “It’s time. They’re ready to come out.”

Riordan swallowed back the wave of panic that barreled through him. They had prepared for this. His bag was all packed and ready by the door. All they had to do was alert Enar and Maz and inform Rhene and Erwan, who would help them get to the clinic as fast as possible, including Wilmer.

Jermon leaned in and pressed a kiss on Riordan’s forehead. “You’ll be okay. You’ve got this.”

Riordan wasn’t sure how his mate managed to sound that confident when they both knew the risks. His body wasn’t made to carry eggs. He was a mammal, part human and part wolf, anatomically suitable for carrying babies, pups. Not eggs. But still, he appreciated Jermon wanting to reassure him.

He took a deep breath. “I’m ready.”

“You go get dressed. I’ll wake Wilmer and alert the others.”

Wilmer stirred. “I’m awake. What’s going on?”

To make sure they wouldn’t accidentally bump against him in their sleep, they had placed a rolled-up blanket between Jermon and Wilmer, with Riordan on the outer side, afraid as he was to hurt Wilmer.

“The eggs are coming,” Jermon said, his voice surprisingly calm. “I’m going to make the calls, and then I’ll help you get dressed, okay?”

“Okay. If it takes too long, I can wait for Rhene and Erwan.”

When Riordan rolled out of bed, another cramp blazed through him, and he grabbed the mattress with both hands to steady himself. It ached more in his back than his belly, strangely enough, and compared to two minutes earlier, the pain had gotten sharper. That was to be expected, though, wasn’t it?

He carefully put on his clothes, holding on to something with one hand at all times in case an unexpectedly fierce stab of pain would hit. The last thing he wanted was to fall. Jermon had jumped out of bed and was making rapid calls, one after the other, getting dressed in between. Luckily, they had it all planned out, and everybody knew what to do.

“I’m ready,” Riordan said with far more certainty than he felt.

“I’m going to help Wilmer, and then we’ll leave, okay?”

Riordan’s insides grew mushy as he watched the tender way Jermon helped Wilmer. For a man his size who was supposedly not very coordinated, he sure took care when assisting him, avoiding touching his wounds. Within two minutes, he had Wilmer ready.

When Riordan and Jermon opened the front door, Rhene and Erwan were pulling up in Rhene’s truck. They must’ve broken world records to be there that fast. Few words were spoken as Jermon helped Riordan into the front seat while

Rhene and Erwan carried Wilmer outside and installed him in the bed of the truck where they had a mattress set up for him. It would only be a short trip to the clinic, so Rhene would drive with Riordan next to him, with Erwan and Jermon in the bed with Wilmer.

No matter how quick the drive was, it was far from pleasant, and when they reached the clinic, Riordan let out a sigh of relief. They arrived at the same time as three wolves, who shifted back into their human forms and opened the doors to the clinic. Enar, Maz, and Lucan had chosen to shift so they could get there faster, and Riordan giggled at the side of those three men walking inside stark naked. These packs really were something else, and also, those three had nice asses, Enar especially.

“I promise you we’ll get dressed,” Enar said over his shoulder, winking at Riordan.

“It wasn’t like I was objecting,” Riordan shot back, but the smile on his face was wiped away when another cramp hit him. Clearly, giving birth to eggs wouldn’t take as long as a normal delivery. Jermon had prepared him for that, but the speed at which the cramps were accelerating and intensifying was proof he’d been right.

Minutes later, Riordan was in a delivery room, his feet up in the stirrups, while Enar and Maz had both changed into scrubs and had gloved up. Wilmer was stretched out on the bed right next to Riordan, so close he could hold his hand, and when Riordan reached for him, Wilmer immediately took his hand. Jermon stood on his other side. Riordan let out a deep breath. “Let’s do this.”

Enar nodded and gently bumped Maz, who cleared his throat. “My name is Maz Ahadi, and like Enar, I’m an ob-gyn specialized in care for omegas. I’m honored you’re allowing me to be present for this, and I promise you I’ll treat you to the best of my capabilities and will do whatever I can to keep you and your eggs safe.”

Riordan’s eyes grew teary. Clearly, Enar had instructed Maz about the need to introduce himself so Riordan would

allow him to treat him and touch him. He couldn't explain how he knew, but if Maz hadn't done that, Riordan wouldn't have tolerated his presence. "Thank you," he managed.

"Is it okay if I touch you?" Enar asked, and Riordan nodded quickly.

Enar's hand was warm as he placed it on Riordan's belly, even through the surgical glove he was wearing, and his touch was comforting. The second Enar's hand was on him, another cramp tore through Riordan, and he clenched his teeth. They were all quiet as Enar seemed to count, only breathing out when the cramp abated, and Riordan could relax again.

"Almost twenty seconds," Enar said to Jermon. "That means we're close, right?"

"Yes. The whole thing takes about two to three hours, and when the cramps get this long, the end is almost there."

"Okay." Enar turned to Maz. "Please double-check that the warmer is ready and at the correct temperature."

Then Enar's kind blue eyes found Riordan's. "I know this must be scary for you, and I get it. I would lie if I said I wasn't a little apprehensive as well. None of us has ever done this, but I have to trust in the magic that got you here. Your mates are right here, and so are Maz and I, and we'll do whatever we can to keep you and your eggs safe and healthy, okay?"

Riordan nodded.

The cramps increased, and a strange sort of spell came over him. Technically, the pain should have gotten worse, but it didn't. Instead, it withdrew, like he was rising above his own body, watching himself without actually feeling anything. And even before Enar told him, he knew he was fully dilated and ready to give birth.

Warmth flowed from the hands of his mates into him, through him, into the precious cargo inside him. He wasn't scared anymore, all fear gone, replaced by the wonder, the miracle of the moment. And when the eggs came out, one by one, it didn't hurt. All he felt was joy, exhilaration even, a happiness unlike anything he'd ever felt before. He was a part

of something special, something so extraordinary that it had never happened before, and yet he'd been chosen for this. Fate had picked him for this honor, and somehow, everything would be okay.

"One more," Enar said as he handed the third egg to Maz, who carefully rubbed it dry, then put it in the warmer. Enar's voice was wavering a little as if he was as affected by the moment as Riordan.

Jermon kissed Riordan's hand. "You're doing amazing, baby. I'm so proud of you."

On his other side, Wilmer held him. Riordan took a quick peek at his face. Wilmer's cheeks were wet with tears.

The last egg plopped out, and Riordan shuddered, his body strangely empty now. All four were out, all of them in one piece.

"This is going to be distinctly unpleasant, and I apologize in advance, but I want to make sure nothing got damaged inside," Enar said. He'd warned Riordan, but that didn't make it any easier. He squeezed the hands of both of his mates hard as Enar's hand went inside him, carefully checking for possible bleeds and problems. It didn't take more than twenty seconds, probably, but it felt like an eternity, and it hurt far more than delivering the eggs had done.

Finally, Enar retreated. "Everything looks great. Let's clean you up."

He quickly cleaned Riordan with disinfecting wipes, which made him shiver, then dabbed him dry with a fluffy towel. As soon as he was done, Enar took Riordan's feet out of the stirrups so he could stretch out on the bed, then covered him with a blanket.

"Can... Can I see them?" Riordan asked.

"Of course." Maz already walked over, holding the warmer. They had constructed it from a heated blanket folded into a carton box, like Jermon had described to them. The dragons had far fancier constructions, of course, but this would

have to do for now. At home, their bassinet was ready for them.

Maz put the box on Riordan's lap, and there they were, his eggs. They were bigger than he had expected, their shells covered in a bluish, pearly shimmery layer. Riordan extended a trembling hand and placed it on the first egg. A tiny spark, like a low-grade electrical voltage, hit his palm, and he laughed with joy. "I can feel him," he said, his voice as full of wonder as his heart. "He's alive."

With each of the three other eggs, he felt the same. All of them sent a spark through his hand. "Come, feel them." He gestured at Jermon first, then at Wilmer.

Enar pushed Wilmer's bed closer and helped him sit up so the alpha could reach the eggs. Jermon had waited for him, and then those two big hands touched at the same time.

"Oh!" Wilmer cried out. "They give off sparks."

"They do," Jermon confirmed. "You can feel them?"

Wilmer nodded. "I can, and every one of them feels different. It's the strangest, most beautiful feeling in the world."

Outside in the hallway, voices rose. "The dragons are here." Jermon looked up.

"The dragons? All of them?" Riordan asked.

"All of us. They can't help it. The eggs draw them in." His look was pleading as he faced Riordan. "Can they come in, please?"

This had to happen. Riordan wasn't sure how he knew it, but he did, and so he nodded.

Enar opened the door, and all the dragons filed in, followed by Rhene, who said, "Are you sure this is okay?"

"They need to see the eggs," Riordan said.

The dragons circled Riordan, Jermon, and Wilmer, and of course, the eggs on Riordan's lap. Erwan stepped forward, his eyes trained on the eggs. "I need to bless them," he said, his



voice taking on a solemn tone Riordan had never heard from him before.

Erwan stretched out his hands over the eggs, then slowly brought them down until he was touching all four. *“Beannaigh na huibheacha seo. Beannaigh na leanaí seo. Tugadh ceithre cinn, bealtaine ceithre fós. In ainm foinse na tine laistigh dúinn.”*

“Bless these eggs,” Jermon softly translated. “Bless these babies. Four were given, may four remain. In the name of the source of the fire within us.”

And then all the dragons came one by one, putting their hands on the eggs and blessing them. Riordan didn't speak Irish, and yet somehow he understood that all those whispered words were blessings, words of power spoken over his eggs. Wishes for a long life, for bountiful gifts, for the courage to stand up for what was right. He shouldn't be able to understand, and yet he did, and every word was carved into his soul like a diamond that was being cut to perfection.

His eggs were a miracle. They were special.

And one day, they would change the world.

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## Chapter Seventeen

**H**e had eggs.

Jermon stared at them as he sank a little lower in the chair. It was three days after the eggs had been born, and Wilmer and Riordan were both napping, the rolled-up blanket keeping them apart in bed, though they were holding hands. Wilmer had fallen asleep separated, but in his sleep, he'd turned toward Riordan, seeking his touch. They seemed so close, so intimate, and it was easy to believe everything was fine and Wilmer wasn't hurt. How Jermon wished that were true. But at least his mate was here, had chosen them over his parents, and that was something to be grateful for. Everything else would require patience.

The four eggs were in the bassinet on a heated blanket set to a constant low temperature. That was only important for the first month, Gael had told Jermon. After that, they could withstand changes in temperature as long as they didn't get too cold. But according to Gael, Riordan would make sure of that, since he'd be attuned to the eggs' every need.

His first clutch. How had he gotten this lucky? Not only had Riordan gotten pregnant the first time they'd had sex—in itself an anomaly—but all four eggs had survived being born. And Riordan wasn't even a dragon. What kind of powerful magic was that? Even if Jermon wanted to claim the credit, he couldn't because he had no clue how this had happened. None of them did.

But in the end, it didn't matter. All that mattered was that he would have four kids in about nine months. No, not he.

*They.* They would have four kids, and they'd have to prepare for that. Of course Jermon had wanted kids, but that had always been more of a generalized, abstract wish. Like one day, he'd love to become a father. But it had never been concrete, and it sure as hell had never looked like this, with him in a threesome with two wolves, one of them being an alpha, and four kids on the way.

The harsh reality was that he couldn't count on four eggs surviving, though. Chances were only one of them would make it. After all, that was what his mother had gone through. She'd lost all eggs save one in every clutch she'd carried. This, too, was something Jermon had always known in an abstract sense, but now that felt a hell of a lot more personal. Those four eggs were his babies, his kids, and the idea of losing even one of them was beyond terrifying.

So maybe he should stop thinking about that and instead focus on something else. With Wilmer and Riordan both asleep and the eggs safe, he needed to have a word with Erwan. He wanted to thank him for the ritual he'd done that had made such a difference for Wilmer, and so he headed out, leaving a quickly written note for his mates. Erwan would be back from the clinic, and Jermon set course for the barn his brother lived in for the moment.

"We should ask Jermon if he can come over."

Erwan's voice carried far enough to reach Jermon when he was approaching the barn. Who was his brother talking to?

"I know, but I don't want to drag him away from his clutch right now. He has different priorities."

That was an extraordinarily sensitive statement from Nativ, who wasn't known for his tact and understanding. Jermon's heart grew warm as he stepped around the barn and found all the other dragons sitting around the fire pit, where delicious smells indicated someone was slow-roasting ribs.

"I'm here." Jermon plopped down in an empty chair. "What's up?"

“We didn’t mean to talk about you behind your back.” Erwan looked a tad worried.

Jermon waved him away. “You didn’t sound like you were bad-mouthing me, and I appreciate your consideration for my current priorities. It so happens everyone’s napping, so I could step away for a bit.”

“How are the eggs doing?” Gael asked.

“Good. They’re strong from what I can tell.”

“Jermon...” Erwan didn’t need to say more than that.

Jermon held up his hands. “I know the statistics, believe me. But for now, they’re good.”

“It’s already a miracle all four eggs survived being born,” Finlay said with a sharp look sideways at Erwan. A few months ago, he wouldn’t have dared to treat the crown prince that way, but Jermon loved seeing him and Gael grow in confidence.

“That’s how I approach it,” Jermon said. “I don’t know what the future will hold, but I’ll take the good news where I can get it. Now, what were you guys talking about?”

Erwan sighed. “The frustration about being stuck. The Murphys are coming in a few days for the next training session, but we have mixed feelings about it.”

Yeah, no shit. Jermon knew exactly what his brother meant. “It’s a hard spot we’re in, being so dependent on a group of men we don’t really like and who seem to have values that are contrary to ours.”

“Not only that, but I’m more and more convinced they have their own agenda,” Blair said. “One that isn’t necessarily good news for us.”

“I agree,” Erwan said. “There’s a lot going on behind the scenes that we’re being kept out of. I hate to accuse them of lying to us, but I’m not certain they’re telling us the truth.”

Jermon thought of what Wilmer had said when they had discussed this topic. “Wilmer brought up something interesting. He said they may not be teaching and telling us

everything we know out of fear we'd become too powerful and would somehow be able to thwart their plans, whatever they are."

Blair clicked his tongue. "You mean like leaving out a lot of information, which would technically not be lying."

"Exactly. For example, when that Tynan guy scanned me, he said the gift of magic was strong in me and that with training, I would make a formidable ally. But so far, all I've heard about my gift is that I can detect magic and gifts in other dragons and that I should be able to do stronger spells than everyone else, maybe have more powerful magical abilities. That doesn't sound all that formidable. You know what I mean? Wilmer suggested they're deliberately not telling me what else I can do with my gift out of fear or concern I would use it against them."

"That makes total sense," Erwan said slowly. "But how does that help us? They're the only ones who can teach us what we need to know, and if they don't, what alternative do we have?"

"Emma," Jermon and Nadiv said at the same time, then grinned at each other.

"We need to find Emma." Nadiv grew serious again. "We're far past the thirty day mark she gave us, and I've been worried sick about her. This only confirms it's urgent we track her down."

"How do we do that?" Jermon asked. "How do we find her when you said she's not responding to your messages?"

Nadiv bit his lip, then sighed. "We'll have to look for her. In the castle," he clarified when Jermon frowned.

"In the castle? But Father will certainly sense our presence," Erwan protested.

"Not if we cloak ourselves with a spell," Nadiv said. "Which Jermon should be able to do with his gift."

A cloaking spell? He'd practiced it once with the Murphys, but he hadn't been all that successful. "I'm not convinced I'm ready yet to pull that off."

“I know, but it’s our only chance,” Nadiv said. “Can you practice it?”

“I’m happy to try, but I’m not sure if I’d be able to grow stronger on my own.”

Erwan cleared his throat. “What if we put Finlay next to you? As a booster dragon, he should be able to amplify your powers.”

“I’m still struggling with using my powers as well,” Finlay said apologetically. “The Murphy dragon who taught me wasn’t exactly forthcoming with practical details, probably annoyed because he was stuck with an omega.”

Despite everything, that slightly sassy statement made Jermon smile. “Why don’t we give it a try?” he suggested.

Finlay widened his eyes. “Right now?”

“Sure, why not? We’re in safe company here.”

“Okay.” Finlay still sounded hesitant, but he got up and sat down in the grass across from Jermon. Jermon rose from his chair and lowered himself onto the grass as well. Funny how that immediately made something shift inside him. Maybe the connection with the earth mattered.

He closed his eyes, focusing on his breathing first. After a few deep, slow breaths that released tension from his shoulders and chest, he called up the fire within him. It responded eagerly, as if it had been waiting to come forward, filling him with warmth, like he was glowing from the inside out.

“*Ceilt sinn,*” he whispered, sending his fire into the words. *Conceal us.*

Across from him, Finlay softly breathed out words as well, but Jermon couldn’t make them out. Power rippled through him, making his whole body tingle. Something was happening, but was it what he had asked for?

“Holy shit!” Nadiv’s exclamation broke Jermon’s concentration, and in reflex, he opened his eyes. The power died down as if a switch had been turned off.

“It was working.” Erwan sent an irate glance in Nativ’s direction. “Until this one opened his big mouth.”

“What did you see?” Jermon was much more focused on the good news than on the interruption.

“You were both fading, becoming semitransparent. I couldn’t believe my eyes.” Nativ still sounded shocked. “Sorry for messing it up, but I was too excited.”

“No worries.” Jermon meant it. He might’ve done the same thing in Nativ’s place. “But I am wondering why it worked so much better than when I tried it with the Murphys?”

“It could be the boosting Finlay did.”

Blair’s suggestion was valid, yet it didn’t feel right. Finlay had definitely played a part in it, but there was more to it.

“Could it be the Murphys were somehow blocking your power?” Gael’s voice was soft and hesitant, but his suggestion was an excellent one.

“That’s definitely something to consider,” Erwan said. “Thanks for speaking up. I hadn’t thought of that.”

Gael blushed at all the attention, offering a shy but happy smile.

“Try it without Finlay’s boosting,” Blair offered. “See if it feels the same.”

Jermon nodded, obediently closed his eyes again, and repeated the procedure. It took him a little longer, but then the fire filled him again, and when he spoke the words, the soft gasps around him told him it was working. He kept it up for a minute, then let it die down. Jermon opened his eyes.

“You were completely gone.” Erwan looked shocked. “We saw you disappear into nothing, like you were fading away.”

“So it wasn’t Finlay’s boosting.” Blair scratched his chin. “But something was different from when you practiced it before.”

“Gael could be right that the Murphys were blocking you,” Valdis said. “Though doesn’t that imply they’d had to be

blocking all of us? That seems like a big strain on their powers.”

He made a good point. But if it wasn't the Murphys blocking, and it wasn't Finlay's boosting, then what made the difference? What had been different about what he had done back then compared to now? He'd used the same words, the same process. They were missing something, a key element. But what?

Another memory of something Wilmer had said tickled him. “The last healing ritual you did on Wilmer made a big difference,” he said to Erwan. Hell, that had been the whole reason he'd come to find his brother, but he'd gotten a little sidetracked.

“It did?” Erwan sounded surprised.

“His headaches are gone, at least for now. Enar wasn't expecting that to happen for a few more weeks.”

Erwan frowned. “I'm glad to hear it, but I'm not sure why it worked.”

“Wilmer's theory was that it was because I was there, since I hadn't been present the previous time you attempted to heal him.”

Silence descended. “That does suggest you have more power than the Murphys are showing you,” Nativ finally said. “Which reiterates my point that we need to find Emma.”

But Jermon wasn't done yet. “Riordan wondered how the Murphys were able to find us after sensing the magic we used. Like, is there something we can do to pick up Emma's magic, if and when she uses it, and then track her down?”

“Your mates are asking really good questions,” Erwan said with a smile.

“But do we have an answer?” Jermon pressed.

Blair sighed. “No, so we can add that to the long list of questions we need answers to.”

“Here's an idea.” Nativ leaned forward. “What if we all try to get at least one question answered tomorrow during the



next training session? If we ask them all, the Murphys might get suspicious, but if we see an opportunity to ask just one of the things we've been wondering about, they might either answer it or reveal at least a little more."

"That's an excellent suggestion." Erwan perked up.

"If I may add something..." Jermon looked at Finlay and Gael. "You two have the best shot at this. They'll never suspect you're fishing for information, considering their low regard for omegas. If you play up the stereotype of the innocent, not-too-smart omega, you might be able to get some information from their alphas."

Finlay and Gael looked at each other, then grinned. "Oh, I think we can come up with some tricks," Finlay said. "Those Murphy alphas won't know what hit them."

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## Chapter Eighteen

As much as Wilmer had appreciated his stay in the clinic and the great way Enar and Maz and everyone else had taken care of him, he loved being home. And yes, it really did feel like home after two weeks, and wasn't that interesting? He was living with two men he barely knew, thrust into a situation that should have had him running for the hills, and yet he felt at peace. His wolf kept assuring him that he was in the right place, and he was. These were his mates. He might not remember them, but they knew who he was, and they showed their care for him every day.

Jermon had left for another training day with the Murphys, and he'd announced he'd probably be gone the whole morning, maybe even past that. He had shared the dragons' plan to pry information loose from the Murphys, and Wilmer had laughed at the idea of using Finlay and Gael. How smart to utilize the Murphys' weakness against them. He couldn't wait until Jermon was back to hear about his experiences.

Riordan quietly slipped into the room, his face lighting up when he saw Wilmer was awake. He carefully climbed onto the bed beside him, making sure not to jostle him, then stretched out. "Did you sleep well?"

"I did. I'm getting really good at that, sleeping."

Riordan caressed his cheek. "Enar said it'll be a while until you're back at your normal energy levels."

"I know, but it's frustrating sometimes. I may not remember the last two years, but I do know that before that, I

always had a lot of energy and had no issue working from sunup till sundown. I can't help but wonder how long it'll take until I'm back at that level... Or even if I ever will be."

Riordan bit his lip. "My first instinct is to say you shouldn't think like that, but that's not a good reaction, is it? As much as I want to reassure you that you'll get there, we don't know."

Wilmer smiled. "You were paying attention when Enar did his reality check speech."

Riordan sighed. "At the time, I thought he was overreacting a little, you know? Of course we were going to be honest with you. At least, I had every intention to be. But it's much harder than I had expected, and the risk of toxic positivity is real."

Toxic positivity. There was a term Wilmer had never heard before until Enar had used it, warning the three of them against forced optimism, especially in situations that called for realism. He'd made it clear that Wilmer needed room to be negative at times and that forcing him to see only the positives wasn't helpful in the long run. Wilmer was starting to discover how true that was.

"I know it's not easy to face reality, but I do appreciate it, and I can tell you it's far more helpful to me than empty clichés. We don't know if I'll ever fully recover, and that's a reality I have to be honest about."

"That's not easy for me," Riordan confessed. "But then again, nothing about this situation is easy for any of us, so there is that."

"No lie detected. What's the hardest part for you, if you're willing to share?"

It had to be the eggs, right? If that wasn't the most mind-boggling magic ever, Wilmer didn't know what was.

"Honestly? Knowing how to treat you."

How to treat him? "I'm not sure what you mean."

“You’re missing two years, but I’m not, and every time, I have to resist the urge to pick up where we left off, to treat you like I did before you got hurt. Like, when I walked in and saw you were awake, all I wanted to do was kiss you and snuggle with you for a bit, but I can’t. Or at least, I don’t think I should.”

Riordan was right. They came at this from opposite perspectives, and while their struggles were different, it wasn’t any easier for Riordan than it was for Wilmer. To be treated like a stranger or a casual acquaintance at best by the man you had fallen for had to weigh heavily on him. But what was the alternative?

“I don’t think I would object to you kissing me or snuggling with me,” he said slowly, trying to sort things out in his head. “That doesn’t hurt me, and it’s not offensive, and it doesn’t bother me in any way. It’s more that...”

How did he put this? Riordan had raised an excellent point, but even with the headaches gone, Wilmer’s mind wasn’t as sharp as it used to be, and he had a much harder time keeping his line of thought and finding the right words. The last thing he wanted to do was hurt Riordan, so he had to be careful here.

“I’m much more concerned about hurting you than I am about you doing something I would object to.”

Riordan frowned. “How would you hurt me?”

“Because when you’re kissing me or touching me or whatever, you’re expressing your feelings for me. In a normal relationship, those feelings would be reciprocated, but I can’t. If I kiss you back, if I hold you, if I let you pleasure me, or we do anything else sexual, all it would be for me is lust. I hate using that word because it sounds so shallow, but I can’t think of another expression to describe it better. I like you and Jermon, I really do, and I’m convinced we belong together, but that’s more a rational conviction than an emotional one. My feelings haven’t caught up yet, but in the meantime, I don’t want you to be rejected or hurt by that.”

Understanding had dawned on Riordan’s face as Wilmer put into words what he was experiencing. “It’s so sweet of you

to be worried about me, but I can take it. My appearance may be one of a classic weak, vulnerable omega, but I'm much stronger than I look."

Wilmer snorted. "You, my precious, are anything but weak and vulnerable. Physically, maybe, though after watching you pop out those eggs, even that is debatable. That must've hurt like crazy."

"Actually, much less than I had expected. At first, yes, but once I was ready to push them out, I barely felt any pain at all. And I feel absolutely fine now, and it's only been a week. Must be some kind of dragon magic."

"If only we could figure out a way to use that magic on me, that would be amazing. Though that last healing ritual made a huge difference, and my headaches are still gone. It's more everything else now. The slow recovery of my burn wounds, but especially my physical weakness."

"I think that's also because you're an alpha. You guys aren't used to being weak and needing help."

Riordan wasn't wrong about that. "I'm sure that has a lot to do with it. But whatever the cause, it's annoying as fuck."

"Welcome to my life," Riordan said dryly.

"Anyway, what I was trying to say is that I'm okay with you treating me as you did before as long as you understand I might not react in the same way."

"So I can kiss you and snuggle with you?"

Riordan sounded so eager that warmth flowed through Wilmer's body. "Absolutely."

He'd barely uttered the last syllable when Riordan scooted over, carefully lifted Wilmer's arm, and snuggled up against him. Wilmer smiled as the omega let out a happy sigh, placing his hand on Wilmer's belly.

"You needed that, huh?" Wilmer said softly after they had lain like that for a while, not saying anything.

"I've always been a touchy-feely person, but lately, that's gotten even worse. Or I should say, more intense because I

don't necessarily think it's a bad thing. But yeah, I often need to touch you and Jermon to feel close to you."

"You can touch as much as you need to, precious."

"I love that you call me that again."

"It must come from my subconscious because I don't do it on purpose. It's like my brain still knows, except it's shielding me from that knowledge." He let out a long sigh. "Anyway, enough about me. How are the eggs doing?"

Riordan raised his head. "Do you want to see them?"

Did he? As always, thinking about the eggs stirred up contradictory emotions. Yes, he was happy and excited and wanted to see them, but he was also sad and disappointed and frustrated. But he'd have to deal with those emotions himself. Riordan didn't need to carry those on top of everything else on his plate. "I'd love to."

Riordan scrambled off the bed, then helped Wilmer into a sitting position and placed pillows behind his back until he was comfortable. He carefully lifted the first egg out of the crib and put it on Wilmer's lap. It was so pretty, light blue and shiny like a pearl.

"You can touch it," Riordan encouraged him, and Wilmer caressed the shell with his index finger.

Immediately, the sparks in his finger made him smile. "He's connecting."

"They always do as soon as they're being touched. They love being close to us, and they recognize our voices too." Riordan made a face. "Finlay suggested I sing to them, but trust me, nobody wants to hear me sing, not even my kids. Hell, I don't even want to listen to myself sing. I'm incredibly tone-deaf, so I'll save everyone that torture."

Wilmer laughed. "On behalf of the eggs and myself, thank you for that."

Riordan brought over the other eggs and gently laid them on a blanket, resting against each other.

"How fragile are they?" Wilmer asked.

“Not fragile at all, from what I’ve been told. And the older they get, the stronger they become. Near the end, though, their shell gets thinner and weaker, which is what allows them to break out of it and hatch.”

“God, I can’t wait to see that. That has to be the most amazing sight ever.”

“Is that you speaking as a dad-to-be or as a veterinarian?” Riordan teased him.

“A little of both, probably. I miss being with the animals, that’s for certain. Pride especially.”

“I can imagine. He’s such a wonderful horse. Jermon and Maz have been riding him to make sure he gets enough exercise, but Jermon said he can tell Pride misses you. He’s much more restless than usual.”

Wilmer nodded. “That doesn’t surprise me at all. Horses are sensitive to emotions, and I’m sure he misses me.”

He caressed the eggs, smiling every time they sent a spark through his fingers. Riordan had curled up at his feet, on the other side of the eggs, and he was touching them as well, whispering the occasional sweet nothing. A tune popped into Wilmer’s head, and he started humming it until the words came to him.

Riordan’s eyes grew wide. “*Dancing Queen?* You’re singing Abba to them?”

“That song is a classic,” Wilmer defended himself. “Everyone should know that one. Hell, everyone should know most of Abba’s repertoire. Their songs are amazing and far more complicated than most people give them credit for.”

Riordan slowly shook his head, giggling. “I’ll take your word for it. And considering I can’t sing in the first place, it’ll have to do. Keep singing, and we’ll see if the eggs protest.”

They didn’t, and Wilmer sang to them until he became too tired to keep his eyes open, and he fell asleep with a smile on his face.

## Chapter Nineteen

**A**s soon as Wilmer had fallen asleep, Riordan put the eggs back in the bassinet, double-checking to make sure the heated blanket was on. “Sleep well, my loves,” he whispered and pressed a soft kiss on each of the eggs.

Crazy? Maybe, but he didn’t care. Finlay and Gael had told him to follow his instincts, and that was exactly what he was doing. And how sweet had it been that Wilmer had sung to them? He’d gone through at least eight Abba songs before drifting off, and Riordan’s heart had been so full it had felt like bursting.

