



*Hellscape
Holidays*

KISSING
the Grumpy
DRAGON

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**MILLY
TAIDEN**

KISSING THE GRUMPY DRAGON

HELLSCAPE HOLIDAYS

BOOK 4

MILLY TAIDEN



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Kissing the Grumpy Dragon

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Published By

Latin Goddess Press

Winter Springs, FL 32708

<http://millytaiden.com>

Kissing the Grumpy Dragon


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Cover: Jacqueline Sweet

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December 2022

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KISSING THE GRUMPY
DRAGON

HELLSCAPE HOLIDAYS 4

*NEW YORK TIMES and USA TODAY BESTSELLING
AUTHOR*

MILLY TAIDEN

— *For dragon lovers,*
Here's a fun grumpy romance.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The last thing Kaia Coll expected when she checked in at Hellscape Holiday Resort was for a dragon to fight a demon over her. Technically, it didn't quite happen that way, but a witch can dream. **Especially since the dragon is one good-looking man, and Portia Flemming keeps throwing them together!**

Dragon shifter Greyson Verlice's idea of a company retreat isn't three-legged races and building sandcastles. Especially not when the distracting witch, Kaia Coll, is always around. **Greyson needs to focus on saving his company and thunder. Not ditch his colleagues to flirt with Kaia.**

But with the Verlice name on the line, Kaia might be exactly who Greyson needs. Kaia and Greyson are in trouble now that Lou and Portia set their sights on them. **Add in a couple of Lou's cocktails, and who knows what will happen with these two!**

ONE



PORTIA

Portia Flemming walked down the hallway from her office toward the jammed-packed lobby of Hellscape Holiday Resort. All kinds of creatures were either checking in or checking out.

Others had used the lobby as a meeting point before leaving in the direction of one of the many activities the resort provided for its paranormal guests. Portia had worked hard to make sure there was something for everyone. Every creature would find something fun to do, no matter if they were vampires, shifters, or demons. It didn't even matter if someone didn't want to have fun. Fun would be had in her place. Portia took her job very seriously.

There was also the added perk of helping people find love, perhaps sometimes under circumstances that would have been impossible without the hotel. Of course, there was a limit to what she could or would accept, and Lou's latest scheme had brought a human to their shores.

That wasn't the kind of attention they needed to make sure their business would continue to thrive. There were conditions to the resort, and *no meddling* was a very big one. Even greater than health code rules.

No meddling.

Portia was aware that she could be accused of meddling for helping certain couples find their way to each other, but finding love isn't a bad thing. She couldn't imagine a single couple being angry that they found each other with her help.

Portia was too good to make mistakes. Besides, she loved her Hellscape Holiday Resort as much as she possibly could. It was her own little world. It was her *place*.

Lately, though, there was only one fly in the ointment.

Lou.

“Hello, you,” the demon in question walked by Portia and took her arm in his to lead her to Lou’s Place, the bar he ran in the resort.

Portia smiled at him warmly. “Lou. What have you done now?”

He pouted. “Oh, come on, Portia. I’ve been very good. It hurts me that you think I’m causing trouble again.”

She rolled her eyes. “Lou, you are nothing but trouble. Take it easy, okay? I’ve got such a busy week ahead.”

Lou nodded. “You got it. I will try to behave.” He kissed her cheek before heading behind the bar. He began to prepare a drink, but Portia knew better than to expect it was for her. One of Lou’s favorite things to do was send unordered drinks to guests in the hopes of making a match.

The demon was a bit clumsy at it because he also liked a good laugh. Matching mismatched people was one of his favorite pranks. But he did expect his couples to be together forever. Or at least a very long time.

Portia had a different way of doing things. She used her instincts. Maybe those came from the fact that she was a succubus and a good one. Maybe even the best. She understood what people needed even if they hadn’t quite caught on yet.

“This is for you,” Lou offered a long, thin champagne flute. The liquid wasn’t bubbly or gold but rather black with floating red beads.

“What is it?” she eyed it with suspicion. “It won’t make me hallucinate, will it?”

He threw his head back with a laugh. “Oh, no. I keep those for your office when you’re off-duty.”

“I’m always on duty,” she replied.

“I know. Isn’t that just terrible? Who’s your boss, anyway?” he asked with a laugh.

“I run Hell’s resort,” she reminded him pointedly. “It’s definitely *not* terrible. This is the perfect place to live and work.”

“If only I weren’t here to fuck it up, huh?”

Portia took a sip from her drink. “If only you could behave for more than two hours at a time. Maybe then I would have some peace.”

“I’ll do my best,” he assured her. “How is it?” He pointed toward her cocktail.

“Good. Very good.”

He puffed out his chest with pride. “I created that one for the coven of witches especially.”

“Nice touch,” Portia praised.

“I figured if they were going to spend their week-long girls’ trip here, I might as well design a cocktail just for them. It’s so good that I might have to put it on the permanent menu.”

“Well, you sure have time to figure it out.” She patted his hand. “I am not printing drink menus for at least a decade.”

Lou gasped. “What? Why?”

“Because I know you. The second I get something printed, you will want to make changes. Tend bar for ten years, and then I’ll print a drink menu.”

“But who knows if I’ll still be here in ten years.”

Portia downed the rest of her drink. “Precisely,” she thanked him for making her point.

Lou barely heard her. His attention was taken by a group at the back of a bar. He watched as their drinks were delivered, and they all sipped his concoctions. Portia decided to leave the bar before the chaos started.

“Remember to behave,” she called out over her shoulder.

Lou chuckled, but instead of staying behind the bar, he swaggered to the table of current interest. “How’s everything?”

Portia didn’t hear the response, but she wasn’t too worried. Lou liked his pranks, but he liked this resort more. He wouldn’t do a thing to jeopardize their home. Oh, he toed the line. He always toed the line. He wouldn’t cross it, though.

If he did, it would break Portia’s heart ... and close the resort down. That couldn’t happen. The place was a pure success, and though they hadn’t been open long, there were already repeated visitors.

Some people claimed that the food alone was worth the visit. Others said it was the privacy and distance from humans. There were even claims that the resort was a great place to find love.

That made Portia happier than Lou was behind the bar.

If Hellscape Holiday Resort became a place people visited when they were looking for love, Portia’s life would be complete.

Love was the greatest force in the world, and if she helped spread a little more of it, then so be it.

TWO



KAIA

“Holy shit,” Kaia Coll giggled as she took in her new surroundings and her home for a week. Hellscape Holiday Resort. “This place is amazing!” she gushed again.

Kaia had never seen this much luxury in her life. Not like this. The floor, the walls, the columns, everything was made out of shiny marble. The ocean breeze came through wide-open windows and doors. Though she didn’t know what ocean or other body of water surrounded them, Kaia thought it smelled like heaven.

Ironic since they were technically in Hell.

Well, to be honest, Kaia had no real idea as to where they were. It was impossible to find Hellscape Holiday Resort on a map. Only paranormal creatures could visit the hotel for obvious reasons. Shifters could walk around in their animal forms, and demons didn’t have to hide their horns or other demonic qualities. Witches could do magic in the open.

It was a place where they could all let their paranormal attributes out of their hiding places. It was as refreshing as the breeze. Kaia couldn’t wait to be in her bikini and on the beach with a drink in each hand and maybe a cute warlock reading to her while she soaked in the sun.

“It really is gorgeous.” Her sister Rachel whistled. “No wonder it costs more than a mortgage to come here.”

Kaia rolled her eyes. “It wasn’t that bad. You’re just stingy.”

“Any other resort would have been fine. We would’ve saved some money, and maybe we could’ve bought a new cauldron and ...”

Kaia pressed her hand to her sister’s mouth. “Shut up, Rach. You’re ruining what is supposed to be a great holiday. You deserve a break, and you never spend money on anything. We deserve to be here and to hang out among our peers.”

Rachel pointed a discreet finger over her shoulder where a group of vampires was checking in behind a couple of demons. “Those people are not our peers. Are you kidding me? We’re lucky we even made it through the door.”

“You shouldn’t have,” one of the demons called out.

Well, fuck you, too, Kaia thought. It took some guts to insult six witches. Kaia didn’t care if the demon had more power than her. No one talked down to her.

She was a high school guidance counselor. Nothing scared her.

“No need for that. We’re all here to enjoy some fun times, so maybe keep the attitude in check.”

“This place exists so we *don’t* have to keep our attitude in check,” the demon responded, taking angry steps toward her. “If you don’t like it, leave.”

“You’re rude,” Kaia said, staring the demon down. “I want an apology.”

Ian pulled at her arm. “Leave it be, Kaia. I don’t want to be kicked out.”

“No. I am not taking this. We paid as much as that demon did to be here. We deserve to be treated with respect.” Kaia managed to get the pixie’s attention, and without waiting to be greeted, the witch said, “Excuse me. That demon is really harming the vibe in here. I didn’t come to this resort to be insulted by demons.”

Una, if her name tag was right, turned pale as her eyes darted over to the demon. He glared at her and her coven, mumbling terrible things under his breath. “Would you please

go to Lou's Place? Have a drink on the house while I deal with this."

Kaia nodded, but she wasn't pleased. She wanted to see how this demon was dealt with. How Una played this would basically decide if the witches stayed for their holiday. Rachel was already on the fence about staying. She wouldn't hesitate to call off the whole thing and make the entire coven leave before anyone could even say *cocktail*.

Kaia didn't rush away like Rachel and the other four witches, Michelle, Anita, Lily, and Ian. She took her time to see what would happen with the demon.

"Did you have concerns to share with me?" Una asked the demon with a clipped tone.

"Yeah. I don't want to share a floor with a bunch of filthy witches. Make sure my room is far from theirs."

"You can't speak to our other guests like that," Una insisted, getting more flustered by the second.

"Yeah? And who is going to stop me, exactly? You? With your fun little wings? Could I pin you by those?"

"Oh!" the pixie was so flustered that Kaia thought Una might explode.

An elegant woman walked up to the counter and took over. Kaia could only guess she was the resort manager.

Behind her came a deep voice. "You're better off going for a drink than listening to that asshole say shitty things." She spun around to see the man who spoke was tall and wide but sleek and *very* sexy. His eyes were a shocking blue, only made more striking by the black of his hair. His pale gray suit might have been appropriate for the climate, but it made him stand out even more.

"Well, I just want to make sure this is dealt with. I don't know if my friends would want to stay if we weren't actually welcomed."

"You're welcomed here," the gorgeous stranger assured her.

She snorted. “You don’t know that.”

“Portia Flemming, the woman who is talking to that demon right now, opened this resort for every paranormal creature. Have a little faith in this place. Most of us aren’t so bad.”

Before she could say anything, the man was gone. Stunned into silence, Kaia made her way to Rachel and the others who sat in Lou’s Place. They were already giggling into the drinks, the demon’s insults hopefully drowned in a cocktail.

“Lou is awesome,” Ian laughed. “You need to chat with him. He’ll make you laugh.”

“Did he make Rachel laugh?” she asked, tapping her sister’s shoulder.

“Oh, very funny,” Rachel grumbled. “Go get a drink, will you?”

Kaia glanced toward the door. She wanted to go right back to the lobby and give that demon a piece of her mind. Maybe she should have done some magic to punish him. It wouldn’t have been anything too bad, given that a demon had way more power than her, but still. Anything would be better than being led away to get a drink.

“No. You know what? I’m going to ...”

Ian grabbed her hand and tugged her into his lap. “You’re not going to do anything, Kaia. You’re gonna sit your bony ass on this chair and drink some drinks.” He slid across the booth seat until they could sit side by side.

As Kaia settled in, Una fluttered into the bar, her eyes scanning all of the faces. Kaia waved her over, and the pixie sighed in relief.

“I hoped to find you in here. We’re so sorry that demon was rude. It’s not a representation of management’s beliefs. On behalf of everyone here at Hellscape Holiday Resort, we apologize. Your rooms have been changed to our luxury cabanas. Tonight, our chef will prepare a beach-side feast for you.”

Kaia was impressed. “And the demon?”

The pixie grinned. “Oh, don’t worry. I told the imps about him.” Whatever it meant, Kaia figured it had to be pretty bad because Una was grinning wide, showing tiny, pointed teeth. “He’s in for a very confusing week.”

THREE



GREYSON

Greyson Verlice was livid.

The pretty witch practically sat in the other *male* witch's lap, giggling along like it didn't matter he had called her ass bony.

It was offensive in two ways. The first, the witch's ass, was anything but bony. In fact, Greyson was imagining what it would be like to take a bite out of her. Not really, but that ass was meant to be treated in all kinds of ways. Good ways. Pleasurable ways. Not dissed.

The second offensive thing was simple enough.

How did that witch let someone talk to her like that? Who was that man to her, anyway? He better not be a lover, or else Greyson wouldn't have a choice but to seduce her away and show her how a real man treated his woman.

Greyson might want to bite that ass, but only because if he ever got the chance, he would make sure he earned it. That meant treating a woman right.

The demon who had insulted the pretty witch and her friends walked by, and Greyson saw an opportunity to take out some of his aggression. The demon was no match for him. "Watch how you talk to people."

The demon's face flashed with fury. "What's it to you how I talked to those witches?"

"Common decency. You're in a public place. Behave like you understand what that means."

“Fuck you.”

“I’m just trying to help you,” Greyson taunted. “Your tone isn’t great, and with a face like yours, you need all the help you can get.”

The demon growled. “Pick on someone you could actually beat, little lizard.”

“Lizard?” he threw his head back with a laugh. “A dragon is hardly a lizard. If you would like me to show you the scope of our skills, perhaps we should take this conversation to another location. I’ll just repeat myself. You’re in a public place. If you want to fight, you take it outside.”

They passed through Lou’s place on the way to the beach.

“Holy shit,” Grey heard as the bar’s patrons caught on to what was happening.

This was a resort for paranormal creatures. The people who had built it must have expected this kind of thing. A lot of alphas were gathered in one space, and sometimes, that spelled disaster.

“That dragon shifter is about to whoop that demon’s ass for being rude to us,” a woman said. “Kaia, you should ask him out if he survives.”

Grey was curious to know if the pretty witch would root for him, but he didn’t get the chance to hear her response. The demon stepped into his line of sight and said, “Outside, you despicable thing.”

Greyson’s father flashed him a disappointed head shake from the bar, but it was too late to back down now. The demon had decided to be rude to a stranger, and Greyson couldn’t stand that.

It doesn’t hurt that the witch is hot, his dragon chuckled. You just want to play the hero.

Grey pushed the thought away. It wasn’t useful when he was about to fight a demon. He focused on his opponent, looking for any obvious flaw ... and any not-so-obvious power.

The demon puffed out his chest, and Greyson guessed the kind of demon he was dealing with ... all talk and very little action, especially now that they were outside, and the demon must have realized that Grey could shift.

Just in case the demon had forgotten all about shifters, Grey decided to shift his hands into his dragon's talons. He waved them at the demon in a taunt.

Grey's opponent's face fell, but he taunted right back. "You think you're scary with those?" The demon threw a fireball at him.

Greyson let the blazing ball hit him square in the chest. The material of his shirt burst into ash, and he patted it out slowly, not looking away from the demon. There wouldn't be a burn on him. "You get the part where I'm a *dragon*, right? You don't seem to understand."

The demon threw a series of fireballs at Greyson. Bored of the demon's antics, Grey shifted into his dragon. His transformation complete, he aimed his spray of fire toward the sky. He didn't want to ruin the scenery and outbuildings for the hotel guests.

Besides, as soon as the demon saw the fire lighting up the sky, he took two steps back. "Whatever. You're a shifter. I'm a *demon*." He stalked off before Greyson could shift into his human form.

Grey grabbed one of the complementary towels, and he wrapped it around his waist just as his father came barreling toward him. "Honestly, Greyson. Can't you behave? This is a team-building trip. You can't beat up rude strangers. You're the CEO's son. What does that look like?"

"It looks like you raised a man with manners," Grey responded. "Like I haven't seen you do this a hundred times."

His father pursed his lips. "Yes, well, you sure pick your timing to start listening to me."

"I always listen to you, old man. Sometimes it just takes a little longer to get through my thick skull."

Dad chuckled. “At least you whooped his ass in front of a whole bunch of demons and other paranormal creatures. Showed them what we’re capable of, didn’t you?”

“Yeah,” he mumbled before making his way to the bar. He needed a drink before he changed for his company’s afternoon activities. His body cringed. He was not looking forward to playing the company man for nine whole days.

“You fought that demon,” the bartender said in greeting, handing Greyson a drink he hadn’t yet ordered.

Grey sat at the bar, not at all bothered that all he wore was a towel. It was a beach resort, and surely folks would assume he wore his swim trunks under the plush covering.

With a sigh, Grey eyed his drink. It was bright green and yellow with a hint of turquoise. Greyson didn’t really trust it and sniffed at it.

“Don’t worry. I wouldn’t give a hero a trick drink. You earned that.” The bartender nudged his chin toward the drink.

“What is it?”

“I told you. It’s a hero’s drink. You drink that, and you’ll get your reward.”

Grey chuckled. “My reward? For what?”

“For being a hero,” the bartender said as if he were annoyed he even needed to explain himself.

“What’s your name?” Greyson asked.

“Lou. And you’re Greyson Verlice. Dragon shifter, here with your father’s company.”

“That’s right, but I prefer to be called Grey.”

“Oh, I knew that,” Lou grinned.

Grey took another sniff of the drink before actually tasting it. It wasn’t bad. In fact, with his third sip, he thought it was probably the best drink he had ever had in his life. The aftertaste lingered, and he found himself reaching for another gulp. “You sure know a lot for a bartender. I never would’ve ordered this, but it’s good. Really good.”

Lou waved him off. “You flatter me. I know enough to do what I can.”

“What does that mean?” Grey narrowed his eyes, his shifter senses tingling.

“What kind of reward would you like?” the bartender chuckled. “For helping the witches,” Lou clarified as if he somehow knew Greyson would need all the patience in the world to get through the next few days.

“I don’t need a reward for doing the right thing. Or at least making sure that demon thinks twice about being a dick next time he’s in a public setting.”

“See? You’re just a great guy.”

What an odd demon. Grey and his dragon agreed.

FOUR



KAIA

The sun shone brightly, and there was nothing better than the fun, black with red beads cocktails Lou had made for them. Kaia had stopped counting after her third because it was barely past noon.

Holiday Kaia was a bit of a party animal, but Work Kaia was a work animal. Did that make sense? Was she drunk? Maybe she was ... Her sister and the others were sure totally liquored up.

“You can see that, right?” Rachel pointed at the water, right where the small waves lapped the dry sand.

“You mean the pack of totally hot men?” Ian lifted his sunglasses. “Yes. We all see them. I don’t think I ever want to see anything ever again. I’m good with this view forever.” He slid his sunglasses back on and continued to enjoy the show.

“I think it’s a stupid display of crappy masculine power,” Rachel grumbled.

“Of course, *you* would say that. It’s a fun game. It’s obviously a company holiday.” Kaia took another sip of her drink as she watched the dragon shifters fumble through a three-legged race.

The handsome man who fought the demon was in the group.

He wasn’t wearing a suit anymore. He wore very little. His board shorts hid just enough to keep her sane, but those abs would keep her up tonight.

You're welcome here.

The words he spoke to her had played through her mind all day. His voice was rich and deep, and she wanted to hear him speak again, but there was little chance of that now. He was busy with his company, and if Kaia made a move on a man in front of her friends, they wouldn't leave her alone.

They would pester her for the details until she would rather drop the man than keep listening to them giggle about her. Not that she totally didn't do the same. It was just a good way to pick the shitty men from the ones who could take a little bit of friendly jabbing.

She hadn't met a man who could deal with her friends, and she doubted the dragon would be fine with a bunch of witches tearing into him to make sure he was worthy of her.

In the safety of her mind, Kaia played through her fantasy. She imagined what it would be like to walk up to that dragon and ask him out for a drink. Maybe she would even be so bold as to kiss him.

She was on holiday, and kissing strangers was definitely okay. Probably even encouraged in a place like Hellscape Holiday Resort.

She didn't know the man's name, but he fascinated her. She couldn't look away. Thank the good Lord that sunglasses existed. She could stare at him all she wanted, and he wouldn't even know.

"You should go and talk to him," Ian said. "He totally fought that demon just for you."

"I'm not drunk enough for that." Kaia laughed.

"Well, then drink faster," Ian commanded with a stern grin.

"No." Kaia totally downed a bit more of her cocktail, but only because she needed to cool herself down from the sight of the dragon shifter's physique.

With the booze's intoxicating effects lowering her inhibitions, Kaia decided she needed to be closer. She made her way to the race to watch him participate. It was quite the

show. He was fast and moved well despite the fact that the man he was tied to didn't have the same level of skill. It stopped the dragon from winning, which he didn't take too well, judging by the scowl on his face when they lost.

"That wasn't great," she called out. "I'm sure you can do better."

He arched a brow at her. "You think you can?"

She waved him off. "Of course, I can do better."

He leaned down and untied his leg from his friend's and stood, towering over her. "You can race with Richard while I watch and see how *you* do."

"Oh, hell no," Richard called out. "I'm not getting in the middle of whatever this is. If you want to get to know Greyson more, I've got a better plan. Take my place."

Before Kaia even knew what had happened, Richard bent down and tied her leg to the sexy stranger. "Excuse me," she snapped, kicking her leg away from the binding. "You need to ask before you do that."

"Jesus, Richard," Greyson snapped, yanking the piece of rope. "You can't go around tying people up." He looked right into her eyes, his sincerity shocking. "Sorry about my colleague's total lack of boundary, miss."

"It's fine." It wasn't. "Obviously, you really don't like kids' games," she said to Richard, more than a little peeved from the gall he had.

Instinctively, she took a step away from him. Her arm brushed against Greyson's, sending shivers of awareness up her spine. He took a step toward her, and she hoped it was because he was protective of her. After all, this was the second time he was intervening on her behalf.

"I don't get paid enough for this kind of embarrassment," Richard snapped. "She can take my place. I'm done with this bullshit." He stalked off.

"Wow," Kaia whistled. "Is he okay?"

“No,” Greyson chuckled. “Clearly not. I’m really sorry he tried to tie us together.”

“I expected this holiday to be weird, but it took a turn quickly there.” She smiled at him. “He’s lucky I didn’t kick him in the face.”

He laughed again. “That’s more than fair. I’m Grey.” He held out his hand for her to shake.

“Kaia.” She slid her hand into his, and immediately, her skin tingled. Her breath caught at the dizzying effect. *What the hell?* Had he felt it too? He didn’t look affected, so she pretended nothing had happened. “What’s the deal here? Company retreat?”

Grey nodded. “Something like that. My dad is trying to make everyone get along.”

“Looks like it’s going well,” she teased.

“Richard is ...” Grey shook his head. “He’s not in the best mood lately. He’s been dealing with a lot of shit.”

“Don’t we all,” she nodded. “Does this shit have anything to do with the company being a family affair?”

His wince was telling. “Yeah. My dad is the CEO,” Grey explained. “This is his attempt at getting everyone to get along before he retires. It’ll be a little hard to do now that we’re one man short.”

Kaia took the piece of rope from Grey’s hands. “Richard *did* say I can take his place.”

“You would step in?” Grey was shocked.

She turned back to her sister and friends. Rachel was speaking loudly, waving her hands around. Kaia recognized one of her sister’s divorce rants when she saw one. In fact, she could deliver it herself since she’d heard it so many times.

Kaia loved her sister, but she had spent all of her meager savings on this trip. Didn’t she deserve a little bit of fun?

“Why not?” she shrugged.

“May I?” Grey held out his hand with the rope.

