



Duckling

Unlocked Mates

ATHENA STELLER

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Athena Steller

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Dedication

– For my found family. Thanks for the support.

Book Blurb

Seb

I'm the boring twin, the one who always has his nose buried in a book. I'm amazed by the new paranormal world that I've suddenly been thrust into. With both my brothers finding the love of their lives, I've been welcomed with open arms into our new family, but no matter how nice everyone is, I still feel like there's something missing. I might be considered the quiet twin, but when I meet a mysterious Reaper, all those fun filthy fantasies I try not to dwell on come to the surface.

Ash

I know the Alpha of the Hellhounds has found his mate and I'm happy for him, but I've given up hope for myself. As a Reaper, I escort souls to their final resting place and live in the Hell realm. Unless my mate is condemned to a lifetime of punishment or is dead, I can't see where I'll meet the person meant to be my forever...until a chance meeting at the Alpha's house. When I first lay eyes on the small, sweet, nerdy human, I know he's mine. Instantly I worry that he's too nice for me, but one look in his eyes and I know the truth. This little ball of fire calls to my primal urges and begs for more.

Warnings – This book contains M/M sexual content (men having sex with each other) and a Daddy/ boy relationship. This book is an exploration of a relationship between two (male) consensual adults who are looking for love and acceptance. All characters in sexual situations are over the age of consent.

No cheating or cliffhangers and an HEA is a guarantee.

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Chapter One: Adam

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Chapter One

Seb

“Remember to hold my hand and don’t let go until we pass through the portal.”

Seb rolled his eyes before he nudged Nate’s shoulder. “You know that I’ve used a portal almost daily going back and forth to the Fae realm for over a month now, right?”

Nate snorted. “Sorry. I guess I’m just nervous.”

“Why?” Seb asked. He was the one that was going down to the Hell realm for the first time. Seb wasn’t nervous, though. Instead he could barely stand still as excitement filled him.

“No one else has asked to see our other home,” Nate shared. “I just...want you to see it the way I do. It’s my second home. I love our house here and the family, but I’m always sad when we leave the realm.”

Seb nodded in understanding. He didn’t have the same feelings of home as the other men he lived with. Seb appreciated being brought into the family, and finding out about this new magical world was amazing, but he didn’t quite fit in with the others. Not that they didn’t try to include him—every single one of the men reached out and checked on Seb. Seb wished he could explain to them that something was missing. “I’m so excited to see your home. Oh! And I can’t wait to meet the puppies.” Hellhound puppies, so freaking unbelievable.

“They’re growing up so fast,” Nate said sadly. “We have another female that’s pregnant and you’ll be here for her delivery. It’s actually pretty amazing.” He held Seb’s hand again before he did the ritual that opened the portal.

Seb watched even though he’d never be able to duplicate the movement on the rocks. If Seb tried, his hand would get burned. The portal that transported him to the Fae realm didn’t

require any spells. Seb just had to wish the portal opened and it happened.

Magic worked differently in different realms, he'd found out.

There was so much information that he'd acquired since he'd first learned about the paranormal world. He'd filled over a dozen notebooks already. Having the chance to see firsthand how different realms worked still made Seb feel like the luckiest human alive.

"One more thing," Nate said suddenly.

"What?" Seb asked with some trepidation. He was headed to the Hell realm, after all.

"Those that live in the realm won't be wearing their glamour."

"Glamour?" Seb repeated.

"Demons will look like...well, demons."

"Oh." Seb hadn't thought too much about seeing the residents of Hell in their natural form. He'd gotten used to the Fae. He didn't see why it would be an issue now. "Okay."

Nate darted a side eye toward him before he said, "Okay." He clicked his fingers.

A flash appeared in front of them and the portal opened.

He walked into the portal with Nate then he was stepping into a large living room. Dark wood furniture filled the room, which made sense as both Bo and Craig were big guys, and Bo probably made every piece of the sturdy furniture. It was the hominess and comfort that Seb found surprising. There was a fire blazing in the hearth. A fire in Hell. Seb had expected it to be sweltering but instead the fire invited him in further.

"We're here!" Nate called out.

"Nate!" A seven-foot-large red demon clapped his hands. "This must be Seb."

He tried, Seb really tried, not to stare, but it was a freaking demon in front of him! Seb was happy for Nate's reminder so he didn't scream or run in terror. Demons were...scary, after all. "Uh, hello."

Gaston smiled, showing off pointed teeth. "Oh, aren't you just adorable?"

Seb shook his head. He'd heard many stories about Gaston and knew that the large demon loved to cause chaos. Pushing his glasses up his nose, Seb smiled back. "And you're very big." And red. With large horns that curled back to his shoulders. Gigantic feet with claws that clicked against the hardwood floor.

"I am!" Gaston turned as if he was modeling clothes for Seb, but since the demon merely wore black leather pants with a hole that allowed his long tail to hang out, Seb didn't know what he was trying to show off.

He swallowed hard. "Great." Nervously, he ran his sweaty palms against the legs of his pants.

"Is Seb's room ready?" Nate asked.

"Yes. I moved a desk, chair, and everything else you asked for in there. I don't see why he'd want all those books, though."

"Books?" Seb turned to his friend.

Nate blushed. "I was talking to Gast and mentioned how much you loved studying. He told me about the library that held the scrolls from the history here and I thought you'd enjoy looking at them."

Seb's mouth dropped open. "Scrolls? On the history of the realm?"

"On the history of...everything," Gaston supplied. "Demons do love their history. Not me. I love shopping. Lots and lots of shopping, so if you need me to buy you anything —"

"Gaston," Nate said, giggling.

“Oh yeah, anyway, my cousin Ari is the curator of records. He’s a huge nerd.” Gaston looked Seb up and down. “You two should get along well.”

“Gast!” Nate exclaimed, but Seb waved his hand at his friend.

“It’s okay. I’m proud to be a geek. If I wasn’t just a nerd, I wouldn’t have learned as much as I have.” He wasn’t lying. Lawson was the sweet one, River the sassy one, and Seb the smart one.

“Yeah, you’ll get along just fine with Ari. He said to come by the library any time. He’d love to answer any questions.” Gaston leaned closer. “And he means it.”

“Great. Thank you so much for bringing the scrolls and telling me. I’d love to meet your cousin.” He’d only just arrived and already he couldn’t wait to dig into his research.

“No way!” Nate grabbed his arm and tugged him toward the large, overstuffed couch.

“What?” Seb asked as he was pushed down.

“You are not locking yourself in your room already. At least not before you see the puppies!” Nate said.

Oh yeah, he really did want to see the puppies. He’d seen Bo in his full Hellhound form several times, but puppies were puppies. “Yes, please.”

“I’ll get them!” Gaston offered before racing from the room.

Nate plopped down next to him.

“I really do appreciate you letting me come down here,” Seb told Nate.

“Thank you for asking,” Nate replied with a small smile.

Seb needed to talk to the other guys and find out why no one else had asked to be brought down here. It could be that they were afraid, but most of them were paranormal so they

should be more comfortable than Seb, who was fully human. Still, it sounded like Nate needed more support.

Nate loved his new home. Craig had even started to spend more time in the Hell realm, and Bo seemed happy enough to go back and forth. Bo also seemed unbothered when Seb bombarded him with questions and answered every one, even elaborating where needed. Once again, Seb was thankful for his friends. They didn't care that he didn't have a mate like his two brothers—they treated him as family.

“Here come the puppies.” Nate bounced a little.

“How—”

They were interrupted when six small black hounds ran into the room. Seb gasped as he peered closer. They...didn't exactly look like Seb had imagined. Since he'd seen Bo in shifted form, Seb was expecting smaller versions of the Alpha. The puppies didn't have the same flame surrounding their legs as Bo. Instead, the fire was more like little flashes of light and smoke. In appearance they resembled rottweiler dogs, just with only black fur.

Seb dropped to the thick gray carpet with Nate beside him.

“My babies!” Nate squealed.

“They're so cute!” Seb gushed. They really were. Being an animal lover, Seb would cuddle puppies all day long if he could, and was surprised, but pleasantly, to find that they were super adorable.

“Wait!” Nate held up a hand when Seb reached for the closest pup, who wiggled like he wanted to get closer to Seb as well. All the pups were pure black with shiny coats and the most gorgeous red eyes. Red eyes that should look frightening but instead just made the tiny hounds seem too darn cute.

Gaston returned, followed by two huge black hounds. This had to be the mom and dad. Now, they were huge, the male at least a head taller than the female. Not as big as Bo, but still there was no doubt these were Hellhounds.

“Samson, Lexi, please come meet Seb. He’s the friend that will be staying here for a little bit.” Nate rose, dragging Seb up with him.

The two large hounds stalked toward him. Seb knew they would smell his fear, if he had any, but could they smell his excitement? He nodded his head in respect to the hounds. “Hello,” Seb said. “I am honored to meet you both. With your permission, I would like to touch...uh...pet your puppies. Would that be okay with you?”

The male hound stepped forward first, his red eyes flashing as he looked Seb up and down.

“Stay still,” Nate whispered.

Not a problem. Seb didn’t move a muscle as the male hound sniffed at his hand, lower back, and legs. He huffed before nudging Seb’s fingers.

“You can touch him. He really likes ear rubs.”

Laying his palm on top of Samson’s head, Seb ran his fingers over Samson’s left ear. The hound leaned his heavy weight into him, and Seb grinned. The hound was hotter than a normal dog, but the flames around his legs didn’t burn or even touch him. He brought his other hand up and began to rub at both ears.

The female hound walked closer, nudging the male out of the way and taking his place.

“Beautiful,” he whispered to her as he gave her the same affectionate ear rub.

She seemed to preen as the little hounds began to bark while circling her legs.

“I think you’ve passed. You can touch the puppies now,” Nate told him.

Seb spent more time petting the pretty lady until she casually walked away and lay on a large pillow in front of the fire. Dismissed by the Queen, Seb grinned as he dropped down on his butt. He was swarmed by the mass of wiggly black

bodies. A laugh left him as every single puppy tried to lick his face.

Chapter Two

Ash

“Thanks for letting me know. We’ll keep an eye out for demons trying to escape into the human realm. That would set a dangerous precedent,” Bo said as he rose from behind his desk.

Ash stood as well, offering the Alpha a brief nod of his head. Ash was uncertain if the rumors he’d brought Bo were true, but he’d wanted someone other than him to hear about them. He’d grown up with Bo and counted the big man as one of his few true friends. They’d both come into their powers around the same time even though fate took them in different directions. They continued to work closely together, though.

Bo smiled suddenly. “Nate is back. I’m sure he’d love to see you. Are you certain you can’t stay for dinner?”

He shook his head. It had been a busy several days and all he wanted to do was go home and shower before vegging out on his couch. Maybe he could even talk his favorite cousin who lived across the street into bringing him some food. “I should get home.”

“At least come say hello.” Bo led him to the office door.

Knowing he couldn’t refuse the Alpha, Ash had no choice but to follow. Reapers and Hellhounds worked independently, but they had to rely on each other often. Ash had gotten to know both of Bo’s mates and quite liked them. He also recognized the changes in his old friend. Power radiated off Bo and had only increased with his matings, but Bo also cared about the creatures in the realm. That was just one reason that Ash was glad they’d remained friends. Ash didn’t have many friends, as his position kept him solitary.

Ash didn’t hang out with those of his own kind. He found other Reapers to be arrogant, annoying, and ridiculous. They thought they were better than everyone else from the Hell realm. Ash might be a Reaper, but he knew that he couldn’t do

his job without the others. The dirty part of their work. Reapers traveled from one realm to another, guiding souls to their final resting place. They needed the Hellhounds to sometimes track down or drag evil souls into hell where they belonged. Demons watched over the souls to make sure they served their punishments, but it was the Reapers that showed up first at the time of death.

Becoming a Reaper wasn't a guarantee, even with his bloodline. Ash's father had been a Reaper, but Ash's three brothers were not. His brothers worked in the Hell realm, keeping things running, but didn't get to leave the realm. Ash was lucky that way. He'd traveled to every realm in existence numerous times. He didn't have to get permission to leave the Hell realm like his brothers or demons.

Walking down the hall, Ash winced at the loud sounds coming from where he knew the living area was located. His over-sensitive ears almost rang with the volume of chaos.

"The boys are playing with the puppies, of course," Bo said with amusement lacing the words. "I swear Nate forgets that those pups are going to grow up to be huge beasts that drag souls to Hell."

Ash snorted. Bo's littlest mate had gossip tongues in their small community wagging. Nate's connection with the Hellhounds was well known all through the Hell realm. Luckily their community was smaller than others in the realm, so even though some of the other creatures were quick to turn their noses up at having two shifters as part of them, they'd quickly accepted both of Bo's mates.

Bo stopped in the doorway of the living room as magical laughter reached Ash's ears.

Ash's body immediately responded.

His vision darkened and his fangs dropped as his cock hardened so fast he grew dizzy.

Ash slammed a palm on the wall next to his head struggling to remain on his feet. He'd never had such an

overwhelming reaction to anything in his life. Not even when he'd first come into his powers and hadn't been able to control his abilities as they manifested.

“Ash?” Bo was beside him.

He shook his head to trying clear the fog invading his brain. Ash didn't try to speak to Bo. Instead, he zeroed in on the sounds coming past the doorway. Or one sound—soft, happy giggles. That sound.

Pushing off the wall, Ash strode forward with only one thought. He had to find out who that sweet sound was coming from.

Ash stepped past the doorway and into chaos. He ran his gaze around the room. Two adult Hellhounds were curled up on a bed in front of a fireplace, ignoring the commotion around them. Gaston, in a pink frilly apron—not exactly a good look for the red demon—stood in the middle of the room with a wooden spoon in his hand, pointing it at two small forms rolling around on the carpet under a puppy pile.

“No!” Gaston shouted over the sounds of happy giggles, short yips, and even some barking. “Do not get them riled up before dinner.”

It was too late. Even Ash could tell that there was no way the pups would be settling down any time soon. He stood there behind the couch, trying to get a look at the...human who was rolling around with the little black hounds. Ash knew Nate so the stranger beside the shifter must be...his. His mate. Ash's human.

Holy shit! Ash's mate was in the same room as him.

“Ash?” Bo's strong hand landed on his shoulder, his finger digging into Ash's flesh, but the touch helped ground him.

He was unable to look away from his...mate. “He's...”

“That's Sebastian, Seb,” Bo said. “He's part of our pack in the human realm.”

Ash swallowed hard. “He's...”

“He’ll be staying with us for a while. Both his brothers have found their mates, so he knows all about us.”

His little human mate was staying in the Hell realm? Protectiveness filled him. This realm was not the place for a little human. “He’s...mine,” Ash finally managed.

Bo’s hand tightened even more, the pain finally helping Ash draw his gaze from his human. Bo’s smile was a surprise. “Mate?”

Ash nodded. He was still finding it hard to manage words.

“Congratulations, brother.” Bo’s smile widened before he brought his fingers to his lips. He whistled loudly and all the chaos stopped.

The adult hounds sat up, the pups plopped their butts on the ground, Gaston froze mid-step, and Nate and the human both looked up.

Now that there wasn’t a pack of hound pups crawling all over his mate, Ash could finally get a good look at him. Small, his human was at least a head shorter than him, and he was absolutely adorable. The human rose slowly, straightening his button-down shirt, before fixing his crooked glasses on his nose. He stared at Ash with wide eyes behind the thick lenses. Hazel eyes met his and Ash knew he should smile or something. Say something. But he just stared back.

“Hello,” his human said quietly.

“Hey, Ash,” Nate said at the same time.

Ash nodded as he continued to watch his human. Sebastian. That was his name. Seb. His. His precious mate that was pale, skinny, and so gorgeous it took Ash’s breath away.

“Uh...” Nate waved a hand between Ash and his mate. “Seb, this is Ash, one of our Reapers. Ash, this is Seb, one of our family back home.”

“Dinner,” Ash blurted out.

“Huh?” Nate replied. He glanced at Seb, but the human’s attention was on Ash. Ash wanted to keep the human’s attention forever. He strained to keep his wings tucked against his back and not spirit his mate away. He had to act civilized.

He cleared his throat. Words were hard. Why were words so hard? What was wrong with him? “Bo invited me to dinner.” At least he hoped that sentence made sense. Ash walked around the couch until he stood in front of his mate. What would it feel like to touch Seb? His mate seemed to have soft skin. Ash would like to rub up against him.

Seb tilted his head back as Ash invaded his personal space.

“What?” Nate looked between the two of them.

Ash could see the movement from the corner of his eye. His mate never looked away from Ash, and Ash couldn’t have taken his eyes off the human.

“Hi.” He tried smiling this time.

His human mate shuddered as his mouth opened. Nothing came out. Sebastian seemed to have the same problem with words as Ash.

“What’s happening?” Nate whispered loudly.

Bo snorted before Nate was pulled away from them.

“I’m Ash,” he said to his little human.

His human nodded before he licked his bottom lip.

Oh shit. Ash’s cock pulsed in need.

“You’re Seb?” he asked. He just really wanted to say his mate’s name. He stepped even closer. His hand brushed against Seb’s arm.

“You...you’re...big,” Seb stuttered.

That, that soft sweet voice. Fuck, Ash wanted to wrap his arm around his mate and fly away with him.

“Oh!” Nate’s voice sang out.

“What?” Seb went to look at the shifter, but Ash gently captured Seb’s face in his hands. Seb’s eyes widened even more.

“Hi,” Ash said again, his voice a low rumble. He needed to get the word out. “Mate.”

“Mate?” Seb squeaked. Then he shocked Ash by whooping and jumping into his arms.

His mate surprised him into stumbling back, but Ash managed to hold on to his little human. It would kill Ash if he dropped and injured his mate. In his arms, Seb was able to look down into Ash’s face and his smile radiated happiness.

Pure joy lit up Sebastian’s sweet face.

“I have a mate?” Seb asked quietly. He was running his hands over Ash’s shoulders and arms, like he couldn’t help but touch Ash as much as Ash was dying to touch him, although he was avoiding the black feathers of his wings and the bones that connected them.

Ash tightened his hold. “You do, my sweet human.”

“Just one though, right? Just you?”

He couldn’t help but frown. Not the question he expected. “Yes. Do you—”

“Oh thank heavens!” Seb said. “River has two mates and that seems like so much madness. Like I get that River probably needs two mates to keep up with him, but I so couldn’t picture having to share my mate like he does. Lawson only has one though. He’s a vampire, my brother’s mate, not my brother. Have you met Drake? You aren’t a vampire though? Nate said Reaper, and I don’t actually know what a Reaper does, but I’m sure you are very good at it.”

As his little human rambled and talked without taking a breath, Ash blinked back at his mate. He didn’t know if he could or should answer all the questions that his mate was shooting at him. So he said the only thing he could think of. “Dinner?”

Chapter Three

Seb

Seb couldn't take his eyes off his mate. Mate! He had a mate of his very own and Ash was sexy, like *so* sexy, and Seb was finding it difficult to focus on his food instead of his sexy mate.

His mate was obviously not human—the huge black wings folded against his back were telling, but so was the fact that Ash was easily over six foot five and just huge. Seb had never seen such large men until he'd started to hang around the paranormal. Ash's eyes were dark, black, as he watched Seb and every so often Seb could see a hint of fangs in his mouth. Sharp, bright white fangs.

He shifted in his chair, trying to relieve some of the pressure from his cock straining against the zipper of his khaki pants. The possibilities of how Ash could manhandle him were running wickedly through his mind.

His mate smirked as he caught the little movement, like he knew what was happening with Seb. Of course, he just might. Seb knew that some shifters could smell his arousal, which meant he wasn't hiding anything from Bo, Craig, or Nate. Seb didn't know anything about Reapers. He hadn't even known there were Reapers.

Still, he had a fairly good idea that Ash knew the little issue Seb was dealing with. Well, not little exactly. His cock was in proportion to the rest of his body. Not that he should be thinking about his cock as he ate at the table with his shifter friends. Or his mate. Who probably knew that Seb's cock was hard. Maybe his arousal had Ash's cock just as hard. Crap! He really shouldn't be thinking about Ash's cock. Seb swore he felt a little bit of precum wet the front of his underwear.

Nate began to giggle across the table from him before slapping a hand over his mouth.

Yep, Seb was not hiding how damn turned on he was just sitting next to his sexy mate.

Ash leaned closer to his side. “You okay?”

“Yep! Yes!” Seb squeaked.

His mate gave him a look, and okay, Seb shouldn’t be so turned on by the amused look directed at him.

“You need to behave,” Ash whispered.

Seb bobbed his head up and down. He tried to concentrate on the conversation between Bo and Craig about the construction happening back home, but his gaze fell on Nate. Nate was grinning so wide as he looked between Ash and back at Seb before making an obscene gesture.

Seb choked on his piece of chicken.

Nate snort-laughed.

Bo glared at Nate.

Ash patted Seb’s back. Oh no, he couldn’t handle having Ash’s hands back on him. Those strong veiny hands that looked like they could hold him down as Ash plowed mercilessly into him.

He hurriedly took a long drink of his water, trying to cool himself down. Just thinking about Ash fucking him was enough that Seb was pretty sure that he was going to explode.

Abruptly, Ash stood, forcing his chair back until it crashed on the tiled floor. He scooped Seb out of his own chair before racing them out of the room. Seb had no idea what was happening or where they were going, but being carried by Ash was not something that he planned to complain about.

Back home, Bryce was constantly being carried by Axel, and sure, maybe Seb had never really understood why, but he did enjoy being held close to Ash’s chest. That wide, muscular chest pressed against his cheek.

Doors opened and closed while Ash moved too fast for Seb to follow.

Dry heat hit him as Seb found himself outside.

Outside, out in the Hell realm, for the very first time.

Since they'd portaled straight into Nate's living room, Seb hadn't gotten to see the new realm yet.

Ash leapt off the porch before he raced around the house. From what Seb could see as the scenery flew by, it was a really nice house. He was lowered to the ground, black sand under his shoes, then shoved up against that very same house he'd admired. Ash leaned the front of his body against Seb's.

"You're driving me insane," Ash rumbled with his lips close to Seb's neck. "I can smell your arousal, your need."

Crap, so Reapers could pick up on that.

"I want you so bad," Ash confessed with a growl. "I haven't gotten to talk to you yet. Or kiss you."

Seb gripped Ash's shoulders hard. "You could kiss me now." That sounded like a fabulous idea.

Ash didn't hesitate. His mouth slammed down on Seb's in a hard, brutal kiss.

Yes! The kiss consumed him as Seb's body lit up. Ash pushed his tongue past Seb's closed lips and Seb opened up for him. Their tongues met, brushed against each other, before Ash deepened the kiss. It was all heat and need.

Seb probably groaned, but it was swallowed up as they continued to kiss and kiss. Ash held Seb's body pinned against the house as Seb grew desperate for more. He thrust his hips forward to rub his erection against Ash's stomach. He needed more, more friction, more pressure. Ripping his mouth away, Seb dropped his head back against the brick of the house as Ash ran his tongue down Seb's neck.

He dug his hands into Ash's thick silky black hair, pushing Ash's mouth harder against him. Ash nipped at Seb's soft flesh and Seb almost came in his khakis.

“Please!” Seb begged. He *loved* being manhandled, used roughly, marked. He might look like a skinny innocent nerd, but Seb liked things dirty. To get fucked against a house while in a new realm dirty by a mate he hadn’t even spoken more than a dozen words to dirty.

“What do you want, my mate?” Ash panted against Seb’s neck.

“Touch me!” Seb wailed.

“I am touching you,” Ash teased. He traced Seb’s collarbone with his tongue before nipping him again. He didn’t pierce Seb’s skin, but damn, Seb wished he would.

“More!” Seb demanded.

“So fucking perfect,” Ash murmured then he kissed Seb again.

Seb kissed Ash back before he was distracted by Ash’s hand against his cock. Ash squeezed Seb’s erection, causing a low long groan to fall from his lips as Ash moved his mouth down again.

He humped into Ash’s hand until Ash unbuttoned and unzipped Seb’s pants.

“Tell me you want this,” Ash ordered. “Let me take care of you, my mate.”

“Yes!” Seb hissed as Ash’s hand slid in Seb’s pants and under Seb’s tight briefs.

He hated the heat that disappeared when Ash put Seb’s feet back on the ground until Ash knelt in front of him.

Ash jacked him off as he tugged Seb’s pants down with his free hand. Desperation clawed at him and Seb pushed his pants and underwear down himself. His clothes fell to his ankles as Ash leant forward. He ran his nose against Seb’s fully engorged shaft.

“You smell so good,” Ash told him. “You smell like mine.”

Seb hated the small whine that escaped when Ash's lips closed over the head of Seb's cock. He did not hate the suction of Ash's mouth as he sucked Seb down his throat.

Seb returned his hands to Ash's hair and gripped the strands tightly while thrusting forward. Ash didn't choke as the tip of Seb's cock caught at the back of Ash's throat. Ash wrapped his hands around Seb, encouraging his thrusts with a firm grip on Seb's ass.

Not that he needed much encouragement. Seb had never felt this way before. Ash's mouth was hot and tight. He'd barely managed half a dozen thrusts and already Seb could feel the tingling at the base of his spine, signaling his near orgasm. It was all just too much.

Another whine escaped and Seb lost all sense, shoving his cock deep into Ash's mouth and came.

Ash drank down every drop before leaning back. He placed a sweet and oddly innocent kiss on the tip of Seb's cock then surged up. Seb found himself pinned back against the house again as Ash fumbled with the front of his black leather pants until they were open and his cock was in his hand.

"Kiss me," Ash demanded.

Lifting to his tiptoes and wrapping his arms around Ash's neck, Seb kissed Ash.

Ash rocked against him, his erection digging into Seb's stomach. He wished he had hard abs that Ash could rut against, but Ash would have to deal with Seb's skinniness. He tightened his arms around Ash's neck, holding him close.

"Fuck!" Ash moaned as he snapped his hips hard over and over. His ragged breaths puffed against Seb's ear, causing him to shiver until Ash's mouth moved as fast as his hips.

Seb could feel each and nip and suck that Ash peppered over his neck and shoulders. He knew there would be bruises later, either from Ash's mouth or from the fingers gripping one of hips tightly. He wondered briefly if it would be weird if he

took pictures of the love marks to keep for later, before he was distracted by Ash's words.

“So good. I want to mark you. Let everyone know who you belong to,” Ash murmured.

Seb wanted that too.

“No one who comes across you would doubt who you belong to.”

Seb clung to his mate. His possessive mate. His sexy mate.

“Mine!” Ash shouted as he coated Seb's shirt and the fluid soaked through to his skin.

Seb tilted his head back, finding himself staring at a weirdly green sky. He started to laugh, couldn't stop, until tears trailed down his cheeks, and Ash was peering down at him in concern.

He didn't even know how to start explaining what he found so amusing. No one in his family, especially his brothers, would believe that Seb had just gotten the best blow job of his life by a man he barely knew in some outrageously strange new world. Oh yeah, no one would ever believe this.

Chapter Four

Ash

Pacing the large room, Ash waited until his mate finished with his shower so they could talk. When he'd carried his mate back into the Hellhound Alpha's house, he had shielded his mate so no one else saw the dazed and rumpled state Seb had been in. Sebastian had muttered something about a shower before he disappeared into the adjoining bathroom.

Aah had gotten caught up in scenting Seb's arousal when they'd been having dinner and he'd literally not cared about anything but getting his hands on his mate. What did Seb think about him? Was he horrified by how Ash had treated him? Seb hadn't seemed like he'd minded during the impromptu blow job and rub off, but that didn't mean that he wasn't now. Maybe Ash should leave?

As he stalked across the room again, he spotted the pile of scrolls piled on the large desk. He stopped to poke through them. Most covered the history of his realm. Walking his fingers over the scrolls, he almost shouted in triumph when he found the ones he wanted. He placed the scrolls in the middle of the desk on top of an old, battered laptop.

