



*My Demon*  
**HUSBAND**

POSSESSIVE LOVE

JAX STUART

# **MY DEMON HUSBAND**

AN M/M PARANORMAL ROMANCE

POSSESSIVE LOVE

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*This one is for my alphas, betas, and street team. Thanks for  
all the support.*

# ABOUT THIS BOOK

## **He was supposed to summon a familiar, not a husband!**

After numerous failed attempts to summon a familiar necessary to guide his considerable magic, Toby was down to his very last try. They would never accept him as a full-fledged member of his birth coven without a familiar. He didn't know which punishment was worse; exile or binding his powers forever. Everything was against him, including his abnormally powerful magic and an enemy hiding in plain sight. When the spell takes a dramatic turn, poor Toby is unprepared for the consequences.

Zephyrin is desperate to no longer be the screw up of the family. His parents have had enough on their plate dealing with a family curse. Even knowing that he could be lost to them forever, Zephyrin answers the surprising call for his summoning. After meeting his summoner, Toby, he's positive that he is destined to be by his side as his husband. Maybe having a witch in his corner could break the curse, that is, if Toby lets him visit home.

Unfortunately, Toby has troubles of his own. Can they work together to find a solution to both their problems before the Witch Council tears them apart?

*His Demon Husband is a standalone paranormal romance between an overpowered witch and a demon with control issues in the multi-author Possessive Love series.*



# PROLOGUE

It might have been my birthday, but I didn't get to celebrate it like the humans did. No, instead I was in the deep dark woods, or rather, a clearing in the woods in the middle of the night, waiting for the witching hour to perform a spell.

Nerves twisted in my gut as I helped my sister, Tabitha, set the circle for me. Mom and Dad watched from the edges, Mom twisting her fingers nervously.

"Don't worry baby, it'll be fine," Mom soothed, catching one look at my face and seeing my anxiety. Sweat beaded my brow and my breaths were shallow pants, despite the cold weather. "I just can't wait to see what animal you get." I looked away from her, unable to hold her gaze. "It'll be fine," she repeated, sounding less confident this time, maybe seeing how my hands shook around the urn filled with sage ash.

"Oh, it'll be a cat for sure," Dad chimed in, sounding more at ease than he looked. "As mischievous as our boy." His expression was pinched at the edges.

I fumbled with the container, nearly dropping it from my sweat-slicked hands. Tabitha caught it. Bandit, her ferret, ran down from her shoulder to sniff at it. "I've got you."

Together, we finished the circle, then she returned to Mom and Dad's side while I stood at the north point and waited. All too soon, the rest of the coven elders joined us, filtering in to surround the area and bear witness to the summoning.

August, the current high priest, nodded at me to begin as the far off clock tower rang out at midnight.

Time to get this show on the road.

I fumbled over the words that I could chant in my sleep. My r sounds came out all wrong, my tongue clumsy in my mouth. More than once I saw one of my family wince as I butchered our spell language. I was sure I'd forgotten parts. Writing it down wouldn't have made it any easier.

With fading surety, I repeated it three times as I was supposed to and waited with bated breath.

With a puff of smoke, the spell died.

Failure.



## AGE 14

“It won’t be any different this year,” I protested, my voice cracking over the words. I so badly wanted to hope that I would finally summon a familiar this year. This would be my third attempt. Third time lucky, right?

“It will!” Tabitha sounded exasperated, which I got. She had been assuring me all day. Hell, all year, since my last failed attempt when my voice had just vanished.

“Okay,” I said, then repeated more firmly, “okay. Let’s do this.”

I repeated the actions of the previous two years, the words of the spell coming more easily to me. The sounds echoed around the clearing, crisper than they ever had. My confidence surged and with it, my magic.

With a blazing blue flame, each of the painstakingly applied glyphs flared and vanished. Then, with another blue flash, the circle lit up and faded to nothing.

Failed for the third time.



## AGE 18

“You have to do this, Toby. There’s no choice here. They gave you a year off after the last attempt, but the elders really want you to confirm your place in the coven.” Tabitha multi-tasked her lecture with bustling around her store.

“Tabby,” I begged.

“No. I can’t use my influence again. Don’t ask me. Please,” she all but pleaded as she made up care baskets to sell in her shop. She had taken over the running of the store when she came of age, twenty-one, and our grandmother retired. Nana was now traveling the world while Tabitha tried to update the store to sell to witches online while keeping the spells secret from the outside world.

I hung my head, my shoulders slumped, and I sighed. “Fine. I just know that it’s not going to work.”

“Not with that attitude it won’t,” Tabitha fired back, taking a sprig of rosemary from Bandit and putting it away.

“You sound like Mom.”

She gasped, cupping her throat like there was a strand of pearls there. “Take that back!”

The sight had me grinning regardless of how shitty I felt. Every year it was the same old thing, ever since I turned twelve and was old enough to summon a familiar. Because of the spell I didn’t get to celebrate getting a year older, I just got to stress all day about how badly this spell was going to go.

“Oscar will be there tonight. August said he permitted it. There will be a few elders present to observe and make sure Oscar doesn’t help you.”

“August, huh? He’s too old for you, Tabby.”

My sister blushed. “I’m of age. I’m nearly twenty-two! It’s fine.”

“It’s not. He’s fifty-five and literally watched you grow up.” I frowned. My sister’s crush on the council elder made little sense to me. It didn’t matter that we witches aged more slowly than humans. The man was in his fifties and had babysat for us!

“Don’t make it something it’s not,” Tabby chided. “I respect August and he’s never been weird. We are both adults, so we can do what we like as long as no one is getting hurt.” Tabitha’s voice was tinged with sadness. I hated being the one to cause her pain.

Going to her, I wrapped my arms around her. “I’m sorry. I just love you so much and don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“It’s fine.” She sighed. “Let’s just get through today, get you your familiar and focus on the shop, right?”

“Right.”

Everything about the spell looked correct. I had the words practically tattooed on my brain. I’d practiced my pronunciation until it was automatic. Now all I had to do was put the magic into it that the spell required.

I had magic.

Maybe just a little too much magic.

While I’d had a break at seventeen, that was only because of the fire at sixteen that caught some trees. The entire thing could have gotten out of control if it wasn’t for my parents being there.

Fifteen had been the only time that I’d gotten close to summoning something, but it turned out to be a ghost, maybe. No one was sure. The elders believed so. It was one that I had trapped in the circle and called into an almost full corporeal being. August hadn’t been impressed.

The walk to the clearing was so familiar to me by now that I could probably do it with my eyes closed. I wouldn’t, because I wasn’t stupid as well as magically inept. Oscar walked close beside me. I’d asked for him to come for moral support. We’d been friends since kindergarten and done most

of our firsts together. Usually, friends weren't allowed, but since August was crushing on my sister, he gave her anything that she asked for.

Going through the routine, I performed the spell as efficiently as I could. Clinging to my power, I funneled it, pushing a gentle stream of magic carefully into my working until I felt confident that nothing was going to blow up.

From the outset, it was clear that something was finally going right for me. The glyphs all lit up, not with blue fire, but a pale blue light. There was a resonance in the air that I hadn't heard before. A gentle hum of something coming closer.

My heart thrummed in my chest, my palms were sweaty around the knife I'd use to blood bond me to my animal. Just a tiny prick of blood from each of us, nothing icky!

A form took shape in the middle of the circle and I stopped breathing, hope stopping my lungs. The moment felt too fragile. No one around me seemed to be moving, like they were frozen. Were they desperate for air like me?

There was a crack, and the silence broke. I gasped in a breath and felt a push on my back. Stumbling, I broke the circle and the thing, whatever I'd summoned, vanished.

It had escaped.

I wasn't asked to perform the spell at nineteen since the elders still didn't know what I'd let loose. They believed that it likely lost energy soon after and slipped away into the nothing. The fact that they weren't sure about this still haunted my dreams.



## AGE 20

My second to last try nearly had my sister, myself, and my dad in the hospital. All I could remember were flashes of light. Fire. An explosion. Being tossed across the clearing and hitting a bush.

If it hadn't been for Oscar and August, then Tabitha might have lost her baby. I would have lost my little niece and my sister. She could never forgive me if anything had happened to that baby.

"I don't know what happened!" I cried as I stood outside of the clinic, my cheeks damp with my tears. "I would never —"

"Hey," August soothed. He left the doorway and stalked over to me, his familiar, a little beagle called Charles at his side. When he reached me, he pulled me to his chest, holding me tightly. The action felt strange, and I considered pulling away, but finally relented, returning the hug. While I'd finally warmed up to my sister's husband, I still found their age gap strange. I'd certainly never expected him to hug me, especially after—

"You didn't do this. That wasn't sage ash. I'm sorry, Toby, but someone tampered with your spell."

"Tampered? What? Why?"

"That's what I'd like to know, too." August pulled away from me and looked me in the eyes. "You've got magical ability, Toby. It's just that you struggle with focus and levels. You're like a bulldozer when you need a hammer." He ran a hand through his thick, dark-brown hair. "Someone doesn't want this for you and you came damn close the last time you tried." The man looked exasperated, worried, scared.

"Do you think—?"



“That you were stopped from finishing a perfectly done spell? Yes.” August paced for a minute, clearly lost in thought. His head kept angling to the side, like he was trying to listen to what was going on inside. He stopped and looked me dead in the eye. “I know you struggle with your magic at times, but you’ve practiced this spell to death.” August gave a wry smile. “You could teach it to the little ones and I know they’d do it properly.” I smiled back at him. He was right. I probably could. “I saw that form. Maybe I couldn’t tell you what it was, but you nearly had it, Toby. Someone stole that chance from you.”

Things had just gotten a hell of a lot more complicated for me. Not content with having wonky magic, I now had someone trying to prevent me from being a full member of the coven.

Fuck. My. Life.

# CHAPTER ONE

Hey,” I said morosely as Oscar settled onto the bench next to me. “Did Tabby send you?”

“Yeah. Are you okay?”

I scoffed. “Am I okay? I set fire to a building. Again.” We lapsed into silence as I stewed in my feelings. “Was anyone hurt?” I finally asked.

“Nah. Minimal damage to the building, too.” Relief filled me that they had averted another disaster of my making. I was grateful that it hurt no one. My guilt still lingered from the last time someone suffered because of my wonky magic.

We sat there for a long time. I fiddled with the stalk of a plant that I was supposed to be crushing for a tonic and just waited. Oscar was silent for so long, I thought he wouldn’t speak again. “What were you thinking, Toby?”

My head fell into my hands, the potion I’d been mixing long forgotten as I processed the day. “August and Tabby want me to practice more with my magic. To get a better handle on my power before the summoning.”

“Right, makes sense.” The pause was shorter this time, but I got the sense that I wouldn’t like what he had to say next. “Do you think you should summon again?”

My head rose, and I looked at him in his pretty blue eyes. His blond hair fell in front of one eye, hiding it from my sight. “I at least have to try, or I’ll never know if I gave this all up for nothing.” I continued when it looked like he wanted to interrupt. “Besides, it feels like something is missing.”

Oscar cast a glance at his falcon, who was perched in their usual spot when both of them visited the workroom. “Yeah, I get that. What if August is right, though?”

“About the sabotage? Doubtful. He’s paranoid. Always thinking people are after his place on the council.” Oscar had asked this question more than once, casting doubt when before August had seemed so rational, to where my answer was automatic. The more I thought about my spell attempts, the more I believed he wanted an outside source to be the problem so he could fix it for me, or for my sister.

“Well...”

“Don’t you start,” I warned him mockingly. “You’re supposed to be the voice of reason.” Now I was wagging a finger in his face. “That’s your duty as my best friend.” I bopped him on his pert little nose. “Keep me down to earth.”

He swatted my hand away. “I’m worried about you. If August is right, then you won’t manage the spell without something happening. You could get really hurt.” Concern saturated his tone. Really, the worry was touching. We’d been friends for so long that all my memories had Oscar in them. Recently, I’d felt him pulling away a little, and I worried that my status as the coven freak was pulling the golden boy down.

“I can’t not try, Oscar. I need a familiar to stay with the coven and practice magic.”

“You know August wants to make an exception for you,” Oscar pointed out.

“Yeah, but that means binding me. That’s the only way the rest of the elders will agree.” I let out a sigh. I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. “If I leave the coven, at least I’ll have some of my powers. I’ll still be a witch.” Stay with my family and friends and be magic-less and often excluded from events, or go it alone and hope as I got older my control got better. Those were my choices.

“Any leads on another coven?” Oscar took the stem from me and started preparing it for the potion, his movements efficient.

Through hours and hours of research I'd found out that there were covens that didn't require familiars to join. I could be useful as a kitchen witch, with the tonics and poultices that I could already make. They were the only reason my coven tolerated me.

"Some leads. Nothing solid. The last place that they were they left a decade ago. The records haven't been updated."

"Toby... I..."

"I don't want to leave, but I don't know how I can be here without my magic." His movements paused. "Just one more try. If it's another failure then I'll leave."

"Will Tabby be okay with that?"

"She understands."



"PLEASE, Toby. Stay. August won't bind all your magic, he promised," Tabitha begged me with tear-bright eyes.

"Shh," I rubbed a hand over her arm. "You'll wake Star. Besides, I can't risk August's position like that." I slumped into a chair, holding my head in my hands, my fingers in my dirty blond hair. "I've caused enough harm—"

"You have not!"

"The fires? Random explosions?" I let my exasperation bleed into my tone. "Then the village was without power for almost a week, Tabby. What else would you call my power?" We were silent for a minute before I muttered, "it's hardly friendly."

"I just—" Tabitha started, then sighed. "If the choice is having you here or not, I'm always going to pick here." She stopped me when I went to interrupt. "I know it's selfish of me. August's promise that I wheedled out of him isn't fair. I shouldn't have asked it of him. If he isn't in power, he can't

protect you. I know this. We all do. Those against him want to use you.”

Here we went again. Tabitha had bought into the paranoid plots that August had dreamed up. “My being gone will be best for all of you.”

“It won’t!” she protested. My sister was predictable like that. Loyal to the last.

“His position will be safer with me gone. It’ll be better for all of you.” I grabbed the mug of chamomile tea sweetened with honey that my sister insisted I drink to soothe my anxiety over the next summoning. We only had days before I tried again.

Waiting for another protest, I saw the exact moment when she realized that I would have to leave. “Toby, please—“ she pleaded, despite knowing it was useless.

“I’ll die here without my magic.” I fell silent, listening to the sound of the kitchen clock ticking away my remaining time here. “Little by little I’ll die inside when I can’t take part in things.” Her mouth opened, no words escaping. “You know they’ll let me stay, just with no magic at all. I’ll grow old before you do if I manage not to crumble.”

Tears filled her eyes. I felt like a monster. I knew that this summoning wouldn’t work. Either my magic would go awry, or they would prove August right. Either way, I wasn’t getting a familiar. Then I’d have to leave my friends and family behind.

# CHAPTER TWO

Sweat dripped down my forehead and into my eyes as I worked to keep the fireball balanced in my hand tiny. The point of this exercise was to maintain an ironclad focus on the size of the fireball. To not let it get out of control.

“That’s it,” Llyrin coached, “focus.” My second eldest brother was as calm as his favored element could be. Serene as a lake at dawn.

My hands shook. My whole body felt like it might vibrate into dust with the pressure to get this right. “I can’t... I... it’s too hard!”

“Stop doubting yourself. Nerioyrin and I believe in you, little brother. Your magic is strong, powerful. Your control is...”

“Lacking,” I panted out. “I know. Heard it all before.” And I had. If they had given me a piece of gold, or a gem, for every time I was told that, I would have a hoard that a dragon would be proud of for their nest.

A bead of sweat hit my eye, the sting throwing me off momentarily. That was all that was needed. The fire lashed out of me in a whip-like arc, charring everything in its path. Fucking magic!

Thankfully, Llyrin pulled up an ice shield in time to save his precious snow white hair. If I had singed even a single strand, he would have made my life miserable. Then our parents would have jumped aboard.



Not only was Llyrin the best with his magic, he was also the prettiest of my mother's children. She valued him for more than his beauty, but he had an arranged marriage in place, so he had to stay that way. A wedding only days away, so he really didn't have time to sort his hair. His wife and husbands would want him looking his best for the ceremony.

"Sorry! I'm so sorry!"

My brother let out a sigh and smoothed down his tunic. "I think you deserve a rest and a drink. That's the longest you've held fire in your hand."

"How long?" I asked.

"About a minute."

Dammit!

I let out a sigh as I walked to the edge of the room, where a pitcher of water waited for us. Performing magic was thirsty work, and I gulped down a goblet before Llyrin approached. He laid a finger on the cup and cooled the water down, making it more refreshing. I'd have given anything if asked for that kind of control.

"You'll get there, little brother. We believe in you."

"Maybe you and Nerioyrin do, but not everyone has such a high opinion of me. They think I'm a fuckup. An airhead." The familiar bitterness swept over me, trying to drag me down into acting the part. If it wasn't for my promise to Mom, I would have let it. I'd promised, not only for her but for myself, to get better. To stop making so many stupid mistakes and letting my magic get the better of me.

"Then prove them wrong," was all that Llyrin said before he left me to my thoughts and to plan his wedding.



THE CEREMONY BINDING my brother to his wife and husbands had been beautiful. Mother had left much of the arrangements to her own husbands and to my brother. She had trusted that they would show our kingdom off to the best of their abilities, and they had.

Maybe there had been a couple of tense moments when I'd tried to perform some simple magic and failed. Like when my water rainbow had nearly soaked one of Llyrin's four husbands. I was immensely grateful that the guy had a sense of humor and amazing fire control, steaming the water from his ceremonial clothing with a brief motion.

The gentle breeze I'd managed to coax into being had been welcome. Air was my strongest element, the one where I had the best control. Still, there were more than a couple of tousled heads when my attention had wandered.

While they had arranged the marriage, Llyrin knew his wife and her, well now his, husbands fairly well. Demons lived long lives and more males were born than females, even before you factored in our family curse. It was rare for a female to have only one husband. His marriage was still a big event to our kingdom, and many had traveled long distances to be there. The families of the other men were also in attendance. We should have gone to his wife's land, but with mother's condition, they had agreed to let us host it. They were a friendly kingdom, and the alliance would keep us both strong.

With so many personalities, including a mixture of magical strengths, it made sense for marital groups to get to know each other before their weddings. My brother spent a lot of time traveling to the neighboring kingdom after the agreement for Llyrin to join Aalishith and her men was made. It helped him to get to know them better and learn how he would fit. Llyrin was the most genial of my brothers. I had met no one with a bad word to say about him, therefore I had confidence that he would have a happy life.

My brother shone with happiness as his new mates surrounded him. It made me wish for someone of my own. Females were pretty, but I was happy just to have one person,

preferably a male, that could look beyond my magic and control problems to see the demon underneath. One that valued family and loyalty above anything else.

At the end of the wedding, they sent me away before I could cause an incident. My earth magic control was terrible. Terranyrin almost laughed himself sick when I tried to lift stones with him for entertainment. I'd nearly squashed a child!

I didn't argue, just watched from a distant balcony as what felt like my entire kingdom celebrated Llyrin's marriage. Yet also mourned the loss of him to another land.

With certainty, I knew that if that had been me, they would have been joyous to get rid of me.

# CHAPTER THREE

Here, I've checked it. The spell, too." August handed me the ingredients that I needed for the summoning. There were only a couple of hours to go before I had to head to the clearing where the circle lay.

"Thanks," I muttered. I still wasn't convinced that all this was necessary, but if it made him happy, I would do what it took to get this over and done with, once and for all. He'd threatened over and over to put a stop to the summoning altogether, so this was us meeting in the middle. I could compromise.

The coven leader gave me an assessing look. "How's the nerves?"

"August, I'm fine."

"Tabby said you've packed your things."

I gave a humorless laugh. "Thought it best to be prepared and all."

"But all the work. The precautions—"

"Won't matter a fuck if someone really wants to balls this up. That's even if there is someone. I could be the problem. Have you ever thought of that?" My temper was rising. Steam felt like it was ready to stream from my ears.

August sagged a little. "You've worked so hard and you know the spell. Why are you risking everything by changing it up?"

"Oscar said—"

“Oscar! You know what I think about him,” August ground out.

“Yeah, yeah. No team Oscar t-shirts for you,” I bit back.

“His dad wants my place. Then there’s Avery—“

“What about Avery?” He was Oscar’s boyfriend. Had been for the last couple of years and was the person who had ended our little friends with benefits arrangement. I didn’t particularly like the guy. I didn’t think he was good enough for my friend, but Oscar loved Avery, so I gave him the benefit of the doubt.

August scoffed. “What about Avery? How about he hates you and wants you gone!”

“So, you think he’s the one that’s been sabotaging me?”

“Could be.”

“Seriously? Even if he hates me now,” the idea caused a pain in my chest, “we used to be friends. He had no reason before.”

“His dad is just as bad as Oscar’s. They could be working together.”

Fucking hell! “Do you hear how paranoid you are? Get a grip, August!”

He flinched. “Toby,” his voice was gentle. “You’ve always been powerful. No one here matches you. That’s the reason you’ve not been properly trained. They don’t understand your magic.”

That was a new take on my magical problem. “Fucking right. That’s it August, you’ve solved the mystery!” I knew I was being glib and kind of an asshole, yet I just didn’t have it in me to care. “I’m the second coming of magic and just no-one can cope with how awesome I am. Give me a break!”

With that last shout, I grabbed what I needed and fled my sister’s house.



IT TOOK me a while to calm down. I made several circuits of the village, taking it all in before I left it for good. On my third pass, I realized that even if the magic all went right; I was going to leave, anyway. These people weren't my people. Aside from Oscar and Tabby, I didn't really have any support. Mom and Dad had taken a step back from me when it all started going wrong. I couldn't rely on them having my back.

While it would hurt like a motherfucker to leave my sister and niece behind, I knew that in the long term, I'd be doing them a favor. I had money. I could hustle in larger cities to make more and search out answers for why I was how I'd been born.

Broken.

A Freak.

With a last goodbye, I headed to the clearing.

All the symbols were in place. Each and every one of the complicated glyphs was evenly drawn in the correct pattern on the stone slab where I'd perform the rite once the moon reached her peak.

I dusted the chalk off my hands onto my black jeans with a huff. Giving it another look, I checked each symbol's position with what they wrote in the instructions. I'd cobbled together my own personal grimoire. My spell book was a hodgepodge of diagrams and words that made sense to me and likely no one else. There were pressed flowers and herbs within the pages and it was tied with a piece of aged black leather.

The sage ash came next. This batch had the August seal of approval. Still suspicious of any last-minute tampering, I gave it a sniff. I caught August's look of approval. Fuck my life. He thought I was on his crazy train.

Before I left, I was speaking to Tabitha about getting him some therapy. Maybe he should step away from the council. He'd led it for fifteen years. The stress must have been warping him.

Ignoring the others that were watching was difficult. They were just there to ensure that there was no cheating, that I got no help to do it. My family wasn't here this time, no surprise really, even if it was my last chance. Just a couple of the elders and some onlookers.

This spell was it. At twenty-one, I was at the end of my window to get a familiar. There would be no more chances after this, even if sabotage was proved. Most didn't believe August that anything had happened in the last attempts. They thought he was biased towards me as my sister's husband. I felt less angry towards him when I remembered that he'd risked his position to vouch for me.

Yet it hadn't bought me more time. When this went wrong and I was still without a familiar, I'd be permanently excluded from joining the coven if I wouldn't let them bind me. There was no way that was happening. This was it for me.

Summon and run.

The thought of leaving was a shard of ice in my gut. I wanted to believe that I could start over somewhere new. Somewhere they didn't need you to have a familiar, just freakily potent magic. Yet witches were secretive and difficult to find, so it was unlikely I'd find any. We had to hide what we were from the norms. They couldn't know about us again after Salem.

It was only summoning a fucking familiar. The most basic of spells that kids could do. A spell I'd performed over and over, seen performed countless times in other birthday celebrations, the only time it could be properly done.

The moon was nearly there. In a fit of panic, I re-checked everything and then tried to take a centering breath. Freaking out would do no one any good.



If it all went to crap like I thought it would, I'd accept my fate with grace and just learn to live with my magic as it was. I'd even let them bind me if they thought that's what needed to happen. Well, maybe not all of my power. Dampen it somehow. That was the entire point of leaving, right? They had to let me keep my magic.

I realized that my mind was spinning me around in circles as a way not to focus on what was ahead of me. The last chance was so momentous, so few had needed so many tries. If by some miracle it worked, I'd still stand out.

A hush came over the waiting crowd. Most of the assembled witches were my generation's witches from the coven. These people I'd suffered through knowing for my entire life. They hated me, well, most of them did, and I hated a lot of them.

So why was I putting myself through all of this stress and heartache?

Oscar. Of course.

My best friend was a full member of the coven already, naturally for Golden Boy. He'd performed his summoning at twelve and passed with flying colors, because of course he did. He was bright, powerful, and extremely kind. I loved him for it, even when I felt bitter about my life. Everyone loved him and they tolerated me because of him.

He wanted me in the coven next to him. Wanted me to work potions with him in the clinic, or to help me in Tabby's shop. So, even when I felt a knot form in my stomach, a sense of dread that this would not go my way, I still tried. For Oscar.

I fingered the lump of citrine in my pocket from my sister. She'd given me the stone for good luck, having charged it for me in the moonlight. I was doing this for her, too. She would manage the shop with Oscar's help, but I was better at the potions. It would be a struggle for a while for her to balance motherhood and the store, but I couldn't dwell on that. Long term, it would be the best decision for us all.

The faint light from the moon hit the spell perfectly. I glanced at the words Oscar had given me. This spell was slightly different, he had said. It funneled the magic through the glyphs better. It would help me channel my weird magic. With Oscar being so good at magic and since I still struggled with witch tongue, the spell language we all used, I went with it. August had checked it and congratulated Oscar, grudgingly, of course, so I guess it was good.

The spell was difficult to pronounce, so Oscar had helped me write it out phonetically, much like Tabitha had done when I was twelve. It gave me a warm feeling to have my friend looking out for me like my sibling. After our last attempt, Tabitha was staying clear, plus she had my niece to look after. Our little Star.

Now that the bells were ringing out midnight, I began the chant; the words slipping off my tongue once I started, feeling familiar and friendly. Never in my life had the witch tongue felt so natural in my mouth.

In my periphery, I caught August frowning as my words became clearer, more confident. It didn't make me pause, even as Oscar stepped closer, putting up a hand as if to stop me.

My magic rushed out from me. The trace of it in the air was the same cornflower blue as my eyes. Each of the glyphs lit up with the same color, similar to a time before, when I thought the spell was going to work.

Alarmed, some witches surged forward, reaching for me. Their hands bounced off a barrier. It was like I was in a glass dome. Even their shouts were muffled.

Yet, even with all the fear and panic, all I could focus on was how good the words felt. I wasn't even reading them off the sheet now. They were forming all of their own. It was just easier to go with the flow of my magic, let it guide me into summoning forth my familiar, the being that would help me hone my magic properly. The one that I would blood bond with.

In the center of the clearing, I saw a form appear from pale blue smoke. At first, it was incorporeal. Then finally, as my

magic came to an end with a last surge. It took shape.

I'd finally done it. I'd summoned a familiar.

All around me, as my familiar became clear to all, there were gasps and shouts of horror.

What had I done?

# CHAPTER FOUR

Llyrin left our kingdom just days after his wedding, though not before a final coaching session. “Focus on your strengths, little brother. No one beats you at your element. The rest will fall into place once your confidence is done.”

“Just don’t let your temper get the best of you,” Nerioyrin chimed in. “It lets you down.”

Like the traitor he was, Llyrin let out a noise of agreement and earned himself a glare. He caught it and let out a tinkling laugh. One of his new husbands heard and turned. Their look of adoration at my brother set off a pang in my heart.

I’d never get something like that, being as I was. The perpetual screw up. Unstable. Unreliable. I needed to prove to the kingdom that I was a prince that they could look to for guidance.

Which is why I threw myself into practicing from suns up to suns down. The heat of both suns beating down on me. Until I got the chance to show them that I was capable of change.

I got the chance just a week after Llyrin left when I begged to take on a task for Mom. Nerioyrin accompanied me into the mountains, into what was likely a trap.

With an ear-splitting shriek, the harpy launched itself at me. I rolled my eyes before turning to mist, letting it go right through me. Not the most pleasant of sensations, yet necessary. Those talon tipped fingers were covered with a nasty toxin that I didn’t feel like dealing with right at that

moment. Sure, I had some healing power, but it wasn't my forte. Wanted your enemies dealt with? I was your demon.

Llyrin was right. The more I used my favored element, the stronger I felt. Other magic wasn't easy, but I was unmatched with air.

The harpy screamed at me again and turned to launch themselves at me once more. I sighed and took my solid form again so that I could use my magic properly.

In my signature move, I stole the air from their lungs, choking them. Except now, my temper wasn't in control. I was. I carefully held their life in my hands. After just a moment, their hands flew to their throat, their eyes bulging almost comically. They clawed at their skin and lunged forward, landing at my feet, begging me to return their air as they cut themselves open. Thankfully, they were immune to their toxins. Still would've hurt.

I sighed as they collapsed and allowed the air to return to their lungs. So disappointing. I thought for a second that they might actually pose a challenge.

"Finished?" Nerioyrin raised a sardonic eyebrow. He stood leaning casually against the wall, looking completely unimpressed by the display the harpy had put up.

"Pft, it was boring. Hardly worth my time." I flicked a strand of long, indigo hair over my shoulder and examined my nails. Unlike the harpy, I could put my claws away. "Tell me again why we were sent here?"

The harpy tried shuffling away, their gray skin turning dark with a flush of humiliation. I stopped them with a foot to the back, pressing them into the floor. "Stay!" I commanded.