“Yup,” she quickly said, looking away as he knelt to tie his leg to hers. Every time his fingers brushed her ankle, shivers raced up her spine. He took his time, caressing her ankle and sliding his finger between the rope and her leg. Maybe he was only ensuring the rope wasn’t too tight, or maybe ... hopefully ... he wanted his touch to linger.

“What’s this?” a loud voice boomed.

Kaia’s heart stopped before kicking up again. A man who could only be Grey’s father, the resemblance was striking, asked, “And who might *you* be?”

“Dad, this is Kaia. Kaia, this is my father, Bill.”

“Where did Richard go?” Bill asked before acknowledging her with a dismissive nod.

“Richard gave up, but this lovely lady has agreed to step in. Apparently, she is a three-legged race champion,” Greyson explained.

“Oh, no. I wouldn’t say that.” She felt herself blush deep and dark. “I was just teasing your son and somehow got roped into this.”

“Ah, yes. Flirting with my son is a dangerous thing to do.”

“Teasing, sir. I was teasing him. *Not* flirting.”

Bill chuckled. “Whatever you say.” He turned and made sure all the dragons were lined up on the start line and shouted, “Go!”

“Your right,” Kaia said.

“What?” Grey asked.

“Move your right foot. On three, and go. Your right,” she called out, moving her foot joined with his forward. “My right,” she moved her right foot forward. “Your right.” They moved their joined feet together. Her instructions, very much like a drill sergeant, made their joint movements easier and more fluid. They won the race, leaving the others in their dust.

Bill clapped and cheered. “Wow, that was a job well done. Those were some communication skills. What business are

you in? Looking for work? If you can get along with this one long enough to win a race, I need you on my team.” Here was a man used to having conversations with himself.

“I have a job, thanks. I just told Grey what to do, and he listened. It wasn’t that hard, really. Teamwork.”

The older man threw his head back with a laugh. “Oh, you’re hilarious, young lady, just hilarious. If you knew just how many times I tried to get that young man to listen.” He shook his head. “What’s your trick?”

“And that’s enough of that,” Grey announced, removing the rope from their legs.

They were both in their swimsuits, and there was a lot of exposed skin between them. Not only could she take it all in as close as she was, but now, she knew what it felt like to feel his bare skin against her. She was not ready to forget this day.

“That was a very good strategy,” Grey admitted. “Thanks for the win.” He held out his hand for a shake.

“You should tell us all about it at lunch. You’re joining us for lunch,” Bill announced like it was already a done deal as soon as Kaia opened her mouth to politely refuse.

It couldn’t be. Did she really want to eat lunch with a bunch of dragons she didn’t know?

Maybe if it was just one dragon in particular and me ...

She shook her head. “No, thanks for the nice offer, but I’m here with my friends. If I ditch them, I’ll never hear the end of it.”

“Nonsense,” Bill insisted again. “You’re coming. Tell her.”

Grey sighed and looked up at the sky. “Dad, that’s not how people talk to each other.” His eyes met Kaia’s. “Ignore him. Do what you want. It’s no bother to me what you do. Come. Don’t come, for all I care.”

Annoyance flashed inside Kaia. *Really?* That was Grey’s reaction? She was sure he had felt something between them during the race, but now that he was looking at her with ... what was that? Disdain?

Well, she wouldn't stand for it. If Grey wanted to get rid of her, then she was going to join the dragon lunch. Let's see how he liked spending more time with someone he clearly didn't like.

And here I thought he was into me.

Kaia wasn't disappointed. Nope. Not in the least.

FIVE



GREYSON

Greyson didn't know how it was possible, but the staff of Hellscape Holiday Resort had outdone themselves. The lunch set up by one of the resort's many beaches was nothing short of impressive. A gazebo sheltered them from the worst of the wind, but the breeze moved through the open sides, offering relief from the heat.

The table was set for a long lunch. He estimated about five courses, which in his mind was one too many. If the meal was completed without someone stalking off insulted, Grey would be surprised.

Thankfully, Kaia was with him.

Not that he was thankful for the witch.

Her presence was light and fun. Though she challenged everything he said, Grey's attraction to her was intense. Even her little quirks made him wild. She constantly straightened her cutlery or turned the salt shaker a quarter inch to the left.

"The Verlice dragons don't have any hard feelings for witches," he said softly. "In case you were wondering"

"I was, thanks."

"My dad wouldn't have invited you to lunch and put you in harm's way." *I wouldn't have allowed it*, he added in his mind where only his dragon could hear.

"What's happening here?" Portia asked, joining them on the beach. As always, the succubus's smile was bright and

warm. She was made to work in hospitality. That much was obvious.

“The lovely Kaia Coll joined us for lunch after helping my son here win the three-legged race.”

Portia beamed. “Isn’t that nice ... I just love when my guests mingle like this. Have a good time, everyone.” She waved before leaving.

Grey leaned into Kaia’s side. “You want more wine?”

Kaia eyed her glass and tried to sense how tipsy she was. “I guess a bit more won’t hurt. It’s not like I’ll ever drink this kind of wine again in my life.”

“Why wouldn’t you?”

“Because I would never spend that much money on a bottle of wine. Not if I can get the same hangover with a more affordable product.”

“There’s your mistake. You don’t drink to get drunk. You drink this to savor.”

She rolled her eyes. “It all tastes the same.”

“No, it really doesn’t. I bet we could do a blind taste test, and you’d be able to decipher which is a good wine and which isn’t.”

“Ha! A bet? Really? You saw how I whooped everyone’s ass in the race, right? Competing against me isn’t a good idea.”

He chuckled. “I bet, but I’m finding it impossible to resist the urge to see you blindfolded ...” He stopped when he realized what he was saying. “Blindfolded for the taste test, of course.”

The air turned sweet with her desire.

Whoa. Was she turned on by the idea of blindfolds? His dragon filled his head with heat. He had to be wrong. His senses were all turned around because he was in a resort filled with magic. Kaia wasn’t into the idea of being blindfolded by him. He was misreading the signs. Obviously.

“I never understood why people put on a blindfold for that.”

Grey had no clue if they did. He’d never done that kind of wine tasting. The blindfold was entirely just a fun addition from his brain ... while having lunch with a cute witch and all of his father’s company. He was totally CEO material. *Not.*

“Oh, yeah,” he lied. “It’s important to wear the blindfold. It blocks out the other senses and heightens the smell and taste of the wine.”

“Is that true?” she asked a little breathlessly.

“I don’t know,” he admitted with a laugh.

She gently punched his arm. “Jerk. You really had me going.”

“I had myself going,” he laughed. “I think I must have seen the blindfold in a bad movie.”

“A bad *porn* movie,” she giggled.

His eyes went wide, and his mouth dropped open. His laughter shocked him. It came from deep inside, and it was loud. “Wow,” he said as he tried to contain his outburst. “I was not expecting that.”

“I can see that. Caught! You’re totally caught.”

“Anyway,” he cleared his throat. Had he seen the blindfold scene in a porno? He couldn’t remember, but now all he could think about was being naked with Kaia. The last thing he should imagine at a crowded lunch party.

“It’s cute, you’re blushing,” Kaia teased.

“I’m not blushing. I’m getting a sunburn.”

“Sure,” she said, not believing him at all. “If you say so.”

“You just like messing with me.”

“I think I do, yeah.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s because you’re so serious. The first time I saw you, you were wearing a suit. A full three-

piece suit at a tropical resort.”

“In my defense, this isn’t tropical. We have no idea where this place is. And more to the point, I thought this was a business trip.”

“It’s a corporate retreat. That’s basically a holiday with your coworkers.”

“It’s a nightmare, is what it is.” He looked in Richard’s direction. Of course, the man would keep himself close enough to be seen and heard by their whole group. Jorge was talking quietly to Dad. Richard glared at Jorge while Dad remained completely unaware that another fight was brewing between the two men.

“I don’t know. The activities you’ve been doing so far sound really fun.”

“Well, maybe for you, but you don’t have to be all awkward because you might be the boss one day.”

“Might?”

He shook his head. He had said too much. “Never mind.”

“That’s a lie,” Richard’s voice interrupted every conversation at their cluster of tables.

“*You’re* the one who fucked up that deal,” Jorge shouted across the way, bringing a final close to the lively lunch discussion once and for all.

Richard leaped to his feet and pointed a finger at Jorge. “You fucked it. Don’t you blame me for your bullshit. Do you hear me? I won’t take it. Bill, what do you have to say about this?”

Dad leaned back in his chair. “Sit. Eat. Shut up.” He turned toward his seatmates and continued his conversation as if the outburst had ever happened.

It made Grey nervous.

Those two needed to air out their shit in a safe way before they came to blows. Two dragons fighting didn’t exactly make for a happy and well-run company.

“Hey, the energy got a little tense here. Wanna get out of here?” Kaia smiled at him as she whispered. “Walk me back to my cabana, at least.”

He jumped up and took her hand in his, not bothering to explain where they were going. Grey sighed in relief as soon as they were out of earshot and walking toward the resort’s main building. “Thanks for giving me an out.”

“It’s fine. You needed it. I thought you were going to bend your fork in two.”

He shrugged. “I hate the way my Dad runs his business. We’re a competitive bunch, and he seems to think that a word from the alpha should be enough to stop the fighting.”

“Doesn’t work like that when there’s a bruised ego.”

He chuckled. “See? You were with us for one race and three courses, and you saw it for yourself. Why can’t he?”

“I don’t know. How would *you* handle it if you were CEO?”

“Oh, I have thought about that a thousand times before. If it were me, I would bring in a shifter mediator, and I would get them to talk. If they wanted to shift and fight, the mediator would help. But this *shut it down* thing that Dad is doing?” he shook his head. “It makes them angrier.”

“No one likes to be scolded.”

“Yeah. It’s embarrassing. It’s how he does things, though. I can’t intervene.”

“Can’t you?”

His pace slowed. “It’s not my place. He hasn’t named me as his heir. He could pick my brother too. Shit, he could even pick someone who isn’t in the family.”

“Do you *want* to be the CEO?” Kaia asked, making him pause.

“No one’s ever asked me that before.”

“Maybe you need to ask yourself that question before you think of a way to handle this in-fighting.”

“That’s actually really good advice.”

“Not advice. I’m just curious to know your answer. So? What is the answer? Do you even want to be the CEO?”

He rubbed a hand over his mouth. “I think so.”

“That’s not a yes. It’s a maybe.”

“It’s a maybe for a reason,” he clarified.

“Which is?”

“You’re nosy.”

“Yup. I am. Comes in handy at work, but don’t deflect. Why are you a maybe on the whole CEO thing? Does your dad know? Maybe that’s why he hasn’t named you his heir yet. Maybe he’s giving you time to come to terms with it.”

“That’s giving him entirely too much credit. There’s no way my dad is actually thinking about me and my future that much.”

“Bad dad?”

“No. Not at all. Just not in his style.”

“Hmm. Well, then, I don’t know why he hasn’t picked his successor yet. Maybe he just doesn’t want to think about retirement too seriously because that might mean he’ll feel useless in his own life.”

Grey thought that sounded like his father. “You’re not wrong there.”

“So your company has a CEO who is reluctant to leave and a son that is reluctant to lead. Interesting.”

“If I knew how the staff would react to different leadership, I might be more vocal. As it is, I have no clue how the older crowd will react to my kind of authority. The younger crowd worries me less because they’re more open-minded.”

“It’s the older dragons you’re worried about.”

“Yeah. Some were working for the company when I was still in diapers. I always expect them to imagine me in my

Pampers, giving them orders.”

She giggled. “Wow. You don’t give yourself enough credit. I bet you could rock any boardroom if you gave yourself a chance.”

He shrugged. “I hope you’re right.”

“There’s an easy way to figure out whether you would be good at it or not. This fight between Richard and Jorge? Why don’t you try to fix it?”

Grey laughed. “You really want me to step between two fighting dragons?”

“Not when they’re actually fighting. When they’re calm.”

“I could ask Jorge to play a game of golf, and I’m sure Richard wouldn’t mind a cricket match.”

“Wow. Okay, when you’ve done *that*, meet me in the arcade for some actual fun games.”

Grey was surprised that he was laughing again. “Every second thing out of your mouth is amusing.”

“Only every second thing? Sorry. I must be having an off day. Good thing this is my cabana. I can rest and make sure next time we talk, I’m more *amusing*.”

“Right.” That hadn’t exactly been a smooth thing to say. “Well, see you around, Kaia.”

“Yup.” She waved her fingers at him before disappearing into her cabana. Grey fought the urge to ask her out for a drink or even a walk on the beach. If he was going to figure out if he wanted to be CEO, he needed to start on his plan to mend the fences between Richard and Jorge.

He didn’t need the funny witch stealing his focus.

SIX



KAIA

Kaia and her friends were enjoying their breakfast when there was a knock on the door. Portia stood on the stoop, a shy smile on her usually confident face. “Morning, ladies. I hope your stay is going well.”

“Are you kidding me?” Kaia laughed. “This place is amazing. I might never leave. You looking for staff?”

“Easy,” Rachel grumbled.

“I love hearing how welcoming my resort is,” Portia said. “Praise my place all you want. But before you do, I do have an ... *awkward* question to ask you.”

Rachel arched a brow. “Yeah? You want us to pay for the upgrade now, isn’t that right?”

“What?” Portia’s hands go to her mouth. “I would never take a gift back like that. No, it’s about the dragons. They’re here on a company retreat, but two of their guests are under the weather this morning. I was wondering if two of your party wouldn’t mind joining their games for the day?”

“Not a chance,” Rachel said, turning back to the inside of the cabana.

“I think we need to do our own bonding.” Kaia felt like she needed to apologize for her sister’s rude behavior. “Thanks for thinking of us.”

“Oh, I’m not the one who thought to ask you. A certain dragon was looking to spend more time with you.”

“Imagine that!” Ian shouted. “The dragon wants to see you again. You need to go play those games with the dragons, Kaia. You just have to. And you, grumpy pants,” he stared Rachel down, “you are going with her because you need a little bit of fun in your life before you drive us all insane.”

“Watch it, or I’ll put a hex on you,” Rachel snapped.

“No, you won’t.” Ian leaned against the door. “Portia, where do I drop Kaia and Rachel off for their playdate?”

The succubus smiled at Ian, pleased to have found an ally in whatever schemes she was trying to pull. There had to be a trap. Kaia couldn’t think why Grey would long to see her again after she had all but told him to fix his own life.

Was she a tad pushy? Her? No, not at all!

Okay, so maybe a little bit, but it came with her job description to be nosy and pushy.

“Would you like to take my spot?” Kaia asked Ian, batting her eyelashes.

“You know the dragon wants *you*,” he replied, batting his lashes right back at her.

“It’s settled,” Portia clapped her hands together. “You two will join the dragon games. You’re really saving my butt here. I can’t thank you enough.”

Kaia wanted to argue, but part of her wondered if dragons always ate long, elaborate lunches. It had nothing to do with seeing Greyson Verlice again.

THE IMPRESSIVE BEACH was full of dragons. Just like every other inch of Hellscape Holiday Resort, the sand was perfect, and even the large hut where they were all gathered was lovely. It was somewhere between total tropical vibes and a millionaire’s dream. Kaia could get used to this kind of life.

Grey spotted Kaia right away. He stood there, his eyes locked on hers. She didn’t know if she should look away or

step toward him. She couldn't even tell if he was happy to see her or if the look in his eyes was anger.

"You're here," he said, coming to stand in front of her.

Kaia held her breath for a few seconds. He was so tall and so hot that it was hard to remember how to breathe. "Portia said a certain dragon wanted to spend more time with me," she shot back, excited to see how he reacted to Portia spilling the beans. Surely, a powerful man like him would hate the idea of her knowing he wanted to see her again ... if it was even true.

"Ah, yes. I believe Portia was talking about my father. He was quite taken with your racing skills."

Her heart sank, but she tried to pretend that his words hadn't stung. "If you like, I can leave. Rachel stays, though. I need a break from her sometimes." She smiled to show she was kidding and that there were no hard feelings. The last thing she wanted was for this man to think she was somehow into him.

"No. Don't go. You're here already; besides, I want to tell you something."

"Oh?"

"I'm golfing with Jorge this afternoon. He didn't show up for the team stuff. Too sick, apparently. I'm sure he'll make a full recovery by our four o'clock tee time."

"Good for you. And have you approached Richard?"

"Yup. We are playing cricket first thing tomorrow morning."

"Nice. You've got a full schedule of games. How does that feel for our future CEO?" she teased.

Grey chuckled. "I think I like it. It's like placating grown people who should know better. I guess we'll see how well I do this afternoon and tomorrow morning before I start calling myself CEO."

"I'm sure you'll be fine."

“All right, dragons and visiting witches,” Portia called out to the group for silence. “The game we’ll play is a little silly, but it’s actually great for communication and teamwork. You will be paired up, and the goal is to be the last pair to be found.”

“Are we seriously playing hide-and-seek?” Grey grumbled.

“Yup!” Portia beamed at him. “The imps play it all the time, and they are a close bunch.”

Kaia thought it might have been because they were a bit terrifying, but she wouldn’t want to insult the little creatures Portia was so fond of.

“When I call out your name, come forward for your team assignments. Then, go off and hide. You have an hour. The limits are the beach here,” she pointed to the left. “And here,” she pointed to the right. “No flying off, but apart from that, feel free to use your wings. Questions?”

“How long do we need to stay hidden?”

“Bill has three hours to find you,” Portia answered.

“I’ll be your partner, Dad,” Jaymes, his oldest brother, said. “I’m good at this.”

“Of course you are,” Grey mumbled under his breath.

Kaia elbowed him, but Portia was already saying, “No, the groups are already made. Come get yours, Bill. See who will help you find your staff.”

Bill slid a slip of paper from an envelope and read, “Rachel.”

Kaia held her breath when Portia gave Grey his envelope. He slid the paper and swallowed hard. When he looked up to meet her eyes, his cheeks were red, and his eyes were full of fire. “Kaia,” his voice was rough.

“Yeah?”

“We’re paired together.”

“I am not even gonna pretend to be shocked. I should have expected this as soon as Portia was on my doorstep.”

He grinned. “Seems she went to great length to pair us.”

“I can’t think why,” she said. “Now, let’s go. We have very little time to hide.”

“We have an hour.”

“Sure, but this is a beach, and there are only a small number of hiding places for the number of dragons.”

“Shit. You’re right.” He took her hand in his and tugged her along.

“Where do you think you’re taking me?”

“To a hiding spot.”

“Shouldn’t we discuss it first?”

“What’s there to discuss? We need to hide and be silent. No discussion needed.”

“You did hear Portia say this was about developing communication, right?”

“There’s more than one way to communicate.” To demonstrate this, he pointed to a couple making eyes at each other.

“No. We should hide in plain sight,” Kaia insisted.

“And how do you suggest we do that?”

“Easy. We’ll lie down on those chairs, soak in the rays, maybe swim a bit.”

“We’ll be found!” Greyson shook his head.

“Not a chance. I’m a witch, and Portia said we could use our powers.”

Grey stopped in his tracks. “What do you have in mind?”

“Magic. I’m just gonna do a little bit of a trick of the eye. Anyone who looks in this direction won’t find what they seek.”

“Is that even allowed?” His smile was amused.

“Of course, it is. I’m not breaking any rules. I’m just using my powers. Nothing wrong with that.”

“If you say so.” He chuckled.

They made their way to a couple lounge chairs that had a large umbrella to protect them from the sun’s harsh rays should they choose to open it. The water’s edge was *right* there, and Kaia wondered what it would be like to dip her toes in.

“What’s the plan here?” Grey asked.

“We sit here. Order some drinks and have fun. Relax, will you? I win these games all the time.” It was true enough. He didn’t need to know that when she hid from her coven, she hid a little better.

“They won’t spot us? You’re sure?”

“Yup.” She moved a hand over him. “Now, you will look nothing like you. We will totally win this. You owe me a prize when we do. It’ll be the second time you win a round because of me.”

He threw his head back with a laugh. “A prize? What did you have in mind?”

“I don’t know. Surprise me,” she answered. “I like chocolate and the good kind of pasta. You know, the kind that’s fresh and drenched in the creamiest sauce ever.”

“Sounds like you’re fishing for an invitation to dinner,” he teased.

“And spend more time with you? Nope. A girl has got to rest. You keep using my intellect to win, and I’m exhausted.”

“Yet you still came when Portia told you a dragon wanted to see you. Why is that?”

She shrugged. “No reason.”

“Oh, there is a reason,” he insisted. “Admit it. You heard that a dragon was hoping to see you, and you came because you wanted it to be me, pining for you.”

“You’re the one sitting beside me.”

“Portia put us on the same team,” he pointed out. “It’s not like I had a choice in the matter.”

“You didn’t put up much of a fight.”

“Neither did you,” he said with a chuckle. “You came all this way. And not only that, but you found a way to hide out while enjoying ourselves on the beach. I think you just wanted a date with me.”

She snorted. “You’re insane, you know that, right? There’s no way I want a date with you.”

He nodded. “Hmm. All right.” He turned and lay back in his chair. “Thanks for the win.” He closed his eyes and fell into silence.

It bugged Kaia. She wanted to poke him and keep making him talk, but she wasn’t sure why she wanted to keep hearing his voice. Sure, it was all deep and manly, but there was more than that.

Kaia wanted to get to know the dragon, and she couldn’t do that if he was giving her the silent treatment to prove a point. It annoyed her, and when Kaia was annoyed, things tended to happen.

SEVEN



GREYSON

Kaia lay back in the chair beside him, quiet with her face toward the sun. She was so beautiful that he had a hard time looking away. He didn't know what kind of magic was blocking them from other people's view, but Grey hoped that no one but him could see how delicious Kaia looked in her swimsuit.

The light orange material stretched over her breasts, making her tanned skin glow. She had curves he wanted to explore and lips he wanted to kiss.

"Why do I get the feeling this isn't the kind of holiday you would've picked for yourself?" she asked with a giggle.

"It's not. I'm uncomfortable with so much leisure time with people I work with."

"Not your friends, then?"

He shook his head. "No. My best friend is a professional tennis player."

"No way! I can't imagine someone like that taking any vacation. Athletes are dedicated on a whole other level."

Grey nodded. "That's right. It's why we get along so well."

"That's one trait you have of a CEO. You're a workaholic."

"No. I just like to be sure that all of my days are as productive as can be."

She pretended to fall asleep and snored. “Wow. You’re a bag of laughs, huh? It’s a good thing that your dad chose this place with its silly team-building games because you need some silliness in your life.”

“I’m a grown man on a business trip playing hide and seek. The last thing my life needs is more *silliness*.”

She shrugged without being convinced. “Maybe you just need to find the right kind of thing to shake you loose.” Kaia moved her body on the chair, shaking herself about. “What do you think would do it for you?”

“I have no clue.” It was a lie. He knew exactly what would shake everything loose.

Her. Kaia could. If Grey had things his way, he would kiss Kaia like she was the only woman in the world and then fuck her until they were both satiated.

She turned to look at him, even pulling up her sunglasses. “I think you’re lying to me, which is fine. I’m a stranger, but it would be a really good idea if you did something insane like went skinny dipping.”

His cock hardened immediately. “Is that an invitation?”

She giggled and covered her face. “Oh, please. Like I would ever be that easy.”

“It wouldn’t make you easy.”

Kaia faced the water once more, but there was a smile on her lips. She was considering it. That’s why she was looking out at the water. Did she imagine what it would be like to be in the water with him? Nude with nothing but water between them?

His breath caught.

You need to chill. We can’t be sitting here on the beach, sporting a hard cock. Get it together. Skinny dipping doesn’t even sound that fun. His dragon huffed because nothing sounded as wonderful as skinny dipping with Kaia.

“Why doesn’t your dad just pick his older son?” Kaia asked, breaking the silence with a killer question.

