



CONNOR

DESTINED PARANORMALS BOOK FIVE

TAYLOR RYLAN

CONNOR

DESTINED PARANORMALS BOOK FIVE

TAYLOR RYLAN

Copyright 2023 by Taylor Rylan

All rights reserved.

www.taylorrylan.com

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cover by Jay Aheer of Simply Defined Art

www.simplydefinedart.com

Editing by Sandra Dee of One Love Editing

www.oneloveediting.com

Proofreading by Judy Zweifel of Judy's Proofreading

www.judysproofreading.com

Cover image from Deposit Photos

www.depositphotos.com

SYNOPSIS

When you're a fae born in the shifter realm, the last thing you expect is to discover your mate is fae, sent from the fae realm just for you.

Connor Romano loves his family. Born to a vampire father and a fae mother, he's spent his entire life witnessing firsthand the level his father would go to protect his mother, him, and their fae sister. Because of this, the last thing he wants is a fae mate of his own. The fates have other plans though.

Milo Thomas just wishes to feel wanted. Orphaned at birth and raised by his grandparents, he's reminded frequently that he is the cause of his parents' deaths. Milo endures and hopes that one day, he can find a way to escape the prison that he's been subjected to for the past eighteen years.

Connor isn't sure he's the right mate for Milo, but the defeat in his mate's eyes draws him unlike anything else. How could someone so young be beaten down by life already? Can he change that? Will they be able to make a life together like his parents did? Will Milo finally open up and let Connor in?

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

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

CONTENTS

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Synopsis](#)

1. [Connor](#)
2. [Milo](#)
3. [Connor](#)
4. [Milo](#)
5. [Connor](#)
6. [Milo](#)
7. [Connor](#)
8. [Milo](#)
9. [Connor](#)
10. [Milo](#)
11. [Connor](#)
12. [Milo](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Taylor Rylan](#)

CHAPTER I

CONNOR



There was no denying it—my niece and nephews were adorable. They were all running around the room, burning off energy from our family meal we’d just finished. I was somewhat surprised our parents had relocated to Montana, but maybe I shouldn’t have been. My sisters were both still in Europe, and although Evelyn was fae like I was and could pop in and out as she pleased, she seemed perfectly content in Europe. Victoria as well. And it wasn’t like our parents didn’t go back and visit. They did. But they had pretty much up and moved and settled here in Montana.

Which brought my thoughts to myself. I had as well. Here I was. I was watching my nibblings running around chasing each other. It was incredibly cute how they would gently touch each other and then fall on their bottoms and giggle. It was good they had each other to grow up with. Not that there weren’t children at the council. The council seemed to be full of mated couples who were having children.

“You’re not listening.”

I vaguely registered Father’s voice, but when he touched me on the shoulder, I turned in his direction and blinked at him.

“I’m sorry. I think I spaced out for a bit.” I continued to blink, exhaustion suddenly hitting me. I’d been working a lot of extra hours lately simply because I was single and none of my fellow park rangers were. In fact, all of them had children, more than one, actually. I simply wanted to offer them the

extra time home with their mates and children if I could. I had nothing to return home to, so why not?

“You’ve been unusually quiet.”

“I am sorry, Father. I’ve just been putting in a lot of hours at the ranger station.” It was the truth, and I planned on continuing to take as many shifts as I could. I didn’t need the pay the department gave me, but what I did need was to remain busy.

“You look as if you are worn down.”

I snorted and shook my head. “I work fifteen hours a day, seven days a week. I probably am, but I see it as better me than the others who have mates and children.”

Father gave me a disappointed look. “Just because they are mated and have families, that doesn’t mean you should run yourself into the ground to please or help them. They have responsibilities as much as you do. They have to be responsible for their position that they have as well.”

I sighed. “I realize that. But I’m offering to spend the time at work. I don’t have anything else going on, so I figured, why not give them extra time off?” I had nothing going on in my life. I was only here in Montana because Mom was. That and I was closer to Garic than I was to Victoria or Evelyn. I loved all of my siblings, but I wasn’t necessarily close to them. We had all chosen different paths in life, and now that I was the last to find my own mate, I felt like an outsider in my own family. I still loved them all, but I was torn with my own feelings about mates and whether I even wanted one or not.

“What do you plan on doing when you find your own mate? It’s bound to happen at some point.”

I sent Father a glare. “I’m not sure I even wish to find a mate. I’ve seen the levels you have had to go to in order to ensure Mom’s safety.” I shook my head. “I don’t wish to have that kind of life.” I stopped Father’s attempt to speak with a hand held up. “I’ve seen what Matteo has had to bear with his mating and having children. What Garic and Luc go through when they’re apart for more than a week, how it’s forced them

to change their jobs.” I sighed. “I don’t want that, Father. Why would I?” I stood, ready to return to my own home. It wasn’t exactly late, but I’d had a very long day at work and was facing another the following day.

“Connor,” Father said, his voice stern. I looked over my shoulder at him and shook my head again.

“Not everyone wishes for the same things in life, Father.” Giggling drew our attention, and when I went to turn back to continue talking to Father, I found him standing beside me, watching Cosette running around after her alpha father. Justin was an amazing mate to Matteo and a wonderful father to both Cosette and Elijah. And Garic adored Luc, and their little Grant seemed to complete their family. But that didn’t mean I had to join them when it came to finding a mate and having a family. Perhaps I’d made a mistake when I settled here. Had I given our parents the wrong idea?

“Are you telling me you don’t wish to have that for yourself?” Father asked, nodding toward Justin, who was now playing with all three children on the floor.

“I will, of course, be thankful if the fates deem me worthy of having a mate,” I told him. “But it’s not something I’m dreaming about every waking moment.”

Father sighed. “You know your mother wants all of you mated and with children.”

“Sure she does. But after seeing what you went through to protect not only her but Evelyn and me growing up”—I shook my head—“the thought of having a fae child terrifies me.” The chances of me finding a fae mate were slim. Sure, fae were here, just as Evelyn and I were, because we were born in this realm. But with the fae realm having been locked, the possibility of finding another fae was low. But that wasn’t the only issue. I was fae. That meant that even if I mated to, say... a wolf shifter, I would still have the possibility of having a fae child. Having to protect them until they could defend themselves wasn’t something I wanted for my children.

“You’re not thinking rationally, Connor.”

I refocused on Father. “How not? I don’t want fae children. What you had to do...leave your home, always moving around to hide us.” I shook my head again. “I don’t want that. Please understand and accept my choice.”

Father sighed. We’d obviously been louder than I’d realized because the room was now quiet, and when I looked out at our family, they were all staring. Matteo and Garlic looked upset, and Luc and Justin uncertain.

“Connor?” Mom asked.

I walked over to her, leaned down, and gave her forehead a quick kiss. “I need to go, Mom. Thank you for the lovely meal. It’s always a treat to have you cook for me,” I told her. I nodded at my brothers and then simply left. I was fae, after all, and I had magic. I wasn’t a young fae either. I was a hundred and thirty. Technically, I should have been mated a century ago. I had no way of getting to the fae realm to make that happen though.

I sighed in relief when I found myself in my own cabin. It was on the other side of the lake, farther away from not only my brothers but my parents. They had settled in Honey Creek because it was closest to Treasure Ridge, where both of my brothers lived.

It wasn’t that I didn’t love my family. I honestly did. I was thrilled for my brothers, but the struggles they all faced regularly had me hesitant to want that for myself.

I walked toward my bedroom, and as I crossed over the threshold for the en suite bathroom, I used magic to remove my clothing. I turned the water on in the shower and waited for it to warm up. It was true it was still early for most, but I had a long day tomorrow, after one today. I wished for a long, hot, relaxing shower and then to fall into my oversized bed and pass out.

I knew Father was worried, and rightly so. He had brought up some valid points, but I had already left Europe to settle here at Mom’s pleading. I had to have something to do. Which was why I’d found a position with the national park. Had I ever been a park ranger before? Nope. Did I enjoy it? I had

found that, yes, I really did. I spent most of my day out touring the park and ensuring the tourists were behaving as they should.

It hadn't been overly difficult so far, and the others in the ranger station were incredibly happy to have a fae among them. Ryker's mate was a warlock, but he was younger and was still working on mastering and controlling all of his powers. I came in handy when having to deal with a wayward bear or tourist.

Steam started billowing out from the top of the shower, indicating it was hot, so I stepped in and under the spray. I sighed in relief as it pelted down on my neck and shoulders. I took several deep, calming breaths, wondering if Father wasn't perhaps right? He often was, and I couldn't see what he did. But it was obvious that I was possibly working too much if this was how I felt after only seconds in the shower.

I stood under the spray, letting the pulsing jets work their magic on my tense upper body while I tried my best to clear my thoughts. Once my shoulders no longer felt tense, I washed and then spent a few more minutes in the shower before I turned off the water and stepped out.

I used magic to dry myself, and as I walked out of the bathroom, more magic to dress in a pair of flannel pajama pants and a long-sleeve shirt. The pull of the bed was tempting, but instead, I went out to the kitchen. I was searching for a small snack, not sure what I was in the mood for, when there was a knock on the door. I pushed out, wondering who it was, and when I received a response from someone not fae, I narrowed my eyes. There were two people standing outside my door.

It took seconds to get there, and the last people I expected to be standing on the other side were the created vampire as well as the created warlock.

"Ah, there he is," Master Ambrosius said. He took a step forward, not waiting for an invitation. I stepped out of the way because, one, you didn't deny the created vampire or warlock

entry to your house. Two, he was coming in no matter what, so why try to stand in the way?

“Please excuse him,” Master Edison said. “He often forgets his manners.”

“Oh no, it’s quite all right,” I told him. “Please come in.” I gestured into the house, closing the door after Master Edison entered. When I turned around, it was to see a glaring vampire and a concerned-looking warlock. “Have I done something wrong?”

“Not as of yet,” Master Edison told me.

“Your father called me, concerned for your health, Connor,” Master Ambrosius added.

I sighed. “I’m perfectly healthy. Tired, but that isn’t unheard of for someone working long shifts.”

“Mmm, yes. I will be discussing your long shifts with my son-in-law,” Master Edison told me. I wanted to argue but held my tongue. “Although it is wonderful that you are willing to offer the others more time with their families, they need to be sure to not take advantage.”

“I’m the one insisting,” I told him. “They all have mates and children.” This wasn’t news. Master Edison was quite aware of the park rangers and who their mates were.

“Yes, but when one of my vampires calls, concerned about his offspring, it becomes an issue.”

I grumbled under my breath. I would be having a conversation with Father soon. He overstepped, and I didn’t appreciate it.

“Yes, Master Ambrosius,” I said instead of what I really wished to say.

“Connor, it isn’t that we are upset with you,” Master Edison told me. “Just that your father has noticed a visible change in you in recent weeks. When I asked Troy about it, he couldn’t answer any questions because he’s not seen you much because he is working shorter hours.”

I sighed. “Very well. Shall I make tea?” I asked, gesturing into the house.

“Tea will suffice since I have a feeling you do not have an espresso machine,” Master Ambrosius said.

“No, not at all,” I said. “But I could—” I was cut off by Master Edison with a hand held up.

“Ambrose, you will survive without drinking espresso every chance you get. Tea is good for you. Remember how much you loved it while pregnant?”

I led the two created ones into my house, both of them bickering back and forth with one another as if they had been best friends for centuries. I knew it wasn’t the case, but everyone anywhere near the council knew of the fast friendship between the created vampire and created warlock.

I used magic to have steaming mugs of tea as well as cinnamon cookies waiting for them in the back den. “Please have a seat, and we can discuss everyone’s concerns.”

Master Edison and Master Ambrosius sat on the couch while I took one of the chairs. I sat, waiting for one of them to start the discussion.

“You aren’t in any trouble, Connor,” Master Edison said. “Despite what Ambrose said, your father is only concerned, and it has brought up other issues not related to you.”

I didn’t know what those could possibly be, but I also realized they weren’t my concern, and I wasn’t going to ask about them.

“Your father mentioned you didn’t want a mate?” Master Ambrosius mentioned.

I grumbled under my breath again. I was most definitely going to have words with him. “That is not exactly what I said, Master,” I argued. “I mentioned how he had always had to be overly protective of Mother, Evelyn, and myself. How Matteo has struggled so much with his pregnancies, and how Garic and Luc have issues with being apart for extended periods of time. It simply seemed like more trouble than it could possibly be worth. I wouldn’t wish to have to live like that.”

Master Edison and Master Ambrosius shared a glance before Master Ambrosius picked up his tea and took a sip.

“Yes, well, that is all things that one discovers they are willing to experience when it comes to your fated mate,” Master Edison said.

I shook my head. “I apologize, but I have to disagree. I would never want a fae or vampire mate. No offense,” I said, looking at Master Ambrosius as he stared at me over the teacup. “I love my father, brothers, and sisters. But I’ve seen firsthand how their energy changes throughout the week.” I shook my head. It wasn’t that I would begrudge a vampire mate my blood. But what if something such as Matteo and Justin experienced happened? Then my mate would be without, and... I shook my head. No. That wasn’t what I wanted for my mate.

“You do not get to choose who your mate is, Connor,” Master Edison said, his voice coming out as a bit of a warning.

I locked eyes, trying to see if he knew something I didn’t. Who was I kidding though? He was the created warlock. Of course he knew something. I took a chance.

“You know who my mate is?” I asked. “I’m getting a mate?” I looked between the two.

“When talking to Thomas and Canyon recently, your name was one that had come up,” Master Edison said.

“When did you talk to them, and where was I?” Master Ambrosius asked.

“The beginning of the month, and I would imagine you were off with your family on a trip. Didn’t you go to Sicily recently?”

Master Ambrosius grinned. “I did, yes. I still think the council should move there. The weather is ideal, and we wouldn’t have to deal with all of this snow. The food is amazing and the wines.” Master Ambrosius seemed to have a moment with himself as he placed his hand on the center of his chest and sighed.

“Focus, Ambrose,” Master Edison said. He shook his head as he turned it back in my direction. “Tomorrow is the winter solstice, and I don’t believe there is time to stop them from sending your mate in your direction,” Master Edison told me.

“I’m sorry, what did you say? Tomorrow?” I was indeed getting a mate? Tomorrow? Seriously? How did he know that? Did I even want a mate?

“Really, Edison? Were you supposed to share that with him?”

Master Edison shrugged. “If I was or wasn’t, it doesn’t matter at this point. It’s done. He knows his mate will be arriving tomorrow. Connor is fae and has full use of all of his powers, and therefore won’t need to make any extra trips to the store for anything. But he should probably think long and hard about how he’s going to react tomorrow when his mate is presented to him.”

I narrowed my eyes at the two sitting catty-corner from me. “I’m right here, you know. I don’t need for you to talk about me as if I’m not sitting here, in my den, with the two of you.”

“Aren’t you happy, Connor?” Master Ambrosius asked. “Didn’t you not just tell us that you hadn’t said to your father that you didn’t wish for a mate? I would think you would be elated. Especially since you are fae, and they normally have their mate by the time they are fifty at most.”

I sighed. “I haven’t thought about having a mate, to be honest. I’ve seen how much extra my family alone has had to deal with because they have their mates. That’s not something I can say that I honestly looked forward to having to deal with.”

Master Edison sighed. “You will need to adjust your attitude, Connor. Your mate is going to need you, in every way. And I’m afraid if he feels as if you see him as an inconvenience, it will be the final nail that breaks him beyond what he can handle.” With that, Master Edison and Master Ambrosius disappeared. I was left looking around the house, already knowing they weren’t anywhere nearby.

What did he mean by his last comment? Why would my mate break? I thought about what he'd said and realized he'd mentioned *he*. So my mate was male? I was to get an omega?

Immediately, I wondered if I was going to be paired with a rescued omega that the council recently brought back. Had they been on assignments in the near past? I honestly couldn't answer that because I had no idea.

I glanced at the table, finding the cookies gone and both cups of tea empty. I blinked at them a few times, wondering when it was they drank it. Master Edison hadn't picked up the mug even once. Master Ambrosius had only taken one sip that I'd seen.

Perhaps Master Edison had taken it to go for the pair of them. Anyway, I used magic to place the dishes in the dishwasher before I got up and plopped facedown onto the couch. The exhaustion I'd felt earlier was returning, but I knew there was absolutely no way I'd be able to sleep. Who was my mate, and why was he broken?

CHAPTER 2

MILO



One wasn't supposed to wake from a restless night with a feeling of complete and utter dread. Especially not when it was your eighteenth birthday. It should be a happy day, one to be celebrated. Sadly, that wasn't the case for me and never had been.

I was curious as to what my grandparents had in store for me today. More berating? Most definitely more chores. And, of course, the constant reminding that I was the reason they'd lost their one and only son. The light of their lives. Their only happiness. Because, of course, the surviving grandchild shouldn't make them happy. No, I was the cause for their son's death.

The feeling of dread deepened in my stomach. I absolutely didn't want to get up and start the day, but I knew if I didn't, they'd just drag me out of bed, and then the day would be all the worse. Ideally, my day wouldn't be terrible if they would ignore me. Sadly, that wouldn't ever happen because my birthday also happened to be the day my omega dad died. I'd been told by other villagers that my alpha father desperately tried to hang on for my sake, and he'd survived a little over two weeks, but he'd simply not been able to continue on. His bond with his mate had been strong already, and his life had been slowly fading away.

"Milo!" I jerked upright at the sound of my name being shouted just outside my door in conjunction with a loud pounding on my door. "Get up and get packed!"

I had just tossed my covers back when the door was flung open. I flinched, then stared at my grandfather.

“You have exactly ten minutes to get whatever you want packed.”

“Packed? Where are we going?”

Grandfather glared at me. “We are not going anywhere. You are now of age and no longer my problem. I want you out of my house. Be thankful I’m letting you pack anything that I’ve provided for you over the years.”

“Out? Where will I go?”

“That is no longer my problem. I’ve done what the village required of me with regards to you. I will never forgive you for the death of my son. It has been unfair that I have had to house his murderer for eighteen years. Well, no longer.” My grandfather looked at the wall and then sneered at me. “You now have eight minutes. Timer is counting. I’ll drag you out of here empty-handed if you aren’t ready.” Grandfather pulled my door shut forcefully, and then I heard his heavy footsteps as they went down the hallway.

I sat there, completely stunned for a moment before I jumped from my bed and started scrambling for something, anything, that I could use to pack my things in. Then again, it wasn’t like I had a lot of things. I glanced down at the threadbare clothes I wore to bed. I couldn’t remember them ever being new, nor how long I’d had them. What little clothing I did have was old, worn out, and fit poorly. I had exactly one nicer outfit that my grandparents forced me to keep and wear only when I left the house. They didn’t want the rest of the village to know how much they hated my very existence, so they had at least provided that for me.

I glanced around the room, desperate for anything that could hold what little I knew I wanted to take with me. When my gaze landed on the pillow I’d just been lying on, I quickly rushed to pull the cover from it. Inside went a few items of clothing, and then I hit the floor and dug under my bed, searching for the picture I kept hidden there. It was the only one I had, and it was of my father when my omega dad was

pregnant with me. I wasn't sure who had taken it, but it was the only image I had of them and the only way I even knew what they looked like.

I carefully placed the image in the middle of the pile of clothing before I stuffed the rest of my clothing on top of them. Sadly, they only filled half of the pillow cover. I went to the drawer where I kept my few bathroom items and placed them on top. My spare shoes went in last, and I was just pulling on my worn-out pair when the door flung open again.

I jumped up, grabbing the makeshift bag as my grandfather lunged for me. Despite his rule of never being allowed to use magic inside his house, I did anyway since he was throwing me out.

I used magic to send myself to the front door. I had been aiming for outside somewhere, but I'd obviously missed.

"How dare you use magic in this house! Get out, you murdering parasite!" I heard Grandfather shout behind me. I flung the door open, but sadly, my escape was thwarted by two men standing just on the other side of it.

"Move," I called out desperately and pushed my way through them. I took off running to the sounds of my grandfather shouting behind me. I had no idea where I would go or how I would afford anything, but I would figure something out. Luckily for me, it wasn't cold in our realm, and I wouldn't freeze.

My grandparents lived in a smaller cottage just outside of the village. It was both a blessing as well as a curse that the place was isolated, but there was nothing I could do about it. Not knowing where else to go, I took off for the village. I would try going to the bakery first. Maybe they would offer me something small to eat in exchange for work. What little I'd been given to eat last evening was long gone, and I knew I would need something to eat at some point today. Especially if I had to set about walking to a new village in order to find shelter.

I ran full speed until my lungs felt like they were on fire. Only then did I chance a glance behind me, and when I saw I

was alone, I stopped running. Grandfather didn't say he would come after me, only that I needed to get out. Well, I'd gotten out, and now I had to figure out where I went from here.

I looked around, noticing it was eerily quiet in the forest, but I wasn't far from the village. In fact, I could see the edge of it from where I was, so I just figured my running was what caused the birds and other small animals to go silent. After looking around again, I found a large enough tree to lean up against, and I sat down.

I took several breaths, hoping to not only calm my lungs but my emotions. So this was it. My grandparents had made it very clear that they never wanted me. They only wanted their son, who had died giving birth to me. I had long ago accepted that I would never be wanted in my lifetime, but I simply didn't know how to get away from everything or them. I had not been given the opportunity to go to school, although I'd stolen books and tried to read them. I pretty much failed until I was older and started learning little by little on my rare trips into the village.

I grabbed my makeshift sack, tying the top to keep what few things I had from spilling out. I would eventually be able to replace everything inside except for the image of my fathers. It was my most prized possession—my only possession, really.

It took a moment for me to realize that this was indeed it. I was now homeless with very little and nowhere to go. I had no skills, could barely use magic because of my young age and being forbidden to use it.

I hugged my meager belongings to my chest before using the cover they were in to wipe my face. I was crying, and I wasn't sure why. I knew it wasn't for the man who had just kicked me out, nor the meek little woman who was not much better than he was. Thankfully, she chose to never interact with me, and I rarely saw her.

“Milo?”

I jumped, not expecting to hear my name nor for it to be spoken by someone I'd never seen before this morning. I

looked way up at the tall, slender man with dark hair and bright blue eyes that were kind yet sad.

I quickly stood, hugging my things tightly to my chest as I took a step back. “I didn’t take anything that wasn’t mine,” I said quickly. “Despite what he might have told you, I only have what few clothes I have and my toothbrush and paste. I didn’t even take the soap. I swear,” I rambled as I continued to step away from the pair that were standing there. The slender man shook his head while holding out his hands.

“We aren’t after you, and your grandfather didn’t accuse you of taking anything. We’re here to help,” he told me. “My name is Thomas, and this is my Chosen, Canyon.”