The bathroom door opened and Ash stepped away from the desk. Seb looked around the room before his gaze landed on Ash. Was that relief in his eyes? Did his shoulders really relax when he spotted Ash?

"You're still here," Seb said. It wasn't a question.

Ash slipped his hands in the pockets of his leather pants. "Did you want me to go?" *Please say no. Please let me stay*, he begged silently.

"No!" Seb said quickly. He cleared his throat. "I...no, you don't have to leave." He stepped out of the bathroom, hair still wet, in a pair of baggy lounge pants and a large T-shirt.

“We should probably talk,” Ash said since he couldn’t think of what else to say.

Seb bit down on his full bottom lip before he nodded.

Shit. Ash didn’t know where to start. Seb stood nervously shifting from one foot to the other as the neck of his large T-shirt dipped low. Ash tracked the lines of bruises along Seb’s neck and winced.

His mate lifted his hand and covered the marks as he smiled. He smiled. Just a small tilt of his lips, but that sweet look loosened something inside Ash.

Ash stepped forward. “Should I apologize for leaving those marks?”

“Never, please, never apologize for that,” Seb replied. He lifted his chin and met Ash’s gaze. “I wanted them.”

Relief flooded him so quickly that his head spun. What was it with his mate that was keeping him whirling? “That’s good to know.” He walked over slowly to his mate before he took Seb’s hand. He drew Seb to sit on the side of the king-size bed with him.

“This was unexpected,” Ash said.

Seb snorted. “You could say that. I never would have imagined that I’d meet my mate while visiting the Hell realm.”

Some of Seb’s rambled words came back to him. “You know a lot about mates. And paranormals in general.”

“My brother, Lawson, he’s mated to Drake, a vampire. My twin River and I took him to a club where he met Drake. It was the night that Bo, Craig, and Nate met.”

Ash had heard the story. “Craig shifted in front of you all.”

“Yeah, it was hard to miss a man turning into a huge bear. Drake took us off to an office—I guess he was going to wipe our memories. Instead he realized that Lawson was his mate.”

Ash ran his thumb over the pulse on Seb’s wrist. “I’m glad he didn’t erase your memories. I could undo it, but it can be

painful.”

“You can...undo it?” Seb repeated.

“It’s one of my powers.”

Excitement filled his mate and Seb wiggled. “Tell me more!”

Chuckling, Ash shook his head. “I’ll tell you everything you want. First back to your brothers.”

Seb sighed dramatically. “Fine. Drake took us home with him and that’s where River met Anton. Anton is Axel’s brother and they’re mated to Rainer.”

“The Fae king?” Ash asked with shock. “I had heard he’d met his mate, but I haven’t been to his realm in many years.”

“Yeah, River and Anton live there with Rainier. I just spent a few months with them, learning everything I could. There’s still much more I want to look into, but I’d already promised Nate I’d come here for a while.”

Ash looked back toward the desk and scrolls. “You seek knowledge.” His little mate was one smart cookie. Ash loved that.

“Yes,” Seb admitted. “If I could make being a student a full-time job, I would. I love learning new things.”

His little human mate couldn’t be more perfect for him. “I travel to all the realms while doing my job...maybe you’d want to come with me sometime?” Ash would have to make sure that his mate understood what it was that Ash did.

Seb eyes were huge. “You’d take me with you?”

“If you’d like,” Ash responded. “You might prefer to stay and study and that’s fine too. I can travel quite quickly, so I’ll always return to you.”

His mate scooted closer. “I have so much to learn about you.”

“As I do about you.” Ash wanted to know everything about his mate. He would make sure that all Seb’s wishes and dreams came true. With his age and abilities, Ash could take care of his mate for eternity. He’d not dreamed about finding a mate of his own in over a century. Once upon a time, he’d been certain he’d have a mate, children, and a home. After accepting his position, that dream had been tucked away. He was surrounded by souls of the dead and didn’t have a lot of contact with the living. He didn’t know how he was going to explain to his sweet mate what he did.

“You’ll have to meet my brothers,” Seb said quietly.

“I’d love to meet them. And the rest of your family,” Ash assured Seb. Ash was close to his own family and there were a lot of members that resided in their community. Seb would have support even when Ash was away on jobs.

“It’s just me and my brothers. Well and our extended family now, I guess. I haven’t seen my parents in years. I don’t even know if they’re still alive.”

Ash could find that out easily for his mate, but he held his tongue. Talking about his parents had both anger and sadness cloaking his little mate.

“It’s for the best, and I don’t really care to see them if they are alive. Lawson took care of me and River as soon as he was old enough to cook and dress us. When he could, he took us and raised us. Both my brothers sacrificed everything for me and worked multiple jobs to make sure that I could continue to go to school.”

There was guilt in Seb’s tone, and Ash didn’t like that at all.

“I was so happy when Lawson found Drake and River mated with Anton and Rainer. Finally, after all they did for me, they both ended up with mates that spoil and take care of them.”

“I’m glad your brothers found their mates,” Ash said sincerely.

“I am too,” Seb said. He was still way too quiet.

Ash didn’t like it. “What’s wrong?”

Seb shook his head before he smiled. It was obviously not a real smile, but Ash didn’t know his mate well enough to push further. “This...this is just so unexpected. I really didn’t think that I was going to have a mate. After both my brothers found theirs so quickly, I’d sort of resigned myself to being the only human, and one day dying.”

“You won’t be dying,” Ash’s voice was hard. He couldn’t even think about anything happening to his mate.

Seb smirked. “Yeah, I sort of get that now. My mate... wow, that’s weird to say, my mate is a Reaper. Wait, what’s a Reaper?”

Ash rose before he walked over to the three scrolls on the desk. He picked them up and took them back to his mate.

“What’s this?” Seb asked, but he took the scrolls carefully.

“I wrote those. It’s information about my kind.”

Seb’s eyes widened before he bounced. “Really? You?”

“I did.”

“This looks old,” Seb seriously.

“Bo and I grew up together,” Ash offered. If Seb knew anything about Bo, then he’d know how old they were.

“Don’t tell me!” Seb held up a hand. “I want to figure everything out! This is going to be so much fun. I was really looking forward to researching your realm, and now I have my very own expert. Nate was trying to help, but he’s still learning as well.”

“I would be happy to help with your research. I can also introduce you to the right people that would love to help you as well.” Ash paused when the brand on his forearm began to sting as it lit up.

“What—?” Seb jumped off the bed.

Instead of responding, Ash dropped his head. Why now? Why did he need to be summoned now? It was the first night with his mate.

“Is your arm on fire? Is that a brand? Why is it glowing? Does it hurt?” Seb peppered him with questions.

“I’m sorry, my mate. I have to go. Duty calls,” Ash told him.

“Duty?” Seb covered his mouth. “Wait! Does that hurt you?” He dropped his hands as concern filled his gaze.

“No,” Ash quickly assured his mate. “It stings to get my attention, but it doesn’t hurt.”

“Good, good. I’m glad. And...you have to go?”

“I wish I could explain more,” Ash said. He strolled over to his mate and dragged Seb’s smaller frame up against his. “I must hurry though. It’s not good if I don’t arrive right when the soul is released. Souls can get lost or wander off. Read your scrolls and I will contact you tomorrow.” He kissed Seb deeply, groaning when his erection hardened once again. Since he didn’t want to meet his next soul with a hard-on, Ash forced himself to step back. “Sleep well, my mate.”

Seb blinked before he brought his fingers to his lips. “Yeah.” He sounded drugged.

Seb watched as Ash waved his hand and a black portal opened beside him. He loved seeing Seb’s excitement grow again before he stepped into the darkness and reappeared in the human realm.

Smiling kindly at the man in his forties outside a club, Ash offered the human soul his hand. “It’s okay. Come with me.”

Chapter Five

Seb

So much information. Seb knew he should have slept instead of staying up all night reading, but he could not force himself to put down the scrolls. They might just be old parchments of paper but there was so much information available.

He rubbed at his eyes before he picked up the scroll he'd set aside earlier. He'd already read it five times. It was his absolute favorite out of the bundle that he'd made it through.

His mate had written the words and Seb could hear Ash's voice in his head as if he were there reading over Seb's shoulder. The scroll that he would never let go of was from Ash's point of view as he came into his abilities. The mark of the Reaper had shown up first, burned into his forearm without warning, before Ash's other abilities showed.

Seb liked following along with Ash as his new abilities had manifested. Even though Ash's father was also a Reaper, it turned out that every Reaper gained different gifts. Ash was a powerful being—one of the most powerful, in any realm. Seb was curious about Ash's abilities and why the fates thought that Seb would be a good mate for him.

If what he learned was true, then the fates didn't make mistakes. They matched mates so that the mates received everything they would ever need to live a peaceful and loving life. Seb wanted to believe with all his heart that meant Ash would never leave him behind...not like everyone else in his life. Surely, Ash would understand how important it was to Seb that he be included in Ash's life.

Ash was Seb's ideal man, strong and broad, smart, kind, with a smile that lit up Seb's entire being. He'd learned so much about his mate and what Ash did for others by reading Ash's words.

Ash, Reaper of Souls, guided the deceased to their final resting place. Good or bad, it didn't matter to Ash—he was there to collect the soul of the person who died. He escorted the soul to purgatory where they would then move on to heaven or hell. It wasn't Ash's job to judge. Instead, he was the final step before judgment. Ash had used fancier words than that but Seb was pretty sure that he understood. It couldn't be easy for Ash, surrounded by death all the time.

He lifted his head as a knock came from his door.

Seb leapt up, his feet getting tangled, before he stumbled.

“Seb? Are you okay?” Nate called from the other side of the door.

Limping, Seb walked over and opened it to find his friend smiling at him while holding a mug of coffee.

“I brought you coffee,” Nate said. He glanced past Seb's shoulder. “Ash isn't here?”

“He had to leave last night.” Seb waved Nate in.

Nate handed him the mug before strolling into the room that Seb had been given for his stay. Nate sniffed and frowned. “It doesn't smell like sex in here.”

Seb choked on the long drink of coffee he'd just taken.

“I'm serious!” Nate said, throwing up his hands. “I left you alone all night so you could be in here getting your mating on.”

Seb wiped the back of his hand over his mouth before he shook his head. “Uh...”

“Instead, you were in here...reading?” He flicked one of the scrolls curled up on the messy desk.

“You know me.” Seb shrugged. “I couldn't wait to dig in and learn more about Ash. He got called away so I spent all night learning everything I could about him and this realm.”

“I can't believe Ash is your mate.” Nate bounced as he spoke. “That's, like, so amazing! You have a mate in the same

realm as me!”

“I can’t believe it either,” Seb confessed. He took another long sip. Doubt was starting to creep in. He was just a boring nerd who loved to read and study. He didn’t even read cool things like his friends, no paranormal, or mpreg. Seb read textbooks and articles.

“Stop it!” Nate stomped up to him and flicked him in the forehead. “Whatever just put that look on your face you need to stop thinking right this second.”

“What if he doesn’t come back? He might have gotten caught up last night but now that he’s had time away—”

Nate plucked the mug from Seb’s hands and gulped it down.

“Hey!” Seb reached for the cup before Nate could finish it, but Nate pushed him away.

“Nope, if you want to be dumb, then I’ll just enjoy this coffee on my own. It’s Drake’s special blend. The one he doesn’t share with anyone but his mate. I had to steal this bag.”

Seb whined but nodded. He wanted the coffee and he also didn’t want to have doubts about him and Ash. “Okay.”

Nate lowered the mug before tilting his head at Seb. “Okay?”

“That was a dumb thing to say.” He’d been studying mates for months. Ash wasn’t just going to change his mind. Logically, Seb knew that. It was nice that Nate was there to reassure him.

“It was. Ash couldn’t take his eyes off you. I don’t know him well, but he was one of the first to welcome me into the realm. I like him a lot. From what Bo has said about him, Ash used to talk about finding his mate all the time before he became a Reaper.”

“I wish I’d had more time with him.”

Nate nodded. “That’s normal and I bet he feels the same way. He’s never said much to me. Not more than a dozen words in all the time I’ve known him, but I could smell that he was into you as much as you were into him. He always seemed so sad to me. He wasn’t sad last night.”

No, Ash had not been sad. He’d been horny, hard, and still careful with Seb.

“So, I’m not going to allow you to have some freak-out and start to doubt yourself and what Ash will mean to you. We both know that when the fates have chosen a mate, it was meant to be. You’ve seen it with your own eyes. Mates are perfect for each other.”

“I know...”

“Do you?” Nate pressed. “Because I don’t want you to waste time questioning what you have to offer Ash.”

Seb could feel his eyes widen. “How?” How did Nate know what Seb had been thinking?

Nate snorted. “Because I almost screwed up my own mating, thinking that I wasn’t enough. I’ve seen my friends do the same. I won’t let you do it, though. Ash is lucky to have you. You are going to be perfect for him.”

“How can you say that? I’m just a human.”

“You are not *just* anything. You are an amazing friend, considerate brother, smart as shit, and are going to be an awesome mate.”

Seb started to smile. This is what he needed, his friend, some time away from his scrolls. “Thanks.”

“Come on, let’s go get some more coffee. I drank most of yours.”

Scowling into his mug, Seb nodded. “Yeah, you did.”

He followed behind his friend as they walked down the long hall. At the entrance of the living room, the hound pups noticed them and jumped up, making a fuss. They were

corralled in some sort of playpen with Gaston leaning over them.

“I just got them calmed down.” Gaston frowned at them.

“They’re puppies!” Nate said. “They need to run around. Not be stuck in a pen.”

“I’m trying to vacuum,” Gaston argued.

“And they keep running from it?” Seb asked. He’d seen dog videos of big massive beasts scared of the little vacuum. Seb didn’t find it amusing, like others did. He didn’t like the thought of any creature being frightened.

“No, they keep attacking it. This is going to be one strong and confident pack. They work together extremely well.”

“I’d expect nothing less from Samson’s offspring,” Bo stated as he walked into the living room. He crossed the room to pull Nate into his arms before turning toward Gaston. “And you vacuumed yesterday.”

“Shedding!” Gaston shrieked. “So much shedding. All of you!”

Nate snorted and rolled his eyes at Seb. The twinkle in his eye was telling. Nate was going to have fun teasing Gaston. Little Nate was kind of a brat.

“I don’t shed!” Seb said as he raised his hand. He hoped to keep the peace long enough for him to get more coffee. He really should have slept some.

Gaston peered over at him before nodding. “That’s true. I’ll allow you on the furniture.”

“Allow?” Bo growled. “You’ll allow? Whose house is this?”

“As long as I’m taking care of it, it’s my rules,” Gaston argued back.

“I don’t think so—”

“Unless you’d like to start cooking for your mates, cleaning up after all these pups...”

Pressing his lips tightly together, Seb tried not to smile as the giant demon glared at the big bad Alpha. They sounded like brothers. A pain of longing hit him. Seb missed arguing with Lawson and River. They were so busy with their new lives and mates that he felt like he never saw them anymore.

“Okay, okay,” Bo sighed as he held his hands up. “I don’t need to hear it again Gaston. I know you work hard around here.”

Gaston harrumphed and nodded.

Seb snorted. For a big bad Hellhound Alpha, a huge bear shifter, and deadly bobcat shifter, his three friends were quite silly. When he thought of all the paranormal creatures that he was constantly surrounded by, Seb was surprised by how they acted. They were playful, joked around, laughed, teased, and loved hard. It didn’t matter that they should be feared—they were still men. Friends. Family.

Already getting emotional, Seb had to clear his throat. He’d spent years hiding his feelings of abandonment and being inadequate so there was no way he wanted those feelings to sneak in now. Not when he’d just met his mate, the person—or creature—that was supposed to be perfect for him.

Nate was right. The fates chose mates that were meant for each other. It wasn’t one sided. Not only would Ash be perfect for him, but Seb had to have something to offer Ash. To make Ash’s life easier, better.

As Bo and Gaston continued bickering, Nate bent over the pen, picking up one pup at a time until they were all free. The pups bounded off toward their mother or the toy basket except for one small girl that clumsily trekked toward Seb.

Seb kneeled to allow the little girl to scramble into his arms.

These pups would grow up to be feared by all evil creatures. Hellhounds were bred to hunt down evil souls that

had evaded Reapers, to be dragged to the gates of Hell. It was almost impossible to imagine with such a sweet wiggly pup in his arms.

“That’s Jasmine,” Nate told him as he joined Seb. “She’s a big sweetie that loves to be cuddled.”

Cuddling, he could do.

“Bring her into the kitchen with us. Bo and Gaston will argue for a few more minutes. It’s like if Gaston doesn’t annoy the hell out of Bo before work, then neither of their days will be good.”

“I think you’re all getting stranger and stranger since I’ve met you.”

“Possibly,” Nate agreed with a laugh as they entered the kitchen.

Seb’s stomach rumbled at the scent of coffee and freshly baked muffins. He hadn’t finished his dinner the previous night since he’d gotten...distracted by Ash.

“Eat up,” Nate said, pushing the plate of muffins across the island toward Seb. “I told Gaston these were your favorite, cinnamon and raisin, and you couldn’t always find them. He scoured the internet to find the perfect recipe for you.”

Sitting on one of the bar stools, Seb placed Jasmine on his lap before picking up a fluffy muffin. A demon, a real-life demon from hell, had spent hours searching for a recipe just for Seb. How was this his life? Less than a year ago, Seb could only afford a handful of dry cereal for breakfast. Now he was traveling through portals to different realms, eating with shifters, Hellhounds, and demons, getting to study the incredible paranormal worlds around him.

Nate poured two mugs of coffee across the island from him as Seb shared his delicious muffin with the Hellhound pup on his lap. Damn, the happiness that filled him was something Seb never wanted to lose.

Chapter Six

Ash

Wiping his hands on the legs of his leather pants, Ash took a deep breath before he knocked on the Hellhound Alpha's door. He'd spent the entire night escorting souls in numerous realms to their afterlives. One summons had led to another then another. When he'd first left Sebastian, Ash had planned to return for breakfast at the latest, but he'd barely managed to drag himself home to nap for a few hours before he was awake and needing to see his mate.

Gaston opened the door, struggling to hold four Hellhound pups in his arms, a cell phone between his shoulder and ear, and some sound of shrieking coming from farther back in the house.

In all the time that Ash had been alive, he'd never seen a demon so...whatever Gaston was at the moment. Flustered just wasn't enough of a word. Ash blinked slowly at the demon before he began to laugh. And he laughed hard. Full belly laughs that took his breath away.

Gaston scowled before he slammed the door in Ash's face.

Okay, Ash probably deserved that from the demon. He wiped the tears from his eyes before he knocked again.

This time when the door opened, Bo stood there, smiling at him. "Hey."

"What is going on with your demon?"

"Too much," Bo said with a long sigh. "I offered to bring in more demons to help, but Gaston got all huffy and pouted for two hours."

Shaking his head, Ash could only share a smile and amusement with Bo. Demons were a fussy group, and Gaston had worked for Bo for many years. They were more family at this point. Of course, Gaston wouldn't want other demons with his Master.

“I take it you’re looking for your mate?” Bo commented with a smirk.

“I was called away last night.” He’d hated leaving Seb alone. Not being able to take him with him. “I was hoping I could steal him away for dinner.”

“Nate took him to the archives. Seb’s one for always wanting to be reading something. I accidentally mentioned the collection that Ari keeps and before I knew it, Seb and Nate were headed off.”

“They went alone?” Ash glanced over his shoulder toward the middle of their small piece of the realm. Their town of sorts. Community. It was safer than other parts of the realm, but Ash still didn’t like the idea of his human mate being unaccompanied.

Bo snorted. “Samson is with them. I would never allow either of my mates or your human to travel the realm without protection.”

Of course, he wouldn’t. Bo might be the Alpha of the Hellhounds, but this was still the Hell realm. Not a place for innocents to be walking around. “My apologies, Alpha. I should have known.”

“I can call Nate and have them return.” Bo held up his cell phone.

“No.” Ash shook his head as he took a step back. “I’ll go over to Ari’s. That will save Seb having to walk here then back with me.”

“I’ll text Nate to tell him that you are on the way. Just send my mate back with Samson when you leave with Seb.”

“Will do.” Ash waved to the Alpha before turning and hurrying down the steps. Ash couldn’t wait to see Seb again and knowing that he had already passed Seb on his way to the Alpha’s house irritated him.

As he walked down the empty streets that led toward the main section of town, Ash couldn’t help but wonder what Seb

thought about all this. This was his home realm, Ash's family had lived there since the beginning of Reapers. He was comfortable traveling to different realms, but he always loved coming home. Seb didn't live in this realm and probably wanted to get back to his own home soon.

It would be hard, but Ash could perform his duties anywhere, although in the human realm he'd have to wear his glamour constantly, which could be exhausting. Still, it would be worth it to be around his mate all the time. Ash hated the thought of giving up his home and being so far from his family, but sacrifices had to be made for a mate. His family and friends would understand that. Finding a true mate was something that every paranormal dreamed of. Ash still couldn't believe that he was lucky enough to be one of the favored.

Hurrying down the streets, Ash rushed toward the large stone building that held Ari's collection. Ari was the keeper of records for their realm. They'd been friends for almost as long as Ash had been friends with Bo. The small demon could often be found buried in old scrolls, books, and other artifacts. He was a quirky and unique individual. From what Ash knew of his mate so far, Ari and Seb would probably become quick friends.

Ash nodded to the few others as he passed, some demons and some not. Their portion of the realm was welcoming to many species as long as they didn't attract trouble. Having the Alpha of the Hellhounds helped keep the riff raff from the area. His mate was safe in the area, even if Ash didn't like the idea of Sebastian being around without him.

It was a warm evening as they didn't have seasons like the human realm. The skies remained green no matter the time of day or night. The warmth from the fires below heated the realm, keeping them all happy. Ash might need to make sure that Seb was comfortable, as the human wouldn't be used to the heat. He didn't know how much Seb actually knew about the paranormal world. From talking with his mate, Ash had determined that while Seb's brothers' mates had given them a

crash course, Ash's little human craved more knowledge. That was something that Ash could help with.

Earlier he'd picked up the paperwork to register Seb as his mate. Once they completed the ritual, Seb would be free to travel anywhere Ash went. Ash could take his mate with him to most realms without registering, but the proper paperwork had to be filled out for some of the more exclusive realms.

Reaching the entrance of Ari's building, Ash stomped up the concrete steps and pushed the heavy door open. He ignored the slight creak as he stepped into the large room.

In the middle of the room sat a long dark wood table, with every available inch of surface covered. Seb and Ari were bent over it looking at a book and not noticing Ash's entrance. In the corner, Nate was sprawled out in a chair, his feet on a smaller table, cell phone in his hand. Samson was napping below him.

Nate spotted Ash first and a flash of relief appeared on his face.

Ash quickly glanced around the room, using his supernatural abilities to search out danger, but there was no one else in the building but them.

Ash stalked toward Nate, but the little shifter rose and stretched his arms over his head.

"Glad to see you, man," Nate said quietly as Ash approached.

"Trouble?" Ash inquired, still worried about his mate.

Nate shook his head as he snorted. "Nah, it is just boring as shit here. I've been playing games all afternoon on my phone and the battery is almost dead. I wasn't sure what I was going to do if I had to actually listen to those two talk about more history."

Ah, Ash believed he understood. "Not your thing?"

"No," Nate agreed. "I've been bored out of my mind. I'm not used to staying still for so long unless I'm in my sniper

nest.”

Ash had forgotten that the small shifter had been a sniper in the military before retiring. Nate always seemed so much younger to Ash, but that might also be because Ash knew Nate identified as a little.

“Your boy though.” Nate nodded toward Seb. “Is in heaven. Bo told me that Seb and Ari would probably get along, but I swear those two are like twins. Getting excited about stories in books and stuff. I don’t understand it, but Seb is having a wonderful time.”

“I think Bo’s right. Seb and Ari are two peas in a pod,” Ash agreed. “I came to steal my mate away and take him for dinner.”

“Good luck. I had to force both of them to stop and take a lunch break. I swear they could read for twenty-four hours straight and never realize they missed a meal.”

That would not do. Seb needed food to keep his strength up. Especially in a new realm. “I’ll take care of it.” Ash patted Samson’s head as the Hellhound sat up. “You good with getting home with Samson?”

“Yep.” Nate popped the *p* of the word as he grinned. “No one messes with me being accompanied with this boy.”

Samson huffed but pushed his chest out as Nate rubbed the Hellhound’s chest. The Hellhound was almost as tall as Nate was.

“Text Bo and let him know you’re on the way,” Ash ordered. Nate might not be his mate, but he belonged to the Alpha, and Ash still didn’t want anything bad to happen.

Nate sent him a snappy salute before he headed toward the door. “Should we expect Seb home tonight?” he asked cheekily.

“I hope not but that’s up to him,” Ash responded. Ash would love to have his mate in his own bed but ultimately their relationship could only move as fast as Seb allowed. Seb

held all the cards. Ash was bound by paranormal law to not pressure his mate into accepting their bond.

“Good answer,” Nate said with a laugh. “We’ll be seeing you guys later then.”

Samson trotted beside Nate as they two left the building. Ash returned his attention to his mate and Ari where they still hadn’t noticed his arrival. Okay, Ash was sure whatever it was that Seb and Ari were looking at was interesting, but he’d like a little attention.

He strolled slowly over to the table with his hands buried deep inside his leather pants pockets. Ash stood beside the desk until Seb turned his head and noticed him.

Seb’s entire face lit up when he spotted Ash. “Hey.”

“Hey.” Ash stepped closer. “Busy?”

“Ari’s collection is so amazing!” Seb gushed.

Ash nodded before he dropped his gaze to the table and its contents. He smiled as he thought back to how Ash had acquired most of the items for Ari. As Ash had complete freedom to visit any realm and come and go as he pleased, Ari often requested he pick things up for Ari’s collections. Now he would hopefully have a mate that could help steer him to things that would be helpful to their realm or something that Ari might want.

Seb moved closer to Ash as he spoke. “Some of these items are so old that Ari is having trouble dating them. I think I can help though. Between mythology and researching some archives I found with Bo’s help, there’s so much to learn!”

Even though Seb spoke quickly, he moved his fingers over Ash’s sides as if he couldn’t help but touch Ash. Ash ran his palm down Seb’s back before tugging Seb up against his body.

“It sounds like you and Ari have hit it off,” Ash commented.

Ari nodded. The red demon with horns three feet tall should be terrifying but in reality was one of the kindest souls

that Ash had ever met. He should know. Ash could see the soul of every living being in existence.

Ari dipped his head. "I really like your mate, Ash," Ari said shyly.

"Me too." Ash hugged Seb tighter against him.

Seb beamed up at Ash. His fingers curled in Ash's silk shirt. Ash hoped that Seb would never get tired of touching him. In fact, maybe later they could do a whole lot more touching, with naked skin. Ash craved to have a taste of his mate again. And soon.

Chapter Seven

Seb

Seb's day had gotten better and better until he realized that for the first time in his life, he actually felt like he belonged somewhere. He loved his brothers, appreciated the family of paranormals that had welcomed them, but it was never where Seb just knew he was supposed to be. Not like the overwhelming sense of peace and home that he was now experiencing.

Beaming up at Ash, Seb couldn't stop touching his mate. Even though he'd enjoyed every minute in Ari's company, some part of Seb had been missing Ash deeply.

Nate had promised that Ash would be able to find him, but Seb didn't want Ash to think that he was more interested in Ari than spending time with his mate. Ari was a wonderful mix of contradictions. When Seb had first come face-to-face to with the huge demon, fear had almost overwhelmed him. Ari was taller and broader than Gaston, the only demon Seb had ever met, but Ari and Gaston were worlds different. Gaston was all loudness and demanding of attention while Ari was shy and sweet. Ari spoke with a low grumbly voice that had put Seb at ease when Ari had offered a shy greeting.

Ari was doing Bo a favor by letting Seb see his collection, but the two of them had quickly found common ground until Ari had excitedly pulled Seb all around the building to show off all the items that he'd spent a century collecting.

Seb's mind had been blown.