“Some people think that the CEO should get the job on merit and not because they were born to it. I agree. I would accept it if my dad didn’t think I was the right man for the job.”

“Fuck that. No. If you want to be the CEO and don’t get chosen, you open your own business. Become your own CEO.”

He laughed. “Because it’s that easy, huh?”

“I didn’t say it would be easy. I just said you shouldn’t give up on it even if it’s not handed to you.”

He laid his head against the chair and took a deep breath, letting the breeze cool him. “Why did your coven come here for a holiday?”

“My sister is going through a really bad divorce right now. Her ex is angry. She’s angry. Everyone is angry, so it’s just been a lot of fighting and a lot of tension. I thought if we took this trip, she would relax.”

“You like making people relax, huh?”

“I’m a guidance counselor at a high school. Helping people remain calm is kind of what I do for a living.”

“Ha. It makes so much sense now. It’s not just helping people stay calm, but you also like to get people thinking. I bet you’re the best guidance counselor in the world.”

“Well, maybe not the world, but definitely in the district.” She smiled at him. “See? Now you have to listen to me. You know that my advice is professionally sound.”

Grey leaned over, closing the distance between their two chairs. He pressed his lips against hers before running his tongue along the seam of her mouth. She let him in with a moan. Her hands went to his chest, and he swore that her touch was hotter than the sun. He was a dragon, but her heat might undo him.

They had to pull away, given the awkward angle of the chairs, but it was for the best. If they had kept on kissing,

Grey's erection would have burst right through his swimsuit. He licked his lips, desperate to kiss her again.

Kaia lay back in her seat and blew out a breath. "I didn't expect that to happen."

"Sorry. I shouldn't have done that."

"No. Don't apologize. It was a good kiss. Definitely in the top ten."

He balked. "Top ten? What the hell?"

Kaia giggled and lifted her sunglasses so he could look into her eyes. "What? Are you not satisfied with your ranking? Would you like another shot?"

He grinned. The witch was teasing him, egging him on. *She wanted to kiss him again.* "Yeah. I'd like another shot. This time, I know I'm competing."

This time, Grey got to his feet, pulling Kaia up along with him. They stood, facing each other, in the shade of the umbrella. She pushed her glasses back into her hair. Grey took this chance to cup her face in his hands.

"Your eyes are so beautiful," he said.

"Bonus points."

"Good to know the judges are fair." He leaned down, taking his time. He waited until Kaia moved one inch to meet him to finally kiss her.

Their mouths met and moved in tandem. Their hands explored and took chances despite the crowded beach. Kaia pulled away, breathless. "Congratulations, you just made the top three."

"I knew you weren't easy." Grey was ready to give it another go, but he was rudely interrupted by the sound of his name.

"Grey! Greyson! Where the fuck are you?" Jaymes was running along the beach.

"Do you want me to remove the spell?" Kaia asked.

“Yeah. Something’s wrong.”

Greyson was immediately spotted by a panicked Jaymes. “You need to come,” he huffed. “There’s been a fight.”

“What?” Grey rolled his eyes. “Who?”

“Richard and Jorge. Your father’s in an emergency meeting with Portia. He’s extended our stay. You need to talk some sense into him. We can’t stay here until those two get along. We’ll have to move here. They *fought*, Grey. Blood was shed.”

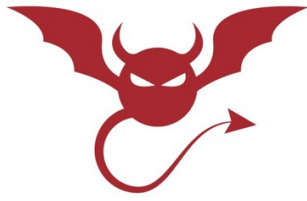
Grey leaped to his feet. “What the fuck? No. I am not staying here longer than I need to.”

“Because it’s so hard to lie on the beach and play games with your coworkers in the sunshine. Take a breath, will you?”

He turned his head slowly toward Kaia. She wasn’t looking away from the beach as if she hadn’t spoken at all. She had. He heard her. She had a very distinctive voice that was hard to forget. It always made his body react.

Grey hated that he had no control over himself whenever the witch was close to him. Now that he knew what she tasted like, he wanted more. He would always want more but now was not the time. “I’m not talking about lying down on the beach. I’m talking about my company being torn apart by egomaniacs.” He stood and stalked off, his patience wearing thinner with every step away from Kaia.

EIGHT



KAIA

I *am not staying here longer than I need to.*

Greyson's words played on repeat as Kaia watched him walk away with one of his thunder mates. He barely looked back at her. What a jerk! What kind of man was he to kiss a woman like *that* and then walk away like he hadn't been rock-hard in his swimsuit a second ago? Maybe Rachel was right, and it was better to stay far away from men.

She gathered her things and went back to her room to change. She slipped on a one-piece with a pair of jeans shorts, and she headed for the cabana's back deck where Rachel, Ian, and the others were lounging in the sun. "This resort is wasted on you," she said, sitting beside her sister.

"What? Why?" Rachel asked

"You should be at the pool or doing one of the many activities. Instead, you're vegging out in the cabana."

"Umm, this is our own *cabana*." Ian lifted his cocktail in the air. "We don't have to worry about running into that demon and his pals at the beach. We have this." He pointed to the deck that dropped off into the water. There was no beach but a ladder to climb back up from the deep yet still crystal blue water.

"Fair, but it *is* nice out there, though. I haven't seen that demon around, and to be honest, I don't see him doing anything now that Grey knocked him down a few pegs." Rachel snorted. "Careful, there. It's starting to sound like you're grateful the dragon intervened for you."

“I am,” she said. “Why wouldn’t I be? It was sweet in that alpha way shifters can have.”

“Oh, please. It had nothing to do with you. That was just two men trying to outdo each other, just like those two dragons who were fighting. As soon as they started yelling at each other like lunatics, I was out of there. I couldn’t find you, obviously.”

Kaia sighed. There was a time when Rachel would have believed Kaia that it *was* sweet, but not anymore. The end of her marriage had made Rachel completely incapable of cheering for love. Not that Kaia was in love with Grey. It just sucked that she wanted to tell her sister she had made out with him so they could both rage at him for walking away. That wouldn’t happen, though. Instead, Rachel would be annoyed that Kaia had taken that chance in the first place, and the next thing she knew, it would all be *her* fault.

“Sure,” Kaia finally said to placate her sister.

“I don’t know,” Ian commented. “It sure looked like he was trying to teach the demon some manners.”

“There are better ways to teach,” Rachel grumbled.

“Well, sure, but can we all agree that the dragon is *fine*?” Ian waited for Rachel to join in on his laughter, but she didn’t. He was her best friend, and even he was having a hard time reaching her. It was hard to watch Ian struggling to make a connection with her after decades of friendship.

“He’s not my type,” Rachel stood and went into the cabana.

“She’s snarky,” Ian sighed. “I thought your plan to get her here was genius! Why isn’t it working?”

“We need to get her away from this cabana and out there with other people. We need to bring that woman back to life.”

“We are so on it,” they all agreed.

“I’ve got the best idea. Let her sulk tonight, but tomorrow, we are going to start the day off right. I’m thinking brunch by the beach and then some snorkeling.” Kaia stood. “I’ll talk to

Una at the reception desk and set everything up. You just make sure Rachel is ready and out of the door at ten.”

“You got it,” Ian assured her.

Maybe on her way to the reception desk, she would run into Grey and totally ignore him. He deserved it after so rudely dismissing those kisses. Maybe she had been too harsh in judging his kisses in the top ten and then in the top three. The truth was that even that first kiss had blown every other one away. She only egged him on because she wanted more.

Now, he was off dealing with his company drama, as he should be. She only wished he hadn't been a dick about his holiday and the time they were spending together.

Maybe Rachel was right, and she needed to cool off a bit. Maybe love wasn't all that it was cracked up to be if even Hellscape Holiday Resort couldn't help heal her sister.

THE BEACH-SIDE RESTAURANT was stunning in the morning sun. The linens were white and almost matched the sand. Small waves lapped at the dry beach only a few feet away from the back of the patio, where the hostess brought Kaia and her friends.

“It's so early,” Rachel moaned. “Why do we have to be here for ten? Brunch is later. Much later.”

“You're on holiday. That doesn't mean sleeping the day away. Not in bed, anyway. You do that on the beach after a nice swim. Now, stop your whining and read your menu. Look! They have waffles. Your favorite. Let's get some waffles for sure.”

Rachel sighed. “Fine. But might as well get two orders because once I start, I won't be able to stop.”

They ordered enough food to feed the entire restaurant, but the feast was worth it. The waffles were out of this world and just what Rachel needed. She ate one after the other, relishing each bite with a quiet, “This was a good idea, Kai.”

It was all she needed to know; she was helping her sister. That's all she wanted ... for her sister to be okay. Not happy quite yet. That was asking too much. But if Rachel could be okay, then at least the long way back to herself would be easier.

Ian winked at Kaia from across the table. He mouthed, "Thank you."

She waved him off and tucked into her omelet.

"Kaia, good morning."

She looked up from her plate to see none other than Greyson Verlice standing beside her table, looking fresh and rested in a pair of tan shorts and a gray tee. Damn him for looking this good after yesterday.

"Morning," she replied, not even bothering to act like a lady and meet his gaze.

"I was hoping to run into you. Would you like to join me for drinks this afternoon?" Grey added a smile to his question. His eyes were almost the same color as the water, and Kaia wanted to pass out from the way her body was going insane.

Had he just asked her out, or had her ears stopped functioning?

"Sorry?" she asked.

His smile widened. "We were so rudely interrupted yesterday, and then I spent the day doing damage control. I couldn't get to you until it was much too late to knock on your door."

Ian was looking at the exchange with glee, but Rachel glared at Grey like he was her most bitter enemy. In some ways, he was. He represented everything that had led her to her divorce.

A flirting and good-looking man.

"I wondered if we could pick up where we left off and go for drinks."

"She is saying yes," Ian cut in.

Grey chuckled. “As happy as I am that you approve, I would prefer it if Kaia came willingly.”

She swallowed and took a deep breath. “Drinks. I assume that means we’ll be surrounded by dragons? This is a work thing, right?”

“These drinks were mandatory for us, yes.”

“Ouch.” This was almost as bad as being nothing but someone to pass the time with.

“Oh, no. I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I know. But it’s very easy to rattle you,” she admitted. “I can’t help myself. You’re tightly wound. You need to relax if you’re going to survive the CEO gig.”

“I don’t even know if that’s what I want.”

“You know what you want, Grey. You’re just scared to admit it to yourself for whatever reason.”

“This is just so fascinating. Can I come to drinks?” Ian asked.

“No,” Kaia answered too quickly. She cleared her throat. “No. Grey and I have some talking to do.”

“Apparently, we do. I’ll see you later?” He gave her the time and place before saying his goodbyes. She watched him go with a gleeful feeling sitting in her heart.

“Don’t get too excited,” Rachel warned. Ian shot her an apologetic look. “You don’t know him. As soon as he sleeps with you, he’ll be on to the next.”

Kaia didn’t know if that was true, but really, she believed Rachel was wrong.

NINE



GREYSON

Greyson didn't know what time it was, but he was sure that he was being stood up. If Kaia didn't show up in ten minutes, he would leave.

Only, he couldn't leave. These drinks were mandatory. His father had insisted on everyone gathering to discuss their favorite activity so far. It was a dumb way to force everyone together, but no one would put their jobs on the line and skip the awkward drinks after an awkward day.

Suddenly, there was a hush in the noise. The crowd parted, and just like that, Kaia appeared. She walked toward him with a small smile, looking ravishing in a royal blue dress that almost touched the ground. Her hair was loose and set in waves.

Grey rushed to her side. "Hi."

"Hi," she returned. "It looks like a funeral in here."

"People are getting a little sick of being forced to stay here while two employees hash out their shit. Some of these dragons have families they're missing."

"You're dad should've made it a family thing. Then people could meet each other's families and really get to know each other. It's one thing to know a man is always ten minutes late, but then when you meet his wife and their four kids, you get it."

"That's not a bad idea. I wouldn't have suggested that because I wouldn't have a family to bring. Maybe one day, I'll

bring the missus and our kids here. First, I have to meet this woman and marry her.”

“Good luck with that if your dad is waiting on your marriage to release his staff from this holiday.”

“I’d have to meet someone here,” he said with a chuckle. “Know anyone you could set me up with?”

She rolled her eyes. “You could always ask Rachel her thoughts on marriage.”

“She’s something.”

“Don’t judge her too harshly. Rachel has always been the cloud to my sun. That’s what our parents used to say, anyway. Even when we were little girls, she was the grumpy one, and I was the little ball of sunshine.”

“That’s actually not a bad way to describe you, you know.”

Kaia was stunning in the flowing blue dress. It dipped around her breasts, and he was sure that someone had called it a sweetheart neckline before. He was a bit nervous about bringing her around the dragons when there was so much fighting going on. Surely, she would see and hear things that weren’t too pleasant.

But her presence made it bearable for him.

“Thanks for coming with me.”

“Thanks for inviting me, I guess. You needed a buffer?”

He winced. “No. That’s not why I asked you. I wanted you to come because I want to spend time with you, but all my time is being eaten up by these activities and then teaching two grown men not to fight.” He rolled his eyes. “I don’t know why my dad wanted to prolong the trip. At least there is a silver lining there.”

“Is there?” she asked.

“I get time to chat with you. Why were you upset with me yesterday?”

She narrowed her eyes at him. “Come on, you know why.”

“No. I don’t.”

“You said something like you didn’t want to stay here longer than you need to.” She kept her voice low.

He stepped forward and cupped her cheek. “I meant stuck with these idiots. Not with you. You’re a good silver lining, Kaia, but what is happening here is hard to deal with. It doesn’t help that it’s happening in public for everyone to see.”

“Says the man who beat up a demon.”

“I didn’t beat him up. I only sprayed him with a bit of fire. He’s fine.”

“His body is fine, but I’m not so sure about his ego. Have you seen him around?”

“No,” Grey answered. “Have you? He better not have been rude.”

“Calm down, dragon. I haven’t seen him again.”

“Good.”

“You took that very seriously,” she pointed out.

“It’s happened a few times over my career that a demon gave me shit for being a human. It’s caused some tension with certain kinds of demons. I don’t like it when people are rude. Not about what kind of creature we are.”

She nodded. “Ian was hoping you did it to impress me.”

“That was a silver lining. There are a lot of those when you’re around.”

Her breath caught, and for a second, he thought she was going to chew him out for being so cheesy. She didn’t. She smiled softly. “That’s actually a really sweet thing to say. Thanks, Grey.”

“Sure. You wanna get out of here?” he asked.

Kaia looked around. “These drinks are mandatory. We can’t leave.”

We.

She would stay, then. That was something, at least, given that. Richard and Jorge were shouting at each other, and the event had only just started.

“It’s gonna be a lot of this,” he warned her.

“That’s okay. I work in a high school. This is nothing.”

“Any pointers?” he asked with a grin.

“Yeah, take away their favorite toy, and they’ll listen. Either that or put them in detention.”

“This holiday *is* their detention.” Grey laughed. “I don’t know how we could detain them any more than we already have.”

“I have an idea,” she started. “It’s a little weird.”

“This I gotta hear. Tell me.”

She looked around and shook her head. “This is a room of shifters. I’ll tell you later. Just know, it’s good.”

“Good because you’re the best guidance counselor in your district?”

“I’ve got the plaque and everything, but no. That’s not where I’m getting this idea from ...” She covered her mouth and giggled. “I’ll tell you later.”

“Don’t forget.”

She grinned. “Like I could.”

He hoped Kaia was no longer talking about her mischievous idea but about him. Grey hoped Kaia could never forget him.

He sure would never forget her.

GREYSON DIDN’T WANT to be a stalker, but he was about ten minutes away from knocking on Kaia’s door.

But then, when he showed up at her door, he would have to face an angry Rachel, an eager Ian, and, no doubt, a very upset

Kaia.

Their night hadn't exactly ended in the best way. *Again.* His dumb coworkers kept on interfering with his love life. Ironic since he was here for work, and his love life shouldn't even be on his mind. But he couldn't stop thinking about Kaia. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw her face.

He hadn't kissed her in way too long.

Grey had intended to walk her back to her cabana after the drinks were done, but before the waiters had even brought out the appetizers Dad ordered, Richard threw a drink at Jorge, who threw a couple of punches before stalking off.

Grey had grabbed one of the imps ... Ocho ... and paid him candy corn to walk Kaia back to her room. She insisted it wasn't necessary, but he had asked her on a date, and that meant he should be a gentleman and walk her home.

But, of course, Richard and Jorge were intent on making everyone around them as miserable as they were. The insults they threw at each other were just plain odd. Grey didn't know what to think anymore.

All he could do was roam the resort in the hopes of running into Kaia. The place was massive, and he hadn't had any luck. He was due to have dinner with his dad, but he had some time before then.

Hopefully, enough time to find Kaia and ask her out. *Again.*

Hopefully, this time, no other dragon would ruin it. *Again.*

He stopped short on his way to the beach when he spotted Kaia sitting alone at one of the poolside bars. He didn't know whether he should smile or be pissed she was all by herself. Her little purple sundress left very little to the imagination. He could even see her black swimsuit under, peaking out to say hello.

Before he knew what he was doing, he was on his way over to her. He pulled out one of the vacant chairs beside her and sat down, motioning over to one of the bartenders for a

coffee. Kaia finally looked up at him, and she gasped in surprise.

“You.” She might deny her attraction to him, but she couldn’t hide her heartbeat. It was fast. Only when he was around. A dragon could get ideas from that.

“Me,” he responded just as the waiter brought over a cup of coffee. He took a sip of it, watching her carefully. “Why are you sitting here alone?”

“I’m not alone.” She lifted her book for him to see. “I’m in great company.”

He took the book from her hands and laid it on the bar. “Don’t be rude, Kaia. You can’t sit here and read while I’m trying to make conversation.” He hoped he injected enough of a teasing tone. He really was terrible at flirting.

She narrowed her eyes at him. “I was in the middle of a sentence.”

He flipped the book open where his finger had kept her page. “Where were you? I’ll finish it for you.”

“Never mind,” she grumbled. “What is it you want from me today? What game do you want me to win for you?”

“I think you’re misremembering how that hide-and-seek game ended.”

“Technically, we were never found. We won,” she pointed out.

He smiled. “Sure. We won. Never mind that a fight broke out.”

She giggled. “Dragons are fascinating creatures. Always fighting.”

“We’re not all fighters like that. I will say we can be hotheads.”

“All that fire has to go somewhere. It’s impressive, by the way.”

“What is?” he asked.

“Your dragon. It’s a very impressive beast.”

“Is it?” He was pleased but shocked. “When did you ...” He nodded and chuckled. “You watched the altercation with the demon.”

“I did. You’re a very pretty dragon.”

He threw his head back with a laugh. *Don’t laugh, his dragon roared. She just gave me a nice compliment. You need to thank her for me, not laugh!*

“My dragon thanks you for your compliment.”

“He can hear me?”

“Of course, he can. He’s always in my head.”

“Does he have a different mind than you?”

He thought about it for a second. “No. Yes. It’s hard to explain. We’re both here. We’re connected, but it doesn’t get crowded.”

“So, when you make a decision, he always agrees?”

“No,” Grey and his dragon said at the same time.

“That means you are connected but don’t have the same mind. It’s so cool to think you have a friend in there all the time.”

I like her. She’s nice. You should keep her around for longer than a holiday fling.

On that, Grey and his dragon agreed.

“Do you wanna go for a walk by the water?” he asked.

She nodded, smiling up at him. “I’d love that.”

“This is a date, by the way. A short one where I will try to impress you with nothing but my conversation skills because I am meeting my dad for dinner later.”

“Tall order. Are you sure you wanna give it a shot? Wouldn’t you rather wait until tomorrow?”

“I have no clue how long we’ll be here. Let’s not wait. Walk with me?” He extended his hand, and she took it.

TEN



KAIA

He held out his hand, and Kaia couldn't stop herself. Not that she even wanted to stop herself. She wanted to walk along the water with Grey and chat with him. There was still that whole fight thing she wanted to talk to him about.

Protective was one thing, but she didn't really abide by violence.

Nor did she appreciate being ushered away by an imp before the night was over. It wasn't Greyson's fault. He was here to bond with his company. It was silly that she got angry when they couldn't hang out for more than two seconds before Richard or Jorge threw hissy fits.

"Let's go this way," she suggested. "I haven't seen this beach yet." Kaia led them down one of the many paths. Some went to beaches, and some led to cabanas or other exterior buildings. Off in the distance, small islands could be seen. "I heard a rumor that those islands can be rented."

"Really?" He didn't look shocked.

She nodded. "Do you think it's true?"

"It has to be. Why else would there be a whole bunch of them out there like that? Would you like that? Renting your own island?"

"Depends who I'm with ..." She smiled. "If it was just Rachel and me, I wouldn't be responsible for my actions after twenty-four hours."

He laughed. “I think that’s fair. Maybe not with a sibling, then.”

“No, not a sibling.” *But a special friend? Totally.* “I already know that you would absolutely hate being on an island all by yourself. Stuck with only one person? How would you work?”

“I can think of a few things that would occupy me if I were on an island with the right person.” He squeezed her fingers, and Kaia squeezed her core. He had to be talking about her. Or, at the very least, he was talking about the things he would like to do to her.

Rachel’s warning played back through her mind, but she tried to ignore it. Did it matter if this was nothing but a holiday fling? There was nothing slimy about Grey, and Kaia thought he wouldn’t be that bad of a one-night stand. She wouldn’t mind remembering Greyson Verlice when she was on her deathbed.

Grey wasn’t just hot. He was sweet too. Maybe he was a bit cocky, but there were things he wasn’t too sure about, and that was endearing. The big strong man couldn’t always be big and strong, and that was okay. He’d learn that with the right woman one day. She wouldn’t expect to be that woman, but she could be a fun time on the way.

Kaia kicked off her sandals and walked close enough to the water that the water touched her toes every now and then. It was cool and kept her fresh and alert. She was still holding Grey’s hand, and though she didn’t want to let go, she was starting to feel a little bit lightheaded from the contact. She would need something more ... and *soon*.

It definitely didn’t help that she knew just what a good kisser he was.

“Just so you know, at the end of this beach walk, I’m going to ask you out again. I don’t know what the hell my dad is cooking up for the rest of our schedule. That’s why I’m meeting him tonight.” He rolled his eyes.

“Has he made a last-minute addition to the retreat games?” she asked.

“Yeah. It’ll probably be actual torture now.”

She giggled. “I don’t see your dad resorting to that. He could just fire them.”

“They’re thunder members, so it makes getting rid of them a bit harder.” He shook his head. “Getting rid of them sounds so bad. They would have a severance package if they were fired. Their 401Ks would be secured. I’m not a monster. I would just explain that I expect more from my employees.”

Did he know it sounded like he had already made up his mind? It sure sounded like Grey wanted to be the CEO. “Have thunder members ever been fired before?”

He winced. “No. Never. No precedent.”

Ha. So he had checked the company archives already. “But it’s what you would do? Fire them?”

He thought about this for a little while. “I don’t know. It would depend if I’m alpha *and* CEO.”

“Huh? What does that mean?”

“None of us know if the CEO will also be the alpha. My dad holds both titles, but no one knows what he intends to do with either of them. My mother is just going out of her mind. She wants him to retire from everything so they can travel together. I don’t know what Dad is doing.”

“That’s going from two full-time jobs to retirement. Your poor dad.”

“I have no sympathy for him right now. He shouldn’t be keeping us in the dark. If he was more upfront about his plans, maybe Richard and Jorge wouldn’t be fighting so much. No, they still would be because those two cannot stand each other, but it might not be as bad. Everyone is exhausted at work, and I get it. We have to deal with all this negativity.”

“You should ask Portia to plan a yoga session before you leave.”