The muscular blond man stepped forward at the mention of his name and not only smiled but held out his hand. I glanced at it, then him, before I stepped forward and shook it. For such a large man, he was surprisingly gentle.

“Hi. I’m Milo, but I guess you already know that.”

Canyon nodded. “We do.” He let go of my hand and gestured toward the man who had introduced himself as Thomas. “This is my mate, Thomas, but he already said that. But I’m trying to put you at ease.”

I swiped at my eyes with my free hand before I relaxed a little. “I didn’t do anything. I don’t know why you would be here, but I didn’t do anything. I’ve only ever done what they told me to. He said I had to get out.” I held up my pillow cover. “I grabbed what I had and got out.” I understood they said they were fates, and even though I’d not been allowed to attend school, I knew what the fates represented. “I have to go,” I said. I knew I wouldn’t be getting a mate—there was no way that would be in my future. I was homeless and destitute.

“Yes, you do,” Thomas told me. “We’re going to take you to our realm first, and after we have a long discussion about your grandparents, we will talk more about your mate and where you’re going to end up.”

I blinked at Thomas a few times before shaking my head. “No, I don’t have a mate.” I started to take a few steps back.

The tears returned, and I didn't try to stop them this time. "I'm an orphan who is unwanted. No alpha would want me. I have nothing," I told them. "I can't even read except for the most basic words." I wasn't mate-worthy. I would find a village that would accept me, and if lucky, I would be able to get work in exchange for a bed somewhere. Even a cot on the floor in the corner would be acceptable. Just somewhere.

"Your mate will want you," Canyon told me. "He's stubborn, and he's the last in his family to be mated."

I heard what they were saying but could only shake my head while holding my belongings against my chest tightly.

"If nothing else, come with us," Thomas said. "We will take you away from here. You'll have food, shelter, all of the things you need."

That grabbed my attention, and when I met Thomas's eyes, after I swiped at mine to clear them, I saw that what he spoke was truth. If I left with them, I would have the basics I needed. A quick glance toward the village I'd rarely visited was all I needed to have me deciding that leaving here was the better option. The villagers had always been kind, but even dressed in my nicest clothes, I'd still realized that I was looked upon with pity. They were always polite about it, but I could tell they knew I didn't belong, that I wasn't wanted.

I nodded again. "I would like that," I told them. "If you could help me find work, I'm a hard worker," I added. I was too. I didn't have a whole lot of skills, but I could cook and clean. I could do the wash. Surely they needed those skills somewhere?

"It will all work out, Milo. Please trust us about that," Thomas said.

I took several more steps toward them, and I felt my body tingle as it moved from one place to another. It suddenly stopped when I realized I was no longer where I had been just moments before. I looked around and saw a cute cottage that was well maintained. It was white and brown and had flowers both at all of the windows and on the ground around it.

“Welcome to our home,” Thomas said.

I looked up at him, my eyes rounding. “Your home?”

“Yes. We have much to discuss,” he told me.

“But you said I would have the things I needed.”

“And you will,” Thomas said. “We will provide everything you need, but we must also discuss your future.”

I wanted to argue, but I held my tongue. Even I knew I needed the things they’d said they would provide. I had no funds. I couldn’t even purchase a slice of bread, let alone a full meal. I glanced down at the threadbare clothes I was still wearing from last night and nodded slowly.

I followed them inside, Thomas entering first, me second, and Canyon last. Inside was just as cozy as the outside, and I couldn’t help but wonder what it was like to live in such a place. It had such a welcoming feel to it, and although I knew I would never live someplace this nice, I could enjoy the prettiness for the moment that I was welcome here.

“Please sit down. We have much to discuss and figure out,” Thomas said.

What was there to figure out? I needed work. Without work, I had nothing. “I just need a job. I’m not asking for things for free. I’ll work for everything,” I told them. I wanted them to know that I wasn’t asking for handouts. I had been working for things, although only for my grandparents, since I was little.

“We will get to that,” Thomas told me. “Please just sit and relax for a little while. You’ve obviously had a rough morning already; we would like to alleviate that some, if at all possible.”

I sat down because, honestly, there was nothing else I could do. I was in an unknown area and had no idea as to where I needed to go or how to get there.

“Would you like some breakfast?” Thomas asked seconds before the table was suddenly filled with all sorts of foods. My eyes widened at the spread as I wondered how anyone could

eat so much. There was an empty plate in front of me, and I hesitated to grab a piece of bread. It was Canyon who noticed, and instead of leaving me to remain indecisive, he held up the bowl.

“These biscuits are my favorite,” he told me. “You should try them with the country gravy here.” After setting the bowl of biscuits down, he picked up another that contained a thick, creamy sauce. There were chunks of something in it, but if he was recommending it, who was I to say no? I was a guest, and I couldn’t remember the last time I’d been offered so much food. Even if I only got the biscuit and gravy, it was more than my grandparents ever let me have for breakfast.

“We realize your grandparents and how they’ve treated you is going to have a lasting effect on you, but please know that they have been sent somewhere other than their house and will be dealt with,” Thomas said while passing me a bowl with something I recognized immediately: eggs. I loved eggs but didn’t get them often as we didn’t have chickens.

“Am I in trouble? Because I caused my dads’ deaths?” I sat with my hands in my lap, unable to accept anything for sudden fear that this was all a ruse and I was about to be punished.

“No, not in the least,” Thomas told me. He and Canyon shared a look that I couldn’t even begin to understand and didn’t try to.

“We understand you have had a rough upbringing, and it is something we are going to be looking into more closely. We need to monitor the fae realm because, unfortunately, your situation isn’t isolated,” Thomas said.

I felt terrible for all of the others who had been raised as I had. It was no way to live. Knowing that you were the cause of your fathers’ deaths and reminding of that on a daily basis was no way to live.

“The first thing you need to know is that you did not cause the death of your fathers. You weren’t the reason. Things go wrong in pregnancies all the time. Looking back through their histories, your omega father had a difficult pregnancy, and

then you came early. Without skilled medical care, there wasn't much that could be done. So please don't continue to believe that you were the cause. You weren't," Thomas told me.

"That's what my grandparents said. Especially Grandfather. Grandmother mostly just glared and pointed at what she wanted me to do."

Thomas sighed. "We have a family for you, Milo. Your mate's family is amazing, and they would absolutely love you without hesitation and completely. But perhaps we should hold off. The timing might not be best to put you in that situation."

I thought about it a moment and shrugged. "If I can work and help provide, I figure it can't possibly be worse than what I was in," I said. "And maybe my mate would finally be someone that would want me?" I wouldn't expect him to love me, at least not in the beginning, but eventually he would, right?

Canyon looked at Thomas and nodded. "Connie and Victor are both incredibly loving, and after everything Matteo has been through, they were there for him and Justin every step of the way." Canyon placed a hand on his mate's shoulder and nodded. "We'll set him up with Dr. Bennett for counseling, and speaking from experience, the love from amazing parents can go a long way to helping one feel as if they not only belong but are worthy of being loved."

I stared at the couple sitting across from me, wondering what exactly they were talking about. I just wanted the ability to find a job. If I did that, I could get the things I needed. Sure, if I was going to have a mate, I hoped he would someday care for me even a little, but I wouldn't expect it. I couldn't.

"Are you sure you want to go through with meeting your mate?" Thomas asked. He seemed hesitant, and I could somewhat understand why.

"If I can find work first so I don't go to him with next to nothing, sure. I know I'm poor, and I don't have anything and likely never will. But I don't wish to be a burden to him."

Canyon shook his head. “That won’t be an issue. We always provide to those we pull from your realm. But Connor is an alpha and one that has lived for over a century. He can more than provide for a mate. He’s stubborn, and his mind is a bit closed off to the idea of a mate, but deep down, he wants nothing more than what all of his siblings have found: love and families with their fated mates.”

I dared to smile at that because to me, that sounded absolutely perfect. To have a mate and children to love? Even if they couldn’t love me in return, I could still devote my time and give my heart to them. Would that be enough? I sure hoped so because it was all I had to give.

CHAPTER 3

CONNOR



I was exhausted but couldn't sleep no matter what I tried. I'd soaked in a hot bath, drank hot tea, tried meditating, and even tried exercising to the point of exhaustion. That only resulted in me needing a shower, and now I was not only tired but sore. Luckily, that would disappear soon enough. Sadly, I couldn't sleep. My mind simply wouldn't shut off, and it was completely the created warlock and created vampire's fault. I had a mate arriving today at some point. Why would they tell me this?

Giving up on trying to get any sleep at this point, I got up and dressed. It was still dark out, but technically morning. The sun didn't rise for a couple more hours, but it wasn't exactly unheard of for others to be up and moving about at this hour. The question was, who exactly? I needed to talk to someone, but I already knew what Dad would have to say. Same with Mom.

Matteo had two kids, and they kept him extremely busy. Same with Garic, only they only had the one. Who did that leave me with? Victoria and I had never been overly close. We didn't dislike each other, but we'd just not been close. I wondered if Evelyn was up for a chat. I decided against that. The sibling I'd always been closest to was Garic.

I went to the kitchen, unsure if I even wanted to have breakfast. Coffee, at least, but beyond that, I wasn't interested. I made my coffee, then packed my bag and headed to work. Sure, I could use magic to get there, but I actually needed my truck because of tourists, so I hopped into the cab and turned it

on. It was cold in the cabin, so a little bit of magic was all it took to have it be a comfortable temperature.

I drove to the ranger station in silence, thinking about my predicament. What could I possibly do to change things? I had a mate who was going to show up at some point today. He was going to need a gentle hand, and he would take time to heal from past hurts.

I wondered just who all the council had rescued recently. I wasn't involved with them for the most part, beyond the fact that one brother worked for them, and the other's beloved did. Justin. He was probably my best bet when it came to getting any information I could about the omegas that had been rescued recently.

It was still too early to call him though, but now that I had somewhat of a plan, I felt a little better about what was about to happen. Possibly. I thought about it for a moment and rolled my eyes at myself. Who was I kidding? I was, of course, happy about the possibility of meeting my mate. I simply didn't like the idea of having to wait all day. Or would he show up this morning? They hadn't specified. Only that it would happen today. I would have rather not known. It was the knowing that was bothering me so.

I pulled into the ranger station at the park entrance, and although I expected there to be at least one light on inside, I found it completely lit up. That was unexpected as we didn't man it overnight. When I drove around the building to the employee lot, I was surprised to see two vehicles there. After parking beside Troy's truck, I slid out and realized the other one belonged to Grayson. Neither should be here this early because they weren't on the schedule until afternoon.

I got out, taking my bag with me, and climbed the set of stairs that would take me to the back deck of the ranger station. I could see both Troy as well as Grayson inside, both of them holding cups of what I was certain was coffee.

They noticed me as I walked across the deck, and when I opened the door, they seemed surprised to see me here. That

was confirmed when I walked through and closed it behind me.

“What are you doing here?” Troy asked. “We were told you would be off of work for the next month because you met your mate.”

I sighed. “As far as I know, only two people knew of that, but no, I haven’t met my mate.”

Troy and Grayson shared a look.

“I’m supposed to meet him at some point today. I wasn’t told specifically when, and in all honesty, I wish I didn’t know he was coming at some point today either.”

Troy’s brow furrowed. “I’m not really following. Elliot’s papa came to us yesterday evening and let me know that your mate had been found.”

I shrugged. “I have no clue who my mate is just yet. Only that yesterday Master Edison and Master Ambrosius came to my cabin and told me my mate would arrive today. I would have much preferred to not know at all since I wasn’t able to sleep even a little last night.”

Grayson winced. “I remember those nights, but not for the same reason. It’s one of the biggest reasons Jai and I decided we were good with just the twins.” Grayson looked at Troy. “Why would your father-in-law say Connor had his mate if he didn’t?”

“Maybe he was supposed to have met him this morning?” Troy shrugged. “Connor, you don’t normally come in this early, right?”

I shook my head. I opened the station, but yeah, usually not this early. That had me wondering though. “Why are you two here so early if we don’t normally open this early? The office officially opens at eight in the winter months, and I know the two of you know that because you’ve both been here longer than I have.”

“Yes, but we were told to come in early,” Troy said.

I suddenly had a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach. They were here earlier than even I would normally arrive, and they had been told I'd met my mate. What if my mate was somehow arriving at my place? Maybe Master Edison was going to bring him to me?

"It seems you've come to some conclusion," Troy said. I shook my head as I turned and glanced at the door behind me.

"I think I should go. With what you've said, it doesn't sound like I was supposed to come in today." The more I thought about it, the more I became concerned that my mate was going to end up standing outside of my place in the cold, unable to get inside. Would he shift to keep from being cold?

I needed to find out more about when and where I was supposedly meeting my mate today. If I needed to remain at home, that should have been shared with me. Same with here at work.

I hurried out to my truck, and after getting everything situated, I was on the road again, this time back to my place. I touched the screen on the dash, searching for my father's name because I absolutely needed to speak to someone, and he was going to be it. The phone rang a few times before it connected and I heard his half-asleep voice through the speakers in the truck.

"Connor, what's wrong?"

I was a bit surprised by the question. "Why would something be wrong?"

"Because you are calling me at..." There was a moment of silence. "Too early. It's ten 'til six. What's wrong?"

He made a valid point. I couldn't remember ever calling either of them this early in the day. But I was a bit desperate at the moment and needed a calm and logical person. That was Dad.

"I have found myself in a situation, and I need your help," I told him.

"Give me a moment," Dad said. I heard rustling and assumed he was getting out of bed. I was tempted to go to his

and Mom's place, but I was almost positive that my mate wouldn't show up at their house. If anything, it would be mine, wouldn't it? I really wish I'd had the forethought to ask these questions yesterday evening.

"All right, I'm downstairs now. What is it that has you calling me before six in the morning?"

"I apologize. I should have waited. I realize it's early and understood that when I called, but I need some advice, and you have always been good with that."

"Why do I sense something is wrong? Again, beyond the fact that you called me before the sun rose."

I sighed. "True. I had visitors last evening, and it's thrown me for a loop, to put it mildly."

"All right, son, just spit it out."

I took a deep breath. "Master Edison and Master Ambrosius came to see me yesterday evening. They said my mate would be here today, and now I'm honestly freaking out a bit. I couldn't sleep, and I went into work early, but then Troy and Grayson were there, and they said they'd been told I'd found my mate and wouldn't be in, so now I'm really worried that my mate is at my place and is freezing because I'm not there to let him in. Why would they do that? Why wouldn't they tell me when exactly, other than to say today?"

I took a deep breath and waited as I stopped the truck at a red light. I needed to go left, and after another block, I'd be out of town and would be able to hurry on home to check my house.

"I'm trying to follow, Connor. You said your mate is here? And you're meeting him today? That's not how it normally works, son."

The light changed, and I made the turn, now on the highway that would take me home. "What's not to follow? I understand that's not normally how it happens, but Master Edison said my mate was special and would need special care because of how mistreated he'd been. But then I couldn't

sleep, and now I went to work when I probably should have stayed home.”

I’d made it past the last block in town, and once I was outside of town limits, I sped up. I had a sudden urge to be home. What if what I was thinking was actually the truth? What if my omega mate was at my house trying to get in out of the cold?

“Can you tell me exactly what Master Edison or Master Ambrosius said?”

I thought about last evening and shook my head. “Not exactly, no. Just that my mate had been chosen and I’d meet him today, so think about my attitude so I don’t break him more than he already is and can’t be repaired.”

I could hear the frustration in my dad’s voice. Of course, if he was frustrated, imagine how much more so I was.

“All right, what is it you wish from me? How can I help?”

I opened my mouth to reply but realized I had no clue as to how he could help. “I’m not sure. You’ve always been so calm and reasonable, and I guess I’m looking for some of that. What do I do when my mate finally shows up? I don’t have anything for a mate. I live alone, and just yesterday, I didn’t even really wish to have my mate because of everything you had to go through to protect Mom.”

I heard a chuckle through the speakers, Dad’s noises being amplified through the hands-free call, and I wanted to glare at him, but he wasn’t here for me to do that. Why would he chuckle at my plight? I was honestly worried here.

“Really, Dad, I’m asking for advice, and you’re laughing at me.” I should have called Garic. He obviously wasn’t as old as Dad, but he was fairly levelheaded, and he and I had confided in each other since we were younger.

“I’m not laughing at you, son. I’m merely chuckling at the anxiety I’m hearing in your voice. Not that I should be laughing at that. But even you have to understand that it’s incredibly ironic that just yesterday, you didn’t really wish to talk about having a mate, and now...well, here we are.”

I did glare then, only Dad couldn't see it. Not that it mattered. I was home, and since he wasn't really in the offer-sound-advice mood, I would end the call shortly.

“Never mind. I'm home now, and I don't see anything different about the place. I should try to get some sleep if I'm going to be meeting my mate at some point today.”

I pulled around the house to the garage, and after pressing the button on my visor, the door started to lift. I stopped, waiting, and a sudden wave of calm suddenly washed over me. Was that because my mate was nearby? Or because he wasn't, and now I felt I could relax because he'd not been left out in the cold?

“I have advice, I'm just not sure you want to hear it.”

I slowly drove my truck into the garage, and when I was in far enough, I put it in park and shut the engine off before pressing the button again to close the garage door behind me.

“Of course I want to hear your advice. What do you have for me?”

Dad chuckled loudly now, not trying to hide the fact that he most likely found my situation amusing. “I recommend you get yourself ready to meet your mate. Your world is going to change drastically in the next week, and despite the fact that you most likely don't feel ready, you are.” Dad sighed. “I understand your reluctance and why, but you too would do everything I had to in order to protect your mate. You simply don't realize it just yet. Look at Matteo. He almost starved to protect his beloved. It's how we are wired, Connor, and despite how much you hated having to move as we did and how protective I was of your mom, you, and Evelyn, I wouldn't change it if I could. You are my family, and I'd do anything for any of you.”

I grabbed my phone and brought it up to my ear when I opened the door. The call disconnected with the truck and transferred back to the phone as I slid out of my vehicle.

“Did I lose you?” Dad asked.

“No, I just left my truck since I’m home.” I walked inside, dropping my bag by the door, and then used magic to remove my boots as I continued on through the house. “What do I do, Dad? I really need to know what I should do.”

“Beyond telling you that you need to go into this with an open mind, I cannot tell you what you should do in this situation, Connor. You don’t know who your mate is yet, nor what has happened that could break him, as you mentioned. Patience is needed, and when the time is right, your mate will find you.”

“I want to ask if that’s it, but I assume it is.”

Dad chuckled again. “Connor, I cannot control how you react to meeting your mate for the first time. I can only remind you to be kind, understanding, and go into things with an open mind and heart.”

I plopped down on the couch and groaned. “You’re right, and I know it. I was just...I don’t know, Dad. What if—”

“Don’t ask yourself what if. Simply be patient and wait. You will work things out with your mate when you meet him.”

I thought about it for a moment and nodded in understanding and agreement. He wasn’t wrong.

“Thanks, Dad. I’ll do that. I’m going to try and get some sleep,” I told him. As soon as I did, I started yawning. The sleepless night finally caught up with me, and I moved to where I could lie down on the couch and stretch out. Sure, my bedroom was just upstairs, and my bed was by far larger than the couch, but it was here and actually quite comfortable.

“I do recommend sleep. You know how mates tend to be when they first meet,” Dad said. “Take care, Connor, and be sure to give us a call when you come up for air and are ready to visit others or are up for visitors.”

I yawned again, now struggling to keep up with the conversation. “I’ll do that, Dad. Tell Mom I love her,” I said.

“She knows, but I will always share. Rest up, son.”

“Thanks, Dad. I’ll talk to you soon.”

I ended the call, and with magic, I placed the phone on the table and then covered myself with the throw blanket on the back of the couch. The blinds were still open, so with a little more magic, I had them closed, blocking out the morning sunshine. I sighed deeply, letting exhaustion finally overtake me. I knew I was going to need the rest.

I woke hours later, feeling groggy and disoriented. When I glanced at the blinds, I could see light coming from around them, and with a bit of magic, they opened partway, letting the light from outside in. It appeared to be cloudy, and after a moment, I was able to get up and make my way to the back door to look outside. It had snowed again at some point during the day, and the sky promised even more to come during the day.

Needing both the bathroom as well as something cool to drink, I hurried to the bathroom first, and once those needs were met, I went to the kitchen in search of something to drink. Juice sounded best, and I'd just poured myself a glass when there was a knock on my door. I froze, a sense of déjà vu hitting me.

Perhaps it was Dad? Or maybe it was Master Edison once again? I pushed out, wondering who could be there, and when I received an answering aura of another fae, I became confused. It wasn't Mom's aura, so who was it? Although I'd been told there were a few fae in the area, I'd only met Mom as I'd not spent any extended amount of time on Treasure Ridge.

There was another knock, and I set the juice carton down and went to the door to see who was out there. It wasn't as if I lived near others, and one would have to either be incredibly lost or know exactly where they were going in order to find my place.

I felt a tingle go through my body as I approached the door, and when I reached for the handle, realization hit. My mate was on the other side. And he was fae. That was absolutely the last thing I expected.

CHAPTER 4

MILO



This place was amazing. I'd never seen anything so large, nor had I ever imagined that houses could be as large as they were here. I expected the places to be more like the cottage in the fates' realm. But this place, it could easily fit four of those cottages inside. I was certain I was in the right place because when the glowing portal opened, it put me here. I had to assume that meant the fates knew where they were sending me.

I knocked on the door again and then looked down at my new clothes. They were by far nicer than anything I'd ever had and fit better as well. I glanced over at the two proper bags and felt a bit of embarrassment at the contents. They were completely stuffed with new clothing and toiletries. I'd never had so much, and although I'd argued with Thomas as he kept using magic to add more things to the stack, it fell on deaf ears because the pile continued to grow. Canyon chuckled and told me it was of no use, that Thomas loved to provide for those who truly needed it, and I should simply accept the gifts as they were provided with goodwill intended.

I was about to knock for a third time when the door suddenly opened. I had always figured that you would never be prepared when you came face-to-face with your fated mate for the first time. I was right. My body immediately recognized the fae standing in front of me. When I looked up, I realized he was actually quite a bit taller than I was, and I had to look up quite a bit.

"You're fae," he said.

Yes, I was. So was he. My mate seemed disappointed in that revelation. I'd not been prepared for that and wasn't sure how to react. The excitement I'd felt just moments ago was now gone and replaced with uncertainty.

I cleared my throat, finally getting the courage to speak up. "I am. I'm Milo," I said, holding out my hand. "I was sent here by Thomas and Canyon." I could only stand there, waiting. I'd not been invited in, and I was beginning to wonder if I ever would be. My mate stood there, an array of emotions showing on his face.