Ari wasn't only interested in the Hell realm but all realms, just like Seb. Seb's brothers and the other guys tried to support him as much as possible giving him access to their history and encouraging him visiting the Fae and Hell realms, but they didn't get it. They didn't understand why Seb was so interested in the other realms. Ari understood. Seb and Ari had talked at length about how knowing how all the realms were

created and the changes they'd gone through could help all the different species of the world.

Creatures, demons, shifters, Fae, all the different species in dozens of different worlds were struggling to find their mates. Axel's mating had even reached those in the Hell realm, giving the residents down here hope that there were more mates out there in other realms. Then Bo found his two mates and the excitement became contagious through all the realms. Seb had no idea that finding a mate had become so astonishing. In Axel's pack, more than half of the men had found their mates.

Seb had so many questions for Axel. Did the Alpha know that he was in the minority? That so many other paranormal creatures were interested in the family because of the frequency of them finding their mates? While Seb was gathering more and more intel about realms, he was also beginning to realize that there wasn't one place for someone to go to for answers. Each realm held on to their secrets with a fierceness that didn't allow a lot of sharing. Ari suggested that with Ash's help, Seb might be able to crack through some of the other creatures' hesitancy. It was something to bring up with Ash later. Much later. Just being in his mate's arms had Seb wanting to skip the research and find the nearest bed.

“Seb?”

Seb looked back up at Ash and found his mate frowning at him.

“Sorry, I got lost in thought. What did you say?”

“I asked if I could take you to dinner? Maybe show you around a little?”

“Yes!” Seb practically shouted. He cleared his throat. “I mean, yes please. I'd like that.” He turned back to Ari. “We can finish this later?”

Ari was already nodding before Seb finished speaking. “Yes! Yes! Go, go!” Ari waved his hands. “Go explore your new home. I hope you enjoy it as much as we do. It'll be so nice to have a friend just as nerdy as me around.”

Beside him, Ash stiffened but didn't respond. Deciding not to ask in front of Ari, Seb smiled at his new friend. "But tomorrow morning?" Seb said. "We can look at that book some more?" He pointed to the volume that held all the registered matings in the realm for the past five decades. There weren't many.

"Yes, yes." Ari tapped his lip. "In fact, I think I might have..." Ari mumbled to himself as he started to search the bookcase behind him.

Ash shook his head. "And we lost him."

Seb laughed. His brothers had often teased him about getting lost in his head and forgetting what he was doing but now Seb could see things from their perspective. "So, dinner?" he asked hopefully. Nate had forced them to stop for sandwiches, but that seemed like forever ago.

"Dinner and a nice walk," Ash responded. He held out his elbow and Seb slipped his hand in the crook.

He couldn't help but admire what an odd but somewhat striking couple they made in the long mirror beside the door. Ash, tall and dark, skintight black leather pants and a black flowing shirt cut in the back for his wings, standing beside Seb's shorter and thinner body. Seb had dressed casually in a pair of faded jeans and a blue button shirt.

"Am I dressed alright?" he asked.

Ash looked up to peer at them in the mirror before he pulled Seb to a stop. Ash's gaze reflected back at him and Seb didn't miss the heat.

"You, my mate, look completely edible. It was all I could do not to jump you the minute I saw you."

Instantly Seb became over-warm. His blood burned and his cock was hard as steel. Just that fast, Ash could turn Seb on like no one before. The look of need and want in Ash's eyes were alluring.

"You didn't kiss me hello," Seb said breathlessly.

“Damn, right you are,” Ash said before he pulled Seb around to face him. “What a terrible mate I am.” He backed Seb into the wall and against the mirror. “Let’s rectify that.”

Seb was one hundred percent on board with that. As Ash lowered his head, Seb pushed up on his tiptoes and their mouths met. The heat that seemed to consume him earlier was now a fire. Seb pressed closer until Ash’s hands went around his back then Seb was lifted off his feet.

Pressing his hard erection against Ash’s stomach, Seb kissed Ash back with all the passion that filled him. He rubbed his tongue against Ash’s as he humped into Ash’s stronger body.

Ash moaned, but Seb swallowed the sound and kissed Ash harder.

If he didn’t get Ash’s hands on him quickly, Seb was in danger of coming in his jeans.

Just as he was about to beg for more, Ash pulled back. Ash’s dark eyes practically glowed as he peered down at Seb.

“More,” Seb demanded.

A loud noise behind Ash had them both jumping, and Ash let Seb down until his feet touched the ground. Seb looked over Ash’s shoulder to see Ari picking through a stack of books that had fallen.

Crap, they weren’t even alone and Seb had been about to beg Ash to fuck him there and then. He rested his forehead on Ash’s chest as they both fought to gain control.

“I didn’t mean to get carried away,” Ash said quietly.

Lifting his head, Seb smiled. “I like that you want me as much as I want you.” Since they were still pressed tightly together, Seb could feel when Ash flexed his hips and Ash’s cock rode Seb’s stomach. A few fantasies he’d had flipped through his mind, but public sex wasn’t something that Seb was ready to share with Ash yet. Some secret desires would take more time for Seb to be able to confess.

“Trust me, my sweet mate. I want you badly.”

Seb did trust Ash. Far more for someone that he just met, but Seb had also promised Nate that he wouldn't question the mating bond. “Take me home?”

Ash's grin was wicked. “Dinner first, my little duckling. Dinner first.”

“Duckling?” Seb frowned at the nickname. Where had that come from?

Ash laughed. “Sorry, it slipped out. You remind me of a little duckling.”

“Is that a compliment?”

“It is to me.” Ash smiled.

“Okay, explain please.” Seb didn't mind the cute nickname, but he was curious about Ash's thinking process.

“The first time I saw you, it felt like you'd imprinted on me. I knew that I would be able to find you, anywhere, at anytime. I knew you were mine.”

Seb grinned.

“You also squeaked like a little duckling when I shoved you against Bo's house last night.”

He laughed. Seb had been pleasantly surprised.

“I can also picture you wandering around with your nose buried in a book and not paying attention to anything else.”

“You have no idea.” Seb had run into many walls because of that.

“You are so perfect,” Ash said with a sigh.

Shaking his head, Seb didn't know how to respond. He was a nerd. Luckily, Ash found nerds sexy.

“So...” Seb trailed his fingers up Ash's hard stomach. “About taking me home...”

“Behave, little one.” Ash caught Seb’s hand before bringing it to his mouth and kissing each finger. “Let’s get out of here before I carry you back to that table and fuck you in front of an audience.”

Seb tried to remember why that would be a bad idea.

He stumbled when Ash suddenly stepped away.

“You, my mate, are trouble. I just know it.” Ash tucked Seb’s hands into his before guiding him back toward the door.

Laughing along, Seb knew he had a few surprises for his mate. He just looked sweet and innocent. In fact, there were many dirty things he couldn’t wait to do with Ash.

Outside, Seb looked around the quiet street. He didn’t know if he could call the area outside Ari’s building a street as there was no vehicles. “I haven’t seen any cars,” he mentioned.

“There aren’t any,” Ash answered. “That’s a human invention. Demons can portal and some can fly where they want to go or walk.”

That wasn’t something that had caught Seb’s attention in the Fae realm but there hadn’t been any cars there either. “Oh.”

“I could fly us to the café, but I thought you might like the walk. We’ll pass a few buildings that I think might interest you.”

Seb squeezed the fingers he held. “Thanks. I guess I wasn’t paying much attention when Nate and Samson brought me here this morning. I was so in awe of the sky.” The constant green sky was so gorgeous. There was no moon or sun, just an eerily green sky above him.

“Ask anything your brilliant mind can come up with,” Ash told him. “I love talking about my realm.”

“You might come to regret that,” Seb said, only half joking.

“Never.” Ash tugged on his hand. They started to walk down the street. “West of us are the red dirt caves. We’ll visit there soon and it’s one of Ari’s favorite spots as well, so I’m sure we can talk him into joining us. He’s found several artifacts in the area from before we settled in our community.”

“You were part of the first settlement?” Seb questioned. He knew that Ash was old. He’d read the scrolls. Still, knowing and hearing Ash talk about it were two different things.

“I was. My father married outside his species, which was uncommon back then. We moved here so that my parents and us kids could have a more stable and accepting life.”

“Are your parents still around?” Seb didn’t know if he was ready to meet Ash’s family. He’d never been in a serious relationship where meeting the parents came up.

“Yes, although they are away from the realm at the moment, visiting my mother’s family. We might run into a few of my siblings though.”

“Siblings?” Seb repeated, slowing his feet. “How many do you have?”

Ash seemed to think of the question for a few long minutes before he nodded and replied, “Twenty-two.”

Seb jerked to a stop, causing Ash to have to stop or drag him. “Twenty-two? You have twenty-two siblings?” Damn, Seb could feel a panic attack coming on.

“What’s wrong?” Ash released Seb’s hand to grasp his shoulders.

“I...I...”

“Breathe,” Ash said quietly before he drew in a deep breath himself and blew it out. “Breathe with me.”

Eyes locked with Ash’s, Seb followed Ash’s example until the panic receded and he was no longer dizzy.

“Better?” Ash asked.

Seb nodded. "Sorry. I freaked out there for a moment."

Ash nodded. "About my siblings?"

"Your twenty-two siblings," Seb clarified. "That...that's a lot. What if they don't like me?"

"Why wouldn't they like you?" Ash questioned, with confusion showing on his face.

"Because..." Seb motioned to himself. "I'm just a geeky human."

"My mother is human," Ash shared. "Most of my siblings are as well and live in your realm. Only a few were gifted with any paranormal elements."

"Oh." Seb really needed to learn more about his mate. "Maybe you can tell me more about your family at dinner?"

"I'd like that," Ash told him. "And I'm not really close to most of my siblings. A lot of them are hundreds of years younger than me. There are only really a couple that you'll spend any time around."

Seb could handle a few, right? Besides he was going to have to introduce Ash to Lawson and River. Shit, River was going to be such a pain in the ass. Seb groaned. "Then I'm going to have to warn you about River."

Ash smiled. "Deal."

Chapter Eight

Ash

Ash loved watching Seb trying the food from the café. Seb had referred to the food as street tacos. Ash tried to get Seb to pronounce the food in Ash's native tongue, but being human, Seb couldn't say the word right. It had been cute that Seb tried though.

Sitting at an outdoor iron table sharing a plate Seb's eyes were huge as he spotted different demons and paranormals walk by.

His little human mate was trying to keep from staring, but the demons around them weren't helping. Demons were known for being vain and showing off. Having a human in their territory kept the demons as curious as Seb was.

Ash had already growled and stared down several demons who thought to get close to his little mate. Until Seb wore Ash's mating bite, Ash was not taking any chance of letting a demon close to him. He'd have had a problem with Seb already meeting Ari without Ash present, but Ash was one of the few that knew that Ari had already met his mate. It was a secret that Ash had sworn to take to his grave and he would never betray his friend's trust. The unmated demons that seemed taken by Ash's human were starting to piss him off. Maybe this wasn't a good idea after all.

"You're scowling again," Seb commented as he dipped the corn wrap into the special sauce from a bowl in the middle of the table.

"Fucking demons," Ash muttered.

Seb giggled before he wiped his mouth and laid the napkin down. "I'm sure they're just interested in knowing why the human is around."

"They know exactly why you are here," Ash replied grumpily. His scent was all over Seb from their little make-out

session earlier. The demons were fully aware that Seb belonged to him. They were just...demons and would like nothing else to cause some sort of chaos. He glared at two particular demons across the street who were smiling and waving at Seb.

“Hey.” Seb laid his hand over Ash’s fist on top of the table before scooting his chair closer.

Ash grabbed the seat of Seb’s chair and yanked until Seb was practically on his lap.

“Is this close enough?” Seb asked quietly while his tone held amusement.

“No.” Ash was actually pouting. He was a grown-ass Reaper who was pouting because stupid demons were showing his mate attention. “I’d prefer you on my lap.”

“Okay.” Seb pushed out of his chair and plopped into his lap.

Surprised, Ash wrapped his arm around Seb’s waist to hold him steady. “What?” He looked around the small café.

“You said you’d prefer for me to be in your lap, so here I am.”

He blinked down at his mate before he realized how silly he was being. His mate wasn’t interested in any of the demons that were primping and trying to catch his attention. As Seb had eaten, listened to Ash’s stories about his family, shared stories of his two brothers, Seb had noticed the others, but never in a sexual manner. It wasn’t until he sat on Ash’s lap that Seb’s scent had instantly increased with arousal.

“I apologize, my sweet mate,” Ash said. “I’ve ruined your first meal in the realm with my jealousy.”

“You haven’t ruined anything.” Seb cupped Ash’s face.

His little mate peering up at him with so much trust made Ash nearly breathless. Seb was in the middle of the literal Hell realm, surrounded by demons, with only Ash for protection, and he was worried about comforting Ash.

“I’ve never had reason to be jealous before,” Ash confessed. “These are new feelings for me. I just wanted to take you out and show you how amazing my realm is. The café owner, Sabine, is one of the best cooks in all the realms. She studied for over five hundred years in fourteen different realms to learn her craft.”

“Thank you for wanting to share this with me.” Seb placed his forehead against Ash’s. “I’ve never had anyone be jealous in regard to me. Not that you need to be, but I kind of like you getting all righteous and protective over me. It’s sexy.”

Ash moved his head back to search Seb’s eyes for the truth. “Yeah?”

“Oh yes.” Seb wiggled on his lap.

Ash’s cock, trapped behind a layer of leather and under Seb’s cute ass, ached. With the weight of his mate and the scent of Seb’s own excitement, Ash’s control slipped a bit. His fangs dropped.

Seb smiled. “I love that I can tell how much I turn you on when your eyes darken and your fangs drop.”

His human mate might look sweet and innocent, but Ash was also enjoying this brazen side of his mate. “I can smell how much you like it.” Ash dropped his hand below the table to rub on Seb’s erection.

“Oh yeah.” Seb rocked his hips. “I always forget about that. Don’t stop.” He pressed up harder against Ash’s hand.

“Is that what you want, baby?” Ash squeezed Seb’s shaft through his clothing. “You want me to rub you off while all the demons around us watch?” Ash nibbled along Seb’s neck as Seb arched for him. That was what Ash wanted. To claim his boy in public.

Ash’s sharp fangs scratched a thin line, serving as a mark of kinds. It wasn’t a blood exchange or a mating mark, but Ash was pleased to see a sign of himself on his mate’s delicate skin.

“Yes. No. What?” Seb babbled while lifting his hips.

Ash sucked up a visible mark next to his fang scratches before smiling against his mate’s flesh. “I said...” He stroked Seb through his clothes again. “You’re a dirty boy who wants me to get him off in front of all these demons, letting you know that you belong to me, aren’t you?”

Seb shuddered as a low moan escaped.

“I think you are.” Ash was going to lose his mind. Seb was such an amazing find. All sweet and buttoned up until Ash had his hands on him. “Even though they can’t see my hand under this table, they’re going to know, aren’t they? You’re going to be loud enough for them all to know exactly what I’m doing to you.”

“I...I...”

Ash glanced around the area. The only other patrons of the café were across the area and wore smirks; the demons across the street stopped to gawk at them, others walking by didn’t pay them any attention. Moving his fingers, Ash quickly unzipped then tugged the button of Seb’s jeans to expose the briefs Seb wore under them.

“You... Yes please, do it.”

“My sexy mate. I know what you want. You want me to get you off right here.” Ash slipped his hand inside Seb’s tight briefs. “You don’t care who can hear or see us. You’re just desperate for my touch.”

“Yes!” Seb hissed as Ash wrapped his fingers around Seb’s bare cock. Seb’s flesh was hot and Ash gave his human a few quick strokes.

“Are you going to come in my hand? Let me carry your scent on my skin for the rest of the night?” Ash flexed his hips so Seb could feel Ash’s own rigid cock against his ass. “Then let me take you home and bury myself balls-deep in your tight little hole.”

Seb whimpered, a sweet needy sound that Ash rewarded him for with kisses.

“Such a good boy. Such a good dirty boy for me.”

“Tighter,” Seb begged. “Please, Daddy.”

Daddy. Ash froze at the word. Nothing, no word had ever sounded so right...so...perfect.

“Please,” Seb wailed.

Ash tightened his fingers before he pumped Seb’s cock again. He licked up the salty moisture on Seb’s throat as his mate shook. This was not how Ash had imagined their date would go, but he would never complain about Seb showing him how much he wanted him.

He continued to tease, taunt, kiss, lick, stroke Seb until everything else fell away and the only thing that Ash cared about was making his mate come.

Seb was sprawled across his lap, head tilted back, eyes closed, with only small sounds escaping his perfect pink lips. Ash wasn’t lying when he said that he couldn’t wait to be buried inside Seb. Ash’s own cock wept pre-come and he needed release as well, but that would have to wait.

“Kiss me, mate,” Ash whispered against Seb’s ear. “Kiss and come or me so I can take you home.”

With a surprisingly strong grip, Seb yanked Ash’s head down before he pressed his lips against Ash’s. Ash opened his mouth to Seb’s demanding tongue at the same time that he felt hot sticky wetness coat his fingers.

Ash stroked Seb through his release before he gentled the kiss and eventually ended it.

He peered down at Seb and smiled.

His mate looked absolutely one hundred percent wrecked. His hair was mussed, his eyes glassy, and the just-came-hard look made him even more attractive.

As their surroundings came back to him, Ash glanced around the area once again. The patrons across from them had started to kiss and Ash could see their own hands moving under their table. While the demons across the street were gone, a few new onlookers were giving Ash appreciative glances.

Oh well, this was Hell. Two men going at it wasn't a sight that would shock anyone. At least no children were around, or Ash and Seb might have scandalized them.

Discreetly, Ash picked up his napkin from beside his plate and cleaned his fingers and Seb before he buttoned his mate's jeans back up.

"That...that was...amazing," Seb croaked.

Picking up his water, Ash helped his human drink as he pulled a few coins from his pocket. He dropped the payment for the dinner on the table before pushing his chair back.

"Hang on tight. I'm going to get you home," he said as he rose.

"To your home, right?" Seb asked as he held tight to Ash's neck. "You said you were going to fuck me."

He had to bite back a groan. Ash had said that and he meant it. "My place isn't far."

Ash released the muscles that allowed his wings free.

"Holy shit!" Seb exclaimed as Ash's black wings fell into place. Ash shook each delicate membrane that held his feathers until they relaxed.

"Here we go." He held his mate close to his chest as he fluttered his wings and they rose.

Chapter Nine

Seb

Seb might still have been a little cum-drunk as he and Ash fluttered over the city. The experience was indescribable. He was literally flying above empty streets until small stone dwellings started to appear below them. Everything was darker in the Hell realm. The sky, the stone, the streets, and yards of houses. Different colors than Seb was used to but beautiful in their own way.

As they soared over the different buildings, Ash spoke low into his ear, telling him what they were passing. A few young demons that had been playing some sort of street hockey stopped and waved at them and Seb waved happily back. They began to descend, and Seb strained to see the outside of a gray brick and stone cottage set away from the street. A garden of dark purple flowers bordered the entire plot.

“Is this your house?” Seb asked as the ground came closer and closer.

“Yes, I’ve been here for a few decades now. My favorite cousin lives across the street in the house with the white chimney. His mate is from the core of our realm and finds our territory much too cold so they’re always using the fireplace. She swears it’s cold enough to snow here.”

Seb laughed. It wasn’t burning hot like Seb had always pictured, but the realm was warm to him. He guessed it would be a lot like living in different regions in his own realm. Some people thought seventy was cold and some thought it was summer. “But you don’t get snow here?”

“No, our territory doesn’t change much. It’s this temperature every day of the year. We aren’t reliant on the same clement changes that your human realm is.”

“I like it. If there was a perfect temperature for me, this would be it. I don’t need a jacket and short-sleeve shirts are fine. I hate being cold. I was cold much of my childhood.

You'll hear no complaints from me." Seb hoped that Ash took his words to heart. He might have a lot to learn about his new realm, but he hoped that he'd find a welcoming home here. He already felt like this was where he belonged. He couldn't wait to see the inside of his mate's home.

His feet touched the ground and Seb looked around. Ash's yard was small but well maintained. Now that he was closer to the purple flowers, he could see that they were quite different from anything he'd ever seen. Seb stepped closer, only to have Ash pull him back.

"Careful, they bite."

Seb laughed at the joke until he saw the purple flower spread apart and a tongue appeared. And...were those freaking fangs sticking out of the petals?

He jumped away, his back slamming against Ash's front. Ash slipped his arms around Seb. "I told you."

"I thought you were joking," Seb responded warily. He was still curious about the dangerous flowers though.

"Just to be on the safe side, use caution with anything that you don't recognize. Even then there might be a few things that are more extreme in this realm even if they seem like something from yours."

"Good to know." Seb peered around the rest of the property. "You planted flowers that bite though? Why?"

"Actually, my mother did that," Ash replied. "They're a favorite of hers."

"The biting flowers are a favorite of your mothers?" Now Seb really didn't know if he wanted to meet the woman that enjoyed the fangy flowers.

Ash chuckled. "They were the first flower that my father brought to my mother when he was courting her."

Seb turned to face Ash just to make sure Ash wasn't joking with him. "What?"

“My mother is a botanist,” Ash supplied. “Unique flowers from the Hell realm...yeah, she said that was what sealed the deal and she finally said yes to dinner with my father.”

“Oh...wow.” Seb didn’t know what else to say.

“You’ll understand when you meet my parents. They’re weird.”

“Weird?” Seb repeated.

Ash nodded so earnestly that Seb had to shrug. He seemed almost bashful.

“I don’t know how to explain it other than by saying you’ll see.”

“Okay.” Seb had lived with River his entire life and River was definitely weird.

“Come inside.” Ash tugged him forward. “I promise my mom didn’t decorate the inside. Well...she did pick out the dishes but that was because I kept dropping and breaking them so she bought me some made by stone elves that wouldn’t break.”

Seb stumbled as he was dragged behind Ash while Ash excitedly told him all about the numerous dishes he’d been through. It sounded like Seb needed to be charge of the kitchen since Ash left pans on the burner or dropped them after cleaning up. Seb didn’t mind cooking and cleaning though. In the main house with his brothers, Drake’s domain was the kitchen and even though he’d been told he was welcome, Seb always felt like he was intruding. The small kitchenette in the suite he’d been given worked better for him anyway.

Reaching the front steps, Seb gaped at the enormous door. Yes, Ash was tall and broad, but he wasn’t that big.

“I know,” Ash said. “It’s a big door but some demons can top off at nine feet.”

“Nine feet?” Seb had seen a couple demons that were all taller than him but not nine feet.

“The warriors especially. You’ll meet Atom. He’s probably the biggest of the demons around here.”

“Why would I be meeting this Atom?”

“Oh.” Ash paused with his hand toward the knob. “I probably shouldn’t have said that. It’s just if you’re going to be friends with Ari...”

“Let me guess... Atom has a thing for Ari?”

“It’s more than a thing.” Ash was growing uncomfortable.

“What is it then?” Seb pressed.

“It’s a secret,” Ash whispered. “But not mine to tell.”

The pieces clicked together. “Ari’s secret?”

Ash nodded.

“Okay, I can appreciate a friend’s secret. If I see a huge-ass demon around Ari, I’ll know that’s Atom.”

Relief flashed over Ash’s face. “Thanks for understanding.”

Before Seb could say anything else, Ash turned the knob and pushed open the huge door.

“You didn’t lock your door?”

Ash frowned. “No one would dare steal from me.”

“We’re in Hell. Surrounded by demons. You’re telling me that demons wouldn’t steal from you?”

“Of course they wouldn’t. I’d drag them to the core and make them face the Master. He knows everything and would punish them severely. Reapers aren’t to be messed with. We do our duty and keep souls from wandering around lost. Even the demons know better than to mess with my kind.”

“If you say so,” Seb said quietly. He’d just have to train Ash to lock his door. It shouldn’t be too hard. Ash was a smart guy and while he might be too trusting, Seb knew that there were always bad apples in any bunch.

“Come in. I hope you like it. Of course you could change anything you wanted. Bring your stuff or...” Ash trailed off, but Seb’s attention caught on the open floorplan interior that was breathtaking. The black accents ran through the rooms he could see with sturdy dark furniture. Seb loved the bright pillows and blankets that were placed on the furniture and the pale-yellow walls that made the entire space homey.

Seb walked farther into the house, finding himself in the middle of a large living room. The big-screen television was mounted on the wall with two bookcases framing it. The bookcases held a mass collection of everything from books to movie to games. Seb could already picture himself spending nights curled up with Ash with a book or watching a movie.

“If you don’t like—”

Seb held up his hand as he continued to look toward the dining room with a large six-seat table and into the kitchen with shining stainless-steel appliances. He turned toward Ash and smiled.

“I’ve never had a home,” Seb said quietly. “Lawson did the best he could to shield me from my parents and their problems but we were constantly having to move around because they’d spend the rent money on drugs. When Lawson took me and River, we could barely afford one-bedroom apartments or trailers. I didn’t mind. I liked being with my brothers more than anything else. We were family and that was what was important. It wasn’t until we moved into the big house with Axel and the other guys that even had my own room. But this...” He waved his hand around the rooms. “If I could picture the most comfortable and homey place, it would be exactly like this.”

The hope that filled Ash’s eyes told Seb they were on the same page. “Yeah?”

“Yes,” Seb confirmed again. “Sure. I’ll need a place to read my books, well, now scrolls, as it seems that you older generation liked to write scrolls, and some of my other stuff, but I already can see this as our home.”

Ash's smile fell. He walked across the room to join Seb and took his hand. Ash pulled Seb to the overstuffed couch where they both sat.

"I know you'll want to return to your realm, to be with your brothers. I promise you now that I'll always come home to you at night. I'll have to perform my duties and travel, but I'll go to you every night. I swear it. You'll never be alone."

Finally all the little comments and the lost smiles made sense to Seb. He squeezed Ash's hand before he released it and climbed on Ash's lap. He belonged on Ash's lap all the time. They were mates and mates were always perfect for one another. Letting Seb use Ash as his very own seat should be included in the mate thing.

"Ash," Seb said seriously. "I get the feeling that you think we have to move to the human world to be together."

"That's where you live," Ash responded. "I know that. We can talk to the Alpha about a suite for the two of us or I can build you our own home. Whatever you want."

"What about your house here?" Seb inquired. He loved that Ash was willing to relocate for him, but he didn't understand why Ash hadn't asked for Seb's opinion.

Ash looked around. "I'd like to keep it. I'll still need to be in my realm some, and my family is here. I'll travel back and forth between realms just like I do for work."

"And couldn't I travel back and forth as well?"

"Of course! I would love to have you here with me. You could come whenever you wanted."

Wow, Ash really wasn't getting it. "And if I wanted to live here and travel to see my brothers and friends?"

"Sure. Wait? What do you mean live here?"

Ding, ding, ding. Ash was finally catching on. "I mean if I want to make this house, your house, our home and travel to the human and Fae realms I could. I have an open invitation to go back when I want, I'd still be able to do that, right?"

“Yes. If that is what you want.”

“I think it’s worth talking about. At least in the beginning. If it’s as simple as using a portal to get back to my brothers and I could visit whenever I wanted, then I don’t understand why you would insist on uprooting your entire life and moving in with me.”

“I thought...I...assumed...”

Seb grabbed Ash’s face. “You were worrying about our future and making plans without consulting me,” he pointed out.

“I was. I just wanted to make you happy.”

“Being with you is making me happy. I love my brothers and I’ll visit them. Lawson lives in the main house in the human realm, but River lives with Rainier and Anton in the Fae world. He goes back to the human world to work every day, but I wouldn’t even need to do that. We have a movie night every week, the three of us, no mates, and I still want to continue that and maybe have dinner one night a week in addition with Lawson and the guys and one night with River and his mates.”

“That’s...” Ash blinked before he smiled wide. “That makes a lot of sense. Plus you’ll be working closely with Ari to go through his collections so it would make more sense for you to already be here.”