“Huh? You want me to suggest a yoga class to my fellow dragons?”

“Yeah. I think it would be a good idea. With the right teacher, those things can change lives. It happened to me. I wasn’t going to apply to college. But then, I randomly went to this yoga class Ian dragged me to. But I swear, I was never the same. The teacher spoke during the class, and he said something that just made me realize I needed to go to college so I could *help* people.”

“You got all that from a yoga class?”

“Yup.”

“Must have been some class.”

“But that’s my point. We’re in Hellscape Holiday Resort. Are you telling me Portia wouldn’t have something up her sleeve? Seems to me like that woman *always* has one plan cooking, or at the very least, she’s good at helping others cook their own plans. She’ll know with a background in psychology and mediation. Or at least a yoga expert.”

He chuckled. “You’re right. She would definitely have an idea. This is great. I’m gonna set this up before dinner and surprise my dad with it. He’ll be shocked that I agree with him. Before we met, I was ready to call back the jet.” He winked at her.

Kaia wanted to do a little victory dance, but she stopped herself. The man clearly wanted to be in a leadership role, but the current CEO and alpha wasn’t too great at giving other people the place to explore roles and opportunities.

It sounded like the whole company needed to sit down with a guidance counselor. That was her professional opinion, but it wasn’t Kaia’s place to say anything. At least Grey was well on his way to being the CEO the company needed. She could only hope that his father would see the same potential in his son.

“Would you like that, Kaia? If we stayed a little bit longer?”

“That depends. If you do stay longer, will you ask me out?”

He grinned. “I told you I would just as soon as I learned our plans.”

“But now you know that you’re staying. You’ll talk to Portia about the yoga and make your dad stay for a bit longer.” Kaia smiled back at him.

“And here I thought I could be all romantic and surprise you with a date.”

“You don’t need to surprise me, but if you tell me when we’re going, I’ll give you a reward.”

He chuckled. “Why would I need a reward?”

“Because you’re always working or thinking about work. If you’re thinking about something else, like me, for example, then you should be rewarded.”

“How?” he spun her into his arms and took her by the waist. He leaned into her and tilted her head back to look into her eyes. “Tell me.”

“Nope.”

He sealed his mouth to hers and kissed her. “Do you think I can think about work when you kiss like that?” His erection pressed into her. Kaia moaned and longed to reach out and cup his length.

“Come this way.” She tugged on his hand and led him to the back of the small staff utility cabin. It gave them just enough privacy to make out. They explored each other, letting their mouths and hands do daring things given the setting.

“Grey,” she whispered. “I want you.”

“You sure? Anyone could walk in on us,” he whispered in her ear.

“Shut up.” She kissed him with everything she had. She didn’t want to stop. A whole parade of clowns could walk past, and she wouldn’t care. She wouldn’t stop, either.

It had been a while since she had sex, but she had never been kissed by a man like Grey. She would never get a chance like this again. She was on holiday. If she wanted to have a beach fling with some sexy stranger, no one could blame her. If they did? That was on *them*.

Besides, Greyson Verlice was not the kind of man that came around often. He might well be one of a kind. This was a man who had fought a demon for being rude to them. This was a man ... one who could lead a company ... but he wanted to pause and consider his choices.

He didn't do that now.

Grey was hard, he wanted her, and she was letting him take her.

To know that she could make a man this controlled lose sight of himself was fun. Powerful. Amazing.

"I won't ask you again," his whisper sent shivers all across her body.

"Good. Don't. It'll only waste precious time."

He hiked her dress up, bunching it up around her waist. She dragged down her swimsuit bottoms until they pooled at her feet. Grey lifted her off the ground while her hands fumbled between them to release his erection. She gripped it before letting her hand run up and down the girth. He hissed out a breath. "Kaia," he growled. "Careful."

"I know how to handle a cock," she shot back.

"Well aware, love." He positioned himself at her entrance and lowered her down onto his length.

She clenched her pussy around his erection, closing her eyes in bliss. She dropped her head back and moaned. "Oh, Grey. You feel amazing."

"*You* do," he insisted.

He moved inside her.

Her skin tingled with anticipation. She wanted to orgasm before they were caught. She didn't even know what the hell

she would do if they were caught, but she didn't care. She could easily cast a spell, shielding them from view. She wanted this. She wanted him. If Grey was told to get on a plane tonight, he would be gone, and she would lose her chance to be with her.

No. That couldn't happen.

"Grey," she moaned, clenching again. He groaned and captured her mouth in a kiss.

He didn't stop thrusting into her until all she could do was hold on. He held her tightly against him as she came apart. Her release was powerful and surprised her with its intensity. Soon, Grey was grunting in her ear, his pace wild as he emptied himself inside her.

She wasn't too worried about getting pregnant, thanks to a spell she had, but she would make sure to tell him later. Kaia wanted to bask in this moment. She wanted to feel his body inside hers. She wanted to stay pressed in his arms like this until she had her fill of him.

"We should move." Grey set her down and helped her straighten her dress. He kissed her softly before taking her hand in his. "I'm gonna walk you to your cabin."

She wanted to tell him that wasn't necessary, but it was.

She didn't want to let him go.

ELEVEN



GREYSON

Greyson was in absolute shock. Never, in all of his long life, had he ever had public sex, but now he had done it with a witch.

Kaia could have easily shielded them from prying eyes. Regardless, Greyson would never be the same. Not because there was a chance that they would be caught ... and that would have fucking killed him. No one should see his witch naked but him.

Careful, his dragon warned. You're becoming possessive because you've just had sex. Try not to scare this one away, will you?

He helped Kaia to her feet and helped her tug her dress back into place. He hissed out a breath. He shouldn't have gone this far at the back of a supply cabana like some kind of sleazy bro. He was a grown man, and both of them had a room. Greyson was too pissed with himself to say much on the way to Kaia's cabana. It wasn't until they were at her door that he managed to say, "Kaia, I'm sorry about earlier. It shouldn't have happened like that."

"Why are you sorry?" Her face was still flushed with an orgasmic glow. She was so beautiful that he couldn't keep his hands off her. They went back to her waist so he could bring her back to the hallow of his hips.

"That shouldn't have happened like it did. Our first time shouldn't have been that"

“Well, then maybe wait until we’re in the safety of a bedroom before you do me next time,” she teased.

“Next time?” he arched a brow.

She stepped a bit out of his embrace. “*If* there is a next time,” she corrected.

There would be a next time. Grey didn’t know how he would survive if this was their one and only time. It was too good, and they had barely gotten the time to explore each other.

“Next time,” he insisted.

“You’re pretty confident in your skills as a lover,” she teased.

“You came. I have every reason to be confident.”

She shook her head, but he still spotted her smile. “Fine. Be as confident as you want to be. But you don’t know if we’ll get another time. You might be getting on a flight home tomorrow.”

“My dad is dead-set on finishing this retreat, remember? Besides, we have yoga in the morning. I’ll find you after yoga tomorrow.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No, don’t find me. Tell me where to meet you and when.”

“I have no idea when the yoga thing will happen. Let’s say two. Late lunch. Dinner too. Don’t make breakfast plans either.”

“Too confident,” she warned with a grin.

“If we only get a few days, then we’ll make the most of it.”

She giggled. “Fine. That’s a good point. I’ll meet you here at two.”

“It’s so far,” he whispered before kissing her softly.

“You have to go, Grey. I’ll see you soon.” She kissed him, but he wasn’t ready to let her go. He deepened the kiss and

grabbed hold of her. They were interlaced when they were interrupted.

“What the hell is going on here?” Rachel asked, her mouth gaping in shock. She blinked between her sister and Grey. He tried to find a reasonable excuse to explain what was going on, but he was at a loss. He couldn’t form a single thought.

“Oh. Rach. Hey.” She smoothed down her dress and then her hair.

Rachel noticed and narrowed her eyes at him. “You need to come with me. There’s been enough dragon time. You’re here with us, and it’s about time you hung out with your coven.” She took Kaia’s hand in hers and began to lead her away.

Grey, who was still holding on to Kaia’s waist, didn’t let her go. Rachel had no choice but to let her hand drop. He cupped Kaia’s cheeks in his hands and brushed a soft kiss against her mouth. “If you want to find me, I’m staying in the blue cabanas. Number seven.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

They kissed again before he made himself walk away. If he hadn’t, Rachel was going to kick his ass down the path. Hopefully, Kaia wouldn’t be impacted because of her sister’s concerns.

“Don’t fall into his trap,” Greyson heard Rachel hiss through tight lips, making him look back at them.

“I won’t,” Kaia replied softly.

The first thing Greyson felt was a crushing disappointment. It was insane, really. Why should he care if Kaia wouldn’t fall into the whole love and marriage trap? It’s not like *he* wanted to marry her and be stuck with her beautiful smile and perfect giggle forever. It’s not like *he* wanted to see what their children might look like.

It’s not like he cared about her at all.

Kaia Coll was a good lay, and that was all there was to it.

That wasn't the truth, though. That's not all there was to it. Grey liked her. He missed her now, even though he had only just left her side. He wanted to kiss her again. He wanted to lay her down on a bed and explore every inch of her body.

As he continued to daydream about Kaia, Grey made his way to Lou's Place. He hoped the demon might know where Portia was. Lou was nowhere to be seen, but Sei, the young demon who sometimes stepped in for Lou, was behind the bar, busy flirting with a couple of pixies. When he spotted Greyson, he slid his way over, grabbing some ingredients as he went along. It wasn't quite as smooth as Lou, but it was a decent enough effort.

"How is our hero?" Sei asked

Grey rolled his eyes. "Did Lou put you up to that?"

Sei nodded. "He did, and it's worth more than my job's worth to ignore Lou. He made it clear that you're to drink for free anytime you're in here."

"I just wondered if you knew where I might find Portia," Grey said instead of replying to the demon.

Sei's eyes went wide. "Oh! And why do you need to talk to the big boss? Is there something happening? Do you want me to help? I am a good helper. I help people all the time. Lou showed me how, and he's the best at helping people."

One of the other patrons snorted in their drinks at Sei's line. The bartender pointed a finger at the bear shifter and said, "If you don't agree, go drink somewhere else or imbibe one of Lou's cocktails at your own peril." The man stood and left, leaving a more-than-hefty tip on the bar top. Sei grabbed the money and shoved it into his pockets. "As I was saying. I am very good at helping folks around here."

"I did come to you because I need help," Grey pointed out. "I must find Portia."

"Fine, fine. Be secretive. She'll be doing the rounds right about now. Best to wait here and have a drink."

"I'll take a lap of the grounds," Grey said.

On his way out of the bar, Grey spotted the demon who had been rude to Kaia's coven. The demon looked like a lost little child, stumbling around, mumbling about evil imps and poisoned shrimp. Greyson didn't stop to help the demon.

He was on a far more important mission, but finding Portia proved difficult. After walking around the resort, he decided to check her office. There, he found Portia lounging on a leopard print couch with Lou, the bartender. They were drinking elaborate cocktails, and he was clearly interrupting something. "I can come back later."

"Don't you dare," Lou said, sitting up. "Tell us. Why are you here? You look ..." The demon grinned. "You look like you're having a very good time at our resort."

"I am. Thanks. I was wondering, Portia, if there is a yoga teacher on staff. I would like to book a class for all of the dragons in my party."

"Interesting," Portia sipped her drink. "We don't have someone on staff, but I know a few people who could be called in. Why yoga?"

"Someone suggested it. I thought it was a good idea," he shrugged.

Lou and Portia's eyes lit up. Grey frowned, not understanding what was making them so eager. "Who was it?" the pair said together.

"Another guest, actually," he replied.

"Could it be one of those witches?" Portia asked.

"I bet it was," Lou agreed, nodding vehemently.

"So?" Portia pressed.

"Yeah. Tell us!"

Grey's head twirled from their fast-talking, but he had a feeling he shouldn't divulge too much information. He doubted they would appreciate the use of their supply cabana. It was true that Portia was a succubus, but there were still limits to what she would allow in her place of business. Public

sex probably wasn't accepted, even if this *was* Hellscape Holiday Resort.

"It was one of the witches, yes. She suggested yoga after witnessing the fight. Her way of thanking me for sticking up for her."

"Oh, I bet you did," Lou snickered.

Grey's frown deepened in confusion. "What?"

"Nothing, nothing," the demon assured him. "Just an old demon's mind going. Nothing to see here."

"When would you like this yoga class to take place?" Portia asked. "This evening? Tomorrow morning?"

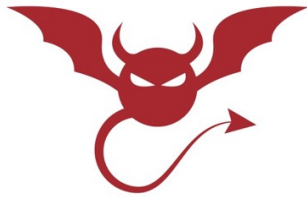
"Tomorrow late morning would be great."

"Let's say ten," Portia continued, reaching for her phone. "I'll take care of it."

"Thanks, Portia." Grey left in a hurry before they grilled him more.

He had a strange feeling that Portia and Lou knew a lot more than they were letting on, but how could they possibly know he was falling for Kaia?

TWELVE



GREYSON

The outdoor restaurant Greyson's father picked for their lunch meeting was a bit more relaxed than his usual choice. Grey was surprised his brother Jaymes wasn't joining them. These meetings were usually a competition between the brothers while Dad watched on with a smile. It was terrible, but only because his older brother wasn't exactly the usual dragon shifter. Jamie was shy and quiet without an ounce of the attitude it took to make it as a CEO and thunder leader.

"Are we waiting for Jaymes?" Grey asked his father when the waiter came by to take their drink orders.

"No," Dad answered. "It's just the two of us this morning. Jaymes went out on a boat at dawn to do some fishing."

"Well, I'm sure we can fill him in later."

Dad nodded but wasn't really paying attention. His focus was completely on the menu. Dad had a real dragon's appetite, and if it weren't for his dragon metabolism, he would be in a serious health crisis. The man ate butter like it was going out of style. Dad slathered a thick layer of butter onto a fresh roll and polished it off in a single bite. "The food here is so damn good. I'd come back for that alone." He grabbed a handful of rolls and dumped them onto his plate, eyeing the butter.

Grey wasn't in the mood for small talk, so he decided to get right down to business, which was, after all, the point of their meeting. His dad didn't do family time unless Mom insisted. "Dad, I booked us a yoga class in the morning.

Mandatory for all dragons. I think we could all benefit from some deep breathing and meditation.”

“What kind of bullshit is that?” Dad shook his head with a dry chuckle. “No one is gonna want to do that, Greyson. This trip has been hard enough already. We can’t be doing that yoga bullshit.”

“Not if the CEO reacts like that, no. But I was talking to a witch I met here, and she suggested that yoga might help Richard and Jorge to stop fighting. There’s something about the deep breathing and stretching that is supposed to help.”

His father looked at him like he was seeing him for the first time. “You were talking to someone about our business?”

“Well, no. I was just venting my frustration at how they’re behaving. She saw the fight. It’s not like I’m sharing company secrets. The entire paranormal world knows our company is in danger now because the fighting has been so public. This should help.”

“Ah.” Dad’s back straightened. “So this suggestion is actually you showing an interest in the company.”

“Not just the company, Dad. The thunder. This affects all areas of our lives, in *and* out of work. It’s this big drain on our resources and on our time. We shouldn’t be here trying to get grown men to behave. We should be with our families or our clients. Don’t get me wrong. Time away from the office as a team is a good idea, but this has felt more like a hostage situation than a holiday.” He stopped himself before he went too far and insulted his father. That wouldn’t help him at all.

“Quite the tone,” Dad commented, tearing into another roll.

“I’m angry that this has gone on this long,” Grey slipped out before he could catch himself.

“Look at that. At least one of my sons has teeth. Good to know. Where was this attitude before? Really would have been useful in some of the situations I’ve been in lately.”

Greyson clenched his jaw. *That’s because you need to retire already!* He didn’t know if he had the thought or if it

was his dragon. Either way, it was true. Dad was no longer the right person to head up the company. His resolve to keep things civil during the meeting flew away. He was just way too angry to hold back. “Maybe if we were given a chance to speak out without you tearing into us in front of a boardroom full of our peers, we would be more willing to share our ideas.”

“Well, well. The young dragon is interested in the company for a day, and just like that, everything I do is wrong. You know what, Greyson? I don’t think you’re who I envision as the leader of the company or the thunder. Not if these snarky things you’ve got going on right now are any indication. To be CEO, you need ...” Dad continued to rattle off a list of qualities a CEO and alpha should have. It was a good enough list.

The irony was Dad didn’t even realize he was describing his polar opposite. Dad knew what a CEO should do, but somehow, he never could quite get it right in action. Grey believed he could put things right.

Before meeting Kaia, he would never have admitted this to himself. Even having the thought in the privacy of his own head was too risky. Not anymore, though. Now, Greyson thought that life was too short to let bad things continue to happen just because it was uncomfortable to challenge it. His time with Kaia had shown him just how precious time was ... even if he had more of it ahead of him than the common man.

Kaia had asked him if he wanted to be the CEO, and Grey had the answer now.

“You know what, Dad, I’ll see you at yoga. I’m not going to sit here and take this verbal dressing down again. I know what it takes to make a business and a thunder run. I can feel the right thing to do here.” He pressed a hand to his chest. “You’re fucking up a lot lately, Dad. I’m sorry, but it’s true. You are. We’re doing the yoga because I believe it will help.”

Grey stood and made his way out of the restaurant without looking back. Never ... not once in his entire adult life ... had he talked back to his father, boss, and alpha like that. If Dad

wanted to punish him by giving him hundreds of hours of grunt work, he could. He could do it because he had done it before when Grey was a teenager on *multiple* occasions.

Once, Greyson had taken the initiative to plan a food drive before Thanksgiving. He had set up a whole bunch of volunteers with the local fire and police station, a couple of high schools, and the community association. He had used the family name and logo to get the word around.

Dad grounded him for six months.

Did it matter that his food drive had tripled the food bank's annual intake? Nope. Did it matter that his principal was so impressed that a wing of his high school was named Verlice Hall?

Dad punished him. "You can't use the Verlice name like that without asking for permission. Do you hear me? You wear that name because I allow it."

Remembering that terrible day ... the day he learned that his father would never believe in him ... always made Greyson angry. He walked along one of the paths, hoping to burn off some of his energy. He felt like a teenager all over again, reprimanded for trying to do a good thing. The right thing.

Why was his father so blind to that?

He was so lost in his thoughts that he didn't notice that Portia was walking beside him. "Greyson, hello," Portia smiled when he blinked at her in shock.

"Sorry, what was that?"

"You're just the dragon I was looking for," Portia explained. "I wanted to confirm that Damian will be ready for your yoga class tomorrow morning at ten."

"Great, Portia. Thanks so much."

"Is everything okay?" The succubus studied his face carefully as if she could spot the cause of his distress on his face.

He nodded tightly. "I'm fine. Just some family squabbling."

"I definitely know how that feels," she laughed softly. "Take it easy on your father. It's not easy when you start to feel like you don't matter in your own company and family."

"If he modernized his views and how he runs things ..."
He stopped himself short. "Sorry. This is not your problem."

Portia grinned. "Let him stew on his thoughts before yoga tomorrow. I suggest a nice flight for you. You can fly as high as you want here. The borders of the resort will protect you from view. The mountains by the green cabanas have a particularly beautiful view. That's why we set up our zip line there."

"That's a good idea. Thanks, Portia. I appreciate the suggestion."

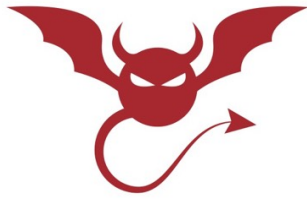
"Any time. That's what I'm here for." She waved before leaving.

Grey thought letting his dragon out for some air was just what he needed. He wanted to be relaxed and no longer angry when he spent time with Kaia.

Kaia.

Even the witch's name made him feel better.

THIRTEEN



KAIA

“Don’t fall into his trap,” Rachel snapped as she walked them away and into the cabana.

Kaia couldn’t help herself. She turned to glance back at Grey. He watched her go, his hands in his pockets and a sad look on his face. Maybe he wanted to go for round two. Maybe he didn’t want to let go of a woman who didn’t mind fucking in public.

If Greyson Verlice thought he could have her anytime he damn well pleased now that he had her in public, he was wrong. That was foolish. Wonderful. But still very dumb.

Anyone could have walked by or seen them. What if it had been that mean demon? Grey had already fought him once, and she couldn’t imagine the dragon taking too kindly to being interrupted when he was deep inside her.

“I won’t,” Kaia said, knowing it was already way too late. Grey looked back for one reason alone. He didn’t want to leave her side. “There is no trap to fall into, Rach,” she added. “Greyson is a good man. I like hanging out with him.”

“It can’t go anywhere,” she pointed out.

“We don’t know that.” Kaia felt a protective surge for Greyson. He was a good person. She could *feel* it. This *was* going somewhere. She didn’t know where, but she was going to find out. She didn’t make a habit of getting down and dirty with a man in public, but Grey was like no other man she had ever met.

“Please, Kaia. *Please* don’t become one of those women who have a holiday fling that she thinks she can change into a lifelong commitment,” Rachel said as she opened the cabana door. Ian and the others were in the living room, sipping coffee and munching at the mounds of food they ordered from room service.

“What’s this about a holiday fling?” Ian squealed.

“It’s nothing,” Kaia rushed, but Rachel shook her head and interrupted, “Just spotted this one with her tongue down that dragon’s throat.”

Ian’s eyes went wide. “Whoa! Awesome.”

“Not awesome,” Rachel insisted. “*Dumb*. He will be around for a second to get what he’s really after.”

“Don’t be hurtful,” Ian warned Rachel. “Kaia is your sister. You should want her to be happy even when you’re hurting.”

Anger flashed in Rachel’s eyes. She never liked being told what to do. “Did I ask you to tell me how to live my life? I don’t think so.” She stalked off, going to the back deck.

“Wow,” Ian whistled. “Wasn’t this trip supposed to make her nice again?”

“She’s sad,” Kaia defended.

“Doesn’t mean she has to shit on all of us. We’re not the ones who cheated and left. We’re still around even when she’s a major bummer.”

“We’re her family. We have to stand by her even if she isn’t quite herself. We need to be supportive.” Kaia smiled at her coven and hoped it would be enough to make up for Rachel’s terrible attitude.

“You’re a better sibling than I am. I would never have let my sister walk away after saying something like that. I don’t care that she is going through a divorce. That was a terrible thing to say.”

“It’s fine if Grey and I are nothing beyond a holiday fling, but I get this funny feeling that there is more to him than meets the eye.”

“Well, girl, you know what to do? What are you doing, hanging out here with us? Go be with him.”

“I can’t. Not right now. He’s meeting with his father. We have plans later, but I think I’ll go clear my head.”

“We’re about to go to the beach and snag the best spot. Join us?”

“No, you go ahead. I need to be alone for a bit.”

Ian gave her a sad smile. He must have guessed how she was feeling because he was right about Rachel. Kaia tried to be as understanding as possible, but she didn’t want to be hurt in the process. She went to her room and changed into a pair of workout leggings and a loose white tee that made her neon orange one-piece stand out underneath it.

She made her way to the mountains by the green cabanas, right where the zip line course was set up. If Una was right, the last line went from one mountain to the other, and the view was stunning.

It didn’t take long for her to get set up with a harness and helmet, and off she went. She swung from one platform to the next, following the course along the mountain. It was only when she was on the final and longest line that things went horribly wrong.

A loud *snap* echoed through the air just before Kaia started to fall.

Oh, my god!

Kaia tried to move her body as she fell, hoping to roll herself into a little ball before hitting the water. Hopefully, that would save her from too many broken bones when she hit that water’s surface. Her eyes were screwed shut as she tried to pray for survival. The wind was loud in her ears, and she was sure she was going to die after having a fight with Rachel.