Nerioyrin chuckled. "You know why. Mother took offense to this one, so now they have to pay for that slight."

"Please! Mercy!" the creature cried.

I shared a glance with my brother. Was this actually worth our time, or could we get away with letting the thing go? Mother's moods were increasingly mercurial now that her

pregnancy was in its final stages. Our sister would be born any day now.

Just the thought of the tiny baby had me sending up a prayer to every hell deity I could name. There were fucktons of them, so excuse me if I forgot some. I pleaded with them to spare my sister. If she survived her first year, she would be the only of my sisters to do so.

I could forgive Mom for being extra emotional, knowing what could happen to the child that she carried. Sons weren't a problem for her, only daughters, after being cursed by her own sister, a ruler from a rival kingdom. While she was no more, the curse was still in effect.

"Mom doesn't need the added stress," I pointed out, earning a whimper from my prisoner.

"She doesn't need this one's family coming for revenge," Nerioyrin stated simply. He stared me down, forcing me to think through the potential consequences of ending the harpy.

Damn, he had a point. "Well, fuck. You had to take the fun out of it, didn't you? So now what do we do?"

"We could let it go," he said.

The harpy liked that suggestion. "Please, I promise no harm!"

I pressed it harder into the rocky ground. We were in its lair, a simple hollowed out cavern accessed only by flying in.

"It needs more punishment than that." I thought for a second, tapping my foot against its wing joint. "We could break a wing?" It made a pitiful noise of fear. Unwilling for it to hear the rest of the conversation, I focused a wind around its head. It could still breathe, but it would not hear our discussion over the rushing air.

Nerioyrin raised an eyebrow and tilted his head, observing my magic. "Nice work, little brother. Your control is really coming along."

"Fuck off, Nerio. Are we breaking its wing or not?"

“Not.” He held up a hand, claws safely tucked away, demonstrating he understood he was in no danger. I had the creature and I would rather take an injury than hurt him. He was my favorite brother after Llyrin, even when he was trying to get a rise out of me. “If you did that, then it would surely starve and it would be our fault. Leading trouble to Mother.” Well, fuck. I hadn’t thought of that. Having my brother accompany me on these missions for Mother was enlightening. “Think, Zephyrin. You’re smarter than this. It needs to be a suitable punishment for a slight.”

It felt like my older brother was leading me to the answer. My cheeks burned with humiliation that he thought me so dimwitted that he had to follow me on these excursions or risk more trouble on our heads. I looked at the harpy under my bare foot. It was easier not to wear coverings on our feet as talons could extend from our toes. It would be too easy to dig my sharp claws into its back.

My brother’s prompt to think worked. I thought about the situation with the harpy and what had led me to be here, in its lair, after hunting it down.

What had the harpy done to anger Mom so?

The memory surfaced. The harpy had insulted Mom’s figure, suggesting that she could no longer protect herself or fly because she had become fat. My other brother, Terranyrin, Mom’s next favorite after Llyrin, had soothed our mother by telling her she was powerful and well fed. Her children were strong because she was, and other such platitudes. He was right, though.

Unable to help itself, the harpy had then called my mother ugly. I pushed down harder with my foot, grinding the harpy into the dirty floor at the recollection. My mother was neither fat nor ugly, but Nerioyrin was right. Causing harm now would lead to revenge.

A thought had the wind dying down so it could hear me once more. “You will apologize in front of all the kingdom and perform hard labor for one month in service of your queen.” I looked up at my eldest brother and saw his approval.



“A just sentence, brother! You are learning so much.” Pride and just a touch of condescension filled his tone. Smug bastard. “Sometimes leniency is the safest choice for all.”

While my brother was right, I knew I would have to present it to our mother carefully. Make it sound like she was doing the harpy a favor and was not afraid of retribution.

“Do you agree?”

“Yes! Anything!”



THE CASTLE WAS STILL OVERFLOWING from the wedding. Everywhere we went, eyes followed us and people bowed with the proper respect that the Crown Prince, Nerioyrin, deserved. I was pretty sure they didn't care about giving me the same treatment. I just happened to be next to him, so I received the same polite bows and words as he did. They couldn't look bad in front of the Crown Prince.

I was the one they told tales about once they had too many cups of wine. Or at least, I had been, until Nerio and Llyrin had agreed to train me up. Under their guidance, I felt like I was becoming the demon that I was supposed to be. Someone that my mother and fathers could be proud of.

The harpy was bound in a tornado and propelled by my magic into the throne room where Mother and her husbands all held court. My brother had trusted me with their containment. He could have used a water spell, his preferred element, but had shown his trust in my abilities. My magic was stronger than his, though I lacked the same control that he had.

The room fell into silence as we approached. Mom was the first to break it with the growl that she let slip. “What is this doing here after how it spoke to me?” she yelled.

Holding back my flinch was hard, but I managed not to let anything slip. My face was a calm mask, hiding my fear

underneath. I loved my mom dearly. I just knew how hard pregnancy was on her.

“Remember what I said,” Nerio whispered.

Taking a deep breath, I started my explanation. This would be where I would sell the court on my plan. “Mother, Fathers, I have brought this creature in front of you so that they can see that you are a just and benevolent ruler. Even in the face of baseless insults, as our queen had to endure.”

“Nice touch, brother,” Nerio spoke in an undertone, his words practically in my ear.

“I’m listening,” Tonantzinith, my mother said. She sat back on her throne, her hands cradling her bump. Only those that knew her well could detect her pain and discomfort. My poor mother was carrying too much stress.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a couple of my fathers grinning. Shenanryn, Elioryn, and even Ciroryn were smothering chuckles.

Perhaps I was laying it on a little thick. “The harpy has agreed to a public apology—“

“Is that all?” Mom barked. Her eyes were lit with flames. She moved forward in her seat, as if ready to pounce and end the harpy herself.

“No, of course. A paltry apology isn’t sufficient for the offense. They have also agreed to a month’s labor for the kingdom.”

The room rang with silence and I watched as Mother thought through the offer. “Nerioyrin, you really are working wonders with Zephyrin.” Mom tried to rise.

“Tonantzinith,” Ciroryn chided. “Please, rest.”

She made a scoffing noise, and the others helped her down from the dais, staying close to her just in case. When she was close, I could smell the brimstone scent that always followed her anger. With a caress to my cheek she breathed, “well done, Zeph. You make us all proud.”

Not wanting to cry in front of her, I forced a smile. The words had really hit hard in my heart, having never heard them from her before, certainly not when so many could overhear.

“Thank you. Does this mean you accept the punishment?” I asked, formally putting it into record.

“I accept a public apology and one month of labor as recompense for the insults levied against me. Thank you, Zephyrin, for seeing to this matter so speedily.”

It was a matter of moments before our prisoner was turned over to the guard and my magic released.

“Come, let us retire to the family room,” Shenanryn suggested. Mom agreed. Her husbands all assisted her into the room, letting me, Nerioyrin and another of my brothers, Terranyrin, follow after.

A servant poured me a cup of wine as I settled onto the heavily stuffed chair, the back low to accommodate my wings. I could will them away, but it was more comfortable to leave them free. Remembering my manners, I thanked them and they shuffled away after a low bow.

We were all chatting about the harpy, though I was also basking in the rare praise when I felt a strange tugging. I ignored it while my family amused themselves by recalling a time, one of many, when my control of my magic or my temper had slipped. The story ended as it usually did, with me breaking something or someone. At that point, I wasn't really listening. Loyal, Nerio returned to how carefully I'd managed the situation with the harpy. Reminding my parents that I'd muffled the harpy's hearing with my air magic and thought the situation through.

Though I should have enjoyed the compliment, the feeling of something reaching inside me and yanking was becoming harder to ignore. It was like an itch that I just couldn't scratch.

An alarm rang out. One that I hadn't heard in my lifetime. I looked at Mom, bewildered. She looked back at me; her face was fearful. It caused an ache in me to see it. Fear was an emotion I hadn't seen in her for a long time.

“What is it?” I asked, the strange feeling worsening inside of my chest.

“The summoning alarm!” someone bellowed, the words sounding distorted over the sound echoing through the vast castle.

“What?” I shouted over the cacophony.

“Someone is being summoned. We must find out who!” Elioryn yelled, his voice barely audible over the din.

Mother cut off the noise with a spell, and I stood, then staggered. Once steady on my feet, I tried to pinpoint why I’d stood in the first place. I just needed to go... somewhere. Elsewhere. Away. The pulling feeling grabbed a hold of me and towed me across the room to the window.

“Zeph!” Many voices cried out my name as I opened the window.

“No! You can’t have him.” Mom’s knees shook, her body sagged before they caught her into muscular arms. I glanced over as she sobbed into the shoulder of one of my fathers. I couldn’t see who, too focused on not spilling out of the window of the castle and into the river below.

“Please, son. Fight it!” Elioryn begged from beside me. He reached out, but I shrugged him off.

There were more shouts. Hands grasped at me, trying in vain to keep me in place when every cell in my body told me I had to go.

“But it feels good. I’m needed.” The words escaped my mouth without thought. It was true, though. A sense of belonging was trying to take me far from here, somewhere I was wanted.

Terranyrin laid a hand on me, using magic to seek deep inside and find out what this was. He was silent for a moment as I clung to the window frame, my claws digging deep grooves into the wood. “This magic is old. Father... Shenanryn, I need your help,” Terran finally said, looking to his biological father.

Shenanryn approached and cupped my cheek, letting his magic out. His eyes filled with tears as it searched inside me to see what was being done to me. His words, when they came, were somber, his eyes downcast. “This is both a great honor and a curse. You have a choice.”

“A choice?”

“You are being summoned to the human realm to be bonded to a witch,” he said simply.

My heart rose into my throat. All I could think of was unknown places and people, away from here, where I still had to prove I was capable. “Bonded?”

“Joined. Married.” When my eyes widened, he rushed to explain. “Not like we do it here. Just one partner. They would be your ruler.” I frowned, not sure if I liked that idea. “You would belong to them.”

“Belong? Like a slave?”

There was a protracted pause. “If I remember correctly, no. You would be a conduit for their magic. Necessary to them. It is unlikely to mean you are mistreated. You would be more like a pet at first. Affection would grow between you as your bond deepens. Then it would be like a marriage.”

“But? There’s something else you aren’t telling me.”

A tear escaped and ran down his cheek. “You could never come home. If your witch dismisses you, then you will be stuck there.”

Now it was my turn to be afraid. “So I’d never see you all again? What about my sister? I’d miss her birth.”

The feeling in my chest grew more intense. No matter how I felt about this situation, this witch wanted me, no, needed me, so desperately.

“If your witch is kind, perhaps they will allow visits or will open a window to our realm so you can see us.” It felt like Shenanryn was trying to soothe me, like he did when I was a child. He was always the one we all turned to when we needed that extra care.

In the background, I could hear Mom crying and my fathers trying to calm her. Nerio looked anguished and Terranyrin his stoic self.

“Please, Zeph,” Nerio pleaded.

“I—I’m sorry, I—I don’t think I can stay.”

Everything inside, every part of my being, told me I had to go. It tore me apart to be leaving my family behind, probably forever. What were the chances that I would luck into getting someone that liked me, that didn’t just tolerate me? I had to hope for a fresh start. Nerioyrin’s help had been working. I was improving every day. Now I just had to see if I could make it on my own.

“I can’t fight it. Don’t want to. I’ll bring them here one day soon. You’ll see. It won’t be long, I promise!” I called as I wrenched my fingers free.

Letting go was easy and natural. I let the magic guide me up and away, through the ether that separated our worlds and to somewhere new.

To my bonded. To my spouse.

# CHAPTER FIVE

“It’s a demon!” came cries. More help was called for, yet I stayed still, my eyes transfixed on the figure alone with me in the circle. My brain had stopped working, unable to compute what was in front of me. Had I really summoned a demon? Why wasn’t I scared?

All that I felt was this insane pull towards whatever it was. It was a glowing ember inside of me, urging me forward.

There was pounding on the barrier, which still seemed to be holding firm. It had trapped me inside with this thing, so I prayed to everything I had that it would obey me long enough that I could either send it away or bond it to me fully. I wasn’t scared for myself. It was more for the others. I wasn’t sure how it would react to them. I didn’t understand why I felt so safe with it.

In between the screams and swearing, the barriers and the smoke from smudging, I saw the figure rise from its kneeling position. My heart pattered a staccato rhythm in my chest. Finally, I felt that trickle of fear. Though it was more that it would see me as lacking and refuse to work with me than a worry that it would hurt me.

It turned to face me, a smile spreading over a strangely pretty face. The being had horns the color of onyx. Its skin was a golden brown. No, it was a he. That was definitely a dick. He looked like he spent a lot of time in the sun. His eyes, even from this distance, were an electric blue and had a slit pupil like a cat’s eyes.



The most unusual thing about him, though, was his size. No, not that he had clawed fingers and toes. Or that his ears seemed to move independently from his head and were pointed and slightly furry like an animal. Or even the pair of glossy black feathered wings that hung from wide shoulders. Though they were stunning. He also had a tail, with a tuft of fur on the end, which I vaguely thought was weird.

No, it was that he was small. Like, smaller than me and I was five foot ten. He was maybe five foot six. Tops.

Sure, he was built. His muscles had muscles of their own, but he was little for what a demon should be. Or what I thought one should be. Apparently they came in fun size. Except for that dick. That was not proportional. He'd been gifted there. My brain was shouting at my eyes that it was inappropriate to stare so long at his junk, but it was right there!

The demon broke out into a grin. Fuck, he was cute! He had little fang teeth that peeked out from under his full upper lip. I wondered with a shiver, what they would feel like on my skin.

I immediately scolded myself out of that line of thinking. This was my familiar. I wasn't even sure if it was sentient.

"Hi, I'm Zephyrin," he said, immediately dispelling that worry.

"Um, hi," I stalled, not sure what to say. "How do you know English?" I blurted, my mouth ahead of my thoughts, which were still spinning. He could talk and I could understand him!

Zephyrin giggled. I swear to the goddess that it was a giggle. Why was he so freaking cute? It sent tingles through me. "I know many things about the human realm, but I speak English because that's what you speak."

"Right, and why is that?" I asked, confused.

"Because you're my husband," he said plainly, like that was the obvious answer. It clearly made sense to him because he gave another beaming smile with those cute teeth making an appearance.

Everything inside me came screeching to a halt as the words filtered from my ears into my brain. “I’m your what now?”

“Husband.” His smile slipped. “Bonded. I belong to you... unless you don’t want me.” His face turned sad. I hated that look already. It was wrong on his face.

The words took a moment to process. “You belong to me.”

Zephyrin was beginning to look afraid while simultaneously puffing himself up to look bigger. Adorable. Absolutely adorable. “I do.” There was a beat of silence before continuing. “If you don’t want me, then I’ll be stuck here alone.” He deflated like the admission had pulled all the air out of him. He had that kicked puppy look again that I detested. I sensed a smidge of emotional manipulation from him, yet I didn’t care. I understood it, really. Here he was, summoned to this strange place, with his life literally in my hands.

I swear that my mind shorted out for a bit, then came back on to an information overload. Turning, I looked for someone, anyone, to help me. They were all standing and staring, the barrier still in effect and muffling everything. I was pretty sure they couldn’t hear a damn thing we were saying.

Turning back around, I faced Zephyrin. “Let me get this straight. I was trying to summon a familiar. An animal guide for my magic, but instead, I summoned you, a demon, and now you think we are married. Am I getting that right?”

“That’s right. My father said that you bound me to you. If you don’t complete it, I will be stuck here. I have to stay with you.” Zephyrin smiled at me in what I was sure was supposed to be in a charming way. As if that look alone would convince me to keep him. He was working hard to get me onside. I liked him, though I knew that I really should try to send him back.

My legs turned to jelly. I braced myself on the dome, the energy of it crackling pleasantly through my hand. What should I do? Whatever path I took now would either have him tied to me forever, or, I looked back at the gathered witches,

destroyed. There was no way that they would allow a demon to go wandering off unbound in the world.

Could I bind him to me now and release him later? Was that a thing?

“You’re not giving me much choice here,” I complained.

Zephyrin looked confused. “What do you mean?”

“You know if I refuse to bind you, they’ll try to kill you, right? We are outnumbered here, even if I wasn’t completely shitty at magic.”

“I’m sorry, Master.” Why was that so hot? Could I make that a condition if I did bind him? “Perhaps you can convince them to let me go?” He looked so hopeful.

Giving another glance over my shoulder didn’t do anything to ease the knot in my stomach over the decision. Despite my initial fear, I was drawn to him. He was so cute! Plus, technically, he was my familiar, wasn’t he? I’d done a summoning and gotten him, so I couldn’t just leave him to die, could I? “How do we complete the bond?”

He looked unsure. “I don’t know. What do you do with the familiar?”

“We share blood. It’s a blood bond.” It had never really sat right with me that I had to cause harm to an animal familiar. I couldn’t imagine drawing blood from a demon.

Clearly, Zephyrin didn’t share my reservations. His eyes flashed a brighter blue. “Yes! Let’s do that!”

I gave him a wary look. “Just like that? You’d tie yourself to me?”

Zephyrin blew out a breath. “It’s like this: I chose to answer the summons, knowing that I’d be stuck in this place if you didn’t accept me. My father didn’t say it outright, but I got the feeling that he meant dead, not stuck. So what you said about your coven made sense. I think he was careful about what he said because Mom was too upset to hear the words.” My heart hurt for him. I had ripped him away from his family and he knew that this could end badly. “You are the one I’m

worried about. I'm in this," he continued, "our bond means something to me. I'm supposed to be with you."

Casting yet another look over my shoulder, I saw the entire council there with grimoires in hand. My knees wobbled, and Zephyrin approached to steady me. "Careful," his voice was gentle. His touch was soft and warm through the fabric of my shirt. He caught the coven looking at him. "Do so many come for summoning a familiar?"

A mirthless chuckle escaped me. "Only when you've fucked up as many times as I have." I groaned. "This was my last chance. I'll never be a full member now."

"Why?"

"I need a familiar bond to stabilize my magic. I can't be in the coven without having summoned a familiar animal."

"Would a demon familiar count? I'm willing to be tied to you—?"

He was clearly waiting for my name. "Toby. I'm Toby."

"Tie me to you, Master Toby, and I'll help you with your magic and keep your place in the coven."

"You'd do that?" I heard the skepticism.

Zephyrin raised an eyebrow, a weirdly human thing to do. It was at odds with his otherworldly appearance. "It's that or face the mob out there. I don't fancy my chances."

Fair enough, I mused. Aloud I said. "Sure, can't make tonight any worse. There's going to be rules, though."

"Like?"

"I dunno right now. Honestly, I'm still trying to wrap my head around you being here and speaking to me. I expected a cat or some sort of mouse or something."

His chuckle was rich and warm, sending more delicious tingles through me. Fuck, I was hopelessly attracted to this strange being.

"I agree to you making the rules at a later date and vow to fulfill your every wish of me. I won't let you down."

Damn, that sounded so hot. My poor overloaded brain had given up trying to run the show, now my hormones and instincts were in charge.

“Fine.” I pulled the jeweled and etched silver athame from its sheath and extended a hand for one of his. The blade had been given to me at my naming ceremony as a baby and handed over for my first summoning. It glinted under the light of the moon and the torches spread around the clearing. “I’ll prick your finger. We don’t need a lot of blood, then do the same with mine.”

Zephyrin placed his hand in mine and didn’t flinch as I dug the point into his thumb. We both watched a bead of blood well up, the same ruby red as my own. I nicked my thumb and laid it over his so that our blood intermingled. Then with careful pronunciation, I spoke the words to tie Zephyrin to me as my familiar.

There was a rush of magic, similar to the one before. It whipped around us, tousling our hair. His long, dark hair was a tangled mess when the wind subsided, leaving us staring into each other’s eyes.

All of my energy left me as the adrenaline crash hit hard. The last thing I was aware of was my new demon familiar catching me in surprisingly strong and steady arms and a feeling of safety.

# CHAPTER SIX

The backlash of all the magic that my young witch had been casting hit him hard, leaving him unconscious and slumped in my arms. His dirty blond hair flopped into his closed eyes. When I'd seen them, I'd noticed that they had been a brilliant blue that reminded me of the lakes of home.

With his magic reined in, the barrier that had kept the other witches from us vanished, leaving us both vulnerable to attacks. I wanted to growl and snarl at those creeping closer, instead I looked for a way to protect us both.

Torches still blazed around us, giving me something to work with. I stole their light away to put a ring around my witch. While he slept, I would shield him to the best of my ability. He was mine and everything that I was belonged to him. That meant all of my magic.

Fire still wasn't my strongest element, even after all my training, and it fought me briefly, making me pour more power into it than I'd wanted to. The barrier that I formed worked well to keep the witches back, though I felt them trying to put it out with their own spells, costing me more power to maintain it.

Around the fire circle I'd placed an air buffer so that my witch didn't become singed. I'd heard that humans were fragile, and witches were similar enough that I had to be careful he didn't suffocate or overheat. The flames did my bidding, though reluctantly, so they wouldn't hurt me.

"Toby? Toby!" I heard voices call. "Are you okay?"

I stroked a claw down his pale face gently, aware that too much pressure could tear the delicate skin. It was possible that our bond wouldn't allow that. It would prevent me from causing any harm to my bonded witch. I just didn't want to test its boundaries so soon after it had formed. I could have willed them away, but I didn't want to shift focus away from the fire for an instant.

“Demon! Let him go!” more shouting erupted. “Don't hurt him!” another cried.

“I wouldn't!” I yelled back. “Toby is mine and I am his familiar.”

Silence greeted my announcement.

“Pull down the fire!”

It took me a moment to weigh the idea. If they truly believed me to be harming Toby, and they certainly seemed to think that with the panic that was swirling around. Then surely they would be comforted, seeing that he was safe and protected in my arms. Letting the fire down would be a gesture of good faith.

Letting it drop was a relief. It had been taxing, keeping it lit and even around us. I sent it back to the torches so that I could clearly see all around me. The air I kept, it would push back anyone that ventured too close.

“Toby!” A man sank to his knees just outside of the air circle, not noticing the breeze that mussed his curls. Tears welled in his eyes. Why was he so upset?

“He's fine. There's no need for tears, witch,” I said scornfully. “The bonding took the last of his energy for now. He is replenishing from me.” I could feel the slight drain on my reserves. It was like the bond had locked away part of my magic for Toby's use. He needed it now, too depleted from the spell to wake. I was happy to be useful to him in that way.

My words seemed to snap the witches into action. One, I assume a leader of some sort, pushed the others back with assurances that he would check Toby's health and let them know. Another took the crying witch away before the leader



got closer again. He approached the air buffer and was repelled as I'd intended. The man tried again, putting force into it and gritting his teeth against the strain, but eventually collapsed back. With a wave at the others who tried to assist him, he got to his feet with a determined expression. If I wasn't worried that he was going to harm my Toby, I'd almost respect him.

“Demon—“

“Zephyrin,” I interrupted. I was to be one of them. It was best to lay boundaries now. Mom had taught me this with the staff. Let them know what to expect from the start so I wouldn't be taken advantage of.

“Right,” the man continued. “I am August and I am married to Toby's older sister, Tabitha. Toby is my family. May I check on him?”

Family wouldn't hurt Toby, right? I gave it a moment's thought and relented. Grudgingly, I allowed a break to form in the air curtain so that August could pass through. He did so quickly, his distrust clear. He kneeled in the dirt to get a close look at my bonded and lightly touched his forehead.

I yanked Toby out of his reach with a hiss. Toby was not his to touch! “No!” I snarled. There were sounds of alarm all around. This time, they were more frantic than the voices that called for Toby. There were more shouts for August. They did not value my witch as much as this one. Something that they would come to regret.

“I'm sorry,” August placated. “I just need to check his energy levels. I can tell he is drained, but you seem to be helping him.”

With a shuffle, I edged closer so that August could continue his checks on Toby. “We share magic,” I told the older man.

Witches were odd. I got the impression that he was much older than Toby, yet August only looked a few years older at most. It occurred to me that witches must age much like demons did, slowly and staying in their prime for much of

their lives before succumbing to old age. Very few supernatural races were truly immortal. Just long lived.

August briefly laid a hand on Toby's forehead again and closed his eyes. After a second, he pulled his hand away. "I can see that you are doing the job of a familiar and sharing your energy. He will recover soon." The man was frowning. Though I hadn't expected a warm reception, I wasn't quite expecting the witches to be so wary. Had none of them seen a demon before?

"I would never harm him. I'm not sure that it's something I could do. He owns me." My words made him frown harder rather than soften the expression.

"It's impossible. Demons are not familiars. Toby was supposed to have a cat or something."

It was my turn to frown. "Does Toby like cats?" Would he have preferred a regular familiar bond? While he had blood bonded to me, there was always the risk that he would send me away. It would take a lot of magic, but he could sever the bond, leaving me lost and alone. Without him, I was never getting to go home, even for a visit. I needed Toby to like me. To need me and what my magic could do for him. Together, we could be a great team. He could help me with my control.

"Toby likes all animals. He wouldn't have bonded with you if it didn't make much sense to do so. His magic control isn't the greatest." My heart stopped. Fuck. We were quite the pair. It was likely we were doomed. "But his intuition is the best I've known. He just needs to trust himself more."

Another witch approached the air barrier. The crier from before. "August? Is Toby okay?"

"I'm just checking him," August called.

The pair spoke back and forth for a few moments. August updating the other witch on Toby's improving color and energy. "I've got him, Oscar. Tell the others to head home. Toby just needs to sleep this off."

August waited until, reluctantly, the others moved away from the summoning circle. Then in a low voice he whispered,

“keep an eye on that one. The witch I spoke to. He’s Toby’s best friend, Oscar, but I think he’s been sabotaging Toby’s spells.”

With that, he stood and motioned for me to follow with my Toby in my arms. He tried, briefly, to take Toby from me, but my growl kept him at bay.

As I walked, my mind was reeling. What the fuck had I stumbled into? A witch with control issues, a strange coven, and an enemy for a best friend. Life with Toby was sure to be interesting.

# **CHAPTER SEVEN**

Coming awake, pulling myself out of the blessed quiet of sleep, was a battle I wasn't sure I wanted to win. All throughout my life, I wondered if it would just be easier on my family and my coven if some accident was to take me out. Or if I should just walk away from magic, all that I knew, for a regular human life. For some reason, I'd battled on, trying to make something good out of my life with the messed up magic I'd been given. I just got so tired sometimes.

I had a reason to keep living now. Zephyrin. My demon familiar. Husband, if what he was saying was right. It blew my mind that I didn't have an animal tethered to me. I had a person. Sure, he was a demon, but Zephyrin felt... I just didn't have the words to explain my feelings about the demon.

"Toby?" I heard his sweet voice somewhere close to me. For all his power and muscle, the way that he spoke was gentle and reverent. Everything about him radiated comfort to me.

I cracked an eye open and was rewarded with a lovely smile, those fangs peeping out again. I clearly had been reading too much monster romantic fiction because I felt no fear, just a curiosity over what he would feel like.

Slowly, I raised myself into sitting and looked at Zephyrin properly. Someone had clothed him. He was in a plain blue t-shirt, one that looked vaguely familiar, and some dark gray sweats. His wings and claws were gone. In the daylight of my bedroom, I could see that his long hair was a deep indigo color. He also had stumpy horns on his head, just visible through his hair.

Just the sight of him took my breath away. I couldn't believe that he belonged to me. Yet, I could feel it. Our bond was faint, though solid. With it he was replenishing my magic slowly, siphoning it off from his own well and pushing it into me.

Then came a rushing swell of shame. I had a person tied to me. My magic was so fucked up that I'd taken someone from their home and bound them to me!

Rage slammed into me, almost stealing my breath. Anger at myself and then my magic, even my parents for making me this way and leaving me to deal with it alone. I was furious at the world.

"Toby?" Zephyrin laid a tentative hand on my arm. Immediately, my red hot fury cooled and a sort of resignation settled over me. "Are you okay?"

"It's... it's a lot to process," I finally muttered. I coughed, my throat dry. "Could I—?"

Zephyrin handed me the glass of water I'd barely noticed waiting for me on my nightstand. There was a note that I ignored in August's writing. I didn't want to speak to him, to anyone, until I got my emotions under control. My magic was still quite drained, the backlash of the spell lingering. I felt burned out, raw.

Sipping on the water, I looked the demon over. To an outsider, I would bet that he looked calm. He was anything but. There was a sense of tension in the way that he perched on the bed next to me, just within arm's reach. He was watchful, alert, as if he was ready to jump to my defense if I needed him to protect me.

The bond we shared was clearly giving me an idea of what he was feeling, and likely doing the same to him. Inside, he held an undercurrent of fear that I could bet anything on that he would deny. There was curiosity, and I wondered what had his brain ticking over. How much did he know about the human realm?

"So... you said you speak English because I do, right?"

“That’s right. If too many people are speaking, it’s like there is a... delay, as the magic catches up.”

“Huh.” I mulled that over. When had he learned that? When I was passed out? It had to have been then. I got the impression that he hadn’t left my side since I’d yanked him away from his family. Another shot of shame landed in my gut, twisting it and making me feel nauseous. “Do you think it only works with me nearby, or does our bond do it if I’m far away?”

A brief flash of... panic? passed over his face. “I don’t like the thought of you being apart from me.”

When I thought about it, I didn’t like the idea of being separated from Zephyrin either, which could be a problem.

“Have you seen anyone from the council or my family?” I asked. I needed to know what was happening. There was no way I was leaving this bed, though. My body felt too weak for that.

“I spoke with August. He said your sister would come, and he took us here to rest. Then he set wards so I cannot leave.” Zephyrin looked upset about that.

“You wanted to leave?” My voice broke around the words and our eyes caught as he looked up at me.