“You’re here,” Seb told him. “That is the most important thing in my world. I really appreciate what you said. Your promise that you’ll always return to me every night. I want you to keep that vow. No matter what’s going on, where we are, every night you’ll come to bed with me.”

“Yes, I swear it,” Ash said quickly.

Seb bit his lip. He didn’t know if he should bring up what happened earlier between them. “There is one thing we haven’t talked about.”

“What’s that?”

Seb wiggled before he blushed. He pressed his hands to his cheeks, not that he could hide their redness. “You...know.”

“I do?” Ash appeared utterly confused.

“You know...what I called you.”

“Mate?”

Seb huffed. “No, not that.”

“Baby, I’m trying, really but—”

“Daddy,” Seb whispered. “I called you Daddy.”

Ash smiled and a dreamy look appeared.

Seb’s eyes widened. Could Ash actually be on the same page as Seb? Damn, Ash was sexy when he peered at Seb like that. Like he could eat Seb alive.

Talk! They needed to talk.

“I haven’t been a Daddy to someone for many years. It’s not something that I have to have in a relationship, but I do enjoy the dynamic. I guess we should start with expectations and needs. I don’t want there to be any miscommunications.”

Seb gave a little human growl. He might not sound as fierce as Ash but he was just as possessive. “I don’t like thinking of you being a Daddy to someone else.”

“As I don’t like thinking of anyone touching or even thinking about you,” Ash replied. “It’s good we’re in agreement.”

“Okay.” That was good. Seb might be human but he’d fight for Ash. Ash would learn that Seb could be feisty as well. “I’m not a little. You know, like Nate.”

“I know all about Nate’s dynamic with his mates. I didn’t see you as a little, but I’m glad you told me.”

“So is it just a name for you? You know, like during sexy times?”

Ash chuckled softly. “I suppose it’s more of a role I would take with my partner. I want to care for you, make sure that

you are eating enough, happy and healthy. I want to watch over you so you can use that brilliant mind of yours for what interests you.”

“You don’t know I have a brilliant mind,” Seb muttered but happiness seeped from his pores. Of course Ash was perfect. They were true mates.

“I have no doubt about your brilliance. Just the fact that you can keep up with Ari says something. I want to take all your worries away so you can learn everything your little heart desires.”

Seb nodded. “I can take care of myself. My brothers have always done a lot for me but I learned early on how to make things easier for them and how to get by with nothing.”

“That’s not something you ever have to worry about again,” Ash vowed.

“Maybe not. I just want you to understand that I can take care of myself.”

“You just don’t want to,” Ash finished for his mate. “You want to spend your time learning and researching, which could benefit not only your home pack, but my world here. I want that too. I want you to concentrate on what you love and just let me take care of you.”

“What if it’s too much?”

“No, baby.” Ash cupped his mate’s cheeks. “You have no idea how alone I’ve been. My entire existence was nothing by darkness and this giant void. Seeing your gorgeous hazel eyes for the first time...I could have fallen to my knees and cried. I was so happy. You are everything I ever wanted.”

“So you don’t mind a skinny, nerdy, human mate?”

“You are perfect.” Ash kissed the tip of his mate’s nose. “When I was a young child, still living at home, I used to talk all the time about finding my mate. I didn’t realize that my parents were one of the few lucky couples to find their true mates. I thought it was a given that I would find mine. When I

spoke about my mate, for some reason, I already thought my mate would be human. As for you being skinny or nerdy? I already told you that you're perfect for me. I can keep telling you that. Every day for the rest of our lives, if that's what it takes. Or I can show you. And I will. I'll show you how precious a gift you are to me."

"Then I think you should show me to your bedroom. I want to see where I'll be sleeping."

"From now on," Ash said. "From tonight on, even if we wait to mate, you'll sleep with me."

"Yes. From this night forward."

Ash rose with ease even as he picked Seb up with him. "We could always split our time in other realms. Live here for a decade, the human world another, then the Fae, and so on. We could live in every realm you wish."

"You're immortal," Seb blurted out.

"And you will be too once we mate."

Logically, Seb knew that. It was the same with his brothers. Seb just hadn't gotten that far into thinking about mating with Ash. Oh, he wanted to be mated to Ash, but there were questions he needed to ask, and Ash should probably meet his brothers. "Okay, we'll talk about that."

"Whenever you want," Ash agreed as he hurried down the hall. "In the meantime, let me show you the bed that Bo custom-built for me."

"Yes, please." Seb wrapped his arms around Ash's neck before he lowered his lips to Ash's ear. "Then we'll see what marks you can add to those you gave me at the café." He still couldn't believe they'd gotten so out of control in public, but Seb didn't regret it. Hell, that had been the hottest hand job he'd ever received.

"I'm going to mark every inch of you," Ash swore. "Until you wear my mating bite, I'm going to keep marking you, so

everyone knows who you belong to, so there's no doubt who you belong to.”

The words were music to Seb's ears.

Chapter Ten

Ash

Ash carefully placed Seb on the mattress as he stared down at his delicate human mate against his dark blue comforter. Seb belonged right there in Ash's bed. He'd never sleep anywhere else than in Ash's arms again. The wave of possessiveness that flowed through him caught Ash by surprise.

Leaning up on his elbows, Seb smiled wickedly up at him. "You need to come closer."

He loved the playful side of his mate. "Do I?" Ash stepped until his knees bumped the side of the mattress.

"Closer," Seb murmured. He dropped his eyes down to Ash's groin. "I haven't forgotten that you didn't come when I did."

Cupping himself, Ash winked. "Because I'm not coming until I'm inside you."

Seb's shudder and groan cut off as his little mate began to tug at his clothes. In a flurry of limbs and cotton, shoes and socks went flying off the side of the bed, his clothes following, and Seb was undressed down to his tiny briefs in less than a minute. Ash gaped at him.

"Your turn. I want to see all that magnificent body that I missed out on last time."

Running his gaze up and down Seb's small frame, Ash couldn't help but rub at his erection. He was painfully aroused. Fully clothed, Seb was handsome, but naked, oh fuck him, Seb was sexy as hell. Ash needed to calm down so he could keep his promise and not come until he was inside his mate for the first time.

"You're getting distracted," Seb teased while running his palms up and down his chest. "I think we should have a no-clothes rule for the bed."

“Yes.” Ash’s fangs dropped. Luckily, Seb hadn’t seemed turned off when that kept happening. “But that means you need to lose that underwear.”

“These little things?” Seb plucked at the waistband on his briefs. “They barely cover anything at all.”

Ash licked his lips and growled. “You are playing with fire, my little human.”

“Hmm.” Seb continued to tease Ash with glimpses of lowering the front of his briefs.

Ash pulled off his shirt and let it drop to the floor. “This better?”

“Oh yeah.” Seb pulled the band of his briefs below his erection.

Popping the button on his leather pants, Ash decided to give his little mate some payback. “This what you’re looking for?”

“You know it is.” Seb pushed his briefs down to his upper thighs.

“I don’t know. What if I want to taste you?”

Seb whimpered. “I want to taste you too. We can do that later. I can’t wait much longer to feel you inside me. I feel like I’m going to burn up.”

His mate wasn’t the only one. “Take your underwear completely off,” he ordered.

Seb complied before grinning up at Ash. “Now what?”

“Roll over.” It was getting harder and harder to form words. Ash needed to get his hands on his mate.

Seb rolled then spread his legs open. The sassy human knew exactly what he was doing. Ash finished removing the rest of his clothes before he knelt between Seb’s legs. He ran his palms up Seb’s legs then grasped Seb’s plump ass cheeks. His mate had a perfect ass, pale, round, and firm. He spread Seb’s cheeks to gaze down at Seb’s tight hole. He’d be inside

his mate soon, buried deep, claiming him in the most intimate of ways.

“Are you going to just stare at it or put something in it?” Seb taunted breathlessly.

“Oh, my cheeky boy,” Ash teased. “Daddy’s going to put something in you all right.” Ash leaned forward to run his tongue up and down Seb’s crease. Seb cried out pushing back into Ash’s hands. “Like that?”

“Please... Feels so good...”

“You taste like mine,” Ash said then dove back in. He licked and sucked at Seb’s tight hole until his mate started to open for him. Without lifting his head, Ash fumbled for the bedside drawer where he kept his lube. He finally found the small bottle and got it open.

“Yes!” Seb hissed, pushing back harder.

He continued to lick Seb open until he couldn’t stand it any longer. Ash rose and coated his fingers before pushing one digit in deep.

Seb released a long sigh. “I’m empty. I need you inside me.”

“Soon, my mate,” Ash promised.

Ash plunged his finger in and out before adding a second. He scissored his digits until Seb was rocking and begging. Ash added a third finger, relieved beyond words when Seb didn’t hiss or complain. His mate was ready to take him.

Placing a kiss on the small of Seb’s back, Ash gently pulled out his fingers. He quickly lubed up his cock before he knee-walked up behind Seb.

“I want to see your face when I make you mine,” Ash told him. “Turn over, baby.”

Seb rolled onto his back, eyes wide and gazed, with a look of pure hunger.

“You ready for me?”

“Yes—please don’t make me wait anymore.”

Grasping the base of his cock, Ash peered down then moved into position. Seb lifted his knees and grasped them to his chest as Ash placed the head of his cock at Seb’s entrance.

“You are mine,” Ash declared and pushed inside.

Heat surrounded him and Ash closed his eyes as he connected in the most intimate and loving way he could with the man who would be his forever. Seb’s body clamped around his shaft and it was perfect heaven. The greatest feeling that Ash had ever felt.

“You’re mine too,” Seb whispered.

“That’s right,” Ash agreed. He pulled out until the tip remained before he slammed back in. “Mate.”

He had to call on every ounce of control that he’d ever held. His body screamed to breed Seb as his, but this was their first time. Ash wanted to enjoy the heat that surrounded him.

Seb flung his arms before grabbing his back tight. “Oh!” He immediately let go.

Straining, Ash held himself over his mate. “What’s wrong?”

“I touched your wings. I’m sorry.”

“Touch them, baby,” Ash told him. “In fact, stroke the membrane. I don’t trust anyone near my wings but you.” He gently rocked his hips. “If you want to help me get off, then touch them.” It was a little-known secret for Reapers.

“Like this?” Seb stroked the thick veiny membrane on his right wing and even though he was trying to be gentle, Ash jerked, his hips plowing forward.

They both groaned.

Seb’s eyes twinkled with mischief. “Or like this?” He repeated the touch on the left side.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have told you that. This is going to be over too quick.”

Seb winked before laying his hands slowly on the pillow under his head. “I’ll just lie here and be a good boy.”

Ash didn’t believe him for a second. Gripping Seb’s hips tight, Ash angled Seb before plunging deep. He brushed over the spongy magic button inside his boy and Seb screamed.

This time when Seb clung to his back, crushing his wings, fingers digging into his back, they both groaned. Snapping his hips hard and fast, Ash kept hitting that spot inside Seb. He was lost in the overwhelming pleasure that surrounded his entire being. They were connected on every single level. No secrets between them. Pure passion rode them as hard as Ash rode his boy.

Sweat and steam rose from the bed as Ash’s power sparked and ignited.

“Oh, there. Again! Again!” Seb begged.

Lowering his mouth to Seb’s, he kissed his mate hard enough that their teeth clashed. It was all too much as Ash knew he wasn’t going to last long. “Gonna fill you up.”

“Give it to me!” Seb cried. “Yes!”

They came together, which wasn’t something Ash had ever experienced except in romance novels. Ash filled Seb as wet heat splattered on Seb’s stomach. Wiped out, he eased himself down on top of his mate. He’d move in a minute, as soon as he caught his breath.

Seb trailed his fingers down the membrane of his wings that connected to his spine. Ash’s cock jerked and they both moaned. Fuck him, his cock was putting up a valiant attempt of recovering. He could probably go again.

Chapter Eleven

Seb

Seb gripped the wet strands of Ash's long silky hair while thrusting into Ash's mouth over and over. What was supposed to be an innocent shower had quickly turned into a game of who could make who come first. Seb had easily won the challenge as he licked Ash's hole open for his fingers before pegging Ash's prostate and sucking him off. Ash had come so hard he'd had to grip the shower wall to keep from collapsing. Seb had been basking in his glory when Ash had pinned him to the tile before dropping to his own knees. Seb's mate had an unbelievable recovery time.

It was a good thing that he'd kneeled first because Seb was absolutely about to lose his mind. Ash's tongue felt too good teasing the crown of his cock and Ash's suction too hot.

"Gonna—" he cried, throwing his head back against the tile. He didn't even care if he banged his head.

Ash lifted his face from Seb's shaft. "Do it. Come in my mouth." He lowered his mouth and swallowed Seb's cock down to the back of his throat.

"Yes!" Seb yelled as his balls emptied and he filled Ash's mouth with his spunk.

Ash sucked him dry before leaning back on his heels and grinning up at Seb.

"Wow," Seb whispered. He had to clear his throat.

"That's a great way to wake up in the morning. Shared blow jobs. We should do this every morning." Ash groaned as he used the tiled wall to stand.

"It would help if either of us could walk right now."

Chuckling, Ash pulled Seb to his chest and back under the water. The heat still rained down even though they'd been in the shower for far too long.

“I’ll help you wash up,” Ash offered.

Seb laughed. “That’s how the blow jobs started.”

“That was your fault. I was being a good Daddy, innocently enjoying you scrubbing my back—”

“Innocent, my ass,” Seb joked. His cock was worn out from the three orgasms the previous night and one that morning. He did love when Ash massaged shower gel into his back though. Leaning against Ash until the water was turned off, Seb trusted his mate to hold his weight. He had a big bad-ass Daddy after all.

Ash pushed the glass door open. Towels hung on the warmer and Ash handed one to him before picking up the second. “Come here, my little duckling.” Using the second towel, Ash dried his body as Seb concentrated on his hair.

“After breakfast, I can walk you over to Ari’s, if you’d like.”

Seb lowered his towel from his face to turn to look at Ash. His brothers were always teasing him with how much he studied and tried to learn. Even though he liked the other guys at the Alpha house, none of them understood either. Seb craved knowledge. He loved to learn new things. Ash did more than understand—he got Seb. He was offering to assist Seb in his obsession.

“You’d be okay with that? If I went back to Ari’s today?”

“Of course,” Ash answered. He finished drying Seb off then quickly wiped down his own body. After, he tossed the towels in a hamper. “That’s why you came here. I need to meet with the Master and register you as my mate. I’d like to start the paperwork so when we’ve taken the finals steps of our mating, you can travel to other realms with me.”

Seb smiled at Ash. He was amazed by the creature the fates deemed his perfect match. Ash didn’t look like the other paranormals that Seb had been introduced to. The wings were of course the most obvious feature, but Ash had never pretended to be human around Seb. He didn’t hide from Seb.

“Who’s the Master? The Devil? Lucifer?”

“No.” Ash laughed. “I could tell you about the hierarchy of Hell or let you read about it. Which would you prefer?”

“I want to read about it,” Seb confessed. His Daddy mate knew him so well already. Mmm, Daddy mate. A new word. Seb liked it.

“I know.” Ash smirked. “Might I suggest you move that subject up on your list of things to research? You’ll have to meet the Master when we celebrate our mating.”

“Celebrate?” Seb dropped his towel. “What celebration?”

“The party we throw once we’re mated.”

Seb’s stomach turned sour. “Party?”

“Didn’t your brothers have a party?”

“River did, but I thought that was because Rainier’s a king. For Lawson and Drake, we just sort of had a cook-out. Of course, Axel had just found Bryce and Bo, and Craig and Nate mated at the same time. It was more of a family meal.”

Ash crossed the bathroom and took Seb’s hand, drawing him back into the bedroom. Ash led him to the bed and sat before tugging Seb onto his lap.

Yep, Seb always wanted to be in Ash’s lap. “It’s fine,” Seb hurried to assure his mate. “A party. Cool.”

“No.” Ash caught Seb’s chin and held his face still. “Tell me the truth. What’s the matter? Do you not want to celebrate our mating?”

“It’s not that.” Seb might not be able to drop his chin, but he could lower his eyes. “I would scream it from the rooftop but—”

“But that’s not the kind of person you are. You like being in the background at social gatherings. You would rather have your nose buried in a book than be the center of attention.”

“Yeah.”

“Except maybe when I have you pinned and open for me? You don’t mind an audience then, do you, baby?”

Seb flushed. “Yeah but...not in front of my brothers.”

“It’s a good boundary to have,” Ash told him.

“You don’t think that I’m weird for it?”

“No, baby, I think it’s hot. I was right there with you, remember?”

How could Seb forget? “So this party? We can have whatever you want.” He’d force himself to get through it. Ash was offering him so much. It was the least that Seb could do for his mate.

“Look at me.” Ash’s tone was firm.

The deep, demanding rumble sent a shiver through him. Seb lifted his eyes.

“Did you know that I can pick up how you’re feeling?” Ash asked.

Instead of answering, Seb shrugged. He hadn’t known that.

“Do you think that I care about whether we have a big celebration or not?”

“Don’t you?”

“No.” Ash smiled. “I didn’t mean for it to seem like this celebration had to be a big deal. It can be as simple as having our family and close friends for dinner.”

“And the Master,” Seb added.

“Yes, he runs things in our realm but he’s also my oldest friend.”

“Okay, if you don’t mind a small celebration—”

“That is exactly what I would want,” Ash assured him.

Of course Ash would say that, but was that really what he wanted? Or was Ash just trying to make Seb happy? Like moving realms if that was best for Seb. It seemed to him that

Ash was all about sacrificing his own happiness for Seb. That was worrisome. “Thanks,” he said distractedly.

“Let’s get dressed then stop for breakfast before we head to Ari’s.”

“Sure,” Seb agreed, his mind already moving on to a party that he’d have to grow used to to prove to his mate that they were partners. He did want to show Ash off. Maybe Ari would have some advice. He seemed to be as shy as Seb.

* * * * *

Ash

He knew he’d said something wrong that morning, but as Ash made his way down to the core of his realm, he still couldn’t figure out what he’d done. Their realm wasn’t large, but it was created in layers. The core was the hottest part of the realm, where only the vilest of souls spent their eternity.

The Master stood at the top of a red dirt hill with a whip in his hand. Below him, several naked souls pushed large boulders up the hill. The higher they pushed the boulder, the more the hill grew. Ash chuckled as he joined the Master.

“It never gets old watching them, does it?”

The Master snapped the whip toward the closest soul. “That one sexually assaulted, tortured, and killed over twenty young gay men as a police officer just because he could.”

“How long will he be on this level?” Ash asked. Some souls were moved from one bad level to another.

“Until I get tired,” the Master answered with a grin. The Master never got tired. “But you’re not here to talk about these guilty souls. Happiness is radiating from you, my friend.”

“I hope so. I wanted to talk to you about something important.”

The Master held out the whip and one of the young demons rushed forward to take it from him. “Let’s walk. I have more levels to check on today.”

Ash fell in step beside the Master. They walked down the hill to the cages located in the pits of fire.

“You haven’t sought my counsel in a couple of decades. This must be serious.”

“I found my mate,” Ash confessed.

The Master paused before he turned slowly. “When? Where?”

“Here, actually. He’s a human and the guest of the Hellhound Alpha. Part of his pack in the human realm. He was visiting and I ran into him while I was at the Alpha’s house.”

“Tell me about him.”

“He’s wonderful. Quiet, sweet, inquisitive. He’s my perfect match in every way.” Ash knew his grin was dopey.

“Congratulations, my friend.” The Master’s hand squeezed Ash’s shoulder.

Ever since they’d been young creatures causing trouble in the Hell realm together, the Master had spoken about finding his own mate. They’d both believed that it would happen for them and had made plans that only the young could make. Eventually the truth reached them and they realized that mates weren’t something one just stumbled along. Well not normally. Not for a very long time. The Master had more faith than Ash, who’d given up decades ago, until the Master had earned his position and became the Master.

“Mal—”

“No!” the Master snapped. “That’s not me any longer. I am the Master of punishment. I know my place.” He shook his head before pulling Ash into a strong embrace. “I’m happy for you. You deserve this honor.”

“I shouldn’t have come.” Ash hadn’t been thinking about his oldest friend’s feelings. He’d been selfish. The pain he saw on the Master’s face was like a knife to the gut. Ash had caused that pain.

“Yes, you should have. You came to ask me something. Ask.”

Damn it. Ash rolled his shoulders and stood tall until he met the Master’s eyes with his own. “I’ve found my mate and I am requesting that you register our mating.”

The Master’s smile tilted his lips and was barely there, but Ash knew the other creature was taking his request seriously. It was what friends, what family did for each other. “Ash.”

“I want it to be you. Only you.”

“You know what this means,” the Master said. “How this will change things?”

“First Bo and now me,” Ash said. “It’ll give hope to our realm again.”

“It’s been a long time since we’ve had any hope,” the Master said.

“Bo could have been a one-time miracle but now...” Ash let his words trail off.

The Master closed his eyes. “Now we could see more mates being found.” He opened his eyes, the red swirling fire reflecting in the orbs. “Finally.”

“Will you register my mate and me?”

“Yes, I’d be honored.” The Master closed a fist and held it up to his heart.

“Thank you, my friend.”

“When will you complete the mating?” the Master questioned.

“Soon. I still need to explain things to him. Make sure he knows the changes that will occur.”

“You said he was human?”

“Yes, but he already knew a lot about us. Both his brothers are already mated. He was here studying our realm and had

just come from the Fae realm. He loves learning and exploring new things.”

“Sounds like the perfect match for you.”

“The fates know what they’re doing.”

“When do I get to meet this special human?” the Master asked.

“How about dinner this week? You can come for dinner and meet Seb. He’d enjoy it.”

“I’d be honored,” the Master replied before he yanked Ash into a rough hug.

Ash winced before squeezing his old friend back.

“I’m so happy for you, truly.”

“Thank you.” Ash stepped back before he peered around. “I don’t miss this damn hill.” He’d done his time in the core, watching over evil souls, until he’d come into his Reaper abilities.

Laughing, the Master shook his head. “You never did belong here. Becoming a Reaper was your destiny. I’ll speak with you soon.”

Ash watched the Master walk away. His old friend sauntered, drawing the eyes of every demon in the area, and he oversaw his kingdom. There was only one Master of punishment in existence at any given time. His friend was no longer the young boy that Ash had grown up with. The change from Mal to Master had been overseen by the highest order in Hell. Even Ash hadn’t known that Mal had accepted the position until after the change had been made. Ash wished his friend had made another choice, but he supported the Master. Mal had become the most powerful being in the realm that wasn’t born into royalty. That position had to be worth sacrifices, but Ash still wished that his old friend would find a mate of his own.

Now that he’d gotten business taken care of, the registration would go through the Master—which would give

Seb unlimited protection as the Master had just accepted the pledge—Ash had a mate to check on.

Seb and Ash now fell under the Master's protection. If anyone hurt Seb, they'd be dealt with in the harshest of ways. That didn't mean that Ash didn't worry about his sweet mate.

Opening his wings, Ash launched himself up into the sky.

Chapter Twelve

Seb

Excitement thrummed through Seb's entire body as he devoured the words in front of him. The Master was both a title and a position within the realm. It was the highest honor that someone born in the Hell realm could achieve.

"You're barely able to sit still," Ari said as he added more scrolls to Seb's pile. "I've never seen someone devour so much information, so quickly, before." Ari frowned. "Except me."

"This is so interesting," Seb responded as he lifted his head. He really did feel as if he and Ari were two peas in a pod. "The Master..."

"Ah yes. The Master of punishment. What made you decide to research him?" Ari sat next to Seb before passing him a bottle of water.

"Ash said that he was going to see the Master about registering our mating."

Ari squealed as a plume of smoke escaped his nostrils. Seb had learned that happened when Ari was really excited. Ari got excited about scrolls he found for Seb and when Seb asked any question that Ari was dying to share his wisdom about. "The Master is going to register your mating? That's so awesome! You should be honored."

"Honored?"

"Ash just guaranteed your safety in any part of the realm," Ari said. "The Master is both highly respected and feared. When he registers your mating, it means that you are under his protection along with Ash's."

"Oh...I..." Seb looked at the scrolls scattered around him. The politics of Hell were a lot more complicated than Seb would have ever imagined. He didn't know if Nate was aware of how things worked or if the little bobcat shifter just didn't

think to share. At least his friends had invited him to this intricate society, which pleased Seb immensely. Not to mention he'd met his mate here!

"I have more about the Master," Ari stated with a frown. "Maybe in the east wing? The Master position isn't something that gets asked about often. Although now I'm wondering how we'll deal with the number of requests that are going to come in to leave the realm. The Master is usually the one that has final approval of the demons. There is no way that he is going to be able to deal with the increase in requests and perform his daily duties."

"What do you mean? Requests to leave?" Seb asked. He pushed the scrolls away and leaned back in his chair, stretching out. He'd been in the same hunched position too long, and his body was feeling it.

"Bo finding his mate in the human realm was a big deal. It gave hope to all the others here. Ash finding you so soon after is really going to stir things up. Demons will be coming out of the woodwork to get a look at you. Ash wanting to protect you is no surprise. Now, because you're human, there'll be more requests to travel outside this realm. It's an exciting time for all of us."

Nerves reappeared. Seb wasn't anything special, especially in the human realm. He wasn't sure how to feel about the importance being placed on him. He hated to disappoint anyone but especially his mate. "I don't know anything about all that. I'm just happy to have found Ash."

"It's curious though." Ari tapped his long black nail on his chin. "The dragon Alpha found his mate then the members of the pack quickly followed suit. Mates found in both the Hell and Fae realms as well as the human. The connections..."

"I want to see everything you have on matings," Seb practically yelled as an idea began to form. He'd heard how long different species had been without mates. There had to be some kind of connection. "Do you have any census or data that follows mating couples?"

“Of course.” Ari wiggled. His tail thumped against the back of the chair. “This is exciting, isn’t it?”

Seb covered Ari’s hand with his. “Yes!”

The doors to the building banged open, causing both Seb and Ari to jump. Seb’s mouth dropped open as a huge demon strode in and straight toward them. This creature was massive, bigger than massive, just wow! He was taller than any creature that Seb had ever seen. From what Seb could see of his massive body, he was covered in black and silver skin. His black eyes swirled with red and his horns were as long as Seb’s arm. Wearing a red and black kilt with black boots, he looked badass, intimidating, and like he could take on an entire pack of Hellhounds without breaking a sweat. Seb had a good idea who this was.

“Oh!” Ari scrambled out of his chair and next to Seb. “What are you doing here?” His gaze darted around the room until it landed on the floor then Ari shoved his hands into the pocket of his khaki pants.

“Who’s this?” Atom pointed a long finger at Seb.

Ari rolled his eyes before he pushed up his thin wire-framed glasses. “That’s Seb.”

“Seb.” Atom said his name like it was a curse word.

“Hi, you must be Atom.” Seb folded his hands in front of him. There was no fear, even with this demon glaring at him. The demon really didn’t want to give his attention to Seb. Oh no, Seb was not who was on his mind. Not with the way Atom’s eyes kept returning to run over Ari and the heat Seb saw. Seb was well versed being around couples and the sparks that flew around them.

“You know my name?” Atom looked over at Ari and raised one black bushy black brow.

“I...” Ari glanced at Seb helplessly.

Oh no, Ari hadn’t told Seb, but Seb was totally getting the gossip out of his new friend the next time they were alone. “I

do, and I believe you are friends with my mate.”

“Mate?” Seb had Atom’s attention once again. His red eyes sparked. Interesting. Seb had never seen that happen before with any demon or paranormal.

“This is Ash’s mate.” Ari waved a hand toward Seb. “Seb, you obviously know this is Atom.”

Seb stood then gave a half-hearted wave, but Atom only had eyes for Ari. Seb sucked in his lips to avoid smiling. Ari was a nervous wreck beside him. He kept putting his hands in his pockets and out again. The demon was so freaking adorable.

“Hmm.” Atom hummed as he stepped forward, his gaze returning to Ari. “Now, this is interesting. I thought having a mate was just a childish dream and nonsense?”