A large rumble made her eyes snap open.

There was a very large dragon coming right at her.

Kaia knew that dragon. It was *her* dragon. The one who made her heart thump when near. It was Greyson Verlice in his

dragon form diving right for her. He gripped her tightly with one taloned hand before slowing their mad descent with a flap of his wings. He grumbled at her again.

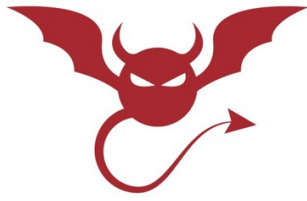
“I’m fine,” she shouted in the air. “You saved me.”

The grumble was nothing she could understand, but she guessed it was something along the lines of, “Good thing I was out for a random flight.”

He set her down gently on a tiny corner of a beach surrounded by tall shrubs. He took his human form, and that’s when Kaia learned that shifters lose their clothes when they shift.

There Greyson Verlice stood, as naked as the day he was born.

FOURTEEN



GREYSON

Grey knew he would be completely nude as soon as he shifted into his human shape again, but he didn't think it mattered. They had already slept together, not that sleeping had actually happened. He walked toward Kaia, and she threw her hands over her eyes. He chuckled softly and pushed her hands back down to her sides. "What are you doing?"

"You're *nude*."

"Yeah," he laughed again. "Nothing you haven't seen."

"This is different. You're ... and I ... and ..."

He threw his head back with a laugh. "Are you speechless, Kaia?"

"Yeah, shut up. It's not my fault. You're scrambling my brain with your man parts."

"My man parts?" he looked down at his body. "And what is wrong with my man parts?"

"Nothing," she rushed to say. "Only a bit intimidating."

"Have you looked in a mirror lately?" he leaned over and kissed her gently. "I know that we're supposed to meet later, but I'm so happy Portia told me to go for a flight."

"You don't think she planned that wire snapping, do you?"

"What? No. Of course not." He faltered. It was quite odd that Portia would send him just where Kaia happened to have an accident. "We need to tell someone that happened, though."

“The imp working the lines up there must have noticed that I fell.”

“Imps are strange creatures. Not sure I would trust them with this kind of task. You’re okay, and that’s what matters. We need to tell Portia about this. That kind of accident is a huge liability.”

“There’s the business brain,” she teased with a shaky voice.

“If you’re trying to make me feel better, it won’t work. I’m so angry. You could’ve died.”

“I’m choosing to pretend that didn’t happen. I’ll process it later with a pint of ice cream.”

His face fell. “Oh, Kaia. That must’ve been terrible.”

She lifted herself to the tips of her toes and kissed him. “I didn’t die. I *am* pleased that you care that much about my well-being.”

“Of course, I care about your well-being.” He cupped her face in his hands. “I don’t know what I would’ve done if something had happened to you. I only just met you.” He chuckled. “Sorry. I’m a dragon.”

“I know. I expect you to come in a little hot.”

He pulled away to look into her eyes. “Are you actually *teasing* me right now?”

“I am, yeah.”

“Aren’t you scared of your near-death experience?”

“Of course, but I’m also pleased with how I dealt with it. I was readying myself for the fall, bracing for impact. For all I know, I could’ve been fine.”

“Wow. Bracing? That’s some good and fast thinking.” He had to believe that she would’ve been fine had he not been there to catch her.

Kaia grinned and tapped her temple. “I have to be fast. I’m a guidance counselor. A teen in crisis *will* keep you on your toes.”

“I believe that. You’re very strong, Kaia Coll. I admire that in you.”

“You’re just as strong,” she pointed out. “You’re trying to lead your father’s company from the backseat. That takes guts.”

He chuckled. “Is that what I’m doing?”

“Well, it is from where I’m standing. Don’t you th ...“ she was interrupted by the sound of an oncoming watercraft. Grey stepped behind one of the shrubs, shielding his nudity from whoever was beelining for them. He wasn’t shy about his body, but now he wanted to make it clear only one person got to see his dick, ... and that was Kaia.

“Oh, my goodness! Are you all right?” Nette, the witch who ran the zip line desk, shouted as she killed off the jet ski’s engine. She left it to idle in the shallow water. “That wasn’t supposed to happen! Are you okay?” She was on the verge of hyperventilating.

Grey was scared she would fall right off her jet ski if she didn’t stop shaking. That didn’t do anything to stop the flow of his anger. She was responsible for the lines. “I’ll say,” Grey snapped. “She could have been killed.”

“The imp who set the line meant it to snap for someone else,” Nette explained. “It’s no excuse, I know, but ...“

“No excuse?” Grey roared. “What is the imp’s name?”

“Please, sir, Trei didn’t mean to hurt her. It was the opposite.”

“This is what Una meant when she said the demon was going to have a bad day, isn’t it?” Kaia asked, much to his confusion.

“What are you talking about?” he pressed. “Aren’t you upset?”

“Not if this was an accident,” she replied.

“Trei wanted to get the demon,” Kaia explained. “Una told me that the demon would have a weird week here because of

the imps. I was only on the zip line course at this time because there was a cancellation.”

“That’s just it,” Nette insisted. “I was on break when I saw the demon in question. I rushed back to warn Trei, but it was too late ... I am so sorry.”

“We’ll be telling Portia about this,” he said.

“To what end?” Kaia shrugged. “Nette is clearly upset, and no harm to a human who can die was actually done. Thanks to Portia, apparently, you saved me. This is what happens when people focus on revenge instead of moving on. The imps are doing the same thing to the demon that you did.”

Grey pursed his lips. Shit. She was right. Did that make him as bad as Jorge and Richard? He sure fucking hoped not. That wasn’t the kind of dragon he wanted to be, but Kaia had a point. “Fair enough. So long as the imp apologizes and the rest of the imps leave the demon alone, we’re good. We can’t have rogue imps putting guests in danger.”

“You got it. I’ll spread the word,” Nette assured him. “I’m so sorry. Again, that really isn’t how this place is run. The imps are very odd, and they sometimes develop loyalty to people. They’re loyal to Lou, Portia, and Una. They’ll do anything those three ask. Please, see Portia about this. I will definitely warn her that the imps went too far this time.”

It was an interesting trio to be loyal to, given that Lou, Portia, and Una were at the very center of the resort, but Grey would think about that later when the woman he was starting to fall for hadn’t just nearly fallen not in love with him but to her death.

“Have someone bring me a robe, will you? We’ll hang here for a while.”

Nette nodded and was quick to make her escape. Once they were alone, Grey took Kaia in his arms again.

“Nothing like seeing you fall to your death to realize that I don’t want us to be a holiday fling.”

She pulled away from his embrace to look into his eyes. “What?” she gasped.

“Coming in a little hot again, aren’t I?”

“Yeah. I mean, no. No, it’s fine. I like it. No. I don’t like it. I mean ...” She huffed. “I don’t know what I mean. I’m flattered that you think of me like that because I was thinking the same thing earlier.”

“You were?”

“I was,” she admitted. “Now I’m the one who’s coming in hot.”

“Not at all. I love it. Say it again.”

“What? That I was thinking I don’t want us to be a holiday fling?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, there we have it. We both don’t want this to end when we leave the resort.”

“That might be hard,” she whispered. “I don’t know what state you live in.”

“You assume I’m from the U.S.?”

She grinned. “A man obsessed with being CEO? Yeah. A safe bet.”

He threw his head back with a laugh. “Good one.” She blushed, and he guessed she didn’t know if he would like her joke. “Obsessed, am I?”

“You give off a bossy vibe, that’s for sure.” She trailed her fingers up and down his chest. “Thanks for saving me, Greyson Verlice.”

He wanted to tell her she was the one who saved him. Not just him but his company and his back. Because of her, Grey knew what needed to be done.

He kissed Kaia, letting his hands climb up her shirt to her breasts. She arched into the touch with a moan. She closed her arms around his neck and returned the kiss with passion. His cock began to harden as she pressed into him with her whole body. She clung to him, lapping at his mouth just like he needed her to.

“We need to stop,” he whispered.

“No.”

“An imp is on his way with a robe. We will definitely be caught if we do this right now. I don’t want to chance it. And I won’t have sex with you again until we have gone on an official date.”

“What? Why? We already established that we’re basically dating.”

“Look right there!” he pointed behind her shoulder, and coming right at them was an imp holding a silver tray on which sat a white terrycloth robe.

“Damn! Foiled by the imp!”

“This you’re angry about?” he shook his head. “You weren’t that angry when one of those things almost killed you!”

“Don’t be mad. It was for the demon. A demon, by the way, you huffed dragon fire at, so what leg are you standing on?”

“Stop teasing me like that. It makes me want to throw you over my shoulder and take you back to my room to quiet you already.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“No. You’re right. I wouldn’t dare, and you know why. We aren’t sleeping together again until after our date.”

“Well, aren’t we seeing each other at two? It’s basically two now. This is a date. A zip-lining date.”

“Nice try. I need to get some things ready. I’ll pick you up at your cabin at two, just like we agreed.” He kissed her gently before walking away and down the path, wrapped up in his robe.

“Where are you going?” she called out.

“I’ve got about three dates to plan. See you soon, love.”

He chuckled when she swore.

FIFTEEN



KAIA

Kaia paced in the massive cabana while Ian, Rachel, and the others watched on. Rachel kept puffing that this was a terrible idea. If her sister had it her way, Kaia would have stayed in the cabana to listen to Rachel rant all night long about her terrible judgment.

She had foolishly thought that by fessing up to her sister about her interlude with Grey, Rachel would soften to the man. After all, he was coming back for a date *after* sex. That was a good sign.

Of course, that's when Rachel started in on the fact that Greyson was only after her magic. For this, Kaia had no answer. She could only tell her sister that she *swore* that wasn't the case, but she didn't have proof. Something that Rachel kept asking for.

"Would you leave her alone?" Ian cried. "She's falling in love, and it's amazing." The entire coven snapped their heads to the door when the sound of a knock interrupted them. "Oh!" Ian ran to the door. "I'll get it." He swung the door open, and there stood Grey.

"You must be Ian. Kaia speaks highly of you." Grey held out his head. "I'm Greyson Verlice. Pleased to meet you."

"Charmed," Ian cooed. "You're suave AF, and I love it. Have fun with our little Kaia. Break her heart? You'll wish you've never messed with a witch."

"Wouldn't dream of breaking anyone's heart," Grey promised.

Rachel snorted. “Yeah, well, we’ll see, won’t we?” She left before anyone could respond.

Ian and Kaia shared a look, and he said, “Ignore her. She’s grumpy because of the divorce. You go do what you do with that fine man.”

Kaia blushed at Ian’s words because he was always a little bit bolder than her. But thankfully, Ian led the rest of the coven out the back deck, leaving Kaia lingering in the entryway with Grey.

When they were finally alone, he leaned down to kiss her cheek, but he lingered a little too long because his hand was on her hip. “You look stunning, love.”

She blushed because he was looking at her like she was the most beautiful woman in the whole world. Kaia had never felt so wanted before this very moment. “Thanks. You clean up nicely too.”

He wore a pair of fitted beige shorts ... definitely a notch above business casual ... with a white-and-blue button-down shirt. He was, without a doubt, the most stunning man she had ever seen, but really, what was the icing on the cake for Kaia, was that look in his eyes. “Are you ready to go?” he asked softly.

She nodded. “Oh, yeah.”

Grey took her hand in his and waved to the gathered witches in the window, gawking at them. Kaia rolled her eyes. “I think they’re very protective of you.”

“You’re not wrong. They are. But Rachel is not herself right now. We’re not speaking at the moment. Or I should say, she isn’t speaking to me.”

“Did you tell her about the fall?”

“I did. She was furious.”

“Good. She should be. I still think that imp needs a talking-to for nearly killing you.”

“That’s not why she was furious. She was mad that you showed up. Now, she doesn’t think that you’re after me for a

quick fuck because I already gave it up behind the cabana. Her new theory is that you are somehow responsible for the wire snapping, and you wanted to be the one to catch me. She thinks you're trying to get me to do magic for you."

"What? That's insane."

"That's what I said."

"I already have a witch who curses all my enemies," Grey shrugged.

Kaia's feet stumbled at his words as she tried to look at him to see if he was joking. He had to be.

"Sorry," he chuckled. "Bad joke?"

"No," she shook her head. "I just didn't catch the sarcasm, but mainly because that's ... happened."

Grey frowned at her. "What do you mean?"

"Rachel thinks that her ex was only with her for her magic, and once he had the life and career he always wanted, he left her after finding *real* love with his long-time lover."

"How long?"

"She was married to him for six years, and Rach found proof they were together the week of their second wedding anniversary."

Grey shook his head in disbelief. "That takes a special kind of an asshole."

"Right?"

"I think I'll have to spend a bit more time with your sister if I want to win her over. I don't think she'll ever like me if she's always trying to guess my motivations to be with you."

"What *are* your motivations?" she giggled. "Should I know them before my sister?"

"You know my intentions, Kaia. Don't be coy. If we're saying that we want to make this work in the real world, we will. I wouldn't put that much effort into you and getting to be

with you if I didn't see you and me as a long-term relationship."

"Oh," she whispered. "Right. Makes sense."

"I think so, yes. So, maybe sometime before I leave, your sister and your friends could join us for a drink. She could be as rude as she wants and grill me as long as she can stand it."

"You would do that?"

He nodded, then nudged his chin to a small boat on one of the paths. "We're going this way."

"I've never been down this way. Where does it lead?"

"I'm not spoiling the surprise. You'll have to wait and see."

Kaia expected it to be a lavish late lunch on the beach. Something that was taken right out of the brochure, but Grey surprised the hell out of her when he led her to one of the blue cabanas and ushered her inside.

"This cabana is all ours for the night. No one will bother us. I've taken the liberty of having some things delivered for us. Is that okay?"

"You rented a cabana for one night?" she asked, shaking her head in disbelief.

"Too hot?" he asked with a shy smile.

She could only shake her head again. She tried to speak, but nothing would come out. The things he had delivered weren't big domes of food from room service. The kitchen counter was covered in ingredients ... dry pasta, a head of lettuce, cream, and a chunk of Parmesan, amongst other things. "Are you seriously going to *cook* for me?" she finally managed to say.

"Yup. We could've gone to any old restaurant in the resort or had a private dinner on the beach, but that would mean two things. One, we would be in public."

Kaia threw her head back with a laugh. "Is that really why you wouldn't book us a table?"

He nodded. “Absolutely.”

“And the second thing?”

“The second is that even a private dinner on the beach is *also* public.”

She grinned. “You’re really stuck on that. You really need to get over what happened, Grey. I have zero regrets. Besides, we were behind a little cabin. Someone would have had to *really* want to see something to see something, you know?”

“Yeah, well, that’s not how a good man treats the woman he plans to ma ...” he stopped and started to pour water into one of the pots.

“Grey,” she said. “The woman, you what?”

“The woman he plans to make his girlfriend.” The answer was slow in coming, as if he had to make it up as he went along. She didn’t believe him.

Mate.

Marry.

Those were two possible options. Could there be something else he was trying to say? She didn’t know what else it could be. What she did know of shifters could fill the wine glass Grey handed her. That was to say, enough to know it was a good vintage.

“Well, the woman is known to do some crazy things like going zip lining alone and free falling from the sky.”

“Not funny.”

“A little funny,” she returned. “I’m okay with it. It’s one of the most daring things I’ve ever done.”

“I don’t think that’s true. I think you’re all kinds of daring. You were trying to stand up to that demon all by yourself. It was terrifying to watch because he could’ve had you in pieces before I even got to you.”

“You think you would have dove for me like that before we even met?”

“Why do you think I fought him? I didn’t like the way he talked to you.”

“You did the same with Ian.”

“I did,” he agreed. “I need to lead by example and behave like I want others to behave.”

“You’re really hard on yourself. Are you sure those aren’t your father’s words you’re saying to yourself right now?”

He grinned sadly as he started to prepare a homemade Alfredo sauce without even needing a recipe card. *Who was this man?* CEO, dragon, savior. Good kisser, good in bed ... not that they had actually made it to a bed yet. That was a big *yet*, and she was going to get it!

“Can you put the garlic bread in the oven, please?” Grey dodged her question completely.

As she did what he asked, Kaia hummed under her breath. “This cabana is nicer than my first apartment when I went to college,” she laughed. “I’m pretty sure the whole place would fit in this room.”

“Did you enjoy your college experience?” he asked, stirring pots over the stove.

“I did, but I probably didn’t have much of a social life. I don’t remember missing out on anything, but I spent most of my time studying and doing volunteer work in schools.”

“That’s nice.”

“I figured the easiest way to get a job was to make sure the schools in the neighborhood knew I was good with the kids and trustworthy.”

“That’s very clever. Did you get a job right out of college?”

“I did. That’s when my apartment got a serious upgrade. What about you, though? Did you like college?”

“I suppose I did, but I didn’t study half as much as I should’ve. I partied a little too much and spent too much time fooling around with my buddies.”

She gasped. “What? I can’t picture that at all. Are you sure this is true?”

“Of course, it’s true,” he chuckled. “It’s probably why my father hasn’t picked me as his heir for the thunder and the company. It’s the same with my brother. I don’t think he takes either of us seriously.”

“You’ve grown. I think your dad should be aware of that.”

“Maybe. I guess we’ll see what happens.”

Kaia nodded. “Do you think you should just straight up tell your father what you want?”

“Nope. I told you already. That’s just a mess waiting to happen.”

“He’s your dad. You know him more. I just think it’s sad that he hasn’t seen what a good man you’ve become.”

“He chewed me out for fighting the demon for you.”

“I did that too,” she reminded him.

“You did, but you see me. He doesn’t take the time to do that. I don’t know why I’m surprised. He doesn’t even realize he’s the reason Jorge and Richard are fighting. It’s like he’s completely lost touch with what makes the company work. And that’s him. The CEO. People look to him for their behavior.” He sighed. “Sorry, I’m talking your ear off. This can’t be sexy.”

“No, don’t be sorry. I’m a naturally gifted listener. I think having Rachel as an older sister trained me for my job as a guidance counselor. I give way more advice than just what path to go on career-wise. A lot of kids come to my doors with all kinds of things. One thing I’ve noticed is that most folks don’t believe in themselves as much as they should. You have every reason to believe in yourself.”

“Thanks, love. You really are the best guidance counselor in your district. Three years in a row,” he added, plating their meal.

They ate while chatting about the resort and everyday things, but Kaia was struck by how easy it was to be around

Grey. He was serious, but she could easily make him laugh. He was hardworking, but she could see that he wanted to break from that.

Why else would he be playing hooky to spend time with her?

And to rent a cabin for their date. It was almost too much!

“You know, I don’t think I even know what kind of company you own.”

“We run a lumber and paper business. My family has been growing it for centuries, so it has a whole lot of umbrellas. It’s a lot of things to keep track of.”

“I can imagine. Are you sure you want both jobs? CEO and alpha?”

Greyson considered this. “Honestly? I think that both jobs can be streamlined. My dad is so old-school. Some of the stuff he does isn’t even that useful anymore. There’s a lot of wasted time.”

“You really want to fix this, huh?”

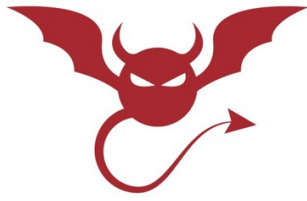
“Well, like I said. My family has been building this business for a long time, and it would just break my heart if it was all lost because my dad isn’t great at it.”

“Promise me one thing,” she asked.

“Anything,” he whispered back.

Kaia wanted him to promise her his heart, but when he looked at her with those eyes, all her thoughts flew right out of her head, and she kissed him.

SIXTEEN



GREYSON

“Promise me one thing?” Kaia asked, making his heart stop beating in his chest.

“Anything,” he replied.

She sighed, and instead of telling him what was on her mind, she kissed him. Surprised, it took him a few seconds for his hands to find her hips, but when he caught on, they came together, kissing like they hadn’t seen each other in years. He only pulled away because he was burning with curiosity. “What did you want me to promise, Kaia?”

“I don’t remember,” she whispered.

“No, you didn’t forget,” he pressed with a rough voice.

She giggled. “I didn’t,” she finally admitted. “I just want you to promise me that you won’t let your dad steer you off whatever course you choose for yourself.”

“I won’t,” he promised. “Not anymore.”

“Good. Is it weird to say I’m proud of you?”

“No. Not weird, but maybe a bit premature. Maybe I’ll be a terrible CEO. The test will be tomorrow, I suppose. I have no clue how yoga will go in the morning. It could be a complete disaster.”

Kind of like his kitchen, Grey noted.

Kaia was a lot of fun to cook for because she didn’t panic every time he used a new utensil to stir the sauce or splashed ingredients onto the counter or floor. Armed with her good

humor and a washcloth, Kaia had moved around the kitchen, cleaning behind him. He might be able to cook, but he wasn't great at limiting the mess.

"Watching you cook is like watching Bambi learn to walk. Still graceful, somehow," Kaia teased him when he accidentally spilled some of the cream onto the counter.

He grinned at her comment. "Bambi?" He pulled a face. "I don't think I've ever eaten one of those before."

She pursed her lips at him. "If you think you can shock me, you won't. Your cooking skills have to be impressive as hell if you're this messy!"

"It'll be worth it, I promise," he said with a smile.

"Well, it better be as good as it smells because ... *wow!*"

Grey chuckled. "Thanks. It's the only dish I know how to make."

"What? How is that even possible? You can boil water and make Alfredo sauce from memory!"

"Only because I made it so much in college, I memorized it. I also perfected it."

"Ate a lot of pasta, did you?" She teased. Her college pasta meals came from a box. Fresh cream and parmesan were way too rich for her wallet back then.

"I was in a lot of sports in college. I told you I partied, right?"

"Are we talking about a full-blow *college athlete situation?*" she pretended to cringe.

He laughed. "Yeah. *And* I was in a frat."

Kaia covered her mouth with her hands. "No way! You were a frat boy?"

"It was the jock fraternity. Why wouldn't I join? Besides, I was a ..."

"Legacy?" she finished for him.

"Yeah. Good guess." He laughed.

“Well, I figured. Dragon and athlete are a safe bet for legacy. A whole family affair. You want your sons to go to the same college, don’t you?”

“Not really. If my kids don’t want to follow my path, I won’t guilt them as other parents might. It’s not my style.”

Kaia frowned at this. “Are you saying your father *pushed* you on the path you’re on?”

“Totally. That’s why it took me so long to realize this is what I want. He pushed it on me so much that I lost track of what I wanted just because it happened to line up with what my father wanted for me.”

“Oh, Grey. That actually sounds really sad, but do you think that somewhere deep down, your dad *did* know you were meant for great things, and that’s why he pushed you?”

Grey frowned. “That’s giving him way too much credit.” He thought for a moment. “I do regret letting my dislike of his practices affect the course of my life.”

“Expertly said. That would be a hell of a line in a college essay.”

Grey chuckled. “Funny part? I went to business school. I have a master’s in Manufacturing Economics.”

“Sounds fascinating,” she smiled.

“I did love my classes.”

“Only that would explain why you chose to complete a master’s degree. That does say dedication and hard work.”

He nodded. “You obviously studied in the education field, right?”

“Yeah,” she smiled. “Education and counseling. I wouldn’t change a thing for the world.” She caught his wince. “You can still alter the company’s course,” Kaia said. “You need a plan.”

“I need to be more assertive and intervene when Dad doesn’t. It’ll be tough. Counterintuitive, even. We are taught not to question our leader, but then one day, we’re expected to

be all alpha to prove our worth.” He sighed. “Seems flawed to me.”

“Grey, you would excel at anything you set your mind to. If you want to be CEO, which I suspect you long for, you will rock it. If you want to be CEO and alpha, you can. You’d be a natural. But guess what, Greyson? If you want to quit life and open a surf shack on the beach, I’m sure that Portia will be more than happy to accommodate you.”