After several minutes of standing in the cold, I started to shiver, and since I'd obviously not been deemed an acceptable mate, I nodded in defeat. "I apologize," I said quietly. "I'll leave." I reached for my bags, picking up the one and putting it on my shoulder while I grabbed the handle of the other. It had tiny wheels which would be most helpful since I had no idea where I was going to go. I could try to use magic to get myself somewhere else, but I didn't really know how to use my magic all that well.

"Where are you going?" my mate asked when I turned and started to walk away. I heard him hurrying up behind me, and when his hand touched my shoulder, I jerked it away.

"I know when I'm not wanted," I told him as I continued to walk down the pathway.

"Where are you going to go?"

I glared at my mate. "Does it matter? Away. I need to find work. I can't find a room to stay unless I have work. I have some money from the fates, but I don't expect it to last long."

"Look, you can't leave." There was a yank on the case I was pulling behind me, and then it was suddenly gone, as was the one on my shoulder. I grabbed for it, but it was truly gone.

"I...my bags," I cried out. "Those were...my things. I need my things."

"They're just inside." He held out his arm, pointing toward the front door. "If you would come inside out of the cold, we could talk." My mate closed his eyes, looked upward, and

sighed deeply. Seconds later, he looked at me and shook his head. "It's not that you aren't wanted. I apologize for making you think that. I just wasn't expecting a fae mate."

I tilted my head in question. "But you're fae. Wouldn't it be natural for us to be mates?"

"Yes, if we were in the fae realm, but I was born here from a fae mother and a vampire father. There are often mixed pairings here."

Vampire and fae? Huh. I'd not been told that, only a few details about my mate. I figured that, if nothing else, I should go in and find out where I could go for the evening. I wasn't convinced my mate wanted me, despite him saying otherwise. His initial reaction said he wasn't pleased with me. Or maybe it wasn't me but the fact he simply didn't want a mate?

Because I was cold, I started for the door. I would stay long enough to hear him out, and if he decided we weren't going to be mates, I would contact someone named Alpha Forest. I was told by Canyon that he was his brother and could get in touch with him if I ever needed anything. It was reassuring, and right now, I seemed to need that.

There was a vast difference in temperature between outside and inside. And once inside, I certainly didn't wish to leave anytime soon. I shivered again, the heat causing my body to register just how cold it had become.

"See, your bags are just there," my mate said, pointing down to them. "Please come in and get warm."

I took another step inward, and when I moved away from the door, my mate closed it.

"Would you like something warm to drink?"

I would love some hot tea, but I wasn't going to ask for anything. Not just yet. I needed to know where we stood before I felt comfortable enough to accept more than the offer of warmth inside out of the cold.

"I'm good without, thank you," I told him. "I don't...what may I call you? You haven't shared your name yet."

My mate seemed surprised by that. “Did they not tell you?”

I shook my head. “No, just that they would open the doorway just outside of where you would be.” I gestured toward the door behind me. “It opened, and when I walked through, I was in front of your door just there. I knew you were my mate when you opened the door because my body reacted with the tingles.”

“Ah yes, the tingles.” My mate smiled and slowly nodded his head. “I know what you mean. And you can call me Connor.” He held out his hand. I stared at it for a moment before reaching out and placing mine in his. “I do apologize that I made you feel as if you weren’t welcome. I would love the opportunity to share everything regarding all of that with you if you wish to hear me out?” Instead of shaking my hand as I’d thought, he brought it up toward his mouth as he bent. When he kissed the back of it, my breath caught in my throat when a zing went down my arm, stemming from where his lips were touching the back of my hand.

“I’ll hear you out,” I said quietly. It wasn’t like I had somewhere else to be. When Connor started walking farther into the house, I followed, trying to look around to see if I could discover anything about my mate while trying to not be obvious.

“Please sit here. It’s comfortable, and I’ll get a fire going. It’ll help warm you up quickly.”

Connor pushed out toward the far wall, and when flames whooshed there, I could only stare in awe. I wished I had that kind of control over my magic. I could barely use it, sadly. Yes, I was young, and I’d hit puberty a little later than most come to find out, but I should still have more use of magic than I did. I sat on the couch, and when Connor immediately came at me with a blanket, I smiled up at him as he placed it on my lap. He sat beside me, angling his body toward me, and I did the same. There was still a whole lot of room between us, and I wondered just how comfortable the couch would be for a nap. Or even as a bed.

“Thank you,” I said.

“You’re welcome. We need to talk, and you need to warm up. We can do both here and accomplish two things at once.”

“All right.” I’d done a whole lot of talking over the past day. There was what Canyon had called a crash course for me, and when he and Thomas had discovered just how my life had been growing up, I’d become worried about Thomas and how red his face had become.

“Again, I apologize. I was told yesterday evening that my mate would be here today, which is a bit weird in itself, but here you are.”

I held up a hand to ask a question. Connor glanced between my face to my hand and back to my face.

“You don’t have to hold your hand up as if you are back in school,” he told me.

If only he knew that I’d not been to school. Connor stared at me for a moment until I realized he was waiting on me. “Oh. You’re waiting on me?” He nodded. “Is it odd that I was here or that you have a mate at all? I’m not sure how things really work here.”

Connor nodded. “Just the way I was informed that I’d be meeting my mate today. I was told by the created warlock that today I would meet you and that I needed to be ready. But as far as I know, that isn’t necessarily how it normally happens. But when it comes to the created warlock, you never know, I guess.”

“Ah, I see.” I thought about it for a moment. “Maybe because I was brought from the fae realm yesterday?”

Connor nodded. “Most likely. I owe you an explanation about my comment about you being fae and what you will eventually realize once we claim each other.”

Claim each other? Now he was willing? That was probably a good thing, but maybe he wouldn’t want me once he realized just how much he was going to be shorted when it came to mates.

“I mentioned you being fae because although I’m fae and my mom is fae and I have one fae sister, I didn’t want a fae mate.”

My chest hurt at that statement, and I reached up and rubbed it.

“Let me explain why before you think ill of me.”

I shrugged. “It won’t change anything though, will it?” I sighed. “You don’t want a fae for a mate.”

“Only because I had to live my life watching my dad moving us from place to place to protect us from his birth coven. We were always looking over our shoulders, trying to remain safe from those like my dad. From other vampires.”

I wasn’t making the connection. Why would they need to be protected from vampires?

“You said your dad was a vampire.”

“Yes. As are my two brothers and my other sister.” Connor stared at me for a moment before furrowing his brow. “Do you not understand?”

I shook my head. “Should I? Would your dad or brothers be dangerous to you?”

“No, but other vampires are. Not so much after we’re mated, but there is still that underlying danger.”

“Why?” I shrugged. “I’m sorry I don’t understand. I…” I shook my head, wondering if I really should tell him that I’d never been to school so soon. “I don’t know much about other paranormals other than that they exist.”

Connor seemed to think about that for a bit before he moved a little closer to me. He was now sitting close enough that I could reach out and touch him if I wanted, but I would never make such a move.

“You don’t know about paranormals?”

“No. I wasn’t taught such things.” I left it at that, hoping he wouldn’t probe more.

“Huh.” Connor looked to the side and stared blankly at the wall. I didn’t know what to say to make it better, but thankfully, I didn’t have to because he refocused on me. “Well, just so you know, vampires are incredibly drawn to fae blood. Unmated vampires, that is. So much so that they will go to great lengths to kidnap an unclaimed fae and use them as a donor against their will.”

My eyes widened. That sounded terrible. “Did your siblings have problems with you and your sister?”

Connor shook his head and chuckled. “No. The opposite, in fact. The three of them were just as protective of me and Evelyn as Dad and Mom. Mom was obviously mated, so the draw to her was diminished, but it was still there for some. Every species has those that just aren’t good, and they don’t play by any rules, and mated or not, they take what they want.”

I shivered at those words. There were a few in our village that were like that. Luckily for me, I was never on anyone’s radar because I wasn’t ever around them. When I was, it was only for moments, and then I was sent back to the house and back to my chores. I was sure my grandparents only let me come out every so often because they’d had pressure from other villagers about me. Especially since I’d never gone to school with the others.

“Are you still cold? You’re shivering.”

I shook my head. “No. I was thinking about a few that we had in our village that were as you described. The take-what-they-wanted kind. I never had much interaction with them, but they just had an air of ugly about them.” I shivered again thinking about it.

“Yes. Unfortunately, they are everywhere.”

I nodded in agreement.

“I find it odd that you didn’t learn about the whole vampire-fae thing when going through classes about mating and everything pertaining to it.” Connor shrugged. “I guess some villages are different though? I’ve never been to the fae

realm and never will. But Mom has talked about it a few times and said there are lots of different villages.”

I nodded. I’d lived in the same one my entire life, but I knew there were other villages out there. I’d often thought about running away in the middle of the night, hoping to find a new village where I could make a new life for myself. Somewhere that I would have someone to talk to, decent clothing and amounts of food. I was a hard worker, something I’d learned early to avoid scolding from my grandparents.

“Are you all right?” Connor asked, his hand gently touching my leg that was under the blanket.

I made eye contact and nodded. “Yes, I was thinking about my grandparents.”

“I would imagine it’s difficult to leave the only home you’ve known and come somewhere else.” Connor glanced around the house. I couldn’t help but notice the room more closely now. It was large and had plenty of room for things. Connor had decorated nicely, and the room was inviting without feeling crowded.

“It’s different,” I told him. I had nothing, so leaving hadn’t been an issue for me, but he didn’t know that.

“Are you hungry? Do you need something to eat? Tea? Coffee? Juice? Milk? Water? Anything at all?”

I had just eaten one last time before I left Thomas and Canyon’s place, but something to drink would be nice. “If it’s not too much of a bother, might I have some water?”

Connor looked thoughtful before he nodded slowly. He held out his hand, and suddenly, there was a glass that was filled with water.

I took a deep breath before reaching out for the glass. I had to squeeze my hand into a fist to keep Connor from seeing that my hands were shaking. I was quite nervous. Not only of how Connor would react when he learned about me but of being rejected. Moreso that. If he decided he wanted a different mate, I didn’t know where I would go. It had to make me look what I’d always been told I was—useless. There was

definitely something wrong with me if Connor rejected our mating. Not that it would be the first time I'd been scorned.

“Your aura is one of sadness. Why?”

I slowly brought the glass to my mouth, the shaking barely visible, and took a drink to stall. I cleared my throat, wondering just how much to share.

“You miss your family,” Connor said, seemingly sure that was why I was sad.

“I'm nervous because I'm not sure what to expect. I cannot change the fact that I'm fae.” And the fact that I absolutely wouldn't be able to defend myself if I ever encountered someone who wished me harm made me a bit of a burden. What would happen if I ran into a not-so-nice vampire?

“I understand that, and I just...” Connor reached out and squeezed my leg gently again. “I was wrong, all right? I want you to know that and understand that. I actually had a talk with my dad this morning. He's always been full of good advice, and I asked him what I should do because my mate was coming. He said to go into things with an open mind. Things might not seem like they would work out, but in the end, they would.” Connor smiled. “I think they really could. It will take some time to get to know each other, but if the fates picked us for each other, I'm sure there was a reason. I'm supposedly good for you and you me, right?”

Sure. That sounded good. I mean, I knew about mates, obviously. How could you not? But I didn't know much about them. The barest minimum, but that was because my grandparents were given no choice. That and I honestly thought they might hope that I would find my mate early on and they could finally be rid of me. Well, as it were, they were right. I was pulled on my birthday—it couldn't get any earlier.

“You don't agree?”

I shrugged. “It's not my place to agree or disagree. I was sent here, and to be blunt, I'm at your mercy. If you decide you don't wish to claim me, I ask that you please take me to Alpha Forest. I was told he would know how to get into

contact with Canyon, who was one of the fates that sent me here.”

Connor seemed irritated at that. “Why would you think that? We have to claim each other, Milo. We’re fae. We’ve met, and our auras have recognized each other.” Connor reached out and touched my hand, causing those tingles that were there to become stronger. “You feel that, don’t you?”

I nodded.

“Those will only get stronger to the point of severe pain if we don’t claim each other. So much so that we most likely won’t survive.”

“What?” I asked quietly.

Connor tilted his head. “You didn’t know?”

I shook my head slowly before lowering it. “I didn’t, I’m sorry.” I didn’t know what else to say. But if what Connor said was true, that meant he was stuck with me and I him. I could accept spending the rest of my life with someone who didn’t want me. I’d already done that for the first eighteen years. But could he?

CHAPTER 5

CONNOR



My first impression of my mate, beyond the fact that he was fae, was that he was incredibly cute. But I could sense so much sadness in him, and I couldn't understand how or why. I was suddenly horrified to think that he wasn't yet of age. The fates wouldn't send me an underage mate, would they?

"Milo, can I ask how old you are?" He didn't seem to know how mates worked, and maybe that was because he was younger than normal age when they were sent to classes regarding mates.

"I turned eighteen yesterday," he told me.

Eighteen yesterday? My mate was just barely legal.

"Happy birthday a day late. Did you get to celebrate with your family?"

Milo slowly shook his head. "No, I left yesterday morning when the fates came. I spent yesterday with them in their realm, and now I'm here with you."

He was legal but yet didn't know about how fae and claiming worked. "Milo." I reached out and gently took the water from him. I used magic to send the glass to the kitchen, realizing he was using it as a bit of a shield of sorts. "What do you know about mates? Claiming? Fae in general?" Another thought occurred to me. "You do know about fertile periods, right? You're an omega, and at eighteen, you should have started them?"

Milo nodded, but it was so subtle I would have missed it if not for the fact that I was studying him so closely.

“You’ve had them, yes?”

“A few. I was told mine started later than normal, and they haven’t come every year.”

That was interesting. We would need to contact the doctor who had taken care of Matteo when he was pregnant. It mattered not to me if we had children or not, but I wanted to ensure Milo was all right.

“I want to know all there is to know about you, but I’m not sure how to start that conversation,” I told him. “Do you have questions for me?”

Milo looked as if he was thinking, and maybe he was.

“Do you want a mate?”

Going right in for the big question immediately.

I sighed. “In all honesty, I’ve always wanted a mate, just not a fae mate because of the way I grew up.”

If it was possible, Milo’s face fell even more. “And yet here I am. The one type of mate you didn’t want, that’s who you get stuck with.” Milo rubbed his arms and nodded slowly. “What is it about vampires that is so bad? I’ve never been around them, obviously, and I wasn’t taught about any other species. All I know is what Thomas and Canyon shared with me.”

“How did you not learn about here? I thought that was standard for fae children when they were in school and started puberty?”

Milo shook his head. “My grandparents kept me home. I didn’t go to school.”

I noticed he mentioned his grandparents again but not his parents. “Milo? What about your parents? Were you not raised by them?”

He met my eyes, and there was more sadness. “No. They...my omega dad died in childbirth. He was my

grandparents' only child, and my alpha dad died a week or two later." Milo shrugged. "At least that's what I've always been told. My grandparents took me in, and they raised me."

"You miss them, then?"

Milo snorted. "No. I'll never miss my grandparents. I cannot miss my parents since I've never known them. My grandparents blamed me for their son's death, and because of it, I was mistreated."

His head dropped, and he fiddled with his fingers. Master Edison's words echoed in my head.

"You will need to adjust your attitude, Connor. Your mate is going to need you, in every way. And I'm afraid if he feels as if you see him as an inconvenience, it will be the final nail that breaks him beyond what he can handle."

He knew. Somehow, he already knew who my mate was. But how?

"Milo?"

Milo looked up at me, and I wondered what I could do to cheer him up. "Would you like to go for a drive?" I asked, suddenly filled with an idea. We could lighten the mood if I took him around to show him the area. No matter what, Milo was here to stay, and soon enough, he would be my mate because that's how paranormals worked.

"Drive?"

"Yeah, in my truck," I said. I stood and held out my hand. Milo stared at it a moment before he placed his in mine. I helped him to his feet, and as I led him toward the garage, I used magic to put on my boots and coat. I glanced down at my mate and figured he was similar to Matteo's size and guessed a small. When I had him in a warm coat, I was pleased to see it was a good fit.

Milo looked at his torso before he met my gaze.

"How did..." Milo stopped before finishing the sentence.

"How what?" I opened the garage door and led him to the truck.

“How did you...” He touched the coat. “It fits.”

I smiled. “Yeah, you’re similar in size to my brother. Well, brothers. They’re not twins, but they sure could pass for them. They look exactly like our father.” I opened the door and gestured to the truck. He looked up at it, and I realized I was probably going to need to put running boards on it. I glanced down at the truck below the doors and nodded. A little magic, and now my truck had dropped running boards to help my mate get in and out of it.

Milo stepped back before looking up at me. I grinned at him before winking. “It’s to help you get in and out,” I told him. “You just step on it, and I’ll give you a little boost. Also, you can grab the handle here to help pull yourself up in.”

“All right.” Milo moved next to the truck, and when he tried to reach for the handle, I realized he was too short. I gave him a boost, and together, we were able to get him into the truck with the help of the running board and the handle. I helped buckle his seat belt and then rounded the back of the truck after closing his door. I easily climbed in, and after opening the garage door, I started the truck. Since it had sat in the garage all day, it was cold, so I used magic to warm the air around us while the vehicle warmed up and heat came from the vents.

“How did you do that?” Milo asked as I backed out of the garage.

“Do what?”

“You used magic to make the air warm, didn’t you?”

“Ah. Yes, I did. I just thought about it being warm and pushed my magic out, and now we have warm air.”

I noticed Milo glance down at his hands in his lap before he shook his head and his shoulders slumped. A thought occurred to me, and although he was young still, he should be able to do magic.

“Milo? Can you use your magic?” He had it. I could feel it when around him.

“A little. It doesn’t always work how I want it to though. I wasn’t allowed to use it at home, and I didn’t go to school with the others my age, so I didn’t get the lessons on how to use or control it.”

I took a few deep breaths and decided on a change of plans. “Don’t freak out, all right?”

Milo looked at me with wide eyes. Of course he was going to freak out since I told him not to. I should have known better.

“Hey, it’s all right. I just don’t want you to get too nervous when I do what I’m about to do.” I was still sitting in my driveway, and I put the truck in park as I touched the screen on the dash and called my parents. The phone rang twice before Dad answered.

“Connor? Is everything all right?”

“Hey, Dad,” I said, remembering the early morning phone call and what all we discussed. It was now afternoon, bordering on evening, and I was sure he was curious if my mate had shown up yet. “Are you and Mom home? Specifically Mom?”

“Connor, if you wanted to talk to your mom, why didn’t you call her?”

I glanced at Milo and rolled my eyes. “Because I wanted to know if both of you were home? I need some help with something. Something that Mom can help with.”

“Yes, she’s here. We were thinking about going up to Treasure Ridge a little later for the solstice celebration, but we’re still undecided.”

“Good,” I told him. “I’ll be there in a bit.”

“Here?”

“Yes. See you soon.”

“All right, son.”

I ended the call and grinned at my mate before putting the truck in reverse and backing up and then turning around to drive away from the house. A house that I was now glad I’d

bought way larger than needed since I was now going to have a mate.

“We’re going to see your parents?” Milo asked. I could hear the nerves in his voice and tried to reassure him.

“We are. They will be incredibly excited to meet you, and in all honesty, Mom will be so much better at answering any and all questions you have about magic. She taught not only me and my sister, but she’s taught other fae as well.”

“Really?” Milo asked, his face finally lighting up some and losing some of the sadness.

“Yes. She’s great. And although I’m...” I thought about it for a moment and tried not to let it bother me; there was obviously an age difference between us. “...I’m a lot older than you are and definitely can help with your magic, Mom is better at teaching. It’s what she used to do, and she just has the knack for it.”

“Are you sure she won’t mind?”

I nodded as I continued to drive down the road. “Definitely. They’re going to meet you soon enough, and eventually, we’ll go up to Treasure Ridge, and you can meet my two brothers and their beloveds.”

I noticed Milo’s smile fell.

“What’s wrong?”

“They’re vampires?”

I chuckled. “Yes, but they are mated. They wouldn’t be interested in your blood anyway. Just like Dad wouldn’t either. Trust me when I say you have nothing to worry about anyone in my family.” Would he want to travel via magic and go to Europe to meet my sisters? Evelyn would adore him, and while Victoria would be nice, she simply wasn’t as open and friendly as the rest of us. Not that she wasn’t nice. She was. She just wasn’t as extroverted as we were. That and she spent a lot of time working.

“If you think they would want to meet me, I’d like to get to know your family.”

I nodded. “My family definitely will want to meet you.” I stopped at a red light but only had to wait a few seconds before it turned green. I drove through Timber Valley and, on the other side, went toward Honey Creek. My parents lived between the two, choosing to live somewhat close to all of us. With Matteo and Garic both living on Treasure Ridge, they considered living at the base of the mountain but chose a little more distance when they discovered my place was out in the middle of nowhere, basically. I loved it that way and didn’t have to worry about anything where I was.

In minutes, I pulled into their driveway, and immediately, I could sense Milo’s anxiety. I turned to my mate and reached for his hand. I gave his hand a tight squeeze, trying to reassure him. “It will be fine. Trust me,” I told him. “I’ll be right there to help you down. At least until you get the hang of things.”

Milo nodded, but he didn’t seem as excited as he was a little while ago. I understood how difficult this was probably for him. He’d known only one thing, and from the little bits I’d gotten so far, it wasn’t a good thing. Now he was here, and I’d made the mistake of letting him know that up until now, I didn’t want a fae mate. I was an idiot, and I needed to work on fixing things. Which had to be a record since I’d just met him about an hour ago.

I quickly slid from the truck and rounded the hood to help Milo out. My truck wasn’t overly large, and it wasn’t that tall, but Milo was short. I reached for his hand, and when he placed his on my shoulders for balance, I moved mine to his waist. He slid out easily, and we were left standing with him between me and the truck. I smiled down at him and couldn’t resist. I reached out and touched his cheek gently. “I promise, it’ll be all right. Relax. They would never hurt you nor be mean to you. And Mom is a teacher at the shifter school over in Timber Valley. You really did end up with the right family when they paired you with me.” I shrugged. “Maybe I’m not the best mate, but I’ll try my hardest. I promise.”

I took a step back because it was cold out, and I was already finding Milo tempting. Now wasn’t the time for things of that nature. Eventually, we would be forced, but until then,

we had time to not only get to know each other but work on helping Milo feel more comfortable not only with me but my family.

“Just relax if you can. They really are amazing. Dad is great for asking questions, Mom is a tremendous cook, and together, they are a perfect pair.” I really wanted Milo to feel at ease with them. If he truly did have a terrible childhood, I knew that he wasn’t going to know what to expect from kind and caring parents. Mom and Dad would be quick to officially welcome him into the family. Would he be uncomfortable about that?

I walked side by side to the door with Milo, my hand on the middle of his back. I had to chuckle when the door was suddenly opened as we walked up and I was about to knock. There stood Mom, and when her eyes widened when she saw I wasn’t alone, I had no doubt that she had already put two and two together and knew that this was my mate.