Ari cleared his throat and tucked his hands behind his back.

“Isn’t that what you said?” Atom pressed as he floated forward. “To quote you, ‘mates are a dream from the past’.”

For such a big guy, Atom moved fluidly. It was quite a show to watch, the big demon crowding the smaller demon back. The more Ari backed up, the closer Atom moved, until Ari had no place to run.

Seb turned, sitting back against the table. He loved watching the two of them interacting. He had been around the other couples around the Alpha house, noting how they fit together so perfectly. It was said that the fates knew what they were doing when matching mates, and Seb couldn’t disagree. Each couple or throuple seemed just perfect for one another.

“Uh, yes, well...” Ari stammered but he couldn’t seem to stop peeking up at the larger demon. He was obviously smitten. Why hadn’t he already mated Atom? Mates were everything to the paranormal. It didn’t make sense. Ari had been excited that Seb was there but was hiding his own mate?

Atom now towered over Ari. His huge stature compared to Ari's made Seb's new friend look tiny. Ari's back was against a tall bookshelf as he looked up at Atom. The chemistry between the two of them was sizzling.

"So which is it? Are we finding mates again or is that just wishful thinking? I'd really like to know, Ari," Atom drawled. "If mates have returned, then what excuse are you going to give me now?"

"I really..." Ari pushed his glasses up his nose. "Don't have an answer to that."

"So then maybe I should follow my instincts." Atom leaned closer to Ari. "Maybe I should just spin you around, pull down your pants, and finally bury my dick in your ass."

Ari shivered and Seb bit back a moan. That was hot.

"I don't... We..." Ari swallowed hard. "What?"

"Is that what you want?" Atom ran his hand across Ari's hip. "You want me to take control, little bit?"

"Don't...don't call me that," Ari whisper-shouted.

"Why not?" Atom licked up the side of Ari's neck. Seb felt like he should be fanning himself. "That's what you are, my sweet little bit of frustration."

"If I'm nothing but a frustration—"

"I never said that you were nothing but a frustration. I said you were my little bit of frustration. Mine. Not that I don't enjoy this little dance we've been doing for the last year, but when are you going to give in to me?" Atom was practically purring while rubbing against Ari.

Ari was visibly trembling as he licked his lips over and over. "I..."

"Unless you really don't want me," Atom stated. "I told you that I would never force my claim on you. I would never do anything you don't want."

"I know that," Ari whispered.

“So what’s it going to be, baby? Are mates back or not?” Atom nuzzled Ari’s neck again.

That was when Seb noticed the kilt Atom wore didn’t hide just how much he wanted Ari. The front of the kilt tented and Atom appeared very happy to be around Ari. Ari’s own bulge was just as noticeable, trapped in his pants.

Now things were getting good.

Seb couldn’t help but hope Ari and Atom forgot all about him. Just like he didn’t mind being watched, Seb was finding the live show erotic as hell.

Ari whined as Atom cupped Ari’s erection and squeezed.

Seb’s own shaft throbbed as he continued to watch the demons.

Atom definitely didn’t care that Seb was still in the room as he shoved his hand down the front of Ari’s pants.

“You are naughty, my little duckling.”

Seb jerked. He would have screamed, but Ash’s hand clamped down on his mouth.

“Shh,” Ash whispered against his ear. “You don’t want to disturb them.”

Ash rested his chin on Seb’s shoulder as his arms came around Seb’s waist to rest on Seb’s erect cock. “They’re hot together, aren’t they?”

“Yes,” Seb hissed as Ash added pressure against his dick, rubbing harder.

Across the room, Atom’s hand was moving fast inside Ari’s pants while Ari had his head thrown back against a row of books and Atom tongued Ari’s flesh. Atom’s hips pumped as he rubbed off against the smaller demon.

Seb turned his head so his lips brushed Ash’s ear. “Do you think we’re that hot when we’re together?”

“Hotter,” Ash said with a growl.

Lifting his hips, Seb shoved his shaft harder against Ash's hand.

Ari cried out. "Please more, please."

"Anything you want, my little bit," Atom growled. He spun Ari around and attacked his pants.

"That's our cue to go," Ash said before he swept Seb up in his arms. "I think I know what's going to happen and they deserve some privacy for that."

"Having sex?" Seb asked.

Ash kissed his cheek. "More."

"They're mates, aren't they?"

"I believe so," Ash responded. "I don't know why Ari has been holding off Atom, but the sweet way that Atom treats Ari speaks of a deep bond to me."

With the conversation he'd just heard, Seb agreed with his mate. Ari hadn't believed that mates were being found again in the Hell realm. With his arrival, things were changing.

"It's because of me. Because you found me," Seb said. "Demons want mates too."

"You are a blessing and give hope to our people," Ash confirmed.

That was a little overwhelming. "I'm just me."

"Oh, my love, you are so much more." Ash carried Seb out of the building and into the warm air.

Seb rested his cheek against Ash's chest, listening to the steady rhythm of Ash's beating heart. A heart Seb was tasked to take care of for the rest of eternity.

"How would you like to meet my brothers?" he asked suddenly.

"Your brothers?" Ash stopped walking to stare down at him. "Are you ready to introduce me to your brothers already? I'd love that but I didn't know—"

Seb lifted a shaky finger and pressed it to Ash's mouth. "Of course I want you to meet my brothers. The sooner the better. I also need to grab some more of my stuff from my room."

"So you'll come back here with me?"

"Every night in your bed, remember?"

"I do." Ash nipped at Seb's finger. "Every night."

"So when we get back to your house, I'll call my brothers and see if they want to have dinner and meet my mate."

Ash's smile grew.

"After dinner, we'll grab some more of my stuff and bring it down here."

"There's two things wrong with what you said."

Seb frowned. "What?"

"First we need to take care of this." Ash grasped his cock again.

"O...okay. And?"

"And you'll call your brothers from our house, not my house."

"Our house," Seb repeated. Wow, his first real home that he could see spending the rest of his life in. His very long life now. "Ash?"

"Yes, baby?"

"After you meet my brothers, will you claim me? Like for real? Mate with me, make it permanent?"

Ash's wings exploded from his back. Seb jumped, unprepared.

"Sorry." Ash blushed before dropping his gaze.

His big bad Reaper blushed. Seb smirked. "Is that a yes?"

"It's a yes. It's a Hell yes!"

Chapter Thirteen

Ash

He didn't think that he'd ever been more nervous than standing in the woods outside a house. It was a normal house, big and nice, but it was just a house. A house that held his mate's two brothers and other family.

Ash was a Reaper. Demons trembled in front of him, he had the ear of the Master, and he could portal to any realm he wanted. He was a fierce warrior, and he was terrified.

They'd informed Bo that they would be returning to the human realm for dinner and the Alpha along with his two mates had decided to join them. Ash didn't know if it was better or not that he had his friend's support. He really hoped he didn't make a fool of himself.

Ash didn't spend a lot of time around others, especially humans. He knew how to use his manners, but the men he was about to meet were very important to his mate.

"Ready?" Seb asked quietly as he slipped his hand in Ash's.

Bo, Nate, and Craig were already moving toward the big house in the distance, but Ash's feet were frozen where he stood. "Yeah, sure." He still didn't move.

"Are you...nervous, Daddy?"

Ash scoffed. "Of course not."

"Uh-huh." Seb released his hand to stand in front of Ash and plaster himself to Ash's front. "Just calm, cool, and collected."

"Of course."

Seb grinned up at him. That was at least enough to pull his attention to the homes and everyone inside waiting on them.

"What are you smiling about?"

“It’s cute,” Seb sassed. “You being nervous about meeting my brothers.”

“I.” Ash tugged at the hem of his shirt. “Am not cute.”

“Adorable.” Seb blinked his big hazel eyes up at Ash.

“You’re about to earn yourself a spanking,” Ash warned.

“Am I? Are you sure?”

Ash snorted. “That you need a spanking? Yes, I’m sure.” The tree closest to them began to shake, leaves rustling, and Ash pushed Seb behind him. He released his wings and allowed his fangs to drop as he took a protective stance in front of his mate.

“Wait! What’s going on?” Seb tugged at his waist.

“We’re not alone,” Ash warned him.

Seb patted his hip. “Not really surprised. It’s probably one of my brothers.”

“Not unless your brother is a Dryad.”

“A what now?” Seb screeched. He peered around Ash’s side and Ash growled. He had to keep his mate safe but he wasn’t picking up aggression from the creature hidden before him.

The leaves shook again, this time fiercely, before the tree began to shrink.

“What the...” Seb trailed off as a young man in jeans shorts and nothing else transformed out of the large oak.

“You can’t tell Bryce! He hasn’t figured out what I am yet!”

Ash straightened at the dark-haired boy stomping his foot like a brat. “Well, if you wanted to keep your secret, you shouldn’t have been spying on us,” Ash advised.

“Uh, Adam?” Seb said quietly.

“Please, Seb! Please don’t tell Bryce,” Adam begged. He even dropped dramatically to his knees and interlocked his

fingers before his chest.

“Adam?” Seb’s voice was strained.

Ash turned to his mate, and the boy rose to his feet. “You okay, Seb?” Adam asked.

“You...you were a tree,” Seb accused.

“I was! I am! Isn’t it cool?”

“Super cool,” Seb agreed even though his tone didn’t match the words.

“Baby? What’s wrong?” Ash rubbed Seb’s back.

Wide hazel eyes gazed up at him. “Tree?”

With a snort, Adam stood before skipping forward. “Sort of. But really, you can’t tell Bryce!”

“On one condition,” Seb responded. “Anything!” Adam vowed.

Ash tried to hide his wince. Words had meaning and no one should ever make a blind promise like that. That was how demons were able to collect souls and make bargains. Ash needed to get his mate up to speed quickly before they returned to the Hell realm. Even if it hadn’t been his mate who’d made the vow, it was better that Seb knew how to deal with the demons.

“You have to tell me everything, absolutely everything, about being...a tree man,” Seb demanded.

Adam giggled as he fell into Seb. Since Ash was embracing his mate, he managed to keep Seb upright. Gazing down at the other boy, Seb had a feeling that Adam was a bit of a brat. Whoever was in charge of this boy had his hands full. Peering at the boy’s aura, Ash found himself growing sad.

The boy was bright, a good soul, but was utterly alone. Adam, Seb had called the boy, craved a mate to take care of him. Ash had to curb the desire to comfort the brat.

“Oh!” Seb brightened. “Adam, this is my mate, Ash!”

Adam straightened before eyeing Ash up and down. Wow, Ash actually grew a little uncomfortable at the frank appraisal from Adam. Total brat. That did give him an idea though.

“Are you eyeing my mate?” Seb sounded pissed.

“Of course I am!” Adam stomped his foot. “And I bet he’s a Daddy!”

Seb’s blush answered the question. Ash pulled him into his chest. He could tell the boy was teasing his mate, but Ash didn’t like Seb uncomfortable.

Adam crossed his arms over his chest while scowling. “I want one!”

“I know.” Seb pulled Adam into a hug that had Ash embracing them both. Even though he was human, new to the family, Seb didn’t hesitate to comfort the other boy. Seeing his mate like this made Ash wonder if his mate would want to accompany him when he was called to perform his duties.

Ash never wanted to see his mate hurt, even emotional, and some ending of life was hard. Especially when a being was killed by someone they loved. Those were difficult cases, but Ash did his job. He tried to remain calm and kind to everyone. It wasn’t his place to judge. There were times that he had to fight, especially evil souls who refused to move on, but not only was he powerful but Ash had direct contact with the Alpha of the Hellhound Pack. Still, as gentle and caring as Seb was, maybe Ash shouldn’t offer to take him.

“You’ll find your mate,” Seb whispered to Adam.

Adam buried his face in Seb’s neck. “I really am happy for you. Just jealous, I guess. There’s no guarantee that I’ll have a mate out there. So many don’t ever find their mate.”

Seb pulled back and smiled at Adam. “But you see...that’s what I’m working on. If I can find out why it’s been so long since mates we’re found, why they’re being found now, and how to help all the realms, maybe it will be easier.”

“Do you really think that’s possible?” Hope filled Adam’s eyes. “I still remember my parents telling us about when they met. Back then almost everyone in the realm had a mate. Rainier had been expected to find his mate...”

“Wait! You’re Fae?”

Adam laughed. “Yep.”

“But...but...” Seb frowned. “How did I not know that?”

“I asked Rainier not to say anything. It’s really been Bryce’s one goal to figure things out on his own.”

Nodding, Seb sucked on his lower lip. “I don’t know if he’s going to figure this out though.”

“Actually, he’s getting close,” Adam told him. “He has this whole spreadsheet with questions, answers, guesses. It’s sort of neat.”

“I wanna see it!” Seb exclaimed.

“We can ask after dinner.” Adam smirked. “If your mate is done being a chicken—”

Seb slammed his hand over Adam’s mouth. “You should probably not say that. You don’t want Ash to drop you off in the core of the Hell realm with the Master of punishment. I don’t think you’d enjoy that.”

“A few hours might be just what the brat needs.” Ash played along. He’d never actually follow through with his threat, but he did enjoy how the brat squirmed. And Mal... well Mal would be intrigued by this little troublemaker.

“I don’t know if I should be horrified or turned on,” Adam whispered, loudly, to Seb. “I think I’m turned on!”

Seb groaned before pushing Adam away. “Go inside. We’ll be there in a minute. And keep my brothers inside as well, please.”

“Sure.” Adam grinned. “And just so you know, I wasn’t spying on you two.”

Ash narrowed his eyes.

“I wasn’t!” Adam swore. “I was spying on Levi.”

“Levi! Wait! I want to know!” Seb called after Adam when the boy turned and ran away laughing.

“Levi?” Ash asked. He tried to push down the jealousy that burned inside. Seb had said his name was a familiarity that Ash didn’t like.

“No.” Seb wrapped his arms around Ash’s neck. “No jealousy needed. Levi is one of the guys that lives here. He’s a great guy, quiet and standoffish, but sweet.”

Ash growled.

“But he’s never shown any interest in me or anyone else. There’s a man he’s been courting, using a dating app, and Levi was really into him. Right before I left, he deleted the app and refused to talk about it.”

Ash was ridiculous. He knew his mate wasn’t interested in anyone else. Even Seb had said how he enjoyed the pack but hadn’t really felt he’d been home. Not until Seb had been inside Ash’s home. Seb loved his house, their house, and Ash had no reason to be jealous. “I’m sorry.” He dropped his eyes in shame. His mate deserved better.

“I’m pretty sure that I already told you how hot it is when you get jealous,” Seb said, pressing his cock into Ash’s leg. “Like super hot, remember?”

Ash was trying to recall why it would be a bad thing to throw his mate down on the ground and mount him.

“If you start having sex, I’m going to stand here and watch!” someone yelled.

Seb jumped away with a curse. “Fucking River.”

Ash snapped his head to the side to stare at the guy that stood on the back porch, hands on his hips, and smiling.

“You know he’ll watch.” Another guy joined the first. He pushed River to the side before waving. “Hello, brother.”

“And that’s Lawson,” Seb mumbled.

The brothers. Ash wasn’t sure why, but he’d expected someone older. River was almost a carbon copy of his mate, except without glasses, with longer hair, muscular arms, and shredded jeans under a tank. Lawson wore black slacks with a nice red button-down shirt. Even from a distance Ash could see the resemblance to his mate. He turned his head back to Seb. “You’re a twin?”

“Yeah, umm, didn’t I tell you that?”

“No.” Ash felt horrible. He’d been keeping his mate from his twin.

“Oh, is that a big deal in your realm or something?”

“It’s not that. I just hate that I have been keeping you away —”

“Hold up.” Seb glowered. “You do realize that I’d already been planning on staying in your realm for a month or longer before I met you, right?”

Oh yeah.

“And River lives in the Fae realm with Rainier and Anton so it’s not like he’s been here waiting on me to get back. I haven’t even spoken to him since I left and that’s not unusual. He’s busy. They’re all busy.”

Ash pulled Seb back into his arms. He hated how sad his mate sounded. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I actually like how my life is turning out.” He lifted his head off Ash’s chest and smiled. “Sure, I miss my brothers, but I also wouldn’t have things ending up any other way. Lawson needs a mate like Drake, who’ll spoil and dote on him. River is perfect for Rainier and Anton. I’ve seen both his mates become so happy in the few months they’ve been together.”

“And you?” Ash asked.

“I couldn’t think of a better match. My very own Reaper. We have a home, a new realm, and Ari’s already my best friend. I’m right where I’m supposed to be.”

“Then I guess we should go and introduce me to your brothers.”

“Yes, because we have some serious plans for later.”

Oh, fuck. Ash’s wings burst open and his fangs dropped. “You have to stop saying things like that,” he warned.

“Oh. My. God! His wings!” One of the brothers, River, maybe? shouted.

Seb laughed. “Come on. I think we’ve tortured them enough.”

Ash pulled his wings back but there was no helping the fangs. He could use his glamour, but he’d been wanting to meet Seb’s brothers as his true self.

“Oh, Lucy! You got some s’plaining to do!” River drawled.

His sweet little mate flipped his brother his middle finger.

Chapter Fourteen

Seb

He wanted to roll his eyes at his brothers but knew that would only encourage River's antics. "Hey, guys." He waved the hand not being held prisoner by Ash's strong grip.

Reaching the bottom of the back porch steps, Seb stopped. He was being glared at by both his brothers. He expected some kind of hazing from River, but Lawson was normally the levelheaded brother.

"What?" he questioned.

"Hey, bro," River said. "Nice to hear from you! How's Hell? Oh, and what's this about a mate? And why did we just hear about it tonight before Axel announced you were bringing your mate to meet us?"

"Wait! What?" He'd texted his brothers. Hadn't he? Well, now that he thought about it, he hadn't received a text back, which was weird. "Oh!"

"Oh!" River repeated. "All you have to say is 'Oh'?" He stomped down the stairs as anger replaced the teasing in his eyes. "You find a mate in Hell and all you can say is 'Oh'?"

Seb cowered back, knowing that he'd really messed up. Being the youngest, his brothers had always been protective over him. Before he could reply or explain, he was pushed behind Ash's large frame and Ash's wings blocked him.

Ash was crouched low as if expecting an attack.

"Wait!" Seb yelled.

Commotion on the porch, more shouting, and a yelp. Crap, this was not how Seb wanted this meeting to go.

Ash growled deep in the back of his throat.

"Get back, River!" Axel's strong voice commanded and everyone froze.

Well, everyone except Seb. Seb peeked from around his mate. Drake had Lawson in his arms and looked ready to run off with him. Anton was wrapped around River, who had made it halfway toward them with Rainier crouched in front of River.

Axel stood with his hands on his hips at the edge of the deck. He was glaring at River.

“Easy, Reaper,” Axel said, turning his gaze onto Seb’s mate. “River is not a threat to your mate. They’re brothers and while River should have known better, they’re still new to this world.”

To Seb’s surprise, River’s shoulders dropped, and he blushed as he allowed Anton to pull him back. “Shit, sorry,” River mumbled.

Ash shook out his wings before he folded them back. “My apologies, Alpha. It was instinct. I know Seb’s brother won’t hurt him but...” Ash lifted a shaking hand to rub at the back of his neck.

Seb wrapped his arms around Ash’s waist.

“But you haven’t completed the mating,” Axel finished for him. “We understand.” He glared at River.

“I wasn’t going to hurt him!” River defended himself.

“You were angry and approaching him,” Rainier said as he rose to his tall—very tall—height. “I would have reacted the same way.”

Ash relaxed. He bowed his head. “Thank you for understanding. This is still so new to me.”

“This is nothing,” Axel said with a laugh. “We’re a family of strong-willed Alpha males that have precious treasures to protect. You’ll fit right in.”

Seb found himself smiling. Okay, so the meeting hadn’t been perfect but it didn’t look like anyone was holding a grudge. And really River should have known better.

Axel waved his hand toward the door. "Please come inside, you two. We can relax and talk before dinner." He turned to lead the way.

Drake carried Lawson back into the house and everyone else who'd come outside followed. That left Rainier, River, and Anton outside with him and Ash.

"I really am sorry," River said.

Grinning, Seb darted around his mate before stomping up the steps so he could pull his twin into a hard hug.

River hugged him back just as strongly before he buried his face in Seb's neck.

"I love you, brother, but might I suggest that you don't tease my mate."

"Yeah, I get it." River kissed Seb's cheek before letting him go. "Can we try again?" he asked Ash.

"I would love that." Ash strode up the steps to stop in front of them. "It's really nice to meet you. Seb's told me a lot about both his brothers."

River grinned. "It's all lies. I'm not as bad as he said."

Seb pushed his brother lightly. "Are too."

His twin ignored him. "I really would like to say the same, but Seb hasn't said a word to us."

"I thought I texted!" Seb exclaimed.

"You should have called. This is totally a phone-call-worthy conversation," River told him.

Yeah, his brother was right. "I know. I... It's just..."

"You got distracted." River waggled his brows, making him look ridiculous. "Details?"

Ash chuckled, but Seb screeched. "Absolutely not!" Seb said firmly.

"Fine." River hooked his elbow with Seb's. "You can tell us everything else." He started to drag Seb into the house.

Glancing over his shoulder, he caught Ash and Rainier exchanging back slaps and a brief hug. Oh yeah, Ash knew the Fae King. He allowed his brother to tow him into the house and toward the main living area. Since they'd all come to stay there, the living room had been transformed into the room for family meetings.

As they reached the threshold, Lawson was there to pull Seb into a hug.

"I'm so happy for you," Lawson whispered. "He's gorgeous."

"He is," Seb agreed as he embraced his oldest brother. "And perfect for me in every way."

"Of course, he is." Lawson drew back, smiling. "He's your mate."

His mate. Seb would never tire of hearing those words.

They settled into the massive living room with Seb sitting as close to his mate as possible. The other couples were cuddled together as well. Bryce on Axel's lap, Lawson sitting on Drake, Nate draped over Bo and Craig's legs, and Anton cuddled under Rainier's arm with River sitting between their knees. Shawn had his arm wrapped around Sam's shoulder as Trever cuddled Ansley to his chest. The single members of the family were there as well. Adam and Logan huddled in front of the couch, close to Axel. Levi and Gavin were leaning against the wall, a little bit distant from the group, but Adam was right in the middle of the floor, on his stomach, as he teased everyone.

This was his family.

He might have regrets about holding himself back. The others in the group had opened their arms to him and Seb had spent most of his time hiding away. Now that he had a mate of his own, he understood better why when his brothers found their people, they were totally wrapped up in them.

There was so much love in this room. The lucky paranormals that had found their perfect match or matches.

Seb peered around at the single members of the family. Levi, Logan, Gavin, and Adam all deserved to find the same happiness that coursed through Seb.

“How has the new realm been?” Lawson questioned. “I love it.” Seb bounced a little. “I met the demon that keeps the records of the realm. His name is Ari and he is so sweet.”

“Sweet?” Adam popped up to sit cross-legged. “A demon?”

Nate kicked at Adam. “I’ve been telling you that what you think about demons is totally different from reality. The demons are just...like us. Kind of.”

Beside him, Ash snorted. “Like every species, there are good and bad demons. We’re born in the hell realm. We don’t come into our purpose, our powers, until we’ve reached maturity. Our natures dictate what we become.” “Is that normal?” Drake leaned forward as he spoke. “I don’t know much about other realms.”

“The hell realm is similar to the Fae realm,” Rainier supplied. “We have our own problems, dark elves, and others. Ash is correct. There are good and bad in every species.”

Drake nodded as he sat back, giving Lawson a hug. “My boy is still going to worry about his brother.”

Lawson met Seb’s gaze. “You’re not coming back, are you?”

Of course, his oldest brother would know where Seb’s thoughts were. “With Ash’s job, I’ll be able to travel with him to other realms once we mate. He said that he can make it easily enough for me to come here whenever I want.”

“Even if your mate couldn’t, I’d offer my help,” Rainier said.

“It’s important as mates are found, and changes come, that we still remain a family.” Axel frowned as he peered around the room. “I’d given up on ever finding my mate. I want

everyone in this room to feel the peace that comes with mating. I know that means changes are coming.”

“That’s...” Seb took a deep breath. “That’s what I wanted to talk to you all about.”

“You can talk to us about anything,” Axel said kindly. “Anytime.”

“The same problems with finding a mate that you’ve had is also happening in the hell realm. They haven’t had true mate matches in a long time. I want to find out why.”

Axel was already nodding.

“That won’t be easy,” Rainier said. “It appears to me that all paranormal species have been affected.”

“With my access to the other realms, I believe this will benefit Seb’s research,” Ash supplied.

“You’ve always wanted to travel,” Lawson said with a smile.

“I know!” Seb grabbed Ash’s hand and held on tight. “My mate is opening so many doors for me.”

“Anything you ever want,” Ash said before kissing the top of Seb’s head.

“I want to help other paranormals find their mates. If we can find out why it stopped happening, maybe we can do something.” Seb shrugged. “It’s just a thought.”

“A very kind thought,” Gavin said. The gruff older man didn’t speak a lot. He was a bit of a loner. Still, he’d always been nice to Seb. Accepting.

“I don’t know if there is anything I can do—” Seb started.

“You’re trying,” Adam spoke up. “I know I tease all of you a lot, but I really do want to find my mate. I want that connection. If there is someone who can figure out what’s happening, it’s you.”

That was a lot of pressure, but Seb excelled at research.

“Maybe...” Anton’s voice was quiet and soft. He stopped speaking and shook his head as he avoided looking at anyone else.

“What is it, mate?” Rainier asked gently.

Anton sighed. “With father still in prison for his attack on me, maybe, we could...” He ducked his head.

Seb had seen how Anton had grown in confidence after mating with Rainier and River. Anton had been beaten down by his father and the expectations he’d almost drowned in.

River climbed up to his knees and scooted closer to Anton. He blocked Anton from everyone else as River cupped Anton’s cheeks. Seb enjoyed seeing how much River loved his dragon mate and how dependable the troublemaker had become.

“Talk to me,” River whispered. “Don’t worry about everyone else.”

“We talked about going back. Could we? Now? There’s a lot of records that my father’s advisors kept and it may aid Seb. We could get those and...”

“And give you closure,” River finished.

“Yeah.” Anton buried his head in River’s chest.

Rainier wrapped his arms around both his boys. “That’s a fantastic idea.”

“It is?” Anton asked with surprise.

“Yes,” Rainier assured his mate.

Axel kissed the side of Bryce’s head and set him close to Drake before he rose. He crossed the room in a few long strides to kneel beside River.

“Anton.” Axel reached for his brother.

“I know I shouldn’t want to go back but—”

“No!” Axel shushed his brother. “You have every right to want to go back. I just wanted to know if it would be okay if I

brought Bryce along. I'd like to show him our home."

"You'll come?" Anton brightened, the shyness slipping away.

"Yes. It will probably be the last time. I don't have the same attachment, but I'd like to show my mate."

"Please! Please bring Bryce." The brothers hugged and Seb found himself leaning into Ash's side.

Family.

That was what they were. Seb should have tried more with the others, but it wasn't too late. And maybe he really could help the others find their mates.

As Axel returned to the couch and his mate, Seb smiled at Anton. "Thank you, Anton. I know it won't be easy going back, but any records you could find would be very valuable."

"My father's advisors kept track of matings. My father was obsessed with finding his mate. Our mother wasn't his true mate. I'm sure he has something that can help."

Excitement filled him. Seb had just wanted to bring up the idea of starting his research, but it appeared that everyone wanted to know as much as him. He couldn't wait to tell Ari. He bet Ari would love to get his hands on the dragon shifters records.

"It's settled then," Axel said. "We'll make plans to go and collect what we can."

A buzzer went off in the direction of the kitchen.

"That will be dinner," Drake said as he stood.

Seb's stomach rumbled at the delicious scents that filled the house. Drake was an amazing chef and they were lucky that he'd agreed to make this special dinner for them. As Drake and Lawson headed toward the kitchen, everyone else slowly rose. Seb caught River's arm and held him back as everyone went into the dining room.