“Funny. I don’t think the imps would like me hanging around so much. Not after the way I scared poor Trei.”

“You didn’t scare him. Trei is a tough imp. Besides, that whole exchange with Trei and Ocho just proved that with a calm and well-thought-out conversation, you can win people over.”

“Is that what happened? I won the imps over?” He grinned when she nodded. “You have a lot of faith in me.”

“Of course I do. I see what you’re capable of.”

“Thanks, love.”

“You’re a good man, Greyson Verlice,” she whispered, her fingers playing through his hair. “I also *know* what you’re capable of.”

“We’re not talking about the business side anymore.” He growled with anticipation.

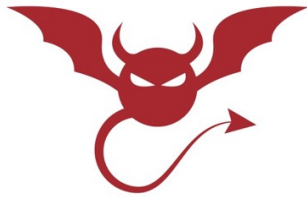
She didn’t answer. Instead, Kaia took a step back from him. She slid one strap of her dress down her shoulder and then the other until the garment fell at her feet. There she stood in a pink lace bra and panties, looking more delicious than anything he had ever craved in his life.

He couldn’t help himself. He stepped forward, reaching for her hips.

Grey needed Kaia.

And this time, he would take his time.

SEVENTEEN



KAIA

The more Kaia encouraged Grey to follow his path and to follow his passion, the more she wanted to follow hers. And at that moment, her passion was all about Greyson Verlice.

The man who cooked her a meal instead of throwing money at a lavish resort dinner. The personal touch ... and the glimpse of what a night in the kitchen with him would entail ... made it the best date she had ever been on.

The bar wasn't high, but Grey blew it out of the water just by being himself. Kind and considerate with that ever-brewing dragon temper under his calm demeanor. Grey didn't want to climb the corporate ladder for greed and power. He was motivated by a need to protect his thunder and his family's company. The riches were a byproduct that he could share with the people he cared for.

Kaia was sure he would become even more of a great man. She had a sense for these things. "I also *know* what you're capable of," she tangled her fingers in his hair.

"We're not talking about the business side anymore," Greyson's voice was gruff with need.

Kaia slipped out of her dress, revealing her matching set of pale pink lace underwear and bra. Grey's eyes went wide as he took her in. He took a step toward her, his hands going to her hips. He kissed along her neck before finally settling on her mouth.

"No, we're definitely not talking about business anymore."

She placed her arms around his neck to deepen their kiss, and his hands left her hips to squeeze her ass, bringing her into him. Already, his erection strained against his pants. She rubbed against it, and he groaned into her mouth.

“Kaia,” he said roughly, “we need the bedroom.”

“Living room is fine.”

Without saying another word, he lifted her and swung her over his shoulder to take her to the bedroom. The bed was enormous ... bigger than any California king she had ever seen. He gently laid her on the mattress and stepped back to admire her. “You’re so damn beautiful, Kaia,” he said, kissing her ankle. He continued to kiss his way up her leg, pausing a little longer along her thighs and hip bones.

Kaia wished he would venture to the scrap of material that still covered her sex, but he dropped kisses along her abdomen and up her chest. He didn’t pause at her breasts, and this time, she squirmed, rubbing her legs together with anticipation.

He really was making up for the staff utility cabin incident.

Greyson finally kissed her mouth, his tongue dipping in and out. He settled over her, wearing nothing but his briefs. The black material tented from his erection. His hands roamed over her chest, her shoulders, and finally, her back.

His agile fingers unhooked her bra, and he slowly pulled at the garment. He drew out the moment until, finally, the lace brushed against her nipples. He tossed the bra aside and hungrily eyed her hardened nubs. He reached out to brush his thumbs across them, and Kaia arched off the bed with a moan. It sent a surge of desire to her core.

He repeated the gesture again and again, but when he closed his mouth around one nipple, drawing his tongue around it, Kaia gripped his hair.

“Grey,” she whispered. “I want you.”

He kissed his way across her chest and laved the other breast with the same attention. He pressed his erection into her, but his tongue was too preoccupied for him to respond. Grey kissed his way back down, this time pressing kisses

along the waistband of her panties. Slowly, he peeled the garment down her legs and threw it over his shoulder.

Kaia watched breathlessly as Grey lowered his head between her legs. He kissed her mound and along her opening. His tongue took soft swipes of her. So soft that it was nothing but a tease. She arched up to meet his mouth, but Grey only chuckled and pinned her hips to the bed with his strong hands. He continued the slow exploration of her core.

When Grey's tongue twirled around her clit, Kaia cried out in ecstasy. The tortuously slow lead-up had left her desperate for exactly this sensation. His tongue was on her, drawing out waves of pleasure. He didn't stop until Kaia came apart on his tongue. He lapped and sucked until she was boneless and panting on the bed. She giggled and covered her face. "That was hot," she whispered.

"You're with a dragon, love. The night is still young. It can get a whole lot hotter." He grinned and kissed his way back up her body.

Kaia wanted desperately to kiss him despite where he had just been. It might have been a little too primal with any other man, but with a creature like Greyson ... a dragon shifter, an alpha to-be, a future CEO ... it felt right.

Their kisses continued to deepen as they explored each other's bodies. Grey's fingers eased into her sex, pumping in and out of her, brushing her clit with his palm with every movement. Kaia was lost in a sea of pleasure when Grey settled above her, his body poised against hers. His eyes met her own, and with a rough whisper, he asked, "What do you want, Kaia?"

"I want you," she replied, bowing off the bed.

Grey took her hips and slowly thrust into her body. Once he was fully seated, he pulled out, only to surge forward again. His pace was slow but steady. Once again, he was drawing out the moment, making sure to build her pleasure with every movement.

"Grey," she gasped, holding onto his shoulders. "Oh, yes."

He kissed her, silencing her cries and moans just as they became louder. Grey's rhythm increased just as Kaia was ready to go over the edge. Her pussy fluttered before clenching down hard on his cock as her release overtook her.

Above her, Grey called out her name. He continued to move inside her but grabbed hold of her legs and tilted the position slightly. The new angle seemed to reach deeper, and Kaia felt her body tighten with delicious tension again. Grey continued thrusting in and out of her until she was once again lost to her climax. This time, he followed behind her. His hips continued to move slowly as they settled back into the bed, panting but satiated.

“Kaia, love. You're incredible.”

“I could say the same to you.” She kissed him before he wrapped her in his arms. They fell asleep in the glow of their lovemaking for only the first time that night.

THE SUN WAS PEEKING through the windows. The warm rays basked Kaia's face until she woke. It took her a few seconds to remember where she was, but the memory of her night with Greyson soon brought a smile to her face. What a night it had been.

“Good morning,” Kaia stretched out beside him, brushing his erection with her hand. He chuckled and kissed her neck.

“Morning. Did you sleep well?”

“I did. You?”

“For the few hours you let me get, yes. I slept well.”

“I think you have that the wrong way. *You're* the one who kept me up with your bedroom talents.”

“Bedroom talents?” he laughed again. “And how do they compare to my cabana skills?”

Kaia giggled. “I like both. Any other skills you want to show off?”

“I think we need to continue exploring the bedroom talents.” He nibbled her neck, and Kaia imagined what it would be like to let the dragon mate her.

It wasn't unheard of for witches and dragons to mate, but maybe it was all a little too soon for her to bring this up. After all, the only time they had ever *almost* discussed their home state, and neither of them had answered. Now, every time Kaia tried to bring it up, she stopped herself in the nick of time. She didn't want to turn into the stereotypical stage-five-clinger. Eventually, the conversation would need to happen, but for now, she was content in spending whatever time she could with Grey.

“When will I see you again?” he asked her, somehow reading her mind.

“Right now,” she answered, locking him in her embrace. *No stage-five-clinger here.*

He chuckled. “I have to go. I have the yoga thing this morning.”

She pouted. “Damn. Are you going to be wearing very tight pants that show off your butt?”

“Do you want me to?”

“Absolutely not. No. Not if I'm not there to see and enjoy,” she teased.

“Then, by all means, come see and enjoy.”

She sat up. “You think the other dragons will mind if a witch tags along to another activity?”

“Given that said activity wouldn't even be happening without you, I think it's a fair bet that they won't mind too much. Besides, I'd love it if you did join me for this.”

“Okay. I'll go with you,” she said before even thinking about checking in with Ian. Rachel must be furious with her for spending the night away with a *man*. She was very much the enemy in her sister's eyes right now.

“Please tell me you'll wear tight pants,” Grey added before kissing her.

“Oh, you just wait. You haven’t actually *seen* tight pants.”

“I can hardly wait.”

They only just made it to the makeshift yoga studio in time to welcome each and every member of the company. Kaia watched Grey interact with his colleagues with a sense of pride in her chest. He might not be her man ... officially ... but her man was definitely a leader.

He greeted every dragon employee with a handshake and asked after a family member and other meaningful personal events. Kaia knew the skills it took to recall all of that information. She did this herself in her work.

Greyson wasn’t just a man she was having a fling with. He was every bit the man she saw herself with. No job was worth the cost of a soul mate, right? Could she walk away from her students if Grey asked her to relocate down the line? Were they doomed before they even began?

Kaia spent the entire length of the yoga class trying to stay positive and trusting in the greatest power in the world. *Love*.

EIGHTEEN



GREYSON

Never ... in all of his life ... had Greyson been so undone by a pair of pants.

These weren't just any kind of pants. They were stretched out over Kaia's curves, begging him to peel her out of them. He wouldn't be able to focus on anything around Kaia in those leggings. He shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts from all things naughty. It didn't work.

Not when Kaia stretched down, folding herself into two, putting her fine ass on display. He was seconds away from drooling all over his yoga mat.

Thankfully, a tall and lanky demon with an impressive set of horns growing out of his forehead walked into the yoga studio. He was topless, and his baggy peasant pants were bright orange. His feet were bare, but his toes were polished, and more than a couple were adorned with rings.

The demon settled on the yoga mat at the front of the room ... the color of the mat matched his pants, giving the impression he hovered on a cloud of orange flames. Maybe this demon would be just the ticket to get the dragons to behave.

Jorge was sitting with his arms crossed ... in a full three-piece suit for the first time since their arrival at the resort. Richard sat on the complete opposite of the room with his arms and legs crossed and a look on his face that said he would rather be in a board meeting than here.

Dad was no help. He hadn't bothered to wear workout gear as Greyson suggested. Instead, he wore his swim trunks and Hawaiian-print shirt that was left unbuttoned. He had a lit cigar in one hand and Scotch in the other. "What?" he barked when Grey gave him the stink eye. "I'm on vacation, and I've got to do this hippie stuff, so I might as well try to enjoy myself."

What a terrible example to set for the employees. Grey noticed that as soon as Dad spoke, Richard looked even more ready to head for the door. Jorge was on his phone, typing away furiously.

"Aaaaaand let's sit in the center of our mats," the yoga teacher called from the front. His eyes were open, but he looked too relaxed to be in any state to teach a class. "My name is Damian, and I will be your yoga teacher today. I want everyone to sit in the very center of their mat and imitate my pose, letting your hands fall where they want."

Damian sat with his legs crossed, his back straight, and his palms up on his knees. He looked peaceful and serene, but when Grey tried to take the same position, he found his body resisted him. He felt silly and awkward, and he knew he didn't look anything like Damian. Beside him, Kaia was already in the right position with her eyes closed and her chest moving to the rhythm of her slow breathing.

"Very good," Damian said, standing. "I want everyone to close their eyes if they can and let their breath in. Fill your lungs completely. Take in as much air as your lungs will allow. Let it out very slowly. Let it out until your belly is completely empty." He started to breathe deeply, showing them how to do it.

As he went along the room, he helped the dragons straighten their backs or set their arms and hands in a more comfortable position. "So much energy in this room. So much energy ..." Damian smiled, but there was a crease in his brow. "Slowly, move into the child's pose, allowing as much space for your hips as you can." Damian demonstrated the pose before continuing his rounds around the room.

So it went on for nearly ninety minutes. Damian made comments and posed questions and reflections as they moved from one yoga pose to the other. No one said anything about Damian's perceptiveness.

The demon had caught on that there were a lot of different energies in the room ... some that clashed terribly. He started talking about water and oil and how in the right condition, they could work together for the same cause.

If he was trying to say that one day, Jorge and Richard would be able to work together without tearing each other apart, Grey didn't think that would ever happen. Both dragons were too stubborn, and their leader wasn't doing anything about it.

Finally, Damian called for them all to get into the final pose, resting on their backs with their eyes closed and breathing deeply.

"As you lay on the ground, focusing on your breath, I want you to send forgiveness and compassion out into the air. I want to feel us just surrounded by that kind of energy." Damian closed his eyes and breathed in deeply.

Grey tried to do the same, but something made his spine tingle. He cracked an eye open and saw that Jorge was inching away from his mat, heading right for the door. Damian watched him go as he said, "Sometimes, it's hard to accept forgiveness and compassion because we might not feel like we deserve it. Maybe we don't even *want* those things. Maybe we think we've done absolutely nothing wrong and all of our actions and words are justified. This is the time to pause and consider how our actions might be perceived."

If Jorge caught on to what Damian was saying ... a pretty big fucking clue that Jorge should not be leaving before class was over ... he didn't let on. Grey noticed, and he opened his mouth to call Jorge back. But Dad shook his head at him, pointing toward Damian, who was now on his back and staring up at the ceiling.

Grey turned his head toward Kaia. She opened her eyes after only a second and smiled at him as she reached out to

squeeze his hand.

“Whenever you feel the need to leave, please do so, but be mindful of the others who are choosing to remain in a state of relaxation.”

Dad was the first out of the door, quickly followed by Richard. Grey sighed and tried not to shake his head. After that, the dragons left in a slow trickle, but something happened. Something that made Grey more than a little proud of what he had done.

Every dragon who left whispered a kind *thank you* to Damian. A couple even asked if there would be other opportunities for yoga classes during our stay.

“I’m sure Portia will be more than happy to welcome me a little longer. Especially if it is to the benefit of her guests,” Damian told the last small group of dragons.

“We can book something tomorrow,” Grey said once only he, Kaia, and Damian remained in the room. “I’ll make sure you’re fairly compensated. I do want to apologize for my colleagues’ behaviors. It was very rude to leave before the end of class.” *And then, the CEO walked out without thanking you or checking in with his staff.*

Grey was shocked even though he shouldn’t be. Hadn’t his father been listening to everything the demon said during the yoga session? So much of it had been relevant to them, specifically. Yet, he had walked away like maybe using the open door ... thanks, Damian ... to have some tough conversations.

Nope.

Dad walked away. Grey wanted to gather the dragons and see what they had thought, to ask them if there was anything they would like to address within their community of the thunder and the company.

It was something the alpha and the CEO should have been doing when things were this bad. What would it take for Dad to catch on that an all-expense trip wasn’t the solution he thought it was? They needed mediation, at the very least.

“Hey,” Kaia whispered, pulling him to a stop as they left the yoga studio. She rose to her toes to kiss him. “You killed it with the yoga thing. Really. The majority of the dragons were really pleased and relaxed. You heard what they said to Damian. That was a success, Grey.”

“The two dragons I wanted to impact left, though.”

“I know, but Damian made Jorge think. I’m sure of it. I think that’s why he wanted to crawl out of there. He was uncomfortable because he knows his behavior has been less than professional.”

“Maybe you’re right,” he sighed.

“I know I am. If anything, you just showed your colleagues that you would be a great leader. I’m sure they’ve noticed that you fully participate in all of the activities. It shows that you’re invested in making this trip work for the company.”

“You’re very good at finding the silver lining.”

“I know,” she laughed. “It’s part of the job! I love doing it and turning someone’s day around with a little bit of sunshine.”

Grey kissed Kaia before she said anything else that would make him fall even harder for her.

NINETEEN



GREYSON

The yoga had actually managed to do *something*. The dragons were calmer, and more were joining the activities without threatening to quit. Greyson thought it might have something to do with the fact that his father ... the alpha and CEO ... was less aggressive with the threats.

The yoga had helped his dad, apparently.

No one was more shocked than Greyson was when his father showed up at his cabana door just as Grey was stepping out.

“I’ll walk with you, so you’re not late to meet with Kaia. She’s a wonderful woman, Grey. Really. Beautiful and smart. What does she do for a living?”

“High school guidance counselor.”

“Good for her. That can’t be an easy job.”

They walked along the path in silence before Dad sighed. “When Jorge left yesterday, I went after him. I tried to get him back into the studio, but he wouldn’t listen. He doesn’t want to be here. *Here*. Of all places.”

Grey had already told his father that Jorge felt that way, but of course, he was still shocked by it. There was no reason to repeat himself. At least Dad had tried to get Jorge back into the class. The fact that Dad hadn’t called him out in front of everyone was actually a huge leap of progress.

Dad would have berated and belittled Jorge in front of everyone if they had been anywhere else but a yoga studio.

Inevitably, that would've made Jorge angry, and he would then look to start a fight. His usual target was Richard because the other dragon engaged him like no other person in their pack and company.

It was the same when it was Richard who got chewed out. It didn't matter how often Grey told his father that a CEO shouldn't tear his employee a new asshole in front of everyone. That was the kind of conversation to have alone in a closed office where no one could hear you.

"It's good you didn't disrupt the class to talk to Jorge."

"A lot of the others came to see me and thanked me for the yoga. Can you believe it? Of all the shit I tried? Yoga."

Grey flinched. Dad was taking the credit for the yoga, then. "We've been playing a lot of competitive games," he pointed out. "We're all dragons with tempers to match. Something more mellow was different enough to change the dynamic a bit."

Dad stopped walking and narrowed his eyes at him. "Since when have you been so good at this?"

His jaw clenched. "Always, Dad. Or at least, I've tried. I'm used to working in a team. Doesn't matter what sport I played; I know how a good team runs. A company, hell, even a thunder, is just like a team."

Dad remained quiet, and it made Grey angry. Why wasn't Dad responding? Grey could have brought up all of the times that his dad had ripped into him in front of others because he dared to suggest something that was not the usual way of doing things. Very unlike a good team player, let alone a team *leader*.

After a while, Greyson stopped suggesting things for the thunder and the company.

"A company is like a team," Dad repeated with a sour tone. "What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. I don't want to be late for Kaia. Excuse me." Grey rushed away before he said something he regretted.

The strange thing was Kaia had been right. That yoga stuff was pretty damn cool. He would remember that before the next annual board meeting. Mandatory yoga before the meeting. Hell, maybe even before, during, and after. The other dragons had enjoyed it enough to bring it up to the CEO.

And whether Dad had realized it or not, he had approached Jorge in a calmer way. It didn't matter. Not yet. At this point, it was enough for Grey to get the validation he needed to move forward with his plans.

He was going to be CEO, whether it was with his family's company or his own. He would find a way.

So long as he had Kaia by his side ...

He wanted to know where she lived and how far it was from his own home. He wanted to know if she would relocate. If she didn't, what would become of them?

KAIA WAS ALREADY WAITING for him by the door. He rushed forward and kissed her hello. "Am I late?"

"No," she sighed. "But I couldn't stay in there." She pointed to the cabana she shared with her sister and the rest of their coven.

He frowned. "Why? What's happened?"

"Rachel's lawyer emailed her late last night. Her ex is trying to do some shady stuff. She was upset, so we spent the night trying to make her feel better."

"I'm guessing by the look on your face that it didn't work out too well."

"It did not, no."

"I'm sorry you had a rough night, but I think I'll have the best breakfast to take your mind off it."

"Thanks, Grey. Without you, this vacation would be terrible."

He chuckled. “I think the same. I thought about you all night. I’ve been venting on you nonstop, basically using your guidance counselor skills to help my cause. I won’t talk about anything work-related today, I promise.”

“Oh, ha-ha. There’s not a chance that you can avoid work talk for a day when you’re literally here on a work retreat. Besides, you make it sound like you’re taking advantage of me. You’re not. I am *always* helping people. All the time. Everywhere I go. At least, I try.”

“You do,” he replied. “You try so hard for everyone. But Rachel is losing her husband. You can be there for her, but you can’t grieve for her. She’s angry. Isn’t that one of the steps in the grief process?”

“You’re right. And I do know that, but ...” she sighed.

“It’s probably hard to watch her fall apart and not be herself. It’s a powerless feeling.”

She nodded. “That’s just it. That’s why I totally understand what you’re going through, Grey. I know it’s not the same scale, but I do feel for you. I think you will turn that thunder and company around one day.”

“I hope you’re right.”

She shook her head. “Of course you will.” Thankfully, she changed the subject. “Where are you taking me this morning?”

“A restaurant on the beach,” he pointed at it off in the distance. “Apparently, it makes these insane breakfast crepe wraps.”

“Wow, that sounds amazing. Good thing I’m famished. I didn’t even know this restaurant served breakfast.”

“Lou gave me the tip when I ran into him last night.”

“If Lou recommended it, you know it’s going to be very good.”

The restaurant was actually more of a small, wall-less hut on the edge of the beach. The breeze came in from the water, cooling their legs as they sat at their table. The waitress brought over their coffees before taking their order.

“How long have you worked at the same school?”

“Since I graduated,” she answered with a grin. “I never thought I would stay there for so long, but I like it. It’s a school where I can make a lot of difference.”

Could this be his chance? “Would you ever ...” he cleared his throat. Nope. Now was not the right time to ask this question.

Oh, come on! His dragon roared. Just ask her already. We’re both dying to know. Open your mouth and say, I want you to move to my city. Do it.

“Grey?” Kaia asked, pulling him away from the argument with the dragon in his head. “Are you okay? You zoned out there.”

“Sorry, love. I was just thinking about your students. They must miss you when you’re not at work.”

“They get by. There are other guidance counselors out there.”

“But not ones who have won awards,” he pointed out. *Or ones who are as pretty and kind and sexy and sweet as you are.*

The waitress chose that time to deliver their breakfasts. The white oval plates were loaded down with long, perfectly thin crepes from which an abundance of fruit and chocolate drizzle oozed. There was even whipped cream on the top.

Kaia’s eyes went wide, and her smile was adorable. “This isn’t breakfast. This is some kind of dream dessert.”

He threw his head back with a laugh. “Nope. It’s very much breakfast.”

She cut a bit off and slowly slipped it into her mouth. Her eyes closed in bliss. “Wow, this is the best thing I’ve ever had in my mouth.” She took another bite.

Grey could barely touch his meal because he was too mesmerized by the sight of Kaia eating her own. He never wanted to look away. He wanted to continue to watch her eat and moan and roll her eyes back.

The crepes were good, but Kaia was so much better.

“I don’t know what the hell they put in that chocolate drizzle,” she said. “It’s addictive. I am going to dream about this stuff.”

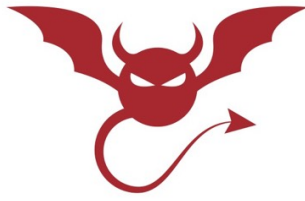
He chuckled. “I’m glad I was suggested this place. Would you like to go for a walk?”

She nodded. “Oh, yeah. Good idea. I am totally ready to walk. I need to walk off this crepe baby,” as she tapped her stomach. “That was *amazing*.”

Hand in hand, they walked along the paths that ran through the resort. They didn’t have a destination in mind. They only roamed while chatting and taking in the sun. When the sun was high, and the breeze coming off the water wasn’t enough to cut through the heat, Kaia suggested they go for a swim.

Simple and half-naked. He was so there for it.

TWENTY



KAIA

The horizon was full of sparkling water, and Kaia thought that a dip in the blue waves might be just the ticket to get Grey out of the funk he had been in since the yoga session. He was deep in his thoughts, and though she understood, Kaia also knew that their time together was coming to an end.