“No, I wanted to check around your house to see if it was safe for us to rest.” He spoke plainly. There was something like devotion in his eyes, which freaked me the fuck out. All I’d done since I’d met him was panic and then pass out, so I had not earned that emotion. Shoving that thought into a box, I focused on the here and now.

It occurred to me then that I’d been dumped in my house with a demon that I didn’t know and just left alone with him for what had to be hours. The sun was already high in the sky, so I assumed it had to be mid morning, at least. They didn’t know that he was the sweetest thing to exist and hung on my every word. They just left me when even I didn’t know enough about our bond to know if I was safe with him.

Alarm shot through me. Zephyrin reached out and ran a calloused hand over the bare skin of my arm. Someone had undressed me and put me in a blue t-shirt similar to the one that Zephyrin wore. My shirt. He was wearing my clothes. His touch was soothing. I wanted more contact with him. “Come up here and sit with me better,” I suggested.

I needed a moment of calm with my familiar. Since I’d awoken, I’d been going through emotional whiplash. I could only imagine the feedback Zephyrin was getting through our fledgling bond. Sighing, I took a cleansing breath and just tried to think about the good things in my life.

Wriggling, I settled against the slatted headboard and stretched out. Zephyrin hesitated and then did the same. “Like this?” he asked.

“Yeah.” We were silent for a while. His magic slowly filled my empty well as I rested beside him comfortably. “Sorry, everything was a mess yesterday. I can’t promise it will get better, but you will have me. I won’t be so weak next time.” The words came out quietly, yet the vow in them was loud.

“You weren’t weak. The magic you performed was strong. The witches are scared of you.”

I laughed. “No, I’m pretty sure they are terrified of you.”

His pride was clear, which made me chuckle again. “I am scary, but they said that you were an abomination and should have been cast out.”

Not going to lie. That hurt. It wasn’t a shock. Over my life, I’d heard similar things more than a few times. People always hated and feared what they didn’t understand, and my magic was something my coven just couldn’t get. So they cast me aside because of it. Instead of helping me get to the bottom of the problem, they made it worse by denying there was an issue in the first place. They put the blame on me with no chance of a solution or any support.

“My words hurt you, Master Toby.” Zephyrin was frowning.



When had he taken ahold of my hand? The feeling of his skin on mine was comforting. Our magic mingled, mine filling that much faster with better contact with my familiar. His hand was hotter than mine, probably part of being a demon.

“I’m okay, Zeph. Please don’t call me master. I don’t like it.”

He smiled. “Alright, Toby. I like you shortening my name if that is what you prefer to call me. It feels like we are friends now. One of my fathers said many things about what our bond could be. He did not mention friendship.”

“What did he say?” I was curious about his family. I’d caught one of, so that suggested a few fathers. Were all demons poly? Or just his family?”

Zeph answered with a cheerful smile. I was grateful that he wasn’t too upset about being taken from his family. “He said that we would be married. You would own me. Like a pet.” He didn’t seem upset about that. I knew I would be.

“I won’t treat you like a pet. We are equals. You aren’t a slave. If I am doing something that you don’t agree with, then I expect you to speak up.”

“Is that an order? One of your rules?”

So, he remembered that. Useful. “It is a rule. I never want to harm anyone with my magic—“

“Not even if they deserve it? If they hurt you or someone close to you?”

“Fine, there are exceptions. Mostly, I just don’t want to become someone to fear. I just want to live my life in peace.”

“Then I will help you do that.”

I enjoyed his company. I would have sat there all day asking him questions about his life and where he had come from, I just didn’t have the energy. Slowly I drifted off, my head against his shoulder and my hand still tucked in his.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

I jolted awake at the first knock on the door. Toby woke when the person began pounding their fists, or perhaps kicking at it instead.

“Toby!” a female sounding voice yelled, their voice reaching the back bedroom where we had fallen asleep, Toby’s head on my shoulder.

I hadn’t meant to let my guard slip. It was just that I had been awake the entire night as I watched my human sleep, his magic slowly replenishing. Had I known that physical contact sped the process, I would have held his hand or something sooner. Perhaps having him initiate the contact was better. I didn’t want to do anything that would have me dismissed as his familiar. The witches would be out for my blood then. Though neither of us felt particularly safe as it stood.

“Toby! You better answer!” the voice cried out, sounding a tad hysterical.

“Should I go let her in?” I asked my master. He certainly wasn’t up to the task.

“No, the dumbass has a key. Just wait until she remembers,” Toby said sleepily, unmoving from where he rested against me. My shirt was slightly damp where he had drooled on me as he slumbered. It was adorable, not that I was sure he would think so.

Sure enough, the door rattled and there were sounds of someone coming inside. “Are you decent?” the female asked.

“Yes!” Toby called back, his voice loud in my sensitive ears. He caught my wince. “Sorry,” he whispered. Then he ran a finger over my ear, eliciting a shiver to run through my body and nearly pulling a moan from me.

Twisting, I caught his hand in mine, preventing another teasing stroke. “Careful. They’re sensitive.”

Toby looked like he wanted to say something, but that was the moment that a woman that bore more than a passing resemblance to my witch interrupted us. She had to be the sister. August had said that she would come by in the morning. It surprised me that she had left us alone for so long.

Outside, I could tell that there were people watching us. We were under a heavy guard, with several witches surrounding the property. From what, I wasn’t sure. I wasn’t going to harm Toby, and I was sure that he wouldn’t have me hurt any of them. From what little I knew about him, I knew that he wasn’t the kind to let power go to his head.

The sister glared at me, then turned her full attention to Toby. “I’m okay!” he said, hands raised to ward her off. “Zeph is helping me replenish.” His statement had me graced with a slightly softer distrusting look. She rounded the bed and put a hand over his forehead, her long fingers brushing my ear since Toby hadn’t made a move away from me.

Quickly, he grasped her hand. “Don’t touch him.” The growl in his voice rumbled through me. I liked the possession of it. Especially since I didn’t particularly like her touching him. The only thing that made it okay was that they were related.

She pulled her hand away as if he had burned her. “Sorry!” She glanced between us. “You two are freaking me out! Is this a familiar thing? I don’t remember Bandit being like this with me.”

“That’s because Bandit is a ferret, Tabby, not a person. We’ve just got to find our feet with this bond. Plus, he’s filling my magic. We need to be in physical contact to do that better. You know this.”

“Fair,” the woman, Tabby, said. “It’s just strange. You have this...” Her hand made this swirly motion while she paced as she searched for the right word. “Demon in your house! I come in here and you are cuddling in bed with each other!”

“Tabitha, I love you, but you are getting worked up over nothing. Me and Zephyrin have rules and we understand each other. He’s going to be a great familiar.” Toby’s tone was placating. I’d heard that kind of voice so many times as my brothers or friends tried to clean up after my mistakes.

“Do you prefer to be called Tabitha or Tabby?” I spoke, filling up the silence left by Toby’s words.

“Tabby, actually.” She looked stunned.

“You can call me Zeph if you like. My full name is Zephyrin. Well, I have a last name, but it doesn’t translate into this language.

“It’s... uh... nice... well, no, actually, it’s fucking strange to be making acquaintances with a demon!” Tabby slapped a hand over her mouth. “Fuck! That was rude. You know what I mean, though, right?” She looked pleadingly at Toby.

I couldn’t parse the look on his face. It had reddened from the pallor that had been cast over him when he was so badly drained of magic. His eyes glittered, but, again, I didn’t understand the emotion there. Through our bond, I could feel rage so deep and foreign to me that I knew that I had to step in before Toby did or said something that he regretted. If only Nerioyrin could see me now, he would see our lessons had paid off.

“The circumstances are unusual—“

“Unusual?” Tabby echoed, her voice rising in pitch with each word she spoke. “My baby brother went to have his last chance to perform his ridiculous spell.” Her next words were for him only, “you know other covens don’t—“

“Tabby!” Toby raised the volume of his voice to ear ache levels. “Sorry,” he turned to me with an apology, then back to his sister. “We aren’t going through this again. I’ve done the spell. No one was harmed this time.”

“This time?” I hadn’t intended to speak.

The color on his cheeks was from a blush this time. Shame, not embarrassment. I felt it plainly through how he held his body.

“There have been accidents and tampering,” said Tabby, before her brother could answer.

“Tampering we can’t prove.” Toby sounded exhausted. I needed to intervene on his behalf.

“What do you need so Toby can rest? He is still recovering.” I wrapped an arm around him, settling him closer to me so we were pressed together from knee to shoulder.

Tabby watched us for a moment. “Just a wellness check and to prove what August said last night. Oscar is frantic. I’m surprised he hasn’t burst in here already.”

I frowned at the thought of the enemy, but Toby brightened. “I’d like to see Oscar. Later, though, I’m tired.” His head fell against my shoulder. Soon, the room filled with the sound of his soft snores.

“Help me get him onto the pillows,” Tabby ordered, as she approached and began fiddling with the pillows and covers.

“We need contact,” I pointed out, likely needlessly.

“Shuffle down. You need to sleep too. August said you stayed awake all night.”

“He needs guarding. August said there are enemies.”

“August... I love my husband. Have for years, even when my family, especially Toby, didn’t understand it. He’s a good man. Ruling the council has made him see enemies out of friends.”

“So you don’t think that Oscar hurt Toby?”

“If he did, it wasn’t on purpose. He’s devastated that Toby might be banished from the coven. Some want to bind my brother’s magic and still banish him.”

“What can I do to stop that from happening?”

“When he wakes, you’ll both go in front of the council. You need to prove that you are not here to cause harm.” She finished arranging the bed and helped me get Toby settled onto the pillow with me pressed along his back, an arm over him protectively. From this angle, it was easy to see her expression. She was conflicted and scared, but there was a trace of hope. Likely her faith that her husband would come through for her to protect her family.

“If I can’t?” I asked in an undertone, careful not to wake my sleeping witch.

It took so long for her to answer that I thought she wasn’t going to.

Finally, she spoke. “Then you need to take him and run.”

# CHAPTER NINE



By the time that I woke again, darkness had fallen. My demon had been in our realm for nearly a whole day and I'd spent very little of that time awake with him. How was I supposed to protect him? How were we supposed to bond?

I really had to cut myself some slack. I'd performed a stupidly difficult spell and had summoned a demon from another dimension! Of course, the magical burnout was going to hit me hard! The kind of spell work that I'd pulled off was usually done by a coven. Not my coven, but I'd heard of others doing it in the past in the histories. There had also been horror stories of what had happened after they successfully summoned the demon. Basically, it had also wiped them out. I'd just married mine.

Married.

Honestly, me being married was probably the most ridiculous thing to come out of the last day. I never thought I'd find someone to tie themselves to me in that way. True, my husband wasn't human, but he was hella cute! If I didn't think too hard about consent, it could be a sweet meet cute story to tell our adopted babies one day. Zephyrin had looked enthusiastic about it. I'd given him a choice. It wasn't the best of choices, but still, I'd tried. So maybe I could hope that he liked me well enough to make this work.

I opened my eyes to find a wall of tanned flesh in front of me. Up this close, Zephyrin could be mistaken for a human man. He was warm, running as hot as a shifter. I'd met one once. We'd hooked up and parted as friends. Zephyrin had

sculpted muscles and dusky colored nipples. His torso was devoid of hair, aside from a thin, happy trail that looked to be the same color as the hair on his head. I wanted to explore where that trail went, which was insane. He was a demon, and I was his master, even if we were technically married. The balance of power between us meant that I had to keep things platonic, despite him being tempting.

Zephyrin shifted. His arms tightened around me, smooshing my face harder against his chest. Was that drool? No, there was no way that I'd been doing that as I slept. My bladder protested as Zeph half rolled onto me, pinning me to the bed. I started tapping on his back, with no response. Then I tried tickling, though that just made him squirm. I did note he was ticklish for another time. Not that we would be sharing a bed like this again. Platonic.

Stuck, with increasing pressure on my gut making me freak out that I was going to piss myself, I opted for trying to shove him off me. Screw being gentle. I had to get to the bathroom. Now!

Ugh, he was just a wall of muscle and weighed a ton. I puffed and panted as I pushed at him. There was no chance I was moving him. "Zeph! Zeph!" I called his name louder and louder, but he only stirred enough to hold me even closer! Another time this would have felt amazing, but we were really in dangerous territory now.

Magic. I had magic. Or at least I should have some. I checked my magical well. Filled to the brim, almost overflowing. Just a zap then. Only a tiny tingle.

With a thought, I sent a surge of electricity into him. Surge, not a tickle.

One moment I was being suffocated by my familiar. The next he was colliding with the wall, eyes wide, hair almost standing on end. He crumpled to the floor and then shot to his feet.

"Oof! What the fuck?" His eyes landed on me. They were full of confusion and, hopefully, no pain.

“Oh shit! Are you okay?” I leaped from the bed and was halfway to his side before I remembered my reason for using my magic and dashed to the bathroom. “Sorry!” I yelled before I slammed the door in his face.

“Fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck,” I chanted as I relieved myself and washed my hands. I spared a second to examine my reflection in the mirror, finding the same guy in the glass that had been there just a day before. Same dirty blond hair and blue eyes. There was slightly more stubble on my face; I wasn’t hooking up often, so I wasn’t the most fastidious about shaving, plus the facial hair made me get carded less. I still looked tired, but my eyes weren’t as lifeless.

“Toby?” Zeph called from the other side of the door. “Are you okay?”

I threw the door open. “Am I okay? Fucking hell, dude, I threw you across the room with my magic! Are you okay?”

Zephyrin looked down at himself. He had put back on the shirt that he’d been wearing earlier, covering those delicious muscles. So, I liked buff guys? Sue me. Aside from looking rumpled, he appeared unharmed. There was no mark on the wall. It was like the entire thing hadn’t happened. Not even a hair was out of place. “I’m fine, Toby. You didn’t hurt me. I was just surprised.”

“Surprised?” I echoed.

He came closer, holding his hands up as if trying to reassure me that he meant me no harm. This guy, I swear. I’d just launched him into a wall and he was treating me like I was the injured party. “Toby, I’m fine. Come sit down for a minute.”

Listening to him, I sat heavily on the bed and put my head in my hands. It was then that everything just got to be too much. I couldn’t have a familiar, especially not a person. Not Zephyrin. I’d end up hurting him. Killing him with my messed up magic. Suddenly, the solution was obvious. “This. The wall. Me. It’s why we need to find a way to send you home.” His expression was stricken. I needed to make him understand.

“I’m a fuck-up, Zeph. That was supposed to be a little zap to wake you up. Why can’t I do anything right?”

Wrapping an arm around me, he pulled me close. I automatically rested my head on his shoulder, slightly awkward since he was smaller than me, but the motion was soothing. Being so close to him brought me a lot of comfort. “I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“I’m not. Toby... I like being here with you. Everything with our magic will work out.”

“You sound so certain.”

“I just have a good feeling. Don’t send me away. Please, Toby.”

He looked pitiful. I could feel myself relenting. It didn’t help that I was hopelessly attracted to him. Most of that had to be our bond. Also, I was sick of being alone. Having Zeph with me was nice. He was a comforting presence. “I can’t promise that I won’t. If I need to in order to keep you safe, I will.”

“Alright.”

We sat in a companionable silence for a while until my stomach growled. “We should maybe eat. Decide what we’re going to do.”

Zeph stood and held out a hand for me. “While we eat, we need to figure out a plan for when we go in front of the council tomorrow.”

Way to drop a bombshell, Zeph.



MY DEMON SEEMED to know a lot about the human realm as he called it, considering this was his first visit. He claimed it was because the veil was often thin enough for some of the stronger ones to pass and explore until we sent

them back, then laughed at my aghast face. Then he admitted it was that though they didn't have the same technology, they somehow could watch television in spelled mirrors. A demon had brought the spell back to them. Now they watched us wreck our planet and kill each other for entertainment.

No, really. There were bets on how long it would take for our society to collapse completely. Hint, it wasn't all that long.

So Zeph managed to figure out how to work the toaster and how to make coffee. He did so while I watched him learn where things were in my kitchen. It was the middle of the night, dawn only a handful of hours away, but there was no chance that I would be getting any more sleep. Besides, I wanted to spend time with him before the council tried to part us. I tried not to let my worry flow down the bond, but wasn't very successful judging by the looks Zeph was shooting me.

"All will be fine," he kept repeating as he munched on the toast with strawberry jelly that Tabitha made.

I'd barely touched my food. The coffee was good, I just didn't feel up to anything. My nerves over the council meeting had a stranglehold on my appetite. "I want to believe you, I just don't have the best track record with the council."

"But you like August?"

"I..." How did I explain my relationship with the council leader? "August has been council leader for around fifteen years now. He's in his fifties—"

"Oh, so you age like us. I'm seventy three."

That stopped my thoughts for a moment. I was grateful that he was at least over the legal age here after our compromising position earlier and some of the feelings I'd had towards him, but still, that was quite the age gap, and I'd given Tabitha a lot of shit about August.

"Right," I said eventually. "So I liked him until Tabitha started to get interested in him. She was over twenty before he even looked at her like that, but still... I didn't like it. I thought he was too old to be interested in her. Thing was, I'd forgotten how mature my sister was. She had helped raise me

since I was much more powerful than both our parents.” I laughed. “Tabitha was almost the only one that could keep up with me. Fuck, I love her. She helped me read, taught me so much and has always had my back.”

“She loves you, too.”

“Yeah, she does. I’ve made peace with her relationship with August. He respects her. Really values her as a person, y’know?” Zephyrin nodded, but I wasn’t sure he really got it. “Tabitha could have had any witch in the coven. August was all that she saw. He adores her. Would do anything for her. Which is why he tried to bend the rules to keep me in the coven.”

“Why didn’t he?”

“I wouldn’t let him.” I shrugged. It would have been the easiest path. I just knew what pitfalls and dangers would spring up if he had tried it. “If August had used his position like that, then he would be leaving himself open to a challenge. Star, my niece, is too young to lose her dad, or to be cast out with him. It was simpler for me to go.” Zeph looked confused. “I was packed to leave after my summoning failed. See?” I pointed to a couple of bags and a suitcase. “The rest I was going to get shipped to wherever I landed.”

“Instead, you got me.”

“Yeah, I got you.”

“And that hasn’t made anything better, has it?”

“No, it hasn’t.”

# CHAPTER TEN

The knowledge that I had made Toby's life that much harder sat heavily in my gut as we ate and then prepared to go in front of the council.

"If I tell you to fly, just go, okay?" I nodded, unable to voice the lie. There was no way that I would leave my witch behind to face the consequences alone. If we were going to run, then we would do it together.

I couldn't tell if he believed me or not. He just went quiet and checked his bags. "I'm starting to think that no matter the outcome of the meeting, we should just get the hell out of dodge and start over somewhere else."

That I could agree with.

"Is there any way for you to get rid of the horns, ears, and the eyes like you did the claws, wings, and tail?"

A frown pulled at my forehead. I reached up and felt my ears, noticing for the first time that Toby had strange fleshy ears close to his head. How did he hear anything? I tried reaching into my magic and gasped when my ears vanished, forming into ones that probably looked like Toby's. "Is that better?"

He looked like he was thinking about how to word his response. "The horns and eyes are still there. I mean, the horns are small, you could cover them with your hair, or a hat. The eyes though... I'm not sure."

After a few more attempts, I had to call it a day. All that was happening was that I was burning magic that we might



need and getting a headache for my trouble. “I’m sorry.”

Toby wrapped his arms around me. “Thanks for trying. We’ll get you a baseball cap and some shades or something.” He touched my new human looking ears. “I almost miss the furry ones.”

“I can’t hear as well like this,” I grumbled.

“You don’t stand out... okay, you don’t stand out as much, with them like this. Like this, you almost look like a normal cute guy I might see in a club. Your hair is so... it’s just pretty and looks so soft.”

I preened at the compliment. Back home, I never had much of a problem finding someone to warm my bed. My duties as a soldier kept me busy enough that I didn’t partake often. It warmed me that Toby found me attractive. I enjoyed looking at him and one day, when we had less to worry about, I hoped to show him off as my partner. Him finding me appealing was just stage one in my plan to make him fall in love with me and keep me with him forever.



IN ORDER TO get the bags into Toby’s vehicle, I caused a distraction, diverting the attention of the guards stationed around the house. I demanded to speak to August and would not budge until another intruder approached the house. Their stealthy advance caught my attention.

Oscar.

I hadn’t broached the subject of the young man with my witch, worried that he would be defensive about his friendship with someone who had betrayed him.

“Can I speak to you inside?” Oscar asked Toby in a trembling voice. His eyes were ringed with red, like he had been crying for days. His skin was deathly pale, almost as if all the life had been sucked out of him and he was just left a

hollow shell. In other words, he looked like shit. Guilty and sad.

“Os? Are you okay? Let’s get you some tea.” Toby slung an arm around his friend and drew him inside. I followed after.

Standing sentinel, I watched Toby make tea in the small kitchen as Oscar slumped into a chair. Whatever happened was really eating at him, enough that I felt a twinge of sympathy until I remembered that he could have gotten Toby killed. There were still repercussions from this spell to deal with.

We sat in silence while Oscar sipped at his far too hot tea. Toby watched his friend anxiously, and I absorbed every move the other witch made.

“Where’s Hayto?” Toby asked, making Oscar jolt and spill his tea.

“Fuck!” Oscar stood, holding the cup away from his body and flapping at his baggy shirt with his free hand.

My witch approached with a towel and began cleaning his friend off. There was a flash of feeling that I didn’t understand and then, poof, Oscar’s shirt went up in smoke. One minute he was standing there dripping tea onto the carpet, the next the shirt was ashes and his skin was steaming.

“Zeph!” Toby admonished, glaring right at me.

“What?” I shrugged.

“You could have hurt Oscar!” Toby was stroking his friend’s arms. Was he trying to comfort the weasel?

I muscled Toby out of the way and looked the witch over. Aside from some pinking of his skin, he was fine. “Look, no harm done.” Toby gaped at me, so I changed the subject. “Why are you here?” I demanded of Oscar. The young man was trembling and beginning to look paler than before.

“Zephyrin, back off! You’re scaring Oscar.” Toby pushed me back to my former position. “Give me your shirt.” Doing as ordered, I handed it over, just for him to hand it to his friend. The growl that escaped me was completely by accident. My wings bursting free, less so.

Oscar shuddered and set down his cup. After putting on the stolen shirt, making me rumble out another growl, he opened his mouth to speak. He tried a number of times before any words came out. “Avery’s dad has Hayto.”

“What? Why?” Toby sank to his knees in front of his friend and took his hands.

“To make sure I didn’t tell you, it was Avery that tampered with the spell.”

I scoffed, gaining both their attention. Toby silenced me with a stern look in my direction. “But you made that spell, Os. August checked the wording himself.”

“Avery changed it after August saw it.”

“Avery? Who is this Avery?” My anger made my tone sharp.

Oscar looked at me, his eyes skittering away from mine. “He’s, uh, my boyfriend.”

I let the words hang there. His boyfriend was the source of this trouble. Why?

After a beat, Oscar spoke again, this time only to Toby. “When you started speaking it in the circle, I knew something was wrong. Those weren’t the words I wanted you to say.”

“How did he change it? That was the font you downloaded on your computer, Os. We practiced the spell.” Toby looked so confused. I had to admit, I didn’t get why anyone would let their boyfriend get away with something like that, especially when their friend was the target.

“Didn’t you notice halfway through that it wasn’t the same? You hesitated, so I thought you realized. Then you got past that bit and then started chanting another language altogether.” Oscar’s eyes met Toby’s.

It was almost like they didn’t remember that I was in the room. I tamped down on another growl. Oscar wasn’t worth Toby’s time and attention. It was down to him that Toby was put in such a dangerous position.

“No,” Toby said softly. “All I know is that the spell felt right to me. Easy. For the first time, I felt confident that my magic was doing what I wanted it to. And it worked! Well, kind of.” He looked at me with affection, so I smiled at him, hoping he knew I was grateful that he kept me. “I got Zeph out of it. He’s pretty cool, Os. Don’t you just love his wings?” I puffed up at the compliment, letting my wings stretch out.

“I, uh, liked the tail, yesterday, I mean. He had a tail.” Oscar smiled in my direction. I managed not to bare my teeth in his. We were never going to be friends.

To make Toby smile at me, I let my tail out. The tuft at the end, similar to that of a gryphon’s, was the same indigo color as the hair on my head and groin. I ruffled my feathered wings and a single feather came free. I grabbed it and held it out to Toby, brushing it along his cheek before handing it to him. “For you.”

His blush was sweet. “Thanks, Zeph.”

Oscar’s gaze ping-ponged between us. “Um, you don’t have a lot of time, Toby. The council, they...”

“What is it?” Toby sounded alarmed.

“They are going to try to steal your demon. Then you’ll be bound and banished.”

“But we haven’t had a hearing! August will never go for this.”

I felt Toby’s fear through the bond. He clutched my feather tightly in his hand, his knuckles white.

“I just came to warn you, and explain that it wasn’t me that did this. I know August suspects me. He’s right to. Avery, he, uh... fuck!”

“Os?”

“I knew it was Avery that wrecked your last summoning! I was just afraid to tell you. He said it was a prank.” Oscar pulled away from Toby, hiding his face in his hands. His shoulders soon shook with sobs as Toby sat frozen on the floor by his feet.

Unable to see my witch suffer, I crossed the room to him and squatted. With a grunt, I hoisted him into my arms and sat us on the sofa, Toby in my lap. “I’ve got you. You’re safe,” I crooned in the softest voice I could manage.

Toby shuddered and then wilted. “Zeph, I can’t do this. What if he’s right? I can’t lose my magic. I don’t want you used... what if they hurt you?”

Before answering him, I thought things through. If the witches were anything like my mother’s government, they would have to discuss things. If Toby was being charged with a crime, there would need to be evidence. “Oscar, can you testify that the spell was tampered with?”

Oscar drew into himself. “No, they will just blame it on me.” He was crying. “I swear, Toby. It looks like it came from me, but it didn’t! Avery used my laptop. I swear it.” He sniffed. “They have my familiar as leverage. If I even try saying anything, then... I can’t, I just can’t, Toby! Or they’ll hurt him.”

“We won’t risk Hayto. There has to be something else.”

“You said August knew the spell? He checked it?” I asked. They both nodded. “Do all of the council have to agree to a banishment?” Another nod. There was a spark of hope in Toby’s eyes. “Then we just sow doubt. Make them wonder if there was tampering. Prove that I am of no harm to anyone, just a familiar in a different form.”

“If that doesn’t work?” Oscar asked, wiping at his tears.

“Then we delay long enough to flee.”

# **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

With not much of a plan in place, Oscar left my place and went home, sneaking past the guard and into the early morning light. While I felt for him, I also knew that Zephyrin didn't believe the story, and neither would August nor even Tabby. They all knew now that the spell had come from Oscar. They knew Avery was his boyfriend, but how much of the tampering had actually come from Avery?

It occurred to me that Oscar hadn't mentioned a thing about being done with Avery. Could he stay in a relationship with someone that held his much loved familiar hostage? Or was it all just a bunch of bullshit? I had no idea what to believe.

I tried, unsuccessfully, to eat something at breakfast. Zephyrin pushed his oatmeal around his bowl, not eating much either. Neither of us spoke, too lost in our own thoughts.

Guilt, anxiety, fear. They all swirled inside me. I felt guilty that I'd dragged Zephyrin into this mess. It almost made me wish the spell hadn't worked or had struck me down instead.

We left the house with plenty of time to spare, hoping that good time-keeping would help our cause. My car was stuck in the middle of 2 others, obviously a way of ensuring that I didn't just drive away.

Zeph's eyes were full of wonder on the short drive to the town hall. The place we lived in was pretty self contained, small, so more a village than a town. Still, there was plenty for him to see. We occasionally had to travel outside for larger items, though, or get things delivered.

Just in case we wouldn't be coming back to my house, I took the scenic route, peeling away from one of the guard cars, and let him look at everything. I let him gaze at the place that could be our home if we could just convince the council that Zephyrin wasn't a danger to anyone.

All too soon, I entered the street where the council headquarters were held, along with our town hall. I was careful in picking my parking space, wanting to have an easy escape. My instincts told me that we'd need it.

I switched off the car and turned to my familiar. "Let me do the talking. You need to show them that you do what I say."

"Yes, Toby."

"Look, we haven't even had a chance to see how our bond works, but I don't want to lose you, okay? So, just... please, let me talk to them. Do everything I tell you and don't use your magic." How quickly I had changed my tune. Was it because of Oscar that I felt this way? Or was it just the pull to my super cute demon familiar? Being around him was so easy. No one could blame me for wanting to keep him, could they?

Zephyrin looked at me with those electric blue eyes. They seemed to swirl and dance with energy. "Only if you are safe. If anyone touches you, then I will protect you, whatever it takes." The intensity in his stare, the passion in his voice, left me a little breathless.

What was I supposed to say to that?

I cleared my throat around the lump that had formed there. "Just don't seriously maim or kill anyone, okay?"

"Okay, I can do as you ask."

We got out of the car and I noticed his tail was flicking back and forth, the only outward sign of his agitation. "Can you put the tail, ears, and claws away again?" I asked. Zeph had tried time and time again to get rid of his horns and change his eyes, to no avail. We'd styled his hair to cover the horns, but he'd just have to avoid direct eye contact with people.

"Of course," Zeph answered, willing them away.



I gave him a grin. “Thanks.”

Side by side, we entered the building. They scanned me for weapons and potions. Zeph, they gave a wide berth. I could sense the tension ratcheting up as we walked into the hall where the council had convened. August sat in his center chair, looking cool and collected, though his eyes gave away his anxiety.