But now that Wilmer was napping and the eggs were resting too, Riordan had something else he needed to do. A lot of what Wilmer struggled with was his burden to bear and hard for Riordan to alleviate, but Wilmer had mentioned one thing Riordan could do something about. He headed to the stalls, where he found Kean and Michael hard at work. They were mucking out Sarie’s stall while the magnificent horse roamed free in the pastures with the others.

When Riordan came close, Kean looked up and put down his pitchfork. “Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes? How are you doing?”

Riordan couldn’t get over how attentive all the pack members were, even those who belonged to the Hayes pack. He’d only met Kean a few times, but the beta’s concern was genuine. “I’m good. Recovering much faster than I had expected. I pretty much feel like the old me again.”



Was that too much information? Not everyone was comfortable with omegas sharing personal and medical stuff. But Kean didn't seem fazed. "I'm glad to hear that. It must've been hard to know what to expect under the circumstances."

Riordan chuckled. "You can say that again. I'm happy to report giving birth to eggs is far easier than to an actual baby."

"Duly noted." Kean's grin was wide. "Anyway, were you just checking in? Or were you looking for Jermon? I don't think he's back from the training yet."

"Actually, I wanted to ask for your help with something. I know you're probably super busy, what with Wilmer out of commission and Jermon being absent for his training, but —"

"Happy to help," Kean interrupted him gently. "What can I do for you?"

"Wilmer really misses Pride, but he's not strong enough yet to come here. Is there any way you could help me bring Pride over to our cabin so Wilmer can see him?"

Kean's face lit up. "Absolutely. What a fantastic idea. Research has shown how important animals can be for healing, especially those people were already close to. I'm sure a reunion like that would be good for both Wilmer and Pride."

"Thank you. Yeah, I'm hoping it'll do him good."

"And who knows, maybe it will shake loose some memories."

Riordan nodded. "He's been remembering more and more, but so far, it's all been fragmented. Little snippets, seemingly insignificant details his brain is somehow pushing forward."

Some of those were not suitable for sharing with Kean, but Riordan left those out.

"That's wonderful to hear. Would you like me to bring Pride by later? Or were you coming to get him right now?"

Riordan checked his watch. "Wilmer slept in this morning, so I'm not expecting him to nap for very long. He should

probably be awake in about half an hour, so what do you think?"

"Let's get Pride from the pasture and bring him here, and then you can text me whenever Wilmer is awake, and I'll bring him over. How does that sound?"

"Thank you so much. This means a lot to him."

Kean put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. "Of course. It's my pleasure to help."

Riordan took a quick look around the stalls, which looked messier than they used to. "I'm so sorry you guys are struggling to keep up."

Kean shrugged. "We're doing what we can, but we're definitely short. With most of the men being pulled from their jobs to help with construction here, a lot of things are falling by the wayside. It is what it is. As long as all the animals are fed and their living quarters are reasonably clean, we're doing a great job. Everything else will have to wait until Wilmer has recovered."

His earlier discussion with Wilmer went through Riordan's head. "If he fully recovers. At this point, that's not a guarantee."

Kean's shoulders dropped. "I know."

Kean held up a hand, signaling to Riordan to wait for a moment, then walked into the stall Michael was working on. "I'm heading over to the pasture for a moment to get Pride. I'll be right back."

Riordan couldn't make out Michael's muffled response, but Kean grabbed a halter and gestured that they could leave, and with a few quick steps, Riordan caught up to him, and they made their way outside.

"I've been worried about Wilmer," Kean admitted after a little while.

"You guys have been friends since college, right?"

"Yeah, we hit it off from the moment we met. He's a great guy. Steady, smart, someone you can rely on. And surprisingly

sweet underneath that somewhat tough alpha exterior.”

Riordan smiled. “He is. I’m so lucky with him and Jermon.”

Kean was quiet for a moment. “I’m not sure if you knew, but Wilmer and I hooked up back in college.”

“No worries, he told me.”

“Oh, good. I’m so glad to hear that.” Kean’s voice was full of relief. “I didn’t want to keep it from you, but I wasn’t sure if he’d had the time to tell you.”

Riordan shot a smile sideways. “He said it was one of the reasons why he decided to join the Hightower pack rather than stay in yours. Apparently, Bray is of the jealous kind?”

Kean rolled his eyes. “He sure as fuck is, and Wilmer and I didn’t think it wise to poke that particular bear. He’s possessive, my Bray, but it comes from love.”

“I’m sure it does, but it seems smart not to test it.”

“We all have our faults and weaknesses, but it’s easy to forgive Bray for being a jealous asshole sometimes because he’s such a good mate and a fantastic father. No one cares more about our kids than he does.”

“You guys have two kids, right?”

Kean nodded. “With a third on the way.”

“Can I ask you something personal? And if you don’t want to answer, that’s fine.”

“Let me guess. You want to ask how it feels to be a father to a child you’re not biologically related to.”

Riordan wasn’t even amazed that Kean had guessed it. Those Hightowers were smart, all of them. “Yeah, that. I’m worried for Wilmer, as you can imagine.”

Kean let out a long sigh. “He’s in a tough spot with that one. At least in our pack, the oldest child has always been the alpha heir, so the second kid not being biologically theirs has been a little easier for our alphas to stomach, if you pardon my expression. But for Wilmer, that’s different. Not only are the

eggs not biologically related to him, but he doesn't have that guarantee of a child of his own either. And what with Jermon being an alpha as well, man, that's tough."

With his perfect summary, Kean knew exactly what the core of the problem was. "You know Wilmer better than anyone else. How can we help him through this?"

"I think you guys are doing what you can. The fact that you're aware and sensitive to his feelings means a lot, I would think." Kean was quiet for a bit. "Our situation was a little different as well, since Jax, our oldest son, had already been born when I met Ruari. He and Bray had had a one-night stand that had gotten Ruari pregnant. Bray wasn't even aware he had a son until their paths crossed again. I didn't have those months during Ruari's pregnancy to worry about whether or not I would feel a bond with his baby. I loved Jax from the get-go, and that made things a hell of a lot easier."

Riordan bit his lip. "Wilmer does seem to be bonding with the eggs. He's holding them, even singing to them."

"Singing? That, I have to see."

Riordan giggled. "Earlier today, he was singing Abba songs to them."

Kean laughed out loud. "Oh my god, that man and his weird Abba obsession. At least he's a decent singer."

"He is, and it was a super sweet moment. But... I don't know what will happen when the eggs hatch. We're having little dragons, not babies, so will he be able to bond with those?"

"You know what never ceases to amaze me? The parental instinct of animals, even when it's for a young from another species. I've seen mama dogs nurse little kittens who had lost their mama and a cow raising a foal after his mom passed away. That parental instinct is strong in us, including instances when the offspring doesn't look like us. I have faith in Wilmer's character but also in his biological instincts. He's an alpha, Riordan. He's wired to love and protect his offspring, no matter what."

Riordan had never looked at it like that, but it was a comforting point of view. “Thank you.”

“If you ever need to vent, I’m here, okay? I might not be the most obvious choice for you, but I still wanted to offer. I’m a good listener.”

“You are, and I’ll remember that offer. It means a lot to me.”

They had reached the pasture, and even before they called him, Pride came running as if he knew why they were there. Kean jumped the fence with ease, then helped Riordan climb over as well, albeit a tad less elegant.

Riordan held out his hands to Pride, and the horse sniffed them, then came closer and pushed his face against Riordan’s. He slung his arms around Pride’s neck and dropped his cheek against his soft coat. “I know you missed Wilmer. Want to go visit him? I’m sure he’ll be over the moon to see you again.”

Pride was unusually calm as he allowed Kean to put the halter over his head and attach a line to it. As they led him out of the gate and back toward the stalls, he followed them without hesitation. “It’s as if he knows why we’re getting him,” Kean said with a sense of wonder in his voice. “I’ll never be amazed at how much animals pick up from us.”

Back at the stalls, Kean gently bumped Riordan’s shoulder. “You go back to your mate and your eggs, and I’ll make sure Pride is ready to leave, okay? Just text me when Wilmer is awake.”

When Riordan got back, Wilmer was still sleeping, but as Riordan had predicted, he woke up not long after. Riordan quickly shot a text to Kean.

“Why don’t we sit outside for a little bit?” he suggested to Wilmer after helping him to the bathroom. “The weather is gorgeous, and it would do you good to catch some sunshine. Now that your headache is gone, the sun shouldn’t bother you anymore, right?”

“It shouldn’t, but I’ll wear sunglasses just in case. And thank you for suggesting that. I’d love to.”

Wilmer slowly made his way to the little patio behind their cabin, where Riordan had already set up a comfortable chair for him. He covered him with a blanket, knowing that Wilmer was often cold, then rushed inside to make tea for them both. He had just brought out the tea and some cookies when he heard the unmistakable sound of a horse neighing.

Wilmer set up straight. “What was that? That sounded like...”

Kean popped around the corner, leading Pride, and as soon as the horse spotted Wilmer, Kean let him go. Pride immediately trotted over to Wilmer, who pushed himself into a standing position, then wrapped his arms around the horse and leaned against him. His face was hidden from Riordan, and he couldn’t understand a word of the muffled words Wilmer was saying, but when Wilmer finally looked up, his face was wet with tears.

“Thank you. Thank you both so much.”

Pride pushed his head against Wilmer’s, and Wilmer laughed. “I know. I missed you too. God, I’m so happy to see you.”

That feeling was definitely mutual, and Riordan’s heart filled with joy at the sight of Wilmer reuniting with his horse. He and Kean had done good.

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## Chapter Twenty

When Jermon walked back into the cabin, he was practically vibrating with energy. Training with the Murphys had been different this time now that they were onto them and had a plan of their own. He couldn't wait to meet up with the others and compare notes.

"I'm back!" he called out.

"We're out on the patio," Riordan shouted back.

Jermon grabbed a glass of lemonade and made his way outside. Wilmer lay on the lounge chair, covered by a blanket, and Riordan was curled up on a chair next to him. Wilmer sported the biggest smile, and the sight sent a warm spike through Jermon. He loved seeing him smile again.

"Hey, baby," he said, then bent in and kissed Riordan.

"Hi." He waved at Wilmer. Awkward as fuck, but what else could he do?

"You can kiss him," Riordan said, and Jermon frowned.

"Excuse me?"

"Wilmer said he's okay with us hugging and touching and kissing him. He understands where we're coming from."

Wilmer chuckled. "It's not like it's a sacrifice, precious." He turned to Jermon. "Riordan explained it's hard for you to know how to treat me, since you're not missing two years of your memory. So all I said was that I understood and that it's fine if you treat me like you used to. It'll only help my brain get into the right mode, I think."

“Yeah?” Jermon’s heart grew warm. “You don’t think it’s weird to be treated like a boyfriend by two men you’ve only met a few weeks ago?”

Wilmer shrugged. “I don’t think we knew each other that well before. From what I gathered, we were still figuring everything out.”

“We were.” Jermon didn’t ever want to lie to him. “In fact, we weren’t officially together before the attack. We were definitely getting there, but we hadn’t talked yet about where we were heading. I think maybe we felt we should take it a little slower.”

That last time they’d had sex, against the side of the barn, seemed like an eternity ago, even though it was mere weeks. How things had changed in that time.

Wilmer snorted, pointing at himself. “It doesn’t get much slower than this, trust me.”

Jermon rolled his eyes. “Not that kind of slow.”

He hesitated but then walked over and briefly kissed Wilmer. More would feel awkward, but even this one kiss made his whole body light up. He needed Wilmer, emotionally and physically, and this was definitely a step in the right direction. As he leaned back, his nose caught a familiar scent, and he frowned.

“Have you been around horses?”

Wilmer’s smile was so wide it stretched his entire face. “Kean and Riordan organized a surprise visit from Pride. God, I was so happy to see him.”

Jermon looked at Riordan. “What a wonderful initiative. I can’t believe I didn’t think of that.”

He should have. He knew how much his horse meant to Wilmer and vice versa.

“Don’t blame yourself for that,” Wilmer said firmly. “You have so much on your plate it’s a wonder you haven’t toppled over from sheer exhaustion. How was the training today?”



Tired was about the last thing he was, but Jermon kept that to himself. He couldn't even explain where his strange energy buzz was coming from. He plopped down in the chair and took a few big gulps from his lemonade. "It was good. Well, as good as could be expected. I worked with Colin again, and he wanted to focus on protective spells. Not what I would've picked, but I did learn some new stuff."

"Oh, good," Wilmer said.

Jermon shifted in his seat, resisting the urge to tap his fingers.

"What's with the ants in your pants?" Riordan chuckled.

Jermon forced himself to sit still. "Sorry. I've been restless the whole day."

"No need to say sorry. It wasn't criticism," Riordan said.

"Oh, okay. S—" He held back another apology, then sighed. "I should be tired, but I'm not. You know that feeling when you're exhausted but have this weird burst of energy? That's how I feel. It'll wear off."

Wilmer was studying him with narrowed eyes. "You know what always helps in a situation like that?"

Jermon shook his head.

"A good, hard fuck. Just let out all that pent-up energy in some explosive sex. I'm sure our sweet Riordan here would happily volunteer to be your partner."

What? "I can't just... It wouldn't be fair to..."

"Not fair to me? I can't have sex yet, not that kind anyway, but I can sure as fuck watch. As long as one of you volunteers to take care of me afterward, I'm all down with a little private porn show."

Oh my god, he was serious. Wilmer was proposing for Jermon to fuck Riordan and have him watch, and even the thought was enough to make Jermon instantly hard. It had been so long since he'd fucked Riordan, and even though he should have been used to celibacy after being locked up for two hundred years, he'd struggled with this. Not as much as

Riordan, though, and one look at the hungry expression on the omega's face and Jermon knew he was all in. Were they really doing this?

"Are you sure?" he asked Wilmer. "We waited for you, and we can keep waiting. You shouldn't feel pressured."

"I'm not, but it's sweet of you to reiterate. I promise you I wouldn't have proposed this if I didn't want it. You two need it, and how could I object to watching?"

"I'll suck you off," Riordan promised Wilmer hoarsely. "It would be my pleasure."

Wilmer winked at the omega. "Then we're all set because you want this, precious, don't you? You've been dreaming about that monster dick for weeks."

Riordan moaned. "I have."

"Inside," Jermon managed. "I'm not doing this outside."

Helping Wilmer get undressed down to his boxer shorts and back into the bed didn't dim their desire. If nothing else, Jermon was grateful he had the opportunity to cool off a little. But with Wilmer stretched out on the bed, Jermon and Riordan were left standing, staring at each other. Riordan had stripped down to his underwear as well, whereas Jermon had only taken off his shirt and was still dressed in jeans and barefoot.

Jermon's mouth watered. God, Riordan was so beautiful—miles of soft curves and smooth, flawless skin, all on display for him. For them. He took a step toward him, then another one until he was close enough to place his hand against Riordan's cheek. "You're gorgeous," he whispered.

Riordan rubbed against his hand like a cat, and Jermon brushed his lower lip with his thumb. They were only inches apart, their eyes focused on each other as Riordan sucked Jermon's thumb into his mouth. The sensation of that hot, slick tongue circling his thumb shot straight to Jermon's balls. He moved in, smoothly replacing his thumb with his tongue, sweeping into Riordan's mouth.

Within seconds, the kiss grew deep, wet, passionate, and Jermon placed his hands on Riordan's ass and lifted him up.

The omega wrapped his legs around Jermon's waist, and they kept kissing and kissing, Riordan rubbing his groin against Jermon. Jermon wasn't sure Riordan realized he was doing it, as his movements seemed instinctual, but it was so freaking hot.

Jermon sucked Riordan's full bottom lip into his mouth, teasing it with his tongue, then his teeth. Wilmer had done that once to Jermon, and it had been the best thing ever. Riordan whimpered, shifting restlessly.

"Jermon," Riordan moaned. "Hurry up."

How could he say no to that?

"Mmm, you two are so hot together..." Wilmer said, his voice low and deep. "Play with his nipples for me, precious. I wanna see how he likes that."

Before Jermon could respond, Riordan unwrapped his legs and sank down again, bringing his mouth to Jermon's right nipple. It perked into a tight bud, and when Riordan sucked on it, a delicious spark of pleasure cruised through Jermon's body. Riordan did it again, then gently bit down. Oh gods, that went straight to Jermon's balls, which tightened in response.

Riordan's nimble fingers found Jermon's left nipple, and he rolled it between his thumb and index finger, shooting another flare of pleasure through Jermon. Riordan switched positions, using his mouth on the left and his hands on the right. Jermon had never known his nipples had so many nerves. Every touch, every lick, every scrape of Riordan's teeth sent him higher...and they'd barely gotten started.

"Move downward," Wilmer told Riordan. "Slowly."

Riordan happily obeyed, kissing his way from Jermon's nipples down to his belly button, where that devious tongue teased him until Jermon was squirming. He threaded his fingers through Riordan's hair, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to push him away or pull him closer. Both? It was the sweetest torture to have Riordan spend so much time worshiping his body when all Jermon wanted to do was bend him over the bed and fuck him until he saw stars.

But if this was what Wilmer wanted, then Jermon would bear it. He would endure anything and everything to make his mate happy. And happy Wilmer was, stretched out on the bed, his hand cupping his cock and making slow, round movements. His cheeks were reddened, and he looked stunning.

Riordan had reached Jermon's waistband, his fingers on his zipper. Finally.

"Stop," Wilmer said, and Jermon barely held back a whine. "If you touch him there, he'll blow. We can't have that."

Jermon groaned. This was gonna be torture, wasn't it?

"Why don't you return the favor?" Wilmer suggested. "Get naked, precious, and climb onto the bed so I have a perfect view."

Riordan did as he was told, happily giggling, and Jermon took a steadying breath. All he had to do was be patient. He'd get to fuck Riordan eventually, right? Please let it be so.

But when he took in Riordan's luscious form, all spread out on the bed, something stirred inside Jermon. Yes, he wanted to fuck him, bury himself again in that tight hole, but Wilmer was right. Riordan deserved to be worshiped as well. He deserved for Jermon to take the time to fully appreciate him. He stepped up and slid his hand down Riordan's silky smooth chest with the pretty pink nipples. He'd gained a little weight, maybe from carrying the eggs, and it looked amazing on him, accentuating those tantalizing curves.

They had raised the bed on pallets so it was easier for Wilmer to get in and out, and it now provided Jermon with full access to Riordan's body without having to bend. "I don't think I've ever seen anyone with skin as perfect as yours," he said softly.

"Moisturizer," Riordan said hoarsely. "I use a lot of moisturizing body lotion."

"Mmm, I can tell. It's so soft, like velvet."

When Jermon caressed lower, Riordan pulled up his legs and spread them wide. The sweetest scent drifted into

Jermon's nose, the slightly musky, tangy smell of Riordan's slick. His body knew what was coming and was preparing him for it.

Riordan's cock was as pretty as the rest of him. Perfectly sized for an omega, it stood erect, the tip flushed and wet. Considering Riordan had volunteered to take care of Wilmer, maybe Jermon could return the favor with Riordan. He grabbed Riordan's waist and dragged him sideways so his feet rested on the edge of the bed and he was in the perfect position for Jermon when he kneeled on a pillow. He dropped kissed on his knees first, then down his legs, even peppering soft kisses all over his feet. Silly, maybe, but Riordan seemed to appreciate it, and that was all that mattered.

He reversed course, working his way back up Riordan's legs. That spot where his leg met his groin smelled delicious, all sexy and slightly sweaty, and Jermon breathed it in deeply. More kisses, then a path sideways until Riordan's balls rubbed against his cheek. He didn't even think but took one into his mouth. Riordan arched his back, moaning so loud it startled Jermon. He lost his rhythm for a moment but managed to pick it back up, sucking on one testicle and rolling the other in his hand, then swapped.

Riordan's cock was leaking, and as Jermon bumped it, he got the precum all over his cheek. He didn't mind one bit, but he also wanted to taste it. Reluctantly, he let go of Riordan's balls and licked the crown of his cock, where another big drop was waiting for him. Then he lost all patience and sucked him into his mouth, all the way until his nose was pressed against Riordan's pubic area.

He put pressure on Riordan's cock, relaxed again, and let him slide out of his mouth, only to repeat the move. Suckling the tip felt good too, and so he did that for a bit between sucking hard. Riordan was trembling.

"I'm close," he warned Jermon.

Should he stop? Wait until he was inside Riordan to let him come? Nah. The omega had two rounds in him at least, so Jermon would let him have them.

“Let him come in your mouth,” Wilmer said. They were on the same page, then. Good.

He took him back in, his mouth a seal around Riordan’s cock as he kept the pressure unrelenting. Riordan’s body tensed up, all his muscles tightening as he sucked in a hard breath. He hovered for a moment on that edge, then let out the loudest grunt and came in Jermon’s mouth. Jermon swallowed as best he could, but he still struggled with that part, and some of it dripped out of his mouth and down his chin. Whatever.

He shifted to a gentle suckling until Riordan had come down from his high. He let go of him with a wet plop. Riordan was like a puddle on the bed, all blissed out, his eyes soft and dreamy. Knowing that Jermon had given him that pleasure? Best feeling in the world.

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## Chapter Twenty-One

**J**ermon had done well. Wilmer had watched him take care of Riordan with growing admiration. In fact, he'd gotten so caught up in the erotic feast in front of him that he'd forgotten to give directions, as had been his intention. If he couldn't join them physically, he might as well make the best of the situation and at least be involved like that. Only he'd spaced out watching Jermon give oral. He'd done it with so much devotion and attention.

When Jermon stood up again and stretched, Wilmer took his fill of those wide shoulders, that glorious broad chest that tapered down into lean hips, his jeans riding dangerously low and showing off that big, hard bulge. Wasn't it fascinating how half-dressed was often more sexy than completely naked? To Wilmer, it was all about the suggestion of it, the tease.

Jermon caught him staring, and a smile spread across his face. "Appreciating the view?"

"I sure am. You're hella sexy, baby." The last word had slipped out before he realized it, but it felt right, and when Jermon's smile widened, Wilmer was even happier he'd said it.

"Thank you."

Jermon brushed his palm down his chest and pressed it against his hard cock. Wilmer swallowed. "Maybe you could get rid of some clothes?"

Jermon chuckled. "You've gone from commands to requests?"

“Words are a little hard to come by at the moment.”

“I see.” Jermon slowly turned around and bent over, showing off that strong, muscled ass pressing tight against faded denim.

“Jesus,” Wilmer said weakly. “I’m glad Enar made sure my heart is working fine.”

Jermon unbuckled—was there a sexier sound in the world?—and slowly dragged down his jeans over his hips, giving Wilmer a show. This kind of sexy striptease didn’t seem to fit Jermon’s personality at all, and the idea he was doing this for Wilmer, to please and pleasure him, made Wilmer’s insides all warm and gooey.

Jermon’s underwear followed, and holy shit, that ass. Wilmer’s mouth literally watered. “On my next checkup, I’ll make sure to ask when I can fuck again because I have two of the sexiest men on the planet in my bed, and I want to fuck them both,” he said hoarsely.

“We can’t wait for you to be healthy again.” Riordan turned his head toward Wilmer and sent him the sweetest smile.

“Yeah, you missed my cock?”

Riordan frowned. “Not your cock. You. We missed *you*.”

Jermon was fully naked now, and both Wilmer and Riordan got distracted by the sight of that absolute monster cock, erect and standing proud. Jermon had his arms crossed across his chest, but Wilmer didn’t miss the vulnerable look in his eyes, the underlying fear of rejection and ridicule.

“Jesus,” Wilmer said again, his brain coming up empty for more eloquent words. “That’s one hell of an eggplant, baby.”

“That’s what you said the first time you saw it,” Jermon said.

Somehow, that made it even better. Knowing that he might’ve lost his memories but that he was still the same man inside meant more to Wilmer than he had expected. “Then you know I mean it. Now, why don’t you scramble onto the bed



right next to me so our little horny omega can ride that monster dick, and I can have a front-row seat to the show?”

Jermon did as Wilmer had asked, climbing over Riordan in the process. Wilmer couldn't help but admire the sheer size of Jermon's cock. It was long, thick, and perfectly curved upward, and Wilmer reached for it with his left hand and trailed the full length with his finger. Jermon shivered in response, and his cock gave a little twitch. “How does that eggplant feel inside you, precious?”

Riordan pushed himself to his knees on the bed. “It's the best feeling ever. That and your knot.”

“Show me.”

Riordan heaved his leg over Jermon, who held his cock up with his right hand. Riordan's face scrunched in concentration as he lowered himself, biting his lip. He went slow, taking Jermon in inch by inch, but he would have to, since they weren't using extra lube. Riordan's body would produce enough slick, but it would take a minute to catch up.

Riordan's panting breaths were loud, interspersed with little whimpers, but he worked that monster in little by little until, finally, he'd bottomed out. Jermon had lain still, not moving a muscle, and even now, he was motionless, waiting for Riordan to give the signal he could move.

“How are you doing, precious?”

Riordan blinked, almost as if he had to wake up from a trance, and he wriggled a bit. “I'm full, so full, and I love it.”

“Does he stretch you wide?”

“Like a hard fist inside me, but it feels so good. I love the burn, the sting.”

“Ride him for me, precious.”

Riordan took his time, lifting himself up until only the tip of Jermon's cock was inside him, then sinking back down. The sight of that pretty pink hole being stretched obscenely wide had to be one of the most erotic things ever, and Wilmer

couldn't look away. That cock was so big and intimidating, and Riordan took it like he was born for it, clearly loving it.

“Help him,” Wilmer told Jermon.

The first two thrusts were clumsy as Jermon attempted to find the right rhythm, but then he had it, and he snapped his hips upward as Riordan sank down. He slammed into him with a wet squelch, and Riordan shouted out, faltering for a moment but then resuming his moves. Jermon held Riordan's hips and helped Riordan push upward and descend again as Jermon kept driving into him.

Riordan's cock had hardened again, bobbing against his stomach, and the scent of sex permeated the air. Sweaty, filthy, loud sex, and god, how Wilmer wanted to join them. He wanted to bury himself inside Jermon, fuck that incredible alpha ass, make the dragon crazy with want. And then do the same to his precious, sweet Riordan. How quickly he'd come to care for these two. Or had his heart recognized them, even when his brain didn't?

And what a sight they made, lost in their own world, their brutal rhythm, Riordan riding that cock for all he was worth. Jermon was chopping into him, his thrusts fierce but controlled, and a litany of whimpers and moans burst from Riordan's lips. “So close... Please, alpha... Need it.”

He was stunning like this, his skin all flushed with pleasure, his voice throaty, and a thin layer of sweat covering his body. His eyes kept rolling back every time Jermon fucked upward into him, and Wilmer could only imagine how amazing that big dick had to feel to a hungry omega like Riordan.

Wilmer's cock throbbed. Pressing his hand against it didn't really help, but damn if he was going to rob himself of the blow job he'd been promised. Getting himself off might feel good, but it would pale compared to Riordan's mouth on him.

Riordan panted, speeding up, and Jermon followed his increased tempo without missing a beat. The omega closed his eyes and threw his head back, his whole body taut as he slammed himself down one more time, then convulsed. His

cock sprayed its meager load all over Jermon's chest. Seconds later, Jermon drove his cock deep into Riordan and came as well, letting out a guttural cry.

Riordan sagged down on Jermon's chest. As Jermon's cock slipped half out of him, the first cum seeped out of his hole. Damn, the man didn't just have a huge cock. He'd dumped a massive load of cum, judging by how much was trickling out. Such a filthy, sexy sight—one Wilmer hoped to see many more times.

Jermon tenderly wiped the sweaty curls off Riordan's forehead. "That was spectacular."

"Mmm, it was." Riordan lifted his head for a kiss. "Thank you."

Jermon chuckled. "Don't ever thank me for sex. That's my pleasure as much as yours...and Wilmer's."

They both turned their heads toward Wilmer, who lay on his side, watching them. "Don't mind me. I'm patiently waiting until it's my turn."

Riordan's eyes sparkled. "Good, then I can take my time recovering."

"Riordan..." Wilmer protested. God, he was seconds away from whining and begging.

"Riordan, what?" the omega teased him.

Wilmer pouted. "You're mean to a sick, hurting alpha."

Riordan snorted. "You want me to blow you out of pity?"

"If that's what gets me the quickest orgasm, then hell, yes."

They all laughed, and Riordan rolled off Jermon and crawled toward Wilmer. "You in a hurry?"

"After that performance? Yeah. I bet I could make myself come with a few tugs...but I don't wanna miss out on your mouth on me, precious."

Riordan positioned himself above Wilmer's cock. "You don't have to miss out on anything...alpha."

Wilmer's dick was straining so hard and tight the first touch of Riordan's tongue made him jerk. "Sorry," he said. "I'm on edge."

"That's what I'm here to take care of." Riordan grinned at him.

"Make me feel good, precious."

Riordan wasted no time and suckled on the tip as he curled his hand around the base and pumped upward, doing a neat little twist at the end. Wilmer's hand found purchase on the bed sheets, and he needed it because Riordan took him in so deep that most of Wilmer's cock had disappeared into his mouth.

He gurgled but didn't stop, and he sucked until his cheeks hollowed. Sparks blazed through Wilmer's balls, up the length of his cock, and right back until his whole body was tingling. Riordan's lips were still swollen from kissing Jermon and so tight around Wilmer's cock. Teardrops clung to his long eyelashes, and when he blinked, they dripped down his cheeks. Those pretty blue eyes were full of devotion, and he put his mouth to good use.

Wilmer wasn't gonna last long, but he'd never expected to. Nor did he feel like he had to. In fact, wasn't it a compliment to Riordan and Jermon that after their show, Wilmer was already on the verge of coming?