“Mom, this is my mate, Milo,” I told her before looking down at Milo. “Milo, this is my mom, Constance.”

Mom squealed and bounced up and down on her heels with her hands in front of her mouth. I couldn’t help but laugh at her. I knew Mom, and it was taking everything within her to not reach out and snatch Milo from me. I had absolutely no doubt that she already knew he was fae just like we were, and she finally got a fae bonus kid by way of mates.

“It’s all right, Mom. Just don’t scare him too much,” I said, joking, hoping that Milo would relax a little.

“It’s nice to meet you, Constance,” Milo finally said. He smiled at her and then glanced up at me before moving slightly closer. I moved my arm from his back to his shoulder before I pulled him in even tighter.

“Can we come in? Or are you going to keep us on the front step?”

“Connie, let them in, my love.”

I glanced down at Milo as Dad came up behind Mom and grabbed her around the waist. He simply picked her up and

carried her off to the side.

“That’s my dad, Victor,” I said, chuckling again. “Neither will bite, nor will they hurt you, all right?” I added quietly, close to Milo’s ear.

Milo nodded in response.

“Good? Want to go in?”

“Yeah.”

I walked to the door, and after Milo entered, I followed directly behind him, where Mom and Dad were standing just to our left.

“So this is Milo, Dad. He’s my mate that the fates chose for me.”

“You don’t say,” Dad said, a smirk on his face. He reached out his hand to Milo. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Milo. Welcome to the family.”

Milo shook Dad’s hand and then tucked himself back into my side.

“Connie won’t hurt you, I promise. She’s just obviously excited that Connor got a fae mate. Please come in, and welcome to our home.”

I looked down at Milo and grinned. It would be wonderful once we claimed each other and had the ability to talk through our bond. For now though, we would do things the other way.

Dad had to pull Mom away. It was actually comical with how excited she was. I wasn’t sure why, but she was. Maybe it was that her last child had finally been fated with their mate. Perhaps it was as Dad had said—Milo was a fae.

“We’ll leave whenever you want to. I only brought you here so we could get some pointers from Mom about your magic. That, and I really wanted you to meet my parents.”

I helped Milo unzip his coat and took it from him with a little help. I carried it with mine and walked into the house toward the kitchen. I wasn’t surprised that they’d gone there. Mom loved to cook and bake—without magic.

I placed the coats on the back of one of the barstools and helped Milo sit on one.

“Milo, would you like something to drink? Tea? Coffee? Cocoa? Juice? Water?” Mom asked.

“Water is fine, thank you.”

Mom looked my way, and I shook my head. “I’ll just have a coffee,” I said, using magic to get my own mug and holding it up. Dad was standing on the other side of the kitchen, his own mug in his hand.

“Are you sure just water? Not that water isn’t important.”

“Yes, please. Thank you,” Milo told her.

I watched as a glass suddenly appeared in front of Milo. Immediately, he wrapped his hands around it and held on as if it were a lifeline. We were going to have to work on that, and so much more, I was certain.

“Congratulations on being paired with your mate,” Dad said, breaking the silence.

“Thank you,” I told him. I looked over at Milo and grinned. “I never expected him to come knocking on my door, but there he was.” I placed my hand on the back of his stool before I looked back to my parents. “We had some questions, though, and a request?”

That had Dad standing and Mom coming closer, just to the other side of the counter. “What questions?” she asked.

I looked to Milo to make sure he was all right with this, and when he didn’t seem too terrified about it, I went ahead.

“Milo is younger but still of mating age,” I told them. “But he’s not been given much opportunity to practice or learn to control his magic.” I made direct eye contact with Mom. “Would you be willing to help?” I asked her.

Mom’s eyes widened before she looked to Milo. “Oh, my sweet. Of course I can help. We’ll practice as much as you like. I’ll get permission from either the pack or the den, and we can work on your magic on their lands. Does that sound like something you would like?”

Milo was silent, and when I finally got him to meet my eyes, his were watery. “Hey, it’s all right. We’ll get you using your magic.” Milo nodded and then looked back to Mom.

“I would like that. Thank you. I appreciate the offer. That is so very kind of you.”

“Oh, sweetie, it’s nothing. That’s what we do. Family helps family, and if you need help with magic, you’ll get help with magic.” Mom’s eyes widened, and then she gasped before she rounded the counter. “Come with me for a moment. I have something for you that I think will help.”

Milo looked up at me, and I nodded. “I’ll be within earshot if she tries to kidnap and keep you. Just shout out,” I said. I was joking, and Mom rolled her eyes and playfully pushed on my shoulder gently.

“Stop it. You’re going to make him think I’m trouble.”

“But aren’t you, my love?” Dad asked.

Mom gasped but then grinned. “Come on, Milo,” she said. “We’re going to the living room. I have something to show you.”

I chuckled as Milo left with Mom. I was about to follow, but Dad stopped me by clearing his throat.

“Want to talk about it?”

I groaned. “I do. There’s a lot already, Dad. I’ve known him maybe an hour?” I leaned closer and whispered, “Dad, I think he was really abused growing up. He wasn’t allowed to use magic, ever. He said he wasn’t sent to school, so he didn’t know anything about fae and vampires, and I’m assuming he has no idea about the history of fae and warlocks.”

We both glanced toward the living room. I could just barely hear them talking, but it wasn’t as if I didn’t trust Mom with my mate. I did.

“Dad, I want to ask if there’s anything we can do because of what his grandparents did to him. Do you know who I talk to about that?”

“Possibly Master Edison. Master Ambrosius would be easier for me to get in contact with, but he and Master Edison seem to be good friends, so I would think he could help.” Dad tilted his head. “You mentioned his grandparents. What about his parents?”

I shook my head. “Milo said they died when he was born. He never knew them at all.”

Dad’s eyes widened. “I’ll make a call or two. Go rescue your mate from your mom though. She’s showing him notebooks about magic, and your mom just told me Milo seems upset.”

I didn’t need to be told more. I left the kitchen so Dad could make his calls and I could go see what was up with my mate.

CHAPTER 6

MILO



Constance was so very kind, just as Connor had said. Connor looked a lot like his mom but not a whole lot like his dad. Well, except for the height. It was obvious that Connor got his height from his dad. Constance was right around my height. Which was short, even for a fae. Usually, male omegas were a little taller than I was, but I was short.

“This is the one I was looking for. Here are all of the general and basic magical powers. I’ve done my best to try and describe what it feels like to use the magic for these things, and of course, the more difficult ones are toward the back. You should first be able to do all of these basic magics before trying the more tasking ones.”

She held out the notebook, and I took it, already knowing it was of no use to me. I couldn’t read. I’d tried, and I had been able to pick up a few basic words here and there, but I’d not ever been to school. I couldn’t read or do numbers or know anything about history. Nothing of the sort.

“Thank you. I’ll look through it,” I told her.

“What do you have there?” Connor asked as he entered the room. I looked up at him, hoping I wasn’t pleading too much, but that’s exactly what I was doing.

“It’s one of my old notebooks. I’ve used it so many times over the years when teaching younger fae about their magic.”

Connor rounded the couch and sat on the side of it next to me. He held out his hand and grinned at me. “May I?”

“Of course.” I handed the notebook over.

“Mom, this is amazing. It’s so much more detailed than I would have thought of.” Connor looked over at his mom. “Can we take it with us for a bit?”

“That was the intent. You have all of that space out there in your big house with all of that land. Maybe you could help him out there without too much issue?”

“I plan on it, for sure. I need to make sure the magic doesn’t cause issues with anyone else though. I don’t need the council coming down and getting on us because we’re practicing magic at the house.”

“No, I don’t need to practice it,” I said. I didn’t want him to get into trouble. I already felt as if I was a burden and we’d just met. He didn’t want a fae for a mate, and now he’d been paired with me.

“Hey now, it’s all right,” Connor said. He moved down to where he was kneeling in front of me. “We won’t get into trouble. I live out in the middle of nowhere for a reason. I like my privacy, despite my job.”

I realized I didn’t know what Connor’s job was. Or even how old he was. I knew he had red hair and blue eyes, but you could see those things. He was taller than me, and so far, he had seemed to be nice. He’d apologized for not wanting a fae mate, but would he still feel that way if I’d shown up and I’d been, say...a vampire like his dad? Or what if I was a wolf shifter? I snorted internally at that thought. I was anything but a wolf shifter.

“What’s going on through your mind right now?” Connor asked.

I felt my face heat and shook my head. “Nothing.” I looked down at the notebook that Connor had handed back to me. I would have to come clean with him and his parents that I couldn’t read it.

Victor came into the room suddenly, and when I caught his eye, he smiled at me. I noticed he had very sharp teeth, and I gasped. The smile fell from his face, and he moved to the other side of the room.

“Connor, Master Edison said he would contact you soon about what you were asking about. Magic shouldn’t be an issue at your place, and if it is, you and Milo are welcome to come up to Treasure Ridge and practice where the warlocks do.”

“Warlocks?” I asked. “There are warlocks here?” I looked at Connor.

“There are, yes. All different species of paranormals are here, as far as I know.”

I nodded before glancing over at Victor. He caught me, and I took a deep breath, trying to get the courage to ask my question. Connor stood and held out a hand to me. I placed mine in his, and when I felt him tug on me, I stood, wondering if we were leaving already.

“Thanks, Dad. I’ll listen for his call. I have many questions, and I just wasn’t sure who to get in contact with.”

Victor shrugged. “I had to make three different calls to get to him, but it wasn’t too much of an issue.”

I cleared my throat. Everyone looked at me, and my eyes widened. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

I absolutely did not need to upset Connor’s parents. I think I already did, though, because his dad was all the way on the other side of the room. There was no way he was that comfortable standing against the wall.

“May I ask a question?” I said, finally getting the nerve to do so.

“Of course,” Constance said. She was still beside me, and when she placed her hand on my arm, I felt a warmth there. There were no tingles like I felt where Connor was touching me.

“I don’t mean any disrespect, but I’ve never met a vampire before,” I told them. “And Connor told me his dad was a vampire.” I took a deep breath. “But your canines? Teeth are really sharp. I didn’t mean to be rude. I just wasn’t expecting them. I didn’t mean to offend you. I’ve not learned about all of the other paranormal species. I do apologize.”

There. I'd gotten it all out. And now I felt ready to go dive under my bed at home and hope that nobody came looking for me.

"No offense taken, then," Victor told me. "I don't wish to cause you worry or make you feel uneasy."

I shook my head. "This is your house. I'm the guest. I feel I've made you feel both of those things, and I'm sorry for that."

"Vampires' fangs are always down," Connor told me. I looked up at my mate, shocked.

"All of the time? Always?"

Connor nodded. I looked over to Victor, who did the same. "We get really good at smiling without showing our teeth. I am obviously more relaxed about it at home and, of course, when on Treasure Ridge visiting our sons and their families."

"What's this Treasure Ridge? Is it another town near here?"

"Yes," Victor said.

Connor wrapped his arm around my shoulder and pulled me back into his side.

"Treasure Ridge is on top of the mountain. It's where the council is, and it is protected. It's almost all paranormals. Those that aren't are only allowed to be there because they are mated to a paranormal."

"So, like the fae realm?" I asked. "We only have fae there though. But it's protected, and we don't have to worry about others seeing us. So like that?" It sounded wonderful if you asked me. Thomas and Canyon had warned me about humans being here. It was their realm, after all. And they didn't know about us, so we had to be careful when using magic around them. They couldn't see it.

"It is similar, yes," Constance said. "Tell me, what was the name of your village?"

I looked at my mate's mother and smiled. "I come from Springville Village." I wasn't sure if it was where I was born

or not, but I knew it was the village my grandparents' house had been just outside of.

Constance seemed lost in thought before she shook her head. "I don't know that one. I was from Glistening Coast Village. It was so beautiful and got its name from the sun glistening off of the water of the lake when setting." Constance sighed. "It was such a beautiful lake. I still remember it to this day." She blinked a few times, and her eyes focused on me. "The water was so clear. You could see to the bottom and watch the fish swim around."

"Umm...we had a creek. And it was fed by a natural spring. I think that might be where the name for our village came from." I shrugged. "I didn't really learn much about it. I wish I had."

Constance nodded. Then her eyes widened again. "Oh, that reminds me. I wanted you to take these with you." She held out her hands, which were empty, until fully extended. Then, there were several more notebooks. I tried to keep my composure, but it was more books. I couldn't read them, and I didn't really want to share that the very first time I met my mate's parents.

I reached out, taking the books and offering another smile. "Thank you," I told her.

"You're most welcome. They're various books that we use at the shifter school. They'll teach you about the different paranormals."

I nodded as I started thumbing through them. I would love nothing more than to be able to read them and learn all the things about others. It just wasn't going to happen anytime soon, I was certain.

"You and Connor can read them together. That way, if you have questions, you can ask, and he can know exactly what you have questions about."

I nodded and closed the book I'd been thumbing through. "Thank you," I told her again.

"We will, Mom. When we have time," Connor told her.

Moments later, she gasped again. “Oh, of course. I wasn’t meaning you had to go home and read them now. I completely understand that mates...you know. You have things to do. Claiming and such.” Constance looked at me. “You know about fertile periods?”

I was...stunned. Perhaps it wasn’t such an unmentionable topic outside of my grandparents’ house?

“I do,” I told her, nodding again. I knew that I would have one every year or two and that I had to be with my mate while having a fertile period in order to become pregnant.

Constance stared at me for a moment before looking up at Connor. I glanced at Victor, and he shook his head.

“Constance, I’m sure Connor and Milo would love to stay and chat more and get even more books from you, but why don’t we let them get back home? I’m sure they’d much rather spend time just the two of them.”

“Yes, of course,” Constance said in agreement.

“If you’re kicking us out, we’ll leave,” Connor said. I didn’t mind either way. I knew there were things I needed to discuss with Connor, but they could wait.

“You don’t have to leave, you know this,” Victor said. “But even I know what it can be like when a fae first meets their fated mate. It might have been quite some time ago, but I do remember what those first few days with your mom were like.”

“Eww, no. I know you two had sex and still do. I just...nope.” Connor grabbed my hand and pulled me from the room and away from his parents. “Thanks for the books. I’ll call you next week or sometime soonish.”

We were walking through the house one moment, and then we were suddenly outside and wearing our coats once again. I looked down at myself and wondered if I would ever be able to do that so effortlessly.

“Are you upset?” I asked Connor as he continued to pull me along with him.

“No, why? I just didn’t want the mental image of my parents going at it. I understand sex is natural, and it happens, and I love sex, but I don’t want to think about my parents in that sort of position.”

I guess I could understand that. I knew my grandparents still had sex, but I tried to not think about it too much either. What Connor said finally registered though. “Wait. You like sex? You’ve already had sex?”

Thankfully, we were finally at the truck, and Connor stopped pulling me along behind him. I’d had to almost run to keep up with his pace. He looked down at me, his eyes wide.

“Milo, I…”

“You didn’t wait? But fae wait. We have sex with our mates only. I might not have been schooled, but even I know that. Mates are sacred, and we wait for them.” I pulled my hand out of Connor’s.

“Milo, you have to understand that I wasn’t born in the fae realm.”

“So? That means you don’t have the same ideals? Is that one of the reasons why you didn’t want a fae mate?” There was a sharp pain in the center of my chest, and I just knew it was the feeling of hurt. I wasn’t sure how he could hurt me so painfully so soon, but here we were. I sighed. “You know what? It doesn’t matter. I ask that you take me back to your place, please.”

I would get my things and set out elsewhere. He didn’t want me; he had said as much. He didn’t even wait for me.

“Milo, I’m a hundred and thirty years old. Was I supposed to wait around for over a century for a mate that may or may not have been fae?” Connor asked.

“You’re that old?”

“Yes. And I’m positive that if I’d been born in the fae realm, you wouldn’t be my mate because I would have most likely been gifted one a century before you were born. I understand your life has been completely upended in a very short time, and I’m sorry, but I can’t change the fact that I’ve

lived in this realm my entire life and I've had sex before you were even born."

Connor opened the door for me and held out his hand. I could tell he was irritated, and honestly, he had every right to be. I took his hand, the tingles from where we touched even stronger than they had been before, and I wondered if it was because he was upset. Most likely.

I was up and into the truck easily enough, and I grabbed the belt that he'd clicked around me earlier. Connor opened the back door and placed the books there, then closed that door as well as mine. He then walked around the vehicle and climbed in effortlessly. Oh, if it were that easy for me.

"I'm sorry," I said quietly. He was right. I shouldn't be upset because things were different for us. Completely. "You were absolutely right. You are older than either of my parents even." I snorted. "My grandparents even."

Connor looked at me, horrified.

"I'm sorry, but it's probably true. If you do the numbers. You are three generations old?"

Connor groaned. "Please don't remind me. Nor ever bring that up again."

Connor started the truck and then backed out of the driveway. We were on the road and moving back in the direction we'd come in moments.

"I need to talk to Matteo. Actually, probably Justin. I need to know how he dealt with that now that I think about it. Because there is no way I'm going to ask Dad about large age gaps at this point."

I felt bad. "Who's Justin?" I asked.

Connor glanced at me, then back to the road. "He's Matteo's beloved. Justin is a wolf shifter. They have two kids, one a wolf shifter, and she's absolutely adorable. And then they have a little vampire. He's a cutie. Garic and Luc have just one, a little vampire, but they're both vampires, so they didn't have a choice in that. They're all adorable and a lot of fun to hang out with."

I turned in my seat a little so I could look at Connor easier. I studied my mate for several minutes while he drove toward his house. I could tell he knew I was looking at him because every so often, he would glance at me out of the corner of his eye.

“I am sorry, Connor. I’m not upset anymore, and I really had no right to be in the first place.”

Connor sighed. “You did to an extent. I’m fae, and you’re correct that in your world, fae wait. Mostly.”

“But not in yours.”

Connor looked at me. “No.” He stopped the truck, and I realized we were back in town and at a red light.

“Why are you stopped here? I don’t know about any of this.” I gestured to the surrounding area.

“Well, the red light means I have to stop. It’s so traffic coming from the other direction can go through the intersection.”

I looked around but saw nobody else. “What other people?”

Connor chuckled. “Right now, nobody. But this intersection gets really busy during peak hours in the morning and again in the afternoon.”

The light changed colors, and Connor drove through the intersection, as he’d called it. “Connor?”

He glanced at me, offered a small smile, and then held out his hand. I placed mine in his, and he set them on the middle thing, my hand in his.

“It’s all right, Milo. We have a lot to learn about each other. And it will take time for us to understand one another as well as become completely comfortable with each other.”

“You’re not still mad?”

Connor shook his head. “No. I never was. Frustrated a little, but not mad at you. I do understand I’m not what you were expecting, and I keep putting myself in a not-so-great

light. I promise, I'm not a bad guy. I'll take care of you and our family if we should have one. We'll build a life together here, and you'll get to experience all of the things that it seems as if you didn't get to when you were growing up." Connor squeezed my hand. I did the same back to him.

"I am sorry," I said quietly.

"It's all right. You are allowed to be upset and disappointed. That's part of life." Connor turned the truck, and when I looked out the window, I was confused.

"Where are we?"

"I'm not sure about you, but I slept all day today after having been up all night last night. I'm hungry. This place has the best burgers and fries, in my opinion. You want to get something to eat?"

I wasn't sure what he had just said, but I was willing to try anything once. "That sounds good." I suddenly realized my things were at his house though. "Umm...I left my bags at your place," I told him. "I can't pay, so maybe I can just come in with you to keep you company?"

"No, Milo. I'm your mate. I'll buy you dinner, and it's not an issue in the least." Connor stopped the truck and then turned it off. He grinned at me. "Sit tight, I'll be right there."

I could only nod and wait while he got out. It wasn't that I couldn't get out on my own. That was easier than climbing in. But I would get used to it, I was certain. It was time for me to experience a burger and fries, apparently. That was definitely not something that Thomas or Canyon had mentioned, but they'd not exactly had a whole lot of time with me. Connor opened the door, and I offered a smile, getting one in return. I could do this. We could figure things out. Couldn't we?

CHAPTER 7

CONNOR



The least I could do was buy Milo dinner. We were at one of my favorite places, not that Timber Valley had too many. If we wanted something other than the diner or a few fast-food places, we would have to travel an hour away. Unless, of course, you were a fae with magic like I was. But tonight, I was going to take Milo out and see what he liked.

“What do you think you want?” I asked.

“Umm...” Milo looked up at the menu screen with wide eyes. He then turned them my way and honestly looked like he wanted to cry.

“Hey, what’s wrong? Does it not smell good to you?”

“Oh, that’s not it.” Milo glanced at the menu again before he looked around the restaurant. He pulled me away from the counter and then tugged on the front of my shirt.

“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t read. I wasn’t allowed to go to school. Ever. I know only a few words, and even then, I struggle with them.”

I stood up, surprised by what Milo had just shared with me. My poor mate. He’d not been allowed to go to school? How was that even possible?

I glanced at the menu before looking back down at my mate. “Do you trust me enough to order for you?”

Milo nodded, and I smiled at him before taking his hand and then walking back up to the counter.

“What can I get you tonight?”

“Can we get two of your number three combos with fountain drinks?” I asked.

“Sure thing. Anything else?”

I shook my head. I had sweets at the house if Milo wanted dessert, and they were by far better than what they had to offer here. People didn't come here for the desserts. They came for the burgers and fries.

“All right, two number three combos with fries and fountain drinks. That will be twenty-two dollars and thirty-eight cents.”

I pulled out my phone, held it up to the card reader, and pressed the side button on my phone when my wallet popped up. Transaction complete, I took the receipt and our drink cups.

“Thanks,” I told him.

He nodded at us before I ushered Milo off to the side. I handed him his cup and then led him to the drink machine.

“They have water if that's what you want. The price is the same, no matter what. You're paying for the cup here.”

Milo looked around, his eyes still wide. “It's...bright in here.”

I chuckled. “It is. Next time, I'll take you out to a nicer place, and it'll be much dimmer.”

“No. I'm not complaining. We didn't have places this bright back home.”

I nodded at Milo's choice of words. We were in a public restaurant that had several humans in it. Milo understood that we couldn't disclose who we were to them. Not unless they were our mate, and even then, it took time with humans.

“They also have tea. But it's iced tea.”

“Umm, I'll take that? I'm not sure I'm ready for...” Milo glanced at my cup as I filled it with soda. “That.” Milo moved closer. “Is it fizzy?”

I chuckled again. “It is. That’s the carbonated water in it. I like it, but not everyone does.” I held out my cup. “Want to give it a try?”

Milo leaned in, sniffed the cup, and then moved away, rubbing his nose. I should have warned him.