Seeing the leader I respected so concerned for me really did nothing to lessen my fear. I wanted to hold Zephyrin’s hand so I could keep him close to me. I knew, without question, that it would be a terrible idea to show weakness in front of these vultures.

Shaking with fear, I barely heard the council begin their questioning. I’d been in front of the council before, so I knew they would give me a chance to put my side across before they would take a break to discuss what they planned going forward. Punishments before had been temporary bindings. Yes, I’d been bound before, which was why I knew I couldn’t do it long term. They also had me perform acts of public service. Basically, I’d been a slave to the council’s whims, only being forgiven thanks to August’s intervention.

“This is your chance to explain what happened and events after the spell,” August said calmly, breaking into my thoughts.

Again, I cleared my throat. The dryness there making me wish for a cool glass of water. “I, uh...”

A guard approached with a bottle of water. Quick as a flash, Zephyrin intercepted the offered bottle with a loud growl. He grabbed it with claw tipped fingers and a parting snarl for the man who retreated to the safety of the corner of the room.

“Behave,” I muttered at my familiar.

“Apologies, Toby. I thought he meant to harm, not hydrate.” His grin was cute, his eyes twinkling.

“Fine. Just put the talons away, okay?” With a nod, he did. I took a long drink from the bottle and handed the remainder

to Zeph. “Sorry about that. The last couple of days have been hard on me.”

“Can you explain what happened?” Jenny Eagles asked. I liked the older woman. If I had any allies on the council, I could count on her among them.

“As you know, there have been concerns around tampering with the spell in the past.”

“Unfounded,” Malcom Farmer, Avery’s father, bit out.

“There was enough evidence to acquit Toby before,” Norma Davies pointed out. Another of my allies. I made a cream for her that worked wonders on her arthritis so that she could continue crocheting baby items for the special care ward at the nearest hospital.

Farmer harrumphed, but stayed quiet. I surveyed the rest of the council, looking for Oscar’s dad and not seeing him. It was odd that he wasn’t there.

“Like I said,” I directed a pointed look at Malcom and his cronies. “There had been tampering, so this time, someone on the council checked each part of the spell. All was going well, and it looked like I would either manage or fail without outside interference.” I paused, uncertain how to not accuse Oscar or anyone else, for that matter. If Oscar was right, then Avery’s dad was the cause of all this. He’d done something to the wording of the spell.

After a long pause, I continued. “Oscar provided me with a spell that had been checked by August. This spell was of his own creation and was supposed to funnel my magic more carefully than the original summoning spell that everyone else uses. Then, because I struggle with our native language, Oscar wrote it out phonetically for me, like Tabitha has done before.”

“You have to get it translated into simple language?” Malcom sneered.

“I’m dyslexic and have dyscalculia. So, yes, I had it simplified so I could pronounce the spell correctly. Oscar even used a font that he knows works for me.” My voice was rising,

and I could feel the humiliation staining my cheeks. Bastard Malcom.

Several voices broke out, arguments and pointed jabs.

“This has been discussed in front of the council before.” August was calm but firm. I was grateful for the intervention. “Continue.”

“I didn’t notice it at first, but something about the spell differed from what I had practiced. It was going okay and then the words just changed.”

“Changed?” August asked.

“The words on the page weren’t the same as I remembered. Then it was almost like I wasn’t in control. My magic took over. The words just poured out of me, my magic with it.”

The room was silent. Some of the council members exchanged glances with each other.

“What are you trying to say?” Norma sounded puzzled.

“I’m not sure if there was tampering in the translation, or if it was me. I don’t have the paper with me, so I don’t know either way.” An oversight on my part. It had to be with the clothes I’d been wearing for the summoning. I remembered putting it back in my pocket.

Did Malcom look relieved? Was I just looking for an explanation where there was none?

“This is besides the point. We need to know if the creature is dangerous!” James Hall barked. The Halls and the Farmers were the largest families in the area. They both had tried to become the head of the council, only to be outvoted for August. I liked James. He was more likely to be fair to me, so the animosity in his expression took me by surprise.

“Zephyrin obeys me as he is expected to as a bound familiar. He refilled my magic after I strained myself performing the spell and holding the dome that cut me off from the coven.”

There were whispers now between the members.

Malcom rose from his chair. “Proof! We need proof that they are indeed bound. They need testing.”

My gaze strayed to August. If my brother-in-law stepped in here, that would be suicide for his time on the council. At the same time, I really didn’t want to be separated from Zephyrin. I wasn’t sure how he would react.

August nodded, an edge of defeat in the gesture. “Fine.”

Turning, I spoke to Zephyrin. “Remember what I said. Everything will be fine.”

“Toby?”

Two guards approached Zephyrin and took an arm each, leading him out of the room, and by the sounds of his protests, down the hall away from me.

The further that he seemed to go, the more than the bond tugged on me. I felt weird. Really shaky and kind of fragile. A sheen of sweat broke out on my brow and I struggled to stay upright.

“Toby?” I heard August’s frantic voice just before I hit the floor.

# **CHAPTER TWELVE**

A dull ache began in my body almost as soon as the guards led me out of the room. I could have easily pushed them off me, but Toby had warned me not to harm anyone. I wanted to be good for my witch.

Instead, I let them pull me away from Toby, the ache morphing into a stabbing pain as our bond stretched and flexed. I knew beyond certainty that it wouldn't break, but I feared for my bond mate. Was he feeling like this, too? I didn't want him to be feeling even a fraction of this.

The world spun, my feet falling from under me, my knees smacking off the marble floor as blackness tried to take me. My magic surged to protect me, an air buffer cushioning my fall.

All I heard were the frantic shouts of the guards and cries from further away.

I fought with everything that I had to stay conscious even as my eyes closed without permission. *Toby?* I sent the thought down our bond, which was likely still too fresh and new for us to share thoughts. As expected, my new husband didn't respond. I hated the absence of his emotions. It was all too easy to fear that something had happened to him. That anxiety over the lack of Toby gave me a jolt, keeping me aware that the guards had picked me up between them.

With me slipping in and out, it took me longer to realize they were taking me back towards Toby.

It was easier to stay alert the closer that we got to him. The bond wasn't as fraught with tension, though I couldn't get a

read on Toby. My human's presence nearby was enough for me to recover my strength and I pushed the guards off as I entered the room to find Toby collapsed in a stranger's arms.

Fury ripped through me, and I extended a hand towards the man holding my witch, stealing the breath from his lungs. I simultaneously circled Toby with air and brought him to me carefully. The man scrabbled at his throat, gasping and panting, though I hardly noticed, my focus on my bonded. He was all I saw as I fought to keep the magic even and gentle around his fragile form.

Once Toby was safe, where I could touch him, I let the man breathe, just as he slumped unconscious on the floor.

"Better check him," I told the stunned onlookers. The room echoed with my words. No one spoke or even blinked for a second, until the spell broke, and they rushed to the downed man.

I could almost taste the bitterness of the witches' fear and disgust for me. Not that I really cared. I was where I was supposed to be; next to Toby.

As the others checked on the man I'd choked, I watched for Toby's eyes opening. Soon those cornflower-blue orbs settled on me. He smiled, a weak thing, clearly still feeling the effects of our brief separation. "I'm here," I assured him. "They won't take me again."

"No. You cannot be apart without harm." August approached us slowly, as if I would turn on him.

"I mean no harm to you," I said to the councilman.

"No, but you harmed Alex," he said pointedly.

"He was touching my Toby."

"That's no excuse! He was helping him." August was angry with me. How was I to know that the man hadn't done something to my bonded?

My shoulders slumped as I admitted my mistake. Toby squeezed my hand, still weak in my arms as I kneeled on the

hard floor. “I didn’t know. Sorry, August. I acted without thinking.”

He seemed to consider this. “I can see what it looked like. Your guards said you were in a similar way.”

“This is all a fabrication!” The announcement came from one of the angry council members. This man didn’t like my witch. He held envy in his heart.

August turned to face the bitter one. “How so? Both suffered the effects of being apart. Newly bonded familiars and witches are like this, are they not? In time, they will be able to be further away from each other.” I noticed that there were no familiar animals present. I had never seen August with his animal.

“They clearly pretended! Toby knows what happens and told this creature!” The man was going purple in the face with his rage.

“Then we can try other tests.” August maintained a level of calm that I found admirable. If I had been in his position, the purple man would have a fireball in the face to deal with. I’d made my promise to Toby, though, so I watched it all happen. Unless one of them turned on him, no one would face my wrath.

Toby’s flinch suggested that I wouldn’t like these tests. An older woman approached with a drink for Toby. “Drink this, my dear, and recover your strength while we get the tests ready.” Her expression was ambivalent towards me, warm for Toby.

“Thanks, Norma. Do we have to do them?”

“I’m afraid so.” She patted his hand and moved away.

My witch got to his feet with a forced smile. “I’m okay, Zeph. Just do everything they ask, okay?”

I nodded, unable to argue with him. I wanted out of here as soon as possible. No, I needed to be out of here with Toby by my side. The feelings that I got from these people gave me an itch that I couldn’t scratch. It was distracting.



Taking the lessons that my brothers had taught me, I took a centering breath and just gave in to what needed to be done to escape. Once we were out of here, I hoped I could spend time getting to know my husband. Was being married the same here as it was in my realm? Did Toby want that kind of thing from me?

My witch was gorgeous. His body was lean in a way that suggested that he forgot to eat. I would have to do something about that. He had an air of someone that neglected themselves for others. His hair was a dirty blond color that said that he'd spent time outdoors. It needed cutting; the sides getting as long as the top. Most of all, I loved his eyes. They reminded me of the skies at home. Such a brilliant and beautiful blue that I could get lost in.

Without me noticing, they led Toby to the other side of a screen from me. We were still in the same room, so the bond between us didn't sharpen and cause pain. I could feel him when I looked inside myself and his nervousness was clear. What did these tests mean?

"Begin," August ordered, a frown on his craggy but handsome face.

A guard approached and handed me a piece of fabric. "Cover your mouth," he demanded. His words differed from his frightened expression. While he wasn't sweating as much as the other person, who was shaking far away from me, becoming whiter, he was still pale and scared. "Now!" the first guard barked with false confidence. He was lucky that Toby had forbidden me from causing harm to these people.

I glared at him, wishing him pain, then took another breath. For Toby, I could do this pointless test. They all knew I was bound to him. This was just to pander to August's opposition.

Doing as I was told, I covered my mouth with the cloth, tasting the bitterness that I associated with magic. A spelled item. Once it was fastened, I tried to speak, "happy?" Not even a muffled sound escaped.

The more talkative guard nodded at August and the council leader gave a grim nod to the shaking one. With a lunge, the palest one came at me, some sort of spear in hand! He jabbed me in the thigh, making me cry out uselessly, the sound unable to escape. The pain was sharp and hot. I felt blood running down my leg at the same moment I registered Toby's scream.

Toby!

My heart stuttered in my chest. He could feel my pain!

"Again!" someone shouted from deeper in the room. It sounded like the one that called Toby a liar. He was the first for punishment when Toby allowed me. I could feel Toby's horror at the situation, the echo of the pain that had been inflicted on me. He was crying, I knew it in my heart.

Too slow to react, the next blow came to my upper arm. The guard had likely been going for my shoulder. Again, I bellowed under the gag. This time, my own tears escaped even as Toby begged for them to stop hurting me.

In response to my emotions and with the injuries I had sustained, my wings, tail, ears, and claws broke free of their binding, drawing gasps and screams from the room. My borrowed shirt fluttered in tatters to the floor. I ripped what remained from my shoulders, shocked at the blood I saw there.

There were more important things to worry about than my injuries. I had my witch to protect. I couldn't stand the thought of anyone harming him, not while I could keep him safe. With a claw, I tore the gag from my mouth. "Toby?"

"I'm here!" I could see his shadow through the barrier they had put up to divide us. He was charging towards me before his own guards stopped him. They had hands on him! He struggled in their grasp as my fury got the best of me.

With a thought, I incinerated the barrier until it was only ashes. It would impress Nerioryn to see the control I had on my fire. My wings extended, I pushed myself off the floor, over the heads of the humans, and to my witch.

A burst of air pushed them away from Toby, allowing me to grab his outstretched hands. "Got you!" I used pockets of

air to lift him into my arms as we rose towards the skylight.

“No! The glass!” Toby cried.

Calling for the earth was easy with my witch so close to me. I pulled the stone from the walls and broke a hole right through the glass. My bonded covered his head, afraid I’d let the debris fall on him. Without even realizing, I superheated the glass and rock, turning the fragments into sparks that bounced off us harmlessly.

Together, we burst into the open air. I spared a glance at the commotion below us, then flew towards the car.

“Zeph! Are you alright?”

I nuzzled his hair, slowly lowering us to the ground next to his vehicle. “I’m fine now that you are safe. They won’t hurt you again.”

His feet hit the ground, and he straightened, making me look up at him. He cupped my face, looking seriously into my eyes, then checked my body. Toby gasped in horror at what he found. “You’re bleeding!”

“I’m fine,” I insisted. “Look.” With what little water magic I had, I used its healing power to wash away the blood and close the wounds, leaving just a pink raised line where the cuts had been.

Toby’s eyes widened with surprise. “Oh, shit! That’s amazing! You’re amazing!”

He leaned down and kissed me.

It was just the briefest kiss. We barely touched lips.

It wasn’t enough.

Pulling him close, I yanked his face down to mine, making him hunch a little. I mashed our lips together, kissing him hard until he opened to me. With a groan, his tongue met mine. His hands went to cup my face, fingers tangling in my hair. He leaned me against the car, kissing me harder, nipping on my bottom lip and sucking my tongue. I clasped his hips, grinding against him, feeling a jolt of arousal at feeling his hardness.

Never had I been kissed like this. There was so much passion there. Heat and chemistry that had been missing from all my other relationships. It was made all the more special knowing that this was my husband. My bonded. I wanted this for always.

With a bang, the door to the hall burst open, and we jumped apart, lips swollen and wet, clothes askew.

We looked at each other as the guards ran for us. Toby's face was stricken with panic, his blue eyes wide. "Get in the car!" I yelled as I tried to tug the door open like he had shown me.

Toby fumbled with something from his pocket as he rounded the car and flung himself inside. He pushed open the other door for me. "Let's go!"

I tried to enter the small vehicle, but couldn't with my extra appendages. With a thought, I pushed away my wings and tail, keeping the claws for a weapon, and ears for heightened senses. He had the engine ready, the car in motion before I could even close the door behind me.

"Seatbelt!" His voice was tense, his eyes focused on the road ahead as I watched for people following us.

He caught my glance. "I'll hit a motorway soon. We just have to avoid them until then."

"Are you sure you want to do this?" I asked, worried. "You're giving everything up."

Toby took his eyes off the road briefly to fix me with a look. "There's no way I was going to stay there and let them torture us, or worse, try to break the bonding." His gaze sharpened. "They're following. Can you do something with your magic?"

I tensed. "I might break one of your orders. It could harm them."

"Zephyrin, ignore that order. Just don't kill them. I need you to blow them off the road so we can get away."

With his direct order clear, I followed his instructions, sending a tornado to touch down in front of the car. They swerved and spun, landing in a ditch. Moments later, they were on the side of the road watching as we drove away.

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

My heart thrummed in my chest as I drove away from the only life that I had ever known into an uncertain future. The adrenaline crash from this was going to be wild. My lips still tingled from the kisses I had shared with Zephyrin. Bone melting, soul altering kisses.

Yet guilt still plagued me. Was he able to fully consent to anything? Did that second kiss happen because he thought I wanted it or because he had?

Whenever we stopped, I was getting answers from my demon husband. I had to admit that the idea of being married to the feisty little demon was growing on me, despite the predicament we found ourselves in.

“Where are we going?” Zeph finally asked in the quiet of the car. I’d switched the music off so that he could concentrate on the other sounds. We needed to know if we were being followed.

“There’s a city not too far from here. It’s a good place to wait things out, or at least until the council can calm down and realize that you aren’t a danger to anyone. Well, unless they provoke you.” I flashed a grin at him.

“Or hurt you in any way.” His smile was wicked, his sharp teeth peeking out and sending a zing through me. I wanted to feel those teeth on me while I was buried inside him.

“That’s fair. We need... we need to talk about what happened when we stop.”

“What do you mean?” he asked with faux innocence.

“Aside from the test, we need to talk about that kiss.”

“Did you not like it?” Dammit, he sounded hurt.

“No!” I said too loudly. “Let’s just wait until we can get a room somewhere, okay?”

“Okay,” Zeph said in a small voice, folding into himself.

We remained quiet for the rest of the trip into the city. Hiding in amongst so many people was going to be difficult, but we would stand out less in a larger crowd.

“I need you to put away the ears and claws, Zeph.” He immediately did what I wanted, making me fear that his will would always be overtaken by mine. Could he even think for himself? I was giving myself a headache just overthinking everything. I’d do my own tests and find out where I stood. “Oh, there’s a hoodie on the backseat. You’ll need to put that on and over your horns.”

With barely a look at the hoodie, he used that neat little wind trick and had it soaring into his outstretched fingers. Zeph worked his arms into it and flipped up the hood. No matter how hard he tried, though, he couldn’t manage the zip to cover the expanse of tanned skin that was his perfect chest.

“Leave it,” I croaked. “I’ll sort that for you when we stop.”

His fingers paused. “Thank you, Toby.”

A chain hotel I was familiar with came into view ahead. I took the turnoff and parked in the back of the lot. “I’ll go see about a room. Stay here.”

I left the car, trying not to look back at Zephyrin staring at me with a forlorn expression, but failed. “One minute,” I called, raising a hand.

Not even halfway across the lot, the pain began. “Seriously?” I muttered to myself. “That’s the limit? Fuck this!” I went stomping back to the car. “Get out!” I ordered.

Zephyrin struggled with the door, ramping up my frustration. I wasn’t angry at him, just at the situation. We needed to stabilize our bond as soon as possible, because if he



really couldn't consent properly, I was going to need to relieve this pressure myself.

Rounding the car, I flung the door open, startling Zeph. "Sorry, Toby. I don't understand these things yet."

I sighed and tried to draw on some patience from somewhere. "It isn't you, Zeph. Our bond is so tight. I didn't know that it could cause pain to be away from you. I wasn't all that far." Slumping, I leaned against the warm car. "This whole thing is out of control."

Zeph stood close, looking up at me. "Do you regret me, Toby?"

"You? Never. I just hate all this mess. Why can't they listen?"

"It's not that they can't. They don't want to," he pointed out reasonably.

It struck me how pretty he was in that moment, in the late afternoon light. With the hood up, his horns weren't visible. His hair looked black until the sun caught the strands. Then it could be passed off as an expensive, but lovely, dye job. His eyes were so beautiful and unusual, the slit irises making them difficult to read. I wanted to unravel all his secrets, learn to read every expression from his eyes alone. While he was smaller than me, he was more muscular, straining the sleeves of the borrowed hoodie.

"Tomorrow, we need to go buy you some clothes that fit," I said as I reached for the zip. All that skin was distracting. My fingers brushed his stomach and chest as I slowly raised it, hiding him from view. My inner caveman was delighted at keeping his perfection to myself. No one else was allowed to see him like that. Never had I felt so possessive of someone in my short life.

"Okay, Toby." Zephyrin's cheeks were a little red. Was he blushing?

"Right, let's grab our stuff and get a room. Stick close. Keep your eyes down if you can."

"I will."

It felt natural to take his hand and twine our fingers together as we walked through the parking lot up to the entrance of the hotel. If anyone saw us, no one said anything.

At the desk, there was a stunning black woman checking people in and answering calls. If I'd been on my own, I might have flirted up a storm, maybe tried to get her number, or her to share my room with me once she was off shift. Before Zephyrin, I'd been a young, single, bisexual guy with no particular preference for gender or body type. Now, all I wanted to do was untangle these feelings I had for my familiar.

She greeted us with a kind smile when it was our turn. "A room for two, gentlemen?"

"Please," I leaned in, smiling at her suggestively, "could we have somewhere private? Do you have cabins here?"

Beside me, still gripping my hand, Zephyrin let out a low grumble, likely inaudible to anyone but me. He squeezed my hand tighter. Not enough to hurt, just a reminder that he was there. My familiar was jealous. I squeezed back and pulled him closer to me. He softened against my side.

"You guys are cute." The clerk gave a look around. "Haven't seen a demon before. You witches, sure."

My jaw about hit the floor. "You know I'm a witch?" I whisper-shouted.

"Toby, this person is a shifter," Zephyrin supplied. "Some sort of feline creature. I don't know the name."

"How?" I looked at him askance.

"Her scent. There's also a sense of her inner animal. A strong predator. It urges me to protect you." With his words, he put himself slightly in front of me.

The woman smirked. "Oh honey, you got yourself a good one," she told me. To Zeph she said, "I'm a jaguar."

"I don't know what that is," he said, sounding confused. He missed her look of sympathy.

"I'll show you on my phone or something once we get checked in. We can still stay here, can't we?" I directed my

question to the shifter. A fucking shifter! What were the chances that we would run into one here? I should have picked it up. I'd met one before, after all. Now that Zeph had pointed it out, I could see the feline grace with which she moved.

“As long as you can vouch that he is bound to you and won't go off opening portals and shit, then it's fine. I will have to tell my pride and my queen might want to see him.”

With a sinking stomach, I faced Zephyrin. I couldn't bear the thought of more tests. “We can try somewhere else.”

“No, I am bound to you. We were tested. They hurt me. It should be enough that we know it.” Zephyrin was getting angry. A breeze stirred in the reception, likely from his agitation. I'd noticed him favoring wind for his magic.

“Calm down, Zephyrin.” My voice took on a new tone, one I had never used before. Whatever it was, it worked. Within a few moments, the breeze had stopped.

The woman looked at us. “Nicely done. Here's a key to the furthest away cabin. You have it for the week. We'll be in touch.”

We were halfway there before I realized I hadn't paid her or asked her name.



“I'M SORRY,” I blurted just as we reached the far off cabin. The clerk had done us a solid by placing us as far away from other people as possible. These were likely honeymoon cabins to give newlyweds privacy.

“For what, Toby?” Zephyrin was the most withdrawn that I'd ever seen him.

“For ordering you. I think my magic took over there. I just—I don't want to do that to you.”

“I understand why you did. I was letting my feelings get the better of me. If you want to flirt with someone else, then I have to let you do what you want.”

Fucking hell, I was botching this. “I wasn’t flirting. I was being friendly.”

“So you do not find her attractive?” His eyes were shrewd.

“I do, but like you said, we are married and I want to know how you feel about that.”

“We should go inside where it’s safer for you.”

It took me a few tries, but I managed to unlock the door with the stupid keycard thing that I’d been given. I led the way into the well-appointed cabin. I took a brief glance around, noting we had everything we needed so that we wouldn’t have to go out much while we figured out our long-term plan.

“Toby?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you doubt how I feel about you? You are my husband. In time, feelings will grow. One day, you might even love me.” He said the last part sadly, like he didn’t actually expect that to happen.

“Zeph, you’re bonded to me, so I just—“

“What?”

“I worry you can’t say no to me. That it’s the bond doing this, making you feel this way for me.”

Zeph slumped. “I don’t know how to convince you. I came here, away from my family, knowing it would bond me to a witch. From the first second, before you tied me to you, I wanted you. I was excited to be your husband.”

“You were?”

He approached, pinning me against the door. Reaching up, he clasped my face. “Tell me not to. See what happens.”

“Don’t,” I croaked. Firmer, “don’t kiss me, Zephyrin.” There, under the words, was an order. It was a thin binding of

wills. We both knew I didn't mean it.

His lips met mine. Just a brief kiss. "Try again."

"No kissing, Zephyrin." The words felt like an order. I felt them reach out for him and bounce off.

He pulled me into another, longer kiss. I felt his sharp fang teeth with my tongue. Then shivered as they nipped at my lip.

Together, we made our way to the bed, lips still fused, hands wandering. All I could think about was the ice cold taste of his tongue, the warm smooth skin, his hair wrapped around my hands so I could hold him in place. He felt so very right against me. Perfect.

Zephyrin's legs buckled as they hit the edge of the bed. He fell back with an oomph, a grin lighting his handsome face. "Come here," he whispered, voice raw. He reached his hands out for me.

My movements faltered. "Why won't the orders work?"

"Because neither of us wants them to. I want to kiss you always. You want to be kissed. Let me love you, Toby, please."

Knowing that he could ignore the orders because he didn't want to obey should have concerned me. If I couldn't show that he was harmless, we could never go home. Now we were in shifter territory, it was even more important that I could demonstrate control over my demon. They'd end us both if I couldn't.

"Zephyrin," I put in as much power as I could into my voice. "You must never knowingly end a life without it being to protect another from harm. You must not show your powers to humans and put us at risk." The last order nearly stuck in my throat. "You must say no if you don't want to be with me."

On the bed, he blinked at me as the magic took hold. "I want to be with you Toby, in all ways. As your husband and your familiar. Do you want that too?"

Relief had tears welling up in my eyes. I blinked them away. Knowing that those were his true feelings for me

warmed every part of my soul. No one had made me feel like this. Like I could take over the world. Powerful and strong. Desired. I felt it all from him as our bond deepened.

After our first kiss, I'd felt more of his feelings. Now, it was almost like I could hear his thoughts. I knew how much he hungered for my touch. How much he wanted me inside him, completing our bond properly. If we did that, there would be no going back. Only death would part us.

A flash of a distant future passed before my eyes. Happiness, warmth, love. All of it with my demon.

“I want you like that too.”

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The emotions filtering down the bond were nearly enough to steal my breath. Toby's feelings for me matched mine for him so completely that I was sure this was how we were supposed to be.

Seeing him looking down on me with a look of wonder cemented my decision. "Come here, I need you."

This time, he didn't waver. Instead, he peeled off his shirt and leaned down over me. The delicious heat of his skin warmed me to my toes. Any time that we weren't touching, I felt cold and alone.

Toby hovered over me on his elbows, pressing kisses to my forehead, nose, and then chin. "You are perfect. So pretty." He pulled away, sitting so that he was straddling my hips. "Could you—?"

"What? What do you need, Toby?"

"Could you let your ears and tail out? Can I touch them, and your horns?"

Heat rushed through me, making my very interested cock twitch in the borrowed sweats. Toby grinned as he felt it. "I can do that, but they are very sensitive. I... it could end things before they begin."

"What's your recovery time like?"

It took a moment to understand what he was saying. Sometimes the spell that worked as a translator... lagged, for want of a different term. "Not long," I finally answered. "Maybe a few minutes?"



“Good.” He stood. “Now get those clothes off and get up the bed.”

I hastened to comply, shedding the clothing my master, my husband, had given me with care. I didn't want to ruin the gifts, especially now that we were on the run.

Heat rose to my cheeks at the open expression of desire on his face as he ran his eyes over my body. They darkened further as I let my claws, ears, and tail escape their magical confines. Truly, I hadn't meant to let my claws out, but my excitement overruled my control. I was just grateful my wings stayed where they were.

Toby climbed onto the bed. I reached for him, letting my claws skim gently over his pale skin. It was a creamy white, dotted with freckles on his shoulders, arms, and over his chest. Unlike me, he had a small amount of coarse, dark blond body hair over his pecs and in a line down his stomach to his groin. I'd missed when he had taken his pants off and looked my fill of his cock. Human cocks didn't have the ridges on their members that my people did, but the vein on the underside would feel amazing inside me. Toby was meant to fill me to complete our bond. I had no doubt that he would bring me great pleasure. The magic had chosen me for a reason.

He lay beside me so that we could touch and kiss for a while, our arousal slowly ratcheting up as we got lost in the feel of each other's bodies. I could easily become addicted to his taste.

My tongue explored his mouth as I cupped Toby's head, needing more than this teasing. I pulled him on top of me so that he could grind against my cock as our mouths came together over and over, only parting to breathe. Taking our shafts in hand, I worked them, the copious amount of precum I'd leaked slicking the movement.

“Holy fuck! That feels amazing.” Toby moaned into my ear before sucking a mark on my neck. I flexed my hips, needing more, my release just out of reach.

“Please,” I begged. “More!”

Toby replaced his lips on mine with a finger. “Suck,” he ordered, with no real compulsion. My Toby didn’t fully understand his power and our rules. In time, we would learn our limitations.

I complied, sucking the digit deep, slicking it with saliva. It popped free, and I felt it press against my entrance just moments later.

As he worked a finger inside me, Toby returned to pressing kisses and nips along my collarbone and up my neck. Each one had me moaning and sighing as I continued to work us, Toby’s hips thrusting with the movement of my hand. He hit the sensitive spot just under my jaw with a playful bite at the same time as a finger ran over the furry shell of my ear. That was all it took for me to reach my peak, releasing all over us in thick ropes.

“So hot,” Toby moaned against my neck. He pecked me on the lips and sat back on his knees between my splayed thighs. He scooped some of my sticky semen off his stomach. “Hmm,” he licked it off his fingers, “tasty.” He reached down, running a finger over my hole again. “Handy lube, which is perfect because I didn’t pack any.”

With my own spend, he opened me enough to take his cock, gazing at his fingers disappearing inside me. I watched him, desperate for the feel of his body on mine. Goosebumps erupted over my skin, my nipples pebbled in the cool air as I waited for him to deem me ready.

He gathered the last of my cum from my stomach and coated his member with it. It gave me a shiver to know that my pleasure was being used to give Toby his. I was his to do with what he wanted.

Leaning over me again, his cock at my entrance, he asked, “do you want this? Want me? Forever?”

For a brief second, I was speechless. “Yes,” I whispered. “I want you. For always.”

His cock pushed inside me with a slow and careful slide. I’d had lovers before. Had them mount me as much as I’d

mounted them, but none had given me this feeling. With my husband, I felt complete. Once fully seated, he kissed me and began to rock his hips in a gentle rhythm.