"You okay?" River questioned.

“Are we?” Seb asked. “I screwed up. I really thought I had sent a text. I would never want you to find out I found my mate from someone else.”

River sighed. “I was pissed. I won’t lie. There are so many changes. Finding Rainier and Anton is everything, but it’s been a lot at one time.”

“Yeah. I didn’t think I would find my mate so soon. Heck, I didn’t think I even had a mate. I thought I’d be left behind.”

“Shit.” River rubbed the back of his head and frowned. “Of course you did. I’m so sorry, Seb.”

“Nothing to be sorry about,” he assured his brother.

“Yes, there is. Lawson found Drake and then I was messed up about Anton before Rainier suddenly showed up. I should have checked in with you more often.”

“I understand.” And Seb did. Now that he met Ash, Seb would have acted the same way as his brothers.

“I still should have handled it differently.”

“Everything turned out like it should.” Seb smacked his brother’s shoulder. “Can you believe it’s been less than a year since that night we went to the club?”

River snorted. “Who knew a simple trip to a club to give Lawson puppy time would change our entire worlds?”

As Seb caught Ash’s deep laughter coming from the other room, he smiled. He wouldn’t change anything. That man with Seb’s found family was his perfect match. His mate. Somehow, he’d found the key to unlock the greatest treasure of his life.

And he was going to get Ash to complete their mating. Enough waiting. Seb was ready to start his new life.

Chapter Fifteen

Ash

Leading Seb into the master bedroom, Ash had never been more sure of anything in his life than that this was the most perfect moment. He would be claiming his mate and linking them for eternity. His sweet, smart, and surprisingly sassy mate. Why was Ash being so blessed?

“You sure about this?” he asked one final time.

Seb turned into his arms and smiled at him. “Yes, I’m absolutely sure that I want to be your mate.”

He lowered his head to brush his lips across Seb’s. What he meant to be a nice, sweet kiss quickly turned heated. Ash couldn’t help it. Seb always responded so beautifully to him. He had to force himself to pull away. “Why don’t you go take a shower while I get things ready?”

Seb frowned. “Get things ready?”

“Trust me.” He had a plan. Ash wanted to romance his mate. Seb deserved the very best romantic, sweet mating anyone had ever received. He’d spend the rest of eternity showing Seb how special he was.

“I do.” Seb pushed up on his toes and kissed Ash again before he grinned. “I’ll be quick.”

He held back a moan as Seb sauntered off to the bedroom, stopping to send a saucy wink over his shoulder, before the bathroom door closed.

As soon as the bathroom door clicked, Ash moved. He quickly replaced the sheets with black satin bedding and turned them down. Inside his hall closet, he found battery-powered scented candles that he set up around the room. Ash grabbed two bottles of water for later and set them on the nightstand before he thought of something else.

Rushing outside, he went to the backyard to grab several red rose stems. Of course, this was the hell realm so while the

red roses looked much like the ones in the human realm, they were different. Black-trimmed petals with purple swirls mixed in the red. The petals were beautiful.

Ash returned to the bedroom and sprinkled petals from the bathroom door to the bed and on top of the mattress.

The shower in the bathroom turned off so Ash quickly shed his clothes and dumped them in the closet. His erection pressed against his stomach, already excited about what the night would bring.

Ash raced across the room and turned off the overhead light. He turned as Seb stepped out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist but moisture still on his skin. His mate had been in a hurry

Seb gasped, his hands going up to his mouth, as he took in the bedroom Ash had prepared. "Ash!"

He crossed the room and pulled Seb into his arms.

"It's so romantic," Seb exclaimed.

"For you, my mate." He drew Seb to the mattress. "I made a promise to you the night we met that I would always return to our bed. No matter where I am or what I'm doing, we'll never sleep apart."

"That means a lot to me. I want to make my own promise." Seb gripped his hand tight. "I will always support you, love you, and have your back. I know that I can't do as much physically or with paranormal powers, but I'll always do my best to take care of you."

"Thank you, my mate." Ash leaned forward and kissed Seb.

Seb wrapped his arms around Ash's neck as he tilted his head back. Ash covered Seb's body with his own. They kissed, tongues entwined, and hands mapping out each other's body.

His boy arched into his touch as Ash trailed his fingers down the middle of Seb's chest.

“I’m going to take my time,” Ash warned. “Drive you crazy before I claim what’s mine.”

Moaning, Seb let his legs fall open. “Please.”

“Not yet, boy.” Ash followed the trail of his fingers with his lips. He kissed, licked, and sucked his way down Seb’s body until he reached Seb’s hard cock. Pre-cum already oozed from the tip. Ash caught the liquid with his tongue.

Seb’s eyes were bright as he stared down at Ash.

Fuck, Ash loved the way that Seb was looking at him. The love was there. Maybe it was too soon for Seb to really feel that way but Ash knew that he loved Seb, so he would hold on to his hope.

He dropped his attention back to Seb’s body. Lowering his face, he nuzzled the side of Seb’s shaft. Seb might be on the smaller side, a head shorter than Ash, but his cock was a thing of beauty.

Letting his tongue trace over the head of Seb’s dick, down, following the thick vein, to the base, Ash lavished Seb’s shaft. Seb was finding it hard to stay still as he squirmed around.

“You’re teasing.” Seb tugged at his hair.

“Not teasing,” Ash corrected. He continued to play with Seb’s cock, giving a slow stroke, a causal lick, until Seb’s legs were shaking.

Finally, he took Seb into his mouth and swallowed around his cock. Bobbing his head up and down, he let his saliva cover Seb’s shaft, getting him all nice and wet.

Seb tried to move his hips, but Ash was stronger. He could hold Seb down and make his mate accept the pleasure.

“I need...”

He knew what Seb needed. His boy needed more.

Ash popped off Seb’s cock but didn’t move up the bed. He pushed Seb’s knees to his chest, opening his boy up. Using his face again, Ash ran his cheeks, nose, and lips from the base of

Seb's cock to his pretty little hole. And Seb's hole was gorgeous.

Licking the ring that he needed loosened, he drew a long low moan from his mate.

"You like that, baby?" Ash asked as he blew across Seb's hole.

"Uh! Please!"

His boy was going to enjoy being licked open? Diving back down, he used his tongue to ease Seb's hole open. He sucked and licked the opening until Seb's body started to relax and let him in.

Grabbing the lube from under the sheet, Ash coated his fingers before adding one digit to join his tongue.

The shaking returned. Ash knew that from the sounds that Seb was making that his mate was close. He needed to decide if he should give Seb one release first. Yeah, that sounded like a good idea.

With two fingers brushing over Seb's prostate, Ash swallowed Seb's cock again. He took Seb's shaft to the back of his throat, gagging a little, and swallowed hard as he pegged Seb's gland.

Seb screamed and Ash was rewarded with his mate coming hard.

Ash ate up all Seb's cum, keeping the boy on the edge as he added a third finger.

They weren't nearly done yet.

Removing his mouth from Seb's dick, Ash went back to licking around his hole as his three big fingers held Seb open.

"Ash! Mate! Daddy, please!"

"Not done," Ash murmured.

"I need you inside me."

“I am inside you.” To prove his point, he pegged Seb’s prostate again.

“No!” Seb moaned. “Claim me, Daddy mate.”

Against his will, Ash’s cock jerked, and he almost came himself. It was time.

Slowly, he withdrew his fingers. Ash wiped his hand on the bedding as he moved up the bed. Leaning forward, Ash kissed Seb’s lips open.

As their tongues twined, Ash gripped the base of his cock and added more lube to his shaft. He would never hurt his mate. As much as Ash wanted to be buried inside Seb, he still needed to take his time. This was the night that they would remember for the rest of their lives.

He pulled back to peer down at his boy. “You ready for this? You want me to claim you?”

“I do.” Seb gripped his shoulders. “I want to belong to you for all eternity.”

“My love.” Ash kissed Seb again.

Their mouths were fused together as Ash entered Seb.

This wouldn’t be like the other times. Not in the past or in the future. This was when Ash would bind Seb to him.

He pushed deep until Seb’s entrance clamped around him and held his cock hostage. Seb ripped his mouth away and gasped.

“So big,” Seb murmured.

Ash grinned as he withdrew before he slammed back inside.

Little electric shocks shot along his nerves, from the top of his spine to his toes. Rocking inside, Ash lost himself in the pleasure of Seb’s body.

He couldn’t have asked for a sweeter, sexier, sassier, smarter mate. Seb was perfect.

They groaned together while Ash braced his elbows next to Seb's head as he plunged deep and hard.

"You feel so good!" Seb cried.

"Yes!" Ash hissed. He thrust hard and deep, riding the wave of ecstasy until sweat dripped down his back and forehead. He wasn't going to last much longer. Being inside Seb's warm snug channel was taking everything from him. He needed to complete the claiming.

He drew back and surged forward hard. "I claim you, my mate. I'll love you until I take my last dying breath."

"I love you, Ash. Make me yours," Seb vowed quietly.

Ash let his fangs drop and lowered his head to Seb's neck. He pumped his hips again until he could feel the tingle, the heaviness of his balls, until it was time.

"Seb," he gasped. As he came, he bit down on Seb's shoulder, giving him the mark that would bind them for the rest of eternity.

His vision darkened before sparks lit up his entire being. His wings burst open on his back. Every paranormal ability he possessed flowed from him and into Seb. Purple smoke filled the room and surrounded them, enveloping them.

"Ash!" Seb screamed his name, his cum covered the both of them.

Loud thunder rocked the house and rain started to pelt the windows. It didn't rain in hell. Never rained. Ash carefully withdrew his fangs and lifted his head as he smiled.

Moving his attention back to his mate, Ash kissed Seb's lips gently. "Look, baby." He motioned toward the window.

"A storm? Was it supposed to rain?"

"It doesn't rain here. We've been truly blessed by the fates."

Seb beamed. "I mean it. I love you, Ash."

“My mate. My entire world. I love you too.” Still buried deep, he cradled Seb in his arms as he folded his wings back. “I love you so much.”

Chapter Sixteen

Seb

Squirming in his chair, Seb tried to find a comfortable position. It had been three days since he'd mated to Ash and they had spent the entire time in bed. Ash hadn't been called out for any jobs until that morning.

With Ash leaving to perform his duty, Seb had showered, dressed, and walked over to the library.

"I could find you a pillow," Ari offered with a smirk.

Seb laughed. He was so glad that he'd been introduced to Ari. As soon as Seb had entered the library, he'd been greeted with a big hug from his friend. Ari had zeroed right in on the mating mark on Seb's neck. Seb had noticed that Ari sported one as well. "I'm not the only one that needs a pillow."

Ari blushed. Seriously, how cute was it to see a demon blush? Ari was freaking adorable. Seb couldn't wait until he could introduce Ari to the rest of his family. "Atom..." Ari cleared his throat. "Atom is quite gifted."

Seb snorted. As Atom seemed to favor kilts without anything under them, and he found being around Ari very arousing, Seb had a good idea how gifted Atom was.

"Stuff it," Ari mumbled as he dipped his head.

"It's awesome," Seb said. "I'm so happy for you."

Ari closed the book he'd been going through. "I really did doubt that Atom was my mate. Why would we have found each other when no one else has found a mate in so long?"

Seb saved the last entry he'd made in the spreadsheet he'd started. He was keeping a digital record of all matings, dates, and species that they came across. He'd started with his family and expanded from there. Hopefully, they would have a lot more entries to add once word got out what Seb was looking for. Ash promised to pass the request for records around as he portaled from realm to realm. Already, Seb had received an

email from someone Ash had told. An email from the west coast of the United States, a wolf pack, where they hadn't found mates for six decades. They still wanted to provide what information they had. Seb had exchanged emails with the pack's omega who kept the records.

Not only was Seb collecting information for his study, but it seemed that he might just make some friends along the way. The omega, Jasper, had been funny and intelligent.

Seb captured Ari's hand in his. "I can understand why you hesitated. You were afraid to hope."

"Yes. I didn't mean to hurt Atom. It wasn't anything against him. I just didn't—"

"He knows that," Seb assured his friend. Sure, he hadn't said more than hi to Atom, but mates were always perfect for each other. Ari could only be mated to a kind and loving person. "He didn't hold it against you, did he?"

"No." Ari smiled. "He was so sweet. I mean..." Ari blushed again. "After he...he...made me come the first time, he sat me down and we talked for hours. He let me explain my fears and told me his own. It was exactly what I needed."

Seb couldn't help that his smile was so wide it hurt his face. He wanted everyone to have this same feeling that he and Ari shared.

"It makes me want to find a reason why the matings stopped."

"Me too," Seb said. "When I had dinner with my brothers, I saw how the single members of the family held themselves back. It must be hard to see all those around you find their mates."

"It's different here. Bo finding Craig and Nate was a miracle. Then you and Ash. I guess I was just scared that what I felt for Atom wasn't real."

"I've seen the way that demon looks at you. It's real."

Ari giggled. “We didn’t bring a rainstorm to the realm with our mating, but I have no doubts about Atom belonging to me.”

“Good.” Seb squeezed Ari’s hand. “And you and Atom are coming to dinner tonight? I want to introduce my family to you. Axel, Bryce, Rainier, River, Anton, and Gavin are leaving in the morning to go into Dragon territory.” The mating celebration dinner would be in the hell realm, at Seb’s new home, before his family left for their trip. Everyone from back home was attending with Ari, Atom, the Master, and some of Ash’s family. His parents for sure.

“You just want a buffer between you and your new in-laws,” Ari teased.

“In-laws,” Seb repeated. Holy shit! He was going to have in-laws. Seb had never met a partner’s parents before. He hadn’t ever had a real boyfriend and now all of a sudden he was mated to a man that had a whole lot of family, including parents. “I don’t—”

“Here.” Ari shoved a bottle of water at him. “Drink.”

Seb fumbled getting the lid off before he gulped down the clear cold water. He’d been so excited that his family was coming to help him celebrate but he hadn’t thought about the strangers he would be meeting as well.

“It’s going to be fine. Everyone is so excited that Ash found his true mate. His family is going to love you.”

“He met mine. I guess I just hadn’t thought how many people would be here from his side.”

“You’re going to get along so well with his mom. You two are so similar.”

The mom that favored bitey flowers. Right. “I hope so.”

His email chimed and Seb clicked on it. Another email from someone that Ash had met with. His mate was really coming through. “Oh! Atlantis. I’ve heard about that realm from Rainier.”

“Back to work. We have a mystery to solve,” Ari told him. “I’m going to go look for some more books in the vault. I’ll be right back.”

Seb waved his friend off as he read the email that had just came in. Rainier had a family tie to the Atlantis realm but Seb hadn’t asked for mating records for the Faw King knowing he had his hands full with the trip with Anton. However, Juniper, Rainier’s cousin, was happy to share the matings from their realm. Opening the file, Seb was surprised by the number of true mates that while slowed down, hadn’t stopped completely. There was something there. Something important.

Why did the Atlantis realm still have recent matings? The last year, two mates found, the year before five...there hadn’t been a year when at least one mate hadn’t been found. True, a few years only one had been found, but the numbers were very different from the Hell, Human, and Fae realms. This was the first good piece of intel that might help solve what had happened to mates.

He quickly started to fill in the new information to expand on his spreadsheet.

While his fingers flew across the keyboard, Seb tried to put the pieces together. The Atalantis realm, while small, still held over a thousand paranormal species. Seb wondered how that worked if a mate didn’t breathe under the water. Was it a realm like the Hell realm that had different layers? He was merely picturing what he imagined the realm looked like, but he honestly had no clue. Maybe Atlantis wasn’t even under water.

He jumped as a black portal opened beside him. “Ash!” Seb leapt to his feet to wrap his arms around his mate’s waist. They’d only been separated for a few hours but after three days of being together, Seb had missed his amazing mate so much.

“Hey, my little duckling. Did you miss me?” Ash chuckled as he held Seb close.

Maybe Seb should have been embarrassed, but once he'd found everything he'd ever wanted, it was hard to let go. To spend time away from Ash. He hid his face in Ash's flowing black shirt.

"What is this?" Ash cupped Seb's face, forcing him to look up.

"Sorry, Daddy mate." Seb tried to smile. "I know you haven't been gone that long."

"No," Ash barked. His fingers tightened on Seb's chin. "Never apologize for missing me."

"It's dumb."

He was lifted off his feet and spun until his ass landed on the tabletop. Ash stepped between his legs. "Stop, I don't know why you think suddenly that missing me would be wrong. "You are my baby and I missed you so much that instead of stopping in my office to complete my paperwork, I came here first. Don't you know how much you imprinted on my heart, duckling?"

"Really?" He didn't know why doubts had suddenly filled him. Seb had just been so happy to see his mate. He didn't want Ash to think he was too much either.

"I already hated to leave you this morning. With each portal that kept me away, I had to force myself to perform my duty."

"I love you." Seb hugged Ash's waist as he kissed his neck. Instead of being annoyed by his neediness, Ash encouraged it.

"My baby, I love you too." Ash dropped his lips to Seb's.

Seb loved the taste of his mate. He'd noticed that when Ash kissed him, it was different from any other kiss he'd had before. Now that they'd mated, there was something more. A flavor that seemed connected to his mate.

Moaning, he dropped his head back as Ash nibbled his way to Seb's ear.

“I really missed you,” Ash repeated but this time he pressed his hard cock against Seb’s inner thigh.

“Daddy,” Seb whimpered. “Ari...”

“Ari’s in the vault. I can sense him. It’s okay.”

He was at the point of not even caring if his friend could hear them. Leaning back on the table, crumpling his notes no doubt, Seb surrendered to the need for his mate.

Ash’s hands were instantly on his jeans unbuttoning and pulling the zipper down. He shoved his hand inside the flaps to cup Seb’s erection.

A whine escaped as Seb pushed his hips up.

“Like that. Let me get your jeans down.”

Seb held his ass off the table until his jeans and briefs were down to his knees. Ash unsnapped his leather pants until his cock was out.

No underwear? Seb about swallowed his tongue.

Ash stroked his own cock as he bent and licked around Seb’s shaft.

Seb tried to stay still as Ash bobbed, sucked, and swallowed down his cock. Ash’s mouth provided heat straight to his core and every nerve seemed to be electrified. Need burned through him.

“Please, please, please,” he chanted.

Ash sucked harder and as embarrassing as it was, Seb was already ready to blow.

“Ash! Daddy, I need to come.”

The hand Ash had been using on himself came up and brushed over Seb’s hole.

“Yes!” he yelled and came hard.

Ash sucked down every drop until Seb’s cock twitched and it became too sensitive. His mate popped off his shaft before he went back to stroking his own cock. Seb leaned forward to

close his lips around the tip of Ash's shaft while Ash pumped his cock.

His mate grunted as he filled Seb's mouth with his seed.

Lapping at the tip, Seb collected everything Ash had to give before he dropped back onto the table.

He lay still as Ash fixed his pants before helping Seb redress.

"Is it safe to come out?" Ari called.

Groaning, Seb covered his face with his hands. He should be embarrassed but just like the time in the café, he found the thought of being overheard hot. Even if Ari had watched, Seb wouldn't have a problem with it.

"I'll take that as a yes." Ari walked around one of the large shelves, carrying three books that looked heavy.

"Hey, Ari, thanks for giving us a few minutes."

"New mates. I get it."

And Seb knew that Ari did indeed understand.

Ari dropped the books on the table, so Seb forced himself to climb off. He tried to straighten out his notes that he'd been lying on.

"How's it going here?" Ash asked as he helped fold down Seb's notes.

"So good. I already heard from the pack out east and Juniper from the Atlantis realm. Thanks for that."

Ash shrugged. "Just doing my part to help my mate. Everyone is excited that I've found you. They want to meet you. I kept getting asked when I'd be bringing you with me."

Seb nodded. He wanted to travel with Ash, but he was also worried. He was naturally shy and didn't make friends easily. Although with the two new contacts he'd made from Ash that day, maybe he should consider it more.

“No pressure,” Ash said. “I did hate being away from you.”

“That’s true. I know we can’t spend all our time together but—”

Ash snorted. “I don’t know any such thing.”

Seb smiled. He liked that Ash didn’t play games or act like he was too cool to need Seb around.

“Should I make space for you to move your office here?” Ari asked.

Seb turned to his friend, but Ari wasn’t teasing. He was honestly asking.

“That’s not a bad idea. My reports get sent to you anyway so you can update the death records.”

Ari nodded. “Atom already asked if he could use the space between this building and the next to set up a training yard.”

“Training yard?” Seb questioned.

“Atom is one of our warriors. He trains other demons who are just coming into their power. Sort of like the military for the realm,” Ash supplied.

“The building next door has been empty for a few decades now. I can’t remember who owns it, but Atom’s going to find out to see if he can lease or buy it. No matter what, he has enough space to set up a small training area,” Ari told them.

“I’ll talk to Atom tonight and offer my help. If you don’t mind, I think I’d like to move my office here. I know my mate wants to spend most of his time on his studies until we figure this out.”

Seb practically tackled his mate as he hugged his waist.

“The four of us will be close,” Ari said. “I can feel it.” He sniffed. “It feels good to have family again.”

Ari didn’t know anything about Ari’s family but he planned to find out. No one should sound that sad.

Before Seb could go hug his friend, Ash was pulling Ari into their shared embrace. Seb wrapped his arm around the demon's waist and held him tight. Ari was nothing like what he'd expected of a demon. Seb was glad that he hadn't let prejudices keep him from meeting a new friend. He was also determined to make sure Ari spent some time with the boys of his family. Adam didn't have a mate yet and maybe they could talk him into spending some more time in their realm. The boy was usually up for anything.

"Can anyone join this hug?"

Seb jumped at the deep voice that came out of nowhere.

"Atom," Ari whispered for his mate.

"What's wrong?" Atom asked even as he added his strong arms to their embrace.

"Nothing's wrong," Ari assured his mate. "Just happy. I feel like I have a family again."

"Oh, precious." Atom kissed the base of each horn on top of Ari's head.

Seb blinked. He wondered how sensitive the horns of demons were when Ari shivered.

"We should probably get home and get set up for dinner." Ash pulled out of the embrace.

"Do you need any help?" Atom offered.

"I have it covered. Just make sure you and Ari are there," Ash responded.

"We wouldn't miss it," Atom vowed.

"Ready, baby?"

Seb peered back at the table where his notes and work waited.

"Tomorrow will be soon enough," Ari said. "You only get mated once and nothing is more important."

“Okay.” He’d been hoping to get lost in work so he didn’t have to think about the family of his mate that he’d be meeting.

“I bet a hot shower would relax you,” Ash whispered in his ear.

“Would I be alone in that shower?” Seb asked. He ran his hand down Ash’s back to cup his leather-clad cheek.

“I might be persuaded to join you.”

“Okay!” Seb started to tug Ash toward the door. “We have a party to get ready for. See you both later tonight.”

Atom’s booming laugh followed them out, but before the door closed behind them, Seb heard a squeak and then a long moan. Guess his friend was going to get his own form of relaxation.

“I’m taking my duckling home now,” Ash said with a laugh.

“I might be too tired to walk. Maybe my Daddy mate should fly us.” That way they would have plenty of time to shower together before the party.

Ash winked before he pulled Seb into his arms. “I knew you were brilliant.” Opening his wings, he launched them into the sky to fly home.

Chapter Seventeen

Ash

Watching his mother babying his mate was a sight that Ash didn't think he would ever forget. His mom had immediately attached herself to Seb and the two of them had been teasing each other ever since. With the arrival of Seb's brothers, Ash's mom had two more boys to spoil.

There was a reason that Ash had so many siblings. It wasn't just because of the length of time his parents had been mated. His mom loved being a mom, taking care of all of them, and supporting all her children.

He felt the strong presence before the Master walked up to his side. "Good turn out."

Ash grinned up at his friend. Even as tall as he was, Mal towered over him. His powers had affected every part of him, including his size. "I was beginning to think you'd bailed on me."

"Never." Mal squeezed his shoulder. "I have registered your mating under my name. That boy of yours will be safe no matter where he goes in the realm."

Ash turned to face his friend. "Thank you." He grabbed the back of Mal's head and put their foreheads together. "Thank you, brother."

"I am so fucking happy for you. Take care of your mate," Mal said quietly.

"I will. A day won't go by that Seb doesn't know that I love him."

"That's all that I ask."

"Thank you for everything. And for coming tonight. Come meet my new family."

Mal stepped back. "Are you sure? Aren't they humans?"

“Some are but everyone here is part of Seb’s home pack. They won’t have a problem with you. Hell, they’ve already adopted Ari into their fold.”

Mal grinned, showing off his fangs. He wasn’t just part demon. He’d taken on a lot of appearance traits that were recognizable for their realm. He had horns, wings, fangs, and the appearance of demons. “Ari deserves to find people for himself.”

Ari was one of the few demons that both Ash and Mal had grown up with that had known what he would become. His love of books and learning had been obvious since the day that Ari said his first words. It had been a complete sentence. They’d taken Ari under their wings and had always kept him safe from the other demons.

“Atom asked me to register them,” Ash confessed. “It’s a first for me but I couldn’t turn him down. Ari’s always been a part of us.”

“We’ll make sure he remains protected. With mates being found again, I’m a little concerned that the attention to going to turn to Ari and your mate.”

“I’m moving my office into the library and Atom’s setting up a training square beside the building. We’ll figure it out.”

“Good.” Mal stepped back as he started to scan the room.

They’d set up dinner as a buffet to make it easier for everyone to visit and get plates of food as they met everyone else. It was casual, laid-back, and exactly what his baby needed. Maybe it was different from a formal dinner or a ball for celebration, but having people coming in and out of the house, laughter ringing, teasing and playing happening around them, this was perfect.

Nate ran through the living room with Adam, Anton, and River chasing after him.

Beside him, Mal stumbled.

Fast as possible Ash threw out his hand to catch his friend. “Mal...Master.” He needed to watch how he addressed his best friend. Mal was a name in the past and Mal had earned the title of Master. “You okay?”

The Master’s eyes burned red as his fangs dropped. “Who. Is. That.”

Ash released his hold on the Master’s arm as his body heated. He searched the room for a threat but everyone was laughing and having a great time. Well, everyone except for Adam, who had stopped dead in the middle of the room, jaw hanging open, as he openly stared at the Master.

“Uh...” Ash looked around for his mate. He needed help. He didn’t want Adam accidentally disrespecting the Master and getting in trouble. He understood that Adam liked to joke and play around but the Master did not have a sense of humor.

“Holy shit!” Adam finally squealed.

The Master growled, low and dangerous.

Ash stepped forward to place himself in between Adam and the Master to avoid any trouble.

“Mine!” Adam declared in a loud strong voice before he ran for the Master.

Ash tried to catch Adam but the little one was stronger than he looked and shoved Ash out of the way before he leapt at the Master.

The Master shocked the hell out of Ash when he easily caught Adam and their mouths were pressed firmly together.

All movement, conversation, everything in the room went completely silent.

Well, everything except for the sound of moaning coming from Adam and the Master’s growls that were being swallowed.

“Ash.” Seb stepped up beside him and gripped his hand. “Who—”

“The Master,” Ash said.

Seb’s hand trembled in his. “The Master of punishment. The most powerful demon in the realm?”

“Yeah.” He was in such shock that Ash didn’t know what to do other than stare at his best friend. Mal...the Master was making out with Adam and if they didn’t stop soon, Ash was pretty certain that he was going to watch a lot more than just kissing.

“What...what is happening?” Seb asked him.

“I have no idea,” Ash confessed. He’d never seen his friend act that way. The Master always kept himself away from others.

“Unless they’re mates?”

“Mates?” Could it be? Mal...the Master had always assumed that his dream of having a mate was over once he’d taken his position.

The Master’s hand drifted to the back of Adam’s jeans and Axel stepped forward as if he was going to break it up.

Ash intercepted the Alpha and shook his head. “I’ll take care of it.” He didn’t want to have anyone having to go up against the Master. It wouldn’t end well.