She wanted to make the best of it.

She pulled her dress over her head and immediately heard Greyson's groan of appreciation. Her one-piece had mesh material framing her hips. She looked good in it, she knew that much, yet Grey's instant reaction to her made her belly dance.

He took his shirt off, and, without any warning, he lifted her off the ground and took off at a run into the water. He didn't stop until he was waist-deep and then let her go, drenching them both. She got her revenge by pinching his side. He chuckled and swam away toward one of the little docks on which cushions, towels, and sunscreens were placed.

She tried to catch up to him, but the shifter was much faster than she was. He helped her up onto the platform. Together, they lay on the cushions and dried off in the sun.

"This is probably not what I should be doing right now," she said once her hair was almost dry. She couldn't continue to ignore the guilt anymore.

"What do you mean?" Greyson asked.

"I should be with Rachel. At least give Ian and the others a break from her. She's my sister, and I'm always sneaking

away.”

“You’re allowed to take time for yourself, love. This is your holiday too. If she tries to take that away from you, that’s on her.”

“We came here to cheer *her* up,” she reminded him.

“But you paid good money to be here too. We could both be somewhere else trying to help other grown adults deal with their feelings, but in the end, they’ll do what they want. And where does that leave us?”

“Well, inevitably, we both feel guilty.”

“True,” he agreed. “But we can’t part just yet.”

“I’ll have to eventually. As much as I would love to spend the rest of the day with you, we both have responsibilities elsewhere we can’t neglect any more than we already have.”

He held her in his arms. “You could *try* to leave, but I’m not sure how far you’ll get.” He nuzzled her neck. “I don’t want to be responsible right now.”

She giggled. “Yet we’ll both wind up doing exactly what we need to do. You’ll go check on the dragons. I’ll go spend a few hours with Rachel. Some real sister bonding time. We can meet for lunch tomorrow,” she offered.

“That’s a very long time from now.”

“I know,” she groaned. “But better that than Rachel tracking us down because she thinks you’ve brainwashed me or something.”

He arched a brow. “Huh?”

“Oh, never mind. Rachel gets a little too involved with her thoughts sometimes.”

“Right, well, maybe it *would* be best if you spent some time with her. I’ll try to set up time with Jorge and Richard. Maybe do some mediation of my own.”

“Good luck,” she teased.

“You too,” he laughed.

“Two angry dragons or one pissed-off witch?” Kaia joined in on his laughter. “I don’t know which is worse.”

NOTHING BUT SILENCE greeted Kaia when she entered the cabana after tearing herself from Greyson’s embrace. The quiet did nothing but worry her. A bunch of girls on a friends’ trip shouldn’t be this quiet ... even if one of the said women was going through something terribly sad.

“Hello?” she called out as she made her way to the back deck.

There, she found Michelle and Ian lounging on some of the recliners. Ian’s large black sunglasses didn’t hide the fact he had been crying recently. Kaia’s guilt increased, and she slid into the seat beside him. “What’s going on?”

He sniffled. “It’s nothing.”

“That’s not true,” Michelle insisted.

“Why won’t you tell me?” she pressed.

Ian wiped away a tear. “Because you’re having a wonderful holiday with your dragon, and this thing with Rachel shouldn’t ruin that for you.”

“Ian, she’s my sister. I shouldn’t be spending so much time away.”

“But she’s my best friend, Kaia,” he insisted. “Since we were this tall.” He made a vague gesture, but it didn’t matter. Ian and Rachel were best friends when they were learning to crawl. As close as she was to her sister, Ian was much closer to Rachel.

“She’s said something to upset you,” Kaia pointed out. “You’re not the kind to sit around and cry in a fancy resort.”

He sniffled, but at least this time, it was accompanied by a smile. “I’m not, no. But she was in fine form at breakfast. She didn’t sleep.”

“That’s my fault,” Kaia winced. “I shouldn’t have spent the night with Grey.”

“No way,” Ian said.

“He’s right,” Michelle agreed. “You had a good night. It’s totally fine. If you had been here, it wouldn’t have changed anything.”

“What happened last night?”

“The ex called her,” Ian shook his head. “The idiot. He knew why Rach was giving the lawyer a hard time, so he thought calling would be a good idea. He actually said he hoped that the sound of his voice would calm her down.”

“What a patronizing asshole,” Kaia grumbled. She definitely couldn’t have stopped *that* from happening. The guilt wasn’t eased, though. “I’m really sorry this trip is turning out to be such a disaster.”

“Are you kidding me?” Ian asked. “I have zero regrets. I’m happy this is all going down here. Can you imagine if Rachel was at her place going through this?”

Kaia shuddered. “Keeping her away from curses and hexes would be harder if she had all her magic tools with her.”

Ian and Michelle nodded their agreement. “I’m just pissed at her.”

“He’s pissed at her because Rachel said a mean thing about you,” Michelle clarified. Ian glared at her.

“Nice,” he said. “Way to cause drama between the sisters.”

“Look, Rach will need to apologize for what she said. It’s not like we can all ignore what we heard.”

“What did she say?” Kaia asked. Her heart hurt a little as she thought of what Rachel might have spewed out during a moment of anger.

“No,” Ian stood. “This isn’t right. If you want to know what Rach said, ask her.”

“I just think it’s nicer if everyone is upfront about what they feel and think. Less drama if we’re not all sitting around

trying to decipher what the others are thinking.”

“You’ve got a point,” Kaia agreed. “Tell me what she said.”

“She said that the only reason Greyson was turning your head was because you were a naive little witch who doesn’t understand the world.”

“And that made you cry?” she asked Ian.

“Well, yeah. You don’t get it. Before this whole thing happened, Rachel would go on and on about you. About how wonderful and kind you are. She would rage at the world for not sending you a good man. To hear her be so mean about you after you finally find what she hoped you would?” He shook his head. “It made me realize that no matter what I do, right now, Rachel is not herself. I can’t magically make her better.”

Kaia nodded, understanding him completely. “Where is she? I’ll talk to her.”

Ian raised a brow. “Where do you think she is?”

“Is there a rock-climbing wall here?”

He nodded. “Of course, there is.”

“Right,” Kaia laughed before tracking down an imp who could tell her where to find the rock-climbing gym in exchange for some candy corn.

Kaia found Rachel just as she was repelling down the rock wall. She unclipped her harness from the wires before Kaia waved at her. If Kaia hadn’t waited, she was sure Rachel would have climbed her way back up the wall to avoid her.

“Don’t say anything,” Rachel snapped.

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” she admitted. Kaia could understand that Rachel might need to do some rock climbing to clear her head ... even if it was an activity that Rachel and her ex always did together.

“I’m guessing by the look on your face that Michelle opened her big mouth.”

“Be nice,” Kaia warned.

Rachel rolled her eyes. “I’m getting a little sick of everyone being so sensitive about their feelings right now.” She slid out of her harness and handed it over to one of the demons behind the service counter. “What about my feelings? Huh? The one person who was supposed to have my back till death do us part is taking *no* consideration for my feelings. Why should I care about anything anymore?” Her eyes lined with tears, and it made Kaia’s heart squeeze in pain.

“Rach, I’m so sorry. It’s terrible that he met someone else.”

“Not someone else. Another *man*. It’s not like I can work on our relationship. He loves someone else now. I didn’t even get the chance to fight for my marriage.” Kaia’s heart continued to squeeze painfully as Rachel poured out her grief. “One day, just like that, it was over. A relationship I thought I would be in until my death. I can’t think, Kaia. I can barely breathe.”

Kaia did the only thing she could think of and hugged Rachel tightly. Her sister immediately began to sob, her body shaking uncontrollably. “He called, Kaia. Just the sound of his voice made me *ache*. I don’t know how to do this.”

“You take it moment by moment,” Kaia replied. “We all have your back. Even when you lash out at us, we’ll show up. That’s what a coven does.”

Rachel wiped her eyes. “I can’t go back to the cabana. Ian is so mad at me for ...” She sniffled. “I’m sorry I’ve been giving you a hard time about Greyson. I’m just scared that you’ll feel this kind of pain one day, and that’s the very last thing I want for you.”

“Not all men are bad,” Kaia said. “I’m not even sure *the ex* is bad. He’s a flawed person who hurt you, but how you handle this doesn’t have to define your life, sis.”

Rachel nodded, and slowly, her tears began to dry. “I’m sorry I gossiped about you behind your back and said shitty things.”

“It’s okay,” she assured her. “I’m sure it wasn’t the first time you were bitching to Ian about me.”

She laughed. “No. Any time you stole my shoes or one of my shirts, he got an earful.”

Kaia smiled. “You and Ian are best friends. You can survive this bumpy road, Rach. He won’t leave you. He couldn’t. Ian loves you just as much now as he did when you were crawling around in the nursery.”

“You’re right. I’ll plan a friend date for us tomorrow morning. Do something insane like getting a full spa treatment.”

“Do it,” she encouraged with a smile. “Drink all the champagne and have a blast. Relax and bond. How about tonight, we have a good, old-fashion coven chill night and have dinner on the beach? Maybe ask Portia if we can make a fire and watch the stars.”

Rachel hugged her tightly. “I’m really happy you’re my sister. Sorry, I’m a bitch sometimes.”

Kaia laughed. “Not a bitch, exactly. Maybe an angry witch is a better way of describing you.”

That night, Kaia and her coven ate a feast by the beach as the sun was setting. They watched the stars by the heat of a huge fire tended to by a few gleeful imps. It was a night to remember, and Kaia could feel a shift in her sister.

Maybe everything would work out after all.

It gave her hope for her morning plans.

TWENTY-ONE



KAIA

Kaia woke bright and early despite having gone to bed late. She wasn't entirely sure she had gotten more than three hours of sleep. She was full of energy, though, because she was so very excited about her plans.

It was a new day, and she had a lot to get done. She grabbed a quick coffee from their cabana's nifty coffee machine and downed it quickly before leaving for the day.

On her way to her final destination, Kaia made a few stops. Each one made her giddier and giddier. By the time she knocked on the seventh green cabana ... where Grey was staying ... Kaia was nearly hopping on her feet with excitement.

Bill, Greyson's father, opened the door. His face fell, but only for a second. "I thought you were the breakfast I ordered."

Kaia smiled. "Not quite, sorry."

"Kaia?" Grey asked, poking his head over his father's shoulder.

"Nice to see you again," Bill said before retreating into the cabana.

Grey looked downright sexy in a pair of black swim trunks and a white tee. His hair was still damp from his morning shower, and the scent of his aftershave tickled her nose. He kissed her in greeting, his hands lingering on her hips a little too long.

“Grab everything you might need for a day-long excursion around the resort,” she said, pulling away from their kiss.

“What is happening?” he asked.

“I’m taking you out for the day.” She tugged his hand. “Come on! Daylight is wasting away.”

“Are you seriously kidnapping me for the day?”

Kaia grinned and nodded. “Yup. You can’t shift and fly away. I’d just catch you with my magical powers, anyway.”

He threw his head back with a laugh. “Don’t tempt me. I’d almost like to see what that would look like.”

“Don’t you dare. We have places to be.”

“Where are we going?” Grey asked time and time again as Kaia led them down one of the resort’s many paths.

“Stop asking questions. You will know all in good time.”

Grey took her hand in his, and they walked hand-in-hand to one of the beaches. Kaia spotted a little imp waving at her. Trei pointed to the canoe and oars he had gathered at her request. It had only cost her a bag of candy corn.

Grey shook his head. “Did you seriously trust that imp with another task after he almost killed you last time?”

“Don’t be so dramatic, Grey,” she laughed. “He didn’t do it on purpose last time. Besides, I trust Trei with this. All he did was bring me a canoe and some supplies.”

“With his luck, the canoe will have a hole in it, and the supplies will be bad.”

She pinched his side and kissed his cheek. “He said he was sorry, and I believe he didn’t mean to hurt me. Isn’t that enough?”

“You’re too sweet for your own good. How do the teens not eat you alive?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe it’s because someone circulated a rumor in the school that I’m a witch.”

Grey, who had been placing the canoe in the water, stopped short. “What?”

She threw her head back with a laugh. “I’m just joking. The kids don’t know I’m a witch, but I’m sure they can sense that they can’t mess with me.”

“I can sense that from here,” he teased once they were settled into the canoe and paddling away from the shore. “Are you going to tell me where we’re going?”

“Nope.”

“You know the man is supposed to be the one to plan fun dates, right?”

“Oh, please. Don’t be old-fashioned. I wanted to do something nice for you. This is it. Now stop complaining and enjoy, will you?”

He laughed and continued to row. “Not complaining. Just thinking I’ve got to up my game.”

“You rented a whole damn cabana. Calm down and see what’s up my sleeve first.”

“It’s you, Kaia. It’ll be amazing because everything you do is amazing.”

They followed along the shore. Una had been right. Paddling along the shore like this gave them a great view of the horizon but also of the resort and its strange geography. There really was something for everyone. Kaia even thought she spotted people skiing down one of the higher mountains. There were other hotel guests in all kinds of motorless watercraft along the beach. The sound of laughter was never too far off.

Finally, Kaia spotted the big rock. It was one of the landmarks Trei gave her to navigate them to their destination.

“Not long now,” she announced.

They rounded another wide turn in the shoreline, but they heard it before they spotted it.

“I know that sound,” Grey said animatedly. “That’s a ...”

The sound of the rushing waterfall cut off the rest of his sentence. It was just big enough to send a fine, cool mist their way. They banked the canoe into a small alcove and got out. Kaia grabbed a black cooler bag from the bottom of the canoe and swung it over her shoulder. Greyson tried to take it from her, but she shook her head. “You’re just trying to sneak a peek inside the bag.”

“I can smell the food from here,” he said just as his stomach growled. “I don’t need to look inside to guess what’s in it.”

“This is what happens when you hang out with shifters, huh?” she teased.

“Yup.” When he reached for the bag this time, she let him take it.

They made their way through the underbrush and tall grass to settle close enough to the waterfall to feel the mist off the water but far enough away that they could chat without shouting at each other. They lay on a small blanket that some demon or imp had thoughtfully packed for them.

“I bet it’s a Portia touch,” Kaia laughed.

“Maybe Una,” Grey offered.

“Definitely not Lou,” they said together before chuckling.

“If Lou had packed this basket, we would have all kinds of booze and maybe sex toys, but definitely not a blanket and *this*.” Kaia pulled out huge sandwiches, clearly made to satisfy a shifter’s significant appetite. Grey tucked in immediately. “Wow, your parents must have almost gone broke when you were a teenager if that’s how you eat.”

Grey swallowed his big bite and grinned. “Shifters have an insanely fast metabolism. It’s not my fault.” He shrugged with a smile before taking another bite from his meal.

“Good thing I made sure to tell Una the basket was for a dragon, or I might have been in danger of becoming your lunch.”

He placed his sandwich down and rubbed the back of his hand against her leg. “Never,” he assured her with a serious tone. “But you will definitely be my dessert.” To prove his point, he settled above her, pushing her onto her back. Grey kissed her softly, cupping her face in his hands. “This is a very sweet activity, love. Does seem like you’re trying to make a memory before we have to say goodbye.”

She looked away. The look in his eyes was too intense for her. It made her long for things she didn’t know she could have.

“Kaia,” he said, raising her chin to look into her eyes. “This isn’t goodbye. You have to know that.”

“We’ve both been avoiding what happens when we leave Hellscape Holiday Resort,” she pointed out. “You want to be the CEO and alpha to your people, and I would never stand in the way of that.”

He nodded and opened his mouth to speak, but he stopped himself. He sat back and took another bite of his food instead. Kaia sighed and picked at her own sandwich.

“You couldn’t be in the way of anything, Kaia. I want to be with you. I’m a dragon. My wing span is pretty big, and it lets me travel long distances in very short amounts of time.”

“I live in New Hampshire, Portsmouth, to be exact.”

Grey smiled. “Convenient. I live in a small town not too far from Nashua.”

She returned his smile. “New Hampshire too? *Very* convenient.”

“I can make that flight in about twenty or thirty minutes,” he assured her.

Kaia tried to do the math. If Grey could fly to her place in about thirty minutes, it would take her approximately one to one and a half hours in her car, depending on traffic. She breathed out her relief, regardless. At least Greyson had said he could make the flight. That was heartening. Yet, in truth, she half expected Grey to ask her to relocate. She was a bit

disappointed that he hadn't. But Kaia was all too aware that it might be too soon, even for a dragon.

He wasn't coming in hot on this.

She wondered if there was a reason she was missing, but she wouldn't push him. It wasn't the time, anyway. It would just waste the precious seconds they did have together.

"If I call you to hang out, you'll fly out to see me?" she asked.

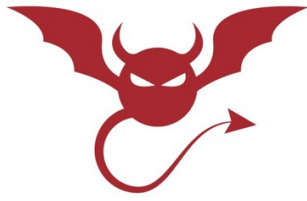
"Call me, and I'll be there in twenty-nine minutes max," he teased. "That's better than being stuck in traffic in bigger cities," he pointed out.

Neither one of them mentioned that a dragon's thirty minute flight was probably doubled, if not tripled, in a vehicle. This meant that no matter what happened between them, Kaia would need to change jobs one day. She couldn't ask Grey to relocate his entire thunder and company.

Unless he was okay with flying to and from work every day ... Did dragons even do that? She wasn't so sure. Kaia shook her head before turning toward the sun. Maybe this was a problem that would never actually be a problem. She was taking it on faith that their new relationship would last, but then again, it might not.

All they had was this moment in time, and Kaia was going to soak in as much of Greyson's presence as she could. And that started with them making love by the beautiful, cascading waterfall.

TWENTY-TWO



GREYSON

Greyson paddled the canoe back toward the little cabana, and together, they returned the canoe to the waiting imp. Grey tipped the creature generously with candy corn. Deep in thought, he planned out the rest of the day and evening with Kaia. He couldn't rent another cabana for them. He actually wanted to top that. He needed to ask Portia what was plausible here in the resort that he could wow Kaia with.

Just as he was about to take Kaia's hand in his, the quiet resort was disturbed by a loud and terrible growl.

He stilled, recognizing the sound for what it was. *Fighting dragons.*

"Stay here," he instructed Kaia before taking off at a run, following the sound of the fight.

"Grey! Wait!" Kaia shouted behind him.

He couldn't slow down to explain. He needed her to stay put. In a dragon fight, there could be a whole lot of collateral damage. The fire wasn't exactly an easily controlled force once it was unleashed. Greyson knew Richard and Jorge were already shifting and throwing flames at each other by the flashes of fire across the sky ... and in a crowded resort, no less.

When Grey finally rounded the corner and spotted the action, he was shocked to see Kaia had kept pace with him. He started to tell her to leave, but he stopped short when he spotted his father making his way to the dragons, readying himself to shift.

“Dad!” Grey shouted. “Don’t.”

The thought of his father fighting two dragons to bring them to heel made his stomach hurt. Dad hadn’t been in a fight in years, and though he was a tough old man, Grey feared the two fighting dragons would easily turn their anger toward its real source.

The Alpha and CEO.

His father.

Grey just couldn’t let that happen.

Over the shoreline and above them, the two dragons ripped into each other. The scent of blood filled his nostrils, and he wanted to shift and join the fight, but it wasn’t his place. He looked at his father, but the older man really didn’t seem to want to stop the fight. He was watching it all unfold with a bored look on his face.

“Dad?” Grey said. “I’m going to fight in your place.”

“Like hell you will,” his brother Jaymes roared in a loud voice that was definitely out of character. “It’s way too dangerous. You could be killed.”

“Umm, no offense, Grey, but I totally second that,” Kaia said, her eyes wide with fear. “I don’t want you high up in the air, trying to fight off *two* dragons. That’s just totally insane.”

He cupped her face in his hands. “As much as I appreciate the sentiment, I have to do this.” He kissed her gently. “I’ll be fine. I’ll come back to you. I swear it, Kaia.”

“You know I’m a witch,” she whispered. “I can hex you if you don’t,” she added.

He kissed her again softly before taking off at a run. He shifted on his way to the fighting dragons. It was a sight to see. One second, Greyson was there, and the next, a massive dragon flapping his wings on his way into the aerial battle.

Flashes of fire filled the sunny blue skies, increasing the already terrible heat. Portia watched the fight with her arms crossed, with Una on her right and Ocho on her left. Lou, the

bartender, lounged, bored and drinking a cocktail as he bet the pixie waitress on which dragon would win.

Grey thought it was all very dramatic. This wasn't the way they were supposed to behave themselves out in the world. Especially not when nearly all of the patrons knew they were in the resort for a company retreat. Surely Portia would be livid. Lou might be amused, but the bartender couldn't have all that much power.

Grey flapped his wings and sent a spray of fire into the air, right between the fighting dragons, Jorge and Richard. To keep things nice and confusing, all three dragons were blue like all Verlice dragons. The only differences were in the subtle shades of blue along their large scaly bodies.

In their older age, Jorge and Richard had started to fade a bit, but Grey could easily tell them apart, having known them his entire life. He sent a second spray of fire between the dragons to get their attention, but he had no luck. They continued to tear into each other with teeth and talons.

With a controlled movement of his wings, Grey coasted close enough to Richard to grab his tail, and he then used his shifter strength to drag the creature away. Confused, Richard growled and shot fire at Grey, who moved aside just in the nick of time.

Jorge flew away without turning his back toward Greyson. He wondered if Jorge had recognized him. Surely, both dragons wouldn't comprehend why the alpha's son was intervening and not the alpha himself. Grey was stepping in for his father, and no longer would he allow this kind of behavior. It was a disgrace to all the dragons of the world.

Unsurprisingly, Richard was the fiercest of the two dragons. He didn't care if he injured one of the alpha's sons. He flapped his wings, beelining right for Grey, who dove out of the way with an expert spin through the air. Richard spewed fire at him in a long line. Grey managed to escape it, but he hadn't accounted for Jorge's fire. The flame caught him right in the chest. Dragons were not imperious to another dragon's fire.

It singed and burned him.

Grey wasn't having it ... now even angrier, he flew at Jorge, dug his talons into the other beast's chest, and crashed them into the ground. Pinned into a deep pit of sand, Jorge lay motionless while Grey roared right in his face in a terrible warning.

You move, you die!

Richard was hovering over the water. Every time he flapped his wings, waves crashed along the shore. Richard sent a spray of fire toward Grey, and he spread his wings wide to protect the gawking onlookers from the deadly flames. He howled in pain. His ears wrung with his own shouts.

You don't hurt innocent people, Grey shouted!

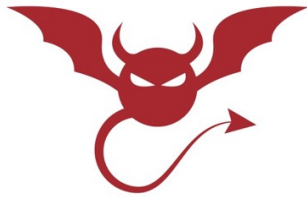
He flew at Richard, aiming for the center of the other dragon's chest, but at the very last second, he veered left. In another second, he went for the right.

Richard fell for the decoy, leaving his right wide open. It was a big mistake. Grey didn't waste his time and kicked at the dragon, all the while flapping his wings. He added a dose of fire to make sure Richard was disoriented. Grey drove onto Richard using this momentary advantage, hoping to repeat his earlier move.

Richard was having none of it. He kicked and scratched at Grey, who finally landed in the water. The two dragons scrambled out, but Grey was faster. He grabbed Richard by the tail again and dragged him backward. Grey dunked Richard under the water before giving him a chance to take a breath of hot fire air.

He dragged Richard to the shore, and finally, the alpha stepped forward.

TWENTY-THREE



GREYSON

Greyson dragged Richard toward his father. The alpha didn't look nearly as angry as he should have been.

"Stop this fighting immediately," Dad shouted without any further instructions.