Tingles of magic began to work their way up my body. I recalled a mating song that I'd been taught and muttered it against Toby's shoulder as he thrust harder and deeper inside me. I chanted the words from a long forgotten time as I clasped his sweat soaked body to me, claws digging in, but never piercing flesh, as he fucked me.

Pounding harder into me, Toby took up the chant. His beautiful cornflower blue eyes began to glow as he echoed my words.

I worked my body with his, desperate for us to reach our orgasm together. From now on, we were one and together we could do anything.

My nerves were alight with pleasure and magic. "Your eyes!" Toby gasped. I could see them reflected in his. Matching. Both glowing with the supernatural light that was our shared magic.

The remainder of the song came to me and I sang it out loud and clear, Toby joining me, his beautiful tenor voice melding with mine. A final ripple of magic crashed over us as I came, Toby following behind. Then we slumped into the mattress, completely sated.

Our breathing was labored, our skin clammy, but I'd never felt so happy before. The part of me that had always been missing was returned to me now that we were irreparably bonded.

My master was the first to speak. "You know there's no going back, right?"

"I knew that before I let the summoning take me."

"And you're okay with it all? Being my husband as well as my familiar?"

"Toby? Do you regret—?"

"What? No! I'm just scared I didn't give you a choice."

I ran my fingertips along his spine, my claws hidden once more. “I sang the wedding song. It was my choice to do that.”

“Wedding song, huh?”

“Our people, when they mate after marriage, they sing the wedding song to bind their magic together. We were already married thanks to the bonding. This just made it so you will have all of my magic and we can never be parted.”

His head rose so his eyes could meet mine. “I’m glad you chose me like that.”

“Eventually, if you decide you want another, we will sing to them too.”

Toby’s eyes went wide. I already missed the glow our joined magic gave them. “We can be poly?”

I growled without thinking. “Maybe not for a while. I like having you to myself.”

He relaxed against my chest. “Same. I’m not sharing you. You’re mine, Zephyrin. For always.”

# **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

The cool night air made the thin curtains flutter as I lay in bed next to a soundly sleeping Zephyrin. My new husband had drifted off to sleep not long after I'd cleaned us up after our... lovemaking? Gah, I hated that term. Sex. We'd had sweaty, glorious, life-altering, and meaningful sex. I wasn't about to call it anything else.

Husband. My mind lingered over that word a lot as I lay there and listened to his steady breathing and the far-off sounds of the city. To be honest, I'd thought the whole husband thing was a sort of mistranslation from the spell that let me and Zeph understand each other. In my head, it had been just another word for familiar or bonded, not what he would come to mean to me in my heart.

Stupidly, I was growing fond of the demon. No, more than that, though I wasn't ready to give voice to those particular emotions.

Internally, I sighed at my dramatic self. I was becoming one of those stupid heroines from the romance books my mom read when I was younger. Not that I'd ever read them, of course. The heroines always overlooked the most obvious and ignored all the red flags.

I glanced at Zeph, worried that he could feel my inner conflict the same way I could feel his bliss in his dreams. He was truly happy about what had happened, which should have been a huge relief, yet I still felt guilty, like I'd forced him to feel the way he did about me.

It was time to be rational and look at the red flags that Zephyrin had. I scoffed, since it was probably too late. Actually, I knew it was far too late. We were freaking married for good, for heaven's sake, but my brain was spinning over the events of the last few days. I needed to process things properly. Really think them through before someone got hurt. Okay, before I got hurt.

So, Zeph. What about him? What were his good and bad qualities? I hadn't known him long, but the pressure situations we had found ourselves in had shown me a lot about him in a short time.

For instance, I knew my demon husband was sweet, doting, and extremely powerful, though he appeared to struggle with control like I did. He also blushed a lot, got jealous easily, liked me to himself, and was impetuous. What else could you call answering a summoning like he had? While he had denied my orders, he also could have used far more force on both the guards and the council and had always erred on the side of caution. He didn't want to cause harm, or more likely, he remembered my first rule, the one that I had just carefully repeated, pushing a lot of power into it: cause no harm.

Either way, I could breathe freely knowing that his morals or my orders were preventing him from using his magic to end people.

The thing that really bothered me was how we had gotten into this situation at all. While I loved having Zeph as a familiar and wouldn't change that, it still wasn't supposed to be like that. I was supposed to have an animal, something like my sister's ferret, or Oscar's bird. Something I could pass off as a pet, not a person.

The coven said that since this was my final chance, they would do all that they could to make it work. With overpowering previous attempts, they had given me a stronger summoning spell. One that had been checked by August, a man whose integrity I would bet money on. That man, despite my former discomfort, worshiped the very ground my sister

walked on. He wouldn't let me be hurt because it would devastate her.

Oscar, one of the most powerful of our coven, had constructed the spell. August had checked it. The ingredients hadn't left my sight. My home was a fortress. So, it had to be the spell from Oscar when he had written it out phonetically. August hadn't checked that. None of us had thought we would need that part checked. Could Avery have done something with it, or, most likely, had Oscar betrayed me?

The question was, why? Why would they need to? What did Oscar get out of ruining me? No, not just that. I would have been cast out if it had failed. Their changes had summoned something potentially fatal. I could have died. Summoning a demon could have gone horribly wrong and I would have been dead at the end of it. How would Oscar have explained that?

Clearly, someone in the coven wanted me gone in the worst way, and they didn't mind a spot of murder to do it. So was it a prank gone horribly wrong, not knowing that I could actually do it? Or had they thought I might just manage it and hoped the demon would do away with me? Did that mean Oscar wanted me dead? Or just Avery? Did Oscar know about the tampering beforehand? Why, why, why...? I knew my thoughts were rambling, that I was spinning out of control. I didn't know how to switch my brain off. It hurt to think of all the possibilities.

Zephyrin reached an arm out to me and pulled me into the circle of his body. There, our skin touching, I finally calmed. All that mattered was, for the time being, that we were safe. Everything else, the issues with the coven, why this had been done to me, would wait for another day.



I WOKE BEFORE ZEPH, the early morning sun in my eyes pulling me from sleep. Carefully, with minimal jostling, I



extricated myself from his tentacle-like arms. Seriously, that guy had a grip on me.

Looking at his sleeping face, I almost wanted to crawl back into bed with him again. He looked so peaceful and didn't stir while I re-dressed. He must have been exhausted.

Leaving him a two word note on a handy piece of paper, I headed towards reception. The bond didn't pull as much as it had before, with it more settled within me after my night with Zeph. It meant I could go farther from him, and be away longer without either of us suffering.

I needed to get a handle on the situation here. The clerk had been a shifter. That had half a dozen questions running through my mind. Was this hotel pack run? Was there someone I needed to report to? More to the point, would they let us hide out here?

Having a demon with me was an extra complication I hadn't factored into my escape plan. I knew that leaving the coven might mean fleeing in the night and hiding out until they lost interest, depending on how badly I damaged things before I left. Now I was running with a familiar that happened to be summoned from another world and had his own magic. My coven wasn't going to just leave that. They'd want to know that we weren't coming back to take the place apart. Or take over.

No, we had to hide until I was sure that we wouldn't be a danger and we knew what had happened with the damn spell in the first place. I had the sliver of paper in my other jeans. I'd made sure to pack it, so I just had to find someone to read it for me that knew the witch language. They could tell me how badly I'd fucked up then. It would also narrow down who we could trust at home.

Home. Just thinking about it hurt my heart. I wanted to be there with Tabby and Star. Even August. I was too anxious about Oscar's role in things to think about him. His potential betrayal was enough to bring tears to my eyes.

The reception was empty when I pulled open the door. A man with dark skin, smooth black hair artfully styled, and

deep brown eyes greeted me. “Ah, the witch. I wondered if you would come to me, or if you were going to enjoy the honeymoon facilities for a few days first.” He took a few delicate sniffs. “Oh, you partook, honey. Congrats and all.”

I flushed what felt like several shades of red. “How? Are you a shifter, too?” I stuttered.

The man rolled his eyes and with a thiwp sound, two razor sharp looking fangs dropped to his lower lip. “There are other creatures out there than just shifters.”

Jumping back, I stumbled and fell on my ass, hard. “Holy fuck!” Panic rushed through me so hard I nearly blacked out.

“Oh, my god! Your face!” The guy cracked up, which looked odd with the fangs. He held his sides. He was laughing so hard.

I just lay there, looking up at him and wondering if I was about to die. Was he going to eat me? Were witches a delicacy to vampires? He was a vampire, right? My heart hammered so hard in my chest that I could barely hear anything else.

The door flung open behind me, breaking the clerk’s laughter. “Oh, my!” he exclaimed.

Suddenly, I found myself in the arms of a frantic Zephyrin, his wings cocooning us from view. Between looking for the source of danger and trying to get us to a defensible position, he snuck glances at me. “Are you okay?”

“I, uh, I don’t know.”

“Now sweetheart, this is a family establishment. I’m going to have to ask you to put the wings away and put on some pants.” The clerk interrupted.

Zephyrin looked his way, hissing menacingly. “Vampire.”

“Right,” the vampire drawled. “We’ve been over this with your cutie.” Another hiss from Zephyrin. The man looked at me. “Could you ask your super fine hunk of man meat to put that weapon away? It’s a wonder you can walk today, honey. You got skills!”

There was another hiss, this time from me. A fire sprung up from the pile of papers on the reception desk. “Right, bonded. No flirting.” He popped his head in the direction of the fire. “Could one of you put that out, or do I have to get a fire extinguisher?”

Fuck! I didn’t know how. I looked at Zephyrin for help. “Here, let me guide you. Feel the water in the air?” I nodded. “Then draw it to that area like a cloud heavy with rain and let it sprinkle over the fire.”

Zephyrin made it sound so simple, but with him helping me control the flow of magic, it was. Within seconds, the fire was out.

“Now for the wings.” The clerk threw a blanket at Zephyrin. “Cover up. We need to have a chat.”



ANDRAS, the vampire, quickly settled us into a conference room with some breakfast and more clothing for my demon. We were just waiting on his alpha while we picked through the pastries and fruit.

I was pretty sure that we couldn’t leave the hotel without being hunted down. It was better to get this visit out of the way. To find out what our options were.

The doors opened and several people flowed into the room, all surrounding a petite blonde woman. Every inch of her exuded power. I felt the crackle of it lift the hairs on my arms. I turned to press my face into Zeph’s shoulder. “Oh, shit!” I whispered.

Andras smirked like he had heard. Likely had. Fucking vampires with their insane hearing.

Through our bond, I felt Zephyrin’s interest in the woman. The growing feeling of jealousy prickled at my exposed nerves

and made me tighten my grip on my demon husband. I wanted to hiss and mark him as mine.

There was a flicker of amusement through our bond. “Yours,” was unspoken, but felt. Zeph nodded his head politely to the woman as she took a seat in front of us, the vampire at one side, the shifter from the previous night at the other.

“Hello, Toby.” she said in a musical voice. “Welcome to earth, Zephyrin. My mother would like to visit with you to discuss her home whenever you can make time for that.” That was an order, not a suggestion.

“Thank you,” Zephyrin said in a formal tone. His expression was polite. “I would enjoy a visit with the demoness that birthed you. Your father, is he human?”

The... half demon? Giggled. Fucking giggled! “Oh, no, he’s an angel, if you can believe that.”

Zephyrin leaned forward, forgetting me entirely for a moment. “Really? I’ve heard so many tales of angels. I would love to meet him.”

A shadow passed over her eyes. “Unfortunately, my father was summoned home. We haven’t seen him for many years.”

“I’m sorry,” I muttered, drawing Zephyrin’s attention back to me. I felt bad for feeling jealous. With our bond, I could feel how much Zeph cared about me. I could sense him checking out the threats.

“It’s okay,” she said, drawing my attention back to her. “That’s not why I wanted to speak to you. First, we need to know why you are in my pack’s territory and what your intentions are.”

“We’re hiding. From my coven. We can keep moving—“

She held up her hand. “No worries. I assume it’s because of Zephyrin, right?” I nodded. “Okay, well, introductions. I’m Justice.” She grinned. “I know, cool name for a half demon. Next to me is Andras, who you’ve met. You also met Chloe last night.”

I lost the rest of the names, my head too full already. I'd learn them eventually if we stayed for any length of time. "Nice to meet you all," I said when Justice stopped expectantly. "It's been a wild few days." I went on to outline quickly what had happened, making sure to emphasize how Zeph had obeyed my orders.

"It's all cool," Chloe said. "I watched him last night. We know he's fine. Plus, you could say we have experience with demons."

"Right. Sorry, this is all just so weird. So you are all a pack?"

"We are," Justice grinned. "A bunch of cast-outs and runaways. The unwanted." They looked proud of it. "We're happy to take you in, but there's something about your story that's been sticking with me."

"What's that?" I asked carefully.

"The reason you couldn't control your magic. And likely why the previous summonings didn't work or did weird shit." Justice exchanged a look with Chloe and then Andras.

It was Andras that finally spoke. "We think you have a bit of demon in you."

# **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

Toby tensed beside me, his expression going carefully blank. Justice began giggling. This sweet, high sound was at odds with the barely repressed ocean of power I could sense within her tiny body.

“Oh, honey! I wish you could see your face!” the coven, or pack, leader gasped out.

“Doesn’t he have the best expressions?” Andras asked, joining Justice’s laughter.

Justice nodded at him while the others smiled indulgently at her behavior. Their trust and loyalty were crystal clear. When she finally sobered, she cleared her throat and was handed a bottle of water from Chloe. “Thanks, hun.” Justice took a few delicate sips before putting the bottle down before her. “Look, there’s a few things that you’re unlikely to know. A lot of witches don’t.” She shrugged. “I guess it makes covens uncomfortable to deal with reality, but here we are.”

“What... what are you talking about?”

“Here’s a different question for you. Where do witches come from?” Justice leaned her elbow on the table in front of her, cupping her face. She directed all her attention to a squirming Toby.

“The goddess gifted us magic long ago for following her ways.” Toby stuttered out. “We call her the three faced goddess—“

“The maiden, the mother, the crone, right,” Justice interrupted. “But what’s her proper name? Where did she

come from?”

Toby’s head tilted as he thought about how to answer her. I felt his confusion down the bond and clasped his hand, sending comfort to him. “I—I don’t know.”

Justice smiled sympathetically. “Yeah, I guessed as much. Ever hear about Lilith in your studies?”

“Lilith? No. Why?”

Shaking her head with a conflicted expression, I thought I heard her mutter, “fucking witches,” under her breath. I clasped Toby’s hand tighter, because I knew who Lilith was and where this was probably going. Toby was going to need my strength.

After a few minutes of silence and what looked like a wordless debate between Justice and her people, she finally spoke. “Lilith was the first wife of Adam if you believe in the bible. They cast her aside, and she then became the mother of demons.”

“So a demon made witches?” Toby looked heartbreakingly confused.

Justice reached along the table for his hand. He gave it up unquestioningly. “No, Babycakes. Witches were born from Lilith and human men. Then born from the children that followed the first. Witches have always had demon blood in them.”

Toby’s face blanched. “Then why—?” He looked at me, tears in his eyes. “Why did you ask about demon blood?”

She ran her hands through her blonde hair, smoothing it down. “Right, well, most witches these days are so far from the source they barely have a drop in them. The demon was so far in their ancestry that their great, great-grandparents didn’t know their demon parent’s name.” She sighed. “Their magic is normal, for want of a better word. Tame, maybe.” I watched her squeeze his fingers. “Then there’s people like you. Or like I think you are.”

“What do you mean?” Toby asked. I was just sitting and observing. Neither Chloe nor Andras looked surprised by this



information. It made me wonder if this was the first time a witch like Toby had ended up with them.

Andras was the one that spoke. “We think that your demon ancestor was likely closer in the line than the people in the coven. Probably several generations ago. I—“

Chloe cut in. “He doesn’t explain it well, but like, your coven probably had demons twenty or thirty generations away and you ten. Sometimes when a coven is losing power and they know about the old ways they—“

“Let’s not scare him.” Justice’s voice was firm. “There’s a way we can tell.”

“There is?” Toby looked alarmed.

Andras let his fangs drop. “Yeah, just gimme a taste.”

Toby stood suddenly, wrenching his hands from both me and Justice and sending his chair toppling. There was a sound like flesh smacking and a sound of pain. “Idiot!” one of the women cursed. Likely Chloe.

“No! I’m not letting you bite me. Zeph, we’re leaving!” Toby reached for me.

“Wait!” Justice cried. “I’m not going to let him bite you. Andras never feeds off the unwilling, and he doesn’t need that much blood to check. Just a spot.”

I could see that Toby was curious, but so very afraid of the vampire. He looked down at me. I gazed up at Toby, letting him see I was with him in this. “Whatever you want, okay? We can still leave.”

“Just a spot?” Toby asked warily.

“A pinprick.” Justice confirmed.

With another look at me, Toby righted the chair and slumped into it, holding out his hand. “Go on then.”

Andras reached for a finger and was in the process of bringing it to his mouth when I hissed and shot to my feet. “Get off him!”

Chloe shoved Andras out of the way. “Fucking idiot,” she muttered. Then shifted her hand into a paw, letting claws out. “Hold still,” she ordered a startled Toby.

He didn’t waver as a claw pricked his pointer finger and collected a small amount of blood on it. Chloe held the claw out to Andras, “here’s your blood, leech.” It was said in a teasing way, since Andras laughed and licked the offered claw.

Toby sucked on his finger while Andras hummed over the taste of his blood. My poor husband was beginning to look a little green. I pulled him close and took his injured hand in my own. With a little of my healing water magic, I closed the cut and made Toby smile. “Thanks.”

I leaned in to kiss his nose. “Of course. This test doesn’t matter. It just gives you an explanation.”

He smiled and ran a hand through my hair. “I know.”

“Well, this is adorable and all, but I’ve had my fill of sweetness for the day. Toby, you’ve got quite a bit more demon in there than most witches. So a few generations back there’s a demon ancestor, likely on both sides of your family tree. Not as much demon as Justice here.” Andras stood and laid a hand on Justice’s shoulder. “You clearly are stable.”

“I agree,” Justice said, making to stand.

“So that’s it?” Toby frowned.

“Nah, Babycakes. It’s enough for today. You boys need to see to your bond and process. Maybe get your demon some clothes?” She grinned. “We can talk again tomorrow and you can tell me how you ended up bonded to a demon.”

“There was a spell—“

“Great, tell me about it tomorrow.” Justice was firm. She stood, waving over her shoulder as she left the room, Chloe and Andras following after her.



TOGETHER, we sat in silence as Toby picked at the remaining food. I let him think about all that he had heard as he attempted to eat. It wasn't shocking to me that demons had birthed witches. I'd grown up hearing similar tales. I could also guess at what they hadn't said. Yet, I didn't voice that knowledge. I knew that my witch was overwhelmed by what had happened.

I also knew that I needed to speak to Toby soon about my sister and the curse. Every moment that I put it off was potentially fatal to her. Finding the right time was just so hard. Now he was too overwhelmed by who he truly was to take on this extra burden.

"If I have a close demon ancestor, this means witches have bound themselves to demons before, doesn't it?" Of course, Toby had come to the answer himself.

"It does. It would likely mean that the spell they gave you was an old one and whoever gave it to you didn't understand its purpose." I attempted to not place blame on his friend. I didn't trust Oscar. Didn't trust any of his coven aside from his sister, and perhaps August, with his close bond with Tabitha.

"Makes sense." Toby sounded so flat. So morose.

"Toby, let's get out of here. Explore the city," I suggested, trying to lighten the mood.

"We can't. Not with you like that," he muttered.

I frowned. "I'll cover my horns and keep my eyes down. We can get better clothes, yes?"

"Yeah. I think we should get a burner phone so I can call Tabby and let her know I'm okay." Having something to do seemed to improve his mood.

"And you can show me what a jaguar is."

That gained me a tiny lift of his lips. “Of course. I forgot.”

“But I didn’t.”

His expression was fond. “No, you didn’t.” He began to look sad again. He needed affection and fresh air.

I stood and held out a hand to him. Taking it, Toby grinned at me. I pulled him into a hug. “It will be okay in the end.”

“With you next to me. I believe it.”

The walk over to the cabin we were staying in was painful. I’d flown over and now I had to walk over the tiny prickly stones, wincing with each step we took. “Just fly, Zeph. There’s literally no one here.” Instead, I cushioned my feet with air, lifting me off the ground a little. Toby laughed. “Love it!” Just to hear the sound more, I lifted myself higher, so we were the same height.

Wanting more of his smiles, I slung my arm around his waist and lifted him so that we were both hovering above the ground. “Let your magic do it,” I suggested.

Toby gave a nervous giggle. “Nah, I’ll end up shooting into those trees.” He pointed to a distant copse of trees on the outskirts of the parking lot.

“I promise to help you with your control.” The bond would allow me to siphon off some of the magic that he used and filter it back to him slowly.

“You will?” Toby looked so hopeful.

“Promise,” I vowed.

Through the bond, I felt the flare of magic. He only used a small amount, not really needing me to skim some off. “That’s it,” I encouraged. I slowly took my magic away and allowed Toby to control his on level. He wavered slightly. “Concentrate on what you want to happen, not what could.” With my words, his air steps leveled off, and we slowly got to the other side of the parking lot without accident.

Letting go of the magic, Toby’s feet touched the ground again. His smile was the brightest I’d seen yet. It warmed my soul to be the reason for this brief moment of happiness.

He let us into the cabin and pushed me towards the bed. "Let me make you feel good." The air became charged with expectation. I could feel his lust. His need for pleasure to soothe his rough edges.

Not needing to say a word, I removed the borrowed blanket that I'd wrapped around my body and pushed down the borrowed shorts. I reached for his clothes, then tugged him to me and mashed our mouths together, desperately. I groaned at the taste of him and the feel of his skin against mine.

Toby's answering sound sent a shiver through me. He kissed me frantically before breaking free of my mouth and tracing kisses and nips down my neck to my chest. He licked and bit at each nipple while I arched underneath him. This was a sin. I needed to be touching more of him. I kept running my fingers through his hair and tugging at the dark blond strands, making Toby smirk up at me.

He worked his way to my cock. "This thing is a work of art," he mused. He ran his fingers over the mushroom shaped head. Unlike on a human, there were bumps meant to stimulate on the head, and ridges down the shaft. He fingered each bump and ridge before following the same path with his tongue. "I bet this would feel amazing inside me." He was the demon, not me. His lustful grin set me alight. I wanted to do anything he wanted of me. Toby sucked on the head and then took more of me into his mouth. He didn't stop, opening his throat to me.

"Toby!" I exclaimed, bucking my hips. The pleasure was nearly overwhelming. "I need to touch you."

"Here." He lifted off my cock with a pop. "Sixty-nine?"

His words meant nothing to me. I let him move me into position so I could get my hands and mouth on his delicious shaft. I sucked on his balls, fingered his taint, then took him into my mouth, right to his base. Toby fucked my face while he sucked me down. All I could focus on was increasing his sounds, giving him pleasure. My orgasm took me by surprise.

My witch pulled off with a cough and wiped my spend from his chin. I had a brief moment of worry that he would be

angry, but he laughed while I tried to catch my breath. “Still got it! It’s been a while since I blew anyone.”

He was rock hard as I flipped him to his back and used all my considerable skills to make sure that Toby never thought of another while in bed with me again. I wasn’t satisfied until he was a moaning, writhing mess and I had a belly full of his cum.

“Best. Husband. Ever!” Toby giggled breathlessly as he recovered.

“Nap, then shopping?” I suggested.

“Nap. Another round, then shopping.”

**CHAPTER  
SEVENTEEN**

It was late afternoon before we finally left the hotel and ventured deeper into the city. Amid the hustle and bustle, it was easy to overlook Zephyrin. To me, he was a constant and steadying presence in a world that looked so very different compared to before my chat with Justice. To the world, he was just another guy under a hoodie, trying to avoid notice.

Honestly, I was still processing what Justice had said. Her explanation for my powerful magic made sense. It had sunk down somewhere deep inside me as a base truth and I just believed her. Part of that was I'd never really given much thought to the origins of witches. It wasn't something that was discussed in school. They taught most of us the same as humans until it was time to summon our familiar. Then we studied the witch language, another thing I hadn't thought about the origins of. Was it really a demon language?

Deciding to find the spell when we got back to the cabin, I put the mess out of my mind and focused on what I needed to do. Zeph needed a better disguise, and I needed a burner phone. I was probably being super dramatic about not using my own phone. The device was off and in the bottom of my duffel bag, but it was better to be paranoid than caught. I didn't want them tracking me with it.

I wasn't even sure if the coven was hunting for us and what the punishment would be if we returned. Logic told me they wouldn't want someone as strong as me out there with a demon in tow. They likely wanted Zeph more than they



wanted me. I was guessing that the testing was to see if we were truly bonded so they could steal him.

It made me wonder if they knew our origins, too. Was that a secret that you were let into when you joined the council? Did August know? He had to, right?

Deciding it was best to take Zeph to a clothing store first, we hit an outlet and picked up a couple of everything. I got some things for myself and a much needed bottle of lube for when I tried to take that beast in his pants. I was grateful that he was a grower and not a shower, as there was no way I'd be able to find pants to fit him otherwise. Wearing sweatpants with what he had soft was almost criminal. I found him some jeans, t-shirts, and since it was fall, a couple of hoodies. Zeph took a liking to a ball-cap, so that went into the cart, too.

There was a guy checking us out as we roamed the shelves. Zeph's hand tightened around mine when he noticed the guy looking at my ass. When he realized we had caught him, he just grinned. He met Zeph's eyes. "Cool contacts, man. You looking for a third?"

Zeph stood rigid, his face carefully blank. It was a relief that he kept his growl to a quiet rumble. I felt his agitation, his need to keep me to himself down the bond. I didn't know what the guy's deal was, so I kept it polite. "Hey, tempting—" Zeph's hand squeezed and his growl got louder. "But no thanks. My husband and I are on our honeymoon." I pulled him closer to me, making him soften. "Fucking airline lost our luggage."

"Nightmare. Well, shame. If you change your mind, I get off in an hour." It was only then that I noticed the name tag. I guess they had asked him to check on us. We finished our shopping pretty quickly after.

Zeph lingered quietly behind me as I paid for the items, keeping his eyes trained on the floor. His curiosity ate at me. I wished that he could look and ask all the questions I could feel building up inside me.

"Don't suppose you know where to get colored contacts?" I asked the cashier. Zeph cuddled closer, pleased.

They named the store, and I thanked them before hurrying out the door. On the way to buy the contacts, I bought a cheap burner and switched it on. “I’m just going to call Tabby quickly, then we can get the lenses and hat on you. Then we can go for a coffee or something. Decide what our next steps are.” He just nodded.

The phone rang twice before I hung up and called again, my signal to my sister it was me. “Toby? I’m alone.”

“Hey, it’s me. Are you okay?”

“Am I okay? Are you out of your damn mind? Are you okay?”

I chuckled at her harassed tone. “I’m alright. Scared. Worried, but I have Zeph. We’re safe.”

“Good, I’m glad. It’s all gone to shit here.” I tensed. “Don’t come back just yet, Toby. You need... I dunno, actually.” She gave a mirthless laugh. I missed her so much.

“Tabby?”

“Yeah?” I wondered what she was doing. Where Star was and if she was really okay and not just putting on a brave face for me.

“Is Oscar okay?”

“Oh, sweetheart. I didn’t want to tell you this on the phone.” My heart sank. Shit. This had to be bad.

“You have to. Please tell me what happened.” My fear for my friend clogged my throat. My eyes filled with tears. Zeph wrapped his arms around me, comforting me despite the stares we got from passersby.

“Oscar. Fuck, Tobes. He’s in jail. They are holding him responsible for giving you the wrong spell. They think...” Her voice trailed off. I thought I heard a sob.

“They think the demon was supposed to kill you.” She really was crying. Openly sniffing into the phone. “They think Oscar gave you a demon summoning spell to kill you, only you fucked it up.” She gave a watery laugh. “Only you, huh?”

“Seriously, they believe that Oscar, my best friend for my entire life, the one that saw all the struggles I went through and wrote a new spell for me, that Oscar? That he tried to kill me? Why?”

“I’ve got no idea. The council is all riled up. None of them can see sense and it’s just getting worse and worse. The Farmers believe Oscar’s dad wants to take over the council by getting rid of you and destabilizing it but no one has seen his dad in a week! He’s vanished. Oscar claims to not know where he’s gone. August—“

“What? He saw the spell, Tabby. He said it was good. Should work better. He was proud of Oscar.”

“Exactly. They think he was working with Oscar’s family to get rid of the Farmers. They’re trying to remove him. It doesn’t look good at all. We’re thinking about leaving too. It’s weird here, Toby. You did the right thing about running.”

“You can’t Tabby. The shop!” It horrified me, the idea of Tabitha leaving the shop and all she had worked for over the years.

“We’ll work something out about the shop if it gets worse here. I can’t be here if the council kicks August out. They want to jail him, too, Toby.” My poor sister sounded broken.

My laugh was bitter. Zeph rubbed my back while I blazed with anger. The council would not hurt my family to score points off each other. “They’ve lost it. Look, I’m pretty sure I have a copy of the original that Oscar wrote before he wrote it phonetically for me. The version that August checked.”

“You do? Where?” There was a glimmer of hope in her voice. I wanted to make that grow, give her something to hold on to while it was bleak there.

“I’ve got the phonetic copy where we’ve been staying, but the original is in my safe in the back of my closet.” My house was warded so only Oscar, August and Tabby could enter without me being there, so maybe the safe was overkill.

When Tabitha laughed, it was a clear, happy sound. “I love you. You know that, right?” My anger and fear lessened on

hearing those words.