He laced his fingers through Riordan's curls and thrust up into his mouth. Fuck, yes. Perfect. Two more shoves and he was coming. His release was fierce, his body quaking and shivering with the force of it. When the aftershocks had finally abated, Riordan pulled his mouth off Wilmer's cock.

"Kiss me," Wilmer demanded.

Riordan didn't need to be told twice, and he eagerly crawled up and sought Wilmer's mouth. The saltiness of Wilmer's release hit him, and he moaned in appreciation. Wilmer surged into Riordan's mouth, and what he couldn't do with his cock yet, with his whole body, he played out with his

tongue, fucking between those plump lips until they were both panting.

“This”—Wilmer wiped his mouth with the back of his hand—”was the best encouragement possible to get serious about recovering quickly.”

“So you only want us for the sex?” Riordan sounded shocked and sad, and for one horrible second, Wilmer thought he’d fucked it all up. But then he spotted the cheeky grin on the omega’s face, and he breathed out with relief.

“Sex and your excellent cooking and baking skills because your apple pie is to die for,” he teased him right back.

“Hey, what about me? Am I only good for sex, then?” Jermon joined in.

“Nah, you’re also really pretty to look at,” Wilmer shot back, and then they all burst out laughing. He was exhausted, but when he stretched out on the bed and Riordan snuggled on one side of him and Jermon on the other, he’d never been happier.

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## Chapter Twenty-Two

The day after the second training session with the Murphys, they gathered in the meeting barn of the Hayes pack. As Erwan looked around the room, he couldn't help but be impressed by the company he was in. All the dragons had shown up, but so had Rhene, Sivney, Palani, Lidon, and Grayson. If they couldn't figure things out with these men, they never would.

"Thank you all for coming," Rhene started. "We figured it was easier to get everyone in the same room at the same time so we could ask questions, theorize together, and, hopefully, come up with some answers."

Palani rubbed his hands. "I'm genuinely excited."

Lidon chuckled. "You always love a challenging puzzle like this, trying to figure out where all the pieces go."

Palani beamed at his mate. "Thank you, alpha."

"You say it as if I'm telling you something new."

Palani's eyes twinkled. "No, but I never get tired of hearing your compliments."

Lidon leaned in for a kiss, and Rhene groaned. "Please, for the love of god, can you two keep your hands off each other at least for the duration of this meeting? We all know that once you get started, you won't stop anytime soon."

A chorus of laughter rose, and Lidon kissed Palani briefly, then leaned back. "As you wish," he said with a grin in Rhene's direction.

“Cockblocked by my own brother...” Palani let out a dramatic sigh. “Thanks, bro.”

“As if you didn’t have your alpha’s monster dick in your ass earlier today,” Rhene countered. “I tried to call you, but Enar said you were indisposed, which we all know is code for you getting railed by one of your mates.”

Lidon threw his head back as he laughed while Palani shrugged, not in the least embarrassed. These men were something else.

“Now that we have once again discussed our pack alpha’s sex life, can we return to the matter at hand?” Grayson asked patiently.

They all grew serious again. “I asked you all to come so we can share the information we managed to pry out of the Murphys yesterday,” Rhene said. “I’ve already heard some of it, but not all, and I think it would be helpful to get all your opinions on this. Blair, why don’t you get started with what you discovered?”

Blair cleared his throat. “Like the previous time, I trained with Alistair, the commander of the Murphy clan. From what I understand, he’s been in charge of their dragon army for the last hundred years, and as such, he’s an experienced fighter. Initially, he was very much focused on training me, and I have to admit he taught me useful stuff. But after a few hours, when we both grew tired, he was more in the mood to chat. I figured he would be the perfect guy to ask how they had found us.”

Erwan leaned forward. He didn’t want to miss this.

“How it works is that an energy dragon and a magic dragon together can locate another dragon who is using their magic. The energy dragon is able to sense the burst of magic, and then the magic dragon can use a locate spell to discover where the dragon is. Alistair said it’s accurate to within a mile, depending on how much magic that particular dragon is using.”

“So he’s saying that Gael should be able to sense the change in magic?” Erwan checked to make sure he understood

correctly.

Blair nodded. “He didn’t give more specifics, but I was hoping Gael might be able to find out from his training dragon.”

All heads turned to Gael, whose cheeks grew red. “I’ll try to get that information from him next time.”

“That’s okay,” Erwan said quickly. He didn’t want Gael to feel guilty, as this obviously wasn’t something he could have known to ask. “But you can put it on your mental list for the next training. Make sure to tell the alpha wolf who is chaperoning you as well so that he might be able to help. As resourceful as you omegas are, sometimes alphas talk easier to another alpha. What can I say? A lot of us like to brag.”

That got him a round of chuckles.

“That means I should try to learn that locate spell,” Jermon said. “Because Colin hasn’t covered that so far.”

“What did he teach you this time?” Rhene asked. “Did you get the feeling he was more forthcoming?”

Jermon shook his head. “Oh, absolutely not. Now that I’m paying attention to it, I’m noticing he’s evasive, giving generic answers and avoiding a lot of my questions. He did teach me stuff, but mostly protective spells. Sort of like what our father did around the castle, only on a much smaller scale. I asked Colin if I would be able to set up a protective spell around a property like that, and he shot that option down hard, saying I wouldn’t be powerful enough for that.”

“That’s interesting, considering that Tynan guy told you how powerful you were,” Sivney remarked.

“Exactly, so that tells you how much value I attach to Colin’s opinion.” Jermon shrugged.

“If I can add something to that?” Gael’s voice was soft, but Erwan was proud of him for speaking up in the first place, and he sent him an encouraging nod. “I did with Arthur, the dragon assigned to training me, what we agreed to do, which is playing the dumb omega and buttering him up by basically fawning over him.”



“As the alpha wolf chaperoning him, I can attest to the effectiveness of his methods,” Grayson said dryly. “He had that alpha wrapped around his little finger.”

Grayson had been there? Erwan hadn't kept track of which alpha wolves had chaperoned Finlay and Gael, but Grayson went up in his estimation for allowing Gael to tell his story rather than taking over. It would've been all too easy for the older alpha to claim his position, but he hadn't.

Gael blushed even deeper. “Thank you, alpha.”

“I was impressed. But please tell them what you discovered.”

“Arthur was showing off, telling me how strong the Murphy clan was and how much experience they all had in fighting. I thought that was interesting because other than the dragon slayers, who would they be fighting?”

Rhene quirked an eyebrow. “That's an interesting question indeed. Could it be that they have been fighting the other clans?”

“I don't know, alpha, but I thought it was something you should know.”

“Don't forget that statement he made near the end,” Grayson said gently.

Gael nodded. “It was super weird. He had been bragging for, like, fifteen minutes or so about his clan and how strong all the alphas were. And then out of the blue, he said, ‘but if your prince ever finds out how to use his powers, we'd all be fucked.’ I asked him what he meant, but he didn't want to elaborate, so I changed the topic. I didn't want him to get suspicious of me.”

Erwan leaned back in his chair, scratching his chin. That was one hell of a statement to make, especially by an alpha who'd been bragging about the strength of his clan.

“Which prince was he talking about?” Palani looked from Erwan to Jermon and then to their brothers. “Aren't all four of you princes?”

“We are.” Jermon checked in with Erwan. “But usually, only the oldest two are referred to that way. The heir and the spare, so to speak.”

“So which one of you did he mean? Was that clear from the context?” Palani asked Gael.

“I don’t think so.”

“I agree,” Grayson said. “Arthur made it as a general statement, not related to anything he’d said before, other than him bragging about the strength of his clan. So he could’ve meant either one of them.”

“Well, it wasn’t like we didn’t know already that the two of you are important,” Rhene said. “That whole white dragon thing has to be special and powerful, and what Tynan said about the strength of Jermon’s powers has to mean something as well.”

Erwan sighed. “Unfortunately, I didn’t see a natural opening to ask about the specific meaning of a white dragon, not without alerting Dempsey to the fact that I have no clue what my powers are. However, I did learn something else interesting. Dempsey said the other clans didn’t want anything to do with us after the way we’d betrayed the wolves. That’s why they didn’t show up when we all used our magic, even though that had to have alerted them to our presence. He said only the Murphys were still willing to be associated with us.”

“Doesn’t that paint a flattering picture of them yet again?” Rhene shook his head in disbelief. “I’m starting to doubt every word out of their mouths.”

“Yeah, no kidding.” Sivney frowned.

“Anything else you guys learned?” Palani asked.

Finlay raised his hand. “I discussed this with Erwan beforehand because I wasn’t sure if he wanted everybody to know, but he gave me permission to share, just so you guys know.”

Erwan knew what was coming, and he mentally braced himself. Every time he thought he’d discovered the worst about his family and his clan, something else came up.

“I was chatting amicably with Hubert, the dragon training me, who seemed to like me a hell of a lot more after I all but kissed his ass. And by the way, we definitely should’ve informed the wolves chaperoning us because Bray looked at me as if I were crazy until I gave him a subtle signal I was doing it on purpose. I swear, if I hadn’t given him that sign, he probably would’ve picked me up and carried me out of there, afraid I was under some kind of spell.”

Laughter rolled around the room, and some of the tension in Erwan’s shoulders eased. Rhene took his hand and pressed a kiss on it, and his heart filled with warmth rather than apprehension. He wasn’t in this alone, and he should never forget that.

“Anyway,” Finlay continued. “At some point, Hubert said something puzzling. ‘Your prince had better be careful, or he’ll end up like his cousin.’ I didn’t have to pretend I had no clue what he was talking about, because it came out of nowhere, and I genuinely didn’t know what he was referring to.” He swallowed, shooting an unapologetic look in Erwan’s direction. “He told me some troubling things about the king and his brother. Apparently, Baoth had two kids. I knew he had a daughter he married off to a knight forty years older than her. She died after a few years, and the story was that she died in childbirth, which wouldn’t have been that strange. But according to Hubert, she killed herself because of how her husband treated her.”

Erwan had to shove down the nausea rising in him again. When Finlay told him this, he’d barely been able to keep his dinner in his stomach. That poor, poor girl. She’d been so young when she’d been married off, and her husband had been cruel, even by dragon standards. “Baoth is my father’s younger brother, but he got married young, and his children were born before me and my brothers. The cousin Finlay is referring to was twenty years older than me, and she was married off when I was merely six. Her name was never mentioned again in our household, and to be honest, I’d forgotten about her until Finlay mentioned her.”

“Not to question the veracity of that story, but how did Hubert know this?” Palani asked.

“The guy she married was his cousin. Apparently, Hubert’s cousin was furious and went on some kind of rant that she’d killed herself and brought dishonor upon his family and clan.” Finlay’s scornful expression showed what he thought of that.

“Holy shit,” Jermon said. “I never even knew he had a daughter. I only knew about Ciaran, Uncle Baoth’s son, though my memories of my cousin are vague, since I was only a kid when he died.”

“Wait,” Nadiv said, and Erwan could see him connecting the dots in his head. “Ciaran died from a fall off his horse. Was that the truth?”

Finlay slowly shook his head. “According to Hubert, the king had him killed. He did tumble off that horse, but the poor animal was spooked on purpose.”

Nadiv paled. “You’re saying that...our father killed him? Why?”

“He was a threat,” Erwan said softly. “You said it yourself. Ciaran was older than me. Father feared Ciaran would take my position, ascend the throne in my place, and he had him killed preemptively.”

“You knew?” Jermon’s voice was hoarse.

“No, not until Finlay told me. But Hubert was exceptionally well informed, again through his cousin, who apparently stayed in touch with Father for a while, even after our cousin killed herself. They got drunk together at some point, and Father confessed what he had done. According to Hubert, Uncle Baoth didn’t know, but I’m not so sure that was the case.”

Silence descended, Erwan’s brothers looking pale and shocked. He couldn’t blame them. He’d felt the exact same way when Finlay had told him.

“Will there ever be a day when we can stop apologizing for the sins of our father and family?” Jermon asked bitterly.

Lidon cleared his throat. “These sins are not on your shoulders, nor should they be on your conscience. Not speaking up when you know your father mistreated others is one thing, but this? You didn’t know, nor could you reasonably have known. This dishonor is on the men who chose cruelty and murder, not on you.”

With every word Lidon spoke, Erwan’s heart grew a little lighter. Was that the power of the True Alpha? Erwan had heard the stories about Lidon’s abilities, the legends about the True Alpha, the one true leader of his generation. He wasn’t sure, but he was grateful Lidon had spoken up. “Thank you.”

Lidon nodded at him. “Sometimes, there’s a gray area between right and wrong, but this was an easy one. Don’t carry someone else’s sin and shame on your shoulders.”

Erwan took a deep breath. “Anyone else wanna share something?”

“Where are we on finding Emma?” Nadiv asked. “I’m worried sick about her, and I’m not convinced we can wait until Jermon and Gael have figured out that locating spell. Chances are she’s in the castle, being held against her will, or she would’ve contacted me by now.”

He made a good argument, and Erwan checked in with Rhene, who scratched his chin. “I agree we’ve come to the point where we have to act. I’m not comfortable with the idea she’s under the power of the king and his brother. I’ve seen firsthand what they’re capable of.”

“So what do we do?” Nadiv looked relieved that his worries were taken seriously.

Erwan took a deep breath. “We head to the castle and find her...”

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## Chapter Twenty-Three

Rhene whistled a happy tune as he walked into the forest along the perimeter of the Hightower lands. Things had been crazy lately, what with Riordan giving birth to the eggs, training with the Murphys, preparing the mission to rescue Emma, and a hundred more things, and he was relieved to be away from it all for a bit. He'd never considered himself a nature lover, but he sure valued the quiet.

He slowed down, appreciating the tangle of vines creeping up around the trees and the mosses in a hundred shades of green. Light streamed through the canopy, filtered down to a warm glow, and he raised his face to enjoy it. A rabbit darted away, making his escape before Rhene came close, and he laughed. Smart bunny.

It smelled amazing in the woods—pine needles and tree sap and wet soil, that deep earthy scent that always made him feel connected. They'd had rain the night before, so everything was wet, and his feet sank into the mud from time to time. But they had needed it, and he was never one to complain about rain. Lars would be overjoyed, seeing as how he made every attempt to catch as much rainwater as possible to use for irrigation.

Erwan was at work in the clinic. What stories would he tell today when he got home? Every day, Rhene was amazed at what his mate had encountered but, above all, what he had learned. His healing gift seemed to grow stronger, and Enar and Maz had no qualms about asking Erwan for his opinion on patients they couldn't easily diagnose.

Was Erwan's healing getting more powerful because he was training it? Or was there something else behind it? That was the question Rhene couldn't figure out. The first was the most logical answer, of course, but he wasn't sure if it was correct. Training would only make a person more skilled, not necessarily more powerful. But how could one distinguish between the two? Not an easy feat, especially for someone who wasn't a dragon and not accustomed to their level of magic in the first place.

Be that as it may, Rhene's gut told him it wasn't about skills. It was about power, about the force of the magic, and he was convinced it had grown stronger. And not just in Erwan. Jermon had told Rhene and Erwan about Wilmer's recovery, about how he should still have headaches, and yet he didn't. Why? What on earth could be causing that speedy recovery? Not that Rhene was doubting or bemoaning it, but wouldn't it be nice to know how and why it had happened?

It had to be something magical, something the Murphys knew about and weren't telling them. He'd never fully trusted them to begin with, but his unease with them was growing stronger by the day. Then again, it was one of many questions he didn't have answers to. The list had gotten long.

The night before, he'd hung out with his brothers—something they tried to do once a week now—and Palani had told him it had been like that for him when strange things had started happening, even before Lidon had formed the Hayes pack. “For every answer we'd found, we formulated five new questions,” he'd said. “It was maddening.”

Maddening was a good word for the chaos in Rhene's brain. So many questions but so few concrete answers. All they could do was speculate, conjecture based on the precious few facts they had. With the Murphys not being honest with them, they didn't know what information to trust, and it felt like walking on quicksand, never knowing where to step next. They needed cold hard information, but where to get it?

Palani hadn't known either, which had been comforting. Rhene valued Palani's inquisitive brain and his experience as an investigative reporter, and if he didn't have ideas either, at

least Rhene wasn't the only one who was stuck. He'd kept the Hayes pack apprised of every development, and Palani kept reassuring him that Rhene had Lidon's full support, which might not mean a lot in practical terms, but it sure as fuck was encouraging. Not feeling like he had to carry this weight alone meant more than he could say.

His com crackled. "Alpha, can you check in in the west sector with Adar? We have a visitor."

A visitor? Rhene's heartbeat sped up as he pressed the button to answer. "On my way."

Like Jermon, Rhene was convinced that their previous visitor, the mysterious Matt Brown, had been one of the dragon slayers. They couldn't prove it, of course, but his gut instinct had told him the two were related. And now they had another visitor. What tidings would this one bring?

When he spotted Adar and the small man next to him, he frowned. That was...a dragon. An omega dragon. He was about the same size as Finlay and Gael and probably the same age as well, early twenties in human years. With reddish hair and freckles all over his face, he was stinking cute. What on earth was he doing here? Was he from the Murphy clan?

"Alpha," Adar said. "This is Fallon, one of the Murphy dragons. He requested a word with you."

Rhene had pegged him correctly, then. "Hi, Fallon, nice to meet you. I'm Rhene Hightower, pack alpha of the Hightower pack."

He extended his hand to the omega, whose eyes grew wide before he accepted it, his hand trembling. "It's an honor to meet you, alpha," he stammered, making a formal bow.

Wow, those Murphys really insisted on a lot of pomp, didn't they? Rhene shook his hand firmly. "To what do we owe the honor of your visit?"

Fallon shuffled his feet, looking at the ground. "There's a rumor that... We overheard the alphas talking, and..." He finally looked up. "Is it true that you treat omegas differently here?"



Treat them differently? What did he mean? Oh, of course. Fallon was comparing it to how they were treated in the Murphy clan. Rhene had only seen glimpses of it, but he had no trouble filling in the rest. “Omegas are equal to alphas and betas in our pack, if that’s what you mean.”

“They are?” Fallon stared at Rhene with a mix of awe and disbelief.

Rhene had no reason to trust him. Hell, he didn’t trust any of the Murphy dragons, and yet his gut told him he needed to listen to Fallon and take him seriously. He could be a spy, someone the Murphys had sent to try and wheedle whatever information they needed from them, but as soon as he had that thought, Rhene rejected it. No, that clan would never send an omega for that. They’d never believe an omega would be capable, not when they refused to train them.

“Adar, why don’t you ask Finlay and Gael if they’re willing to talk to him?” Rhene said to the big alpha. “Maybe see if Sivney is available?”

“Absolutely, alpha. I’ll be right back.”

“Who are Finlay and Gael?” Fallon asked.

“Two of the Doyle omega dragons. It’ll be easier for you to talk to them than to me.”

A fierce red blush spread over Fallon’s cheeks. “I didn’t mean to insult you, alpha.”

“You didn’t, but I have some experience in how omega dragons think, and you’d be more comfortable with them. They’d be able to tell you exactly what their position in our pack is and how they’re being treated. That way, you also won’t have to fear I’m lying to you.”

His face still red, Fallon cocked his head. “I don’t think you would lie. You may not tell me everything and withhold facts you think I don’t need to know, but you wouldn’t lie.”

A shiver danced down Rhene’s spine, but not in a bad way. More like a tickle of...magic. “Is your gift magic by any chance?”

Fallon took a step back, paling. “Why do you ask?”

Rhene held up his hands. “I mean you no harm, and if my suspicion is correct, you’d know that. You have my permission to scan me if that’s what you need to do to reassure yourself.”

Fallon’s mouth dropped open. “You would allow me to scan you? An omega?”

“Why not? From what I understand, your gifts aren’t any different from those of alphas, are they?”

“I can’t believe my ears. I heard the rumors, we all did, but none of us believed they could be true. No one has ever said anything like that to us. Ever.”

“But am I right? Your gifts aren’t different, are they?”

Fallon slowly shook his head. “No, they’re not, except the alphas refuse to train us. We only get the basic training as a kid, not the specialized one after our gifts show. We’ve been told it’s useless, since we’re powerless anyway. We’re *only* omegas.”

Rhene snorted. “Only omegas, my ass. There’s no such thing. You guys are far stronger than anyone ever gives you credit for. Far more powerful too. And yes, I mean that. In fact, that Sivney I asked the guard to get? He’s my second-in-command, and he’s an omega.”

“How is that even possible? Or is it just the wolves and not the dragons that live among you?”

“I’ll admit the dragons needed some time to adjust, but they’ve wholeheartedly accepted our standard of treating omegas as equals. You may find them slipping into old behavior at times, but they’ll be called out on it and apologize. We don’t tolerate anything else.”

“What is it we don’t tolerate?” Sivney walked up to them and extended his hand to Fallon. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Fallon. I’m Sivney.”

Fallon took his hand, looking from Sivney to Rhene and back. “He said you are his second-in-command.”

“I am.” Sivney gestured Finlay and Gael forward. “These two are Finlay and Gael, two of the Doyle omegas living with us.”

“Is this for real?” Fallon asked them, clearly still not capable of believing what he was being told. How badly had he been treated that he needed this much convincing? Not something Rhene wanted to think about for too long.

“Yes, they’re not lying,” Finlay said softly. “I know it’s almost impossible to believe, but trust me, it’s true. It took us a while to get used to it, but they mean it. Omegas really are equal to betas and alphas in this pack, and that includes us dragons.”

“They don’t use you as servants?”

“No.” Finlay’s voice was firm. “We offered our servitude, but that was because of the breach in our honor we had to repay. That was our choice too. Prince Erwan didn’t force us. And we get to pick where we want to work in the pack. We’re given the same opportunities as everyone else. Like, the guy who leads the construction crew is an omega.”

Fallon bit his lip, his eyes shifting from Finlay to Gael, then to Rhene and back again. “You have the right to say no?”

Rhene frowned. The right to say no? What did that mean? But Finlay and Gael seemed to understand as they shared a look. “We can say no to whatever we don’t want...and that no is accepted. No one can make us do anything we don’t want to do.”

The soft gasp Fallon let out showed that one had mattered, even if Rhene hadn’t understood. Fallon took a step forward and raised his chin, meeting Rhene’s eyes dead on. “If that’s the case, are you guys open to accepting new members?”

Rhene didn’t even need to look at Sivney. “Yes. I assume you’re talking about yourself?”

Fallon took a deep breath. “Myself and ten other dragon omegas, two of whom are with eggs and due to deliver next week.”

“Ten?” It was out before Rhene could hold it back.

“I can guarantee you that as soon as the others realize the stories are true, there will be more. None of us want to stay there, save maybe a handful who are treated decently.”

God, how bad were things in the Murphy clan that all omegas wanted to leave? Nausea swirled in Rhene’s stomach.

“Is it possible to switch from one clan to another?” Sivney asked Finlay and Gael. “Don’t you guys swear some kind of allegiance to the clan?”

“We do, but it is possible to switch. In the past, clans would swap omegas to ensure fresh blood in their clans. All they’d have to do is take a pledge of allegiance to the new clan.” Finlay scratched his chin. “But I have to admit I’ve never heard of dragons switching clans out of their own free will. Omegas are considered...property, if you will, so that decision usually isn’t really up to us.”

At the word property, Sivney’s eyes flashed, and Rhene’s blood boiled. “Property? You can’t fucking *own* a person. Not even a dragon,” he snapped. “That’s goddamn slavery.”

“Damn straight,” Sivney said. “So I don’t know what we have to do to get you officially into the Doyle clan, but we’ll make it happen, and until then, you can swear your allegiance to the Hightower pack, and we’ll take you in.”

The timing couldn’t be worse, what with them still rebuilding what they’d lost in the attack, but they would manage, even if they had to pitch tents to put these poor omegas in.

Fallon’s eyes filled with tears. “We have a lot of information that would be beneficial to you in exchange.”

Rhene crossed his arms. “That’s awesome to hear, but that’s not why we’re doing this. Accepting you into our pack is not contingent on you deciding to share information with us. We’d love it if you do, but you won’t be forced to.”

Fallon wiped the tears from his eyes, taking a few deep breaths. “The word of your honor preceded you, alpha, and I can see it was true. If we swear allegiance to you, we will defend you and your pack until our dying breath.”

Goose bumps broke out all over Rhene's skin. "And we will do likewise with you. We protect our omegas at all costs. You're valuable and precious to us."

Fallon took a few moments to compose himself. "I managed to sneak away, but I can't stay away for long. If you're serious about taking us in, I'll come back with the others. I can't say when, as it depends on when we'll be able to get out without anyone noticing."

"You're welcome day and night. It doesn't matter. Just make sure you identify yourselves to the guards," Sivney said.

Fallon nodded. "One more thing before I leave." He turned to Rhene. "You're mated to Prince Erwan, correct?"

"I am." Would these omegas have an issue with two alphas being mated as well? Rhene sure as fuck hoped not.

"Is it true he's a white dragon?"

"He is."

Fallon blew out a shuddering breath. "Our alphas don't want you to know what his powers are. We overheard them discussing it with each other, how they were going to keep specific things from you when training you. Especially Prince Erwan and Prince Jermon. They have powers unlike anything our alphas have seen in several lifetimes. Kerry said the air around Jermon was practically vibrating with the force of his magic."

So Rhene had been right about the two of them getting stronger in their magic. "If the Murphys refused to train them, how will they know what they're capable of?"

"We will train you. Our alphas don't realize it, but we've been paying attention all these years, and we've picked up a thing or two. You were right. I do have the gift of magic, and I'd be honored to show Prince Jermon how to use his. In the meantime, make sure to keep the dragons together. The powers of the clan are strongest when the clan is of one mind, physically close together. Dragons aren't meant to be separated, and the more time we spend together, the stronger our gifts grow. At least, that's how it should be."

“It doesn’t work that way for the Murphys?” Rhene asked, too curious to let that last sentence go.

“Not anymore. Breaking the Code has consequences, alpha, and the Murphys are paying them. In the end, honor always wins. Honor and truth.” Fallon took a step back. “I have to go. I can’t let them discover my absence.”

“How will you get back?” Rhene asked. How on earth would the omega find his way back to the hotel or wherever the Murphys were staying?

But Fallon merely smiled. “We have our ways, alpha.”

He closed his eyes, and seconds later, something flashed next to him, and another omega dragon appeared. He never looked at Rhene or any of the others but took Fallon’s hand. “We need to get back. Now.”

Another flash and they were both gone, leaving Rhene blinking. He hadn’t dreamed this, had he? One look at the stunned faces of the others confirmed it. No, this hadn’t been a dream. This had been real, and now all they could do was hope and pray that Fallon and his friends would get away safely. Help was on the way, and it was coming from the direction the Murphys would never have expected it from: their own omegas. Talk about poetic justice.

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## Chapter Twenty-Four

They left late in the afternoon, a silent group as they started on their hike toward the castle. After much discussion, they had agreed they had to check in on Emma and see what was going on with her. Jermon had been one of the ones who had advocated most, but that didn't mean he wasn't nervous about this undertaking. What would it be like to see the castle again? Would the cloaking spell he had practiced so hard work? What if it didn't? What if they ran into his father or uncle?

So many uncertainties, so many risks, and yet the steady conviction in his heart that this needed to be done kept him going, and he guessed it was the same for the others. Erwan and Blair had immediately volunteered, and Rhene had insisted on joining them, making it clear he wasn't about to leave his mate go on such a dangerous mission on his own.

They'd talked about what Fallon had said about the dragons being much more powerful when they were together, and the decision to all go together had been an easy one. Not one of them had uttered a word of protest about Finlay and Gael joining as well. They had offered, and they needed them as much as Blair or anyone else, and so they were part of their group.

Few words were spoken as they made their way through the wilderness, Erwan and Rhene in the lead, with Blair closing their procession. The hike was a hell of a lot easier than it had been in the winter. Then the trees had been bare, but now the canopy was so dense and high. It blotted out the

sky above, casting everything below in shadow. The forest was a riot of new leaves, lush green in all its bright shades. Ferns covered the moist ground, the small, winding path they were taking barely visible. The air smelled fresh, like rain and spring, not with the heavy undertones of decay and rot that had permeated it in the winter. Somewhere close, a brook bubbled happily along and, combined with the evening song of the birds, made for a calming chorus.

“Do you think we’ll be able to see the castle?” Gael asked softly.

Jermon startled, not used to Gael speaking up without being asked a question. “I think so, though I’m not sure.”

“You don’t expect the king to have put a new protective spell on it?”

“Oh, he most likely did, but I doubt he’ll be able to conceal it from us. We have spells we can try, plus there’s always the power of Lidon’s name.”

Gael nodded. “True.”

Jermon shot a look sideways. “Are you scared?”

“I would be a fool if I wasn’t. The king’s powers are formidable, and so are those of his brother.”

“You’re not calling them my father and my uncle.”

Gael shrugged. “I didn’t think you wanted to be reminded of the blood connection. They might be biologically related to you, but you’re nothing like them. And neither are your brothers.”

Touched, Jermon put a hand on Gael’s shoulder. “Thank you. That means a lot to me.”

They kept walking until they reached the area where Erwan had found Riordan, which felt like a lifetime ago. “Let me do a quick check to make sure they didn’t put up new cameras,” Blair said. “It won’t take long, since I know what to look for.”

The rest of their group took a breather, drinking some water and eating snacks until Blair returned. “We’re all good.



There were two new cameras, but I disabled them. We should be able to enter the castle without anyone seeing us.”

As much as they had argued about this mission, they had discussed the specifics even longer. It wasn't like they could walk up to the main gate and demand to see Emma. Luckily, Blair knew a secret way in, through a gate with a lock that was easy to pick—at least, that was what Blair had claimed—that closed off a dry sewer pipe. Well, they'd find out.