“I’ll try to make a distraction for the other boys. Get them into the kitchen or something,” Axel said. As Axel began to herd the other party guests from the room, Ash tried to push Seb to go as well.

His mate shook his head. “I’m with you.”

Damn it. Not that he could blame his mate. He’d never leave Seb alone in a situation like this, but Ash needed his mate safe. “Stay behind me and no matter what happens, do not get between us.”

“I promise.”

As the room cleared out, the Master lurched forward and Adam’s back hit a wall. Adam was wriggling around so much

that Ash was surprised he hadn't fallen out of the Master's arms.

Ash crossed the room but made sure he didn't come up directly behind the Master. Fuck, this wasn't how he wanted the night to go. He cleared his throat but neither the Master nor Adam paid him any attention.

"Master," Ash said quietly.

Nothing.

"Mal!"

The Master yanked his mouth from Adam's and turned his head to snarl at Ash.

Adam whined as he tried to capture the Master's lips again.

"Maybe take this somewhere more private," Ash suggested kindly. "You're in the middle of a party."

The Master blinked like he didn't understand.

Adam's tongue traced the Master's jaw as the Master rocked his hips and his eyes glazed over.

Shit, this was going to hurt. Ash grabbed the back of Mal's neck. "Master! You have an audience."

His hand burned from the touch but he didn't let go.

Mal jerked out of his hold and stepped back. Adam slid down the wall, but the Master caught the boy before Adam's feet hit the ground and eased him the rest of the way down.

Adam turned his head and his green eyes flashed. "Mine."

Ash held his hands up in front of him. "I know. I just don't think you want everyone watching you two maul each other."

"He's right." The Master's deep voice was barely more than a rumble.

Adam hummed. "Then take me someplace else," he demanded.

The Master smiled. It had been so long since Ash had seen true happiness in his friend's face.

"Go," Ash encouraged. "Take your mate home." He was now certain that Adam and Mal belonged to each other. No one would have gotten a reaction out of Ash's best friend like that for any other reason.

The Master sucked in a sharp breath. "I have a mate." The awe was obvious in his tone and his voice shook.

Adam pushed off the wall to place his hands on the Master's chest. "Hi, mate. I'm Adam and I need you to take me someplace private. Can you do that for me, big guy?"

"Whatever you want. Anything," the Master vowed.

"You don't want to say that to me," Adam teased. He jumped up again so the Master was forced to catch him.

The size difference was a thing to behold.

"Take me away, my mate," Adam said to the Master.

Mal cradled Adam to his chest but looked at Ash. "Thank you, my friend. I owe you one. I'd totally lost my head."

Ash nodded toward where Adam was trying to get Mal's shirt open. "You are going to have your hands full, and I couldn't be happier for you. You deserve this brother. Go. Go be with your mate."

Mal smiled, and he was Mal, not the Master in that moment.

"We'll talk soon," Ash promised.

As Mal stalked away, carrying Adam from the house, Ash turned back to his own mate. Seb was paler than Ash liked.

"You okay?" Ash asked, drawing Seb to him.

"That was crazy," Seb whispered.

"Another mating pair found," Ash told him.

Seb's eyes grew wide before he began to dance around. "And this time it was your best friend with someone from my

family.”

“Connections,” Ash said. “We might need to add that as a line in your study. How the connections to other mated pairs play into the whole number games.”

“Yes! Another avenue to explore,” Seb said.

“Is it safe to come out?” his mother called.

Ash laughed. “Yes! Let the party commence!”

There were cheers and shouting and Ash lowered his head to kiss his mate. Seb responded beautifully. The party picked up around them but all Ash cared about was the happy sigh that he swallowed.

Chapter Eighteen

Seb

Seb turned off the light of the clean kitchen as he exited the room. Ash's parents had stayed behind to help clean up after the party but Ash was currently walking them out as Seb closed down the house.

He hadn't made a lot of changes to the house and he didn't know if he would. The important part of having a home for him was the security of knowing that he and Ash would end up in their bed every night no matter what. He had a true partner in every sense of the word.

He strolled through the living room, shutting off lamps before he reached the hall. Seb peered at the pictures on the wall. From one end of the hall to the other were photos of Ash's family, and even some of him with friends like the Master. It showed Ash from a young demon to the man he looked like today. Seb enjoyed seeing the different stages that Ash had been through in his life.

"We need to get pictures of you and your brothers and the rest of the family to add to the hall."

Seb glanced over his shoulder as Ash sauntered toward him. "I don't even know if we have any. Pictures weren't something that my parents ever cared about and we couldn't afford school pictures on our own."

"That is the past but that doesn't mean that we can't make up for it. I know my mom took pictures throughout the night. We'll go through those."

"Your mom was amazing," Seb said. He still couldn't believe that the beautiful woman who hadn't looked old enough to have so many children had immediately pulled Seb into her arms, hugging him. She'd praised Seb for how happy he made Ash and even said she was proud of him.

He knew that his brothers were proud of him but to have a parent's approval had filled a part of his heart that he hadn't even known was empty. Seb kept thinking about everything that Ash was giving to him just for being his mate and found it difficult to see what he gave in return.

Turning, he leaned against the wall. "Tell me you're happy."

Ash frowned as he caged Seb in with his hands planted on either side of Seb's head. "I've never been happier in my life."

"You'd tell me if you needed something else?"

"Baby." Ash pressed their chests together as he stared in Seb's eyes. "Of course, I would. We're a team. I will always be honest with you."

"I can't help it that sometimes I don't think I'm good enough."

Ash pressed his lips together and Seb worried that he'd pissed off his mate. "I'm sorry."

"No." Ash shook his head. "You don't need to be sorry. I can't understand how you feel because you've given me so much. I truly never thought I'd find someone who would love me like you do. Baby, the way you look at me, you wear your heart on your sleeve. You make me feel like the luckiest being in the world. You are my everything, so it bothers me that you don't think you're enough."

Seb started to respond but Ash pecked his lips with a kiss.

"Just listen," Ash said. "I don't understand but I do get it. It is something that I'll remember and help you work on. That's what mates do."

"I do love you. You're my everything too." Seb rose to his toes and attacked Ash's mouth.

Ash opened for him, letting Seb take the lead.

He ran his palms under Ash's shirt, up his back, to brush his fingers over the feathers of his mate's wings. He loved that

Ash didn't hide his true form from Seb. Breaking the kiss, Seb panted up at his mate. "Fuck me. I want it so hard that I feel you for days."

Ash's fangs dropped and he growled as he picked Seb up and threw him over his shoulder.

He squeaked but didn't have time to even catch his breath as Ash ran into the bedroom and slammed the door closed. Before Seb knew what was happening, he was flipped over and sailed through the air.

His breath whooshed out of him as he bounced on the bed. Ash dove and covered his body. Their mouths fused back together. Seb loved being kissed by Ash. Ash showed all his feelings through his kisses.

"Clothes," Seb grunted against Ash's mouth. "Get rid of your clothes."

Ash sat up on his knees and tugged the shirt over his head. As much as Seb enjoyed watching Ash get naked for him, he was more interested in them just getting naked. He shimmed out of his clothes until his jeans got caught at his ankles.

Seb flopped back. "Shoes."

Ash laughed as he helped Seb remove his shoes, socks, and tugged Seb's jeans and underwear off. Once he was naked, Seb grabbed Ash's shoulder and pulled him back on top. He craved the weight of his mate pinning him down.

"Hold on, baby, I have to get the lube."

"Hurry," Seb whined. "Not too much prep. I want to feel it."

His mate had just reached for the bottle of lube and he fumbled with it at Seb's words. If just his words could do that, then Seb needed to work more magic to push his mate.

He sucked on Ash's Adam's apple while using his thumb to tease Ash's nipples.

“You’re playing with fire, my little mate.” Ash popped open the cap.

“Guess you’ll have to teach me a lesson. A very hard lesson.” Seb rubbed his cock against Ash’s stomach.

“Fuck.” Ash spat the word as he coated his fingers.

Seb spread his legs to allow Ash the access he needed. All he cared about was getting Ash’s cock deep inside him.

Ash’s finger probed at his entrance and Seb bore down to get that digit to slip inside. He didn’t stop pushing down until he swallowed Ash’s finger. It burned but it was a good burn.

Rocking, he used Ash’s finger to open himself when his mate didn’t move fast enough.

“Baby,” Ash growled.

“Need it. Need you.”

Ash pulled his finger out and immediately pressed two against his hole. That was more like it. This time Ash didn’t allow Seb to take control—he spread his digits and opened Seb up.

It was messy, sloppy, and quick but eventually Ash was coating his cock with lube and Seb’s legs shook as he waited.

As Ash pressed the tip of his cock to his hole, Seb wrapped his arms around Ash’s back and up to his shoulders. He held on tight as Ash pushed inside with one long hard thrust. Ash gripped his hips in his big hands as he pounded into him just like Seb had requested.

Ash’s cock brushed over his magic button and euphoric pleasure pulsed through every nerve ending in his body. His entire core heated, and all Seb could do was hold on and enjoy the ride.

The loud slap of their bodies coming together echoed around the room as they mated. This wasn’t about making love—yes there was love there, but this was Ash claiming his body, giving Seb what he needed. Appreciating every way that

they could come together, Seb threw his head back as Ash plowed inside him.

It was all too much and Seb couldn't hold back the pleasure.

He yelled out his release as his cock erupted, coating both of their stomachs. Ash's fangs had dropped, and Seb turned his head to the side to reveal his mating mark.

"Do it. Bite me again."

Ash didn't hesitate and his fangs sank deep. Seb's mark throbbed as their bond was renewed.

Heat filled his passage as Ash came.

With a heavy satisfied sigh, Seb collapsed back onto the mattress after Ash removed his fangs. He blinked to peer up at his mate. "Thank you."

Ash laughed. "I love you, baby. You don't have to thank me for giving us both what we want."

"Stay inside me." Seb continued to hold Ash tightly. "For as long as you can."

"Whatever my mate wants." Ash kissed him.

Eventually they slowed the kiss and Ash's cock softened and slipped from Seb's body. Even as they relaxed, and Seb knew that they should clean up, Seb couldn't separate from Ash. Couldn't let go.

Ash's soft snoring filled the room as he dozed.

Seb took the time to run his hands over every inch of flesh that he could reach. He rubbed the soft feathers of Ash's wings between his fingers, finding comfort there. His mind went to events earlier with the Master and Adam. Seb had missed the Master's arrival but he hadn't missed how the massive beast had reacted to his friend.

Adam hadn't been shy in all the times that he bluntly stated he wanted a mate of his own. Seb had hoped that Adam

would be one of the next to find their mate, but he had not expected it to happen at Seb's party.

He found himself smiling.

Now that he'd settled on what he wanted to spend all his time doing, how he could help those around him, those he cared for, Seb had found a true purpose. He was happy and loved. Giddiness swamped him and Seb had to clamp his lips to keep from giggling out loud.

Was this the feeling that he'd been missing all his life? Was this how his brothers felt when they were wrapped in their mate's arms as the night settled around him? Seb closed his eyes making a wish to whoever might be listening that he would figure out how to help mates to be found once again.

Chapter Nineteen

Ash

“Baby.” Ash brushed the hair off Seb’s forehead as he whispered into his mate’s ear. “Wake up for me.”

Seb frowned but sleepily blinked his eyes open.

“Hey, sweetheart. I need to go. I was wondering if you wanted to come with me?”

“Where are you going?” He tried to sit up and Ash slipped his arm around his boy to help.

“I’ve been summoned.” That got his baby’s attention.

“I can go with you?”

“Yes, can you get dressed real quick?” It was good that they’d woken up in the middle of the night dirty, sticky, and sweaty and had jumped in the shower.

“Two minutes!” Seb scrambled out of the bed toward the bathroom.

Ash heard the water in the sink turn on as he headed toward the closet. There wasn’t a ton of options for him as Ash favored leather pants and a flowing shirt with the sides spilt to make room for his wings. He pulled on his clothes before he grabbed a pair of jeans and a long-sleeved T-shirt for his mate. He set Seb’s clothes on the bed as he went to the dresser.

He pulled out two pairs of socks as thin arms came around his waist.

“I am so excited!” Seb said. “But then I feel bad because this means that someone has died. I don’t know how I’ll handle that.”

Ash captured Seb’s hands in his and spun around. Seb peered up at him with worry evident in his eyes. He kissed his mate gently, tasting the fresh mint flavor from Seb’s freshly brushed teeth. He leaned back before he led his mate to the bed.

“It’s not always easy,” he said truthfully. “Especially when the death is violent or sudden.”

“That’s what I’m worried about.”

“But we’re there to soothe the transition. It doesn’t matter what they did in the past, good or evil. We help take them to purgatory where they will be judged for the life they led. Some go willingly, some don’t, and some are just scared. There are also those that have been suffering and the relief of pain being gone makes them thankful. We never know where we’ll go or who we’ll meet, but we have a duty to perform. That’s all.”

“I’ll try to keep that in mind.”

“I know where we’ll be going, and I have an idea of who we will collect. That’s why I wanted you to come with me today.”

“Where are we going? What realm?”

Ash smiled. “One of the oldest and most secretive realms that is home to some of the old-world Gods. They settled in the realm in modern times as they stopped being worshipped and served their purpose. We’ll be going to Magnesia, which is in the Foloji forest.”

“Okay.” Seb took a deep breath.

“Let’s finish getting dressed. I don’t want our charge to be alone after he passes.”

“Do you often get told before someone passes?”

“No, not often. This is a special case.”

Seb rose and dressed while Ash finished pulling on his socks and boots. They were ready to go fifteen minutes after the sigil had gone off. He held his mate’s hand as he opened the portal to allow them to travel.

“I’m ready.” Seb squeezed his hand.

Ash stepped through the portal with Seb by his side. The Foloji forest was a small piece of old-world beauty. Not many people were granted access to their hidden gem. Ash himself

had been there less than a handful of times. The species there were immortal, so for one of them to pass over meant it was a choice they made.

“Wow.” Seb tipped his head back peering up at the thirty-to-forty-foot trees that surrounded them. The colors were muted compared to those on earth but just the size of everything was bigger.

“Come with me.” Ash kept hold of Seb’s hand making their way to the clearing where they would wait.

They walked through two massive trees to stand above the open meadow. Centaurs galloped in the clearing while circling a pure white male as he stretched his face up to the sky.

“We’ll wait until he’s ready,” Ash told his mate.

Seb’s mouth hung open as he stared at the half-horse, half-man creatures before them. “Ash.”

“Centaurs are one of the most peaceful species in existence. They’ve never had a war or been in any kind of battle. They’re immortal, so unless some sort of tragic event or accident happens, we don’t help them pass often. Sometimes they’ll request to transcend on their own. That’s what has happened this time. Jonanish is the oldest living centaur and has decided to leave this world to move on to his eternal sleep.”

“That’s sad but sort of peaceful.”

Ash beamed at his mate. Seb understood. Being immortal didn’t mean that one couldn’t transcend to their final resting place. Sometimes, some creatures accomplished everything they wanted and needed to find their final peace.

All at once, the centaurs in the meadows circled and bent their front legs as Jonanish walked down the middle. Jonanish’s head was held high even as tears flowed down his face.

Jonanish was a beautiful man, long snow-white hair, chiseled features, and kind blue eyes. His horse half was

gorgeous, with every inch a pure white.

“He’s so pretty,” Seb breathed.

Ash didn’t feel any jealousy. Seb merely spoke the truth and Ash knew his mate loved him.

Jonanish left his brethren behind as he climbed the steep landscape that led to where Ash and Seb waited. Ash pulled Seb back beneath the canopy of the tall trees so Jonanish had room to maneuver.

“Reaper Ash,” Jonanish said. “Thank you for coming.”

Ash bowed. “My deepest respect, Jonanish.”

Jonanish smiled as he moved his gaze to Seb. “This must be your special mate. Word has even reached us here. Congratulations to you both.”

Seb stepped forward, placed his hand over his heart, and bowed his head. “Thank you. It is a true honor to be here with you.”

Pride filled him. Seb was a natural mate to a Reaper. Collecting the soul of the departed wouldn’t always be easy but this was a chance to offer his mate a look at what could be the positive side of his job.

“The honor is mine,” Jonanish responded. “I have something for you.” He pulled a rolled parchment of paper from his saddle bag.

Seb walked forward to accept the gift.

“All recorded matings for my people since I was birthed.”

“Thank you. I hope that this information will help others find mates.”

Jonanish nodded. “My own mate passed five decades ago. I have made the decision to join her in eternal sleep. My life is only half fulfilled with her gone. I hope others find the love and peace I was blessed with for so long.”

“I will do everything in my power to complete this task to the best of my ability.”

“I have no doubt.” Jonanish returned his attention to Ash. “I’m ready, Reaper.”

Ash stepped forward. It was not often that he helped someone pass to the other side, but he did have the ability. Jonanish bent his legs to rest on the thick dew-covered mossy ground. Jonanish closed his eyes but held strong and firm.

“Sleep in peace,” Ash whispered. He leaned forward and placed his lips in the middle of Jonanish’s forehead.

Ash pushed his power into the other creature.

A low, heavy sigh released from between Jonanish’s lips before he smiled.

Ash caught the heavy body of the Centaur and laid him gently to lie on the ground. Jonanish’s family would take care of the physical body while Ash cared for the soul. Jonanish’s body was at rest as white smoke rose and his shape took form. He looked as if he had when he was alive but the vision was thinner.

“Come, my friend.” Ash offered his hand to Jonanish’s soul form. There was no point in hanging around. He needed to help Jonanish move on.

Seb moved to the other side and held Jonanish’s other hand.

They began to walk and Ash opened a portal wide enough for the three of them to step forward. Exiting into purgatory had a chill come over him. Purgatory was neither good or evil but merely a place where judgement took place before the souls passed to their final place. It was barren and empty.

From the north, bright white light flashed.

Ash smiled. “Your mate awaits you.” He stepped back and went to his own mate as the soul of Jonanish’s mate reared onto her back legs and called for him.

Galloping forward, Jonanish's soul raced toward his eternal resting place with his soul's mate. Ash beamed as Seb settled under his arm and they watched until the two souls were out of sight.

"Thank you for coming with me," Ash said while hugging Seb to his side.

"I appreciate you showing me this. I know that not all collections will be so peaceful but I also saw what we're fighting for. Two souls being together in life and in eternity."

"Yes, my mate." Ash turned to face his boy. "I want to spend the rest of my immortal life and all of eternity with you. One day, if we make the decision to take our final sleep, we will only do so together."

Seb wrapped his arms around Ash's neck as he moved to his tiptoes. "Agreed. From this moment forward, we do everything together. Always."

"Always." Ash kissed his sweet mate deeply before the chill of the air had him shivering. If he was cold, then his boy would be freezing. He lifted Seb off his feet.

He opened a portal and carried his mate through and into the library.

Ash froze as they were greeted by a low moan coming behind the stacks of bookcases.

"Hello!" Ash called as Seb giggled in his arms.

"Coming!" Ari called back before a growl split the silence.

"Don't let us stop you from coming," Ash teased. "We'll just entertain ourselves."

Seb smacked his arm after Ash set him onto his feet. "Be nice."

Ash winked. "I'm totally being nice right now. I like seeing Ari happy." He followed Seb over to the table where their previous work was still laid out.

“I can’t wait to check this out. It was nice of Jonanish to give this to us.” Seb sat and opened his laptop.

That reminded Ash that he’d planned to order Seb a newer faster model so he could continue his work. Also his stomach rumbled, reminding him that they’d skipped breakfast.

“How about I go get us some breakfast?” he offered.

“Coffee, lots of coffee,” Seb said although he didn’t take his attention from his computer.

“I promise lots of coffee.” He turned for the door as Ari stumbled from where he’d been hidden.

“Did I hear a promise of coffee?” Ari asked.

“And food,” Seb said. “I bet you were working up an appetite.”

Ari blushed as Atom came up behind him. Both demons were a little ruffled.

“You hungry, baby?” Atom asked as he kissed the side of Ari’s horn.

“Yes,” Ari hissed and shivered.

“I’ll go with you,” Atom said to Ash.

“Sounds good.” He waited until Atom joined them before heading to the front door.

It was still early enough that there weren’t many people walking down the streets of their community.

“Did you find out anything about the building next to the library?” he asked.

“The Master emailed me a copy of the deed this morning. The previous owner moved to another realm and I emailed him an offer. I hope, since he hasn’t returned, that he’ll be willing to sell it to turn it into a new training facility. We’ve needed more room. We’ve had a lot of new demons come into their powers the last couple of years. Our numbers are strong.”

“Let me know if I can help in any way,” Ash offered.

“Thank you.” Atom stopped walking and faced him. “I know that you and the Master have always looked out for Ari. I wanted to thank you for that.”

“Ari has always been a sweet demon,” Ash stated. “He needs a strong mate that will spoil him and also keep the bad away from him. Let him bury himself in his books and get lost.”

“Just like your mate.”

“Yes, our mates are going to be close and I am proud to now call you brother.” He offered his hand.

Atom nodded before they clasped palms. “I will protect both our mates. Above all else.”

“I vow as well.”

Pact made and accepted, they returned to the mission of feeding and providing coffee for their busy little mates.

Chapter Twenty

Seb

Seb laughed as Ash's mom, Maria, smacked one of the flowers that nipped at her fingers.

Maria had called and asked if she could come work in the garden around Ash's house and if he'd like to learn how to care for them. Of course, Seb had jumped at the chance. Not only did he want to learn about the plants around their home but he also enjoyed talking to Maria. Maria called every night to check in on him and Ash. He spoke more to Ash's mom than Ash did.

"Sneaky little bastards," Maria said fondly.

"And yet they're still your favorite," Seb pointed out. He had his hands buried deep in the realm's unique soil. The dirt and mulch mix was warm, not cool like in the human world, but silky.

"They are. The first flower that my mate ever brought me." Maria beamed at him. "It's the little things that truly matter. There are a lot of big moments that you'll remember, but the million tiny things we do for our mates are what shows us how they really feel."

Remembering the shiny brand-new laptop that Ash had gifted him with the previous night, Seb nodded. He hadn't needed a new laptop, but Ash wanted to make sure Seb had the best so that his research never got lost. He knew how important that was to Seb and wanted to help.

Seb accepted the small sprout that he had been making a spot for. A bright orange bud that when was fully grown would be the size of a sunflower. Seb was excited to have something in the garden that had been planted by his own hand and that he could nurture. Seb was making his mark on their home.

Maria helped him get his new plant down and covered. Sitting back on his heels, Seb peered at the row of buds put down by his own hands, satisfaction filling him.

“Why don’t I go inside and get us something cold to drink?” Maria offered.

Wiping the sweat from his brow, Seb nodded. He was mostly comfortable with the climate in his new home realm but it could get a little warm for him.

“Wow, look at my friend with his hands dirty from real hard work.”

Seb grinned over his shoulder as Adam hurried up the black sand walkway toward him. “Adam!” He rose and held his arms open. He hadn’t seen or heard from his friend since the night he’d disappeared with the Master.

The hulking beast walking behind Adam shook his head as Adam tackle-hugged Seb.

Seb closed his arms around Adam. Finally, someone around the realm that was his size. “How are you?”

Adam wiggled away before he jerked the collar of his shirt down showing off his mating mark.

“I’m so happy for you!” Seb gushed.

“Thanks!” Adam danced back over to his massive mate to tug him forward. “Sorry for hijacking your mating celebration, but when my man caught sight of me, he couldn’t help but lose his mind.”

“Boy!” the Master growled. “You’re cruising for a spanking.”

Adam beamed and batted his eyelashes. “Am I, Daddy? Are you sure?”

The Master smiled back at his mate before nodding to Seb. “I didn’t get to pass along my congratulations that night.”

“I appreciate it and congratulations right back.” Seb knew that the Master was Ash’s oldest and best friend. He wanted to

make a good impression, but nerves had him shifting uncomfortably.

“I don’t mean to make you nervous. I have that effect on others.” The Master took a step back and Adam frowned at him.

“No!” Seb raised one dirty hand to stop. “You don’t make me uncomfortable or anything. I’m just nervous because of your relationship with Ash.” He dipped his head. “I want you to like me.”

“Oh, Seb!” Adam cried but the Master held his boy back.

“Sebastian,” the Master said as he took a step forward. “I already like you. I have always believed in fate’s decisions and the moment Ash found you, you became my family as well.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, Master,” Seb responded sincerely.

The Master’s lip twitched. He glanced back at Adam quickly before rolling his shoulders to hold his head up. “Family can call me Mal.”

“You haven’t been Mal for a long time. It’s good to see that part of you back.” Ash stepped out of the house, carrying a glass of iced tea. He handed the glass to Seb before turning toward Mal. “Damn good to see that part of you back.”

Ash and Mal hugged. Seb grinned as he took a sip of his drink.

“Aww, my big guy gives the best hugs. I want in on it!” Adam rushed his mate and Ash to throw his arms around them.

Seb took a long drink before setting his glass down and joining in too. He couldn’t help himself.

Mal’s booming laughter shook them. “Okay, enough of this mushy shit.”

The hug ended as Mal drew back.

“Oh, Daddy! You love the mushy shit.” Adam jumped into Mal’s arms and the Master caught him. As soon as the Master...no, Seb mentally corrected himself, Mal, had Adam in his arms, a softness came over him. The transformation was awe-inspiring.

Mal cleared his throat. “We came to ask you to have dinner with us. We’re holding off on our celebration until Adam’s Alpha returns from his trip, but we would like to share a meal with the two of you.”

“And Ari and Atom,” Adam added.

“Yes, we’ll be extending an invite to them as well.”

“We’d love too,” Seb replied before Ash had a chance. He didn’t doubt that his mate would accept but he was excited to be around another newly mated couple.

“Cool! I can’t wait to show you our house. It’s so big. And my minions are already working on fixing up a playroom.”

Mal groaned. “The lesser demons are not your minions,” he tried to correct his mate.

Adam turned huge wide eyes to Seb and blinked slowly before smiling. “Of course. My mistake. They are in no way my minions.”

“Fuck, man,” Ash laughed. “Your mate is perfect for you.”

“Of course he is,” Mal responded. “The fates don’t make mistakes. Although my mate better behave before he finds himself across my knees.”

“Don’t threaten me with a good time.” Adam smacked a kiss on Mal’s cheek.

The Master continued to hold Adam as if he weighed nothing at all. Adam appeared right at home in the big demon’s hold.

“We must be on our way if you wish to invite Ari and Atom and make a quick trip to the human realm to grab some

of your belongings.” Mal motioned toward the road.

“So wait!” Seb said. “You’re moving here? To this realm?”
Could Seb be so lucky?

“Yep. My mate is super important here and he needs my help.” Adam gave a little shimmer of his hips before looking up at Mal like he hung the moon.

“Your help?” Ash questioned. Seb wanted to know as well.

Adam stroked Mal’s neck. “He has a problem leaving behind work. My minions told me so. I have to make sure my mate relaxes at night so he can perform his duty to the best of his abilities. He has to keep on his toes and with a sharp mind so he can punish the worst of the worst.”

“Not your minions,” Mal muttered.

“Perfect!” Ash seemed excited.

Seb peered around at the other three males standing with him. They gave the fates a lot of credit. It seemed that there was reason for it. “I’m so glad you’re moving here. It will be nice to have a friend close by.”

“Mal is going to make it where I can go to the human realm for work and to visit everyone, but my place is beside my mate.”

“Baby.” Mal kissed Adam. The kiss was deep and dirty.

Adam groaned as he wiggled in his mate’s arms.

Ash shared an amused look with Seb before he cleared his throat.

“Not sorry,” Adam said after he pulled away. “My big guy can’t help himself.”

Seb shook his head. Adam had always been a little bit extra but Seb could see that was exactly what Mal needed. Mal was the most powerful demon in the realm but even he needed to be reminded to take a break. “Dinner?”

“If you can come to our house tonight at seven, please,” Mal invited.

“We’ll be there,” Ash promised.