“Love you too. We’ll fix this, okay? Get the spell and show the council that it’s the one that August approved from Oscar. They can do a truth spell. I made some. There’s stock in the shop.” My thoughts were tripping together. “If I’m right and someone tampered with the phonetic one, I... it might not help Oscar unless he can prove that isn’t the version he printed out.”

“Toby...”

“I can’t help Oscar right now.” It broke my heart, but there was nothing I could do. “I have to prove that Zeph is safe, and that August didn’t mean for this to happen. That we were tricked into this. But Tabby?”

“Yeah?”

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell her the truth about witches and demons. “I don’t regret summoning him,” I finished lamely. “He makes me happy.”

“Then that’s all that matters.”



“YOU MAKE ME HAPPY, too, Toby. I am glad every moment that you summoned me.” Zeph confessed in an undertone as we exited the store with some blue contacts.

The words made a warm, tingly feeling shoot through me, though I couldn’t think of a thing to say. I settled on kissing his cheek instead. His blush was pretty, and it made me feel powerful to elicit such a response from a small gesture like a peck.

“I meant what I said, Zeph. Having you with me feels right. My magic is steadier. I feel... more... stable, I guess. I’m not explaining this properly.”

“No, I know what you mean. In my home,” he said carefully, wary of people around us overhearing. “My powers were difficult to control. My emotions influenced it. Air has always been my strongest element, but here, even its power is tighter under my control. I feel like I own the magic now instead of it using me.”

“Yes! That’s it exactly!”

Seeing a cozy-looking place up ahead, I pulled Zeph into a cafe, ordered for us and took him into the bathroom to put the contacts in and put the hat over his stubby horns.

The hat wasn’t too much of an issue. He shuddered when I inadvertently touched them. Zeph kissed me long and deep as I was pressed up against the sink until I wanted to forget about our ordered coffees and muffins. I pushed him away with difficulty. “Later,” I promised.

Getting contacts into his eyes? Fucking nightmare. The noises that he made had someone checking on him. “Sirs? Are you alright in there?”

“I’m trying to remove a splinter!” I lied. “Someone is being a baby.” I grumbled as I finally got the second lens into place.

The employee muttered something and returned to the front of the cafe. “Right, I think that’s you. What do you think?”

Zeph stood blinking frantically as he stared at himself in the mirror. The effect of the lenses was strange. It wouldn’t hold up to close scrutiny, but would be enough so that we could travel and even go out to eat without having people stare at us. Well, they’d stare because of how beautiful Zeph was, but not at how odd his eyes were. “Is this necessary? I’ll do what you need. It feels strange.” he was trying not to complain, except he forgot I could feel his discomfort down the bond.

“Hmm, I miss your real eyes. This is more convenient, though.” I tried to make him feel better about it.

“How so?”

“Why don’t I show you?”

I led Zeph to the front, where our order was ready for us to collect. I took it to an open table near a wide window with a view of the street and a glimpse of a nearby park. Passing his drink over, I doctored my coffee how I liked it and took a sip.

Zeph copied me exactly and moaned as the liquid hit his tongue. “Hmm, this is amazing!” he enthused. The older lady behind the counter looked pleased with the compliment.

“This is why you had to have the lenses in. We can do more of this when you wear them.”

His smile dimmed. “What are we going to do about Oscar and everything at your home?”

“We find the spell I read and check it for tampering. Since Oscar printed it, maybe I can find the file—“

“On your computer?”

“My laptop... that’s at home... in my house.”

“Safe?”

“No, not in the safe, but my house is warded. Though with me away, there is every chance someone could break in.” I pulled at the muffin, my appetite gone.

“Can your sister check?” Zeph tasted a tiny bite of his, giving another loud moan.

“Sure,” I said distractedly. I wanted to take him back to the cabin and test that lube out. “I’ll text her. Our first priority is to check the spell Oscar gave me.” Just saying his name aloud hurt. “And decide what we want to do from there.” Maybe we’d get to that in a few days.

“I think we should return to your council and make things right.”

My lustful thoughts came to a screeching halt. “What? Why?”

“Because you won’t be happy being separated from your family for long and I think, together, we can fix a bigger problem.”

“Bigger than someone wanting me dead?” I hissed, suddenly full of hurt with a smidge of confusion that he would act like my situation was no big deal. Zephyrin usually got me so well, he wasn’t normally almost dismissive.

“I think with you beside me, we can break the curse that will probably kill my baby sister.”

# **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**



What the fuck?" Toby yelled, earning a glare from the lady at the counter. "Sorry," he apologized. "Drink up. I'm guessing this conversation isn't for here."

I looked around the cafe. "No, it would be best to wait until we get back to the cabin, if you can wait that long."

Toby said nothing. He just finished his drink and tidied up the crumbs of his forgotten muffin. I wrapped mine with a napkin to share with him later if he liked. The worry down the bond made me feel bad for speaking up. Yet, I didn't have the time to worry about hurting my husband's feelings. My family needed me to return, if only to visit and break this curse. I couldn't bear to think of my mother going through another loss when I might do something about it.

We returned to the cabin much quieter than we left, with none of the gentle touches that had existed the entire trip. I realized then that I'd fucked things up in a bad way.

"Explain," Toby demanded, taking the armchair in the room's corner instead of sitting on the bed. He wanted distance. He was suspicious of me.

"I'll admit that part of me wondered when I accepted the summoning whether you might be the key to breaking this curse. Your coven must know about demons and their magic to be able to summon one. When we arrived here and met Justice, I thought she might help my family. I just don't trust her enough to ask. Her coven is too unpredictable. Together, you and I, we might be enough if we had access to the right spells."

“So you’ve used me?”

“Yes, and also no. I wanted to come on this adventure. Being with you has been better than any dream I could have had for myself. I think I could fall in love with you very quickly. I worry I’m halfway there when you could banish me any moment. You might decide to for me telling you this.”

He huffed a bitter laugh. That stung me.

Lashing out, I said, “didn’t you keep me because you wanted to have a familiar, even if he was a demon, to satisfy your covenant?”

“It’s not the same.” Toby muttered, though he softened. I felt some of his shame down our fragile bond. My hiding information about my family had caused distrust between us.

“No, maybe not. I planned on asking you. Telling you our history and appealing to your heart. I wouldn’t do anything that would put you in danger.”

“So, breaking this curse isn’t going to bring down pain on me?”

“No, I don’t believe so. The demon that cast it died many decades ago. The spell still lingers.”

“And you were going to tell me? You swear it?”

“I do. On everything that I am. I planned to when we got back from the council, but we ended up in hiding. Adding more pressure to you seemed like a bad idea. Now, though, we can fix things with your covenant, prove that demons have a past with witches. They might let you go home. Or at least not hunt for you. We can build a home elsewhere,” I told him plainly, trying to make him understand where I’d been coming from.

“So this isn’t a ploy to get me to go to your home to keep me there?”

“Gods, no! Wherever you want to live, that is where I live. You are the one with the control here. As my husband, you choose everything. If you decide to bring in another later, you can take my feelings into account, yet the final decision is yours.”

“You’ve mentioned that before. Taking more into our bond. Is that normal where you are from?” Toby seemed less angry. I sensed more of a thawing. He rose from the chair and joined me on the bed, resting his back against the headboard. He leaned his head against my shoulder. His bitterness, a tangy taste on the back of my tongue, dissipated.

I reached for his hand. He clasped it tightly. “Yes. In my world, few females are born. Around one to every four or five males. Some species of male demon can carry children, so for them, they stay in monogamous pairs.”

“Really?” He looked up at me with a wide-eyed expression.

“Yes, though that species is now very rare. Demons once fought over the resources of our world, much like humans still do, and they were the species that suffered most.”

“Oh, that’s sad.”

“It is.” I squeezed his hand, grateful for his kind heart. “My mother has five husbands. One of my brothers recently married, and he is one of five husbands to their queen.”

“Wow! So because females are rare, they rule? You make it sound like your mom is in charge.”

“Yes. The female is the heart of their relationship. Each of the men bond to each other, but she picks them and she will rule if she holds a kingdom, like my brother’s wife does. Theirs was a political marriage, but Llyrin has genuine affection for his wife and her husbands. We all believe he will be happy in the match.”

“Did you have a match planned, or leave anyone special behind?” There was a sharp tang of jealousy and some worry in his words.

“No, while I am considered an adult, I am very young, under a century, so they would not match me until I was more mature. Besides, my magical ability was so unpredictable that I believe they decided they would not choose me to father children.”

“That’s not fair!” Toby protested on my behalf.

I smiled, happy that the magic had drawn me here to serve Toby. He was kind and sweet. We would have a good life together. “I’m okay with never being a father. They are right that before you, my magic was a wild, savage thing that I struggled to control.”

“Still, now that we are bonded, if it was something that you really wanted, we could find a surrogate.”

The term was unfamiliar to me, so Toby explained it. “Maybe my sister would do it. I know she likes you.”

“It’s a lot to ask of someone, and our future is so uncertain.”

“True. So, what did you mean about your sister?”

“Long ago, before I was born, my mom offended her sister, who was the queen of another, much larger kingdom. She was so offended that she worked tirelessly to form this curse to make sure that my mother never had a female child that lived past their first birthday.”

Toby’s gasp was loud in the quiet room. I could hear birds outside and the occasional sounds of traffic, otherwise it felt like we were alone in the world. “Why did she not just attack your mom? Why choose innocent babies?” Tears filled his eyes.

I pressed a kiss to his head and smoothed his hair. “Mother may have been rude, but she had many allies because of her marriages. She had inherited the kingdom through a love match to my father, Elioryn, as his elderly mother had no female heirs. My brothers, though young, charmed everyone they came across. While our kingdom is smaller, it is next to the sea and is rich in resources.”

“So there were too many people willing to back her and the war would have cost too much.”

“Exactly. So the demon queen—because I can never call her my aunt—cursed my mother, and her own kingdom crumbled further for each pregnancy that ended, for each child that died. As Mom and our kingdom mourned, the queen suffered, until finally, she died. Sadly, the curse lingered on.”

“And you think we can break it?”

“I have faith that we can.”



STRESS HAD WORN TOBY OUT. Before long, he was snoring gently on my shoulder. Shuffling us down the bed, I arranged his sleeping form so that he was more comfortable and wrapped myself around him.

While I didn't relish going back to his coven, I knew it was for the best. Toby had to prove his innocence. I had to prove I wasn't dangerous. Perhaps then we could live in peace and find a cure for my mom. Any day now she would give birth. I hoped that worry over me hadn't made the babe come sooner. She was one of the few that had made it this far. So she was clearly a fighter. I just prayed that she could hold on long enough so I could fix things.

Toby's face was lax with sleep. It was tempting to nap with him, but one of us needed to stay alert without wards set up. I took the chance to study my husband. This was the most time we had spent together without someone wanting to separate us or harm us. He had a pointed face, sharp cheekbones, and chin. His eyelashes and eyebrows were a few shades darker than his dirty blond hair. He needed to shave. The stubble on his cheek abraded my fingers as I swept an eyelash away.

His lips were thin, but soft. They were a deep pink. I remembered kissing them and brushed my lips against his, needing to be closer to him. He stirred, making sleepy noises.

“Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you.”

“No, it's okay. We need to have dinner and I won't sleep tonight if I sleep anymore now,” he murmured, cuddling deeper into me.

“You aren't mad now?”

“No, I thought I might be, but I understand why you didn’t say anything sooner, and why you answered my call. Somehow, I will help you fix things.”

My heart thumped in my chest. Toby was all I’d hoped for, and more.

This time, he kissed me, coaxing my mouth open with his tongue.

It was as natural as breathing to open to him, to let him lick into my mouth while he held me in place. With my witch I could be submissive. I knew that he had everything under his control and he would make us both feel good.

Toby took his time peeling us out of our clothes as we kissed and caressed each other. I adored the feel of his creamy skin and the coarse body hair against me.

I was hard and leaking against his thigh when he took me in his hand. “Hmm, I think I need to feel you inside me this time. Is that okay?” His voice was rough with desire, his pupils blown. All I could feel down our strengthening bond was how much he wanted me.

“Please,” I panted as he stroked me, running careful fingers over the vertical ridges and the nodes at the head of my member. Not only were they designed to increase pleasure for our partners, they were incredibly sensitive. If he wasn’t careful, I would embarrass myself. My recovery time was great, but I didn’t want him to go without his own pleasure.

Toby reached for a bottle he had left with our purchases next to the bed. With some difficulty and cursing, he got it open and poured some onto his fingers. The substance that came out was similar to what we used back home. He reached behind himself, but I stayed his hand. “Do you want to prep me?” he asked, looking with a pointed glance at my claws.

I smirked at him. “I can put them away for that.” Taking hold of the bottle, I poured some onto a talon-less hand and pulled Toby closer, so that our bodies slotted together.

Teasing around his hole, I watched his reaction and felt his hips flex against my groin. I muttered a curse at the feel of his

hard cock against my own. I needed to focus on stretching him instead of how good his body felt, or how right he felt in my arms.

He kissed me, mouth opening on a gasp as I breached him with a finger. I pulled away from his mouth, his lips chasing mine, so I could check I wasn't hurting him. Reading his expression was easy, especially with our bond, telling me how much Toby loved it.

It didn't take him long to take three of my fingers. Soon he was fucking himself on them and begging for more, deeper.

Easing my fingers out, I reached for the lubricant and slicked myself up. "How about you ride me?" I suggested.

Toby pushed me onto my back. "Great idea." He took hold of my cock, placing it at his stretched out hole and easing down slowly. His gasps and groans were loud.

"Holy fuck!" he cried as he took me inside him for the first time. I hoped for it not to be the last time. He was hot and tight around me. With only half inside, I felt ready to blow.

He paused and breathed against the burn. I could feel a prickle of anxiety. My husband wondered if he could manage it.

I stroked his thighs and tried to reassure him. "Take your time." Honestly, I needed a moment to calm down, or this was all going to be over.

Toby leaned down to kiss me, taking the rest of me inside with a moan against my lips. "Wow, that's weird," he panted into my neck. His hot breath made me shiver, setting off a chain reaction. "Ugh, wait," Toby begged. "It's a lot."

Despite my need to thrust into him, I stayed perfectly still and let him control things.

Rocking gently, Toby found his rhythm. He was so beautiful to me as he worked us both. The pleasure was indescribable. His skin took on a sheen of sweat and though I felt some joy, I could see a tenseness around his lips and eyes. Toby was trying to mask it, but it was too much for him.

Taking hold of his hips, I gentled his movements. “Stroke yourself,” I urged. I didn’t need him to go so hard to get me off. Just making him feel good was enough for me.

He did as I commanded, sighing and relaxing slightly.

A few minutes later, it was clear he was tiring and struggling. “Toby...”

“No, I want this, I do.” My husband was torn. Confused why it felt good, but also didn’t.

“It’s too much, my Toby.” My tone was gentle. I didn’t want to upset him further.

He slumped forward in defeat onto my chest. “I can’t.”

Carefully, I eased out of him and flipped us. He had softened, but hardened when I took him into my mouth.

I sucked him as I played with his hole, trying to find his prostate. I hit it as I opened my throat to him.

“Gonna—“

He came down my throat moments later. I took it all, delighting in the taste of his spend and the pleasure I had given him.

“Better?” I asked after I cleaned off his cock with my tongue.

“Much!” He lay looking slightly dazed stretched out on the bed. “Give me a minute and I’ll return the favor.”

“No need.” I stroked myself to the sight of him, stretched out and completely sated. His satisfaction through the bond as he replayed things in his head was enough for me. I found my release in only a minute, painting my husband with it.

I collapsed onto the bed next to him. He turned and curled into my chest. “Sorry,” he muttered. “I just couldn’t. It—“

“It was too much for you. That’s okay, Toby.” I paused. “I prefer things the other way. You feel amazing inside me.” My cock gave a twitch at just the thought of Toby filling me again.



Feeling my sincerity, he smiled. I could feel it on my chest. He pressed a kiss there. “I know you mean that, so thank you for making me feel better. Maybe we can try it again another time.”

“We have our entire lives together. There’s plenty of time.”

We lay together, limbs entwined and hearts beating as one for a long time. I loved having him so close to me, where he belonged and where he was safe.

“I’m going to order food and then find that damn spell. Then we’re going to call Justice and make a plan for returning to the coven.” Toby said eventually, sounding determined.

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“I am. Fixing things at home is scary, but I need to be able to visit Tabby and Star. With the backing of the coven, maybe we can break the curse on your family. Maybe me summoning you was a sign that our magic needs refreshed. Are there other demons that would want to live on earth?”

“There are. Or I’m sure my mother would find some as a trade for assistance.”

Toby made a noise and fiddled with the phone. “I’m ordering pizza. You don’t have any allergies, do you?” My look of confusion made him laugh. “Guess not.” He made a brief call and then began tearing through the bags we’d taken with us. “Ah-ha! Found it.” He showed me the piece of paper, but the words meant nothing to me. “Now to get Justice to read it for us.”

# CHAPTER NINETEEN

The conference room where we last met Justice was full of her coven, or pack. I had no idea what she called her mixed bag of supernaturals. There were other shifters, not just Chloe. Another vampire, one much more pleasant than Andras. Even a couple of witches joined the group.

The spell sat in the middle of the table, surrounded by paper covered in witch language. The witches whispered together, discussing what they deciphered. “Holy shit!” They glanced between me and Justice. “This is some bad shit.”

“Explain,” Justice demanded in her quietly powerful way. Her aura was oppressive. I hadn’t noticed it before, too freaked out about meeting a half demon, half angel hybrid and learning that I had a little more demon in me than most witches.

“This spell...” the female said, shaking her head. Zephyrin pressed closer to me. I could feel how much he hated to be in this small room with so many people. He much preferred it just being us, or a small group. I could feel his anxiety over his inability to defend me if things went wrong.

“What is it?” I asked around the lump in my throat.

“You should be dead, dude!” the male said. He and the female were very similar. Twins, I assumed, exceedingly rare in witches. Often hunted for their power. Justice seemed to collect the strange and unusual.

My guts twisted. Somehow, this spell had wound up in my hands. How had I survived it? “So you’re telling me that if I’d done this spell correctly, it would have killed me, whatever I summoned?” Zeph wrapped both arms around me. His wings

burst free, shredding a perfectly fitted tee. Then those covered us too, like they could shield us from the knowledge coming.

The female looked at Justice for permission. After a nod she spoke, “basically, yeah. I can feel your magic, so I’m guessing it surged. Was there a moment when you spoke without using the paper?”

I nodded, unable to speak.

“That was your magic binding your demon to you. He’s unable to physically hurt you. We’d have to both examine your bond to pinpoint where in the spell you deviated. Pointless though, since it’s clear since you are here with a demon bonded. It’s clear that you changed whatever this shit show wanted you to do.”

“The question is, what do you want to do with that information?” Justice asked. “We could return to your coven with you, just me, our witches, and Chloe,” she suggested.

“You’d do that? Come with us?” I honestly couldn’t believe how generous Justice was being. Letting us stay in her territory, helping me understand what I was, and now this offer.

“It sounds like your coven has lost its way. They need to know where they came from.”

“I don’t want to leave it too long, my friend Oscar...”

“There might not be anything that we can do for him. You know as well as I that he is the most likely person who switched the spells,” Justice pointed out.

Hearing the truth hurt. There was no part of me that wanted to believe that of Oscar, especially since the spell was designed to kill. We’d been friends for so long, I couldn’t imagine my life without him. Yet, it was possible that he had done something that we just couldn’t come back from.

All it left me wondering was why. I’d been targeted. Why was that? Why had they chosen to get rid of me in the most permanent way possible rather than just making the spell fail?

“Yeah, I get that. I just have to make things better for my sister and her husband. He’s the council leader and a good guy. I want to be able to help Zephyrin and his family. We need more witches with older knowledge for that. Perhaps there are records locked away. Since I wasn’t a full coven member, I couldn’t get access to them.”

“We’re going to circle back to your pet—“

“Husband.” I cut Justice off. “He’s not a pet. We are equals and we are bonded in a kind of marriage.”

“Right,” she grinned. “I knew I liked you. Anyway, it’s late.” It really was. It must have been circling midnight. “Let’s meet here around noon tomorrow. Gives some of us late risers some time to catch some Z’s.”

Zeph looked at me, confused. “Sleep,” I whispered, though it was futile since so many had enhanced hearing. The vampires and shifters both smiled at my explanation. “Sounds good to me,” I said to Justice. “Thank you for doing this.”

She waved me away. “It’s kinda my thing. Just ask any of this crew. My adoptive parents loved to help people and I’m just passing that along. I’ll ask my birth mom and my family if they might know any spells to get to the demon dimension, just in case.”

The meeting broke apart quickly with Justice assigning people roles for the next day. I let Zeph lead me back to our cabin, where we took out his lenses, showered and fell into bed.



PACKING the car was the easy part. Getting up the nerve to drive it sucked. I was all jitters and no coordination. I stubbed my toe, spilled the shampoo in the shower, then nearly ended myself by slipping on it. Everything I picked up, I dropped. Zeph had taken to following behind me to return things to their places or just clean up after me.

“Sorry,” I said for what felt like the millionth time.

“Let’s not wait for them to arrive,” Zeph suggested. “They have your number. They can call and we can meet them outside of the coven lands. You can contact Justice on your phone.”

“Right.” I unlocked the car and opened the door for Zeph. He still hadn’t gotten the hang of how the door handles worked.

Just as I sat down and turned on the engine, two other cars pulled up alongside mine. I turned the engine off and opened the door when Justice did the same from her vehicle. I’d half expected her to rock up, almost an hour late, on a Harley, not in a Jeep. “Sorry we’re late!” Justice called cheerfully. “We went to get some records from my adoptive parents’ coven. It’s the one we split from because they didn’t want shifters. No bad blood there. In fact, they’d love to meet you both whenever you get the time.”

I didn’t fully understand the situation with Justice’s family situation. While she had a demon mom and angel dad, she had been raised by witches. Justice still had a relationship with her birth parents. It was just that they did not trust them to raise her. It was kinda shitty, and I guess that was one of many reasons she had broken away from that coven.

Checking with Zeph first, who gave me a nod, I shrugged. “Maybe once everything settles down.”

“Fair. Okay, Babycakes. Let’s get this shit show on the road!”

I sighed and turned the car back on. With two cars following behind, I drove home.

We were almost halfway there when Tabitha called me on my proper phone. I gave Zeph the burner with a brief lesson on how to use it, along with my number. After that, I’d turned back on my original device and texted my sister. I messaged her, letting her know she needed to get the original spell, and some truth serum—yes, that was a thing—and meet me near the council’s offices. I’d been vague, but I’d let her know there

were things she needed to hear before we went before the council.

With the bluetooth, I answered the call. “Hey Tabby, I’m driving right now.”

“I’m on speaker through the car, right?” Tabby hated people that used their phones while driving, having lost a friend that way in high school. She had gone to an outside school so she could do a business degree. Probably another reason the coven looked down on our family. Not just my wonky magic and penchant for exploding things.

“Duh,” I scoffed. “You taught me well.”

“Good, good.” She sounded distracted.

“Everything okay?”

“Honestly? I don’t think you will make it into town without being stopped, so whatever bombshell you have, you better drop it right now. Then when you get here, just go to the council and I’ll meet you there. I think I’m being followed. They saw me go into your house.”

“Well, you’re safe there and we’ve got about an hour to go.”

“Toby,” I heard her sigh. “Out with it.”

Briefly, I outlined meeting Justice and her group, their little demon revelation, then, finally, the purpose of the spell that I’d stashed in my pocket during the summoning. I hadn’t even remembered doing it, but when I’d packed those jeans, since, hello, my favorites, I’d felt the paper.

“Holy fuck!” I jolted at her curse, nearly steering the car into the side of the road. Zeph clung to that oh shit handle like it was going to save him from my poor driving.

“Right?”

“So how come my powers aren’t like yours?” It was kind of cool how she just believed me. Tabby never questioned, just took everything as truth. It was hard to lie to her like that.

“Extra willpower? Earlier training? You had Mom and Dad to yourself for a couple of years. Then our aunt was always more interested in you.”

“Yeah, that bitch hated you.”

“There’s another possibility.” I was reluctant to bring it up.

“You’re my brother, Toby. I saw Mom pregnant with you!”

“Yeah, but what if...”

“You could have a different dad.”

“Yeah,” I said, sadly. I hated to think about it, but it was the only thing that made sense.

“Honestly, it would explain why Aunt Beth hated you so much. She was Dad’s sister. He was often distant from you until she was gone.” Tabby spoke plainly. I loved how logical and calm she was in crappy situations.

“Well...” Tabby trailed off.

“Yes,” she and I said in unison. I laughed, but she stayed silent.

“Toby,” Zeph was sympathetic. I knew it was another thing that we had in common. At least his family, or a couple of his fathers and brothers, had tried to fix the issue.

“It’s fine, Zeph. I have you now.”

“And me,” my sister chimed in. “Don’t forget August and Star.”

“As if I could. Warn your husband, would you? We’ll be there in twenty.”



# **CHAPTER TWENTY**

A glance at the side of the road as we neared the village filled me with guilt. There were still signs of the crash where I'd sent our pursuers off the road. I knew I hadn't hurt them, at least not in a way that prevented them from walking, but I still felt bad about the situation. It would not be reversing their opinion of me anytime soon. They'd only ever see me as the terrifying demon the council believed me to be.

The changes in the place were apparent as soon as we drove through the main street. There was more of a presence of the guards we'd encountered. It filled the atmosphere with tension. I saw it in the way people stood and talked quietly. The store where Toby worked was closed with Oscar in jail and Tabitha at Toby's house getting proof. He looked at it with a forlorn expression I hated. I wished I wasn't causing him so much trouble. Though the alternative to me would be a Toby without magic, or even dead. My heart pounded at the thought of it.

A ringing came through the speakers cutting off the playlist Toby had playing. "Tabby?"

"Toby, I'm on my way to the council. They've removed August!" His sister sounded utterly frantic.

"What the fuck?" he yelled. I winced. My sensitive hearing was a curse as much as a blessing.

"You're not going to believe this, but they think he was trying to kill you, too. He's in a cell!"

"This is bullshit!"

That I could agree with. August was the only one, aside from Oscar, that showed any concern for Toby's wellbeing. He genuinely seemed to care for my husband. There was no way that he was behind the attack on him. He'd had many opportunities after the spell to harm Toby and blame it on me, but he helped us instead.

"A coup!" That was all I caught. I sent a puzzled look Toby's way, which he caught as he turned the car towards the council.

"She means they planned this to grasp power. We all know we can prove that August had nothing to do with the summoning spell being changed. He did everything he could to make sure I was safe and to ensure the safety of the council."

"Damn right he did! I'm done with these fuckers after this. They can go to hell." Tabitha was furious.

"If you're okay with shifters and a couple of vamps, then I might have a group you can join." Toby joked.

"Tempting. I'm serious. Star is with August's parents. They want to leave, too. They love their son and know he'd never do something as awful as this. We're all just done." There was a sigh. "What about you?" she asked, restraining her temper.

"We might need the coven to help Zeph, but after that? No idea. Maybe I'll stay with his family for a while. Depends on how easy it is to visit here or wherever you end up."

My heart leaped at the thought of Toby living in my kingdom. I'd love to take him on flights and show him my favorite places. I wanted him to know my brothers. Together, I hoped we would see my sister grow up.

"This is all things we need to think about after we get August out of jail and confirm that Zephyrin is safe to be around." Toby made a growling sound that made arousal burn low in my gut. "Or at least that they will leave you both to be happy." Tabitha sounded like she was moving. "Okay, I'm at the building. I'll wait for you."

“Cool, I see you.”

We could, as Toby swung the car into the lot attached to the familiar building. She was standing tall, her sandy blonde hair tied in a loose knot on the top of her head. She was wearing a simple blue tunic dress over black leggings and brown leather ankle boots. Tabitha looked ready for war, judging by the scowl on her usually pretty face.

Toby hastily parked and got out to join her, giving her a quick hug before returning to my side. We waited for the other cars to join us. “Who’s all this?” his sister asked as people emerged from cars.

“The cavalry,” Justice called. She introduced herself along with the ones that had come with her, then followed our lead as we entered the building.

Inside the main chamber where we had last gone in front of the council, Malcom Farmer, Avery’s father, stood in place of the head of the council, August. Toby had told me the names of the key players that we had to be aware of when he filled in Justice about the state of things.

To his right, as his second, stood his most hated rival. Toby exchanged a worried look with me at seeing James Hall in such a prominent place. Was there more at play here? Or was this a case of keeping their enemies close?

“James, why do you have your daughter in a council seat? Families aren’t allowed to represent the coven on the same council. Does this mean you are stepping down?” Toby asked when he noted a brunette sitting in front of James. She looked like him. Pinched and stuffy. Rich and disapproving.

“If you were a member of this council, I would discuss policy and details with you,” James sneered at Toby, making me bristle. My talons longed to break free. My wings itched, and I feared I would need them again before long. “However, this meeting you so rudely interrupted was to announce that my daughter, Brittany, is stepping up to my place. I will assist her through her pregnancy as a sort of advisor.”

Shock filtered through the bond. “Congrats Brittany,” Toby muttered.

“Thanks, Toby,” the seated young woman said from next to her dad. “I’m looking forward to bringing the coven into a new era. It’ll be busy with the wedding and the baby, but we’re looking forward to it, aren’t we, babe?” She turned to acknowledge a young sneering faced man. He’d been hidden behind Malcom.

“Avery?” Toby’s horror ricocheted down the bond. “But —“

Avery? I knew the name. It took me a second to understand why it was so important to Toby and why Toby was so angry about this news. Avery was Oscar’s boyfriend and the reason the spell had been tampered with before. He was holding Oscar’s familiar hostage.