“Sorry about that. Yeah, that’s the carbonated water.”

Milo shook his head. “No, I’ll do water. Or tea. Where?”

I pointed to the water and the tea and watched as Milo figured out how to pull the lever forward to get the tea.

We took our cups and found a table. I was surprised the corner one was open, and I directed Milo that way. I held the chair out for him, wondering just how much we’d be able to talk here. But there was always later. I was going to enjoy my first date with my mate. I had a lot to make up for, and I could start now.

I had just set my cup down when our number was called. I went to retrieve our food and returned to Milo, who was trying out his iced tea. It seemed as if he liked it.

“Good?”

Milo nodded. “It’s sweet.”

“It is. They have an unsweetened tea if you prefer that.”

Milo shook his head. “No, this is good.” He took another long pull on the straw, and I busied myself with passing out the food. Never before did I ever think I’d be jealous of a straw. But here I was.

“I didn’t order without anything on the burgers. You can pick anything off that you find you don’t like. And if you just don’t like it altogether, we can get you something else.”

Milo opened his burger and then looked up at me with rounded eyes. I smiled at him.

“It’s huge.” He closed his eyes. “Oh, that smells lovely.”

I chuckled. “It tastes it as well. And the fries are cut fresh here.” I looked around and realized I’d forgotten the ketchup.

I'd been so focused on Milo I'd forgotten to grab it. "Be right back."

I quickly went and filled two of the little cups with ketchup and then returned to the table. I didn't know if Milo would like it or not, but it was there if he wanted to give it a try.

"What's that?"

"Ketchup. It's made with spices, although not hot ones, and vinegar, and tomatoes."

"Oh, I like tomatoes."

Milo immediately dipped his finger in the red condiment, and I could only watch, transfixed, as he brought his finger to his mouth and sucked it. I definitely was feeling things for my mate already, but that was how the mate-bond worked, even before we claimed each other.

"It's good. Do I just dip my finger in it?"

It took me a moment to be able to answer because my mouth didn't seem to want to work. "Ah, no. It's for your fries," I said. I held up a fry and dipped it in my own ketchup and then ate it.

"Oh. That might be good. I like potatoes as well, but I've never had them this way." Milo held up a french fry and studied it. "You called these fries?"

"French fries, yes. They don't come from France though. They're fried in oil, and I happen to believe that is one of the best ways to make potatoes."

Milo took a bite, chewed, grinned, and then dipped the rest in his ketchup and did the same. The smile that time was bigger though, and it was nice to see.

"So it seems as if you like fries."

"Oh yes." Milo grinned at me. "Thank you for them. For the food."

I tilted my head. "You're welcome, but I'll always get you food, Milo. It's part of being partners." I glanced at someone

as they walked by on the way to the trash can. They didn't seem to be interested in us at all, which was perfect.

Milo opened his sandwich, and when he leaned down and smelled it, he wrinkled his nose. "What's that smell?"

"I'm not sure. Which one are you smelling? Can you describe it?" I asked quietly.

"It's strong. Overpowering."

Hmm, probably the onions. "Try pulling the onion off," I told him. "It's the white circle things."

Milo picked them up, brought them to his nose, and made a face. I found it adorable, but I wasn't sure he would.

"Yep, definitely the onions, then." I quickly opened my own sandwich and pulled the onions off. If they were something that Milo didn't like, I definitely wasn't going to eat them. Especially since I knew what they could do to your breath.

"You don't have to pull yours off."

"Yes I do," I told him without missing a beat. I dug the rest of the onions off, and after I'd found the last one, I placed the bun back on and grabbed a napkin. "If you don't like them, I won't eat them."

"No, that's not fair."

I reached out and touched Milo's hand. I didn't want him to get upset over onions. "Yes, it is. They're strong, and if I eat them and you don't, my breath will smell of onions while yours doesn't. And, well, I'm really hoping I can at least get a kiss at the end of our date tonight." I shrugged. "I won't push though. If you're up for a kiss, I'm not going to say no. But if not, I can wait until you are ready."

"I would like that," Milo said. "I'm not sure I'll be any good at it, but I'm willing to try."

"I won't complain. And again"—I got his attention with a gentle squeeze of his hand—"only what you are ready for. Nothing more. I'm good with waiting until you're ready for whatever."

Milo glanced around and most likely noticed we were all alone in the corner. The next table occupied was at least two away, and if we talked quietly enough, they wouldn't hear us. But I could just put up a little magical barrier, and they'd not hear anything anyway.

"I'll try. I've not done it before," Milo whispered.

"I know. That's why I said whenever you're ready. I'm happy with waiting. You are worth it, and you deserve that." It wouldn't matter if he was fae or any other paranormal. Any and every mate deserved respect from their mate.

Milo nodded and then looked down at his food. I wasn't sure if he was trying to figure out how to tackle the sandwich or if he was using it as a distraction. Either way, I made sure his sandwich and fries were still hot. No cold food for him unless it was meant to be.

Milo picked up his sandwich and managed to take his first bite. He chewed a few times and then closed his eyes and moaned. He quickly went back to chewing and then gave me a huge smile after he swallowed. "Oh, this is better than the fries. But those are amazing as well." He set the sandwich down, picked up another fry, and dipped it in ketchup.

I sat there, watching my mate enjoy his food, and realized this was the first time he was experiencing them. He'd said he'd had potatoes before, but not like this. Did that mean no fried potatoes? Or just in that shape? Milo was happily eating until he wasn't. He suddenly stopped and stared at me. "Is there something wrong with your food?"

I shook my head. "No. I was simply watching you enjoy yours. I forgot that you've not had this before. I eat here at least once a week, but usually more." Should I? Possibly not. But I wasn't a human, and my metabolism was different. That and, well, I wasn't going to have any worries of heart disease, which was a blessing, actually, since I loved burgers and fries. And pizza. It was an every-Friday-night thing. It was just easier to bring one home on the way after work.

I picked up my own burger and started eating. I had a lot of things I wanted to talk to Milo about, but they could wait. It

was too amusing watching him eat his meal. He was really enjoying it, and that was fine with me.

“Can we come back again sometime?” Milo asked, and I realized his burger was gone already, and he was dipping his fries in the ketchup.

“We can.” I glanced at the room and found it the same; the only change was someone was standing at the counter ordering. “Can you cook?” I asked. I knew he couldn’t use magic, but we would work on changing that.

“Oh yes. That’s what I did for my grandparents,” he told me quietly. “I cooked and kept the house clean. I had a small garden out back that I loved spending time in, but it was always warm where we lived. Nothing like this.”

Mom had mentioned the fae realm several times while we were growing up, but she slowly stopped. I’d always wondered if it was because she had been here so long that she forgot what it was like or if thinking about it was too painful for her.

“No. It gets cold here in the winter. And of course, the snow wouldn’t allow for a garden. We can have one in the spring if you want.” I wasn’t sure we would have time for a garden in the spring, but I already knew if Milo wanted a garden, we would have one. We would have to use magic to keep the critters out of it though. If not, we wouldn’t have a garden to harvest. I’d seen everything from rabbits to marmots to skunks and possums. Then, of course, there were the deer, elk, and, of course, the bears. There were all sorts of wildlife that I’d seen in what equated to my backyard.

“That reminds me while I’m thinking about it,” I said, drawing Milo’s attention. He was busy eating his french fries, and I couldn’t fault him for that. “The wildlife.”

Milo shook his head.

“I only ask that if you go outside, either make sure I’m with you or don’t wander far. Please?”

Milo grabbed a napkin and wiped his hands. “Sure. But what wildlife?”

“I’m not too worried about it at the moment because they’re hibernating, but there are bears in the area. Those are the ones I would be most worried about.” I leaned closer. “Until you can use your magic against one, please don’t wander far. You can hear them and definitely scent them.”

Milo wrinkled his nose, and I thought it was adorable.

“Do they smell bad?”

I nodded. “Yes. Very much so. And they’re big, so there’s a lot there to stink.”

Milo chuckled, and I joined.

“I’ll not go far. I’m finding I’m not really a fan of the cold,” he said.

I chuckled again. “It won’t stay cold, but sadly, it does get cold here in the winter. And it can get really cold. And snow, lots of that.”

Milo nodded. “It’s pretty, but I’m not a fan so far.”

“Maybe next year, you’ll be more used to it. I can understand how going from warm all of the time to twenties for the highs and snow already on the ground is a drastic change.” I pushed my tray off to the side, finished with my own meal.

“Oh, that might be it. Maybe next time will be different?”

It could be possible. And I’d not seen what Milo had by way of clothing yet, so maybe he needed warmer clothes. I had lots of hoodies and sweaters that I wore when not at work, but they would be entirely too big on my mate. Not that I would ever say no to him wearing any of my clothing.

Milo finished his fries and then started drinking his tea. When it was gone, he looked up at me with a huge smile. “That was really good. Thank you. I’m not sure what I’m feeling, but it’s a good feeling.”

I chuckled as my little mate rubbed his stomach. “Most likely food coma. If you’re ready, we’ll head on back to the house, and if you’re so inclined, you can take a nap on the

couch. Or we can watch a movie or spend the evening talking.”

Milo stood up, started gathering his wrappers, and placed them on the tray. “Any of those sounds wonderful. Although, maybe not the movie. If it’s playing, talking might not work the best. But I’m all for a nap, I think. I’m not sure why I’m suddenly so tired.”

I tossed the trash in the bin and placed the tray on the top before I turned back to Milo. “Food coma. It’s the feeling of satisfaction you get from good food, and then you just want to curl up and take a nice nap. You are experiencing that, and it’s perfectly normal, as far as I’m concerned.” I wasn’t sure if it was actually a technical term or not, but I understood the feeling. And with it being winter, the sun set so early here now, and that made for sleepy evenings.

“Are you ready?” I asked Milo after I pulled on my coat.

“As I’m going to be. I have questions, but maybe I should ask them when we get back to your place.”

“You can ask anything you wish. I’ll try to answer if I can. If not, I’ll look it up for you.” I thought about what else he’d said and nodded. “If it’s something about us, then at home is fine, or in the truck.” Milo nodded at me. I reached out, and after lacing our fingers together, I led him from the restaurant. I was glad he enjoyed his meal, but now that I thought about it, I should have taken him someplace nicer. It was his first meal with me, and I’d picked fast food. I really needed to brush up on my dating skills.

“You’re upset?” Milo said as soon as we left the restaurant.

“Not with you. I just realized I should have taken you to a nice place.”

Milo stopped walking and tugged on my hand to get me to do the same. When I did, he glanced back at the burger place and pointed with his other hand. “It’s one of your favorite places, you said.”

I nodded.

“Then it was the perfect place to take me for our meal. I really liked the food, and I’m already looking forward to coming here again. I don’t need fancy. I’ve never had fancy. And any meal I don’t have to cook, I’m going to appreciate all the more. Not that I don’t like cooking because I do. I find it relaxing and a good way for me to help take my mind off of everything going on with my grandparents.”

I pulled Milo with me toward the truck again. We could continue our chat in the warm truck. “I’ll bring you here as often as you want. But I’d like to take you other places as well.”

Milo grinned at me when I opened the truck door for him. “I look forward to it,” he said. With help, he was able to grab the handle, and in no time, I had him in the truck and was rounding to the other side. It was time to go home and have a serious talk with my mate.

CHAPTER 8

MILO



I hadn't been all that hungry when we entered the place, but once I got a smell of the food, I couldn't resist. I understood completely why it was that Connor was there every week. It was by far the best food I'd ever had.

I didn't know how Connor was going to react when I shared my secret with him that I couldn't read, but it was a relief that he didn't look down at me because of it. At least, it didn't seem that he was. I was more than willing to learn, but I'd just not been given the opportunity. Just as I'd not been taught how to use my magic. I'd heard things here and there, and sometimes in the middle of the night, I'd even tried to use my magic in my room. That was how I'd been able to do what little bit of magic I could.

Connor had the vehicle on the road, and it seemed like in minutes, we left the lights of the town behind us and were now traveling on the dark road.

"Does it always get dark so early?" I asked.

"No. It does in the winter, but in the summer, it will be light much later into the evening."

Something else to get used to, I guess. That and the cold. I shivered a little despite it being warm in here.

"Are you cold?" Connor asked.

"A little. I'm trying to get used to your weather here."

"Here." Connor pushed something on the dash, and a little red light turned on. I wasn't sure what it was, but after a

minute or two, I realized my seat was getting warm.

“What did you do?” I asked, looking over at him, not that I could see him all that well. “The seat is warmer than it probably should be.”

“Do you not like it? Is it too warm?” Connor pushed the button again.

“It’s nice but unexpected. Does the button control it?”

“Yes. It’s a seat warmer. They’re nice when it’s really cold out.” Connor glanced at me, then quickly back to the road. “What was it you wanted to talk to me about?”

It was private now, and I could speak freely. That was what I had wanted. “I wanted to discuss what I told you in the restaurant. And other things.”

“I’m sorry you can’t read, Milo. If it’s something you want to learn, I’ll help you in any way I can. I know there are programs out there that are successful in helping not only children learn but adults as well.”

I knew he couldn’t really see me in the dark vehicle, but that didn’t change the feeling of shame I was experiencing.

“I would like that very much,” I told him. “I’ve always wanted to learn, but I assume my grandparents keeping me from school was another way for them to punish me for my dad’s death.”

“Do you know what happened? Did anyone ever talk about it?”

I peered over at Connor and silently sighed. “I only know what they’ve spewed at me for my entire life. Just that something went wrong with the delivery. I didn’t even know either of their names until I was almost thirteen.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah. They never spoke of them. I could see the names written on the back of a picture, but I couldn’t read them. It wasn’t until I was sneaking out one night to try and get my own emotions under control that I heard them talking about their son. They called him Elwyn, and I’ve never forgotten that

name. I wasn't sure if it was really his name or not. But when I was with the fates yesterday, they were able to tell me that Elwyn was my omega dad's name, and my alpha dad's name was Leo. I never knew his name until yesterday. My grandparents never talked about him that I know of."

"Why would you think it wasn't his name?"

"Because it wouldn't have been the first time they said something because they knew I could hear, yet they wanted me to not know the truth. Since I can remember, my grandparents have blamed me for my dad's death." I thought about the last few months and how their treatment of me had only gotten worse. I had to believe it was because they were tired of me and were more than ready for me to be gone. They didn't want me, and although I wanted nothing more than to belong and be loved, I had resigned myself to never experiencing either.

"I didn't mean to upset you," Connor said.

"You didn't. I was just thinking about the past few months. Their obvious hatred of me only increased, and I couldn't really understand why. I'd done everything they ever asked of me and more. I now know it's most likely because they knew they would be rid of me soon."

Connor went quiet, and I just assumed it was because he was concentrating on driving. After several minutes of silence, I was about to ask a question until I felt the truck slow down. I realized we were back at the turn that would take us up to Connor's house.

"You have lights here?" I grinned as we drove through the lights that I'd failed to notice earlier.

"They make it easier in the winter to find the driveway. I often am up and gone before the sun comes up and don't get home until well past it sets."

I thought about that for a moment. He worked very long hours. I would spend a lot of time alone. But I had lots of learning to catch up on, so that would help occupy my time.

"Do you like your job?"

The truck bumped over the stone driveway, and when we hit a particularly deep hole, I tried to remember if it had been there earlier.

“It’s something to keep me busy. I used to live in France with my family, but quite some time ago, Matteo decided he wanted to belong to a coven again.”

“You didn’t?”

Connor stopped in front of his house and reached up above him. I could see him now since there were lights on the side of his house.

“No. I’m not a vampire. Me asking to move into a coven isn’t really a good idea. It didn’t affect my brothers because we’re related, but our blood is a big draw for vampires. I’m told it’s incredibly sweet, and there are some vampires that can’t control themselves around us.” Connor slowly moved the truck back inside, and I spent the time looking around the space. It was neat and organized, but there wasn’t a whole lot in it. There was room for another vehicle, but Connor only had the one.

“Sorry, I didn’t think about that. So no coven for you.”

“No. I stayed in France. I liked it a lot, and my fae sister was there. She met her mate though, and she and Arthur live in northern France now. He’s a lynx shifter, and they have five kids.”

“Five?”

Connor nodded and held up his hand and wiggled his fingers. “Five. You mentioned you didn’t know numbers. We’ll work on that too. Mom is a teacher. She’ll have tons of resources to help. We’ll get it all figured out.”

I nodded. I would really like that and appreciated the fact that Connor wasn’t ashamed of the fact that I couldn’t read or do numbers.

“I’ll be right there,” he said. He was out of the truck before I could fully register what he’d just said. I had my belt off and had just reached for the door handle when the door opened. There stood Connor, and he didn’t even wait for me to turn.

He simply grabbed me around the waist and pulled me from the truck. I squeaked as he slowly set me on my own feet.

“I could have slid out.”

“True, but the running boards are slick right now,” he said, pointing to them. I looked back at them and saw they were covered in what I knew was snow.

“Oh. Well, thank you.”

“Always,” Connor said. He stepped back, giving me room to close the door while he opened the back one and grabbed the books his mom had given us to read. He held them up and grinned. “We’ll work on these a little each day. I want to make sure you don’t feel overwhelmed or become frustrated. That will only make you not want to read, and I don’t want that for you. Reading is amazing, and I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.”

I grinned because I didn’t know what else to do. I followed Connor inside, and once the door was closed behind us, he hurried off to set the books down on the counter. I followed slower, undoing the coat and removing it.

“There’s a closet right there,” he said, pointing behind me. I turned, found the door, and saw it had several coats of different thicknesses inside.

“You’re prepared.”

“It helps. But I don’t have much of a choice. I work as a park ranger at the national park. I go through a lot of clothes. Coats are important, and I have to make sure I look like I’m prepared at all times because we deal with the public, and since humans don’t know about us, I can’t just magick a coat if I get cold.”

“I can’t imagine magicking a coat at all.”

“Do you mind getting comfortable?” Connor asked.

I shook my head but didn’t really understand what he was referring to until my shoes were suddenly gone from my feet. It was a good thing that I was wearing thick socks because otherwise I was sure my feet would get cold on the hard floors.

“Now the clothes,” he said seconds before my jeans, shirt, and vest were gone. In their place was a pair of soft, thick pants and a matching shirt with a hat attached. “Perfect,” he said. Connor’s clothing changed to match, and he led me from the doorway and into the back room.

“So now what?” I asked. I knew I needed to talk to him about claiming because as the evening had progressed, the tingling in my body had started to increase.

“Now, we sit in the recliner and cuddle while getting to know each other.”

I wasn’t sure what a recliner was, but I knew what cuddling was. I was up for that. Especially since being close to Connor like that would mean the tingling would be alleviated somewhat.

Connor sat at the end of the couch and pulled me down beside him. I wasn’t sure he wanted me quite that close, but when he pushed a button on the inside of the end of the couch, it moved, and there was now a footstool. It was plenty big enough for the two of us, and I grinned up at him.

“It has a footstool.”

“It does.” Connor grinned back at me. “Watch this.” He pushed back, and we were pretty much lying down now, and I thought this would be a perfect spot for an afternoon nap. A blanket suddenly covered us just before I heard the whoosh from earlier, and I knew there was now a fire in the fireplace.

“Will you teach me about the magic?”

“I will. We will start working on it soon. Not tonight though, all right?”

I understood that. It had been an eventful day already. Add in magic lessons, and that was just asking for a bad mishap.

“Understandable,” I told him. “What would you like to talk about? You mentioned brothers and sisters briefly. Can you tell me more about them at some point?” I really wanted to meet his brothers. And their children. I’d not been around too many, and I couldn’t help but wonder if Connor wanted kids. Would we have them? Would I suffer the same fate my own dad had?

“I will tell you all about them at some point. I want to know about you and tell you more about me.”

I shrugged with one shoulder, but it was awkward with how we were lying. “What do you want to know about me? I’ve had a very uneventful life. My grandparents raised me, which is probably more than they needed to do.”

“I don’t understand why they didn’t give you to your other set of grandparents.”

I shook my head. “I couldn’t say. I don’t know their names, nor do I know what village my alpha dad was from. They truly never talked about either of them around me. I only know what they look like because I had a picture of them. It’s my most treasured item.”

“Did you bring your picture with you?”

I thought about how I’d stashed it in the middle of the few items I’d had. “I did. It’s in the bag that I had with me. The one on wheels.”

Connor slid his left arm under me and pulled me closer to his side. “Is this all right?”

I sighed at the contact. “Yes. It helps with the tingling.”

Connor chuckled. “Yes, it does. We should talk about that.”

I let my head drop, and when it did, I found myself with my arms tucked tightly to my stomach and my head now lying on Connor’s arm.

“Milo? Did you not wish to discuss claiming each other?”

My head popped back up in a hurry. I glanced at Connor, shocked.

“Is that a no?”

I opened my mouth, trying to respond, but couldn’t seem to form words.

Connor chuckled. “All right, I’ll talk, and you listen for a bit. Then you can tell me what you think.” Connor reached up with his hand and pulled me back down to his side. I sighed

again, and when his right hand moved across his body and reached for my hand, I let him pull it out from between us. He placed it on his chest, where he set his over it and started gently rubbing the back of my hand and fingers. It was soothing, and I closed my eyes and simply enjoyed the attention. I'd not had physical contact before, and I was finding that I really enjoyed it with my mate.

“What did you want to talk about?” I asked.

“We need to discuss claiming.”

I agreed with that. It was going to have to happen eventually.

“I can see your aura if I look, and so far, it doesn't appear that you are in pain yet.”

“No. How long do you think it will take? Is it like this for all fae? I only know about it because I overheard someone one day when I was in the village with my grandmother.”

“It varies for each individual. But to jump off to the side for a moment. What do you mean when you say when you were in the village?”

“A few times a year, my grandparents would make me get dressed in a nicer set of clothes, and they would take me into the village with them. I think they only did it because they were pressured by the other villagers. Otherwise, I was left at home when one of them went out.”

“Why didn't you say anything to someone in the village?”

That was a good question, and I didn't have an answer. Not really.

“I was scared, mostly. I didn't want to lose the chance to keep my only picture of my dads. If I said something to anyone in the village and my grandparents heard, I'm not sure what they would have done. They never hit me, but I've spent time locked in a closet.”

I felt Connor's body tighten. He took a deep breath and slowly let it out. “I've asked Dad to get in contact with Master Edison so we can maybe see about having some sort of

punishment toward your grandparents for how they've treated you."

"They're not there anymore," I told Connor. I pushed up again to look at him. "When I left with the fates, they took me back to their cottage. I spent the night there, and they told me my grandparents would be dealt with. Also that they had been removed from their home."

"Do you know where they were taken?"

I shook my head. Connor's brow scrunched before it relaxed, and he once more pulled me back down to rest next to him.