A few minutes later, Erwan halted. Everyone pulled up alongside him. The castle loomed in the distance, and Jermon shuddered. That had been his home for over two hundred years, but it radiated anything but coziness and homeyness. No, it felt threatening with its tall, thin turrets that reached up to the sky like angry fingers. Four banners depicting the yellow Doyle dragon coat of arms streamed in the wind, but they didn't do much to improve the lack of hospitality. Gargoyles stood on either side of the castle entrance, their faces frozen in horror. Over the years, they had to have seen some despicable acts of dark magic, people suffering at the hand of the king and his brother.

Erwan bumped his shoulder. “Don't forget, that place has no hold over us anymore.”

Jermon straightened. “Thank you for reminding me.”

“Time to do the cloaking spell.” Rhene held out both his hands. Within seconds, their group had formed a tight circle, with Jermon standing between Erwan and Finlay. Jermon closed his eyes, breathing in deeply. Calling up the fire inside him came easy now after so much practice, and his dragon was eager to come forward. Another few deep breaths and he mumbled the words. Power buzzed through him, reinforced by Finlay, who was doing his own spell on Jermon's left side, boosting Jermon's efforts. They kept holding hands as Erwan spoke a blessing upon their endeavor, asking for the favor of the gods to keep them concealed from their enemies.

Now all they could do was trust they were truly hidden. They'd be able to see each other, so they had no way of testing whether the spell had worked. An inner peace came over

Jermon, and all nerves disappeared. Come what may, they had each other, and they wouldn't fail.

They walked perpendicular to the castle until they reached the backside. Blair led them through the prickly bushes down a hidden path that ensured the sharp thorns wouldn't scrape off too much of their skin. Still, Jermon was glad when they had made it through.

The stone walls of the castle rose up like a dam, thick and menacing. They had managed to keep everyone out...and contain Jermon and his brothers. Until that dam had burst, metaphorically speaking, and they'd finally been able to run free. And now they were back, but of their own accord, and it made all the difference.

Gael tapped his shoulder, and Jermon turned around. The omega looked excited, flapping his hands a little as he rose to his toes and brought his mouth close to Jermon's ear. "I can feel her! I can feel Emma's energy. She's there."

The others had caught on something was happening, and they were waiting quietly.

"Can you locate her?" Nadiv whispered, his face lit up.

Gael hesitated. "Maybe if Jermon and Finlay boost me?"

Jermon gestured for Finlay to come over, and they formed a circle with the three of them. Gael closed his eyes, humming under his breath. "She's alive. She's weak, but she's alive. I think she's... She's on this side of the castle. Close to us. Maybe... Maybe in the dungeons?"

That would make total sense. The fact that she hadn't contacted them again suggested she'd been found out, and if the king suspected her of aiding them, he would've put her in the dungeons.

"Well done, Gael," Erwan whispered, and the omega beamed like a lighthouse in the dark.

They caught up the others with a few words, and Blair nodded. They had already planned to use that entrance anyway, so knowing that Emma was in the dungeons only

made things easier for them. It would've been a hell of a lot harder to get to her if she'd been in one of the turrets.

Blair warned them not to make a sound, and they silently followed him as he made his way through the undergrowth, ending up at a black iron gate. He tested it right away, but it was locked. Now it was up to Blair to prove that the lock was as easy to pick as he had predicted. Much to Jermon's surprise, Blair pulled a key from one of the pockets of his black utility pants, and a little can. He sprayed the lock, then the key. When he also sprayed the hinges, Jermon understood what he was doing. Once Blair inserted the key, the gate silently opened, not even making the smallest of squeaks or creaks.

Thank the gods the sewer pipe was indeed dry. That would've made for some nasty business otherwise. Blair took the lead again, creeping into the pipe until he disappeared out of sight. Even a few steps in, the clammy, smelly darkness was overwhelming, but they all grabbed the flashlights they had been told to bring, which helped. It only took minutes to reach another gate, where Blair repeated the procedure of spraying and opening the gate.

Blair turned around and placed his index finger on his lips. They were entering the dungeons now, and even the softest noise could alert the guards to their presence. They snuck through the first hallway, their flashlights off. Little light spilled in from the few flickering lightbulbs that hung from the ceiling, but enough to illuminate their way.

The castle had always smelled of dust and neglect, musty and stale and itchy. The only place where you could catch fresh air was in the courtyard, and once they'd been in isolation, Jermon and his brothers had spent as much time there as possible. But the dungeons were even worse, mold hanging thick in the air. Spiders reigned supreme, their webs covering large chunks of the stone walls. The flagstone floor underfoot was wet, and even though they made as little sound as possible, their footsteps dully echoed. In the winter, this place was even more miserable, bitter cold and prey to the howling winds whenever a storm hit them.

Loud footsteps rumbled, and they all froze and pressed themselves against the damp walls. A servant walked through a hallway that crossed theirs, never even looking in their direction. Phew, that cloaking spell seemed to do the job, and Jermon breathed a little easier.

Blair led them through the confusing maze of hallways, steps, and more hallways, never hesitating as he navigated them toward the part where the king had two prison cells built. For some reason, the king had wanted the castle to have interconnecting hallways, caverns, and chambers in the lowest level of the castle, just like one would find in an original medieval castle. Jermon had always thought it preposterous, considering the castle had been built in the eighteenth century, and he still held that opinion now.

Jermon and his brothers had been forbidden from setting foot in the dungeons. Oh, they'd done some exploring, but on a limited scale, since his father's punishments had been severe when he'd discovered them. Not that they had wanted to spend much time down here. The place had always reeked of despair. That cold sense of foreboding and utter hopelessness crept into your bones.

Blair signaled to halt, and they all lined up behind him and pressed against the wall. He pointed at the chamber ahead of them, then held up two fingers. They had reached the area of the two prison cells. They looked at Gael, who closed his eyes for a moment, then nodded. They were close.

Another signal from Blair, and they stood waiting as he inched forward and peeked around the corner. He was halfway through the motion of gesturing them to follow him when a loud clank echoed through the chambers. What was that? A door creaked open, and hollow footsteps pounded toward them. They all froze, and Jermon held his breath. Who was that?

“Hello, Emma. I've come to see if after a few days of no food, you're more amenable to talking to me...”

The king had arrived.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

Erwan's heart stopped, then furiously picked up its rhythm. His father. Erwan had been hoping to avoid him, but alas, he didn't seem to have luck on his side. At least, not in that department, though so far, their mission had gone off without a hitch, so he should be thankful for that.

"Good evening," Emma said, her voice weaker than Erwan remembered it. "I see you're up to your old and trusted method of wrongly summarizing my actions. I've been more than amenable to talking to you, but it's not small talk you're after. You want specific information, and that I'm unwilling to give."

Wow, she was so brave. To be imprisoned by the king, knowing how powerful he was and taking that stand despite that was pure courage. She'd seen what Erwan's father had done to Rhene, and still, she refused to bow to him.

"I'm your king. You owe me that information."

"On that, we'll have to agree to disagree. I don't owe you anything."

"You're refuting I am your king?"

"The last time I checked, killing your father made one's claim to the throne ineligible."

The king bristled, snorting like an angry animal. "That's an outrageous accusation. Besides, how would you know? You weren't even born yet."

"I've told you before I have my ways of knowing things."

“Bullshit. You’re an omega. What powers could you possibly have?”

Emma’s laugh tinkled through the chambers. “That has to vex you more than anything else, the fact that I’m a woman and an omega, yet I continue to defy you.”

“I demand to know what you’re hiding from me.”

Another laugh. “The list of things I’ve never told you is endless, so that’s way too broad a question.”

“Why don’t we start with you telling me what you know about my son.”

His son? Who was he talking about?

“Which one? Last time I counted, you had four.”

“Erwan, of course. Did you know he was a white dragon before he shifted in the courtyard?”

A short pause. “I suspected it. After the vision Fiona had, he had to be, right?”

Fiona? What did she have to do with it? She’d been Erwan’s aunt, wife to his uncle Baoth. She’d been dead for many years now, even before his cousin Ciaran had died in his horse riding accident.

“That stupid woman.” The king stomped his feet. “She should never have opened her mouth. But that’s on my brother for not teaching her her place.”

“It wouldn’t have changed things. Erwan would’ve ended up a white dragon, regardless of whether Fiona had told you about her vision. Visions are a prediction of the future, and they’ll come true regardless of people believing them.”

The king let out a long sigh. “I suppose I should be grateful she did actually share it. If she hadn’t, I wouldn’t have known to expect it.”

“Did you really think you could have prevented it by not teaching him and his brothers magic?” Emma sounded genuinely curious.

“It was worth a try. And let’s be honest. If they had been raised with magic, they would’ve found out much sooner. Now they’re at a disadvantage because they don’t know anything. That makes them powerless, regardless of any abilities they might have.”

Emma chuckled. “Oh, I can guarantee you Erwan and his brothers are anything but powerless, but you’ll find that out for yourself.”

“Is that a threat? Are you threatening me? You seem to forget you’re at my mercy,” the king snapped.

“You don’t possess even a hint of mercy in the first place, so that’s not as intimidating as you seem to think it is. And no, that wasn’t a threat. It was a statement of fact.”

A clanking noise bounced through the hallways as if someone had kicked against the iron rails of the cell. “I demand you tell me what you mean by that.”

Emma let out an exasperated sigh. “Are we back to that? You can demand all you want, but it’s not going to do you any good. I will tell you exactly as much as I’m willing to share and not a word more, and it doesn’t matter if you’re threatening me, promising me rewards, or demanding.”

“I will starve you to death! You’ll talk when I don’t feed you. Mark my words.”

Cold shivers ran down Erwan’s spine. He’d known what his father was capable of, but to hear him make a threat like that was still shocking, not to mention sickening.

But Emma laughed. “Oh, that doesn’t scare me. I will be long gone before then.”

“Long gone? You plan on dying here, woman?”

“You’ll find out.”

It was the king’s turn to laugh. “Oh, you think my sons will come back for you? You expect them to stage some kind of rescue operation? Don’t be ridiculous. You mean nothing to them, you hear me? Nothing. They would never risk their lives

for a woman, and that includes Nadiv. You know, the guy who's been fucking you for years?"

His father had known about Nadiv and Emma? That was news to Erwan. If that was the case, why hadn't the king stopped it?

"You have no idea of the relationship Nadiv and I have."

"Have? *Had*, you mean. And I wouldn't call it a relationship. He was horny, and you were willing to spread your legs. That's all there was to it. Not that it should have mattered whether or not you were willing. You're a woman. You exist to please us men."

Emma snorted. "You're just jealous that I gave him willingly what you weren't able to take from me with violence."

What? Was she suggesting that his father had attempted to...?

"I should've known back then that you had powers you were keeping from me."

"Yeah, you should have, but you didn't because you couldn't possibly fathom a woman could've outsmarted you."

The woman had balls, goading the king like that, and Erwan's admiration for her grew.

"Outsmarted me? Last time I checked, you were the one behind bars, not me."

"That depends on your perspective, doesn't it? From where I'm sitting, you're the one who's imprisoned, the only difference being that you don't see it. And you never will."

The king let out a frustrated, angry sound, but then his voice dropped lower, and he switched to Irish. He was using magic, the force of it hitting Erwan like a slap to his face. On instinct, he sought Rhene's hand on one side and Gael's on the other. Silently, they all linked hands, and as soon as their connection was complete, Erwan could feel a shield going up. Finlay and Jermon both had their eyes closed, their mouths moving silently, and whatever they were doing was working.



But what about Emma? She'd be powerless against that much magic.

Erwan closed his eyes as well, and immediately, the fire inside him roared into bright burning flames. Something clicked inside him, and his mouth formed the words before his brain had processed what was happening. He was silently mouthing the words as well, a protection spell for Emma, and he visualized walls being pulled up around her, as tall and strong as the walls of the castle. Unscalable, impenetrable, unbreakable.

The king's voice wavered, and he stopped. "How are you doing that? How are you resisting me?"

Emma didn't answer, and then a soft thud sounded. Had she passed out? If she had been without food for as long as his father had suggested, that was not unlikely.

"It can't be," the king mumbled. He loudly gasped.

Erwan didn't know what had alerted him, but something flashed through him, a warning that his father was about to discover them. He spoke another spell into existence, one that came from deep inside him, from a place he'd never known he had, and this time, the walls pulled up around them. Seconds later, his father whispered a revealing spell, demanding that whoever was present would show themselves.

When he was done, a heavy silence hung in the hallways. Erwan and his group didn't even breathe. For ten seconds at least, they stood frozen to the spot, not making a single sound.

Finally, the king let out a frustrated sound. "I knew she was bluffing. I would've known."

His voice was shaky, though, as if he didn't fully believe himself.

"Martin!" the king called out, and footsteps came running.

"Yes, Your Majesty?"

"She passed out again. Make sure she drinks some water when she's gained consciousness again. No food for her for the next week. Just water."

“Your Majesty...” Martin sounded hesitant. “I’m not sure how much more she can take.”

“She’ll take as much as I tell you she can. Don’t disobey my command.”

The king stomped away, his angry footsteps reverberating through the chambers. Erwan waited until the last sound had died away, then breathed out and relaxed. The walls around them dropped. How on earth had he done that? Hell, he’d used spells he’d never learned, just like he’d recognized his father’s spells, even though Erwan had never been taught them. Where was this knowledge coming from?

Blair tapped his shoulder and gestured that the group had to wait. What was he doing?

Without hesitation, Blair rounded the corner. “Martin,” he said softly.

A gasp. “Captain. How...?”

“Martin, you have a choice to make. You know what’s happening here isn’t right. It goes against the ancient Code and everything we stand for.”

“He’s killing her,” Martin whispered. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Yes, you do. Deep inside, you know what’s the right choice here.”

“How did you get in? How did the king not sense you were here?”

“You were there when Prince Erwan shifted, weren’t you?”

Martin gasped again. “Prince Erwan has this much magic?”

“He does, and so do the others. We all are much more powerful than the king wanted us to know and believe.”

“You’re here for Emma.”

“Yes. We’re taking her with us. You said it yourself. The king will kill her if we don’t.”

“I don’t know how she managed to hang on. She’s nothing but skin and bones, and still she refuses to answer his questions. How is that possible? How can a woman stand up against the king? We know what he’s capable of. Why doesn’t it affect her?”

“That’s a discussion for another time. We’re taking her, Martin, and the only choice you have is whether or not you are going to help us or not.”

“If I don’t?”

“I won’t hurt you, not unless you raise the alarm. But we both know what will happen when the king discovers her gone. He made you responsible for her, so her disappearance will be on your head.”

“And the alternative?”

“Help us get her out of here, and come with us. We’ll keep you safe. A change will come, and the choice you have is whether to be on the right side of history when it does... Or not.”

After a brief silence, Martin said, “I’ll do it. I’ll come with you. When the king discovers her gone, my life is worthless.”

“Smart choice, my friend.”

That was the signal for the others to step around the corner. Martin’s eyes grew wide as saucers when he spotted them all, and he stumbled back, bumping against the stone wall. “What on earth? How did he not sense you?”

Erwan ignored him and rushed toward the cell. Emma lay passed out on the floor, her hair spread out like a fan. God, Martin hadn’t been kidding. She’d lost any fat she’d had on her body, her arms so frail they looked like pencils ready to snap. “Open the cell,” he ordered Martin, who complied instantly.

The key made no sound as he turned it, and the door swung open. Erwan hurried inside, Nadiv on his heels. “Emma!” Nadiv cried out, sinking to his knees right next to her. “Oh my god, Emma...”

“Lift her carefully,” Erwan told him. “We need to get the hell out of here. She needs help. Fast.”

Few words were spoken as Nadiv picked her up from the floor, her body limp as a rag doll, and cradled her in his arms. He looked up at Erwan, his eyes blazing with fury. “He will pay for this. Promise me he will pay for this.”

Erwan put a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “He will. For now, let’s focus on getting her back to pack land so Enar and Maz can take care of her.”

They went out of the castle the same way they’d come in, moving as quietly as they could. Martin was walking in front of Blair, who was no doubt keeping a close eye on him in case the guard decided to change his mind. But he didn’t, and they made it out of the castle safely, then backtracked through the brambles, back into the forest.

“I’ll shift and bring Enar and Maz to the entrance of the forest so they can wait for her there,” Rhene said.

“No, I’ll do it. I can fly much faster than you can run,” Jermon said.

Erwan nodded at him. “Go.”

Jermon ran back to the edge of the forest and shifted, taking flight immediately. He didn’t waste time circling but headed straight east for the pack lands, out of sight within seconds.

“Let’s go,” Erwan said, and they started their trek back, Nadiv carrying Emma until his arms gave out, and then Rhene took over, followed by Erwan. All the alphas took turns carrying her, and Emma didn’t wake up even once.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

Riordan was watching his two mates sleep as he sat next to the eggs, taking them out one by one and caressing them, whispering encouraging words. They were so pretty with their pearly shells that shimmered in all variations of blue. He'd never thought eggs could be pretty, but his were, and no one could tell him differently. Not that anyone would even try.

Jermon and Wilmer were as attached to the eggs as Riordan was, talking to them, singing to them—Riordan had discovered Jermon had a wonderful singing voice, though he mostly knew older songs, lots of jazz and blues—and holding them. That was good for the development of the eggs, Gael and Finlay had assured him. The two omegas had become close friends, always happy to share words of advice or wisdom.

Riordan had been worried about them joining the mission to rescue Emma, and what a relief it had been when they'd finally all returned late the evening before. They'd been exhausted, and Jermon had barely stayed awake long enough to take a shower and wash off the mud before he'd tumbled into bed. Wilmer had been asleep already, snoring loudly, but he'd woken up when Jermon and Riordan had joined him, and they'd fallen asleep snuggling.

Riordan had risen early again as he always did, and his mates were still in bed, pressed against each other. Jermon was holding Wilmer, who had found a spot for his head on Jermon's shoulder, and their limbs were tangled. They were

beautiful together, and Riordan's heart grew warm as he watched them.

Luckily, Jermon had the day off, as Kean had offered to help Michael so they could spend some time together with the three of them. Riordan had expected his mates to sleep in, so he had set up a breakfast date with Yitro. They hadn't seen each other much since the eggs had arrived, and since it was Yitro's day off today, they'd made plans to hang out.

Riordan gave the eggs a last caress and kiss. "I'll be back in a little bit, okay?"

He scribbled a quick note to his mates to remind them where he was, then headed out, remembering at the last moment to grab the bacon and cheese pancakes he'd made the day before. Easiest things ever to heat up and so yummy.

Yitro was waiting for him by the door, and the two of them exchanged a fierce, long hug. "Oh my god, it's so good to see you." Riordan took a step back and studied Yitro. "You look amazing. So radiant."

His best friend had a beautiful baby bump, perfectly round, and he cradled it protectively. "Thank you. I'm still tired but nowhere near as bad as in the beginning, and at least that dreaded nausea is gone for the most part. There are still certain smells I can't stand, but it's so much better than the first few weeks."

Riordan followed him inside, where he put the pancakes in the microwave to heat them up. Meanwhile, Yitro made them tea and served some Greek yogurt with fresh berries as a breakfast appetizer.

"How are your men doing?" Yitro asked.

"They were still asleep when I left, so I assume they're good. Jermon was exhausted when he came back yesterday."

"I was so relieved to hear they were able to find Emma and bring her back. I heard she was in pretty bad condition, though."

Riordan's face tightened. "She was. Jermon said she was nothing but skin and bones, at least twenty-five pounds lighter

than the last time he saw her. Nadiv was beside himself with worry, apparently. From what I gathered, she must've been close to her breaking point, at least physically. But she kept resisting the king even under those circumstances."

Yitro slowly shook his head. "That's courage right there. I'm not sure I could do it."

"Same. Though maybe it's different if you're in that situation. Plus, she does seem to have some magical abilities, at least more than Jermon had ever been aware of. She must've had them in order to resist the king's attempts to break her."

"I hope she'll share what she knows with the dragons. God knows they need it."

"Yeah, they do. The lack of knowledge about their abilities, especially Erwan's and Jermon's, has been a massive source of frustration. Hopefully, Emma will be able to shed some light on that. And there's Fallon and his promise of coming back with the other omegas."

Yitro shivered. "I can't imagine what those poor men have gone through in that clan. Even the little that Rhene shared made me sick to my stomach."

"They've already given Delton a heads-up because the assumption is that quite a few of them may need some form of therapy."

"I'd imagine they have some horrific stories to tell."

The microwave beeped to indicate the pancakes were ready, and Riordan gestured to Yitro that he should stay sitting and that Riordan would get them. He made small plates with three pancakes for each of them, which was probably more than they could eat, then headed back to the small dining table where he and Yitro had settled.

"It does make me realize how lucky we've gotten that we found this pack," Yitro said after eating a bit of his food. "I can only imagine what our futures would've been like had we not found a home here."

As always when he thought about the past, Riordan's insides grew tight. "I've had that same thought so many times. After James died, I thought that was it. I might not have loved him, but I could have, and it was easy to imagine a comfortable future with him. Maybe he wasn't my first choice, and we wouldn't have had the perfect happily ever after, but he would've treated me right. After he died, I lost that hope. I was convinced I'd end up being the property of some alpha asshole, regardless of the new laws."

Yitro took his hand and squeezed it. "And now look at where you are, happy with your two mates and with an extended family in the pack. I know it's not all been easy or perfect, but still. It's a thousand times better than the alternative."

Riordan nodded. "Some days I have trouble believing this is real."

"I know the feeling." A soft smile played on Yitro's lips as he looked down and caressed his belly. "I never thought I'd become a daddy. After all, at my age, who would want me? This is a dream come true for me, and I can't wait until I hold my baby in my arms."

"No one deserves it more than you, and I couldn't be happier for you. I know the situation might not be how you had imagined it, but —"

"No, it's perfect." Yitro shook his head. "Rhene and Erwan have been wonderfully supportive, constantly checking in on me, making sure I have everything I need. They've been as attentive to me as any mate would've been, and I'm beyond grateful I get to share this with them. People keep telling me how selfless it is that I'm doing this for them, but with the way things are between us, I'm doing it as much for myself as for them. We'll be coparents, but I'll be the primary caregiver, and that thought is..."

His eyes grew misty as he reached for Riordan's hand. Riordan took it and held it between both of his hands. "I know," he said softly. "I know exactly what you mean."



After a few deep breaths, Yitro pulled his hand back. “How are the eggs?”

“I was cuddling with them for a while before I came over here, and it struck me all over again how pretty they are. I could look at them for hours.”

“From what I understand, near the end of it, soon before they hatch, you’ll be staring at them for hours a day. I was talking to Gael and Finlay about it the other day, and they mentioned that dragon omegas can get pretty crazy during those last few weeks, super possessive and protective.”

“That’s what they told me as well. We’ll see. I’m not a dragon after all, so I’m not sure if I will have those same instincts. But even if I do, that’s okay. I’ve decided I’m not going to try and fight anything but let it happen the way it comes. This whole situation is a miracle in itself, and any attempt on my part to try and control it would be futile anyway. How could I control something that shouldn’t have happened in the first place?”

Yitro chuckled dryly. “No argument from me.”

“Have you three talked about names yet? Or is that something the guys don’t want to reveal?”

“Those two have been hysterical about names. Rhene insisted on a more common name, one he could pronounce, as he worded it. But Erwan argued that pretty much everyone here has an unusual name, so a more common name would only stand out. That led to a whole argument about what constituted a common one and what was a special one, at which point Erwan added that he wanted a name that meant something, and then I tuned out. I told them they could come up with a short list, and I’d have a look at it. I haven’t heard back since, so we’ll see.”

Riordan snorted. “Worst-case scenario, you’re going to end up naming that child yourself. If those two can’t get their shit together, you’ll have to do it for them.”

Yitro grinned. “I *may* have picked out a name for that occasion. Not saying it’s going to happen, but at this point, I’m

not ruling it out.”

“Oh, spill! Or is it something you don’t want to share?”

Yitro waved his hand. “You know I tell you everything. You don’t blab to others about what people entrust you in confidence. I did some research, and I think the name Ainle would be perfect if it’s a boy, which I think it is. It’s an old Irish name that means hero, champion, or warrior, and somehow, that seems fitting for this child.”

“Ainle...” Riordan tasted the name on his tongue. “I like the name itself and the meaning. I think it’s perfect.”

Yitro beamed at him. “Thank you. I really love it too, but we’ll see if I get to use it.”

“Pff, if you don’t know by now that those two would do anything for you, you’re not as smart as I thought you were. They may not be your mates, but they sure as hell would walk through fire for you and their child.”

“Good point. Maybe I should bring it up with them, see what they think.”

Riordan had finished two pancakes and was halfway through another but pushed his plate back because he’d had enough. He used a napkin to clean his mouth and hands, then leaned back in his chair. “Did you know Gael and Finlay were together?”

“No. In hindsight, I can’t believe I didn’t see it. It’s so obvious now that we know, but the thought never occurred to me.”

Riordan clicked his tongue. “I know, right? When I found out, it threw me for a loop that even we are conditioned to think in certain patterns about ourselves. Like, I have no problems with two alphas being together, obviously, but the concept of two omegas somehow never registered with me. What does that say about how I see us omegas?”

“Alphas aren’t the only ones who still have some inner work to do on their ingrained patterns. We do too. And that’s okay. I always have to think about that story I once heard about how they manage to imprison elephants with a mere

pole in the ground when one fierce pull from the elephant would yank that pole right out of the ground.”

Riordan leaned forward. “How?”

“They chain a baby elephant, one who isn’t strong enough to pull it out. He’ll try and try until the day he accepts that he can’t. And after that, all he remembers is that he can’t, and he won’t try again, even though he’s three times as big and strong, and that pole is far too weak to hold him. All he feels is that he’s chained, so in his mind, he can’t, and so he never even attempts it anymore. I don’t think we’re that different. In our minds, we’re still chained to the old system, to outdated thought patterns that no longer apply, but we don’t realize that freedom is right around the corner. All we need to do is embrace the fact that we can.”

As analogies went, that one seemed really apt, and Riordan kept pondering it, even after he’d said good-bye to Yitro and walked back to his cabin. Which old thought patterns was he still clinging to? Where should he embrace the newfound freedom he was denying himself? Not a question that was easy to answer, but he would try.

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## Chapter Twenty-Seven

As mornings went, there were way worse ways to wake up than finding Jermon plastered against him. Wilmer smiled at how his mate clung to him in his sleep as if he wanted to make sure Wilmer wouldn't escape. Granted, Wilmer had apparently decided to use Jermon's shoulder as a pillow sometime during the night, which was interesting because as far as he knew, he'd never been a big snuggler.

But Jermon had wrapped his arm around Wilmer, pinning him to his chest, and his legs were slipped between Wilmer's, holding those in place. And it didn't hurt. His burn wounds were improving by the day, but Wilmer had still expected to be at least a tad uncomfortable being held like that, but he wasn't. All he felt was gratitude and warmth for the affection of his mate.

Jermon and Riordan loved him. They hadn't said the actual words, but Wilmer knew. Everything they did for him showed their deep care for him, their love and devotion. And he'd started to care for them as well. Was it love? It seemed too early for that, but then again, it hadn't taken him long to fall for them the first time around. Or was it possible that his heart remembered, even if his brain didn't?

After everything he'd seen and experienced so far, that wouldn't surprise him one bit. Clearly, not everything that happened could be explained rationally. Hello, Riordan had carried eggs. That alone defied all laws of nature, and yet here they were. Would it be so farfetched, then, that his heart would cling to something his brain couldn't remember?

Next to him, Jermon stirred, his muscles going taut as he stretched. He seemed to realize Wilmer was in his arms, and he relaxed again. “Good morning,” he rumbled.

“Good morning.”

“Where’s our sweet sunshine?”

“Didn’t he have breakfast planned with his friend?” Wilmer couldn’t remember his name off the top of his head, though Riordan must’ve mentioned it. So many names to relearn. No wonder one slipped through every once in a while. Still, he wasn’t complaining, since his headaches had never returned, much to everyone’s surprise.

“Oh, of course. With Yitro.”

“He’s the one who’s pregnant, right?”

“Correct. With Erwan and Rhene’s baby.”

Wilmer gently pushed against Jermon’s arm, and the dragon let him go instantly. They both turned onto their sides, and Wilmer couldn’t help but smile. Jermon looked so adorable with his bed hair, his cheek showing the creases of his pillow, and his eyes still a tad droopy. Wilmer would never have guessed that the tough-looking, strong alpha could be this cute and vulnerable, but he was, and Wilmer’s insides went all soft and weak.

Jermon frowned. “Does my breath smell or something that you keep staring at me like that?”

Wilmer chuckled. “I can’t stare at you? Not even when you’re all cute and frumpy, just waking up?”

The frown disappeared, replaced by hopeful puppy eyes. “You think I’m cute?”

He was insecure. Wilmer had picked up on that before, but it became more and more clear. Why, that was a much harder question. Wilmer paid attention when Jermon talked about his background and his past, and some of it made sense, but Wilmer was missing the bigger picture. But that was okay. They had time.

“Super cute,” he said softly. “Especially when you wake up.”

Jermon’s face lit up. “Thank you.” He angled his head as if he was listening to something. “The eggs want some attention. Is it okay if I bring them here?”

“You can hear them?”

Jermon hesitated. “It’s more like sensing. I pick up a soft hum from them, like a low-voltage electrical charge.”

“Interesting. And yes, of course.”

A minute later, the four eggs were between them, safe and comfortable on their thick, soft blanket. They were so stunning. As a veterinarian, Wilmer couldn’t get over the size of the eggs, their perfect shape, and their pearly appearance. Every time he saw them, he was in awe all over again.

But as a man and as dad-to-be—and there was a thought that still hadn’t fully settled with him—he was enamored with them, almost giddy with excitement and the urge to touch them. And when he did, the sparks brought an immediate smile to his face. “Good morning, buddy,” he whispered to the egg closest to him as he caressed its scale.