“We’ve checked the council charter, and there’s no reason that a married couple can’t lead together. Isn’t that right, Dad?” There was a menacing emphasis on the last few words.

“That’s right, but until the baby is here and Brittany is trained, I’m going to share my seat with my son, Avery. I’m very proud that he has shown he has what it takes to run this coven.” Malcom sounded like he was reading from a script.

“So you’ve just decided that August is guilty and you’re taking his place?” Tabitha bit out. It looked like Justice was holding her back.

“No, we’ve decided that even if August is innocent, and we’ve heard your claims of proof, we voted him down from the council. There is a lack of faith in his ability to run this council. Now, who are these people? Outsiders aren’t permitted to listen in on council business.”

“After we deal with August’s charges, we can make introductions. You’ve unfairly imprisoned a man.” Toby stood tall. He was shaking with rage at this situation and clutching my hand like it was his lifeline.

Tabitha marched to the table and slapped the paper on it. “This is the spell that August approved.” She placed another

item on the desk. “This is the truth serum. You can test it first if you need to.”

There was grumbling and a few scowls before the council could agree to check the potion. Then they had to find a suitable test. I felt Toby’s impatience growing alongside my own. This situation was liable to explode into a confrontation at any moment. I could see Justice and her friends shooting looks at the council and shifting nervously.

Eventually, after numerous complaints from both sides, Toby’s friend tested the vial and found it was a truth serum. Once ingested by August, it would force him to tell only the truth. Lying would cause obvious pain. Malcom and James both looked furious, but they were stuck. They had to follow the process and prove August innocent, destabilizing their claim on the council.

After a pause and a whispered conversation with his son, Malcom sighed and called to a guard, “bring up the prisoner.”



THEY BROUGHT August up in cuffs. His hair was unkempt, and he looked like he’d been in a cell for weeks rather than hours, or a day at most. He had a drawn, tense expression. I realized the cuffs were likely keeping him from his magic. I also saw no sign of the man’s familiar. Separating them was likely adding to his distress.

He stood in front of the table, his former friends all sat around it as they outlined the charges. Magic tampering, calling forth a demon, conspiracy to murder. The charges were ridiculous and wouldn’t stand, but they had left August looking broken. The speed at which the council had turned on him showed how tenuous his position was in the first place.

I stood guard over Toby as one by one they dropped the charges in light of the evidence and testimony. Keeping my displeasure to myself was difficult. I wanted to roar and growl

at each and every witch that had let my Toby down. It was pointless, though. More likely to cause problems than solve them.

Once free, Tabitha ran to her husband's side and wrapped her arms around him. Toby drew us closer, so that we could join in on the hug. "I'm sorry," Toby whispered to his brother-in-law. "This is all my fault."

"No, Toby. They planned this. We need to leave," August's voice was rough. I couldn't tell if it was from screaming, as it certainly looked like he had been tortured, or if it was some emotion making it difficult for him to get the words out.

"We will, just as soon as they get a few home truths." Tabitha's grin was spiteful. She turned to the council. "A couple of things before I take my family and friends out of here. I'm going to let Justice give you a history lesson."

Justice stepped into the middle of the room and let her glamor go and hovered in place in front of the council. I'd sensed her wings, her halo, the divine light. I hadn't expected the unearthly beauty to be a weapon of its own. It froze all of us in place. I could have broken free of the compulsion if I let my own wings and horns out, but it was better for the council to believe I was as powerless as them in front of Justice.

With no one able to argue with the half angel, half demon, she recounted the history of witches and her own personal story. Once finished, she drifted back to the floor and within a blink, her halo and wings were gone. She still shone with her heavenly grace, or whatever the stupid angels called the light they got from their realm.

"So," Malcom sneered, "you are saying Toby, and likely Tabitha, though she has shown no signs, has more demon blood than the average witch?"

"Correct." Justice was the picture of calm.

"And like calling to like, changed the spell. His demon magic called for a demon as a familiar? This is why he survived Oscar's attempt on his life?"

Toby surged forward, ready to defend his friend. I gripped him tightly against me. “Peace. They will not listen.” At this point, I was unconvinced of Oscar’s innocence. Toby, though, was sure that his friend never meant to hurt him. As far as I was concerned, he wasn’t our problem. We needed to get ourselves and his family away from these people. There were no answers here.

“Yes. We hoped your coven held ancient knowledge that would help young witches find their place and help the next generation be more powerful.” Justice lied for me, hiding the real reason that we wanted to look at their archives.

“Why would you think that?” James frowned, his hands on his daughter’s shoulder.

Justice grinned a shark’s smile, all full of teeth and sinister. “Because that spell had to have come from your archives. How else was Oscar able to get it?”

The council broke into blustering and barbed comments, each throwing blame. Some stood getting into the faces of their rivals. It was nearly a brawl. “Are you done?” Tabitha called into the chaos.

They stilled, came back to themselves, and retook their seats. “We have no interest in keeping any of you here,” Malcom said, smoothing his hair back.

“Even Toby and Zephyrin?” August questioned, looking wary.

“Even your brother and his pet. The sooner you leave, the better.”

“You know I’m closing the shop, right? We won’t stay here after this. August’s parents will be leaving with us soon.” Tabitha stood strong as muttering broke out. “We can’t stay here after what you’ve allowed to happen to my brother. He should never have been forced to do that spell so many times. No one ever helped him with his magic!” She choked back a sob. “You shouldn’t have tried to separate them and test them like you did. It was cruel.”



Some of the council looked upset. It wasn't enough to make Toby change his mind about leaving. I felt his resolution through our bond as he spoke. "I'm going to pack what I can today. The only time I will return is with a van for the rest of my belongings and to say goodbye to my parents."

"Once you leave here, you cannot return with that demon," Malcom barked.

"Fine, then write me a check for my house and things and we'll be done today." Toby reasoned. He was shaking. It pained him to let go of his house even when he knew he'd never live there again. It hurt me, deep in my soul, to be the reason for his pain.

"Dad? Toby's house would be a cute starter home for me and Avery," Brittany batted her eyelashes up at her father. To Toby, her words felt like she was twisting the knife.

"Fine. We will ensure you get that before you leave town, so you have no excuse to return. I have no issue with Tabitha and August visiting their home and shop at a later date. I see no reason to keep them away, since they have such deep ties within the community." James spoke with an air of authority he had not earned.

There it was, another way to hurt Toby. I wanted to let my fire out. I wished to cut their air until they were on their knees and begging for help. Toby turned in the circle of my arms. "Please, let's just go."

I watched August make up his mind to speak before he let the words out. "You are making a grave mistake today. As our elders, you are supposed to guide the next generation into a blessed future. Under your rule, this coven is destined for ruin." He then turned and, with his wife's help, walked away from his coven.

**CHAPTER  
TWENTY-ONE**

As we left the council behind, both my mind and heart were in turmoil. While I knew leaving the town I'd grown up in was for the best, it still hurt to give up my home. It may have been just a house, but it was a sanctuary that I'd built for myself.

All throughout our walk back to my car, Zeph held my hand tightly, silently giving me the support that he knew I needed. Our bond hummed with his sympathy. I wanted to give in and cry, feeling so defeated. My coven, or my ex-coven, was useless. How could we help Zephyrin's family now?

At the cars, Justice called out that she was going to help my sister grab as many of her things from the shop and her home as possible, before they headed back to the city. "It's alright, Sweet-thing, we've got you and your family," she assured my sister. "I know a store up for rent in the perfect place for your shop! We've got a family cabin you can use for now." My sister fell into her arms, sobbing her gratitude.

I felt tears prick my eyes over the situation, though I pushed them back. I didn't have time for all that. As soon as I got to my house, I would pick up everything I couldn't bear to leave behind and then just lock up for the final time. I'd have to dismantle the wards if Brittany was serious about buying the place.

It made me feel sick to think of Avery there with his wife and child after what he'd put me and Oscar through. I didn't care what anyone else thought. In my heart, I knew they had manipulated Oscar into doing what they wanted.

Zeph let go of my hand long enough to get into the car. For the first time, he managed the door himself, sliding inside with a grin on his face. Once buckled up, he laid a hand on my thigh as if he needed to reassure himself I was there with him as we drove the short distance to my house for the last time.

The house was exactly as I'd left it. There was a residue in the wards that suggested that someone other than Tabitha had tried to enter the house. Not having the energy to investigate, I muttered the self-made spell and unlocked all three locks. So, I took security seriously, not that it really mattered now.

Once inside, with the door re-locked, Zeph pulled me into his arms. His hug made the broken pieces of me feel less sharp. With him by my side, I knew that I'd be okay. I had him and my family, well, those that mattered. There was just one other person who I needed to be happy. Getting Zeph to agree to my plan would not be easy.

I let him hold me for a long moment, just soaking up the comfort, then I broke away from him. "Here's my plan. Hear me out, okay?" He nodded at me, just watching me as I drifted around the sitting room. I'd always loved this little house. I used the second bedroom as a sort of office, but I guess it would make a cute nursery. "First, I'm going to pack everything that it would make me sad to go without. There's not a lot here, really. Then, I think we should make use of this bed one last time." I gave him a salacious grin.

"I'm onboard with that plan." Zeph caught me around the waist and kissed me soundly.

"Here, let's just toss my clothes into bags. There's not much." I wasn't much of a pack rat. Living with as little clutter as possible was my thing. I guess I'd never been sure that I'd stay with the coven, so I'd always lived light. Since I'd been expecting to leave after the summoning, I had already packed much of the essentials and they were in my car.

Zeph helped me pack some other bits and pieces into a couple of bags, with stuff from my office going into the box we found. We ran them out to the car and bumped into an unwelcome visitor as we returned.

“Hey, Toby. I’ve got the money for the house if you want it. Dad says we can do a transfer?” Brittany was on her own. No sign of Avery. I looked down the street, seeing Avery waiting in his truck. I flipped him off as I re-entered the house.

“Right, come in and I’ll get my details.”

Brittany walked in and took a seat on the sofa. “I’ve always loved your house from the outside. It’s got a great energy about it.” It was hard to hate her. I didn’t know how long she had been with Avery, long enough to make a baby and plan a wedding, but what lies had she been told?

“Thanks.”

She whipped out a tablet and opened up a banking app. With an efficiency that I sort of envied, she called up what she needed. “Okay, I just need your details.”

I repeated them to her and watched as the transfer started going through. At least we would have money no matter where we ended up. This house had been a distant relative’s, so I’d gotten it for a song. “Okay, thanks Brittany. I hope you’ll be happy here.”

“Oh, we will after I rip out the kitchen and pull down that wall there. I do hope it isn’t load bearing,” she said cheerfully as she stood.

“Not my house anymore,” I repeated to myself as I led her to the door. It fucking hurt that she wanted to tear the place apart. All my work would be for nothing. I squeezed my fists, my nails cutting into my palms. “I’ll leave the keys in the mailbox later.”

“Thanks Toby! Good luck!”

Brittany got into the truck, and Avery exited. “I’m just going to speak to Toby, babe,” he called as he walked slowly towards me.

“What do you want?” I growled. Zeph laid a hand on my shoulder in support. I could feel a deep grumble working its way out of him. He hated how close Avery was to me. I had a very possessive demon husband.

“I saw your face. In the council. You think I’m a cheat.”

“Aren’t you?”

“No. Oscar and I broke up a couple of months ago. There’s a bit of an overlap, I’ll admit that, and Brittany knows. He just wouldn’t let me go and I was weak.”

“Right, so you were broken up.”

“No, we were!” Avery insisted. “Look, I think the spell was a way for him to prove his love or something. He came to me after, you know, crying about how he wanted to get back together. Ranting about raising mine and Brittany’s baby. He’s not right in the head.”

“So you’re saying my best friend my entire life tried to kill me so he could get back with you. Is your dick magic or something?” I scoffed.

Avery shrugged. “You believe what you want to believe.”

“What about Hayto?”

“What about him?”

“Oscar said you had him. That you and your dad were keeping him from him. He’s never far from Oscar’s side, and I didn’t see him when he came here.”

Avery laughed. The fucker actually laughed. “You’re so ready to think the worst of me, aren’t you? Well, for your information, Hayto attacked my Ezio on Oscar’s orders. Ezio tore strips out of Hayto and they are both recovering from their healing. Oscar’s already got his bird back. They are in the cells together where they can’t harm anyone.”

I slumped against the doorframe. “Fuck. I don’t know what to believe anymore.”

“I’m not the enemy here. All of this because I wanted to end my relationship with someone who said he loved me. Do yourself a favor and get clear of this place and start fresh.”

Avery was almost at his truck when I called after him. “How’d you get James on board? I thought he hated your

dad.” Seeing them working together hadn’t sat right with me. They had been enemies my entire life.

“My future father-in-law will do anything for Brittany, same as me. Let’s just say I told him Malcom wouldn’t be in charge for long. He was happy to agree with me and Brit running the coven, especially when we told them about our baby.” His smile was so smug, I wanted to break his fucking face!

All of this, the hurt they had caused August, just to gain the coven? They wouldn’t last a year.

Avery jumped into his truck and gave Brittany a deep kiss, his tongue halfway down her throat, then put it in drive. As he drove by me, he smirked and gave a dismissive wave, making my blood boil. That fucker didn’t give two shits about the lives he had ruined, and now he had everything.



“I DON’T WANT you to hurt yourself,” he stated calmly. He took my fist, unfurled my fingers, and kissed my palm. He tugged on my hand until our bodies clashed together. Then, with a teasing slowness, he tipped his head up to kiss my lips.

It started off slow and sweet, just our mouths pressing against each other. Then he opened to me, letting me lick into his mouth. I would never get used to his taste. It was otherworldly. There was a bitter tang of magic on his tongue that always excited my own. Our magics rose to meet each other. Their shades of blue were something only we could see. They danced around us as I took the kiss deeper and led Zeph to my bedroom.

Pushing him back onto the bed, I climbed onto the mattress to straddle him. He grabbed at my hips and rubbed his erection against my ass. “I have an idea,” Zeph smirked.

“Is it that I ride you?” I really wanted to try that again. Even after the failure that was the first attempt. “Or you me?”

Whatever you want, sweetheart.”

“I was thinking.” He bucked his hips again, grinding against me as I laughed. “That we fuck in here. Then in the shower and then just trash the place. Leave it in ruins for that Brittany bitch and that dickhead Avery.” I loved how quickly he was picking up on how I spoke.

The look in his eyes was evil. I loved it. “I think I’m falling in love with you, Zeph.”

He reached up to cup my face. “Good. Now, get naked.”

Using magic, I levitated backwards and peeled off my clothes as Zeph watched me. “So sexy,” he purred.

“You know we don’t have a lot of time, right? The others will be waiting for us.”

Zeph grinned. “We can make this fast. You just need one last happy memory of this place.” Gods, he was so sweet.

He’d removed his shirt, but not his pants. With control I’d never had before, I used fire to burn them to ash, leaving his light brown skin unharmed underneath.

Zeph cupped his hands to his mouth and blew gently, using a whisper of air magic to brush the ash from his body. He then raised the ash into the air in the shape of a heart, making me flush and bark out a laugh. “So cheesy! I love it.”

Crooking a finger, he beckoned me back to the bed. I flew towards him, marveling at how easy it was to use the magic. My toes skimmed his body as I jumped over him and landed on the pillows, giggling to myself.

His hand caught my ankle and yanked me towards him so he could cover my body with his. We both groaned at the contact. His skin was always that bit hotter than mine. He cupped my face and brought our lips together.

The kiss quickly became heated. I hardened underneath him. “What do you want?” Zeph asked as he trailed kisses along my body. His fangs had dropped and the feel of them on my skin was delicious. To know he had the power to hurt me, but was worshiping me instead was a heady thing.



“You, I just want you.”

“Then take me, I’m yours.” Zeph flipped us with some magic and reached for the dresser and the bottle of lube that I’d been about to throw out.

“Here, let me.” I took the bottle from him. “Can I top you?”

“You can do whatever you want whenever you want. For always.”

I took his cock into my mouth while I lubed up a finger and began stretching him. I licked around his mushroom head, loving the feel of the bumps on my tongue. The ridges were strange in my mouth, but I loved the tang of his magic in his precum. He quickly took two fingers and was trembling as he tried not to thrust into me. With one hand, I held him down. I kept his tip just inside my mouth and sucked as I met his eyes.

“Fuck, Toby, please!”

I came off his pretty cock with a pop. “You sound so lovely when you beg.” I shoved my fingers in deeper, searching for that spot that would have him shouting my name. His hips flexed under my arm as I hit it. Using magic, I held him in place as I worked my fingers inside him, continually hitting his prostate.

“Please! Please!”

“What do you need, sweetheart?” I smirked at him writhing on the sheets. Gods, he was gorgeous and all mine. It was decided. I was never sharing him with anyone. No one else could see him like this.

“You, please. Give me your dick.” His impossibly blue cat eyes shone as he stared unwaveringly at me. “Please, Toby.”

With begging like that, it was impossible to say no. I also felt like I was on the edge just getting him ready. Slicking my cock, I bent his knees back and entered him with one thrust, burying myself balls deep in him, not waiting for him to adjust before I started a fast rhythm.

Zeph surged up at the intrusion. “Fuck!”

With a hand collaring his throat, I pushed him back to the mattress and pumped my hips. “Mine,” I growled.

“Yours,” he panted underneath me, his hips rocking with mine, his hands constantly moving, touching every part of me he could reach as I fucked him desperately.

Keeping my hand on his throat, I reached between us and stroked him in time to my thrusts. I felt him thicken in my hand. His slicked cock began to pulse. With my magic, I cut off his air as I gripped his throat harder. Not enough to leave marks, but enough to make him fly.

Zephyrin’s eyes widened as he came in spurts all over us. He gasped in pleasure and moaned my name. His hole tightened around my cock, milking me until I hit my peak and filled him.

I released my hold on the magic as I slumped over my demon. “Fuck, that was good.” I felt a tickle at my neck and grabbed for it, grasping his tail before he yanked it from my hold.

Rising up, I looked at my husband, his tail flicking back and forth lazily. “Happy?”

“Hmm, yes,” he sighed contentedly. “Shower sex, then trash this place?”

“You’re on.”

**CHAPTER  
TWENTY-TWO**

We left the dirty sheets on the bed, then continued our plans to trash the place with a shower. We didn't worry about getting water all over the floor, or how it was so steamy that we couldn't see a thing. Toby encouraged me to have my wings out, and if they knocked things over as he fucked me in the shower, then that was our business.

I'd already lived with years of bad luck. A broken mirror didn't matter, at least, not until Toby cut his foot. With careful water magic, I healed the cut and kissed it better. Caring for Toby was everything to me. He was everything I'd ever wanted and more.

"We're both so much better with our magic now," Toby remarked as we dressed. I had to borrow some more of his clothes after he burned mine. That had been so hot, pun intended.

"We are," I agreed. "I think we must balance each other. Our magic moves between us all the time."

He hugged me to him. "I don't care why. I just know that having you in my life has made it so much better."

"Even with losing your home and coven?" I raised a skeptical brow at him.

"I wasn't going to keep those things without you. Now I have a husband that I love, and control of my magic. I feel good for the first time in my life, and that's because of you." He squeezed me tighter and let go, searching for something.

“I love you, too. You know, just in case you needed to hear it.”

His laugh was bright. “I knew that, but it always helps to hear you say the words.”

I trailed through the house shirtless, my wet wings dripping on the hardwood floors, as I looked for things for Toby to destroy.

“Zeph...” Toby was hesitant. “I need to ask something. You’re not going to like it.” I slumped onto the sofa.

“Just ask.” I sighed and rested back on the cushions. The leather did nothing to soak up the moisture from my wings. I should dry them, but I loved the idea of leaving my mark on this place with a symbol of how different I was to the coven. “I’ll do anything you want.”

“Even if it’s probably a stupid idea?” He was leaning against the wall, trying to look casual.

“Even then.”

“I want to break Oscar out and take him with us,” Toby stated plainly. I could feel the well of emotion behind the request, though he’d tried to hide it from me.

My claws burst free in response to all that I was feeling from Toby. His care for Oscar prompted a wave of jealousy to spill over me. I dug my claws into the sofa, shredding the leather. In his heart, Toby held love for Oscar and I would not share him!

“Are you in love with Oscar?” I ground out after a long moment.

“What? No!” Toby looked horrified. “Wait, are you jealous? Is that it?” He huffed a laugh. “Fucking hell, Zeph. He’s my oldest friend. Leaving him locked up is not an option. I’m not in love with him. I’m just being a decent friend.”

“He tried to kill you!” My claws dug deeper, the stuffing spilled out of the sofa.

“So the council says! And Avery, but really, are we going to believe them?” Toby ran a hand through his hair in

exasperation. “You saw him, Zeph, he was wrecked when he came here. I just can’t leave him.” His voice cracked.

“I’m sorry, Toby,” I finally said.

“I’m doing this with or without you.” He hung his head. I could feel his overwhelming sadness. I’d hurt my husband by not trusting his feelings for me. There was also a sliver of anger in there. I hated him being angry at me.

“Toby? I meant I’m sorry that I didn’t understand what Oscar was to you. Of course I will help you.”

He raised his head, and tear-filled eyes met mine. “I’m sorry I didn’t explain it better.” Toby moved to kneel at my feet, his hands rested on my knees. “Oscar is... I love him,” he rushed to add, “like family. I’m not in love with him. You are my husband. That makes you the most important person in my life. I just wouldn’t be able to feel good living my life with Oscar stuck there.”

I tugged on his hands, pulling him up so he could curl into my lap. Curving my wings around us, I hid us from the world. “I didn’t think of it like that. You’re a good person. I know you don’t want him to suffer, no matter what he did.”

“Maybe Avery is right. Maybe he did this to make Avery proud or some shit, but Oscar, my friend, wouldn’t hurt me. What if he’s ill? He just needs help, Zeph, and I need to be there for him.”

“And you will be. I’ll help you get him out. I promise.”



AS CONFLICTED as I was over Oscar, I knew that giving Toby this peace of mind was the right thing to do. My husband was hurting over losing his home, so taking his best friend with us was a small step to having Toby settle wherever we ended up.

Still, I had some residual anger to get rid of, so once Toby slipped from my lap and wiped his eyes, I used my claws to thoroughly destroy the couch. Each new tear made Toby laugh. I yanked out the stuffing and used fire to melt it into the rug.

“Oooh, fun! Do you think I could do that?” Toby asked, a light in his eyes that had been missing just moments ago.

“Yes. If I can, then you can. Fire used to be my most difficult element. Now it bends to my will.” I demonstrated by holding a tiny flame in my hand. Before Toby, this would have been almost impossible for me to hold for any length of time without strain. To see his smile again, I flicked the fire around my fingers like one would do with a coin.

Toby let out a little whoop and hopped around. “Yas! Okay, I’m trying it. Get ready to heal me!”

“You own the fire. It bends to you,” I reminded him.

It took a few attempts and more than a couple of scorch marks on the carpet and walls before Toby could hold a little fireball. He went to the bedroom and burned the mattress and soft furnishings while I used my earth magic to shake apart the kitchen. Then I used water magic to damage the plumbing.

In the bathroom, I encouraged Toby to use earth magic to break apart the porcelain bath and sink. In my realm, we mainly worked in elements, though I knew Toby was capable of other, more powerful, magic. Working on the elements was a better base for him to grow and learn properly.

By the time we left his house for the last time, we had left no room untouched. Avery and Brittany, and through them, their parents, would pay for what they had done to Toby and August. I was still undecided about Oscar.

“Bye little house,” Toby said mournfully as he put the keys in the mailbox as agreed. I wrapped an arm around him, trying to comfort him as best I could while he dismantled the wards around the property.

Tabitha was waiting at our designated meeting spot just outside of coven territory. “What the hell took so long? We’ve

packed up as much as we can, but we'll need to come back with a truck for the rest."

"Well," Toby grinned at his sister. "Unlike you, I am unable to return. So we had to make sure I had everything. We also left a gift for the new owners."

"Yeah?" August joined the conversation.

I could see a little girl watching us curiously from the backseat. In her lap was a furry creature, by her feet, some sort of dog. It wasn't fair that a young family was having to uproot their lives. I hoped they would be happier wherever they settled.

Toby told Tabitha and August what we had done, pausing his story to laugh every few minutes. Their eyes got wider and wider until they gave in to laughter.

"I wish we could see their reaction!" Tabitha giggled. "Justice has us set up with a family cabin. She says there are open shop units in a good part of the city that I could afford. Until then, she said I can run the online stuff out of the hotel. Isn't she sweet? We've already talked about joining her coven!"

"That's great. You know there are shifters and vamps in the coven too, right?" Toby shared a concerned glance with me.

Tabitha waved his worries away. "Of course. It's fine. I'm looking forward to meeting them all."

At Toby's look, I shrugged. If his sister wasn't anxious, then this had to be a good thing.

A pregnant pause fell between us. I knew Toby was gearing up to tell his family about his plan to free Oscar and take him with us.

"What is it?" Tabitha sighed. "Toby, I can see something brewing in that brain of yours."

"We, me and Zeph, are going to break Oscar out," Toby finally admitted, shoulders slumping with defeat. He expected to be shouted down at any moment.



“I hear you! Drive safe!” Toby called back.

August held a hand out for a shake, but Toby surprised the man by pulling him in for a hug. “I’m sorry,” Toby whispered.

“There’s no need to be sorry. Things will be better from here.” August let go of Toby and joined his wife, child, and familiars in the car.

We watched them leave before turning back to look at the distant coven headquarters. “Thanks for staying with me, Zeph.”

“Where you go, I go.”

“Right then, Babycakes. Let’s get this rescue mission on!” Justice sauntered over to us as the rest of the vehicles left.

“We should leave my car here. It isn’t too far to fly from the building to here, is it?” Toby looked at both of us.

Justice shook her head, “depending on how heavy your friend is, no.”

“We can help with air magic,” I told Justice as Toby nodded.

“Push it under his feet to take the weight off?”

“Yes,” I agreed.

“I can do that. My control isn’t the best, but I’ll give it a shot.” Toby nodded at her. “Ready? Then let’s go.” Justice forged ahead, walking up the road to the building.

We discussed how we would enter. Since Toby knew the place better than us, we followed him through a back entrance and down to a lower level. “Fuckers have a dungeon? What kind of messed up shit is this?” Justice ranted as we went deeper, trying to find Oscar.

We heard the bird before Oscar’s plaintive cries of “help, please. Don’t leave me here.”

Pain. Horror. Sadness. They all filtered through my bond with my husband. Each of them made me feel bad that I’d ever considered leaving without Oscar. It didn’t matter to Toby

what Oscar had done. He firmly believed either Oscar had a reason, or they had tricked him.

“Os?” Toby’s voice was barely above a whisper, but somehow Oscar heard it.

“Tobes?” The hope in his voice was almost too much to bear.

“Of course, dummy.” Toby followed the voice and finally stood before his cell.

Holy fuck! It looked like Oscar had been tortured. The young, damaged man I’d seen before was reduced to a bag of bones. Had they fed him at all in the time that they had locked him up? Witches needed the calories for magic, even basic healing took a lot of energy.

Toby’s knees buckled as he blacked out for a moment. I caught him with an air current and eased him into my arms. Oscar watched with a sad smile. “I look that bad, huh?” He waved away my protests with a half-formed motion. Honestly, I was so stunned by his appearance that I could hardly form words. “You are good to him.”

“I’m burning this hell-hole down,” Justice announced when she got a look at Oscar. “This is fucking barbaric.”

“Agreed. We need to get Oscar and his bird out of here.”

Toby came to as we were figuring out the lock. “Oh, I... um... hold on,” he muttered. “Oh! I know some locking spells!”

He spoke a few words carefully, forgetting in his worry to hold back his power. The lock imploded. The remains landed on the floor.

“Nice work,” Justice commented as she entered the cell and scooped up Oscar. She encouraged the bird to sit on her shoulder with a call.

Justice shrugged awkwardly with her burden. “Doesn’t matter, does it? We got in. No one got hurt. No one heard the noise. I call that a win.”

“Huh.” Toby’s face was bemused.

“What?” Justice asked as she walked back the way we came.

“I just wish I’d met you sooner, is all.”

Getting into the building had been too easy. We all knew that. So it did not surprise us when we came out to the next floor and found guards charging towards us.

“Let me.” I put myself in front of Toby and Justice and let my wings out to shield them, shredding my shirt in the process. Oh well, I hadn’t liked the red color, anyway. With my wings blocking them, I was sure I wasn’t letting anything by me. With barely a thought, I stole the air from the guard’s lungs and placed them in a bubble with no air until, one by one, the guards fell to the floor, unconscious. I let the magic go once I knew we were safe.

“Are they...?” Toby asked warily.

“They are breathing again.” My assurance eased his worry. Even with all that this coven had done, Toby still had a tender heart and didn’t want them harmed.

We encountered another group of guards as we neared the exit. They blocked us from getting to freedom. As soon as we got outside, we could fly away.

“Fuck!” Toby cried. “We need them out of the way!”

Justice moved Oscar so that he was over her shoulder, leaving a hand free. In it, she balanced a fireball. “Burn shit?” she suggested casually.

“Let’s leave the fire until we get Hayto out.” Toby glared at the guards. “Can I try that air thing?”

“Of course.” I explained how I drew the air out, then created a seal so no air could get in. I made sure that he knew how to time it carefully.

I kept them at bay, their spells and tasers bouncing off my barrier. It took a lot of magic to hold, but was worth it for the smirk on Toby’s face as he bypassed it and cut the guards air. They quickly dropped. Once down, Toby let go of the magic to

turn it into a blast that moved the fallen men from the doorway.

We ran and burst into the open air, all of us laughing with relief.