Richard huffed and puffed, but finally, he shifted back after Greyson growled at him in warning. It was only once Richard was once again a human that Grey also took his human form. He didn't trust Richard around so many innocent bystanders. Though why they were all still gathered, he didn't understand. Didn't they have something better to do than to stand around in a dangerous situation?

More to the point, why did Dad look so calm?

"We are leaving the resort *immediately*," Greyson roared. "Every dragon is to go pack their stuff. I want every single one of you in the lobby in thirty minutes. And you two," he pointed toward the bloodied-up Jorge and Richard. "I don't want you out of my sight."

Dad nodded. "Thanks for handling that, Greyson."

Grey flashed a furious glare at his father. They needed to have a serious conversation about how the pack was run.

Jaymes offered a shy, "I can walk Jorge back to his cabin so he can pack his stuff. Someone else can escort Richard."

Grey nodded. "Better yet, go pack his shit for him."

Lou swaggered forward. "I'll make sure our two fighting dragons get their stuff ready to go. I can keep an eye on them

if you want to say your goodbyes.” The demon’s eyes cut to Kaia.

She hugged herself tightly, watching the scene unfold with sad eyes. Rachel and Ian stood on either side of her, glaring at him, but he wasn’t sure why.

“Thanks, Lou.”

The bartender shrugged like he was in the habit of helping people through strange scraps. Maybe he was, Grey thought. Hellscape Holiday Resort was definitely not the usual vacation spot.

“We’re really sorry about all the trouble, Portia,” Grey went on. “Please tell me how much Richard and Jorge owe you for the damage they caused.”

Portia waved him off. “If you think this is the worst fight we’ve had on our shores, you haven’t spent enough time here. These things happen. I’ll fix it all up without spending a dime,” she assured him.

Grey nodded tightly. He wouldn’t argue, but he would be sending a hefty check to the hotel to make up for his thunder’s behavior. “If it weren’t for this debacle, it would have been a very nice holiday. Your resort is truly wonderful.”

The succubus smiled proudly and thanked him. Grey made a beeline for Kaia. He wanted to reach out for her and wrap her up in his arms, but he thought better of it. Maybe Rachel would hex him if he tried to hug Kaia right after ripping into his own pack members.

“Are you all right?” he asked her, his face searching her features for confirmation that she was indeed fine. Tears lined her eyes, and her hands were balled into fists at her sides.

Kaia nodded, but she didn’t move toward him. “Are you?”

He looked down at his wounds. “This will heal in no time.”

“You can’t do that, Grey,” she whispered.

“Do what?”

“You can’t jump into a fight like that. You’re too important to be hurt over foolishness.” Tears fell down her face, and he brushed them away.

“I’m fine,” he repeated over again as he took her into his arms.

“It was so scary to see the two of them go for you at the same time. I don’t know what I would have done if something had happened to you.”

He smiled despite her tears. “You want to keep me around a little longer, don’t you?”

“Of course I do! I lo ... “ she stopped short.

Grey’s smile widened as he leaned down to kiss her. “I love you, Kaia Coll. I wouldn’t have gone up into that fight and broken my promise to you. I told you I would be back, and here I am.” He kissed her again.

“I never thought I’d ever see a dragon fight,” Ian said, shaking his head. “Those screeches are just terrible. I’m going to have nightmares.”

“I still can’t believe that you stepped in like that,” Rachel said, her eyes still narrowed at him. Grey didn’t know how to respond. Surely, anything he said, she wasn’t likely to approve.

He stuck to the truth. “This isn’t just a company. It’s my thunder. My family. This display had to be stopped. This isn’t how we are supposed to behave. It put everyone in danger, and as I said, I had to stop them before someone got hurt.”

Much to his surprise, Rachel’s scowl turned into a hint of a smile. “Well, at least you succeeded. Well done.”

Even Kaia was shocked by her sister’s kind words. Ian wrapped an arm around Rachel and kissed her cheek. “There she is. Let’s leave these two alone.”

Grey shot him a thankful smile. “This isn’t how I wanted to say goodbye.” Some people were still staring as if this was a show. “I have to deal with this.”

“I know.”

“But I’ll fly to you soon. We’ll talk. Figure everything out. I promise.”

“Greyson,” Dad interrupted, his eyes cut to Kaia. “Kaia, my son has a very important job to do back home. He’s not just the alpha heir, but I relinquish my role as CEO to him.” Greyson’s head snapped around toward his father, but he wasn’t finished yet. “Effective immediately.”

Kaia gasped. “Oh!”

“Dad,” Grey started. “Did ...?”

“This is the way it should be,” Jaymes cut in. “It should be you. Look what you just did. It’ll be my honor to call you Alpha, dear brother.” He bowed his head, and Grey’s throat felt tight with emotion.

“Kaia ...” This meant he couldn’t even suggest moving closer to her. Whatever happened between them, she would have to relocate.

“It’s okay. Come find me when you can.”

“I do love you, Kaia.”

“I love you, too, Greyson. Now go take your place. I’ll hang with my girls.”

They shared another kiss before Greyson peeled himself away from Kaia’s side. He couldn’t quite believe he was walking away from her, but Kaia understood that his family’s crisis was now his responsibility.

Greyson was now the alpha.

HOURS AFTER PACKING everyone up and leaving for home, Greyson was finally able to sit and recover from the insane day. What had started with Kaia’s cute kidnapping date turned into a day that changed his life forever.

“I’m proud of you, honey,” Mom said from her seat across the living room. She lifted her wine glass to him. “Alpha and

CEO. Just like your father.”

“And to think that if it weren’t for Richard and Jorge and their stupid fighting, I never would’ve thought you wanted to lead,” Dad said as if this was, somehow, big news.

One thing was certain ... Grey was happy that Richard and Jorge weren’t around to hear this. If they had been, this news might have been what sent them over the edge and into a full homicidal rage. But Grey wouldn’t worry about his two ex-employees.

They had been offered anger management classes and a sabbatical. Grey informed them that he would set firm boundaries if they chose to return. But if they chose to leave the company, he would make sure they were well compensated. He also made it very clear to them that they would always be welcomed as members of the thunder ... as long as they didn’t instigate trouble.

All that happened in a few short hours.

There was still a lot of work ahead for Grey to take care of. The whole company would need to be revamped and made more efficient. He had a lot of ideas. He and Jaymes already had a breakfast meeting set for the morning to make a plan. Grey couldn’t do this without his brother, and he would lean on his sibling’s strengths just like a good leader should do.

“Jaymes, what’s your official new title again?” Mom asked.

“CFO,” Jaymes replied with a smile. “Chief Financial Officer.”

“Oh, that’s just wonderful. I know you’ll do well at that,” she laughed.

Jaymes was more comfortable with numbers than with people, and the company needed his keen intellect. Working together, the brothers would usher in a new era for their family, thunder, and company.

“Now that all of this is settled, what will you do about that nice girl, Kaia?” Dad asked.

Mom immediately sat up in her chair. “Girl? What girl? Did you meet a girl? What’s her name?”

Grey laughed softly. “Kaia Coll is a guidance counselor at a high school in Portsmouth, and one day soon, she’ll be the Alpha Mate.”

Mom squealed her delight and brushed a tear from her eye. “You know, I heard that the resort has a knack for matching people.” She dabbed at her happy tears. “And to think that one of my sons found his lady with Hell’s help. Jaymes, you should book a holiday there soon! See what happens.”

“Jaymes shook his head. “ Let’s focus on Grey for now.” When *are* you seeing Kaia again?”

He sighed. “Not soon enough.”

It might take a few days before he could get to her, but when he did, he wasn’t letting her go.

TWENTY-FOUR



KAIA

Kaia kicked off her heels the second she walked through her front door. She locked the deadbolt and dropped her mail onto the small entryway table, along with her phone and keys. Her first day back at work since returning from Hellscape Holiday Resort was a little rough.

She wasn't used to wearing her heels after a week of sandals and bare toes. The kids teased her about her tan, and it was a constant reminder that she hadn't seen Greyson in three days.

Three very long days.

He called and texted whenever he could, but he was busy taking over the thunder and cleaning up his company. Every time they talked, he sounded hopeful for the future but also very tired.

Grey always included her in his future plans. They just hadn't worked out the details yet. Kaia didn't want to push him because he was already under so much pressure, and she trusted him. She knew, down to her heart, that Greyson Verlice wouldn't let her down. He promised he would come to her when he could, and he would. This was the kind of conversation they needed to have in person, anyway.

She flipped on the hallway lights on her way to the kitchen to pour herself a glass of wine.

"You're simply stunning, Kaia Coll," a deep and familiar male voice said, making her jump in fright with a squeal.

There stood Greyson Verlice in the middle of her living room. He was breathtaking, even in a simple pair of jeans and a white tee.

“Wha ...” she began to say before running into his arms, tears stinging her eyes.

He chuckled as he caught her. They kissed passionately, making up for lost time.

“Are you really here?” she asked, kissing his cheeks.

He laughed again. “Yes. I’m here.”

Kaia couldn’t quite believe Grey was in her home and finally in her arms. “How is everything? The company? The thunder?”

“It’s all fine. Or, at the very least, it’s on its way to being fine. There’s still a lot of work to do. There’s a fair amount of damage control I’m having to wade through. But at least most people seem to be open to all the changes and the new direction we’re headed in.”

“That’s wonderful, Grey.”

“It’s so nice to take a second and hold you.” He breathed her in.

She could feel how tired he was, but he had still made time to come see her. “Why did you fly all this way? You must be so tired.”

He shook his head. “It’s been too long since we’ve been together, love. I hated the way I had to leave the resort so quickly too. It’s been eating at me.”

“What else could you have done? You did the right thing.”

He cupped her face in his hands. “I missed you.”

“And I missed you so much.”

They settled on the couch and continued to hold each other tightly. They kissed every few seconds, sinking into their time together.

“How long do you think we can keep this up?” she asked. “Living this far apart?”

“However long you want,” he assured her. “I’ll fly over as often as we need it.”

“Aren’t you scared of being discovered by the humans?” They both stopped and threw their heads back, laughing. Humans weren’t exactly great at spotting the paranormal world around them. “But all jokes aside, that’s a lot of wasted time,” her tone was sobered.

“Not a chance. There’s no way I would ever look at flight time to you as wasted time.”

“A busy Alpha and CEO, spending an hour a day flying out to be with me?”

“I like to fly to clear my head. If anything, it’ll be good for me to have that commuting time.”

Just the thought that he would do that for her made her heart sing. If Grey said something, he surely meant it. Kaia was comforted by the knowledge that this man would move hell and high water to be with her. It made her earlier decision that much easier.

“I need to tell you something,” she said, leading him to the couch. They sat closely together, their hands instinctively reaching out for each other.

“What’s up, love?” his frown made her smile.

“This is actually good news. This morning, I emailed an old college friend of mine who just happens to teach in Nashua. I mentioned to her that I might be looking for a guidance counseling job near Lumberville.”

“Lumberville,” he smiled. “That’s where I live.”

“I know,” she pressed her lips to his. “Maybe it’s because I’m in love with a dragon, but I’m coming in hot right now, aren’t I?”

He chuckled. “Yeah, but I love it. It suits you. It also means you’ll be a great alpha mate.”

Her heart fluttered. “Mate?” she gasped.

“Of course. I want nothing else with you, Kaia.”

“Just happily ever after?”

“Exactly. What do you say? Will you marry me? Be my mate? Be the person I share the rest of this life with?”

“Absolutely,” she cried, throwing herself into his arms. The kisses they shared were heated and fueled by the life-changing commitment they would vow to each other. “Grey,” she whispered against his mouth.

“Oh, Kaia. I’ll make you so happy.”

“Right back at you, Greyson.” Kaia stood from the couch and walked down the hallway toward her bedroom. Grey chuckled, but he didn’t follow her. She shook her hips at him. “When do you think this mating thing is going to happen?” she asked, turning back to face him.

“Maybe in a few months,” he answered her with a grin.

“Liar! There’s no way your dragon wants to wait that long. No way *you* want to wait that long. Luckily for you, I already know what I want.” She waved him forward. “That’s you. So why wait?”

“Why wait, indeed,” he repeated calmly before standing.

Kaia watched as he slowly approached her. He took her face in his hands and tipped her head back to nip at her mouth. His tongue dipped in and out, and soon, his hands were roaming up and down her body. He continued to kiss her as he bunched her skirt up to her waist.

“Tonight?” he asked, his voice rough.

“Yes. Tonight. I don’t want to wait.”

He chuckled. “Being apart will only be that much harder.”

“Great motivator for me to get started packing.”

“I’ll get boxes delivered here tomorrow morning,” he said, walking them down the hall and into her bedroom.

Grey slowly unbuttoned her blouse, kissing every inch of flesh as he uncovered it. Soon, Kaia stood in nothing but her bra and panties. Grey's tee was long gone, and she slid down the zipper on his jeans. When he reached around to unclip her bra, Kaia held her breath. She only breathed again when Grey took one nipple into his mouth. He twirled his tongue around the tight nub before repeating the same actions to the other.

When Grey knelt to slide her thong down her legs, he kissed her mound. Kaia's knees buckled, and she had to grip his hair to remain on her feet. He kissed his way back up and stood. Kaia reached out to finally remove his jeans and briefs.

Bared to each other, they were ready for this next step.

They joined in a passionate kiss. Kaia wrapped one leg around his waist, and his erection brushed her skin. She shivered in anticipation. "Grey," she whispered, "I want you so much."

"It's been way too long. I'm moving you into my place tomorrow. No, forget tomorrow ... tonight!"

She would be happy if she never ever spent another night away from Grey again. Especially if he made it a habit of looking at her like she was the most beautiful woman in the world. She shivered again, this time because Grey was moving her backward. He placed her on the very edge of the bed and spread her thighs wide enough to kneel between them. He ran his hands up and down her thighs in soft, tantalizing movements.

He kissed his way up one leg until he reached the apex of her thighs. He took a deep breath before kissing her sex. He licked up and down her sex a few times before focusing the tip of his tongue on her clit. He licked, he twirled, and he suckled until Kaia arched into his mouth, seeking her release.

Kaia cried out when Grey eased two fingers into her moistened channel. He pumped into her as he continued to flatten his tongue against her tight bundle of nerves. Her body was on fire, and Grey continued to increase the heat. Every touch sent her orgasm flying higher and higher until it exploded, sending pleasure through her every limb.

She dug her fingers into the sheets. “Oh, Grey.” He didn’t stop until her body started to quiver. “Grey, it’s you I want.” She sat up and knelt on the bed, reaching for his erection. She closed her hand around his girth before moving up and down as slowly as she could. Their eyes were glued together before Kaia slowly eased down until her face was in line with his erection. She circled the head of his cock with her tongue. Then she closed her lips around it and took him into her mouth.

“Kaia,” he groaned. “Love,” his breath caught.

She continued to move up and down his shaft, but Grey pulled away before he could enjoy himself too much. Kaia lay back on the pillows, nearly trembling with excitement. She was a witch. She understood just how important and primal mating was for Grey, and she wanted to respect that.

He joined her on the bed, laying beside her. When they were both on their sides, he cupped her ass and slid her closer to him until her leg was over his hip. His erection pressed into her, and Kaia moaned, “Yes.”

Greyson slid deep inside her. They moved together, each thrust meeting the other. Kaia squeezed her core every time he surged forward, sending sparks up and down her spine. Grey groaned her name, and his grip on her hips tightened. His mouth found hers with a kiss.

They made love, joined and lost in the ecstasy. The gentle pace drew out the pleasure, and her orgasm flamed slowly. The burn was good. *So very good.* Grey nuzzled her neck before taking her mouth in a deep kiss. Kaia felt the stirrings in her core as he increased his speed. He moved with her, and soon, her entire being was nothing but flames. Grey sent her over the edge. She held on to him, lost to the passion.

“Kaia,” he growled softly. “My mate.” He continued to move inside her, intensifying her orgasm. His body shook through his release, and he scratched her hip as he emptied himself deep inside her. Kaia gasped, her body reignited by the mate mark.

Mates.

The small mark shone in the setting sun as Grey and Kaia floated back down from the height of their orgasms. Grey brushed his fingers against her marked hip before leaning down to kiss it. When he laid his head back on the pillow, there was a small smile on his lips. "I love you, Kaia Coll."

"We're mates," she whispered.

Grey leaned over her and kissed her sweetly. "That wasn't too bad?" His hands lingered on her hip.

"I'm an alpha mate. I can take a little scratch."

He chuckled. "Yeah?"

She nodded. "I'll help you whip that company and thunder into shape."

"We will all need a little guidance," he said before laughing.

Excited, Kaia tapped his chest. "That is amazing! A little guidance. I already know exactly what my alpha mate vibe will be."

He grinned. "It's not a big mystery, but I want to hear this vision of yours." Grey lay on his back, and Kaia placed her head on his chest.

"My days as a guidance counselor will totally come in handy for this. If someone has a problem. I'm the person to see. I'll be the wise old lady."

"You're not going to be old for a very long time," he pointed out.

"Maybe not, but we have a long time ahead of us. Think of all the dragons I'll be helping. That's helping family, and there is nothing better than that."

"God, I do love you." He kissed her. "You're amazing, Kaia."

"Award-winning, some might say."

He threw his head back with a laugh. "If Lou was here, he might say that I was your reward."

“You’re a lot more than a reward,” Kaia said. “You’re my mate.”

“And you’re mine.” Grey brushed his lips against hers, sealing the vow.



EPILOGUE

It was only fitting that Kaia Coll and Greyson Verlice get married in a beach-side ceremony at Hellscape Holiday Resort.

After all, this was where they had met. Who knew what their lives would look like without this resort? Kaia was extremely happy she had insisted on taking her coven for a magical holiday here.

She thought the healing would be for Rachel, but she had done some healing of her own too. Kaia didn't try to let Rachel's emotions get the better of her now. Her sister would always be a little high-strung and quick to temper, but she still loved Rachel. At least her only sibling warmed to Grey after the wedding. Part of Kaia felt that her sister was only waiting for the other shoe to drop, just like in her marriage.

Kaia knew it wouldn't happen. There was just no way that Grey would ever cheat on her. They were more than husband and wife. They were mates. Fated mates. They were destined to find each other and fall in love. Together, they would face all of life's challenges.

Together.

With all of their friends and family gathered to watch, the dragon and the witch exchanged vows. Lou, the bartender, officiated wonderfully. Kaia was surprised that a bartender could be so romantic, but Lou's words had more than a few people reaching for the tissues.

The ceremony went well, and so far, the reception has been a blast.

It helped that there were no fighting dragons to bring down the mood this time.

Portia and Lou had helped them plan their wedding and honeymoon, relishing the notion the couple had met at their hotel.

“I take full credit for this,” Lou announced as he cut in between Grey and Kaia during a dance once the cake was cut and the speeches were done.

Portia elbowed him in the ribs and was glad to take Grey’s invitation for a dance. The four stayed close, swaying to the music to reminisce together. “You can’t always take credit,” Portia warned the bartender with a smile.

“Sure I can,” he assured her. “I did tell you that you would get your reward, Greyson. Remember?”

Kaia glanced at her new husband, but he was only confused. It took a few moments for him to crack a smile. “The drink you made me. Yeah, I remember now. You said the cocktail was my reward for teaching that demon some manners.”

Lou’s grin widened. “Is that what I said? I thought it was more along the lines of, you drinking my cocktail *guaranteed* your reward would find you.” The demon winked, and Portia stepped away from Greyson and took Lou’s hands away from Kaia.

“Don’t listen to him,” the succubus laughed. “He’s talking nonsense. You two met and fell in love. That’s all that matters.”

Lou twirled Portia around in a merry dance that didn’t quite match the music’s tempo. The succubus didn’t seem to mind too much, but her eyes were glued to Lou’s face in stern concentration.

“You two are a delicious couple,” Lou was giddy with glee. “Have a good honeymoon.” He led Portia away, leaving Kaia and Grey laughing at their antics.

“He’s not wrong,” Grey said. “Finding you does feel like a reward, but you’re so much more than a prize, Kaia.”

“I hope so. I’m your wife.”

“Wife,” he repeated with a smile. “I’ll never get tired of hearing that. Wanna go to our own private island, wife?”

“Private island?” she repeated, confused.

“Yeah. Didn’t I tell you? We’re staying an extra week for our honeymoon. We have one of those private islands reserved just for us.”

“You’re joking,” she gasped!

Amused, he shook his head. “I kept true to my word.”

“We have a whole island? For a one-week stay? Just for us? Are you really serious?”

He kissed her cheek, keeping his lips close to her ear. “I’ve already cleared the holiday with your boss. She was quite impressed with my wedding gift.”

“So my boss knew about my honeymoon before I did?” she teased.

“Are you surprised?” he asked.

Kaia looked around. The reception was in full swing. Every party guest was having a good time ... from the dancing to the drinking, and the fantastic meal ... there was something for everyone. They would hardly be missed if they snuck away. “Yup. I’m also all partied out. I’ve got an island I want to explore.”

As discreetly as the bride and groom could manage, they snuck away from the beach and followed one of the resort’s paths. An imp drove them to their island in a small boat.

Kaia gasped when they docked on the small private beach that fronted an impressive log cabin. “Some of the other islands have a more modern vibe, but I thought this fit us well.”

“For a dragon CEO, who owns a lumber company? I’d say so,” she laughed. “It’s beautiful.”

Grey took her into his arms. “Even if it’s not our house, I’ll carry you over the threshold. But there are going to be no interruptions out here. No CEO or alpha business. This week is all about us.”

Kaia kissed him. “Best husband ever.”

“Best week ever,” he replied before taking her to their temporary love nest.

Kaia could hardly wait.

THE SUN SETTING over the water was a stunning view. One they could enjoy while completely nude, lounging on their private back deck by the water. Kaia couldn’t remember if she had worn any clothes in the last forty-eight hours. Any time she reached for something, Grey stopped her. When she reached for her wrap, he pulled her into his lap.

“Now, wife, why would you want to hide yourself from your husband?”

“Because the sun is setting, and I’m getting a bit chilled.”

“Ridiculous. I’m a dragon.” It was true that she was no longer cold while laying on top of him. He even threw her wrap over her. “There. Better?”

“Yup. You take such good care of me, husband. Now, tell me.” She cupped his hands in her face, turning serious. “Do you think you’ll ever get tired of me?” She knew the answer, but she wanted to ask anyway.

“Nope,” Grey answered. “Not possible. Why would you ask something like that?”

“Well, we’ll both live a long time.”

“That’s why this is so amazing. Think of all the time with each other we have ahead of us. Plenty of time to be newlyweds and, after a little while, new parents. Then empty nesters and, one day, grandparents. And maybe even great-

grandparents. We can rent this island once a year on our anniversary for as long as *you* don't get tired of me."

"Are you kidding? You're the only person with whom I would ever want to be stuck on a deserted island."

He threw his head back with a laugh. "Good to know. It's the same for me. I love being on an island with you. All to myself and nude. Always nude."

Grey stood and carried her inside in his arms. When he laid her on the bed, which was big enough to be its own island, Kaia was overcome with love for both her husband and the resort that brought them together.

"So long as the resort keeps running, we're coming back."

And, much to the delight of Lou and Portia, they did just that...

The End

*Don't miss Lou and Portia's next antics in **Loving the Warlock**, coming soon!*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

New York Times and USA Today Bestselling Author

Hi! I'm Milly Taiden. I love to write sexy stories featuring fun, sassy heroines with curves and growly alpha males with fur. My books are a great way to satisfy your craving for paranormal romance with action, humor, suspense and happily ever afters.

I live in Florida with my hubby, our son, and our fur babies: Speedy, Stormy and Teddy. I have a serious addiction to chocolate and cake.

I love to meet new readers, so come sign up for my newsletter and check out my Facebook page. We always have lots of fun stuff going on there.

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