"All right. Well, that might change things for certain. But I still want to find out what punishment, if any, and there really should be one that they will be facing. I don't want them to get away with how they've abused you."

"Is it wrong if I say I don't care one way or another? I just don't want to have to go back to them."

Connor's arm tightened around me. "You're not going back." Connor sighed. "What do you know about claiming?"

"Not much. I think I know how sex works though. Maybe. I mean, I know what feels good to me when I have a fertile period."

"All right, well, we will have to work on introducing you to all of that. I would give you a book and have you read it, but..." Connor turned his head. "You know, I think there might be a picture book out there somewhere. I would say we could watch a video, but they're not really realistic and might not give you good expectations."

I closed my eyes again because I'd become warm and comfortable. I realized I felt safe, and that was something that was completely new. I liked it. A lot. "I don't really know what it is you just said. Not really. But I'm willing to try whatever with you. I've seen animals breed. I do know how it works. Somewhat. I've just not...you know."

Connor was quiet. "Yes. I have, and I don't want that to remain an issue between us."

“It’s not.” I yawned, suddenly sleepy. It truly had been an eventful day.

“Milo? Are you falling asleep?”

“Maybe. I’m trying to stay awake. It’s just been eventful. And I’m comfortable and warm. I like being warm.”

Connor chuckled. “We’ll turn the heat up in the house. I’ll make sure you’re always warm.”

I felt Connor touch the top of my head, and if I wasn’t mistaken, he had just kissed me.

“Do you want kids? Is that something you’d like to do? Start a family?” Connor asked quietly.

“I think so. I wouldn’t be upset if it happened, nor if it didn’t. I’m scared though.”

Connor moved me, and I suddenly found myself lying on top of him. I lifted my head and stared up at him.

“I’ll protect you, Milo. And we have a really good warlock doctor. He’s incredibly powerful, and if he can save Matteo, he can save you.”

I wanted to believe him; I did. But I still had a small amount of doubt. “I hope so.” I knew that if my fate was meant to match my dad’s, I hoped that any child I might be carrying would be raised by Connor’s parents with nothing but love and acceptance.

“You’ll be all right,” Connor repeated.

“If you say so.”

“I do.”

I nodded and then lay back down. Now that I was on top of Connor, I wasn’t quite as comfortable, so I slid off to the side and sighed as I snuggled up beside him. Connor chuckled before he pulled me tighter to his side.

“When do you want to claim me?” I asked.

“Whenever you’re ready. Possibly tomorrow. Or within the next few days, if you’re up for it. I want you to be sure it’s

what you want as well.”

I yawned again. “Well, since we’re both fae and the tingles feel better when we touch, I’m happy with this right now. I want to talk about it some more so you enjoy it too,” I said. “But I think I might be too tired tonight.”

Connor’s fingers found their way into my hair, and I moaned when they rubbed my scalp. In minutes, I felt myself completely relaxing, something that was entirely new but most definitely welcome.

CHAPTER 9

CONNOR



I was afraid to move. I felt when Milo fell asleep, and the last thing I wanted was to disturb him. My little mate needed to be pampered. He needed to be cuddled and spoiled. The more I learned about his life thus far, the more I wanted to make his grandparents suffer. I wanted to find out where they'd been taken. Were they going to be punished? They should answer for their years of abuse.

As I lay there holding Milo beside me, I thought about all of the years that I had told myself I wanted any mate but a fae one. But now that I had Milo here with me and he was in my arms, I couldn't imagine it being anyone but him. I wanted to give him all of the time in the world to get to know me and learn to trust me, but I was afraid that I was going to need to claim him before then. He was young, and I wasn't. Already, the tingles, as he'd called them, that were going through my own body were growing. I'd noticed while we were eating that being apart from him for just that little bit of time had caused the vibrations in me to intensify.

I wasn't sure how intense his were, but they were noticeable enough for him to mention them to me. Would they become painful before his fertile period hit? Would we claim one another before?

When I realized that I myself was becoming sleepy, I used magic to move us from the living room to the bedroom. I only had the one bed, and although I could easily magick another, I wanted Milo beside me. I could and would be a perfect

gentleman, but I didn't wish to spend my first night with my mate on my couch despite it being incredibly comfortable.

It was way too early to go to bed, but a lot had happened for both of us today. I was going to give in and try to get some sleep. It didn't take long before I felt myself relax and fall asleep with my mate by my side.

I WOKE HOURS LATER, somewhat disoriented because there was someone beside me. It only took a moment for me to remember that it was Milo and that he very much should be there. I glanced at the window and saw it was still pitch black outside, but that didn't tell me what time it was.

Milo was beside me but no longer cuddled up with me. He had moved away sometime in the night, which was honestly expected. It had been quite some time since I'd spent the night with someone else, and I couldn't remember ever staying close to them all through the night.

Not wanting to wake my sleeping mate, I used magic to transport myself from the bed to the kitchen. When I got there, I could see that it was just after three in the morning. That made sense since we'd basically gone to bed just after seven last evening. I went to the bathroom to take care of things and then back to the kitchen to grab my phone.

I had several messages and calls I needed to make, but since it was the middle of the night, they would have to wait. But I could schedule the messages to go out later, so that's where I started. That didn't take long, and then I found myself wondering what to do to occupy my time. I made myself a cup of coffee and went to my office, where my laptop was. I wanted to do some research on programs that could be helpful to Milo. He not only needed something to help teach him to read but also to do math.

I wasn't sure how long I'd spent searching for programs, but I suddenly felt as if I was being watched. When I looked

up from the screen, I saw Milo standing in the doorway, looking unsure.

“Good morning,” I told him. “You are more than welcome to come in.”

Milo’s expression instantly transformed as he came into the office and around the desk. I pushed back a little to make room for him. I wasn’t too sure how comfortable he was going to be with me, but I took a chance and pulled him closer. When he seemed willing, I tugged again and pulled him onto my lap.

“Did you sleep well?” I asked.

“Too well. I forgot where I was at first when I woke up. Your bed is enormous and so comfortable.”

I chuckled at that. “I like space when I sleep,” I told him. “And although I’m not nearly as tall as some, I didn’t want anything smaller than a king-sized bed.”

“Do you have another one? Or a room we could put one in? I wouldn’t mind sleeping on the floor for a bit. I didn’t mean to invade your space.”

I playfully growled and turned Milo’s face toward mine. “Space to stretch out. Not space from you. Unless you decide you don’t wish to sleep next to me, I very much want you in the same bed.”

Milo smiled shyly. “Your bed is nice. So is the bathroom. I hope you don’t mind I used it.”

“Not in the least,” I told him. “I used the one down here because I didn’t want to wake you.”

“You should have. I don’t need to be sleeping through the day.”

I snorted. A quick glance at the clock in the corner of my laptop screen told me that it was only four thirty. That was hardly through the day.

“Well, since it’s not even five in the morning yet, I’d say you most certainly didn’t sleep through the day.”

“Have you been up long?”

I shook my head. “A little over an hour. I woke up and knew I wouldn’t be able to go back to sleep, so I came down here to do some research.” I moved the laptop closer. “Look at what I found.” I moved the mouse to scroll up the page and show Milo what I’d been researching. “I realize you might not be able to read what this is, but it’s a program for helping to learn to read. We could get it, and it’ll help teach you step by step.” I clicked on the demo and turned up the volume a little. It went through the little example, and while Milo watched and listened, I took that opportunity to observe my mate. He was completely engrossed, and I wondered if he would have an easy time learning to read.

When the demo was over, Milo continued to stare at the screen for a few seconds before he looked my way. “Do you think it’ll work? That I’ll be able to learn to read with this program?”

“I do. I’m also wondering if there might be more to everything.”

Milo seemed confused. “What do you mean?” he finally asked.

“Well, you can talk, and you don’t seem to struggle with that.”

Milo nodded slowly. “And although I realize they aren’t completely connected, I’m trying to figure out how you picked up on talking, on words and their meanings while not being able to read.”

Milo’s brow dropped. “Are you saying I’m not being truthful?”

I touched his cheek. “Hey now. No, that’s not what I’m saying at all. But I wonder if maybe your grandparents didn’t...I don’t know.” I shrugged. “Maybe they used magic on you or something. I’m not really good at understanding how learning to read works. Mom taught us when we were all little, and she would go around always telling us what things were and what they were for.”

Milo sighed. “That sounds nice. I don’t remember either of my grandparents ever doing that for me. When I was younger, they didn’t hide what they were saying around me and talked freely. I remember mimicking their sounds, but not much beyond that.” Milo seemed to become lost in thought for a moment. “There was a time when I went into the village with them. I remember being a lot younger. Someone mentioned something to one of them, and they were yelling. I don’t recall what all was said. But shortly after that, there was someone from the village that came to the house, and they would talk to me.” Milo shook his head. “They showed me things and talked about them.” Milo blinked and then focused on me. “Maybe that’s how I learned to talk. I don’t really remember much. She seemed sad all of the time, and she only came for a short time.”

“What happened to her? Do you know? Why was she sad?”

Milo shrugged. “I have no clue. I remember sneaking out when I was older. I would head into the village and hang out around where the other younger fae were. They would always be talking and I would hide near them just to listen to them talk about things.”

I felt absolutely terrible for my mate. But I felt like there had to be a way to help him. We were fae. Surely there was some sort of magical thing we could do to help him? If not us, maybe someone else? I was certainly going to ask my parents later.

“Are you hungry?” I asked, changing the subject. It wasn’t that I didn’t wish to know all there was about my mate. I did. But I also wanted to lighten the mood a bit because it seemed to have taken a sad turn.

“I’m not sure I’m hungry just yet. If you are, I’ll certainly cook something for you if you want.”

I shook my head. “Nope. I can cook, and you don’t have to. You are certainly welcome to though, but it’s not expected of you.” I could and would, in fact, use magic to make myself something to eat. I did, and often. I patted Milo gently on the

hip, and he seemed to understand and stood. I took his hand once I was standing beside him and led him out of the office, stopping at the doorway. “By the way, this is the home office. I don’t work in here often, but it’s here simply because it came with the house.” I pointed to the door that was in the far corner. “That’s a bathroom over there. It has a toilet and sink but no tub or shower.”

I led Milo out of the office and into the hallway, opening doors as I went. “This is a closet. I keep my vacuum and things of that nature in it.”

Milo looked up at me. He had that confused look on his face again.

I grinned. “What?”

“Do you actually use the vacuum? Or do you use magic to clean everything?”

I couldn’t help but laugh. He had me there. “I absolutely use magic. Just like nine times out of ten, I’ll use magic to cook. I know how to cook; I just don’t. Why would I when I can easily and quickly use magic and have hot food in seconds.”

Milo sighed. “I would love to be able to do that. I can do a few things, but I have to concentrate really hard, and I don’t think it’s supposed to be that difficult.”

“It depends,” I told him as we continued to walk through the house. “When you first start learning, yes, you have to concentrate a great deal. But once you get the hang of it, it becomes second nature, and you can do it effortlessly.” I held out my free hand, and there was suddenly a mug of hot tea in it for Milo. Milo gasped and then smiled up at me.

“Thank you. That’s so kind.” He took the mug, and after giving it a deep sniff, he sighed before he took a drink. “Oh, that’s good.”

I chuckled. “It is. Mom knows her tea, and although I like coffee and drink it more than tea, I do like me a cup of tea every now and then.”

Milo took another drink before looking up at me again. “She seemed really nice last night. But I feel bad about making your dad uncomfortable. I didn’t mean to. I just didn’t know vampires always had teeth.”

I chuckled. “He will understand, I’m sure.” I started walking again. “How about we finish the tour?”

Milo nodded, and I took him around the rest of the house, ending the tour back in the main bedroom. I’d used magic while we were walking around to send Milo’s bags to the bedroom where he could unpack them. When he saw them sitting on the foot of the bed, he hurried over to them.

“I’m glad they’re here. I didn’t remember seeing them yesterday after I brought them in.”

“I wouldn’t let anything happen to your bags, Milo.” I pointed to the dresser that was between the two windows. “The drawers on the left are empty. You are more than welcome to put your things in there.”

Milo hesitated while he looked between me and the dresser.

“What’s wrong?” I pointed to the closet door. “There’s room in the closet to hang up your things as well.”

“That’s not it. I just don’t have that many things. I don’t think I’ll need all of that space.”

“Well, we’ll have to get you more things, then. You’ll quickly discover that in the summer, you’re going to want thinner clothing. It can get incredibly warm here. And in the winter, if we’re out for a day of errands or something, layers might be what you’ll need. Especially since you don’t like the cold.” I remembered my first winter here two years ago. I had, of course, been around cold weather before, but it was different here. Especially with the amount of snow that they got.

“All right,” Milo said. He unzipped the suitcase and opened it. It wasn’t overly large, but it did seem to be packed fairly full. He lifted a few pieces of neatly folded clothing and

set them to the side. When he did, I saw the picture he'd mentioned before.

"Is that them? Your dads?" I asked.

"Yes." He picked up the picture and held it out so I could see it.

I glanced at the image, then at my mate before looking back at the picture. "You look like both of them, but I'd say you favor the one on the right." I pointed to the shorter guy who was standing on the right.

"That's Elwyn, my omega dad. The taller guy is Leo."

I wrapped my arm around Milo's shoulder and pulled him closer to me. "If you want it out in the house, I have just the perfect spot for it."

Milo looked up at me. "You'd be all right with that?"

"Absolutely. Come with me." I reached for Milo's hand and pulled him from the bedroom when he took mine. I led him to the living room, where I had several framed pictures on one of the bookshelves that were on either side of the fireplace. "You can put it wherever here. Then your dads can be with the pictures of my family."

Milo moved closer and set his picture down on a waist-high shelf. He reached out and touched an image of me with my siblings.

"Those are my siblings. That picture is—oh, let's see." I had to think for a bit. "I'd say at least twenty years old."

"Really? That long?"

I nodded. I picked up the picture and held it close. "Yeah. We were back together in France for who knows what. Mom wanted us to take a picture for her though, so we did." I pointed to my brothers. "That's Garic and Matteo. Matteo is on the left." I indicated which brother was which.

"Are they twins?"

"No. They could pass for it though, but they're not. Evelyn is the one with the lighter-colored hair, and Victoria is the one

with dark hair. Hers is curly, like Mom's and mine, but she straightens it."

"You and your siblings look so happy."

"We were. Still are, as far as I know." I felt a stab of pain for my mate. He'd not had the experience of growing up with siblings, nor had he had any love of any sort. Nobody should be raised like that. I hoped that my family and I could change that for him going forward.

"Will I get to meet them?"

"My brothers, absolutely. My sisters are both still in Europe though. We can figure out schedules and go visit sometime though. I'd love to show you around all of the places I grew up." There hadn't been too many. There was the coven when we were little, but then Dad took us to France, and we spent the rest of our formative years there. We didn't belong to any coven or other organized paranormal group. We lived among the humans, and honestly, we'd fit in really well. Sure, we had to move frequently because we just didn't age beyond early forties, and even now, it was only our parents who looked to be in their forties. The rest of us still looked like we were in our twenties.

"I would like that. I want to find work too. I want to contribute to things."

I looked down at Milo, and my first instinct was to argue, but I didn't. He was still trying to adjust to all of the changes, and maybe that was the angle I could spin it.

I gently took the mug from Milo, and when I saw it was empty, I sent it to the sink. Then I took both of Milo's hands in mine and led him over to the couch, where we'd spent time cuddling yesterday evening. We sat, and I grinned when Milo didn't pull his hands from mine.

"About that," I said. "It's not that I don't want you to work. If you really want to, I won't stop you."

Milo grinned.

"But I would like to ask that you hold off on working," I added. "At least for a little while. I want you to be able to

focus on learning to read and working on your magic.”

“But I’m going to be an extra mouth to feed. Even last evening, you paid for my meal at the restaurant.”

I nodded. “Yes, but you should remember that I’m old. Ancient even,” I joked. “I’ve had a lot of time to work on saving up, and I won’t have any struggle with paying for the two of us ever. I didn’t always use to be a park ranger. When we lived in Europe, I worked in the finance field. I saved a lot because I didn’t really have a lot of needs.” I shrugged. “That somewhat goes with the whole magical-being thing.”

Milo glanced around for a moment before slowly nodding. “I just don’t want to burden you.”

“You aren’t a burden, Milo. You needed a mate that could and would provide for you. I’m that person. I know we got off on the wrong foot, and I hope to eventually fix that. But I want to take care of you. I wish to spoil you and give you all of the things you’ve never had.” I thought about it for a moment and shook my head. “I can’t give you your dads back. I wish I could, but I can’t. But I can offer you my family. My parents are more than ready to accept you into our little family. If you want us.”

Milo stared at me, a serious look on his face. The concentration slowly morphed into a smile, and he reached up, touching me on the side of my neck. “I want that. If you’re sure you want me as your mate and can accept me as I am—somewhat broken—I’d like to be yours and belong to your family.”

The amount of relief I suddenly felt couldn’t be explained. Perhaps I truly thought that Milo would actually reject me. The fact that he was accepting me and our mating was such a relief. I couldn’t wait any longer, and I reached up, cupping his cheeks as I slowly lowered my face down to his. Milo closed his eyes as I got closer, and when I finally touched my lips to his for the first time, it sent a tiny jolt of zing through my body, starting at my lips where his and mine met and racing through my entire body down to my toes.

CHAPTER 10

MILO



I was finally getting my first kiss, and it was truly amazing. The tingling that had been going through my body since I first met Connor yesterday seemed to center on my lips, but then I noticed it start to travel down my body. Was this how things happened? I had no clue, but I wasn't complaining. When Connor's hand moved around my neck and to the base of my head, I moaned when his lips moved against mine. His lips moved again, this time opening a bit, and then I felt something else. Something warm and wet. I gasped and pulled away. I stared up at Connor, who looked as if he had been slapped.

"I'm sorry. I apologize. I shouldn't have tried that just yet. It's new, and I had no right to take things that far." Connor stood up and moved away from me, standing several feet away.

I tilted my head, completely confused. "What are you talking about? And why are you over there?"

Connor stopped where he was, his shoulders slumping. "I thought you were upset with me? I tried to deepen the kiss before you were ready."

I patted the couch beside me. "Actually, I gasped because it was a completely new feeling, and I was enjoying it. There was a lot more tingling, and this time, it went to new places." I wasn't sure he needed to know where exactly was tingling, but then again, maybe he was there as well? Thankfully, Connor came back to the couch and sat beside me again.

“You weren’t upset? Or irritated?”

I shook my head. “No. Look, I get it that you’re trying to not push, and I know absolutely nothing about this.” I sighed, frustrated that I hadn’t had the opportunity to attend classes for anything. I wanted to understand and be able to not only please Connor but to initiate things. Sadly, I couldn’t.

“That is of no fault of your own,” Connor told me.

“I know. I wish I knew more about everything. I really do. But I don’t. But I want to be with you. You were picked for me, and although you say you didn’t want a fae mate...” I shrugged. “We were paired, so we don’t have too much of a choice. You’re kind, and you’ve shown me more acceptance and care than I’ve ever had my entire life. I know that might not mean much to some, but it means everything to me.”

“Do you know what you’re asking for?”

I looked at Connor like he didn’t know what I was. “I’m asking you to show me how to show affection. I’m asking you to claim me because as far as I’m concerned, we’re going to sooner or later, and despite everything, even I know what a mate bond is and how it affects us. Maybe it’ll help with some of my issues.” I shrugged and gave him a look. “Maybe not. But we won’t know until we try. I just want you to go ahead and stop being so worried around me. I know what I’m asking for, and I want you to claim me.”

Would that work? Would he be willing to claim me? If we were in the fae realm, I knew that we would already have claimed each other. Even I knew that. I’d heard my grandparents talking about it often enough. That’s how fae worked, they’d say. They met their mate, and that was it. They spent the rest of their lives together.

“Are you sure? There’s no going back if we claim each other.”

“But there’s no going forward if we don’t, is there? This is how mates work? We’re matched, and we claim each other and then figure things out.” In all honesty, I just wanted to be wanted. If Connor, who was my fated mate, didn’t want me, I

wasn't sure where to go from there. How did one recover from rejection like that?

"I am more than willing to take you upstairs and claim you if you are sure that is what you want."

I grinned and stood up. "Then why are we still down here?"

I started walking toward the stairs, wondering how long it would take Connor to follow. I got my answer seconds later when I heard him coming up behind me. He completely surprised me by picking me up, and I suddenly found myself tossed over his shoulder. I squealed as Connor rushed up the stairs. I was given a great view of his backside, and although I had thought about grabbing it, I couldn't because I was too busy holding on to his waist.

"What are you doing?" I asked while laughing.

"Claiming my mate," Connor said. He hurried down the little hallway, and then we were back in the somewhat familiar bedroom. It had an amazingly comfortable bed in it, and I certainly wasn't going to complain about spending more time in it with Connor. This time though, we most definitely wouldn't be sleeping.

I felt both of us flying through the air, and then suddenly, I was lying on the bed sideways, and Connor was somehow lying beside me. "Tell me if anything I do makes you uncomfortable, all right? No matter what it is, I need to know if I do something you don't like or if it feels wrong for you. No matter how insignificant it might seem, until I claim you, I can't know what you're feeling."

"All right."

"Good." Connor grinned before he leaned down and kissed me again. This time, when his lips moved against mine and I felt something other than his lips, I didn't gasp. No, I opened my mouth, and then I felt his tongue gently touch mine. It caused intense tingles, and I couldn't withhold my moan. It was a new feeling, one that was welcome, and I hoped I would feel over and over.

Connor's hand moved up to the other side of my face, and I felt his fingers trail down my cheek. He tilted his head to the side, our new position seeming to be the perfect one because he deepened the kiss even more.

I felt completely helpless, but I was enjoying everything he was doing with me. It made my body tingle in new ways, and certain parts definitely noticed. I was a bit unsure about that until Connor moved his hips closer to me, his equally hard, certain part pressing against my thigh.

I gasped and turned my head to the side, trying to catch my breath at what that meant. That was how it worked, right? We were going to claim each other now? Connor didn't miss an opportunity. His lips moved to my jaw and then my neck, where he gently nibbled on it. I moaned again, this time slapping my hand down on the bed and grabbing ahold of the blanket below me.

"Still good?" Connor whispered in between kissing and nibbling on my neck.

"I feel like I'm about to explode, Connor. My body is tingling everywhere, but it's really intense in my middle."

Connor lifted his head and grinned down at me. When I met his gaze, I saw something I couldn't quite describe.

"That's normal, Milo. And it will only get better the longer we are together. You and I will learn what each other likes most, and when we make love, it will become even more explosive. But I can definitely help with all of those feelings right now. I can take the edge off for you. Does that sound like something you'd want?"