A happy buzz shot through his finger, and Wilmer’s smile widened. “You’re excited about today, huh? So am I. Daddy Jermon is off today, and Daddy Riordan will be back soon, and we’re gonna spend all day together.”

Jermon looked up from the egg he’d been bonding with. “We are?”

“Well, yeah, what else were you planning on doing?”

“I don’t know. Maybe help out Michael for a bit?”

Wilmer shook his head. “You’re off today.”

“I know, but we can’t keep up with the work as it is. Not to make you feel guilty, but it’s already a struggle to get everything done. I can’t afford a day off.”

“Which is exactly why you need one. I understand what you’re saying, but that right there is the kind of thinking that

starts the slippery road to a burnout. You need rest, baby.”

*Baby.* He’d called Jermon baby. The term of endearment had flown from his lips as if he’d done it a thousand times before. It felt right, somehow.

Jermon’s eyes softened. “I love it when you call me that.”

“Did I use to, before?”

“Yeah.”

“Not the most original of pet names.”

“Maybe, but it’s special to me. And it means the world to me that you’re calling me that again.” Jermon’s voice was raw.

“It came out spontaneously. Sometimes I think my heart remembers things my brain has forgotten. It would explain why from the get-go, my wolf was so adamant that I belonged with you guys, even when I had no clue who you were.”

“That’s a wonderful idea, if I’m honest. Knowing that somewhere deep inside you, we still matter, that’s... I love that.”

“You matter to the new me as well. That’s what I was pondering, right before you woke up, how much I’ve grown to care for you.”

Jermon blinked, his eyes growing moist. “You’re gonna make me cry.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“No. Gods, no. This is the best thing ever. Not the crying, I mean, but what you said. When you got hurt, that first day when it became clear you’d lost your memory... It broke my heart for us. We’d just grown closer, on the cusp of becoming more, at least officially, and then it all came crashing down. And I promised Riordan that day that if your memory issues were persistent, if you never regained your memories again, we’d make you fall in love with us all over again.”

“We’re halfway there,” Wilmer said, his heart so full it felt like bursting. “I promise you we’re well on our way.”

The front door opened, and seconds later, Riordan stuck his head around the corner. When he spotted them, a wide smile broke free. “Yay, you guys are up!”

He kicked off his shoes and joined them on the bed. “Hey, babies,” he whispered and kissed each of the eggs in the sweetest gesture.

He curled up between Jermon and Wilmer, and Wilmer’s heart felt lighter. It hadn’t been heavy before, but being with the three of them made a difference, as if it brought joy and contentment on a level he couldn’t consciously touch.

“How was Yitro?” Jermon asked.

“Good. He looks amazing. Have you heard anything about Emma yet?”

Jermon looked guilty as he turned and grabbed his phone off the night table. “I haven’t even checked my phone yet.”

“That’s okay.” Wilmer put his hand on Jermon’s arm. “You don’t need to be connected and accessible all the time. It’s good and healthy to disconnect from the outside world from time to time and allow yourself rest and the opportunity to recover.”

“That sounds like something the old you would say,” Riordan said with a smile. “Not that you’re not the same person you were before, but it’s interesting to be reminded that your character hasn’t changed.”

Jermon had checked his messages. “Erwan texted me. She’s not awake yet. Enar did examine her, and she’s malnourished, which we already knew, as well as dehydrated. She’s very weakened, and Enar expects her recovery to take weeks.”

“But she’s alive,” Riordan said softly. “Thanks to your mission, she’s alive.”

Jermon switched off his phone and put it back. “She is, and I honestly don’t know how much longer she would’ve lasted. She couldn’t have weighed more than a hundred pounds, and before, she was strong and curvy, not skinny. She must’ve



been in the dungeons for weeks to have lost that much weight.”

“It goes pretty fast if you get nothing to eat,” Wilmer said.

“I don’t mean to interrupt, but the eggs are getting sleepy,” Riordan said. “I’m gonna put them back in their bassinet, okay?”

Wilmer and Jermon watched as Riordan carefully lifted the eggs one by one and placed them on the mattress for a moment so he could put the heating blanket back in the crib. He carried them to their little warm bed and gave them all a kiss before he tucked them in.

“You’re amazing with them,” Wilmer said when Riordan crawled back onto the bed between them. “It’s so sweet to see.”

“They’re my babies. I know they’re eggs, but they feel like my kids already.”

“That’s a good thing,” Wilmer said. “The fact that you have such a strong bond with them despite the biological differences is a compliment to your big heart. You’ve wholeheartedly accepted them as yours.”

“I have.” Riordan looked at the crib, his eyes soft. “It may be different once they’re hatched, but right now, they do feel like mine, like I’m their daddy already.”

“You are, precious. You’re the best daddy these four could’ve hoped for.”

Riordan stared at him for a few beats. “I really wanna kiss you right now. Would that be okay?”

Wilmer grinned. “If you can ignore my morning breath, then sure.”

He’d barely said the last syllable when Riordan launched himself at Wilmer and pressed their mouths together. Wilmer might not remember him or the memories they had made before he got hurt, but kissing Riordan was as familiar as breathing. Maybe that was another memory that was stored somewhere inside him. Or maybe they were just made to kiss

each other, considering how perfectly Riordan fit into his arms, how their mouths slotted together like two pieces of the same puzzle.

And when Jermon joined in and it turned into a sloppy, messy three-way kiss, Wilmer's heart soared...and so did his body. His cock grew hard, and he sank into that kiss, reveling in the touch of his mates. He inhaled their scent, and it settled deep inside him, this feeling of being exactly where he was supposed to be, of being home with these two men.

The kiss grew slower, softer, that urgency replaced by something much more tender and languid.

"Can you...?" Riordan made a vague gesture at Wilmer, but he still understood.

"I'm cleared for sex as long as I don't do all the work, Enar said yesterday."

"So lazy sex, then," Riordan joked, and they all laughed.

"If one of you is willing to ride me, then yes, please."

Riordan and Jermon looked at each other, Jermon's cheeks growing red. "You need it, don't you? Riordan asked him, not even a trace of condemnation in his voice.

"I don't want to rob you of—"

"You matter as much as I do." Riordan's tone was firm. "And my needs aren't more important than yours."

Jermon bowed his head, avoiding Riordan's eyes. "I know."

Riordan sent Wilmer a silent plea for help, so he tugged Jermon's wrist until the dragon alpha met his gaze. "Is he right, baby? Do you need it?"

Wilmer hadn't thought it possible, but Jermon's cheeks grew even redder as he squirmed on the bed, playing with his fingers. "I don't feel... It's hard for me, but yes, I do. I really loved it when you..."

"Fucked you?" Wilmer helpfully supplied. "You loved having my cock inside you, baby?"

If what Jermon needed to get over his embarrassment was some sweet and dirty talk, Wilmer would happily provide it. Nothing wrong with wanting to be fucked, even as an alpha.

Finally, Jermon nodded. “Yeah, I did. If you want to, I’d love to...ride you.”

“It would be my pleasure. Literally and figuratively. But you’ll have to do most of the work, and I’m not sure if I’ll be able to fuck you as hard as I undoubtedly did before. You look like you can appreciate a good pounding.”

Riordan giggled. “He does. You fucked the living daylights out of him, and he loved every second of it.”

“I figured as much. Well, precious, you may have to help me here, okay? Make sure that our Jermon gets what he needs.”

Riordan, bless him, nodded. “Why don’t I start by helping you undress?”

The warmth inside Wilmer grew bigger and stronger. “That would be lovely, thank you.”

With Riordan’s help, he took off his underwear, then sank back down on the bed. Both of his mates were watching him.

“I know I don’t look like I once did.” Wilmer took a sad look at his flailing muscles. Once upon a time, his chest had been hard like marble, all chiseled muscles forged by hard work. His body had endured a hard hit from being inactive for this long, his muscles atrophying from lack of use.

“You’re still beautiful to me.” Jermon found the smooth words that had failed him earlier. “You’re alive and with us, and that’s all that matters.”

“Besides,” Riordan said with a cheeky grin, “your cock still works, doesn’t it?”

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## Chapter Twenty-Eight

Riordan had never associated sex with fun and laughter, but here they were, the three of them, in stitches after that corny joke he'd cracked. It had been an easy shot, and he'd made it, fully confident that Wilmer would take it the right way. And indeed, he had and was laughing as hard as Jermon and Riordan.

"I'm glad to hear you have your priorities straight." Wilmer grinned.

Riordan shrugged. "I wouldn't call them straight, exactly, but yeah."

The joking around seemed to have helped Jermon lose his embarrassment, as he wasn't as stiff and red-faced anymore. It hadn't dimmed his excitement, though. His cock was fighting a valiant battle to escape the confines of his underwear. Riordan licked his lips. It might not be his turn, but he could sure as fuck appreciate the view. And he would never, ever grow tired of admiring that stunning piece of equipment.

He reached for Jermon, meeting his eyes in a wordless question, and when Jermon nodded, Riordan pulled down his underwear too. That monster dick sprung free, slapping against Jermon's stomach. Riordan was, as always, immediately drawn to it. He liked cocks anyway—duh—but this one deserved to be worshiped.

After carelessly flicking the underwear onto the floor, he wrapped his hands around Jermon's dick. A little moan of pleasure escaped Jermon's lips, and he thrust his hips, driving

his cock into Riordan's hands. Riordan's mouth literally watered. Surely, it was okay to treat himself to a little taste.

He peppered Jermon's cock with kisses, smiling when it grew even harder, then took his first lick. He should've known that wasn't enough. He always wanted more of his mates, as if he had an endless hunger and need inside him to be with them.

So he bent in again and suckled gently on the crown until the first drop of precum hit his tongue. Still not enough.

He worked him in deeper, that big cock filling his mouth until it was full, and he let it rest for a moment. Not sucking or licking, merely reveling in the weight on his tongue, the way it stretched his mouth and jaw, the slightly salty taste, the musky sweat coming from Jermon's groin. All of it only made him want Jermon more.

He treated himself to a bit more, then slid out, pressed a last kiss on the tip, and let it go.

"God, that was sexy," Wilmer said in a low, husky voice. He gestured Jermon over with one crook of his finger. "Come here, baby. I can't do much, but I will damn well prep you myself."

The eagerness with which Jermon complied spoke volumes about how much he wanted this. Riordan rolled half off the bed, grabbed the lube from the nightstand, and handed it to Wilmer.

"Why don't you keep him occupied while I prep?" the alpha suggested.

Excellent idea. Wilmer propped himself up against the headboard, and Jermon knelt with one knee on either side of Wilmer, his ass toward him. Riordan positioned himself in front of Jermon and offered him his mouth.

"Oh, baby," Jermon said with a sweet sigh, then kissed him, hesitant at first but then more boldly.

Jermon gasped, his body going taut for a moment, probably because Wilmer had gotten started, but Riordan took Jermon's head with both hands and pulled him down. He fused their mouths together again and slipped his tongue into his

mate's mouth. Jermon opened up and sank into the kiss. He slid his tongue against Riordan's in a sensual duet that Riordan was all too happy to engage in.

Jermon plundered his mouth with hot kisses, sucking on Riordan's tongue, then feeding Riordan his own. The man had learned some moves since that first sweet but slightly awkward kiss. Each kiss grew more demanding than the last until they were both panting into each other's mouths, their breaths mingling.

From the corners of his eyes, Riordan caught Wilmer's concentrated gaze as he pumped his fingers in and out of Jermon's hole. He was taking great care in prepping him, and Riordan's insides went all weak and fluttery. He loved his strong alphas, but he loved it even more when they showed their soft, tender side.

He slowed down the kiss, reveling in the wet slide of their tongues against each other, the soft, breathy moans Jermon made, his musky scent. Being near his mates steadied Riordan, like he was building on something intangible deep inside him, some hidden part of him that needed these men more than he'd ever be able to express in words.

"You're ready for me," Wilmer declared, and Jermon froze for a moment. His eyes met Riordan's, and there was that embarrassment again that was so close to fear, maybe of being rejected or ridiculed.

Riordan pressed a last kiss on those firm lips. "Take what you need. You deserve it."

Jermon bowed his head, leaning it against Riordan's forehead. "Thank you. I..."

*I love you.* Riordan knew without a doubt that was what Jermon had wanted to say, but he couldn't. They couldn't. They had to wait for Wilmer. "I know," Riordan whispered, and the sweet smile they shared was full of hope.

Jermon moved back, climbed off Wilmer, and repositioned himself, now facing Wilmer. Riordan stretched out next to them, determined to get a front-row seat.

Jermon held Wilmer's cock with one hand and spread his legs wide, tilting his ass back. As he pushed down, his face distorted, and when the head slipped inside him, he winced and halted.

"Need a second," he mumbled.

"Take your time, baby. We're not in a hurry." Wilmer put his hands on Jermon's hips.

Jermon closed his eyes, took a few deep breaths, and opened them again. The pain that had flared up on his face disappeared, replaced by determination. He lowered himself, those thick thighs trembling as he sank down inch by inch. His forehead was marred in concentration, and he was biting his lip, staring at something in the distance.

"Breathe," Riordan reminded him, concerned about the tightness in Jermon's body. Taking an alpha cock was no small feat for another alpha, and Jermon would have to relax and bear down, or he'd hurt himself.

Jermon blew out his breath.

"That's it, baby," Wilmer praised him. "You're doing so good."

Wilmer might not remember consciously, but he sure as fuck had picked up on Jermon's insecurities and his need to feel accepted when he did this. As Jermon slowly took Wilmer's cock, Wilmer encouraged him every step of the way, lavishing him with sweet words.

Jermon gyrated his hips, screwing downward. Sweat pearled on his forehead as he leaned back, Wilmer's cock completely inside him. He threw his head back, and an expression of bliss filled his face. For four, five seconds, he didn't move but sat there in quiet rapture. He looked like a man who had finally found what he'd been searching for, for a long, long time.

"Fuck, you're beautiful," Wilmer said hoarsely when Jermon straightened himself again. "Now ride me, baby. Use my cock to give you pleasure."

Jermon moaned as he rose and lowered himself again, that fat cock once again disappearing inside him. “Feels so good. So good. God, I missed this. Missed you.”

His back arched as he rode Wilmer, first slow and deep, then faster and faster. He seemed lost in his own world, crying out in pleasure as he slammed down hard and whimpering when he pulled off him again.

Wilmer made his own symphony of ecstasy, his hands going white as he helped Jermon ride him while spewing a nonstop chorus of moans and grunts, of little whispers and harder sounds of pleasure. But above all, he was focused on Jermon. “That’s it, baby. Ride that cock. Make sure it hits your pleasure spot. Fuck, yes, that’s what I wanna see on your face. Let me see you and hear you, baby.”

Jermon let out a throaty groan, his eyes going glassy as he bounced on Wilmer’s cock, every thrust a wet slap that echoed through the room. His dick smacked against his clammy skin with every move, and Riordan couldn’t look away. It was magnificent, awe-inspiring, and Riordan’s hole twitched. Next time. Today wasn’t about him, and he was fine with that.

“Close,” Wilmer warned. “Really fucking close.”

Jermon threw his head back again, grunting and growling, lips peeled. His legs quivered with the effort of holding up his weight as he fucked himself hard on Wilmer’s dick. He wasn’t holding back, slamming down again and again until his eyes crossed and his whole body went rigid. “Oh, gods, yes!” he cried out, and without ever touching himself, he came.

His load splattered all over himself, dripping down his stomach, his chest, and he’d even caught a bit on his chin. At the same time, Wilmer’s body convulsed, and with a loud roar, he thrust up once more, coming as well. What an amazing sight.

After a few violent jerks, Jermon grew still, and he stayed seated like that, his eyes closed. He circled his hips as if he wanted to milk every last drop of cum from Wilmer’s balls. When he finally pulled off, Wilmer’s cock slipped out with a



wet plop. Riordan leaned in, making sure he got a good view of that wide-open hole, cum already leaking out.

“Come here.” Wilmer opened his arms wide, and Jermon rolled right into them, snuggling close. He was half-turned on his side, offering Riordan a perfect view of his ass. Damn, that was the sexiest sight ever. He took a moment longer to admire it, then crawled to Wilmer’s other side. The alpha had room for him as well, and he curled up against him, resting his head on Wilmer’s shoulder.

“I’ll clean you up in a bit,” Riordan whispered.

“I don’t care. Right now, I wanna hold you two.”

“Mmm, I’m down with that.”

Jermon blinked, his eyes drifting shut. He let out a soft sigh, his face relaxing and his body going slack. The soft length of his cock slid down his leg until it had found a new resting place, tucked against his balls. The man looked utterly exhausted but also sated. He’d needed that release, and Riordan’s heart was so full for his mate that he’d gotten what he’d craved.

“We did good,” Wilmer whispered with a smile at Riordan.

“Yes.” Riordan snuggled against Wilmer’s other side.  
“Yes, we did.”

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## Chapter Twenty-Nine

The lush meadow swayed in the soft breeze, and the leaves on the bushes whispered in harmony with the warm, sugary air. The blue sky and white clouds provided a picturesque setting. On the horizon, where the slopes rose toward the wilderness, the meadow was green, the gentle wind rustling the grass like a mother's hand combing a child's hair. It carried flowers and pollen, the lovely and welcome smells of spring.

The occasional insects buzzed by, and bees were flitting from flower to flower as they gathered nectar. The sharp grass became a lush carpet under Jermon's feet, the blades tickling his bare calves as he and Erwan made their way to the spot where they were supposed to meet one of the Murphy dragons.

After that round of sex the day before, he'd slept like the dead, not waking up until three hours later. And he'd been in bed early again, clocking another full nine hours of sleep before he'd spent the morning working. Maybe he'd been more exhausted than he had realized.

He'd talked about it with Wilmer when Riordan had been cooking for them. He'd apologized for needing the sex, but Wilmer had set him straight. "It's okay to need something, especially sex. That's not a need to be ashamed of," he'd said.

Jermon had to admit it had made a world of difference, though how and why he couldn't explain. He'd slept better and was more relaxed, like he'd gotten rid of a hell of a lot of tension. It had surprised him, and he made a mental note that

maybe he shouldn't be so uptight about wanting sex or needing it.

"How's Emma?" Jermon asked his brother.

"Still very weak and resting. Enar has put her on tube-feeding so she gets the nutrients she needs, but he expects her recovery will take a while."

"Not surprising. She looked like death warmed over."

Erwan hummed in agreement. "Nadiv is beside himself, which tells me things between them may not be as casual as he presented them, but they'll have to figure that out themselves."

Yeah, no kidding. Hell if Jermon was interfering in his brother's love life when he couldn't even get his own shit sorted out. "Do you have any idea what this meeting is about?"

"None. All the note said was that someone wanted to meet with both of us and discuss something of importance."

"Is it bad of me that I'm immediately imagining something awful?" Jermon said with a sigh.

Erwan chuckled. "Nope, because that's where my mind went as well. Color me cynical, but I don't think anything good can come from secret meetings with the Murphys."

"I still can't get over what Fallon told Rhene. It sounded like straight-up slavery."

Erwan's face tightened. "It wouldn't surprise me. You've heard the way they talk about omegas. They don't give two shits about them other than for sex and serving them in a practical sense."

"It has to be horrific if that many omegas want to escape. I do wonder if this meeting is somehow connected to Fallon's visit."

"You think they found out about it? We haven't heard back from Fallon, so there's that, but he did warn us it might take time to get organized. But then why this secretive meeting? Why not call us all out on it?"

Jermon was spared an answer as a yellow dragon appeared on the horizon, rapidly closing in on them. The dragon's scales caught the sunlight, its reflection almost blinding. He flew a circle over them, maybe to make sure no one else was there, and his wings flapped like sails billowing in a gush of wind. Even hearing it made Jermon itch to shift and take flight himself.

The dragon gracefully folded his wings and landed without a sound, his eyes blazing like bright orange coals. He turned his back to them and shifted, far enough away to provide him with some privacy as he got dressed. He must've carried clothes, somehow. When he walked up, Jermon recognized him. Hubert, the dragon who had been training Finlay. What on earth did he want with them?

Hubert bowed his head toward Erwan. "Good morning, Prince Erwan." Then he nicked it at Jermon. "Prince Jermon."

"Good morning, Hubert," Erwan said pleasantly. "To what do we owe the honor of your presence?"

Hubert laughed a little uncomfortably. "I see we're getting right to the point."

Jermon quirked an eyebrow. "We did assume you had a reason to set up this meeting, so we can skip the small talk."

"Right, right. Well, as you're aware, I've been working with your omega dragon Finlay in the last two training sessions. He has made quite the impression on me, and I'm confident he feels the same way. So I wanted to arrange my union with him. I'm prepared to pay handsomely."

Jermon blinked. Hubert wanted *what* now? Jermon hadn't heard that correctly, right? But Hubert looked dead serious.

"I have to confess I'm not entirely sure what it is you're asking me," Erwan said, apparently equally confused.

Hubert let out a brief laugh. "To put it bluntly, I'm asking you for Finlay. I want to mate him, have him become mine officially. I'll marry him eventually. I can promise you that."

To become his officially? That insinuated that Finlay was already his, which Jermon knew for a fact wasn't the case.

What was this guy on that he thought Finlay liked him? “To be clear, you’re convinced your courting will be welcomed by Finlay?”

Hubert laughed as if Jermon had said something funny. “Courting... I haven’t heard that word in a long time. I suppose you could call it courting, though I’m not prepared to wait long before consummating our union, if you know what I mean.”

He wanted to fuck Finlay. That part, Jermon could understand. It was crude, but lust was at least something Jermon could grasp. But why on earth was the man talking about a union, about marriage? That indicated he was interested in more than a tumble between the sheets.

“I think I understand what you’re saying,” Erwan said, and to Hubert’s ears, it probably sounded friendly. But Jermon, who knew his brother better than anyone, picked up on the steely undertone. “Can you give us a little more background on why you’re interested in him? Are there no available omegas in your clan?”

Hubert shuffled his feet, staring at the ground for a few moments. “I’m not supposed to divulge this information, but we’re having some fertility issues in our clan.”

“Fertility issues?” Jermon asked. “As in, omegas can’t get pregnant?”

Hubert nodded. “And if they can, they’re having trouble keeping their eggs alive. Every clutch used to have a ninety percent survival rate, but over the last hundred years, that has steadily dropped down to ten percent. And lately, none of the clutches have survived.”

That sounded familiar, but Jermon didn’t tell Hubert that. The less information that man and his clan had about the Doyles, the better.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Erwan said. “It must be a crushing, devastating blow to your omegas to keep losing their clutches.”

Hubert frowned as if Erwan had said something unexpected, but he quickly pulled his face back into a neutral position. “Yes, it’s been hard on them. And, of course, on us as alphas as well. The very survival of our clan is at stake.”

“And you think Finlay will be able to have a healthy clutch?” Jermon asked.

Hubert shrugged. “There’s no guarantee, but some fresh blood might be a good idea. Out of necessity, we’ve had to choose partners within our clan, with only a few omegas from the Fitzgeralds and the O’Connors, so we might’ve had too much inbreeding.”

Inbreeding? He made it sound like he was talking about animals, not humans.

“I can see where you’re coming from,” Erwan said. He was so good at that diplomatic shit. Jermon had to resist shaking Hubert and asking him what the fuck was wrong with him, but he’d follow his brother’s lead and stay polite.

“I’ve been waiting my turn to breed, but I’m losing my patience, and it’s time to take matters into my own hands.”

“Waiting your turn? Breeding is regulated, then?” Erwan asked.

“It is. We need permission from the king, though he has delegated this task to Nicholas, our breeding master. He’s the one who decides which dragon gets to breed which omega.”

A breeding master? The picture was getting worse with every word Hubert spoke. At no point had he mentioned anything about the omega’s permission, which led Jermon to believe the omegas didn’t have a voice in this. From what he had seen of the Murphy clan so far, that wouldn’t surprise him.

“Like I said, I understand, but you also have to see that Finlay is precious to our clan. We don’t have that many omegas, and to lose one would be a hard blow,” Erwan said.

Hubert was quiet for a few beats. “I wish I could offer a swap with one of ours, but I’d need the breeding master’s permission for that, and I don’t think he’d go for it at this point. So what else can I do to sweeten the pot?”

“Out of curiosity, when you said you were willing to pay handsomely for Finlay, what amount were you thinking?”

Hubert scratched his chin. “Well, considering he’s still young, supposedly healthy, and has a lot of value to both our clans, I’m thinking two million dollars. Does that sound about right?”

Jermon had to fight hard to keep the absolute shock off his face. The dude was willing to pay two million dollars to get his hands on Finlay? That could suggest one of two things. Either he had more money than he knew what to do with and two million was a drop in the bucket for him. Or, just as likely, it was a reflection of how desperate the Murphys were for new omegas.

“In itself, I’d consider that a reasonable amount,” Erwan said. “But like you said, you may have to sweeten the pot more for us to be truly worth it.”

Hubert took a step closer and another one. “I’m willing to trade information.”

He’d dropped his voice so low Jermon had to lean in to catch his words.

“What kind of information?”

Jermon was happy to let his brother handle this part. He was still seething too much to even attempt to be polite to the Murphy dragon at this point.

Hubert looked around as if once more assuring himself no one else was listening in. “I know things, things that our leaders are hiding from you. Things that are of crucial importance to you. Sell your omega to me, and I’ll tell you what you need to know.”

At least he was calling it now what it was: the sale of a human being. How despicable to think he could buy Finlay from them without ever inquiring whether that was something Finlay was interested in in the first place.

Erwan pursed his lips and nodded slowly. “That’s an interesting proposal, Hubert. I can’t deny it sounds appealing.”

Oh, he was lying through his teeth, and Hubert was buying it hook, line, and sinker. The dragon offered a broad smile, looking smug as hell. “I am glad to see you recognize the value of my proposition, Prince Erwan. Does that mean I can count on a positive answer?”

“You have to understand something about me, Hubert. I never make impulsive decisions, least of all where it concerns large amounts of money. So I’m going to ask you to give me forty-eight hours to consider this, and then I’ll get back to you. Sound fair?”

Hubert’s smile faltered a little. “I’d hoped for an answer today. If my clan finds out I’m in private negotiations with you, it could cost me.”

Jermon cocked his head, trusting himself he had a good enough grip on his temper to speak up. “They’re going to find out at some point, right? Aren’t you concerned about the repercussions?”

“Nah, I’ll just keep him hidden until he’s pregnant, which won’t take long, I’m sure. What with my strong seed and his fertile youth, I’ll have him carrying my clutch in no time. After that, the others can have him.”

And Jermon’s grip on his temper vanished again, and bile rose in his throat. They had to end this conversation quickly, or he’d say or do things he might regret later. Although a good tongue-lashing was the very least this man deserved. Someone should beat some sense into him, and Jermon would happily volunteer for that job.

“Understood. I’m still going to need those forty-eight hours, though. There’s no need to reach out to me. I know where to find you, and I’ll make sure your clan stays in the dark.” Erwan’s jaw ticked, the only sign he was as upset as Jermon was.

Hubert sighed. “I’ll await your decision, Prince Erwan.” Another nod for Jermon, and he stalked away. Seconds later, he took off like a yellow flash of lightning, disappearing into the sky.



“We deserve credit for not killing him on the spot,” Jermon growled as soon as he was out of sight.

“We absolutely do. What an unbelievably arrogant and despicable asshole.”

“Asshole is too mild a term for him.”

“What makes it worse is that he doesn’t seem to realize it. He’s not concerned about his behavior, which tells me it’s the standard in that clan. If this is how they’re treating their omegas...”

Erwan didn’t finish his sentence, but he didn’t need to. Jermon knew exactly what his brother had wanted to say. “They consider them property.” Jermon sighed. “But would we have done any differently had we not escaped? Were Finlay and Gael not treated as property in our clan?”

“Maybe, but I do hope we would never have sunk that low. The way he was talking about impregnating Finlay and then handing him off to the other alphas...”

Jermon got sick to his stomach all over again. “They’d rape him. That’s what that is, rape.”

“It is.”

“So what are we going to do about it? Because we can’t idly stand by and allow that to continue.”

“We need more information, facts. For all we know, this could be alpha bragging. We need to confirm that what Hubert hinted at is the truth. Hopefully, Fallon will come back with the other omegas. He might shed some light on what’s going on there.”

“You know it’s the truth.” Jermon put a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “But you’re right about us needing the facts. We both know he wasn’t joking, but we still need to confirm what we’re dealing with.”

Erwan nodded. “Let’s see how we can make that happen. Because hell if we’re gonna have this on our conscience as well.”

## Chapter Thirty

Emma opened her eyes four days after she had been rescued, and three days after that, Enar declared her healthy enough to have visitors. Still, Erwan was hesitant as he stepped into her room. Was she really ready to talk to him?

But as soon as she spotted him, a smile bloomed on her face, pale and thin as it still was. “Prince Erwan, it’s so good to see you.”

He sat down in the chair right next to her bed, and Emma carefully raised the headrest of her bed enough to be able to look at him.

“Please, just Erwan, and I am so, so glad to see you,” Erwan said.

“Even though I look like shit?”

He chuckled. “No offense, but you already look a hell of a lot better than you did a week ago.”

Her smile faded. “Yeah, Enar told me how close to death I was.”

“You hadn’t realized it yourself?”

She let out a long sigh. “I was so focused on survival, on resisting the king, that I didn’t allow myself to think about how weak I had grown. I knew I wasn’t doing well, but I didn’t want to face how precarious my condition was. I couldn’t afford to.”

“Your courage and fortitude amaze me. I can’t believe you managed to resist my father for that long.”

Emma slowly shook her head. “Don’t call him that. That man is not a father, and he doesn’t deserve to be called one.”