“K! See you then.” Adam pointed toward the street. “Onward, my steed. We have people to invite and places to be!”

Mal chuckled but dutifully carried Adam away.

“Wow.” Ash tugged Seb closer. “Your friend is going to be so good for Mal.”

“I’m glad that Adam seems to already be working his magic. The way you described the Master, I was expecting a very stern and strait-laced demon.”

“He is the Master of punishment,” Ash said.

“But that’s not all he was or his. He’s Mal too.”

“I tried to remind him of that, but Mal always said that when he accepted his gifts, he’d given up who he used to be.”

“And now he has a sassy little mate to remind him,” Seb pointed out.

“That he does.” Ash lowered his mouth and Seb knew what his mate was going to do.

Seb covered Ash’s mouth with his finger. “Where’s your mom.”

“She went home. She said she’d call you later. Mal and Adam had just showed up when I portaled home.”

“How did your collection go?”

“Great,” Adam responded. “Older woman, ninety-five, and when she reached purgatory, her husband, two of her sons, parents, and three dogs welcomed her home.”

Seb smiled. He liked when Ash collected good souls. When a good souls reached purgatory their loved ones that had passed on before them were always there to great the new soul that would transcend. Ash had explained the deference

between purgatory in regards to good and evil souls. A few days ago, Ash had returned with bruises and a tear in his shirt from a violent job. The Hellhounds had to be called in to help with the collection. It was a reminder that not everyone went peacefully to their final resting place. Ash had assured him that the man who'd fought the collection was now under Mal's thumb. Maybe Seb would have a talk with Mal about the person who had harmed his mate.

“So since my mom's gone, can I kiss you?”

Seb held up his dirty hands. “I'm sweaty and dirty. Maybe you want to share a shower?”

“Yes,” Ash agreed. “First I want my kiss though.”

Seb relaxed in Ash's arms as his mate's lips met his. He kissed Ash back until his head spun, leaving him clinging to the Reaper.

“Shower?” Ash asked against his lips.

“Yes please.” He was lifted off his feet. Seb wrapped his arms around Ash's neck as he was carted into the house. Ash closed the door behind him and Seb cleared his throat.

“What?” Ash stopped in the entry.

Seb dropped his gaze to the lock.

“Yes, dear.” He turned the deadbolt.

“Good job.” He praised his mate even when he received a snort in return. Ash might not be worried about danger in their home but Seb felt better even if it was just locking the door. Ash didn't fight him about it but he didn't always remember. “Onward. Shower please.”

He squealed when Ash pinched his ass. “Don't be picking up bad habits from your friend. You can just as easily find yourself over my lap.”

“As Adam would say, don't threaten me with a good time.”

“I’m going to do more than just threaten you. You’ll be wearing my marks up and down your body before we go to dinner.”

Seb shivered. There were always fingerprints, teeth marks, or light bruises left behind. They were sexy as fuck to see. “Promises. Promises.”

“One thing you need to remember,” Ash said, “I am a man of my word.” He licked at the sensitive mating mark on Seb’s shoulder.

“Mmm,” Seb hummed. He could probably get more than one orgasm out of his mate before they left for dinner.

Chapter Twenty-One

Seb

Being at the core for the first time, Seb couldn't keep his eyes settled on one thing. It was hotter there, louder, nothing like the community that he shared with his mate.

Unease skittered down his back as a long high-pitched scream ripped through the night.

"It's alright." Ash squeezed his hand. "This was why I wanted to portal straight to Mal's home."

"I wanted to—"

"You wanted to see where Adam would be living."

"Yeah." Seb shuddered.

"It might not be the prettiest of places but it does serve a purpose."

"I know. And I know that what happens here serves a purpose. Adam's just so full of life. I worry."

"You'll be here for him. Adam also has an open ticket to and from the human realm."

"That's true." Seb squeezed Ash's hand. "Thanks for bringing me. I know you hate it."

"I want to protect you from everything. That's just my instincts."

"You are such a good mate," Seb told him. "Let's go before we're late."

Ash led Seb from the hill they stood on. They walked over the red dirt until they came to a neighborhood. The houses were big, made of black rocks, and the red dirt under their feet changed to silver sand.

While different from his home, this part of the core was homier than the hills he'd first seen. The houses were far

enough apart that there was plenty of privacy but still close enough to be called neighborhoods.

“This is different.” Ash pointed ahead of him. “I’ve never seen trees like that here before. Those are lining Mal’s property lines and weren’t there the last time I visited.”

“Adam.” Seb smiled. The tall bushy trees reminded Seb of the forest outside his home on the human realm.

“I believe your friend has set up a line of protection for his mate.”

Seb didn’t know much about Adam’s ability. He knew he was part Fae, that he had a connection with trees, but this did seem like a barrier from the outside world.

“The more I learn about your family members, the more I’m impressed. I can see why the pack has been blessed,” Ash stated.

He just hummed in agreement. He still had a lot of work to do but Seb was happy with the amount of assistance that he was receiving. There was still a long way to go but he had faith. He trusted the fates as much as his mate did.

Turning the corner, they stepped onto the path that led to the front door. The white stone pavers lit up as they stepped on each one.

The front door opened.

“They work!” Adam yelled. “Yes! I wasn’t sure how my magic would work in this environment, but it seems to be stronger.”

“That might have something to do with your mate. In some circumstances, a mating can strengthen a Fae’s magic,” Ash said as they reached the porch.

“Oh, that’s true. I’ll call my mom and ask. Anyway, come in, come in.” Adam waved them forward.

With Ash’s hand on the small of his back, Seb entered through the massive door. It made sense with how big Mal

was. The tall entry opened into a large living room stuffed full of comfortable-looking furniture and his friends.

Mal rose from a huge leather chair that faced the entry. Atom and Ari were on one couch, and Levi stood from another.

“Levi!” Seb hurried to his friend and gave him a quick hug before doing the same with Ari. “I didn’t know you’d be here,” he said to Levi after greeting everyone else.

“I asked if I could attend as a representative of the family when Adam came to pick up some of his things. The others will come to the formal celebration, but I felt like someone from home should be here to show Mal that he’s a part of the family.”

Seb beamed. “That’s fantastic.”

“And I appreciate it,” Mal commented. “Adam’s chosen family is just as important as his biological. I gained quite a bit when I found my boy.”

Adam rushed over to his mate. “We’ve both gained so much.” He twirled around. “And let me introduce you to my minions.” He clapped his hands. “Minions!”

“Not minions,” Mal muttered.

Three small demons came into the living room with smiles on their faces. Seb stared at them in surprise. He’d never seen demons smaller than him. They barely reached Seb’s shoulder.

“Guys, this is Siezmen, Notel, and Gammer. They work for Mal and have agreed to complete my evil plan to take over the world.”

The demons laughed and shook their heads but it was obvious that they liked Adam.

“Not taking over the world,” Mal said quietly.

Levi laughed. Seb wasn’t sure that he’d ever heard that sound from the normally stoic man. “Good luck with that. Adam is a handful.”

“I have big hands.” Mal hugged Adam to his side as the boy frowned at them.

“That is not nice!” Adam stomped his foot. “Don’t make me sic my minions on you.”

Wow, Adam was sure going to rock the Master of punishment’s world. And that seemed like a very good thing.

“Dinner is ready to be served,” one of the demons said.

“Shall we head into the dining room?” Mal extended his hand.

“Sounds good.” Seb walked with Ash into a large dining room. The table was set with fancy plates with the middle laden down with platters of food.

They sat where directed, Mal at the head of the table with Adam to his right. Ash sat to Mal’s left, Seb next to his mate, and Levi beside him. Ari was directly in front of Seb with Atom by his side.

The three demons took up the other three seats.

“Thank you for cooking,” Adam told the demons. “I’m going to have to introduce you three to Drake. You should have been chefs.”

The demons blushed and smiled.

Seb took a good look at Adam. Adam played around a lot but he was a good guy. Seb could see how happy everyone in the room was and how the demons brightened at the praise.

His friend was already making the Hell realm just a little better.

Ash slid his hand to Seb’s knee. Seb looked over at his mate and was hit with a wave of love for his mate. He smiled before bringing Ash’s hand to his lips.

Mal held up a wine glass. “To family.”

Seb picked up his own and nodded along with everyone else. “To family.” Because that was just what they were.

* * * * *

Seb

Seb covered his yawn with his hand but sound still escaped.

“We’re home, baby.” Ash placed Seb on his feet.

The entire evening had been wonderful and Seb was grateful that he’d gotten to celebrate Adam’s mating. There would be a bigger party later. Unlike Seb, Adam loved to be the center of attention. Mal was an important person in the realm, maybe *the* most important person, so a formal party was expected. Thank goodness Seb’s mate had understood he didn’t want all that attention.

“I have a surprise for you.” Ash took the key from his pocket and unlocked the door.

Seb grinned. His mate was so good to him. Even if Ash had faith that no one would break in, he locked his door for Seb’s peace of mind. “You locking the door?”

Ash snorted. “No, baby.” He pushed open the door and waved Seb inside.

Stepping inside his home, Seb looked around but he didn’t spot anything different or out of place. “What?”

“Finally!” Gaston stepped into view with a black bundle in his arms. “I have other duties to perform tonight.”

“We appreciate you bringing her by,” Ash told the demon as he wrapped his arm around Seb’s shoulders.

“Her?” Seb asked. “What’s going on?”

Gaston huffed. “She’s now your responsibility. I’ve brought over everything that she needs. She’ll make one hell of a guard and Samson and Lexi are very pleased with this development.”

Seb nearly fumbled with the pup as Gaston shoved her into Seb’s arms. He peered down at the sweet face. “Jasmine.”

“Jasmine has expressed interest in being a guard. She’ll still be part of her pack and help as they grow into their powers, but that is not the path that she has chosen. She wants to be with you.” Ash petted the top of Jasmine’s head.

“I...I get to keep her?” Seb whispered, almost afraid to hope.

“Yes, baby. She’s ours. She’ll serve as your guard wherever you go.”

“My girl.” Lowering his face, he rubbed his cheek against Jasmine’s warm flesh. He’d never considered he’d be able to keep a Hellhound pup. “Are you sure?” Seb hated to ask.

“She chose you,” Gaston said with a kind smile. “This is what she wants.” He straightened and the frown returned. “You know how to care for her, Reaper. I will be checking in.”

“Yes, Gaston.”

“Samson and Lexi will be in and out of here and will bring Jasmine’s siblings often.”

“They are always welcome,” Ash replied.

Jasmine lifted her head and licked Seb’s chin. He was astonished that this little creature would choose to stay with him.

“I left her belongings, food, and a few favorites in the kitchen.” Gaston waved his hand behind him. “I need to return to the house.”

“Thank you, Gaston,” Seb said sincerely.

The demon huffed but smiled back at him before he poofed out right in front of him.

“What?” Seb stared where Gaston had been standing.

“Dramatic demon,” Ash muttered.

Seb turned to his mate. “I really get to keep her?”

“You do, baby. She’s ours.”

“You’ve given me so much. Every minute of our mating has been amazing.”

“And it will just get better.” Ash bent and kissed him. “You imprinted on me the moment I heard your sweet laugh. I love you, my little duckling.”

“I love you too, Daddy mate.”

“Let’s go get our girl settled in and then Daddy is going to take you to bed.”

Seb smiled. And his life just got better and better. His mate didn’t care if he was a nerdy, skinny human. The fates had deemed them a perfect match and Seb wouldn’t stop until he figured out how to bless others with this gift.

Thank You

For reading Duckling: Unlocked Mates

I hope you enjoyed Seb and Ash's story. I will admit that I hadn't planned to add Adam finding his mate to the mix, but when I was writing about Mal, I knew he needed a sassy mate to keep him on his toes. Who better than our little troublemaker? Keep reading for two bonus chapters of Adam and Mal.

As you can see, we're moving along with the series and there are two more books planned until the end. Next, we will see Levi find the man that has been deemed his perfect match.

If you enjoyed this story, please consider leaving a review. Being a self-published author, the easiest way to help get the word out about my books is by leaving a review from where you purchased the story. The number of reviews helps with being found in the huge world of Amazon.

About the Author

Athens Steller is a self-published author of MM & MMM Daddy kink books.

Athena Steller is the alter ego for MF paranormal author Crissy Smith. Under the name Crissy Smith she has been published since 2008 with Totally Entwined Publishing, becoming an Amazon bestselling paranormal romance author.

Athena first entered the writing world in December 2019 with the release of the *Daddy's Boy* series. Writing the Athena books has given her a chance to explore an entire new genre. It's been an adventure so far and opening exciting new opportunities.

Athena/Crissy is the mom to a wonderful twenty-four-year-old daughter, dog mom to three crazy Labrador retrievers, and is addicted to coffee. Her dream is to one day get to write full time to share all of the stories that are locked inside her. In the meantime, she will continue to release books as often as possible.

For more information about Athena's upcoming book please visit the brand new website:

www.athenasteller.com

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Adam's Big Guy

Unlocked Mates

Athena Steller

Chapter One

Adam

Racing from the kitchen with his stolen cupcake, Adam chased after Nate with Anton and River. He laughed as Nate made a beeline for Bo as if the Hellhound Alpha would save him.

A scent caught his attention and he stumbled to a stop. Hot lava, sulfur, and chili peppers. Where was that intriguing smell coming from? He peered around the room until he spotted the tallest demon he'd ever seen. The demon was beside Ash and even made the Reaper look small.

He. Was. Gorgeous.

Adam took a deep breath and that was when it hit him. There was only one reason that he would have this reaction to anyone.

The demon's head came up and he locked eyes with Adam. The huge demon's fangs dropped and his eyes burned red.

"Holy shit!" Adam squealed. It was happening. It was really happening.

The demon growled. It was low and dangerous and Adam's cock pulsed.

"Mine!" he declared with all the authority inside him before he started to run across the room. He ran into someone, but Adam didn't care. Eyes still on the massive demon, he leapt.

The huge demon caught him easily and Adam rewarded him with a smoking-hot kiss. The demon, his mate, was hot to the touch. The coldness that had been with Adam for so long caught fire and he groaned.

Shoving his tongue inside the demon's mouth, Adam coaxed the demon's tongue to play with his. His cock was so

hard that he could burst, especially as the demon tightened his clawed fingers on Adam's ass.

Oh, he'd wanted this so bad. Had dreamed and fantasized about having his mate. It felt even better being held by this strange demon that Adam would have ever expected. Humping against the granite-hard stomach, Adam nearly lost his mind.

The demon took several steps before Adam's back hit a wall. Yes! Oh, fuck yes, that was even better. Legs wrapped around the demon's waist, he pressed up with sharp little movements. He could feel the claws cupping his ass.

"Mal!"

The demon yanked his mouth away and snarled at someone close to them.

Adam whined. He needed more of those hot lips. He tried to chase those lips but someone was speaking too loudly next to them. What the fuck? Who had the balls to interrupt? He ran his tongue across the spikes on the demon's jaw as the demon continued to rock against him.

Suddenly, without warning, the demon stepped back, breaking Adam's hold on him. Adam began to slide down the wall but the demon caught him under his arms and eased him lower until Adam's feet touched the carpet.

That just pissed him off. Adam had waited a really long time to find his mate. He turned his head. The Fae part of him flared to life as he snarled. "Mine!"

Ash held his hand in front of him. "I know. I just don't think you want everyone watching you two maul each other."

Like Adam gave a shit.

"He's right." The demon's deep voice sounded as if he was chewing glass.

Adam didn't care who was around. All he wanted was the demon. If the demon wanted privacy, Adam would make sure that was what they had. "Then take me someplace else," he demanded. Adam didn't care where. His dick hurt.

The demon smiled, which transformed his entire being. Damn, the demon was even hotter when he appeared so awestruck.

“Go,” Ash encouraged. “Take your mate home.”

Adam’s heartbeat quickened at hearing someone acknowledge him and his mate for the first time.

The demon sucked in a sharp breath. “I have a mate.” Not only did he sound surprised, but a little bit of panic reflected in the depths of his eyes.

Pushing off the wall, Adam placed both hands on the demon’s chest. What had Ash shouted...Mal? His mate’s name was Mal. “Hi, mate. I’m Adam and I need you to take me someplace private. Can you do that for me, big guy?”

“Whatever you want. Anything,” his mate vowed.

“You don’t want to say that to me,” Adam teased. He jumped up again, not surprised when his mate easily caught him. His huge demon was so much bigger and taller than him. Adam loved that.

Cuddling him close, his mate made Adam feel so damn safe.

“Thank you, my friend. I owe you one. I’d totally lost my head.”

Whatever, Adam didn’t care and didn’t understand why his mate did. And why weren’t they leaving yet? Since he was tucked up against his mate’s chest, he decided to move things along. Pulling on the black buttons, he tried to get access to his mate’s wide chest.

“You are going to have your hands full, and I couldn’t be happier for you. You deserve this, brother. Go. Go be with your mate.” Ash’s voice held amusement, but Adam had gotten at least half the buttons open and tugged the material apart.

Finally, they were moving. Adam peered up at his mate as his long strides took them out of the room and just about

swallowed his tongue. Mal was powerful. Adam could feel the pulses of power radiating from him and wasn't quite sure how he'd gotten matched up with him. He also didn't care. He finally had his mate. He sighed as happiness swamped him, pulling out his emotions.

They passed the front door before his mate stopped to look down at him.

“Your emotions changed suddenly. Are you okay?”

Adam cleared his throat, which suddenly seemed to be closing.

“Adam?”

He shuddered at his mate saying his name in that deep tone for the first time. He couldn't fight the tears that pricked his eyes.

His mate swore before gently placing him on the ground. He kept one hand on Adam's waist though. “Did I frighten you? We don't have to—”

Desperately shaking his head, Adam swiped the tears away. “It's not that.” Big, deep breath. “I wanted to find my mate for so long. I've felt so lost and empty and now here you are. It's...it's...”

“Overwhelming,” his mate supplied.

“Yeah.”

“I'd given up all hope,” his mate said in that quiet gravelly voice. “You... I promise to take care of you and make you happy.”

“Same,” Adam replied. “Mal, right?”

His mate's eyes widened. “I haven't gone by that name in a very long time.”

Tilting his head in question, Adam blinked up at his mate.

His mate tightened his clawed hands on Adam's waist. “Master. I am the Master of punishment. That's my job but

also my identity. There is only one Master in existence at a time.”

“O...kay.” What was Adam missing?

“I understand if you don’t want to mate with me.”

Adam stepped back, frowning. “Why would you say that to me!”

“Being with me is...not something that I would wish on anyone.”

Shaking his head, Adam balled his fist before punching Mal’s chest. He knew that he wouldn’t hurt the demon, but he wanted his full attention.

Mal’s eyes widened before his hand covered the spot Adam had targeted.

“Are you paying attention to me?” Adam demanded.

His mate nodded.

“I don’t care what your job is. You. Are. My. Mate.”

“You truly feel that way?” Mal reached for him.

“I do. Now take me home. I will be wearing a mating bite by the end of the night.”

He yelped in surprise as his mate grabbed him. There was a rush of air before they stood on a hill to peer below at what looked like a different world. “What just happened?”

“I brought you to my home. Our home.”

“That wasn’t a portal.” Adam pointed out.

“I do not need a portal,” his mate responded stiffly. “I am the most powerful demon in existence. All I have to do is think where I want to be in the realm and that’s where we’ll be.”

Adam grinned. “Awesome.” Peering down below, the first thing that Adam noticed was the heat. “Where are we exactly?”

“In the city of the core,” Mal answered.

A scream pierced the night and he jumped.

“That...that’s not uncommon. I watch over the vilest of souls. Those that find themselves here suffer greatly for all of eternity.”

The Master of punishment. Adam was beginning to understand better his mate’s concerns. “Good thing I have a pair of amazing ear plugs.” He grinned at his mate. “Which house is ours?”

“The big one.” Mal pointed directly below them.

Red dirt covered what Adam would call a street. Their house was huge, black stone, and the red dirt changed to silver sand for the yards. The space between the houses was massive, but Adam had an idea on how to improve privacy. His fingers itched to get to work, but he had other pressing needs first.

“Why are we still standing here?” Adam questioned. He drew Mal’s hand toward his crotch, so his mate didn’t miss what Adam wanted.

“I’ll give you a tour later,” Mal said while palming Adam’s erection.

“Much later,” Adam agreed.

Poof. Adam blinked and they were standing in a large dark bedroom. The walls were gray granite with black specks. The massive black-railed bed had been placed with the headboard against one wall. All the furniture was as black as everything else, including the long rugs situated around the room.

Color. His mate needed color in his life.

“This is my...our bedroom. The house has eight rooms and six bathrooms.”

“Great, awesome.” Adam closed his fingers around Mal’s wrist before yanking him toward the bed.

“Boy,” Mal rumbled.

That...that was exactly how he wanted his mate to respond. “Yes.”

“Don’t be batting those lashes at me. I am the Master of this realm.”

Perfect. “Of course, I would never...” Adam batted his lashes again.

Mal’s eyes narrowed. “Trouble.”

“Who me?” Adam let his lower back touch the edge of the mattress. He was going to have to climb into that gigantic bed. Heck, he might need a stepstool.

“Yes, you.” Mal gripped his waist before lifting him and tossing him on the bed.

“Woo-hoo!” That was an even better way to get on the bed. Adam rose to brace himself on his elbows. He peered over at his mate.

His mate.

That was still incredible.

Adam had a mate.

Licking his lips, he allowed his gaze to linger over his mate.

“Like what you see?” Mal asked, puffing up his chest.

Adam nodded. “I want to know if you’re that big everywhere.”

Mal winked.

Fuck! Adam felt like he’d been hard for hours.

The wicked gleam in his mate’s eye should probably scare him, but instead his excitement grew. Mal placed his hands on the mattress before he started to crawl toward him.

Adam tried to concentrate on breathing. He was being stalked by his mate and he wanted to be caught.

Hovering over him, Mal lowered his mouth until their lips touched.

Adam gripped Mal's horns and held him down as he pressed up. Mal growled but Adam swallowed the sound. They kissed, passion flaring, hands everywhere. He wanted his mate naked.

"Please." Adam arched, pressing his erection against Mal. "I need your hands on me."

Mal didn't waste time. He lifted enough to tug off Adam's clothes. Adam rolled and twisted, trying to help, but he didn't know if he was managing to assist at all. Once he was naked, Adam was more than a little sweaty.

"Your turn," Adam said as he flopped back onto the mattress. He wrapped his hand around his cock and stroked.

"Should you be doing that?" Mal rumbled.

"I don't know, Daddy, should I?"

Mal lunged and grabbed Adam's hands while lowering his mouth. They kissed again and this time Adam allowed himself to be mauled. He loved the intensity with which his mate wanted him.

Adam clawed at Mal's back until the shirt shredded beneath his fingers. His supernatural strength raged out of control as his mind whirled.

With a laugh, Mal drew back. "Impatient."

He was. Adam wanted to be claimed once and for all.

Mal crawled back until he stood at the end of the bed. He made quick work of removing the rest of his garments before tugging off the ruined shirt.

"Holy fuck!" Adam gasped. Mal was big all over.

Mal wrapped his hand around his cock. "You sure you want this?"

"Please."

"Spread your legs, baby. Show me where you want me."

Adam groaned but hurried to comply.

Mal's fangs peeked out from his lips. "I'm going to have to take my time opening you up."

He shivered.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure you enjoy every minute of it." He walked around the mattress to the bedside table and opened the drawer. He picked up a bottle of lube before dropping it on the bed.

Adam tried really hard to stay still but he had never been so turned on in his life. Mal moved back over him.

"I love your mouth. I'll never get tired of kissing you."

Adam grinned. He loved to kiss and was glad that his mate felt the same way. For a reward, he lifted his head and kissed Mal.

He got lost in the taste of his mate until Mal's slick finger rubbed against his hole. Adam spread his legs farther as he sucked on Mal's tongue. He'd always loved bottoming and knew that being with his mate would be better than any other time in his life, but he couldn't help but stiffen as Mal's clawed finger breached him.

"Shh, it's okay, baby. I would never hurt you," Mal soothed. "Relax for me."

Adam tried to do as his mate said but Mal's fingers were thick.

Mal slipped down Adam's body until he began to mouth and lavish attention to Adam's shaft. When Mal's hot mouth covered his cock, Adam did relax. His nerves sang and he wanted to come so bad.

As his mate sucked his dick, he used that thick finger to open him up.

Head rolling on the pillow, Adam grew more and more desperate.

"Not yet, baby," Mal whispered before adding a second finger and went back down on him.

It had to be hours, hours, before Mal finally withdrew three big fingers and popped off Adam's cock.

Adam was almost in tears with his desperation. "Please."

"Hold your knees to your chest." Mal helped Adam get into position before he grabbed the lube and applied some to his erection.

Their eyes locked as Mal positioned himself at Adam's hole.

"Mate," Adam said softly. "Claim me."

"Mine," Mal claimed as he pushed inside.

Chapter Two

Adam

With careful steps, Adam followed Mal from the bedroom and down the stairs where the location was supposed to be. His ass ached and he was sore, but it had totally been worth it to be mated to his beast. And beast Mal was, at least in bed. Adam had never been devoured quite so thoroughly.

It had been awesome.

The house was as big on the inside as it appeared on the outside. He could see himself easily getting lost. It did have plenty of room though, and he couldn't wait to show it off to his friends...after he made a couple of changes, of course.

Mal really needed more color in his life.

"Here we go, boy." Mal pushed a tall swinging wood door open.

Adam could already smell bacon cooking. He stepped inside the room and paused as he took in the three small demons bustling around the kitchen. "Minions!" Adam declared.

The three demons stopped and turned toward him. They were such cute little demons. Adam wanted to immediately adopt them.

"Not minions," Mal corrected. "These are my house demons, part of the staff."

Adam shook his head. "My minions!" He rushed over and tugged them into a big group hug.

The demons sighed as they returned the embrace.

"Hello," one of the demons greeted.

"Hello, cutie. What's your name?"

"I'm Siezman and these are my brothers Notel and Gammer. We are here at your service."

“Awesome.” Adam patted Siezman on the back. “Do you like your job?”

Siezman nodded. “We love working for the Master. He is very kind to us.”

Adam looked over his shoulder to beam at his mate. He knew Mal was a good guy.

“Breakfast is almost ready. We have a mix of human and home foods. We didn’t know what you would prefer,” Notel said.

“I appreciate that.” Adam strolled over to his mate. “I want to keep them forever. They’re adorable.”

“They’re not minions.” Mal frowned down at him.

“Yes, sir.” He patted Mal’s chest. They both knew that Adam was just humoring him.

“Trouble,” Mal muttered before pecking a kiss to Adam’s forehead.

This was going to be awesome. “Feed me!” Adam demanded as he hopped over to the table where platters had already been set.

* * * * *

Adam

“What do you mean Mal doesn’t take a day off?”

Siezman shrugged before glancing over his shoulder toward the house.

“Don’t worry about him. Tell me.” It wasn’t often Adam was taller than anyone, and he adored the little demons.

“The Master works from the beginning of the day until late into the night. He does not take a day off and even when he is home, he is working.”

“Not anymore,” Adam declared. He brushed his hands off on his pants before peering around at the new additions to the

property.

Their house hadn't had a gate or anything to keep people away. His new minions had helped set the white paved stones that Adam infused. They would serve as an early detection alert if someone approached their front door.

Adam had also lined the property with trees.

The demons had been excited to see a dryad planting for the first time. Adam was pleased with his work over the past few hours. Their home was already beginning to show signs of his presence. He might be at a disadvantage not being a demon, but Adam could still protect his mate.

He turned and started back toward the house. His mate was going to take some time off and spend it in bed with him. Mal might be used to doing everything on his own, but they were a team now.

Adam would drag his mate, kicking and screaming if necessary, into learning to relax. Mal had a very important job, but he wouldn't be able to do it for long if he got burnt out. Adam was quite certain what his new mission was in life.

He would bring brightness, laughter, and love into Mal's life and make the Master of punishment happier than anyone else in the realm. And that was going to start right that moment.