Did I? Absolutely. I could only nod my head. My body was feeling things I never could have imagined, and although there had definitely been somewhat close sensations when I'd had a fertile period, those had been nothing like what I was experiencing now.

"Milo? I need to hear your answer. Please?"

"Yes," I whispered. "I want that."

That was all Connor seemed to need to hear from me because he moved in a flash, and I suddenly found myself half-naked. My pants, which Connor had given me yesterday evening, were gone, and my top was pushed up my torso. Connor's lips were on my chest, and when he growled, my shirt was gone seconds later. I found myself completely naked on the bed with my mate, who was fully clothed.

Connor grinned up at me, then winked before his lips lowered to my chest again. He quickly kissed my bud, making it go from hard to painfully hard. My hands moved to his head, and I held on and gasped when I felt his tongue flick out at it. He did it again and again, my body reacting each time, and other parts of me twitched.

I found it difficult to catch my breath and sighed in relief when Connor left my chest. When he moved down my body though, there was no way I could have ever been prepared for what he was about to do.

I gasped loudly when his hot, wet mouth covered my member. "Oh," I called out when his mouth moved down it, and as Connor's hand moved along my leg, I closed my eyes tightly.

Suction encircled me, and I seemed to forget how to breathe. I held on to my mate's hair, wondering if I was going to survive what he was doing to me. The tingling increased and then would back off, seeming to come and go in waves.

I felt Connor's hand move again, this time touching me lower, and I knew exactly what he was doing. I opened my legs as much as I could, hoping to position myself to where he could get to me. He sucked hard on me, his mouth moving up and down me.

"Connor," I panted. "Hmph." I tried to catch my breath. The feelings running through me were too much. They were painful one second and then seemed to turn to pleasure. I couldn't understand it. "Conn..." I moaned out when my body had a sudden wave of intense feeling wash through it. I yanked on his hair and called out as my body finally exploded, the room suddenly awash with bright light as my body pulsed over

and over. I could feel nothing but intense pleasure for a moment before it suddenly died down, and my body was then feeling so much more relaxed.

I came back to being somewhat coherent and realized I still had a tight grip on Connor's hair. I let go, feeling terrible about yanking on my mate's hair so hard.

"That was quite the orgasm," Connor said quietly. He lifted up a little, looking at me with a huge grin on his face. "In fact, I'd say you definitely needed that."

I could only look at him through a completely relaxed feeling. "I yanked your hair."

Connor chuckled. "You did more than that, but we'll talk about all of that another time. Can you feel me at all?"

I tried to understand what he was talking about, but my body felt nothing but complete relaxation.

"I feel like my body is limp. Like I couldn't move even if I needed to."

"I'm not sure, Milo, but you are incredibly wet. I don't know if you're going into your fertile period already or if you're going to be really easy to prep." Connor sat up more, moving onto his knees, and then when he moved his hand, I felt what he was talking about.

I gasped when he pulled his hand away and I could see it shining. "Is that..." I stared at his hand as he wrapped it around his dick. My eyes widened. When did he get naked, and why was his so much bigger than mine? "That's my slick?"

"It is, and you were incredibly..." Connor tilted his head up and sighed as he ran his hand down his cock. "Gah, I want to come so bad. But I need to claim you. But I'm afraid I'll last all of five seconds."

I sat up a little, my gaze transfixed on Connor's hand as it moved up and down his shaft. When he got to the tip, he squeezed it tighter before he opened his hand a little and moved it down to the base.

“Can I see?” I asked. I moved my eyes from his hand where he was stroking himself up to his face. When Connor looked down at me, his mouth was open, and he was breathing heavily. “Can I see you?”

“Do you want me to come? But what about claiming?”

I glanced back down at Connor’s dick. It was deep red, and it looked like it was painful. “But you said you wanted to come. We can claim later? I know you have to be in me to claim me, but you just brought me relief. Can I do that for you?” I put my weight on one elbow and reached out hesitantly. Connor let go of his cock and grabbed my hand, wrapping it around him quickly.

“Please, Milo. I just need a few strokes, and then I’ll be able to give you a proper claiming.”

I felt the heat from Connor’s cock and found it not unlike my own. His was thicker and longer though, and I found that I liked the feel of it in my hand. Connor moaned when I moved to the head and gave it a gentle squeeze.

“Oh fates, I’m gonna...” Connor panted, and that was really all of the warning I got before I felt him swell in my hand, and then he groaned loudly as his cock pulsed as he orgasmed. String after string of warm, white liquid hit me on my chest and stomach. One was so strong it hit my shoulder. Connor groaned over and over as his body found its own release.

I watched, fascinated, as my mate found his own release. He looked so intense with his head thrown back and his breathing coming in heavy pants. Had I looked like that? Would Connor always be so amazing looking when he orgasmed?

His hand tightened on mine, stopping my movement. I understood immediately, but when I tried to open my hand to remove it, he kept it wrapped around him for one more stroke, this one seemingly painfully tight. One last little bit came out of the end, and then Connor’s hand fell away.

I let mine drop as well, and then I fell back onto the bed. I felt completely wrung out, my body seemingly ready for a nap. I'd, of course, had orgasms before, but never one as intense as this one.

“Are you too tired to go another round?” Connor asked as his body suddenly covered mine. We were both completely naked, and the feel of his body against mine caused a sudden renewal in desire.

“I thought you were finished?”

“Only just getting started,” Connor said. His mouth covered mine again, and this time, I knew what to expect, and I tried to kiss him just as he'd been kissing me. This time though, I could taste my own release on Connor's tongue. I found it wasn't completely unpleasant, and I suddenly had the urge to do the same to him. Would he let me? Would that be something he would enjoy?

Connor continued to kiss me, but his lips moved across my cheek to my ear. I giggled when he did, Connor immediately stopping and lifting up to look down at me. I took a deep breath to try and get the smile off of my face, but when he grinned at me, I stopped trying to hide it.

“A ticklish spot, huh?”

“Yes. Down on the neck was fine earlier. But my ears are very sensitive and ticklish.”

Connor grinned, winked, and then moved in for my neck. I tilted my head back, letting him have all of the room he needed. He nibbled on my neck, causing another spike in desire. My own dick, which had gone soft, hardened back up. I wasn't sure if that was normal, but I wasn't going to stop Connor to ask.

“Are you ready?” Connor asked. He pushed up, and I got another very good view of his amazing body. He was slender like I was, but he was taller and obviously a little bigger in all places.

“I'm ready,” I told him.

Connor nodded, then crawled closer until he reached down and grabbed the backs of my legs. He lifted me effortlessly, and when my legs were lying across his, he pulled me close enough that I could feel all of him next to me. I inhaled sharply, anticipation causing me to shake.

“Relax. I won’t hurt you. Trust me when I say that your body seems more than ready to accept me.”

I nodded because I couldn’t seem to do more. Connor placed his dick at my entrance, and although I felt him there, I didn’t feel any pain. When he reached up and grabbed my hip with one hand, I felt him pull me closer to him while it seemed as if his hips pressed forward.

I felt a little bit of pressure, and then I felt more. My eyes widened when I realized what it was. Connor had entered me. It was only just a bit right now, but he was biting his lower lip and breathing heavily.

“Are you all right?” I asked quietly.

Connor took a deep breath and let it out before he opened his eyes and looked down at me. “I should be the one asking you that. I’m amazing, and I’m glad you suggested I come before now. There is no way I would have made it any further than I am now.”

“I’m all right,” I said. “You can move. There is more, right?” There should be more. I knew there was more. Wasn’t there?

“Oh, my sweet, innocent mate. There is so much more. Trust me when I say I’m about to send you soaring.”

Connor grabbed my hips with both hands now and slowly moved me. I noticed that as he did, he was filling me, and it wasn’t an unpleasant feeling at all. I watched his body, and when he moved his hips away from me, he would then press them closer. It was on the fourth push that he hit something inside me, and I shouted as my body felt a powerful zing go through me.

“There it is,” Connor said quietly. He moved a few more times until he couldn’t any longer and I had to close my eyes.

The feelings going through me were indescribable. My body accepted Connor's easily, and when I felt his hips touching my body, I felt completely full and ready to explode again.

"I never imagined it could be like this," Connor whispered. He moved his hands upward, sliding them under my back. When he lifted me, I gasped as I reached for his shoulders. "So perfect."

I found myself slowly lowered back down to the bed, and once Connor was covering me, his arms still wrapped around my shoulders underneath, he started moving his hips. I moaned when he pushed back in, hitting that spot inside that was absolutely something I wanted to explore again.

I felt my body flush hot with desire as well as heat, and if I wasn't so overwhelmed with my mate, I would have realized what was happening to me.

"I'm not going to last, Milo. I'll go again and again to make it up to you," Connor grunted, his hips stopping and then starting again. "But your body is squeezing me perfectly, and you're so wet and tight."

My entire body was tingling with need, and I felt the waves moving through me again, much like a musical building. I slid my hands down Connor's sides, grabbing his waist and pulling on him harder. If he would just push a little more forcefully, I was sure I could be pushed over again.

"More," I finally said, getting frustrated when he kept up his slower pace.

"You sure?"

Connor pushed his upper body away a little, peering down at me. I wasn't sure what he saw, but he looked at me with concern on his face.

"I'll take care of you," he said. "Always."

Connor moved back over me, his hips steadily picking up pace, and when I felt like I was going to scream in frustration because my body couldn't quite seem to go over the edge after several minutes, Connor suddenly groaned loudly. His hips

pushed forward and held, and then I felt a sharp pain on my neck right where my shoulder was.

That was all it took for me to scream, and then my body felt like it was floating. I vaguely remembered Connor pressing my face into his shoulder, and when he told me to bite, I did. I tasted blood seconds before my body short-circuited, and I passed out in bliss and exhaustion.

CHAPTER II

CONNOR



I should have realized that Milo was going into his fertile period. I wasn't really expecting it until after we'd claimed each other though. But we'd spent the night before we claimed each other in bed, holding each other for an extended time. I had no experience with fertile periods, or even recognizing the early signs of them. I had two vampires for brothers and vampires, like warlocks, don't present as alpha or omega until they find their mates. The girls didn't really count because much like human females, they had menstrual periods regularly.

But right before I claimed Milo and he looked up at me with flushed cheeks and glassy eyes, I knew then that the heat and extra slick I'd felt from before was exactly that. The rest of that day went by in mostly a blur. The next, although still filled with need that Milo couldn't control, Milo had started to sleep for longer periods in between rounds. When he passed out and didn't move last night, I lay down beside him after using magic to clean both of us.

I expected Milo to wake within an hour or two, but when I woke several hours later, the sun shining through the edges of the blinds, I realized that his fertile period had ended. It only lasted two days, something I was actually thankful for.

I lay in bed for a few minutes, waking up and taking in the room. I was mated now. I'd claimed Milo, and he'd claimed me. I reached up, touching the bite that was on my collarbone, and grinned. My adorable little mate was so short he couldn't

quite reach my shoulder. I didn't mind it being where it was. It meant everything to me that he'd claimed me when I'd asked.

I glanced to my right, seeing that Milo was still very much asleep. He was so damn precious. I wanted to hurt his grandparents for how much they'd hurt and abused him. He was lying on his stomach, his face squished into the pillow and his mouth slightly open.

I could feel our bond on my side, and when I reached out toward him, he moved his head slightly, but that was it. His memories were there, and it hurt to see them. It made me only that much more upset with the people that should love him. They were too selfish to see that Milo was the last piece of their son that they had. Yet, instead of accepting and loving him for that, they'd abused him.

I knew thinking about it was only going to make me even more upset, so I slid from the bed. My first stop was the bathroom. I needed to take care of my bladder at a minimum. While dealing with natural needs, I decided to take a long, hot shower. I'd used magic to clean us, but it wasn't the same as standing under hot water. It just felt different and had wonderful effects on not only the body but the mental headspace.

I flushed, and after starting the shower with magic, I washed my hands and then brushed my teeth. I needed to take care of not only my mate but other things today.

When I entered the shower, I sighed at the sensation when the hot water ran down my head and then body. It felt amazing. I was a bit sore, but nothing too serious. A little bit of magic in certain areas would help, but I also knew that by the end of the day, I wouldn't feel anything any longer. I didn't heal quite as fast as shifters did, but we had magical powers that could heal things in a hurry.

I stood under the spray for several minutes, letting my mind and body relax. But soon enough, I felt the need to see to Milo and find out what all I could about his grandparents. There was also the question of his magic. I didn't expect him to wake and be able to completely use his magic, but it was

certainly there. Milo's body had burst with magic on more than one occasion when I was claiming him. I was thankful that I'd been quick enough to keep it from causing harm to either of us. Milo had magic; he just needed to figure out how to control it.

I washed my hair and, after I rinsed it, added the conditioner before I started scrubbing my body. It was already clean, but it felt good to move over my skin with a soapy cloth. Once I was sure everywhere was clean, I rinsed the cloth before I stood under the spray again. I started rinsing the conditioner from my hair before I moved around and let the spray wash away the soap on my body.

I stood there for another minute when finished and then gave in and turned the water off. I needed to get started with my day, and I wasn't going to be able to do that from in the shower. I opened the door, grabbed the towel from the rack, and stepped out of the shower while rubbing the towel over my head. I towel-dried my hair and then body before hanging the towel on the rack again.

I finished my routine and then went to the bedroom. A little magic was all it took to be fully dressed in jeans and a thick sweater. Socks on my feet were all I needed at the moment, and after peeking at Milo once more over my shoulder, I left our bedroom. I grinned at that thought. It was now our bedroom. Just like this was our house. We would make our lives together here. Well, until Milo decided he wanted to move elsewhere.

I went to the kitchen and poured myself a mug of hot coffee and then realized I'd not made coffee. I pushed out with magic, getting a response from the back room. Immediately on alert, I moved that way.

"I would never harm you or your mate."

I knew that voice. "Master Edison?" I entered the back room and found the created warlock standing at the back door, staring outside.

"There is a rather large bull moose out back at the moment. If you'd thought of going outside, I'd recommend waiting."

I moved up beside Master Edison and grinned. “Yeah, I’m not sure he’s the same one, but I have a lot of moose out here.” I stared at the moose for a moment before looking over at Master Edison. “Thank you for the coffee. How did you know?”

Master Edison looked my way and smiled. I became concerned when it wasn’t a happy-looking smile.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing like you are probably thinking. To answer your question, I knew because Primrose told me I needed to be here today at this time.”

Who was Primrose?

“Milo is perfectly fine as far as I’m aware. But I’ve come with information about his grandparents.”

My mood changed in an instant. “Unless you’re going to tell me that they’re going to be punished for everything they’ve done to Milo, I’m not overly interested.

“Oh, they’re going to be punished. Milo and his grandparents are also the reason things will be changed a bit in the fae realm.”

“How so?”

“Most likely, he isn’t the only fae that was mistreated the way he was. There are most certainly more, and the fates are working with the goddess to figure out how things will be monitored there. They were supposed to have their own created one, at one point they did, but things didn’t exactly work out with him.”

I knew that story. I’d heard it from not only my mom but others once I’d moved closer to the council.

“May I ask what’s going to happen with his grandparents?”

“They’ll be punished. His situation is a bit of a gray area, unfortunately. Technically, they didn’t cause him physical abuse. Mental, yes, but he is going to recover. They will be stripped of their magical powers and will be sent to the

paranormal holding facility that we have created. It has been moved and is smack in the center of Alpha Sergei's lands."

"Do I wish to know? And how do we know they've not physically hurt him? They mentally abused him for his entire life. They withheld schooling. He can't read or do numbers. He knows nothing of history or what a lot of things are." I was getting frustrated, and I needed to remember that the created warlock wasn't the one who'd caused Milo's mistreatment.

"I have a meeting later this afternoon with the goddess. I'll talk to her about Milo and see if she can do anything to help him. We have been hoping for a meeting with her for quite some time. There is a lot to discuss. I'll be sure to bring it up to her though. It is not fair that Milo should continue to suffer because of his grandparents."

I dropped my head. "Thank you, Master Edison. I appreciate it more than you can know." I shook my head. "It's not that I think less of him for those things. But he doesn't deserve to have such pain from something he had no control over."

Master Edison nodded several times. "I agree. I will talk to her about it this afternoon. There is much to discuss, and the fae and their realm are only a small part of it. But we will be talking to her about what's going on there."

"I cannot thank you enough." I was still curious about his grandparents though. "About his grandparents," I said.

Master Edison gave me his full attention. "What of them? They've been sent to the holding facility. They will have nothing but time to think about how they've wronged their grandson."

"I understand."

"Did you wish for more?"

I thought about it for a moment and shrugged. I couldn't really think of anything else. I wanted them to pay, but would killing them be the answer? Would making them suffer be the better course of action? I was no expert. I certainly wasn't the one to decide what punishment fit their crimes.

“If you’d like, I can keep you updated about how they’re responding to their sentence.”

I shook my head. “I don’t need to know. I can’t speak for Milo though. It’s possible he would like to know, but I’m not sure.”

Master Edison grinned. “Your young mate will be waking soon. You should feed him a large breakfast. Thomas had mentioned he seemed to enjoy breakfast sausage patties as well as scrambled eggs and pancakes.”

“Thank you. I’ll be sure to offer those and more. Things happened fast with us, but I’m not upset in any way.”

“That is reassuring to hear. Take good care of him, Connor. He more than deserves it.”

“I will.”

Master Edison nodded at me and then was simply gone. I stood there staring at the spot he’d been in before I moved away from the door. My coffee had cooled considerably, and I used magic to warm it. Then I took in the room and realized it, too, was cool. More magic had the house warming up, and I went to the kitchen to grab my phone. I needed to message my parents to let them know we were up and about and would possibly be ready for a visit in a week or two.

I found the phone with magic. It had fallen onto the floor of the living room between the couch and the coffee table. I plugged it into the wall, and after it charged, I found that I had several messages. They ranged from replies to mine to asking where I was to assuming that Milo had gone into his fertile period and they would hope for the best for us. I chuckled at my parents and their messages. They were great. I’d certainly lucked out when it came to parents.

I replied, letting them know that, yes, Milo had indeed had a fertile period take us by surprise, and we would be in contact in a week or two. We planned on spending the next couple of weeks settling into mated life.

I felt Milo waking up through our bond and couldn’t help but smile. He was going to be hungry. I know I was, and I’d

not been the one to actually have to go through the fertile period. I was simply there to take care of Milo and try to ease his need and discomfort. I wasn't sure I'd done a well enough job, but I had tried.

I set my coffee mug down and went back upstairs to be there when my mate woke. He was still asleep when I made it back to the bedroom, and when I couldn't resist my mate any longer, I crawled back into bed with him.

I grinned at his moan when I started rubbing up and down his back. After a few more minutes, a much clearer eye popped open just a bit. He gave me a sleepy smile, and I moved closer so I could lean down and kiss his bare shoulder.

“Good morning. How are you feeling?”

Milo moved enough to where he could get his hand out from under his chest and then moaned. It wasn't a good moan though, and I winced when I felt my own arm start to tingle. It wasn't actually my arm feeling the pain though. It was Milo's as his arm started to wake back up.

“I suddenly need to pee. And I really want water. Lots of water.”

I chuckled. “Well, let's get you up and to the bathroom so you can take care of the first thing. I'll make sure you have all the water you want at breakfast.” It was going to be more a brunch than breakfast at this point, but right at the moment, a good breakfast sounded perfect. I helped Milo up and out of the bed, and when his legs wouldn't quite hold him, I easily picked him up and carried him into the bathroom.

“Thank you.”

“You're welcome. But I will always help you. I'm going to set you on the toilet, and you can take care of everything you need to.”

Milo nodded, and after I had him sitting, I went to the sink that was beside mine and set his toothbrush and toothpaste out for him.

“Did you want a bath? Would you like to soak?” I asked. “And do your fertile periods always wipe you of your

energy?”

Milo sighed. “They’re not usually bad. Mine don’t always come every year though. I’m eighteen, and mine didn’t hit until I was fourteen. That’s a lot later than most omegas, from what I understand. I’ve only had two before now, so I can’t really say what happened is normal. I have no way of knowing.”

I nodded slowly at that information. It was interesting to know. “Did you wish to soak in the tub? Or just go back to bed? I can bring you breakfast in bed if you’d like.”

Milo sighed, then shook his head. “I think bed. I feel so weak, and I don’t know how long I’m going to be able to stay awake.”

I could understand that. Once Milo was finished on the toilet, I helped him to the sink, where he washed his hands and then held on to the counter to stay upright. I moved up behind him, and after I wet Milo’s toothbrush, added the paste, and then wet it again before I handed it to him. “You start brushing, and I’ll help you rinse and spit.”

Milo sighed again and gave brushing his teeth an honest effort. It quickly became obvious that he was awake only because nature called. His body wasn’t actually ready to be awake, and I wanted nothing more than to feed him and then cuddle him in bed while he slept the day away. He needed it, and I would make sure he got all of the rest his body required.

I filled a disposable cup with water and handed it to Milo in exchange for his toothbrush. Once he was finished rinsing his mouth and I his toothbrush for him, I helped him back to the bedroom by sweeping him up into my arms again. I gently placed him on the bed and covered him up. He sighed, immediately closing his eyes.

I couldn’t help but run my fingers through his hair and stare at my mate. He was so adorable. Looking at him, I was ashamed of my earlier beliefs that I wouldn’t ever wish for a fae mate. Why would I ever think that way?

I felt Milo fall back asleep through our bond and grinned. He was exactly where he needed to be. I would wait until later to feed him. Right now his body needed rest, and I wasn't going to hinder that.

I sat beside him for several minutes, just taking in his innocence and beauty before I gave in to my own grumbling stomach and left the bedroom. I would be able to sense Milo waking, and when that happened, I'd be there for him. Until then, I knew that I needed to make sure I took care of myself so I could see to my mate's needs.

It was late evening when Milo was finally awake, and we were sitting on the couch with a pair of pizza boxes on our laps. I'd taken a chance and discovered that Milo absolutely loved pizza. I'd ordered two different types, and Milo moved in on the everything-on-it pizza. Supreme pizza for my mate, it seemed.

"This is so good," Milo said in between bites. I chuckled and picked up another slice of pepperoni-and-mushroom pizza. I didn't know what Milo would want, and I liked pizza with anything but anchovies, so I had absolutely no preference.

"It is, and it might not be exactly the healthiest meal, but it was certainly easy." I studied Milo as he quickly devoured another slice of pizza. He was so engrossed in his meal and I hid from him that neither of us noticed we were no longer alone.

When Milo suddenly froze, I felt panic and fear through our bond. I tore my gaze from Milo and was about to send out a wave of magic against whatever had sent such fear into my mate but froze. I absolutely recognized Master Edison, but it was the beautiful woman standing beside him I'd never seen. I knew in an instant who she was though.