Now it was Erwan’s turn to sigh. “I know. Sometimes I say it out of habit, but sometimes it feels like I have to, like people would think it weird if I referred to him as the king.”

“As far as I’m concerned, you can call him Cladhaire or the asshole. Let’s face it. The man doesn’t deserve to be called the king either. He’s not a legitimate king. He stole the throne.”

“Yeah, we heard you tell him that.” Erwan cocked his head. “Did you know we were there?”

“Yes, I could sense you. But I was astonished by the strength of your cloaking spell and your defenses. When Cladhaire did his revealing spell, I thought for sure you guys were busted. But he never pierced your defenses.”

“To be honest, I don’t know how I did it. Instinct is my best answer. I just followed my gut.”

“You haven’t received any training yet?”

Erwan hesitated. “We have a lot to catch up on, but I’m not sure you’re ready for that right away. No, let me rephrase that.” He caught himself. He shouldn’t make that decision for her. “Are you ready for that? Because that might be a longer conversation than you had counted on.”

Emma smiled. “Somebody’s been training himself to treat omegas in a different way. I’m proud of you, and I mean that in a noncondescending way.”

“Thank you. I still have plenty to learn, but I’m trying.”

“Enar told you I wanted to see only you, right?”

Erwan nodded.

“That was because I figured we did have a lot to talk about, and as much as I want to see everyone else, that would be too much for me. But you and I, we need to exchange

information, and we need to do it now. If nothing else, my involuntary stay in the castle's dungeons has shown me that tomorrow isn't guaranteed."

Erwan put his hand on Emma's frail hand, gently squeezing it. "I can't tell you how sorry I am for what you had to go through, for the torture my... Cladhaire inflicted upon you."

"Thank you, but I do hope you realize that none of that is on you. It was my choice to stay in the castle, and you may not believe it, but I don't regret it. This was something I had to go through, and the information I found before I was confined to the dungeons was worth it. But please, catch me up on what you guys have been up to so far."

Gods, where did he even start? "The good news is that we made contact with the Murphy clan. The bad news is that they seem to have their own agenda, are lying to us, and are definitely not fully training us. Oh, and we got attacked by dragon slayers and had to put up a fierce fight alongside the wolves."

Emma's eyes had grown bigger and bigger. "*What?* You'd better start talking fast."

Erwan did, sharing everything they'd encountered and everything they'd learned and discovered, not holding back anything. After what she'd gone through, she deserved the whole truth.

"And those dragon omegas haven't shown up yet?" Emma asked when Erwan was done.

"No, but we're ready for them. Servas and his crew put up a few more of those prefab cabins. Electricity and water are all hooked up, but the bathrooms and kitchens aren't operational yet. That should take another week at the most. But regardless, they have a place to stay. A safe place."

Emma softly whistled between her teeth. "The Murphys are going to be furious to lose that many omegas."

Erwan shrugged. "To be honest, I don't care. If they'd wanted to keep them, they should've treated them like human

beings instead of inferiors, like property or slaves. I don't think we've even scratched the surface of what those omegas have been through."

"Oh, I agree. Don't get me wrong. All I'm saying is that any chance of them being your ally will be thoroughly squashed after that."

"They never were our allies to begin with, so I'm not sure how much of a loss that will be. They told us nothing but half truths and incomplete stories, conveniently leaving things out they didn't want us to know."

Emma pointed at the pitcher of ice water on her night table. "Can you pour me some water?"

Erwan took the lid off the cup, filled it, and put the lid back on. He carefully handed the cup to her, making sure not to spill. "Here you go. Please, if this all gets too much, let me know. I can come back another time."

Emma waived his objection away. "I'm good. Thirsty, but good."

"You're not hungry?"

"It's interesting how the body reacts to prolonged periods of starvation. The first two weeks are horrific, and all you can think about is food, but then you enter into a different state, one where your body learns to conserve as much energy as possible. As a consequence, you're still hungry, but it doesn't dominate what you feel anymore. You're just tired and weak and dizzy. So yes, I'm hungry, but it's going to take me a while to realize I can now eat. And by the way, Enar has still restricted my calorie intake with normal food. I didn't know it, but apparently, you can get really sick if you start eating too much too soon after an experience like this. So he has me eat small portions throughout the day, all light stuff that is easy to digest, plus whatever he's feeding me through the feeding tube."

"I never knew that. Let me know if I can get you anything."

Emma's mouth curled up into a smile. "You're saying that you, an alpha and a prince to boot, would wait on me, a female omega? The times really have changed, haven't they?"

He smiled right back at her. "It would be my honor to serve you. We owe you. I hope you realize that."

They were quiet for a few beats, and then Emma took a deep breath. "Are you ready to learn more?"

Erwan nodded. "Whatever you're willing and able to share."

"You have to understand that for a long time, I felt bound to the code we as librarians adhere to. We're the storytellers, the guardians of history, and we have a sacred oath to serve our clan and our king. That's why I stayed loyal to Cladhair and Baath, even long after they had shown their true colors."

Oh, Erwan understood better than anyone else, since he'd gone through the exact same process himself. It had taken him a long time to face the truth and then more time to gather the courage to do what was right. "What changed it for you?"

"When you shifted and it turned out you were a white dragon. That was when I realized you were the future of the clan, not Cladhair and definitely not his brother. They're evil, both of them, and my allegiance is to you. Not to sound dramatic, Erwan, but you are the true king of the Doyles. You may not be ready to hear this yet or to claim this honor, but you are. And as such, I'm serving you for as long as I shall live."

Her quiet words brought tears to his eyes, and his throat tightened. "I treasure your dedication and your loyalty, Emma. I don't know what the future will bring, but if it turns out it's my calling to serve my clan as king, then I will."

"Did you hear the conversation between me and Cladhair when we talked about your aunt, Fiona?"

Erwan nodded. "I have no idea what that was about."

"Fiona had a strong magical ability, but like most omegas, she repressed it. But when you were born, she had... I guess you would call it a vision. She held you in her arms, and her

eyes went all dreamy, and she said you had special powers and that you were the future of the Doyle clan, that you would make it more powerful than it had ever been before.”

Wow. Erwan wasn't sure how to feel, let alone what to say. “I can't imagine that was considered good news.”

“You're dead right about that. At first, the king was elated, but then he grew scared that you would eclipse him and force him out. So he decreed that you and your brothers could not be taught magic, and you all went into hiding. But now that the seed of distrust had been planted into his brain, he also grew suspicious of his own brother, especially after discovering that Baoth had killed their father.”

Erwan couldn't hold back a small gasp. “That was Uncle Baoth?”

She nodded. “King Niall was an honorable man, committed to keeping the pact with the wolves. But the wolves were weakening, and Baoth and Cladhair saw an opportunity. They wanted the wolves to die so that they'd be relieved from the pact and would be the only ones left standing, the only ones with magic. Not necessarily their clan but the dragons. The wolves were mixing too much with humans and had weakened their bloodlines to the point where shifting became a problem. But I'm sure Rhene must've told you that.”

“Yeah, he said that for many years, wolves weren't able to shift anymore. Lidon's grandfather was the last one to shift on the day he was born, and then for thirtysomething years, no wolf shifted again.”

Emma sighed. “Things were dire until Lidon rediscovered his powers, but they didn't get that bad on their own. By now, the Doyles had retreated into isolation, but the Murphys were keeping a close eye on what was going on, and they, too, saw the benefits of letting the wolves self-destruct. So they used their magic to seduce the wolves to abandon their tradition of mating with humans. After that, it was a matter of time.”

“So they broke the pact with the wolves as well,” Erwan said, shocked by what Emma was revealing.

“The way they argued was that there were no wolves left. The people who were living here were more human than wolf, as evidenced by the fact that they couldn’t shift. So surely, they shouldn’t have to honor a treaty with them, since they had lost their magical abilities. But Lidon’s power grew, and the Murphys got scared. They thought the Doyles were gone, so if the wolves came back, they’d be bound to the pact again. As long as no one had a confirmed shift, they could argue they were dealing with humans and not with wolves, so more than anything, they wanted to prevent that shift. They abused the gift of persuasion and influenced certain men who had their own reasons to attack Lidon.”

Holy shit. The Murphys had been behind all that? “So they’re responsible for everything the pack went through? Because the pack was attacked and lost people. Lidon’s own cousin.”

Emma hesitated. “Coresponsible, I would say. Even with the gift of persuasion, you can’t convince people to do something they don’t want to do. It’s more a strong form of encouragement, of enabling. So the thoughts, the wishes were already there, and the Murphys just egged them on.”

Yeah, that didn’t make it much better. God, Lidon would be livid when he found out, and so would everyone else in both packs. The Murphys had just become their number one enemy. Great. After everything the packs had been through, this was the last thing they needed.

But maybe knowing they’d have the Doyles by their side would help? Well, only if they learned how to fight back and utilize their magic. And first and foremost, he needed to know what the hell was so special about him being a white dragon. But when he looked at Emma, she’d fallen asleep.

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## Chapter Thirty-One

**A**fter what Erwan had told him about the Murphys, Rhene had been furious. In fact, he'd never been so angry in his life. He'd known the Murphys weren't being honest with them and had played their cards close to the vest, but this betrayal was at a whole different level. Posing as their allies and supporters when the truth was that they'd encouraged the men who had attacked the pack? It made him seethe with rage.

Lidon's reaction had been similar, and Palani had blown a gasket, going on a rant about getting even with those fucking backstabbing traitors—his words—until he'd finally calmed down enough to be more reasonable. This new information changed everything, but how should they proceed? Should they inform the Murphys they knew the truth or pretend nothing had happened?

Rhene wasn't even sure he could pull off the second. Looking a man straight into his eyes and telling him you were his friend while knowing he all but conspired to have you killed? He wasn't convinced he could manage that, not when he'd much rather shift and rip them to shreds. But as Sivney calmly pointed out, the Murphys were experienced fighters, and did they really want to go up against them now? They needed more information...and more training.

He was right, of course, and they'd all realized it once tempers had cooled off. It helped that Sivney had arrived after the worst attack and wasn't as emotionally affected as the others. He knew what the pack had suffered, but he hadn't

actually been there at the time, and in this case, that provided him with a better perspective.

The biggest question had been whether this should change their decision about taking the Murphy omegas in. What if they were wrong and the Murphys were sending them on purpose? What if these men were only joining to spy on them? They'd gone back and forth on it, but at the end of the day, they'd concluded that they didn't have a shred of evidence that the omegas were dishonest. Their reactions had been too pure, too genuine, and aside from that, the pack had seen with their own eyes how the Murphys treated their omegas. Men like that would never put their trust in a mere omega, Sivney had assured them.

In fact, taking them in could give them a powerful advantage. If Fallon and the others were willing to train them and show them how to use their magic, that could be the boost they needed to step into their true selves. More than anything else, Rhene wanted that, especially for Erwan. Emma had been so exhausted by the end of her talk with Erwan the day before that she'd fallen asleep. Erwan was meeting with her again that night to get more information from her. Finding the right balance between allowing her to rest and recover and needing her to share her knowledge was tricky.

"Alpha, the Murphy omegas have arrived," Adar announced through the com. "Same spot as last time."

"On my way."

Seconds later, Sivney communicated the same message, and Rhene arrived at the same time as his second-in-command. Fallon stood in front of the group of trembling omegas. Rhene did a quick headcount. Twelve in total. One more than announced. Wow.

"We're still welcome, right?" Fallon said, his voice shaky as if he was on the verge of tears.

"Yes," Rhene assured him. "More than welcome."

Fallon moved back and gently pushed forward a young omega whose face was covered in bruises that looked recent.

His right eye was swollen shut, and his lip had been busted. What the fuck had happened to that poor guy?

“He needs immediate medical attention,” Fallon said. “His name is Oliver.”

“On it.” Sivney stepped a little to the side and raised his com to call up the clinic.

“Who did this to him?” Rhene asked.

Fallon lifted his chin. “Dempsey.”

“He’s mated to Dempsey?”

Fallon shook his head. “Oliver isn’t mated to anyone, but that doesn’t stop Dempsey from using him whenever he wants to. He was pissed off about something two days ago and beat the crap out of him.”

Rhene clenched his fists, fighting to keep his temper in check. Half the omegas were already pale and trembling, and the last thing he wanted to do was scare them even more. “I see. And that’s a regular occurrence?”

Fallon’s face was tight. “With Dempsey, it is. We’ve all learned to steer clear of him.”

That simple line hit Rhene like a sledgehammer. How could the Murphy clan allow this to happen? Even if they refused to accept omegas as their equals, there was still a whole gray area between that and abusing them. “We’ll make sure he gets medical care right away. Sivney is contacting our clinic, where we have two doctors specialized in omega care. They may not know a whole lot about dragons, but they’ll learn.”

“Thank you.”

Rhene held up his hand. “Let’s get one thing out of the way right now. We don’t want your gratitude. As far as we’re concerned, taking you in is nothing more than human decency and the very least we could do. So please consider this your home. I understand that must be hard for you and that you may need time, but we hope you’ll come to understand and accept

that here, omegas matter. You matter as much to us as alphas or betas.”

“That may take us a while to believe and accept,” Fallon said softly. “But we’ll try.”

“Enar and Maz are on their way,” Sivney reported. “They’re our two doctors,” he said to Fallon and the others. “They will check Oliver out and will make sure the rest of you are okay as well. With your permission, of course.”

“Graham and Ross are due tomorrow.” Fallon pointed at two omegas who stood shoulder to shoulder, their soft bellies showing what was growing inside them.

“You were cutting it close,” Sivney commented.

“We couldn’t get away sooner, but we also knew we had to get out of there before the eggs were born. Otherwise, Graham and Ross might not have been able to come.”

“We’ll make sure they’re both checked out,” Rhene said.

“We have accommodation for all of you, and you’ll be sharing cabins with each other,” Sivney said. “Not all the cabins have functioning bathrooms and kitchens yet, but at least one does, so you might have to use the facilities there until the rest is finished.”

“Finished?” Fallon frowned. “What do you mean?”

“We built those cabins new. Or, more accurately, we’re still in the process of building and finishing them. We started on them as soon as you said you wanted to join the pack with a group of other omegas. Out of concern for your safety and privacy, we didn’t want you to have to share accommodations with any of the wolves, especially alphas or betas.”

Fallon’s eyes had grown big as Sivney spoke, and some of the other omegas had let out little gasps, clamping their hands in front of their mouths. “You built new cabins especially for us?”

Sivney nodded. “Yes.”

“That’s... I can’t believe you guys did that. We’ll never be able to repay you.”

Fear played on Fallon's face, and Rhene had no trouble imagining where his mind had gone. "We don't expect anything in return, least of all sexual favors. I need you to understand that you're safe in this pack and that no one will touch you against your will. As pack alpha, that is my solemn vow to you."

The omegas all looked at each other as if Rhene had spoken a foreign language, but then slowly confusion gave way for relief, and a few of them cried silently. Damn, they broke Rhene's heart. What had these poor omegas been through? What had been done to them?

"We'll try not to overwhelm you, but we also need you to know we have a therapist available if any of you want or need to talk. This is completely confidential, and Delton, our psychologist, doesn't share the content of the conversations with anyone else. Not unless he has determined you're a risk to yourself or others in the pack. But that's the only exception, and anything outside that will stay with him," Sivney told them.

That resulted in more tears. Half of the group was now crying, clinging to each other. Rhene was far from an expert on omegas, never having had one of his own, but even he could see these were tears of relief, of shock. What a contrast this reception must be compared to how these men had been treated in their own clan.

Maz arrived first, as always riding Sarie without a saddle. He slid off her with ease, patted her on her flank, and walked forward, keeping a safe distance from the omegas. "Good morning. My name is Maz Ahadi, and I'm one of the doctors who work in the Hayes clinic. If any of you need medical assistance or wants to be checked out, Enar, the other doctor who is on his way, and I would be happy to do so."

"This is Oliver." Sivney pointed at the beaten-up omega who hadn't spoken a word, staring lifelessly into the distance. "As you can see, he needs immediate medical attention."

Maz nodded, took off his backpack, and grabbed a little flashlight. He walked over to Oliver but stopped a few feet

from him. “Oliver, are you okay with me checking you out?”

“Oliver doesn’t talk,” Fallon said softly. “He used to, but he stopped about a year ago.”

Maz hesitated. “I understand, but that makes it hard to ensure I have his consent.”

Fallon bit his lip. “He won’t talk to you. He can’t. I don’t mean to offend you, but you’re...” He gestured at Maz.

“He’s an alpha,” Sivney said. “Would Oliver feel more comfortable with a beta?”

“Probably, but I’m still not sure he will talk. He rarely speaks even to us.”

Sivney turned to Maz. “Let’s wait for Enar. Oliver might feel more comfortable with him.”

To his credit, Maz didn’t even show a hint of protest. “I understand. Is there anyone else who wants to be checked out?”

Graham, one of the pregnant omegas, raised a hesitant hand. “Ross and I are due tomorrow, so we’d love to know if everything is okay with us.”

“Absolutely, no problem. Have you had any checkups during the pregnancy?”

Graham shook his head. “Not from an official doctor, just the breeding master of our clan.”

Rhene was so glad he had shared as much information as he could with Enar and Maz because at least they were prepared for whatever the omegas would tell them. Case in point was this casual statement from Graham, and Maz didn’t bat an eye. “Okay. Well, Enar is bringing the truck, and he should be here any moment, so you can grab a ride back with him to the clinic. We’ll run some tests, do an ultrasound, and make sure you are healthy and ready.”

He’d barely finished his sentence when the rumbling of a truck came closer, and Enar pulled up. He turned off the engine and jumped out, carrying his medical bag. “Good morning, everyone. I’m Enar.”

Fallon studied him, a puzzled frown on his face. “You’re... You’re not an alpha.”

How had he picked up on that? From the outside, Enar still looked like an alpha, the classification he’d been born with.

“No, I’m not,” Enar said. “I’m a beta.”

A smile slowly spread across Fallon’s face. “Yes. Yes, you are. I can see it.”

That must have something to do with Fallon’s magic, and Rhene filed it away as something to ask him at a later time.

“Oliver,” Fallon said softly, stepping close to the battered omega. “You can trust him. There is no deceit in him. He’s pure.”

If that wasn’t the most beautiful description of Enar ever, Rhene didn’t know what was. *Pure*. What a perfect way to describe the man.

Oliver hesitated, his one functioning eye shifting from Fallon to Enar. Finally, he gave the smallest of nods. “He’s okay with you treating him,” Fallon said.

Enar sent the poor omega a warm smile. “Oliver, I’m so honored you trust me with your care. I promise you I’ll take the very best care of you, okay?”

With slow movements, he took a flashlight out of his bag. “Is it okay if I check your pupil reflex? I want to make sure you don’t have a concussion.”

Step by step, Enar checked him out, announcing what he was doing in a calm, almost soothing voice. He checked his ears, his eye, the bruises on his skin, then let him do a simple balance test. “I’d like to take you back to the clinic so we can take some X-rays of your ribs. From the way you’re standing and wincing whenever you move, I suspect you might have a bruised or broken rib. Would that be okay?”

“Can I come with him?” Fallon asked.

“Of course,” Enar replied. “In fact, I was going to suggest he’d bring someone he trusts.”

Minutes later, Graham, Ross, Oliver, and Fallon had gotten into the truck and were on their way to the clinic, while Maz jumped onto Sarie's back and took off. That left Rhene and Sivney with the other omegas, eight in total, who hovered close to each other, their gazes tracking Rhene's every movement. He'd expected them to be apprehensive, but the plain fear in their eyes broke his heart.

He took a step back and softly said to Sivney, "Adar and I need to leave. I assume you've got this. If you need help, let me know, and I'll send one of the other omegas."

Sivney nodded. "Can you ask Finlay and Gael to come to the new cabins so they can help them settle in?"

"Absolutely."

Rhene signaled Adar, and they left the group with Sivney.

"That's the saddest thing I've ever seen," Adar said. He was a man of few words, and the fact that he'd spoken up in the first place indicated the impression these omegas had made.

"Yeah, no kidding. I wanna pay that Dempsey guy a visit and beat the ever-loving shit out of him."

Adar's face tightened even more. "An alpha beating up an omega... It's despicable. They're half our size and so much weaker physically. That man had better hope he never runs into me because I swear to the earth and moon it won't end well for him."

Despite everything, Rhene smiled, and he slapped his hand on Adar's back. "You and me both, my man."

Adar shook his head. "No, Dempsey is all mine. Promise me I'll be the one who gets to teach him how it feels to go up against someone his own size."

Wow, that was unexpected, and yet it felt strangely right. "I promise."

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## Chapter Thirty-Two

Wilmer shuffled into the large barn that had been temporarily converted into a meeting room for the gathering of the pack. With Jermon on his left and Riordan on his right, he felt confident enough to try and walk in on his own power, knowing they would be there in case he needed help.

His physical recovery was progressing well, the burn wounds all but healed, and all that remained was weakness and tiredness from being inactive for so long. That morning, Enar had cleared him to go back to work, though only for a minimal number of hours and with the restriction he wasn't supposed to do any heavy lifting. Fat chance of that, considering how Wilmer felt. He would probably already be exhausted after walking over to the barn. But still, the thought of being able to go back exhilarated him.

“Wilmer, it’s so good to see you,” one pack member after the other greeted him, and how he wished he knew who they were. Riordan was subtle in whispering names, and since both Riordan and Jermon had been good about catching Wilmer up, he at least recognized them. The faces meant nothing to him, and his frustration only grew as more and more people welcomed him back.

It wasn't their fault, of course. They were only trying to be friendly, but it was so annoying he could not remember. No matter how hard he tried, no matter what he did, his memory was absent. Enar had warned him that Wilmer should start to consider the option it would never return.

That prospect would've been a hell of a lot scarier mere weeks ago, when he'd been so lost, not knowing anyone he encountered. That had gotten better, as he'd come to know his mates and others around him, but still. He *wanted* to remember. He wanted to be able to cherish the memories he had already made with his mates, ones they kept sharing with him.

He lowered himself into his seat, and Jermon and Riordan took position on either side of him. Rhene was standing in the front with Erwan by his side, and next to them Sivney. In the first row were two men he didn't recognize, and he bumped Jermon. "Who are they?"

"That's Lidon, the pack alpha of the Hayes pack, and Palani, his second-in-command and also one of his mates."

One of the things Wilmer appreciated so much about Jermon was that he never assumed knowledge with Wilmer. Even though Wilmer had recognized the names Lidon and Palani, Jermon still gave that bit of background information that would help Wilmer place them. "Why are they here?"

"Erwan is going to share information he learned from Emma that is relevant to them as well."

Wilmer quirked an eyebrow. "So you know what this is about?"

"Partially, but I've been working long days again over the last few days, and I haven't had a lot of time to talk to Erwan, so he hasn't brought me up to speed completely yet."

Jermon was working too hard again, and a fresh wave of guilt rolled through Wilmer, even though he knew it wasn't his fault. The day off they'd spent together and the epic sex had helped Jermon, but it wasn't a long-term solution. It still sucked that his mate, as well as Michael and Kean, had to put in so many extra hours to compensate for Wilmer's absence. Another reason why he was glad to start working again, if only for a few hours a day.

"Thank you all for coming," Rhene spoke up, and everyone hushed. "I want to start by offering a special

welcome to Wilmer, who is back for the first time after getting hurt. We're so happy to see you again."

"Thank you," Wilmer said, touched by Rhene's attentiveness and the round of applause that had followed it.

"Wilmer has asked me to provide an update on his health with you so he doesn't have to explain it fifty times tonight," Rhene said. "He's recovering well and hopes to start carefully with work again over the next few days. Unfortunately, his memory hasn't returned, save a few random snippets. So he probably won't remember you and asks for your understanding as he gets to know you all again. Please be patient with him, as this is confusing and frustrating for him."

That last line was Rhene's addition to what Wilmer had asked him to share, but he appreciated it.

"Now, the reason we asked you all to come is that we have a lot of news to share with you, both in events and in things we have learned, so let's dive in. Sivney, why don't you start?"

Sivney cleared his throat. "As most of you will have heard and maybe seen, we've taken in twelve omegas of the Murphy clan. From what we have learned so far, all of them have been mistreated and abused in various degrees, and this makes the transition to our pack rough. They have no idea what to expect, they're not used to being treated as equals, and they carry a heavy burden of trauma. On top of that, two of them have delivered their eggs two days ago, and in both cases, only one of the eggs survived. This is a well-known problem within the Murphy clan, and they have no idea what is causing it. The omegas are under the treatment of Enar and Maz in the clinic and have all been checked out physically, but as you can understand, their emotional trauma is far heavier than their physical issues. One of them had been beaten up by an alpha the day before they arrived, and..."

A wave of anger thundered through the room, furious gasps and whispers showing the pack's indignation at that abuse. Wilmer took a few deep breaths to squash his fury. What kind of alpha used physical violence against a defenseless omega? That violated every code of honor and

made him the worst kind of man in Wilmer's book. Omegas were to be protected and treasured. Even when seen as equals, they weren't equals in size and strength, and one always needed to remember that.

Sivney took a moment to compose himself, clenching and unclenching his fists. "It's going to take time for them to get settled here," he continued, much softer now. "We ask for your care and understanding if you encounter them, especially alphas. Please be aware of their trauma and what your presence and actions can trigger."

"Have the Murphys reacted yet to their omegas disappearing?" a strapping alpha asked.

"That's Adar, one of the guards," Riordan whispered to Wilmer. "I'm surprised he even spoke up, since he rarely does."

Adar was also one of the men Riordan had shared his heat with prior to meeting Wilmer and Jermon, if Wilmer remembered correctly. He'd asked Riordan about it, and Riordan had been open and honest with him, which Wilmer had appreciated.

Adar was big, a handsome alpha with dark hair and brown eyes. What a strange idea that the man had had sex with Riordan. Wilmer didn't think himself the jealous type, but he didn't like to think about Adar and Riordan together too much at all.

"Yes, I received a phone call from King Ennis a couple of hours after the omegas had shown up here. He sounded more baffled than upset and inquired if we knew where his omegas had gone," Erwan said.

"At which point I hope you made it crystal clear that they weren't his to begin with?" Sivney said sharply.

"He sure as fuck did." Rhene shot a proud look at his mate. "And he communicated that as far as he was concerned, the omegas were now part of the Doyle clan."

"Yeah, that part didn't go over too well." Erwan let out a dry chuckle. "The king tried to persuade me to send them

back, but to be honest, it felt more like an obligatory attempt than something he was throwing his full heart and power into. I have no idea of the why behind that lackluster effort, but maybe we'll find out at some point. Oh, and I told him to send Hubert the message that the answer was no. Let him explain that one to his clan."

"Did they threaten with any kind of repercussions?" Jermon asked.

"No, and I was surprised by that," Erwan said. "Rhene, Sivney, and I had discussed it, and we were fully expecting them to make a strong demand backed up by threats, but they didn't. At least, King Ennis didn't. I don't know if he represents the opinions of the alphas in his clan, though."

If the Murphy dragons were to attack them... A shiver ran down Wilmer's spine. His memories of that night might have vanished, but his body instinctively recognized the power of that threat. The last time, the Murphy dragons had fought on the side of the pack, but what would happen if they turned against them? Did the pack really stand a chance against fighters who had trained for hundreds of years? Not something he wanted to spend too much time thinking about.

"This is not the last of it," Rhene said. "We're certain there will be a follow-up of some kind, though what, we have no idea. For whatever reason, the Murphys seem to need us and want to keep us as their ally, so for now, we'll take courage from that."

"That reason may have to do something with me," Erwan said quietly, and the whole room practically leaned forward to hear him. What was he talking about? "I had a long conversation with Emma again, and we finally got to talk about the significance of me being a white dragon. Since it's awkward and uncomfortable for me to talk about myself that way, I've asked Rhene to explain it. He was there when Emma told me, so he knows as much as I do."

Rhene took a deep breath. "According to dragon legends, white dragons are rare. They occur maybe once every five hundred years, and they signify change. White dragons have

special powers, as they boost the gifts of their whole clan, making their clan unbeatable as a result. Not only that, but white dragons also have all magical gifts themselves, though usually not as strong as their individual clan members. But they do have one dominant gift, and that one is ten times stronger than normal. If a clan is united, including the white dragon, no one else stands a chance against them.”

Erwan’s cheeks had grown ruddy during Rhene’s speech, which Wilmer found adorable for an alpha his size. “We think my dominant gift may be healing, but I need more training and experience to know for sure. As for all the other gifts...” He dragged a hand through his hair. “I’ve seen evidence of some of them in me, but not all, and I still have a lot to learn and develop. Hopefully, Fallon and the other Murphy omegas will be able to help me and the other dragons grow in our abilities.”

“Have they been trained, then?” Palani asked.

Erwan shook his head. “The Murphy alphas consider the omegas inferior and too dumb to learn magic. Also, they reckon omegas don’t have strong abilities to begin with, so they don’t really bother preventing them from overhearing or witnessing things. At least, that’s how Fallon reported it, and from what we’ve experienced ourselves, that seems to be accurate. Fallon says they’ve picked up a lot of knowledge that way, though, and they’re happy to teach us.”

“Imagine that disregarding their omegas will be what gets them in the end,” Sivney said, not even bothering to hide his glee. “I’d be totally down with that.”

“Poetic justice,” Rhene agreed.

“Are we concerned for the safety of the omegas?” Adar spoke up again. “What happens if the Murphys attempt to steal them back? Not necessarily attacking us, but going directly after the omegas?”

Silence descended. “We haven’t considered that option, but you raise a valid point,” Rhene said slowly.

“If they see them as their property, they might be bold and arrogant enough to try that,” Sivney said.

“Let’s set up a constant patrol around their cabins,” Adar suggested. “We’ll keep enough distance to not crowd and scare them but remain close enough to keep an eye on things.”

“I’m not sure we have the manpower to do that.” Sivney looked at Rhene.

“We can supply extra men to cover,” Palani said.

“Awesome.” Sivney nodded decisively. “That’s settled, then. Adar, I trust you’ll set up a schedule?”

“I will.”

“I’ve never heard him say so many words in a row,” Jermon whispered to Riordan, leaning over Wilmer. “What is up with that?”

“According to Finlay, Adar and Blair have already been walking patrol around the omega cabins, even before this meeting,” Riordan whispered back. “Apparently, they’re both super protective of them.”

Wasn’t that nice of them? Wilmer loved seeing alphas take care of omegas that way, especially ones they weren’t mated or related to. After all, that was how things were supposed to be, with the stronger ensuring the safety and well-being of the weaker.

“And the new dragon, Martin, has been added to the security team as well. He’s still being supervised because of his connections to Jermon’s father and uncle, but so far, he’s showing that he wants to stay in the pack.”

The more, the merrier, as fas as Wilmer was concerned.

After answering a few practical questions, Rhene and Sivney closed the meeting.

That night, as he was in bed, Wilmer kept thinking about what Rhene had explained about Erwan’s powers, and an idea started to form. What did he have to lose?

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## Chapter Thirty-Three

**E**ver since the pack meeting, the thought had taken hold of Wilmer and wouldn't let go. And so three days later, he brought it up with Jermon and Riordan over dinner.

"You want to do *what?*" Jermon asked.

"You heard what Emma said about the powers of the clan in combination with Erwan being a white dragon. I need Erwan to do another healing ritual, but with the whole clan present. Maybe even the whole pack, to play it safe."

Jermon winced. "You don't do that well with more than two people visiting, and you want to face the entire pack? Are you sure that's a good idea?"

"If it would bring his memory back, he has to try it," Riordan said as he held one of the eggs, rocking it gently. "Not that it would be a problem if you never regained your memories, but you know what I mean."

"I know, and I feel the same way. No, I'm not wild about the idea of facing that many people, which I didn't like before I got hurt, but I'm willing to suffer if there's a chance it could heal me."

"Let's do it outside, then," Jermon suggested. "Maybe being connected to the earth will help too."

"Tomorrow will be a full moon, which is always special for us wolves," Wilmer said.

Riordan's eyes lit up. "That would be perfect. Grayson is convinced we have more power then, and in the past, magical



things have happened during full moons.”

Jermon nodded. “I love that idea. Let me talk it over with Erwan and Rhene and see if they have any suggestions for how we could best approach this.”

It turned out Erwan was on board, and Rhene was even more enthusiastic. After he’d talked to Palani, who conferred with Lidon and Grayson, they decided to make it a full pack meeting. Instead of facing the dragons, Wilmer would now be watched by twenty dragons—the Murphy omegas had all consented to show up, declaring themselves part of the Doyle clan now—and two full packs of wolves. Fun times. But he swallowed back his apprehension because he’d do anything to get better.

He wasn’t well enough to walk all the way to the meadow picked for the ritual, so he rode Pride. Excitement shot through him when he carefully mounted his horse again for the first time in weeks. Pride seemed to sense Wilmer wasn’t himself and was unusually calm and docile, allowing Jermon to lead him by a rope. Riordan was walking next to Jermon, looking over his shoulder every now and then to check on Wilmer. Few words were spoken, but the hope they all held was tangible in the air.

Darkness had fallen, and the sky was clear, devoid of any clouds. Stars twinkled like diamonds on a black velvet cloth, and moonlight danced over their surroundings, her light warm and comforting. It almost felt as if she beamed her approval. The air was warm and sweet, carrying the scents of wildflowers in bloom, and all around them, crickets had started their endless nightly chorus. In the distance, an owl hooted at the moon. It all felt peaceful and calm, and Wilmer blew out a long breath.

When they arrived at the meadow, everyone had already found a seat on blankets and pillows. Wow, seeing everyone together was impressive, the number far greater than Wilmer had counted on. He only recognized a handful of people, but that was fine.

With Jermon's help, Wilmer sat down on a bed of thick blankets, and both Jermon and Riordan took position behind him so he could lean against them. Nerves tickled his skin, making him itchy, but he kept still.

"Thank you all for coming," Grayson spoke up, Erwan standing next to him. "We're gathered tonight to ask the Moon and the Earth for their blessing as the dragons will perform a healing ritual on Wilmer. We've never done this before, and neither have they, but we're humbly proceeding in the faith that our commitment to truth and honor will be rewarded."

Commitment to truth and honor. Wilmer liked how Grayson had worded that. It sounded noble. Worthy. And the power of it pushed his nerves to the background.

"Before we do that"—Rhene stepped forward—"I have a small announcement to make." He took a deep breath. "I alpha claimed my Erwan a few weeks ago. Sivney mentioned after the last pack meeting that I should probably let everyone know, so consider this the official announcement."

Silence descended. Then Grayson cleared his throat. "I thought we'd agreed you needed a witness."

Rhene shrugged. "It was a spontaneous moment. Besides, isn't my mark on him proof enough?"

Wilmer looked at Jermon, who sighed deeply, rolling his eyes. "If I may interrupt? I have actually witnessed it. Not deliberately, I can assure you, but I happened to be walking by when they...did it. Out in the open. Where anyone could've seen them. Only I happened to be so unfortunate."

That got a few laughs from the crowd.

"You watched me being alpha claimed?" Erwan was incredulous. "You never said anything."

"Yeah, forgive him for not knowing the right moment to tell you. 'Oh, by the way, I watched you get plowed by the pack alpha, bro,'" Nadiv quipped.

Wilmer managed to hold his laugh for a second, but then it burst out, and he joined a wave of laughter that rolled through the pack.

Erwan's cheeks grew red. Rhene slung his arm around him and kissed him in front of everyone, which made the laughter turn into a sweet chorus of "Awww."

"I guess that's settled, then," Grayson said dryly. "I should've known that those Hightowers always do whatever the fuck they want."

"Hey," Kean called out, rising from his spot. "I damn well let everyone watch me get plowed by Bray."

"I stand corrected," Grayson said, chuckling. "Kean being the noted exception. I have to admit that was a night to remember."

Wilmer snorted all over again. Never a dull moment in these packs. But he was grateful for the levity it brought, as it took away the last bit of his nerves. Whatever might come, he wasn't alone in this.

"Let's proceed," Grayson said. "Erwan?"

Erwan cleared his throat, looking a tad uncomfortable. "We've been honest with everyone about the fact that we're still discovering and developing our magical abilities, but we want to assure you that we can't harm you. Our magic is good and light, and it won't rise against any of you. It might be a bit frightening to hear us proclaim spells you can't understand, but we ask for your trust that we would never cause anything bad to happen."

He turned to Wilmer. "Are you ready?"

Wilmer blew out a long breath. "Ready as I'll ever be."

Riordan leaned in for a quick kiss on Wilmer's cheek, then crawled back. Erwan sank to his knees next to Wilmer, and all the dragons gathered around them in a circle, holding hands. Erwan laid his hands on Wilmer's head, and somehow, they all connected. A hum traveled through Wilmer's body, a quiet recognition of the power he was now plugged into.

Erwan closed his eyes, and the other dragons followed his example. Wilmer kept his eyes open, though why, he wasn't sure. Maybe because deep down, he he knew he needed to

watch what happened, even if he was helpless to stop whatever was coming.

An electric charge jumped from Erwan to Wilmer, and Erwan spoke, his voice soft but confident. The words were in Irish. Wilmer had no idea what they meant, but he felt them as if they were speaking to his brain directly. The hum of Erwan's power grew stronger, almost like the buzz of a bee.

Erwan's hands moved from Wilmer's head down to his shoulders, gently rubbing him, and with every stroke, every mumbled word from Erwan, tension seeped out of him. His muscles relaxed, and the last bit of pain from his burn wounds drifted away. His lungs filled with clean air that felt refreshing, cool compared to his body, which seemed to grow warmer.

He hovered in that dreamy state between sleep and wakefulness, where he couldn't keep his eyes open because he was so comfortable and warm, his brain blissfully quiet and happy. All pain and discomfort were gone, and his body felt light as air, as if he were floating on a cloud. God, he wanted to stay there forever. Erwan kept whispering in Irish, blessing Wilmer with every word.

All he needed were his mates by his side. Sweet Riordan, always so eager to please him. And proud Jermon, still struggling with fighting free from the constraints of how he was raised and confessing what he really needed. He'd fallen so hard for them, so fast. He'd never said the words, but they had to know, right? They had to know how much he loved them. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with them, taking care of them and their kids, including the baby dragons. Who cared if he wasn't their biological father? Love was what mattered, and he had plenty of that.

He kept drifting away, half-awake and half-asleep, until he grew colder and was forced to come back. He shivered, frowning. Where had all the warmth gone? He didn't feel Erwan's hands anymore either. Reluctantly and a bit miffed, he opened his eyes again. Jermon and Riordan were kneeling on either side, both watching him anxiously. They looked worried, but why?

“I’m okay,” he said, and then the truth slammed into him, and he gasped.

He remembered.

Holy shit, he remembered everything. The memories washed over him like a flood. Meeting Jermon for the first time. Riordan’s sweet, shy smile when he’d asked Wilmer to supervise. That slightly awkward first date with the three of them. Horseback riding together, sharing a picnic in the meadow. Riordan’s heat. Oh god, he remembered everything. His eyes filled with tears, and his throat closed.

“Wilmer?” Riordan sounded close to panic as he looked from Wilmer to Jermon, then over his shoulder to Erwan. “He’s not okay. Something is wrong.”

But Jermon seemed to sense what was going on. He took Riordan’s hand. “Give him a moment, baby.”

Wilmer fought against the tears, but he couldn’t win that battle, so he focused on swallowing away the tightness in his throat. Around them, silence descended. The only sound audible was the soft wind brushing through the meadow.

“I remember,” he finally managed. “I remember everything.”

“Your memory is back?” Jermon’s voice was so full of joy the tears flowed even faster.

“All of it.”

And then his mates were hugging him, falling half over him in their eagerness to touch him, to confirm that yes, he really was back. Applause rose, then died down, replaced by excited voices, but all Wilmer could feel and see and hear were his men. His mates. They had stuck by him, even when he hadn’t known if his memory would ever return. Even when he’d been a grumpy asshole. Even when he’d been downright mean.

“I love you,” Wilmer whispered, meeting Riordan’s eyes, then Jermon’s. “I loved you before the attack, and I love you even more now. I didn’t want to say it before because it felt too soon, like I was rushing things that we weren’t ready for,

but fuck that. Life is short and precious, and I won't waste another day. I love you, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you both."

Riordan kissed him first, the omega's cheeks wet with tears, and then it was Jermon's turn, and all they could do was share sloppy, uncoordinated kisses until they were finally calming down.

"I love you too." Riordan wiped his cheeks dry.

"Even after I told you to get an abortion?" God, he couldn't believe he'd said that to him.

"You didn't mean it. You were angry and scared, and I get it."

Sweet, sweet Riordan. Wilmer didn't deserve his forgiveness, but wasn't that the miracle of love? That you got what you didn't need to deserve? "I'll spend the rest of my life making it up to you. And I promise I'll be the best possible dad to your dragon babies. *Our* dragon babies."

That made Riordan sniffle all over again, but so worth it.

"You know I love you," Jermon said quietly. "How could I not?"

"I'm sorry for everything I put you through. You've had to carry us both, and it can't have been easy."

Jermon shook his head. "It wasn't, but I did it with love. And I never lost hope that you would come back to us."

He had to ask. "What if I hadn't?"

Jermon grinned. "I told you. We would've made you fall in love with us all over again."

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## Chapter Thirty-Four

It took a while before they could make their way back to their cabin, as so many people wanted to congratulate Wilmer on his recovery, but half an hour later, Riordan let out a relieved sigh as they walked in. His first order of business was to check in on the eggs. They were happy to see him but still sleepy, and after kissing each of them, he tucked them back in.

When he turned around, Wilmer and Jermon were both watching him. Jermon had helped Wilmer onto the bed, where the alpha was now stretched out, his hands wrapped behind his head. A confident smile played on his lips, a powerful reminder that Wilmer was back. All of him.

Wilmer held out his hand and crooked his finger. “Come here,” he told Riordan.

Riordan’s heart skipped a few beats. When Wilmer looked at him like that, with that sexy smile and those burning-hot eyes, he was even more irresistible than usual, so how could Riordan refuse him? Not that he had any intention of saying no. In fact, as he sauntered over, he dragged his shirt over his head, then stopped to kick off his pants. Might as well shed a few clothes, right?

By the time he crawled onto the bed, he’d lost all his clothing, including his underwear. His two alphas looked at him with naked desire in their eyes, and he settled on his knees and stretched seductively. Where before, he might’ve been self-conscious about his newfound curves, he now embraced them, knowing how much his men loved them. Loved him.

Because it wasn't merely lust he saw in their eyes. Something deeper and softer shone as well. Love. They'd had sex before, but this would be their first time making love. They were together, in love. Mates for life. And that made everything better and more intense.

"You're the most beautiful sight I've ever seen," Wilmer said hoarsely. "And I can say that with confidence now, since it also includes the period previously lost to me. You're simply stunning, precious."

Riordan beamed. "Thank you...alpha."

Wilmer groaned. "Fuck, I love it when you call me that."

"Do you now?"

As if Riordan didn't know how hot and bothered his mates got when he added that little word. He'd never use it to manipulate them, but on occasions like this, he sure as fuck made use of it.

"You damn well know it," Wilmer said.

Riordan's heart grew all soft and fluttery. "I love you," he said softly. "I love you both so much. And I don't think I'm gonna grow tired from telling you that anytime soon."

"I doubt we'll ever grow tired of hearing it." Wilmer bumped Jermon's shoulder.

"Not in the next two hundred years or so," Jermon agreed.

From anyone else, that might've sounded over the top, but Jermon knew how long that was, and it made his statement all the more powerful.

Riordan spread his arms wide. "Now that you two have me, what are you gonna do with me?"

Wilmer slung out his arm, grabbed Riordan by his neck, and yanked him forward so he tumbled on top of him. Riordan went willingly, fusing their mouths together with eagerness. Wilmer's lips were hungry, demanding, and Riordan gave up everything, holding nothing back. The alpha shoved his tongue deep into Riordan's mouth, and he welcomed the sexy invasion. The little growl Wilmer let out fired Riordan up even



more, making his pulse race. He loved it when Wilmer made those animalistic sounds, so close to losing control.

Wilmer turned them onto their sides. Maybe Riordan's weight was still too much for him? Riordan didn't care as long as the kiss continued, and it did.

"You're ours," Wilmer whispered against Riordan's lips, pulling Riordan closer, their bodies flush against each other.

With Jermon closing in from behind, Riordan was caught in the middle of the best man sandwich ever. As Wilmer kissed him, Jermon roamed his hands over Riordan's body, caressing him everywhere the dragon could reach. He let a flurry of kisses rain down on Riordan's neck, his nape, the tender, sensitive spot behind his ears. His mates surrounded him, invaded him, worshiped him. He'd never felt more beautiful and cherished than in that moment. And the best thing was that he was aware of every second, not hampered by the daze his heat brought.

Jermon stroked his chest from the back and traced his nipples with his thumbs. Riordan wasn't sure whether to lean in or move away from the sweet torture, so he stayed, enduring the onslaught on his system. Jermon's hot breath tickled his heated skin, and he shivered despite the feverish rush that blazed through him.

Wilmer lifted Riordan's leg and draped it over his, providing himself access to Riordan's ass. The sweet smell of Riordan's slick filled the room. His ass was dripping wet for his mates.

"Mmm, you smell that, baby?" Wilmer said to Jermon. "He's ready for us."

"I was born ready." Riordan sighed happily as Wilmer slid his fingers down from his stomach to his balls, then slipped behind them.

Two fat fingers sank inside him, and Riordan moaned. He leaned into Wilmer's touch, hungry for more, and Wilmer smiled, his lips still wet from the kiss they'd shared. "Just

making sure, precious. I don't want to hurt you, and we need you something fierce.”

Riordan loved that Wilmer included Jermon, and the idea of taking both of them again and truly being reunited fired up the heat inside him. He wanted them so much, but even more, he wanted the intimacy that sex would bring, the emotional closeness that was as much about love as it was about lust.

As Wilmer pumped his fingers, staying away from Riordan's happy spot, much to his chagrin, Jermon played with Riordan's nipples. He tapped Riordan's right nipple with his index finger, then drew an agonizing path across it with his nail. Riordan bit his lips to keep from crying out. How could something so simple feel so good?

Jermon did it again, and Riordan bucked against him, hot sparks running down his back. God, he was wet, so slick inside, and fuck it. He needed more than mere fingers.

“Please,” he begged.

Over his head, Wilmer and Jermon shared a look, a wordless communication that left Riordan hopeful that one of their cocks would be inside him soon. At this point, he didn't even care which one.

It turned out to be Wilmer's. Wilmer dragged Riordan's hips down and nudged him to cant his hips. As soon as he had, Wilmer lined up and pressed inside him. They were still face-to-face, a position where the penetration was shallow and yet perfect. Wilmer took his time, filling him inch by inch, and Riordan moaned at that exquisite pressure.

“I missed you,” Wilmer whispered. “I missed being inside you.”

“I missed you too. I'm so happy you're back.”

Wilmer started a slow, deep rhythm inside him, grunting low with every thrust. “You feel so good. So wet and hot for me.”

“Let me feel,” Jermon said, and Wilmer slid out instantly.

Now Jermon's hands were on Riordan's hips, maneuvering him into the right position, and he let him, his heart beating fast. A deep shiver tore through him as he lifted his legs and canted his hips to let Jermon in. As he pushed inside, Riordan's breath caught in his lungs. God, that cock, that massive eggplant. Despite the prep and Wilmer already fucking him, he felt the burn, the sting, but the stretch was perfect, balancing on the right side of that edge between pain and pleasure.

"Kiss me," Wilmer demanded, but he was talking to Jermon, who leaned over Riordan to offer his mouth, pressing his cock in all the way as a result. Riordan's body was on fire, every nerve in him alive and tingling.

Wilmer rutted against his front, slipping his dick between Riordan's thighs. His cock was still slick from being inside Riordan or maybe from leaking precum, and it created a wet slide that was filthy and dirty and erotic at the same time.

"I want him back." Wilmer rolled onto his back. Before Riordan knew what was happening, Jermon sat up, deadlifted Riordan off his cock and onto Wilmer's, which slid in without a hitch.

"Fuck, that is so sexy," Jermon rumbled. "Ride him, baby."

Riordan wasn't sure if he meant him or Wilmer, but it didn't matter. He raised himself on his knees, sank back down, and after a few hesitant attempts, found the perfect position and rhythm.

Wilmer spread his legs wider, and Jermon took a spot behind Riordan. His strong, big hands settled on Riordan's hips and helped him as he rode Wilmer cowboy-style. He appreciated the help, his muscles already growing tired. Drops of sweat trickled down between his shoulder blades in a teasing trail. Jermon licked them from his hot skin.

"My turn again," the dragon said.

He lifted Riordan off, pushed him onto his stomach on top of Wilmer, and sank right back inside him. Riordan cried out

in surprise as much as ecstasy, his ass getting wrecked in the best way.

“Oh, precious, you’re so sexy when you get fucked,” Wilmer said and kissed him again. Riordan could barely concentrate on the kiss, his needs too urgent. Wilmer seemed to understand. The kiss grew lighter until Riordan was merely breathing raggedly against Wilmer’s lips.

“Gods, I love this position,” Jermon grunted. “I can feel both of you this way. It’s not too heavy for you?”

Wilmer shook his head. “Fuck, no. I mean, I can’t do this for hours, but we’re not gonna last that long anyway. And for the record, I love this position too. Your balls slap against my thighs every time you thrust into our sweet Riordan, and I’m telling you I’m gonna have to test that eggplant of yours myself. It’s not gonna go in as easily or as far as with him, but I’m sure as fuck gonna try when I’m fully healed.”

Jermon froze. “You mean that?”

“Baby, didn’t I tell you before I’m not an exclusive top? I’ve bottomed before and loved it. You’re just a little too big and fat for me to take all of you, but that doesn’t mean we can’t have fun trying.”

Riordan had no trouble picturing it, his two alphas together, and fuck, what a feast for the eyes that would be. Those two strong, muscled bodies together? Best. Porn. Ever.

“I’m...” Jermon took a breath. “I’d love that. Like, really, really love that. Sorry, coming up short on words here.”

“That’s okay, baby. We’d better focus on our sweet omega before he decides to take matters into his own hands.”

Riordan snorted. “As if.”

They were all laughing. Jermon slid out of him, and Wilmer sank back in, and after that, it was a mad sequence of cocks inside him, his men pulling out every time he was about to orgasm. The only consolation was that they were edging themselves as much as they did Riordan, but that didn’t help when his balls were aching with how tight they were, and his

cock was painfully hard, smearing its fluids all over Wilmer's stomach.

Wilmer took over from Jermon again, and Riordan sat up, taking him deep inside. A cry of pleasure at the deep penetration escaped him, and he lost it. He needed to come, as in right fucking now. He increased his tempo, pushing away Jermon's hands, which tried to restrain him, and rode Wilmer for all he was worth. His breaths became moans, then grunts and whimpers as he rose higher and higher.

Wilmer helped him by thrusting upward, snapping his hips, his movements hard and fast. Riordan took everything the dragon alpha offered. He rode that dick like a wild horse, and when Jermon rose up behind him and wrapped his big hand around Riordan's cock, he went off like fireworks. His cock jerked violently, and at the same time, Wilmer shouted an unintelligible sound and poured himself inside Riordan.

Jermon moaned loudly, and warmth splattered on Riordan's back. His other mate had finished as well. His muscles weakened, then gave up, and if not for Jermon's quick catch—his hands still sticky from his cum—Riordan would've face-planted on the mattress. As it was, Jermon carefully lowered him and took position behind him again, and they were once again a man sandwich with Riordan in the middle.

"Someone will have to clean us," he mumbled, his eyes drifting closed.

"I'll do it." Jermon yawned. "Later."

Whatever. Waking up in crusty cum wasn't all that bad, right?

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## Chapter Thirty-Five

The day after the healing ritual and a night full of hot sex that had Wilmer growing hard again at the mere thought, he made his way to the stalls. Thanks to the ritual, his memory was back, and all pain was gone. All that remained was tiredness and weakness from not being active for weeks, but that would improve over time. Still, Enar had warned Wilmer to take it easy despite feeling so much better, and he would. The last thing he wanted was to risk his progress.

He'd had enough stamina for a couple of rounds of sex, though, hadn't he? They'd fallen asleep and woken up again a few hours later. This time, Wilmer had fucked Jermon, with Riordan sucking the dragon alpha off. It had resulted in another exhausted, cum-covered pile of men. The last round had been when dawn had broken already, just before Jermon had to get up. It had been a quickie, him fucking Riordan with Wilmer watching. Jermon had made sure to help Wilmer come, showing once again that enthusiasm made up for his lack of experience when it came to his oral skills.

Was it stupid to be so proud of being able to have sex with his mates again? Who cared? Wilmer certainly didn't. After what he'd been through, he'd celebrate every single fucking day he was alive and would never let anything or anyone hold him back again from doing something he wanted.

Shortly before he'd left for the stalls, he'd called his parents. His mother had been over the moon that Wilmer's memory had come back, but considerably less excited that he was still determined to stay with the pack and his mates. But

his father had shot down her protest hard and fast, making it crystal clear that as far as he was concerned, that discussion was over and done with.

Thank fuck because Wilmer was starting to resent his mother for objecting to his mates, and he didn't want to feel that way. He loved his mom, and he wanted her to accept his choices and stop trying to change his mind. Thankfully, his father had put his foot down, cutting off that kind of behavior and talk. Wilmer had promised he'd stop by as soon as he was able to travel and bring both his mates. He had no clue how they'd manage that with the eggs, but they'd figure it out. Inviting his parents to the pack lands seemed like a worse option.

He took his time walking over and was panting like a steam train by the time he entered the stalls, but he was there, wasn't he? Finally. As he breathed in the familiar odors, unexpected tears welled up in his eyes. People would never believe that the mixture of horse dung and hay, the acrid tang of urine and straw, blended with the unmistakable smell of horses could be pleasurable and comforting to somebody, but it sure as hell was to Wilmer. This was home.

He set course straight for Pride's stall, and his horse must've heard him, maybe even picked up his scent, because he was ready for Wilmer. As soon as Wilmer opened the door, Pride pressed up against him, though carefully, as if he feared Wilmer was still hurting. Wilmer wrapped his arms around Pride, burying his face in his shiny fur.

Pride whinnied. "I missed you too," Wilmer whispered. He'd seen him the night before, but only briefly, and they hadn't had time to truly connect.

He ran his hands along Pride's flank. He looked good. In fact, he looked amazing. Jermon must've given him some extra care earlier that morning, knowing Wilmer would show up. Pride was perfectly groomed, his coat shining. Wilmer slid his hand down the front of the horse's left leg, and as he reached his hooves, Pride obediently lifted it. Yup, Jermon had even cleaned out his hooves. He was such a sweetheart. God,

fate had picked the best men on the planet to be Wilmer's mates.

"I can't ride you yet," Wilmer told his horse. "I know I did yesterday, but that was only a couple of hundred feet, and Jermon was leading you. Enar wasn't too happy about me wanting to go back to work in the first place, and I'm under strict instructions not to do anything heavy. Unfortunately, horseback riding isn't on the list of approved tasks yet. But I promise you, as soon as I can ride, you and I are heading back out, you hear me?"

The whiny sound Pride made told Wilmer he'd understood every word. Horses were so much smarter than most people gave them credit for.

"I can bring him out to the pasture," Michael said softly, and Wilmer turned around.

"Thank you. I'm sure he'd appreciate it."

"Jermon wanted to make sure he was here when you showed up so you wouldn't have to walk out all the way to see him."

Wilmer gave Pride a last hug, then reached for his halter. "I can't tell you how much it means to me to be in the stalls again, to see him, but also to be back at work."

"Just make sure you don't overdo it."

Damn, that was a pretty confident statement for Michael, who was usually much more introverted around Wilmer. And much less likely to contradict him or give him advice.

"Trust me, I'm under strict instructions from Enar. His literal words were that if I overexerted myself, he would tie me to a bed himself."

Michael grinned. "I'd like to see that."

"Well, I don't, so I promise you I'll only be walking around, maybe checking some stuff on the computer. No lifting, nothing heavy. I know my limits."

"Good. I'm glad and grateful to have you back, but your health comes first."



Wilmer put the halter on Pride, attached a line to it, and handed it to Michael. “Off you go, darlin’.”

“I assume you said that to Pride and not to me?”

Oh, another cheeky remark from the omega. Things had changed. “I’m pretty sure that if I started calling you darling, I’d be in trouble with my mates.”

Michael sobered. “I can’t tell you how relieved I am that you have your memory back. When I heard you didn’t remember anything from the last two years, it made me so sad. Not because that meant you didn’t remember me, but because of your mates. To forget you had fallen in love with those two seemed like the cruelest torture.”

Touched by his sensitive words, Wilmer put a hand on Michael’s shoulder. “Thank you. It means the world to me that I have my memory back. And yes, not remembering Jermon and Riordan was the worst.”

“Anyway, I’ll leave you to it.” Michael took the line from Wilmer and clicked his tongue. After a confused look at Wilmer, Pride obediently followed the omega out of the stalls.

Wilmer took a slow, long look around. The stalls looked decent, though the sharpness of the urine scent told him that the stalls needed to be mucked out. Wilmer had always been super strict about doing that regularly. The pile of manure outside was a little higher than he would’ve let it accumulate, but all in all, those were minor details, nothing that upset him. Jermon, Michael, and Kean had done a fantastic job of keeping the place going while Wilmer was out of commission, and he’d always be grateful to them. Not that he considered it his kingdom and his job alone, but still.

He walked past all the stalls, running his hand over the aged oak stall doors. The building had been constructed from thick, heavy timber, with a hayloft stretching over half the stalls. High, barred windows let in as much sunlight as possible. The roof was high and sloped so the rain slid off easily into the gutters, where it was all caught and diverted into massive rain barrels. That water was used as drinking water for the animals. How fortunate this structure hadn’t

caught fire during the attack because it would've burned to the ground.

Wilmer took his time walking around, checking in on supply levels, the quality of the hay, the amount of feed they had in storage, and anything else he saw they were running low on or that needed to be fixed or replaced. Flickering lightbulbs, dried-out leather tack, some mold in one of the bags of feed, and a long list of other small things.

Once he sat down in his office, the chair giving a happy squeak, he transferred the mental list he'd made into a paper one, writing down everything that needed to be done. He didn't stand a chance in hell of doing it all himself or even getting it accomplished on short notice with the help of others, but making a list felt like he had some control. He didn't, but his brain didn't need to know that, now did it? He'd learned how to trick himself like that, and the crazy thing was that it still worked, even though he rationally knew he was bullshitting himself.

When that was finished, he was exhausted, and as much as he hated to admit it, he had to call it quits and head home. Just then, Riordan stuck his head around the door. "I'm under instructions to bring you back home," he said with a smile.

"I was about to leave, I swear." Wilmer pushed himself up. "But I'd much rather make the trek back with you keeping me company."

"How did it go?" Riordan laced their hands together, adapting his pace to Wilmer's much slower tread.

"Good. I didn't do much but walk around, inspect everything, and make a to-do list, but at least I feel like I did something instead of lying in bed all day."

"It's hard to feel useful like that. I know the feeling."

Wilmer shot a look sideways. "You miss work?"

Riordan hadn't gone back to his previous job in the kitchen since giving birth to the eggs.

"Not the work so much as the people. I never cared much for kitchen duty, though I didn't mind it, but I loved hanging

out with the other omegas.”