I tossed the pizza box in front of me onto the table and struggled to stand. My legs were tangled up in the blanket Milo and I were under, and of course, I was making a complete fool of myself in front of the goddess.

"Please don't hurt yourself trying to stand," she told me. My eyes widened, and I realized that I probably shouldn't

even be looking at her. Did she ever show herself to others? Especially to nobodies such as myself?

“My goddess,” I said, bowing my head deeply.

“My child,” she said in response. “I won’t keep the two of you from your meal. But it has been brought to my attention by Edison that your mate has been subjected to a severe injustice at the actions of his grandparents after the death of his fathers.”

I glanced over at Milo, who had closed his own pizza box and was trembling on the couch. I wanted nothing more than to go to him and offer whatever comfort I could.

“Yes, goddess,” I said. “Might I comfort my mate?” I asked and chanced a glance at her. “Please?”

“Of course,” she said.

Immediately, I moved the pizza box and placed it next to mine and then sat beside my mate and pulled him into my side.

“I’m here,” I told him through our bond. I’d tried it earlier, and he’d been able to not only hear me but also communicate with me through our bond. It was a huge relief, and I was incredibly thankful that I would have this connection with him. *“I’m here,”* I told him again. *“I’ll always be here for you. Just breathe and calm down if you can.”*

“I do not wish to cause you any stress, Milo,” the goddess said. She was suddenly in front of us, kneeling down to where she could meet Milo’s eyes. He refused to look up though. “I only want to help.”

I chanced a glance but quickly averted my eyes up and over to Master Edison. I found him staring at Milo with narrowed eyes.

“I do not wish to be a burden,” Milo said, barely a whisper.

“You could never be a burden,” the goddess told him. “I wish to help you with your reading and numbers. With all of your schooling, if you are willing. I’m afraid it will most likely make you tired though. Learning so much so fast can be mentally draining.”

I was...shocked. Never did I expect such a gift from our goddess.

“You honor us with such a gift,” I told her. I gave Milo’s shoulder another squeeze, hoping to encourage him. Did he not wish to have such a gift?

Milo finally raised his head, his eyes wide. “I am not deserving of your generosity,” he said.

“Nonsense,” the goddess said. “Are you saying you genuinely do not wish for my gift?”

One didn’t reject a gift from the goddess. It was common sense that you simply didn’t do that. *“Milo, cutie, you need to accept her gift. She’s going to give you the ability to read. To know all of the schooling. It’ll be put into your mind, into your memories. You don’t just go around and reject gifts from the goddess. Please?”*

Milo looked at the goddess and offered a lopsided smile. “I am honored with your gift, goddess.” He lowered his head again. “I cannot ever thank you enough. I will cherish the knowledge you are about to gift to me.”

“Oh, my child. You have suffered greatly. I only hope your life going forward is enough to make up for the injustice you’ve been subjected to.” The goddess reached out, and her hand glowed as she touched the side of Milo’s head. Seconds later, Milo slumped into my side, and the goddess was gone. I pulled Milo close and looked up, finding Master Edison still there.

“He’ll recover. Let him sleep until the morning and then see how things are.” Master Edison was gone with that, and I was left with a completely passed-out mate. I used magic to get him to our bedroom and make him comfortable. I didn’t dare leave his side. The need to remain beside him while he slept and recovered wouldn’t allow me to leave, so I made sure we were both comfortable and lay there holding him for hours while my mind raced. It finally gave in and relaxed, and I was able to fall asleep with Milo in my arms.

CHAPTER 12

MILO



I loved being pregnant. I looked down at my rounded stomach and rubbed it. I was having a baby any day now, and I couldn't wait to meet our little guy. I knew we were having a fae baby, because we were both fae, and that we were having a son. I was thrilled to be having a baby with my mate.

My pregnancy had been a breeze, according to Matteo, my mate's brother. But he had incredibly difficult pregnancies, and anything that didn't have you continually throwing up for most of your pregnancy would be easy, according to Matteo.

I smiled when the baby pushed against my hand that was rubbing my stomach. I picked up the book that Dr. King had given us to read, and I did a little happy dance that I could actually read it. The visit from the goddess shortly after Connor had claimed me was so very terrifying, but the gift she had given me was beyond generous. I had not only been given the ability to read and do math, but I had a history of fae knowledge, as well as all I needed to know about mating, puberty, and magic.

Despite the goddess's gift, I couldn't quite control my magic though. It had been discussed at length that it was possible I could be one of the fae whose magic became unpredictable when pregnant. Constance had been more than willing to teach me about magic, but after discussing it even more with Connor, we'd both agreed that it might be for the best that I wait until after the baby was born.

It was April twenty-first, and I'd been mated for two days shy of four months now, and although I loved being pregnant,

I was more than ready to meet our son. Connor had been hovering around me for the past week, and although I loved having him home with me, I was getting annoyed that I couldn't go to the bathroom without him following closely behind.

He was amazing. He was attentive, he was loving, and he saw to my absolute every need. But he had become so worried about me that I was starting to feel as if I were being suffocated.

I thumbed through the book, wondering which section I should read again. I'd read the book at least a dozen times and felt I was more than ready to welcome our little one into the world. Was I perfect? Absolutely not. But I was going to make sure my baby knew just how much he was loved and wanted.

Feeling restless, I set the book aside and scooted to the edge of the couch. It took a few attempts, but I was able to stand, and after I made sure I wasn't going to fall back down, I stepped away from the couch.

I walked to the kitchen, wondering if we had any melon to snack on. I'd discovered it when Connor brought one home, and it was safe to say it had become a pregnancy craving for me. If we didn't have any, I knew all I had to do was ask Connor, and he'd use magic to refill my stash, but I hated to ask that of him. It was so fascinating to watch him effortlessly do things, but I still felt as if I were asking too much of my mate at times.

I'd come to him with very little. And until Connor, I'd never known what it felt like to be wanted. Connor showed me every day how much he not only wanted me but loved me. Yes, loved. He'd told me early on, and I felt terrible that it had taken me another week to say those words back to him. I truly did love my mate, but I hadn't ever experienced it and didn't know what my emotions were. As soon as I understood them, I told Connor, and we spent the afternoon cuddling on the couch before we made love for hours that evening. It was then that I realized that he'd been showing and telling me that he loved me for some time in his actions and when he made love to me.

It was such an incredible feeling to know that someone as amazing as Connor loved me.

I opened the fridge and found it devoid of any sort of melon at all and sighed in frustration. I turned and was just about to call out to Connor when I felt a sharp pain in the center of my stomach and then a gush of warm fluid running down my legs. I looked down at my stomach and shook my head.

“You really had to come now? You couldn’t wait for me to ask your daddy for some melon first?” I asked our son. I wasn’t actually upset that he’d decided that it was time to make an appearance.

“Milo? Are you all right? I felt a dull pain in my stomach, and I want to be sure you are well.”

I loved that we were able to communicate through our bond so easily. Even before the goddess had blessed me with her gift, I’d been able to hear and talk to Connor through our bond. That was something I was relieved about since I had been worried it might take me some time to figure out how to open our bond, but that hadn’t been the case.

“I’m in the kitchen, and I’ve made a mess all over the floor,” I told him. *“I was looking for melon, but it seems we are out.”*

“I can get you more melon. I put the last we had in your bowl on your breakfast tray.”

I felt another sharp pain and grabbed my stomach.

“The melon might need to wait. Can you call Dr. King? I think our son has decided it’s time for us to meet him now.”

I took a deep breath to try and get through the pain. It was so sudden because I was at my due date, yet my omega line hadn’t started to open even the slightest. Connor had been checking it several times a day for the past week, and it still was just red.

There was a loud noise in the house, and then I heard Connor running. I smiled at my mate. I’d had a feeling he was

going to be one of those mates who was overly frazzled when it came time to have the baby.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were in labor?” Connor asked as he hurried over the last bit of distance to me. He stopped short when he saw I was standing in a puddle on the floor.

“I wasn’t, as far as I knew. I wanted melon, came to look for it, and then there was a sharp pain in my stomach and then a mess.” I pointed down to the floor.

“All right. Let me get you cleaned up, comfortable, and then I’ll call Dr. King.”

The mess was suddenly gone, my pants and myself not only felt dry but clean, and then Connor swept me up into his arms and carried me through the house and up to our room. I could only grin at my mate, loving the fact that he was so attentive and always ready to take care of me.

“You seem incredibly calm for someone whose water just broke and is now in labor.”

I laughed. “Well, that’s because I don’t feel too terrible. Sure, there’s a pain that comes and goes, right in the center of my stomach, but you’re here, so I don’t think I have to worry about too much.”

“I do try.” Connor gently set me on our bed and then stood. “Do you need anything?”

“You mean besides you? And maybe some melon after I push our baby out?”

Connor chuckled. “Understood. I’ll give Dr. King a call.”

I sighed when another pain hit. They were getting stronger, which let me know that it was definitely getting closer to time to have our baby.

Connor was instantly beside me, taking my hand and, with his other, gently rubbing my stomach. After the contraction passed, Connor rubbed my stomach for another minute before he let his hand rest on my stomach. I placed my free hand on top of his and smiled at my mate.

“Are you ready to be a daddy?”

Connor offered a goofy smile. “More than. Especially since it’s with you.”

I tried to turn to my side, but another contraction hit, and I couldn’t keep from moaning that time. Connor went back to rubbing my stomach with his one hand but let go of my other. I was going to protest when I saw that he’d used magic to get his phone to him. He touched the screen a few times and then set the phone down on the bed beside me. It rang three times before the doctor’s voice picked up.

“Good morning. I have to assume that with the week we are in that you are calling with regards to Milo. How is he doing?”

“Hello, Dr. King,” I moaned out.

“Good morning,” Connor said. “Milo’s water broke not long ago, and his contractions are coming quickly and getting stronger.”

“Was he not having contractions before now?”

Connor looked at me, and I shook my head. It was all I felt as if I could handle with my current contraction taking over my body.

“He says no. I’ve not felt anything through our bond until this morning.”

“Very well. That seems to be the way of it this season. I’ll be there in just a few moments. Please don’t throw a magical ball at me when I enter the house.”

“I won’t,” Connor said. The call ended, and Connor put the phone up on the bedside table.

“Have you thrown a magic ball at him in the past?” I asked, confused.

“Not that I can remember. But it’s possible that someone else did.”

“Hello?” we heard Dr. King call out from downstairs.

“Be right back, sweetheart,” Connor said before he stood and left the bedroom.

I closed my eyes as another contraction hit again. This time, without Connor here to help soothe it, I noticed it was more painful. Of course, that could just be that the contractions were getting stronger, as would be expected. I heard Connor and Dr. King coming down the hallway as the contraction calmed.

I looked up at my mate and the warlock doctor who had been seeing to my care during my pregnancy.

“Good morning, Milo. Are you ready to have your baby?”

“Hi, Dr. King. I might be. But right now, I’m just trying to breathe through the contractions. Are they supposed to hurt this much?”

I moaned when another hit. I hissed when it was accompanied by a sharp, burning pain. According to the book that Dr. King had given us, the burning sensation was supposed to signify my omega line opening. But shouldn’t it already be open? My water broke. I was having painful contractions.

“Let’s take a look, shall we?” Dr. King asked, setting a bag down at the foot of the bed. I moaned but nodded.

When I moved my hands away from my stomach, Connor called out. “He’s bleeding. What’s wrong?”

“Calm down,” Dr. King said. “Let me take a look and see if something is amiss.”

Dr. King bent down and carefully pulled my shirt up and then my pants down. I could feel the wetness leaking from me when he did and cringed at the sensation.

“He is fine. The blood is from the omega line. It looks as if it’s torn.” Dr. King looked over at Connor. “Has it opened at all before now?”

“No.” Connor moved to my shoulder and reached for my hand. “When I checked it a few hours ago when we got up, it was red but still very much closed. Is he all right? Will it heal?”

“Yes to both questions. In fact, with just a little bit of magic, it’ll heal and be completely sealed as if it hadn’t opened. But let’s get the baby delivered first.”

“Yes. That.” I held on to Connor’s hand as tightly as I could when another contraction hit, this one stronger than the last. I wondered just how painful they would become before I finally delivered our son.

“Milo, would you like for me to ease the pain?” Dr. King asked.

“Yes,” I said without hesitation. I’d read all about labor and delivery in the book, and yep, I absolutely did not like pain and wanted the doctor to help with that. I’d talked to both Matteo and Luc, and I definitely wanted that wonderful floating feeling. I’d gotten to know Connor’s brothers and their beloveds since we’d mated, and both Matteo and Luc had been incredibly helpful and open with answering all sorts of questions I had about pregnancy and, of course, the labor and delivery. They were both vampires, and Luc was as well, and therefore didn’t have an omega line, so there was a little bit of difference between our deliveries, but it was still very similar.

“All right. Time for that floating feeling,” Dr. King said. He held his hand over my stomach, and when it started glowing green, I immediately felt relief and sighed.

“Oh, there that is. Matteo talked about this,” I said. I felt incredibly relaxed and could finally focus on something other than how painful the contractions had become.

“That is what we like to hear. We want you to not have a negative experience when it comes to labor and especially not delivery.”

I nodded. “What now?”

“Now, we let you relax for a few moments, and then I’ll back the blocker off a little, just enough so you can feel the contractions happening, and then you start pushing.”

I took a deep breath. I could do that. This was what omegas had been doing forever. I could bring our little guy into the world.

“Do you need anything?” Connor asked. He’d sat down and was leaning close, running his fingers through my hair.

“Not right now. I might want some pizza later,” I told him. “And then melon. I didn’t get my melon because my water broke.”

Connor chuckled. “Anything you want, sweetheart.”

I took another deep breath and was finally starting to feel my energy return. When I felt like I was ready, I looked down the bed to where Dr. King was standing and nodded. “I’m ready. I feel like my energy has returned enough to push. Now, I might be wrong once I start pushing, but I’m going to try.”

Dr. King chuckled. “We do this on your timeline, Milo. Unless there are complications, we go at your pace.”

“Is anything wrong?” Connor asked, worry in his voice.

“Not that I can see, no. We will have to wait until Milo starts pushing. There is a head just out of reach in the omega line opening though, so that is a positive. If there are any issues that arise, I’ll take the baby and then see to Milo.”

Connor’s body was on edge. I reached out and touched his arm, hoping he’d refocus on me and stop worrying. I knew why, but we were in a different place.

“Connor?”

My mate finally looked back at me and moved closer. “I’m here.”

“I know. It’ll be all right,” I told him.

“We can’t know, Milo. We don’t know why your dad died in childbirth. Not beyond there were complications. What type? Why couldn’t he be saved? I don’t want that same fate for you.”

Connor leaned down and kissed my forehead as he gave my hand a squeeze.

“I don’t either. But Dr. King knows what he’s doing. He’s delivered a lot of babies,” I said before I looked to the doctor. “Right? You’ve delivered a lot of babies?”

Dr. King chuckled. “I actually have several other pregnant omegas I’m on call for at the moment. There seems to have been a mating and baby boom in recent months.”

I nodded and looked to Connor. “See? He’s delivered babies. He’ll make sure I’m all right.” I needed Connor to understand I would be all right. I understood there was always a possibility that I would have a complication, but I trusted that Dr. King would keep me safe. He’d been a doctor for a very long time, and he was a powerful warlock. “I’m ready,” I told the doctor.

“Very well, then. I’ll back the blocker off a bit, and you’ll start to feel the tightening of your stomach. When you do, crunch yourself up and push really hard.”

I nodded, letting him know I understood. I felt exactly when he lifted the blocker some. I was apparently in the middle of a contraction, and although it wasn’t painful, it was uncomfortable. I waited, wondering when the next one would hit.

I didn’t have to wait long because just seconds later, I felt my stomach start to tighten again. I crunched myself up and started to push. Connor rushed to put his arm behind my back. “We’re doing this now?”

“Your mate is, yes. His contractions are almost on top of each other, and he’s doing wonderfully,” Dr. King said. “Milo,” he said softly. “You can rest now. I want you to push every other contraction since they’re so close.”

I nodded, breathing heavier than I had been just minutes ago, but I was determined to see this through and get our son out here with us. I felt the second contraction starting and crunched up again, Connor there with me this time and helping me to sit up as much as I needed.

“Good, good.” Dr. King moved his hands and then nodded. I grunted and pushed like I really had to go to the bathroom, and it just wasn’t happening. “Relax,” Dr. King told me. I let out what was left of my breath and fell back onto the bed. I took several deep breaths and was going to say something to Connor, but I found him staring down my body.

“What’s wrong?” I asked instead.

Connor looked at me with rounded eyes. “Nothing. You have a head sticking out of you.”

“Really?” I nodded to Connor and sat up, wanting to not only see the head but also to push again. Sadly, I could only push because when I crunched up, my stomach was still in the way.

“Just a little more, Milo, and the shoulders will be out,” Dr. King said. He moved his hands, and then I felt a huge gush of fluid, and then Dr. King was holding up our son. Our incredibly slimy and gunky-looking baby.

I looked at Connor, horrified. He saw my face, and his softened. “Don’t worry, sweetheart. He just has to be cleaned up. I promise all babies look like that when they’re born.”

Dr. King was doing something at the foot of the bed, and then seconds later, we heard a loud cry. My heart melted then and there, and I tried to sit up so I could see our baby.

“Stay down for just a little while longer,” Dr. King said. He brought our son over to us, carefully placing him in Connor’s waiting arms. My mate, being the amazing man that he was, brought our little guy down beside me so I could see him. He was still crying, but not nearly as loudly as he had been before.

“He’s here, Milo. Just look at him,” Connor said quietly. “He definitely has your hair.”

My mate had been right. The baby no longer was gunky, and he had a head full of black hair. His face looked a little squished, but I was sure that was because he was only a minute old. He’d been out of room in my stomach for quite some time. I wasn’t exactly a tall fae.

“He does,” I said. I reached out and touched his cheek. It was soft and warm. When he opened his eyes and bright blue orbs looked at me, I grinned. “And your eyes,” I told Connor.

He leaned around to look at the baby and chuckled. “Yeah, he really does.”

“All right, Milo, your placenta came out, and everything is cleaned out down there,” Dr. King said. “Because of the tearing of your omega line, I used magic to heal it for you.” It was difficult to pull my eyes away from the baby, but I managed to do so.

“Thank you, Dr. King.”

“You are very welcome. You may sit up now if you wish, but be sure to put pillows behind you for support.”

“I can help with that,” Connor said. He handed me the baby, and then I found myself sitting up and extra pillows placed behind me.

“Thank you,” I told my mate. He offered a smile.

“I’ll leave the two of you to bond with your baby boy. I’ll be downstairs, though, for the next hour or so, just in case you might need something. If anything arises, please call out, and I’ll be here to check on Milo or the baby.”

“Thank you, Dr. King,” Connor said.

“Again, not a problem. It’s my job and one of the more rewarding aspects of it,” Dr. King said. “The blocker will slowly fade over the next half hour or so. Milo and the baby are doing well, and you have a nice-sized little guy. He’s seven pounds and two ounces. Not small, but not dragon-sized.”

I gasped. “No, no dragon babies.”

Connor and Dr. King chuckled.

“No, sweetheart. No dragon babies for you.”

Dr. King picked up his bag and started for the door, stopping halfway there. “Not that it is a rush, but when you decide on a name, would you let me know so I can update his information for the council so they can get his paperwork in order?”

I grinned while Connor stood. “We’re naming him Elwyn Leo for his grandfathers on Milo’s side.”

I hadn’t asked for Connor to do that; he had brought that subject up some time ago, and when he did, I couldn’t say no.

I loved that he wanted to honor my dads by naming our firstborn after them.

“Very good,” Dr. King said. “I’ll update his paperwork with the council.” With that, he left the room, leaving me with Connor and Elwyn.

“You know we could have given him a different name.”

“Nope,” Connor said without even looking at me. He walked around the bed to the other side and crawled on with me. He moved to where he was right beside me, and I sighed before I leaned onto his shoulder and closed my eyes. We had a baby. We were parents now. I peeked at Elwyn and saw that he had dozed off. I didn’t blame him. I was suddenly feeling like I could go for a nap as well. But we had things to do, people to inform.

“We should let your parents know their newest grandson is here.”

Connor kissed my head but didn’t let go of his hold on me or our son. “Later. Right now, I want to just enjoy spending time with you and Elwyn.” Connor kissed me again, this one lingering just a bit before he rested his head on the top of mine. I sighed, completely in agreement with my mate. This moment would only come once, and he was right. It was time to cherish our baby for as long as we could. Soon enough, our house would be full of activity, and that would be all right. Later. Now, just the three of us was absolutely perfect.

SINCE I SEEM to be all about brother’s finding fated mates, the next book in this series will be [Knox](#)! It’s time for Luc’s brother to find his own beloved. And of course you will see Luc and Garic again!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thank you for spending time with Connor and Milo. I hope you enjoyed their little novella. I absolutely had to give Matteo and Garic's brother his own HEA, and you will definitely see more of them in future books! I can't say thank you enough for all of your continued love and support. I truly couldn't do this without you.

xx

Taylor

Stay up to date by visiting my webpage

www.taylorrylan.com

[Join Taylor's newsletter](#)

[Taylor's Troublemakers Facebook Group](#)



ALSO BY TAYLOR RYLAN

Paranormal Mpreg

Honey Creek Den Series

War's Mate

Troy's Warlock

Ryker's Enchantment

Grayson's Enlightenment

Gage's Serenity

Jules's Sanctuary

Timber Valley Wolf Pack Series

Forest's Hope

Sterling's Treasure

Alistair's One

Tucker's Trouble

Jude's Whisper

Canyon's Choice

Warlocks of Amherst Series

Cornelius

Balthazar

Constantine

Grantham

Fenwick

Edison

Vampires of the Beloved Gem Series

Diego's Heart

Giovanni's Jackpot

Fergus's Hurricane

Matteo's Whirlwind

Nikolai's Beloved

Paranormal Council Enforcers Series

Ambrosius

Atticus

Reinhold

Garic

Everett

Benjamin

Raiden
Parker
Ramsey
Castiel

Destined Paranormals Series

Aleric
Monroe
Calum
Stefan
Connor
Knox

Contemporary

Men of Crooked Bend Series

My Forever, My Always
My Choice, My Chance
My Survivor, My Savior
My Truth, My Future
My Love, My Valentine
My Heart, My Home
My Christmas, My Crooked Bend
Logan's Loves
Jacob's Joy
Simon's Surprise
Rhett's Gift

Sulfur Springs Series

Protecting My Commitment
Rescuing My Angel
Saving My Sanity
Surrendering My Affection
Disarming My Destiny
Healing My Amor
Wrangling My Heart
Accepting My Desire
Love My Sulfur Springs

Broken Arrow Ranch Series

Gabriel
Kitt