“But you don’t wanna do that anymore now that the eggs are here?”

Riordan bit his lip. “The idea of being away from them for hours is...not good. I get super anxious even thinking about it.”

That had to be that separation anxiety Jermon had talked about, which would only grow stronger as it came closer to the hatching date. “Who says it has to be for hours on end, though? Wouldn’t it be okay to come in for two hours, go home for an hour or so, and then go back?”

Riordan stopped walking, his mouth dropping open. “That didn’t even occur to me. You think that would be okay?”

Wilmer shrugged. “Why wouldn’t it be? It seems like a win-win to me. You’d be happy being among people, and they get your help for a few hours.”

Riordan hesitated, then moved in and rose on his toes to kiss Wilmer. “Thank you. I don’t know why I never thought of that, but that would be perfect. I miss Yitro and the others, and a few hours, even spread out, would be so much better than being home by myself all day.”

“Glad I could help you.”

They resumed walking again, though it was really more of a slow shuffle.

“You know, there might also be a way to bring the eggs,” Wilmer said, pondering the idea. “Like, make some kind of carrying bag where they’d be warm and protected? I’m sure I could create something for you if you wanted.”

Riordan’s eyes went dreamy as he stopped Wilmer a second time. “You really are the best mate possible, and I love you.”

Sweeter words Wilmer couldn’t think of, and he practically floated home, his exhaustion forgotten.

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## Chapter Thirty-Six

**O**n a sunny Sunday morning, two weeks after the dragon omegas had joined the pack, Riordan made his way over to one of the meadows. Before his involuntary stay at the castle, he'd often gone for walks, sometimes as long as three hours. Afterward, he'd been far more careful and hesitant to leave the safety of the pack lands, and now, he didn't want to venture that far away from his eggs. Even being away from them stung inside. He wouldn't tolerate that for long.

He ran into Finlay and Gael, and they chatted as they entered the meadow where all omegas in the Hightower pack were gathering, arriving one after the other. Some were on their own, others came in pairs, and the two dragon omegas who had delivered two weeks prior each carried their egg in a sling. Riordan watched it with some jealousy. His four eggs weren't that easy to bring. Still, he wouldn't want to trade with the omegas, knowing they must've lost part of their clutch.

Twenty-one they were in total, fourteen omega dragons and seven omega wolves, and when everyone had found a spot in the lush, soft grass, Riordan looked around their circle. What an eclectic group of omegas they formed. They varied in age, in appearance, in everything. A few were rail thin, especially the omega dragons, and some still bore the evidence of the abuse they had suffered.

Oliver's eye had turned yellow and blueish rather than black, and while it was an improvement on some level, he didn't exactly look good or healthy. He still moved gingerly, his upper body wrapped in tight bandages. The X-rays had

shown he'd broken two ribs, and Riordan's stomach had turned sour when he'd heard.

Ten alphas—wolves and dragons—kept watch along the perimeters of the meadow, far enough away so they couldn't overhear what was discussed but close enough to come to the omegas' aid if needed. As always, Adar led the group. He barely slept these days, rarely leaving the dragon omegas out of his sight. Oliver had caught his eye, that much had become clear, but the big alpha hadn't so much as spoken to him, apparently content for now to ensure his safety. That spoke to his credit, but then again, he'd always been a patient man. A bit too patient and passive for Riordan's taste, but that was exactly what Oliver needed.

“Thank you all for coming,” Sivney said, and everyone turned their attention to him. “Looking around and seeing this number of omegas is wild, I have to admit, and I'm so happy and excited we have so many new faces.”

Riordan couldn't agree more. The arrival of the dragons had changed the dynamic in the pack, but not in a bad way.

“I've asked you to gather here today to discuss some things without others present. I may be in a leadership position in this pack, but I'm still an omega, and I know all too well the challenges we face on a daily basis because of our status. I figured it would be good to talk among each other without alphas present so no one has to fear repercussions.”

Fallon cleared his throat. “Does that mean you won't report back to the pack alpha what's being discussed here?”

He'd become the de facto leader of the dragon omegas, and while Riordan hadn't had a lot of direct contact with Fallon, he respected the hell out of him for what he was doing to advocate for the dragon omegas. That couldn't be easy, and yet Fallon conquered his own fears time and again to speak up.

“I'll give him a general summary without names or specifics. If I feel he needs details, I'll ask for permission from those involved.”

Relief filled Fallon's face. "Thank you. That means a lot to us. I know you keep assuring us we're safe, but..."

Sivney's expression softened. "That must be impossible for you to believe at this stage, especially after what you guys went through. It's okay. We understand." He looked around their circle. "How have the last two weeks been, for many of you the first two weeks in our pack?"

Graham tentatively raised his hand as if he wasn't sure if he was allowed to speak up. Sivney gave him an encouraging nod. "Doctor Magnusson and Doctor Ahadi have been wonderful in taking care of us and assisting us during our delivery."

"I'm so glad to hear that," Sivney said. "Enar and Maz are not only knowledgeable doctors but supportive and kind as well. I guarantee each and every one of you you'll be safe with them at all times."

"We're very grateful for the new cabins," one of the other dragon omegas said. Riordan hadn't memorized all their names yet. Simon, maybe? "Servas stopped by a few days ago to check everything worked."

"I can't believe he's in charge of all construction," Ross said. "He has alphas on his team who obey his instructions and command!"

"I know!" Fallon exclaimed, and the other dragon omegas chimed in as well, expressing their astonishment.

"But that's no different for you," Fallon said to Sivney. "To see you coleading the pack is just...mind-blowing."

"It's not normal. Let me stress that first." Sivney looked around the circle again. "This is revolutionary for wolves too, but it's how these packs roll. I was the most suitable man for the job, and they prioritized that over my status. Once you're settled in and ready to figure out where you want to serve the pack, that principle will apply to all of you as well."

Stunned, the dragon omegas looked at each other. "You're saying we could end up in leadership positions as well?" Fallon asked, his disbelief clear.

“Absolutely.”

“Even though we’re new to the pack and dragons on top of that?”

“Yes. And my gut tells me you specifically will rise to the top quickly. You’re a leader, Fallon. One with natural charisma and organizational qualities. People look up to you and listen when you speak. That’s what we need from our leaders.”

Fallon dragged a hand through his hair. “I’m... I don’t know what to say. In the Murphy clan, speaking up only got me beatings.”

Riordan’s heart ached at that casual statement. How did one react to that, other than with abhorrence? What could he possibly say to make it better? Nothing came to mind.

“I’m so sorry,” Sivney said softly. “And that applies to all of you. If any of you need to talk about what you went through, we’re here to listen, and so is Delton, our psychologist.”

“I already had a session with him,” Ian, an omega who couldn’t be more than eighteen, said. “It felt good to talk about stuff with someone who wasn’t a part of it. With others, I often feel like they don’t wanna hear it because they’ve been through the same or because their life sucks enough without adding my shit to it, but with Delton, it was different. He just listened to me ramble.” He chuckled self-consciously. “And when I say ramble, I mean ramble. I talked for two hours straight, barely taking the time to breathe. But it helped, is what I’m trying to say. Sorry, I know I talk too much.”

Riordan’s heart filled with compassion for the young omega. He was the sweetest and so stinking cute, but from his words and attitude, it was crystal clear that he had low self-esteem, the poor kid.

Sivney sent him a warm smile. “Not at all, Ian. I’m glad you found talking to Delton helpful, but I hope you’ll remember that you can be yourself here. Talk as much as you want. Your voice matters.”

God, Sivney was so good at this. He always seemed to know what to say, what tone to use. Case in point was the broad smile Ian now sported. “Thank you. I’ll try.”

“Anyone else want to share anything?” Sivney asked.

“H-how do we pay you back?” Ross asked, his voice barely audible.

Sivney frowned. “Pay us back for what?”

“For your hospitality, the food we eat, and the cabins we occupy. I mean, we use water and electricity, and none of that is free. Plus, the medical care and everything else.”

Understanding lit up Sivney’s face. “You don’t. This is a no-strings-attached arrangement. Down the line, when you’ve settled in, we hope you’ll serve the pack, using your gifts and talents, but for now, you’re our guests, and we love having you.”

“There are no expectations? Not even from the alphas?” Graham checked, apparently struggling to believe it as well.

“No. In fact, I need you all to promise me something.” Sivney’s face was dead serious as he made eye contact with the omegas one by one. “If any of the pack members step out of line, any of them, I need you to tell me. If you’re scared to tell me, tell someone else who will report it. Talk to Fallon or any of the wolf omegas. Our alphas and betas are trustworthy and honorable, but in case something does happen, tell me. Abuse won’t be tolerated here.”

“B-but how will you know we speak the truth?” Ian asked.

Sivney quirked an eyebrow. “Would you lie to me?”

“No, but... Whenever it’s been our word against that of an alpha, we’ve always been dismissed as liars.”

“Not in this pack,” Sivney said. “We believe the victims, the survivors, and your word weighs as much as that of an alpha.”

“Not that we’ve experienced anything,” Fallon said quickly. “I’ve checked with everyone several times over the last two weeks, and your alphas have kept a safe distance.”



“As they should,” Sivney said.

“Can we ask you questions as well?” another dragon omega asked.

“Anything.”

“We heard one of you got pregnant with Prince Jermon’s clutch and delivered eggs.”

Riordan raised his hand. “That would be me.” All dragon omegas focused on him, and he swallowed. “Obviously, we had no clue I could get pregnant with eggs, seeing as I’m not a dragon, but I guess dragon magic was stronger than the birth control I used.”

“You’re allowed to use birth control?” Ross asked.

Riordan nodded. “I had only just gotten together with my two mates, and I wasn’t ready for kids yet, so I asked Enar for birth control. That’s the omega’s decision. Always.”

“How many eggs did you deliver?” Graham asked.

“Four.”

Loud gasps rose from the dragons. “Four? You had four healthy eggs?” Graham’s eyes had grown big.

“Yes?” Riordan almost felt like he should apologize.

The dragon omegas exchanged looks.

“I told you dishonor and breaking the code come at a price,” Fallon said softly to his fellow dragons.

“Aye, but why are we paying it then and not the ones being dishonorable?” Gael said bitterly. No one had an answer to that.

“We’ve seen the same thing with the wolves,” Yitro spoke up. “For many years, fertility among the wolves was declining, and the birth rate of alphas had gone down sharply. Not until Lidon started the pack and returned to the old ways did that trend reverse, at least in the packs.”

“You’re pregnant, right?” Ian asked him.

Yitro nodded. “With Rhene’s child, but by artificial insemination. Obviously, we’re not together, as he is with Erwan.”

“Oh, I know.” Ian grinned. “Nothing had our esteemed leaders more upset than discovering those two were mates. That sent a shockwave through the clan.”

“Because they’re both alphas?” Riordan asked.

“That and because they’re different species. Plus, it’s a union between the crown prince of the Doyle clan and someone closely related to the True Alpha. That’s a strong pact that isn’t easily defeated,” Fallon explained.

“But Rhene isn’t related to Lidon by blood. They’re brothers-in-law,” Riordan said.

“Doesn’t matter. Magic doesn’t look at blood. By forming a pack, you all became family, brothers. Those ties bind much tighter and stronger than blood ever could, and our magic recognizes that. Like, according to our customs, we’d have to call you a prince too,” Fallon said to Riordan.

What? Riordan wasn’t following.

“You’re mated to a prince, and you carried his clutch. You’re not only a prince as a consequence, but your children will be as well.”

Princes? His kids would be of royal blood? Somehow, that had never registered with Riordan. “Wow,” was all he could manage.

“I have another question,” Ian said. “How are we supposed to handle our heats?”

Sivney scratched his chin. “Oh, good question. How was that handled in the Murphy clan?”

Silence descended. A painful silence that could only mean one thing. Shivers ran down Riordan’s spine. What cruel fate had these omegas suffered at the hands of alphas?

Sivney seemed to realize his mistake as well. “Strike that question. That was insensitive of me. Let me think about this for a moment.”

Maybe this was an area where Riordan could contribute, seeing as how he'd been unmated until recently? "Before I was mated, I had arrangements with the unmated alphas in our clan. They need permission from Rhene or Sivney to have sex with an omega, so we would arrange this ahead of time. They've always behaved honorably."

"You mean you had one alpha to take care of you?" Fallon asked.

"Yes." Riordan frowned. "Would dragons need more than one?"

"Need? I doubt it. But it's what we're used to. Our heats were more of a free-for-all for the alphas who had been designated as breeders by the breeding master. Four or five alphas weren't uncommon." Fallon's face tightened. "They'd line up in the room and take us one after the other."

Riordan couldn't hold back the gasp of shock. Alphas would line up? That was...rape. Rape condoned by their clan leaders. "And your king, he was okay with that?" he asked.

Fallon sighed, rubbing his temples. "King Ennis is...old. He's not involved with a lot of what's happening in the clan anymore. I'm not sure if he wants to be, but the leaders certainly strive to keep him on the sidelines as much as possible. The king has morals and principles the others abandoned a long time ago."

"So who is actually in charge, then?" Sivney asked.

"The knights, and more specifically, the big three, as we call them. Alistair, Dempsey, and Kerry."

"Not Tynan?" Riordan checked. Jermon had told him about the guy who had scanned the Doyles that first time, how he had confirmed Erwan was a white dragon and stated how powerful Jermon's gift of magic was.

"Hell, no," Fallon said. "He's very close to the king, and they'd be way too concerned about him sharing things they don't want the king to know. They were mighty upset with Tynan for saying too much when he scanned the Doyles."

“They were?” Sivney leaned forward. “Like what specifically?”

“They already knew Prince Erwan is a white dragon because Alistair had told them, though they had a hard time believing him. But the strength of Prince Jermon’s gift especially wasn’t something they wanted you to know. Tynan was admonished for that afterward.”

Wasn’t that interesting? Riordan filed that away as something to tell Jermon, though judging by the look on Sivney’s face, the omega might beat him to it. He, too, must have realized the importance of that tidbit of information.

“So the king doesn’t know about the abuse you suffered?” Sivney asked.

Fallon hesitated. “He doesn’t know how bad it had gotten, but he certainly didn’t step in back when he was still actively involved in running the clan. Omegas have never been treated with respect in the Murphy clan. Then again, from what we’ve heard, the O’Connor and Fitzgerald clans are only a small improvement compared to the Murphys, so there is that.”

“We can’t change the past,” Sivney said softly. “But we can promise you a different future, one in which you’ll never have to suffer abuse again. That, I promise.”

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## Chapter Thirty-Seven

### **F**our Weeks Later

Jermon was with the chickens when the text came in. They'd been expecting it for weeks, and now they had finally shown up.

*The Murphys are incoming. Everyone in their assigned positions.*

Jermon dropped the eggs he'd just gathered and hurried out, taking a second to ensure he locked the gate to the chicken coop behind him. He broke out in a dead run.

He wasn't the only one, as people came rushing from every corner. They had practiced the plan the security team had come up with, and everyone knew what to do and where to be. Jermon had to be one of the farthest out, but luckily, he was fast, and he used his full speed.

When Jermon arrived at the newly constructed main house—Erwan and Rhene had moved in days before—Sivney stood at the door, crossing off names on a clipboard as omegas entered, one after the other. “Riordan is already here with the eggs,” he told Jermon.

Thank fuck. They'd constructed a carrying case together to be used in this exact event when the eggs would have to be transported quickly. "And Wilmer?"

The telltale thud of a galloping horse sounded behind him, and there he was, riding Pride bareback. He came to a full stop, Pride snorting in protest, and slid off. Within seconds, he'd taken the halter off and looped the reins back over Pride's head.

"Be safe, darlin'," he said, then sent Pride off with a slap on his butt. The horse neighed and trotted off, heading for the pastures.

Jermon sucked in a steadying breath. Riordan was safely inside with the eggs, and Wilmer was here as well. As long as he knew where his mates and his eggs were, Jermon was good. Wilmer stalked up to Jermon and kissed him hard. "Love you."

"Love you too."

Wilmer's position was near the door, as he was not deemed strong enough yet to be placed in the first line of defense. That honor fell to Jermon, who took his assigned spot at the beginning of the driveway. His two younger brothers stood to his right, Blair formed the end of the flank, and Adar and two more wolf alphas were on the left. In front of them stood Rhene and Erwan, the latter holding his head high and his arms loosely crossed as they awaited the arrival of the Murphys.

The rumbling came closer and closer, and then they came into view, a line of Harleys, one in the front and two by two behind that single rider, nine in total.

A deep calm settled inside Jermon. They had nothing to fear. They had honor on their side, and that had to count for something. Plus, they had a white dragon.

The Harleys came to a stop in front of them, kicking up a cloud of gravel dust. The pack members stood motionless as the riders turned off their engines, dismounted their bikes, and

took off their helmets. Alistair led the group, his towering figure awe-inspiring, even from ten feet away.

Silence descended as the dust drifted down and settled back on the gravel. No one spoke until finally, Alistair cleared his throat. “That’s quite the welcome,” he said, his tone in itself a challenge.

Rhene shrugged. “If you had announced you were visiting, we could’ve rolled out the red carpet.”

Alistair snorted. “I somehow doubt that.”

“I said we could have, not that we would have. But let’s stop wasting both our time and skip the chitchat. What do you want?”

“Let’s start with our omegas. We want them back.”

Rhene tsked. “They were never yours, bro. They’re people, not property.”

“That’s nice in theory, but I bet they’re not exactly free to go here either.”

“They are, actually. If any of them would want to go back, they can. That’s their decision, not mine or anyone else’s.”

“Bullshit.”

Rhene quirked an eyebrow. “You question my word?”

“I have no reason to believe you.”

“I’ve never lied to you.”

“You never told us you had our omegas.”

“First of all, that’s not lying, and second, as previously established, they weren’t yours to begin with. That’s oh for two, dude. You’re not off to a good start.”

A nerve in Alistair’s jaw ticked as his face tightened. “Prove it.”

“He’s telling the truth.” Fallon came up from behind them, where he’d been hiding. “We came here of our own free will, we’re not forced to stay, and none of us want to go back.”

Alistair cursed. “I should’ve known you were behind this, you little shit.”

“Watch your language,” Erwan said, his voice cold as ice. “We don’t tolerate that kind of behavior against omegas in our pack.”

Dempsey took two steps forward, shaking a balled fist at Erwan. “Your *pack*? You’re a dragon, for fuck’s sake. You’re supposed to be a prince, not a wolf’s bitch.”

Fury coursed through Jermon’s veins at that foul insult, but he held his temper. Rhene had warned them the Murphys would probably attempt to get a rise out of them with taunts like this, but they couldn’t respond. All the Murphys needed was an excuse to attack.

Erwan shrugged. “The fact that you think that’s an insult says ten times more about you than it does about me. Why don’t you listen to what Fallon has to say instead?”

“Why would we? He’s an omega, which means we can’t trust a word coming out of his mouth,” Alistair snapped.

“Let me get this straight. You don’t believe me, but you won’t trust the word of an omega either?” Rhene asked. “So what proof would actually convince you?”

Dempsey, Kerry, and Alistair shared a look. “So you’re not willing to return the omegas?” Kerry asked, wisely calling them *the* omegas instead of *our*.

“It doesn’t matter what we want. They don’t want to return,” Rhene said coolly.

“What they want is not important,” Dempsey argued.

Adar took a threatening step forward, a low growl coming from deep inside his chest.

“You might wanna keep your damn mouth shut before my pack brother here loses the grip on his temper and comes after you,” Rhene warned him.

Dempsey looked confused. “Why would he do that? Not that I wouldn’t kick his ass, but what does he have against me?”



“Pretty sure it has to do with Oliver’s injuries, most notably the two broken ribs he had, as well as the black eye.” Erwan’s tone held barely veiled fury, and Dempsey took a faltering step back.

“I had nothing to do with that,” he said unconvincingly.

Adar growled again, loudly this time, and a shimmer appeared around Dempsey, the air dancing as in extreme heat, going slightly hazy. “He’s using magic,” Jermon said just as Fallon spoke a spell, interrupting the shimmer.

A gasp traveled through the Murphys. “Who... Who was that?” Kerry stammered.

“Me.” Fallon raised his chin. “What, you didn’t know I had the gift of magic? Fools you are, all of you. All of us omegas have gifts, and you never knew.”

The Murphys looked at each other in stunned silence, their confusion and shock too real to be acted. “That’s a lie,” Kerry finally said. “You tricked us, somehow.”

“That seems to be your standard response, to call us liars whenever we say something you don’t like. You do realize that doesn’t make it so, right? Fallon is telling the truth.” Erwan was trembling with anger. Jermon recognized the signs that his brother was close to losing the fight to stay calm.

“Omegas have no magical abilities,” Alistair countered, but he didn’t seem convinced.

Fallon chuckled. “That’s what you want to believe because the alternative would be realizing you could’ve used our gifts all these years, but instead, you opted to suppress us and use us as slaves. Like I said, fools.”

“Mind your words, you—”

A violent grunt from Adar had Dempsey swallow back the second half of that sentence.

“Don’t provoke us,” Alistair said, his face tight.

“Or what?” Rhene challenged him.

“You don’t wanna find out.” Kerry exchanged another one of those meaningful looks with Alistair. “What with how little training you guys have received, you wouldn’t stand a chance against us.”

Rhene grinned. “Is that really what you believe? Even though we have Erwan?”

Oh, he was good at this, this casual back-and-forth, never showing his whole hand.

“What good is a white dragon gonna do you if you don’t know jack shit about magic?” Dempsey scoffed.

“Who’s saying we don’t?”

Dempsey hesitated. “Who would’ve taught you, those brain-dead omegas?”

“Actually, we’ve already learned a lot from them, Fallon especially. He’s been worth his weight in gold in what he taught my brother about his gift of magic and how strong it is,” Erwan said calmly. “But we also have Emma.”

“Emma?” Alistair paled. “The granddaughter of Seamus the Librarian?”

Ah, so they knew who she was. That spoke volumes about the reputation of her grandfather.

“That same one,” Erwan confirmed. “And let me tell you. She’s shared some fascinating tidbits...like your role in the troubles the Hayes pack faced a few years ago.”

Alistair stepped back, as did the whole pack. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Erwan shook his head. “Please, spare me more of your lies. We both know the damning truth, so let me make something crystal clear. We don’t need you, nor do we want you to train us anymore, since all you’ve done is tell us lies and half lies, keeping information from us we really needed to know. You’re not our allies, and you have never been. We’re not considering you enemies yet, but we won’t hesitate to defend ourselves should you choose to attack us in any way. And for the record, that includes any attempt to remove any of the omegas from

our pack without their consent. We're done tolerating your rude and offensive behavior, so feel free to see yourselves out. You are no longer welcome on Hightower lands, and a next unannounced visit will be considered a provocation."

"And how do you plan to stop us from taking what we want?" Alistair sneered. "You and what army would be powerful enough to stop us?"

Jermon had known it was coming, but he still startled when Erwan shifted in one glorious second, towering over all of them. From behind them, another shifted form trotted forward until they stood side by side—a white dragon and a massive wolf that inspired fear simply by the way he looked.

"We have the white dragon and the True Alpha by our side, not to mention honor and the blessings of the earth and moon," Rhene said calmly. "That's all the army we need."

Goose bumps broke out all over Jermon's skin, and he couldn't look away from that magnificent sight of his brother standing next to Lidon. No one spoke a word until Alistair gave a terse hand signal to his men, and they all climbed back onto their bikes. To their credit, the pack waited with cheering until the last bike had disappeared from sight.

They all broke out in laughs and shouts, sighs filled with relief and happy slaps on each other's backs. They had stood up to the Murphys and with great results. Violence had been avoided—for now.

Later that night, Jermon cuddled on the couch in Erwan and Rhene's new quarters, Riordan on his left side and Wilmer on his right. Across from them, Erwan was resting with his back against Rhene's chest, his mate tenderly caressing his hair.

"What a day," Rhene said with a sigh.

"You can say that again." Jermon was exhausted, even though he hadn't done that much physically. The tension about the Murphys visiting had worn him out.

"I didn't think they'd back off that quickly," Erwan said.

Jermon snorted. “When facing a white dragon and the biggest wolf ever? Dude, they were shitting their pants.”

“I hate how they were all lying about the omegas,” Riordan said softly. “Pretending like they didn’t know what you were talking about when you mentioned Oliver’s injuries.”

“Despicable,” Wilmer said. “And every alpha involved should be deeply ashamed for facilitating that kind of behavior.”

“How is he doing?” Jermon asked Riordan. The omegas had formed tight bonds and could be seen hanging out in groups at all times, which was good, both for their safety and their social well-being.

“He’s recovered physically, but he still hasn’t spoken. Not even Delton can lure him out of his shell.”

“It will take time,” Rhene said. “Time and patience.”

“I hope Adar is a patient man because he has it bad,” Wilmer said with a sly grin. “He literally cannot take his eyes off him whenever he’s near...which is most of the time.”

Jermon chuckled.

“He’s the most patient man I know, and in his defense, he hasn’t spoken a word to him, content to make sure he’s safe for now,” Riordan said. “All of us omegas are talking about it, how much we’re rooting for them.”

“Same,” Rhene said. “Those two guys deserve all the happiness. Adar has had to wait for a long time, watching his pack mates all get mated. I so want him to find his happily ever after.”

“Like us.” Riordan rubbed himself against Jermon. On Jermon’s other side, Wilmer did the same.

“Like us,” Jermon confirmed, suddenly hoarse. “I never thought I could ever be this happy.”

“Aw.” His brother’s face softened. “It’s truly special seeing you so in love.”

“Right back atcha.” Erwan looked up at Rhene and raised his mouth at his mate. He got a tender kiss in return. “I didn’t even know I could feel this way. So...content and full and perfectly happy.”

“Wait till our son gets here,” Rhene said. “I’m counting down the days until Yitro will be giving birth.”

Jermon felt the same way about the eggs, and every day, he crossed off another day on their countdown calendar. He stole a glance at the eggs, which were in their carrying case, soundly asleep. Riordan didn’t feel good anymore about leaving them at home, and Jermon fully supported bringing them everywhere.

“The Murphys will be back at some point,” Wilmer said, ever the realist. “And they may not be so easily scared off, so what will we do then?”

“The same thing we’ve always done,” Rhene said calmly. “We prepare, we fight, and we stand together as one. We defend what’s ours, and we do it with love and honor. I have to believe that will be enough.”

“But for now, we rest,” Erwan said softly. “And we spend time with those we love.”

Jermon’s eyes got unexpectedly teary. Love. Wasn’t that what it all came down to in the end? It didn’t matter how many battles you had fought or even won, how strong your gifts were, or what you had achieved in life. All those accomplishments were nothing without love, without mates by your side.

And in that sense, he was richer than he ever thought possible. He had the love of two men he loved more than life itself, two men he would die for and who would lay down their lives for him. Because of that, he had already won, and that love was something no one could ever take away from him, no matter how much violence or magic they used. What Wilmer, Riordan, and he had was forever. Unbreakable. And it would survive whatever came their way.

\* \* \*

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- [Dragon's Mate](#)

## **Ballsy Boys Series**

Sexy porn stars looking for real love! Expect plenty of steam, but all the feels as well. They can be read as standalones, but are more fun when read in order. The Kinky Boys is a spin off set in Las Vegas. Narrated by Kenneth Obi.

- [Rebel](#)
- [Tank](#)
- [Heart](#)
- [Campy](#)
- [Pixie](#)

### **Kinky Boys Series**

- [Daddy](#)
- [Ziggy](#)

### **Ignite Series**

An epic dystopian sci-fi trilogy where three men have to not only escape a government that wants to jail them for being gay but aliens as well. Slow burn MMM romance. Narrated by Kenneth Obi.

- [Ignite](#)
- [Smolder](#)
- [Burn](#)

Or grab the [box set](#), containing all three books plus bonus materials.

### **Stand Alones**

- [Professor Daddy](#) (sexy daddy kink between a college prof and his student. Age gap, no ABDL) Narrated by Kenneth Obi.
- [Coming Out on Top](#) (a toppy twink and a gentle giant get snowed in). Narrated by Kenneth Obi.
- [Captain Silver Fox](#) (falling for the boss and age gap on a cruise ship) Narrated by Tim Paige and Liam DiCosimo.



- [Out to Win](#) (a coming out for you set at a singing competition). Narrated by Charlie David.
- [Ranger](#) (veteran suffering from PTSD falls for a sunshine animal trainer, cowritten with K.M. Neuhold) Narrated by John Solo.

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## More About Nora Phoenix

Would you like the long or the short version of my bio?

The short? You got it.

I write steamy gay romance books and I love it. I also love reading books. Books are everything.

How was that?

A little more detail? Gotcha.

I started writing my first stories when I was a teen...on a freaking typewriter. I still have these, and they're adorably romantic. And bad, haha. Fear of failing kept me from following my dream to become a romance author, so you can imagine how proud and ecstatic I am that I finally overcame my fears and self doubt and did it. I adore my genre because I love writing and reading about flawed, strong men who are just a tad broken..but find their happy ever after anyway.

My favorite books to read are pretty much all MM/gay romances as long as it has a happy end. Kink is a plus... Aside from that, I also read a lot of nonfiction and not just books on writing. Popular psychology is a favorite topic of mine and so are self help and sociology.

Hobbies? Ain't nobody got time for that. Just kidding. I love traveling, spending time near the ocean, and hiking. But I love books more.

Come hang out with me in my Facebook Group Nora's Nook where I share previews, sneak peeks, freebies, fun stuff, and much more: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/norasnook/>

My weekly newsletter not only gives you updates, exclusive content, and all the inside news on what I'm working on, but also lists the best new releases, 99c deals, and freebies in gay romance for that weekend. Load up your Kindle for less money! Sign up here: <http://www.noraphoenix.com/newsletter/>

You can also stalk me on Twitter: @NoraFromBHR

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