Justice moved Oscar into her arms, holding him securely as she let out her gray wings. I noticed she had tailored her clothes to fit her wings. If we were to stay here, I needed to do this too. They fascinated me, the coloring of her wings was unusual. The tips were white, each layer of feathers getting darker, until finally the feathers at the bottom were pure black. It made me wonder about her lineage.

I dismissed it as I caught a look at Oscar's face. The broken witch was looking at the star filled sky as if he had never expected to see it again. Tears ran down his cheeks as he shivered in our friend's arms. "I'm free. Thank you."

"Of course, Os. We got you." Toby bopped Oscar's nose, making him smile.

"Fly Hayto," Oscar commanded with a shaky voice. The bird obeyed with a screech. Justice followed after, lobbing fireballs into the patched up hole we'd left last time. I heard her laughing with glee as sirens began to ring out through the building.

"Let's go, Zeph. I want to get back so I can thank you properly for all this." Toby's grin held wicked promises.

I let my wings open fully, loving the cool night air ruffling my feathers. One came loose, and I held it out for my husband. "For you." He tucked it into his pocket carefully and stepped closer. I circled him in my arms and pushed with both earth and air magic to get us airborne.

Toby kissed me under a million stars with love in his heart as I flew us away from his heartbreaking past into a hopeful future.

**CHAPTER  
TWENTY-THREE**

I didn't care that we had a lot to sort out. Things like healing up Oscar and where we were going to live long term, or even what we were going to do about Zephyrin's family. All I knew was that I had to celebrate our escape with my sexy demon husband. I needed to show him how much I appreciated his faith in me.

Pinning him against the door, I took his mouth in a hard kiss. He opened to me as I licked into his mouth. I sucked on his lower lip, teasing it with a nip before I thrust my tongue into his mouth.

Zeph rocked against me, showing me how hard he was. Maybe the escape had gotten him as hot as me. Using our magic together, the flight, all of it, had been exhilarating. I pushed my hips against his stomach, showing him how much I wanted him.

He made a muffled sound of pain and I pulled away. "What? No," he protested.

"Your wings, I hurt you."

"I don't care." He stepped towards me, clasped my neck and joined our lips again.

With mouths fused, I led us back to the bed and stumbled onto it. I laughed against his lips as I moved to the head of the bed, Zeph following, trying not to break our kiss.

"How about you ride me, Sweetheart?" I suggested when we broke apart. Impatiently, I made quick work of peeling off my shirt and dropping it to the other side of the bed. I settled

him so he was astride my lap and pushed at his hips so he could feel exactly what he did to me. This wasn't going to be drawn out. I couldn't wait.

His grin was wicked. "Hmm, I like the idea of that." He leaned down to nuzzle my neck and nearly took an eye out with his horns.

"Hey!" I gripped both horns, making him moan. "Oh, I forgot you like that. I just want you to be my toy right now. So stay there while I get these clothes off."

Slowly, I unzipped the hoodie I'd found in the car since none of us had wanted to search for other clothes to cover Zeph's bare torso. Once I bared his chest, I leaned forward and lightly bit at each of his nipples and kissed my way up his throat. I retook my hold on his horns, directing his head as I made my way to his luscious mouth.

Using a light tendril of wind, I moved the hoodie down each of his arms so it was pooling along my thighs. Another breeze sent it to the floor.

Zeph smirked into our kiss, but said nothing, just let his wings burst free so I could explore them.

I let go of his horns to caress his hair, then stroked my hands down his shoulders to his wing joints and along his wing bones. His moans got louder as I explored the feathers. I teased him as I ate at his mouth, just loving the feel against my fingers.

As fun as playing was, I'd already decided I wasn't going to make either of us wait. I dropped my hands to yet another pair of my sweats covering my husband's fine ass, and pushed them down as far as they would go. Which wasn't very far at all. I made a frustrated sound as Zeph tried to rise up to let me remove them. Holding his hips, I kept him in place and let my fire tickle along his skin, getting rid of the pesky layer of clothing.

I wriggled a hand between us and threw my phone and wallet onto the bedside table before cremating my jeans. Fuck it, I'd buy us more clothes. Using my magic so carelessly was

a dream I didn't want to wake up from. I used a little tornado to pick up the lube and bring it to me so I could coat my fingers and start teasing Zeph's hole.

All the while, Zeph stayed exactly where I'd left him and watched me with rapt attention. His smile grew each time that I used my magic confidently.

With practiced movements, I opened him up for me as I sucked and bit at his chest, leaving little marks for me to admire later. I felt drugged by the taste and smell of him. I loved his careful touches as he gasped and pleaded for my dick.

"Ready?" I asked him.

His eyes were glazed with lust, slit like pupils blown open, so only a ring of blue remained. "Yes, please, Toby."

Together, we shifted him into position and he lowered himself slowly on my straining cock with a groan. I hoped he was close, because this would not take long at all.

Rocking gently, Zeph took charge of our pleasure until it was me making all the noises under him as I clung to him. My hands had a mind of their own. Shifting from holding his hips, fingers digging in and grinding him down on me, to tracing along his feathers, wing bones and the join where they met his back. Each spot made a new noise burst from him and more precum seep from his weeping length. Our magic rose up as entwined as we were.

The tingle at the base of my spine told me my release was close. I tried to hold it back as he rode me hard. I wanted to feel him come apart on my cock, to have him milk me, so I spilled deep inside. A primal part of me wanted him to carry the mark of me on his skin. To have my scent all over him so the shifters and vampires we'd see in the morning would know who he belonged to. My husband brought out every primal instinct I had, to keep, to protect, to love.

Using his precum, I stroked him, loving the feeling of the nodes and ridges under my fingers. I'd love to feel him inside me again, even after that overwhelming first time. Especially



since we knew each other's bodies better. With one hand, I worked his cock, and the other I used to yank on a horn to bring our lips together.

The mix of sensations had him coming apart with a loud cry. He slumped against me, sweaty and cum-drunk, as I thrust into him, over and over until I reached my peak.

We stayed like that for a while, until my softened member slipped from him, earning a grumble from Zeph.

Showing off, I coaxed the tap in the bathroom on, then wiggled my fingers until a stream of water flowed from the sink over to us. Grateful for my earlier laziness, I grabbed the t-shirt I'd discarded, and got it wet. Using it, I gently cleaned my demon and then myself. I threw the t-shirt towards the corner of the room and then used the little stream again, turning it into a tiny shower of rain. The water only covered our exposed skin, but was refreshing after working up a sweat.

Mixing elements, I made the water evaporate off our skin and switched off the tap.

"No water damage anywhere! Go me!" I cackled to myself, inordinately pleased with how natural and easy that had been.

"Great work, little witch."



FACING REALITY SUCKED. I wanted nothing more than to spend the day in bed with my husband. We were right in that discovery phase of our relationship. Really, we had done things backwards, but I didn't care, I just wanted to bask in it. All I wanted for the next month or so was to spend time with him without others around us.

We'd fallen asleep cuddled together under the sheets after I'd cleaned us up. I was pretty sure I'd slept the entire night with a grin on my face. Sated sexually like never before and so

buzzed with my magic, I was sure I was still high off it and it was nearing noon!

“Ugh, I really should stop burning our clothes,” I said as I fished something to wear out of my stuff that I’d left in the cabin. “I’ll go out to the car and bring some stuff in for you.”

Zeph nodded and kissed me as I exited the cabin, almost slamming into Oscar. “Hey,” he said carefully. My friend was still skin and bones, though he looked like the pack had done some healing on him. His eyes were a clear summer’s day blue. His blond hair shone with health. “Can we talk?”

The early afternoon sky was overcast, the air brisk. I shivered in my thin tee. “Look, we haven’t eaten since yesterday.” I glanced back at the cabin where Zeph was waiting for me. Our stomachs had been growling for the last hour until it got too painful to ignore. “Can you meet us in the hotel? At the restaurant?”

“Sure. Thanks, Toby.” Oscar turned and trudged back to the hotel.

Running to where we left the car, I found a couple of bags with stuff that would work and rushed back to Zeph. “Hey, look, I’m not sure what you think, but Oscar was here. He’s going to meet us inside so we can get food.”

“As long as we get to eat, I’m happy to listen to his side.” I felt a swell of pride for my husband. He might still judge Oscar for his actions, but at least he was willing to hear him out.

Together we walked to the restaurant and put in an order with a server, likely a witch we hadn’t met, and went to join Oscar.

My friend had picked a table in the back and was playing with the paper straw of his milkshake, a plate with fries and a sandwich untouched in front of him.

“Hey,” I greeted as I took a seat opposite him. Zeph sat close to my side a moment later with a nod to Oscar.

“Hey, do you wanna wait for food, or just let me speak? I can leave you to eat after if you want.” He looked so dejected,

broken, that my heart ached for him. Zeph took my hand under the table and squeezed it. I left my hand there as I answered Oscar.

“Just tell me what happened, Os.”

“So... oh my gods, this is going to sound so shitty.” Oscar hid his face in his palms.

“Just tell me. I’ll not say a thing until you finish.”

“Right. Well, you know how we ended our thing when Avery asked me out?”

Zeph stood from his seat, furious. “What?”

I tugged on his hand. “It was years ago. Remember what I said?” He nodded and sat down, this time practically in my lap. “Behave,” I whispered in his ear, earning a shudder from him.

“You two are so cute. Listen Zephyrin, I love my friend, but I don’t want him like that. I don’t think I want anyone like that for a long time. Avery... Avery, well, he kinda fucked me up, quite honestly. He never liked you, Toby. He tolerated you. Was jealous of your power, but only pretended to get along with you so that he could keep an eye on you for his dad. To be honest, I don’t think he was ever into me. I feel like he couldn’t bring himself to date you, or be close to you—“

“Charming!” I muttered.

“Yeah, so, we dated. We all hung out as a group. I thought... I thought he loved me. He didn’t. I was a job to him. He liked the sex well enough. We had some good times, but he was really controlling.”

Oscar took a few sips of his milkshake. “Anyway, I didn’t see our problems right away. The little signs that he was manipulating me, getting me to do things I wouldn’t. He was the one that tampered with the ash for your spell. He got me to switch it out for him—“

Before I could interrupt, Zeph was in his face, growling. I forced my husband back. “Either listen or go over there. We

need to hear him out,” I chided. Zeph slumped. I hated treating him like a child. “I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“His actions nearly killed people,” Zeph ground out.

Oscar didn’t blink. “I know. It was a huge mistake. After that, I barely slept, stopped eating. I couldn’t face you, though I had to make myself check on you and Tabby.”

Seeing Oscar’s guilt and pain, I pulled Zeph back onto my lap and wrapped my arms around him. Our food was delivered, but remained untouched, our appetites forgotten. “I remember how distraught you were.”

“Yeah. It took so long for Avery to convince me it was your magic, your mutant magic, as he called it, that made everything get fucked up. He said it shouldn’t have done that. And I believed him. He worked so hard to get me to forgive him. He sent gifts, made everything about me for a change. Avery was the sweetest that he’d ever been. So I fell for it. Right before this spell, he got antsy. He saw me trying to help you get this try right and convinced me to change out the spell.”

“So you changed the spell last minute. The phonetic version?”

Oscar hung his head. “I did,” he admitted. His eyes met mine. “I swear I didn’t know what it did. He translated it himself and used my printer. There were words in it I didn’t understand. I’d never heard them in the witch language. Turns out they are demon words.” Oscar sighed. “Avery, he had me thinking everything he said was golden. If he said down was up, I would have believed him at that point. He said it was necessary for the coven. Unlike tampering with the ash, it wouldn’t hurt you. It would...”

“Would what?” I could feel myself get impatient with Oscar. His explanation was thin.

“Would siphon off some of your powers into a stone, so that his dad could use it to take over the council.”

“What?” I tried to rise from my seat and nearly tipped Zeph onto the table. Our glasses rocked, but he steadied them

and cast me a look. Zeph was full of simmering rage. It wouldn't take much to set him off.

My ex-best friend slumped in shame. He wouldn't meet my eyes as I willed him to look at me, to make this make sense. He had betrayed me for a somewhat decent dicking. Oscar had to know Avery wasn't capable of loving anyone. I almost felt sorry for Brittany.

"He had me convinced that the reason we were losing power in each generation was because of August's poor leadership. Avery and his dad told me that the coven was broke. We were going to lose the land if we didn't bring more people into the coven. They had a secret pact with some vampires to let them move in once Avery's dad took over."

"Fucking hell, this just gets worse." I pulled Zeph closer, needing the comfort he provided. He patted my hands in sympathy.

"I know. I swear I was under some compulsion. Sometimes I'd do spells on myself after losing time and I found magic I didn't know on me. You know me, Toby. Hurting people isn't me. I just wanted to live in peace. They—" his voice broke. "They took Hayto then. To make sure I did it. They told me you could stay in the coven with no magic. They'd leave you alone then."

A small consolation if there was one.

"Then you changed the spell somehow, and somehow, you got Zephyrin." Oscar smiled at me, a bitter one, as he looked up. "I have no idea how you did it, but I was so relieved. Avery, of course, blamed me. He thought I'd tampered with the spell. It was then he told me about Brittany. How he didn't love me. Never had. He took delight in telling me he was marrying her and they were having a baby. I fucked up my life and nearly hurt so many people for someone who had used me."

Zeph, who knew what I needed before I even did, got off my lap. "Toby needs to think about this. You are a victim here, too. You also caused a lot of pain to someone who trusted you." He picked up his food and drink. "Come on."

I sat for a moment, frozen. “I don’t know what this means for us, Os. Just give me some time, okay?” I stood and picked up my food, ready to go join my husband.

“I’ll wait as long as it takes.”

# CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Guilt warred with relief as I sat down at the new table Zephyrin had found for us. He had purposefully taken the seat that faced Oscar's table, making sure that I had my back to my ex-friend. I didn't need to watch his reactions with how bad I felt about the situation.

Bullshit. It was bullshit that I felt guilt over a natural reaction to several betrayals. I had done nothing wrong! My magic had always been wonky. Too strong for the basic spells that my coven performed. They had let me down, not the other way around! I'd been a child looking for guidance in a world where I didn't fit. At least now I had answers. What I did now was up to me.

I felt a tickle at my elbow and realized it was Zeph's tail. Against my will, it drew a smile out of me. My husband watched me from the other side of the table, his pretty eyes obscured by the lenses I'd bought for him. Honestly, I kind of hated them and thought that maybe he could just pretend his eyes were contact lenses instead. In this place, I didn't think anyone would say anything.

Grasping his tail lightly, I brushed my fingers over the indigo tuft of fur at the tip. I looked around, hoping that no one would see it. I was torn about keeping Zeph's differences hidden and just showing off how cool my husband was.

Properly distracted by my demon, I forgot about Oscar for a moment and began picking at my food with my fingers. After the first few fries, I picked up my fork and started tucking in properly. Zeph left his tail in my lap, carefully obscured from view by our bodies and the table.



Zeph made a pleased noise as I ate my first mouthful. “All will be well,” he said before picking up his own fork.

We ate in a companionable silence for a few minutes and I let my mind wander.

So, August had been right after all. No matter the reason for it, Oscar had betrayed me. He had been the reason that Tabby and Star had nearly been seriously injured. His access to me had let Avery push his father’s plan through for the coven. The consequences of that were far-reaching. If I was a better person, I might have felt bad for my remaining friends there. I didn’t though. In the end, the council had given into pressure and got rid of the one person who had some common sense, August. Without him, I was sure they would flounder, and honestly? They deserved it.

It stung, no, it fucking ached something rotten that my former best friend had broken my trust, broken my heart, for a guy. Not even a decent guy, either. Not the love of his life, his soul mate. Someone who ditched him and cheated on him.

I guess I was in the anger portion of my grief. The acceptance would come at some point, right?

Zeph’s tail twitched happily as he ate. Instead of dwelling on stuff I couldn’t change, I watched him. He had never trusted Oscar, but hadn’t left him behind. My demon knew when I’d gotten to my limit and took me away so that I could process. He was perfect.

Putting down his silverware, Zeph dabbed at his mouth with a napkin. He even had decent table manners, though I guess he would have to since he was a prince.

A prince! My husband was a motherfucking prince! How had I not realized that before?

He grinned at me before the smile slipped away. “Oscar is leaving. Do you want to say anything now?” he asked.

I shook my head. “I’m not ready.”

It was going to take me a long time to get over this. My friendship with Oscar... well, if it wasn’t over, it was damaged irreparably. It didn’t matter that towards the end, he’d had

magic performed on him. He had done some of that willingly. Oscar, or some part of him, had agreed with Avery.

I didn't know where that left us.



WE FINISHED our meals and just sat and enjoyed each other's company. For once, there wasn't anything pressing. Everything with the coven was over for us. We couldn't enter their lands again, and I was content just to leave them to their own ruin. I quickly pushed thoughts of Oscar away. Dwelling on things wouldn't do me any good. Perspective would come with him and how his actions played out from now on. Anything that Oscar did now was without the influence of his ex or the council elders. I had to hope that Oscar would show me the side of himself that had kept us friends for so long.

The server brought over coffee for me, and tea for Zephyrin. My demon wasn't a fan of my bitter drink, but I needed its soothing goodness. The warmth of the mug seeped into my hands as I inhaled its comforting scent. Was there anything better than coffee?

"I don't know how you can drink that." Zeph wrinkled his nose and brought his own cup to his lips.

"And I don't know how you can drink leaf water," I teased.

"Are you happy, Toby?" Zephyrin's face was solemn, an unusual look for my demon. I missed his ears and claws. His horns were hidden in his hair, meaning he didn't have to wear a hat inside.

There was a brief pause as I figured out my answer. "Mostly."

"Good enough, considering. What would make you happier?"

"Um... I feel bad that we don't have any answers. Anything that we can use to help your family. Losing the

coven meant nothing to me because I was ready to leave so I could keep my magic. Having Tabitha and August having to uproot their lives is a pain in the ass, but together, we'll all be fine. I just wish we had a way of helping your family.”

“That’s where I come in with some good news, Babycakes.” Justice plopped down on a booth seat nearby, a laptop bag on her shoulder and a blinding grin. Chloe followed, scooting Justice further into the booth.

“Come sit with us. Justice has something that might help,” she said, looking excited.

As I debated silently with Zeph, Justice was taking a slim silver laptop covered with stickers out of her bag. She opened it, typed in a password and started opening up tabs.

Zeph shrugged and got up to go sit with them. He made me sit on the inside of the booth, so I was hidden from view as Justice began to talk.

“So, remember when you were muttering about the council archives?” Justice asked.

I flushed and nodded. After we had gotten into the car, Justice and Oscar were in the back seat so that she could perform some healing on him. I’d complained about setting the building on fire since that was where the archives were and we had no clue how to break the curse. The fire had seemed like a good idea at the time, but I felt bad about the knowledge that would be lost.

“Then you told us about the curse on Zephyrin’s family?”

“Toby feels a lot of guilt about what happened. Please don’t make him feel worse.” Zeph came to my defense. I shuffled closer to him. “We will find a way to help them. It will just take more time.” He was so calm about this. Resigned. It made me feel worse.

“No need.” Justice grinned and turned her laptop so we could see the screen. “Mom knew some stuff and Oscar came to me with some information. He had spells and cloud access to the digital archives. Seems they’ve been too busy to lock him out. Between the two of them and a source Mom said

didn't want to be named, we have a spell to get to Zephyrin's home and some ideas for what to do about breaking that curse!"

My demon's jaw was hanging open. Hope, real and brilliant, lit up my body. Flicking a look at the screen, I met Justice's excited gaze. "I can't read that. I'm dyslexic."

"Shit! Sorry, Babycakes. I struggle with reading, too. Mom says it's my demon side. The angel side's done its thang, and I can read stuff when I use this font."

"Usually that works for me, but only with English. I can't read witch language at all. My sister had to write it phonetically for me."

"Fuck, well, that's fine. We've got plenty of witches, and I'm sure your sister will help out. That leads me into something difficult." Justice's expression was conflicted. "Look, I dunno if it matters really, but you need to know why your sister has an easier time of shit than you do."

"We kind of talked about this before, but didn't go fully into it. She remembers Mom being pregnant. Could I be a baby swap? A cuckoo? Is she really my sister?" My worry flared.

"No, she is. Just a half sibling, not a full sibling. Like you said, she remembers your mom being pregnant and you have a lot of similarities." It was true. Our eyes were the same color we got from Mom. "You must have different dads. It's hard to say without his blood if the man who raised you was her dad or yours. Anyway," she drew the word out. "Tabitha is your sister, and also a badass. Her potions are really going to help our clan."

Gods, the relief was staggering. Tabitha really was family. I hadn't realized how much it scared me to think I was the imposter. Like I was some sort of changeling. Now that she had mentioned it, Dad had been less powerful than the rest of us.

"So she doesn't struggle with magic, though she is stronger than a lot, because she only has more demon blood on

one side of her DNA. Is that where you're going with this?"

"Zephyrin, you have married a very clever witch. Stick by his side," Justice teased.

"I plan to," Zeph said, completely seriously. He took my hand and squeezed it. Through our bond, I felt his joy and hope. His longing for home and his own family.

"Okay, so I'm going to need you to explain the plan."

**CHAPTER  
TWENTY-FIVE**

Magic took a long time to prepare in the human realm. Spells here were complicated, not just tied to the elements, but phases of the moon and items that were added into incantations. As such, several days went by with hours upon hours of preparation for us to open a portal home.

Home.

Each time that I thought of it, a wound opened in my heart. I wished to go home so badly, but home was with my Toby, so I was conflicted. In truth, wherever he wanted to be was where I stayed. Home was not my mother's kingdom in the demon lands. It was here, in the human realm, with a clan of misfits and exiled witches if that was what Toby wanted. As long as I was with him, I was happy.

Toby, brave witch that he was, saw this as the beginning of an adventure. He wanted to see my home and to do what he could for my family. I worried he would be disappointed by what he saw. We didn't have the things that he had here. Technology, cars, modern things that he was accustomed to. My witch didn't have wings, though our shared air magic would help him fly. Yet, it worried me I might not always be by his side to carry him or share my magic with him.

As our bond grew, so did the distance and time that we could spend apart. Without me by his side, would another demon tempt him into a bond? There were plenty of demons that settled for pairings, groups of three or four, instead of waiting for a female to choose them. They would see Toby and want to be with him, even if that meant being with me.

Would they convince him to cut me loose?

Perhaps if I was already in my realm, I would get to stay there. Was that why Toby was pushing so hard for us to travel there? Did he want to leave me and return to the human world alone?

I shook off my thoughts. It was pointless to worry about things I couldn't change. Toby was coming to my realm with Justice, her Mom, Aerinith, or Airy, as she preferred to be called. There were a couple of other witches from the coven, called Raiven and Lori. It pleased me to have remembered their names. August was also coming with us. Toby's brother-in-law had convinced everyone that he needed to be there for Toby. He was making sure that Toby was safe, which was unnecessary and hurtful. I took my husbandly duties very seriously. My Toby wanted for nothing if I could provide it.

We had to wait until the moon was at its highest to perform the portal spell. There were seven of us in total, with all the potions, books, and equipment that the witches thought we would need to find and break the curse my mother held, then of course, August's familiar. Neither would do well with the separation for so long and to another dimension. So the beagle was coming with us. We also had Airy's belongings since she wanted to return home.

"My daughter is grown. Now she knows the spell she can use it to visit. I need to see my other family and prove to them I didn't make a mistake in answering the call." Airy buzzed with excitement as the hours counted down to us leaving.

It was easier for her to hide her demon side. Her almost white hair was curled and hid the delicate black horns. She had even gone to the trouble of trimming them, though it had caused an inordinate amount of pain. Airy's eyes were a pale blue, the slit pupil hardly noticeable. I'd seen her wings and their pale blue feathers were beautiful. Airy was a stunning woman, just nothing compared to my Toby.

Airy would have been a prized demoness if she had stayed in our world, but she had longed for other things and a monogamous life. Now she was returning with a broken heart



and a half demon child some seventy years after she had left. I worried about how her family would receive her.

Unable to stand still as they made the finishing touches to the spell, I paced inside the circle, never going too far from Toby. I wanted to make sure that I didn't lose him when the portal opened. If tying him to my side was acceptable, then I would have tried it. All I could do was trust that the magic would get us there, and we could break this spell.

Deep in my heart, I prayed that this wouldn't be the last time that I saw my home. That Toby would allow us to visit often and we would make a home near here so he could have everything his heart desired.

The minutes counted down to that important time. Candles were lit. The shifters, vamps, and some other witches, including Tabitha, said their goodbyes and promised to call us home in a few days. We could return to my dimension again if needed.

Chanting began. Toby wound his way to me and took my hand, threading our fingers together. "Stay close. I can't lose you," he whispered before he took up the chant in a louder voice.

Having him close settled my nerves. With him beside me, we could do anything.

Louder and louder, the voices cried out the spell words, until, finally, a crackling portal opened in the middle of the circle. It buzzed with a multitude of colors. Every part of the rainbow, and in it, I could see my family.



JUSTICE HAD EXPLAINED that this portal would be stable compared to the one Toby used to summon me. It would be more like a door than a fishing line trying to hook me.

She had been right.

It was exactly like opening a door. Only this one opened into my mother's throne room. My queen looked regal, though tired, and somewhat sad, until she met my eyes. "Zephyrin?"

My fathers and brothers all turned to me. The courtiers and nobles all looked our way. There were gasps and cheers as they spotted me, my wings on show, tail flicking happily as the faces I loved most surrounded me. Even Llyrin was home!

In his arms, Nerioyrin held a babe. My sister had been born in my absence, yet she had held on for me.

The portal was wide enough that we could step through together, all shoulder to shoulder. August tossed a reminder over his shoulder, "give us two days!" as he walked through with his familiar at his feet.

Then we were through. Justice let the spell go, and we stood, my new family and old one, just staring at each other.

Toby broke the standoff with a low bow. "Queen Tonantzinith, please accept my apologies for taking your son from you. Zephyrin is... I'm so grateful for him. He wished to come home for a visit and to meet his sister. Would you allow this?"

The charm on his wrist caught my eye. A simple translation spell so that both sides of my family could understand each other. The others in our party wore them too. I was so proud to have a witch as a husband. His magic was so special.

Relieved that he didn't mention the curse, I could only smile at him and my mom. I'd missed her and my family so much. Part of me wanted to go and hug them all, the rest wanted to hold on to Toby. I didn't want him to think that now I was home, I would leave him.

"Of course, we shall retire to our private rooms. I'm happy that you allowed my son a visit. I'd like to get to know you..."

"Toby," he said, blushing. "I'm Zephyrin's bonded. His husband."

"It is nice to meet you, Toby. I'm interested to hear all about my son's time in your realm." She called out to the

servants, “clear the room, please. Court is finished for the day.”

Court had run later than usual. It was early evening. No wonder Mom looked so tired. A new baby, healing, and long days would be wearing on anyone. I knew better than to say anything, though.

The room cleared, they ushered us into their private apartments. Servants brought in extra chairs since this was a family room and we didn’t accept guests here often.

No one spoke for a few seconds after the last servant left the room to head to the kitchens. They would return soon with food and drink for us all.

“Mom, I’m so glad that you and the baby are well. Have you named her yet?”

My mother gave me a rare, gentle smile. “Not yet. Oh, I’m so pleased to see you, Zephyrin! Your husband seems lovely. Does he treat you well?”

Toby stiffened at being talked about and the idea that he would harm me, but, thankfully, kept quiet. I’d warned him of my mother’s temper. “Toby and I are very happy together. He has made being away from home much easier. There were complications with his coven—“

“What kind of complications? What happened?” she demanded. Mom sat rigidly in her seat, I think offended on my behalf.

Quickly, I outlined my time in the human world with Toby. The issues with the coven, finding Justice, and even our plan to come to break the curse.

“So these people with you have witch magic?” Elioryn broke the silence that fell after I finished catching everyone up and introducing everyone.

“Yes,” I said simply. “August and Toby have extensive potion knowledge.” I felt Toby preening beside me.

It was true, though. I’d watched him as he got things ready to take with us. He and his sister worked with all the things

she had taken from her shop before we had left the coven. Tabitha had returned once to get more of the stock in the shop, unsurprised to find the windows broken and some things missing. Luckily, she had thought to grab the expensive ingredients as soon as she knew we were leaving.

Toby had worked tirelessly with her over the last few days to make all sorts of potions and tonics that were healing, boosted protections, and broke curses. Since we didn't know what the wording of the curse was, a secret the demoness took to the grave, we had to guess.

"I have a mix of demon and angel magic, due to my mixed lineage," Justice said. She seemed fascinated by everything. "My mother, Airy, would like your permission to travel to her kingdom and meet with her family."

"You are Aerinith?" Elioryn asked. "We heard tales of your disappearance."

"I am." Airy nodded. "With your leave, I would go now and return in two days when the portal is open so I can say my goodbyes to my daughter and her friends. I wish to remain in my homeland."

My mother inclined her head. "You may go with our blessing and return as you see fit. Please do not stay if your welcome is not a happy one. If your daughter and her friends can break this curse, then you have a place in my court forever."

Shocked murmurings broke out among my fathers and brothers. This was a boon. A gift for Airy, should she need it.

"Thank you." Airy stood and bowed to my family, kissed her daughter on the forehead, and left the room.

I wished her well.

**CHAPTER  
TWENTY-SIX**

Once Airy was gone, a sense of urgency came upon the room. “Could I have a look at the baby?” I asked, not wanting to delay a moment more.

One of Zephyrin’s brothers looked at their mother before standing and bringing the tiny bundle to me. He placed her swaddled form into my arms as the servant arrived with tea trays groaning with food. I caught a couple gaping at me holding the child. Seemed it was a big deal for me to be allowed that privilege.

Now that I had a balance with my magic, I felt confident that I could send it seeking out to find the root cause of the problem. Zephyrin aided me with a claw tipped hand on my arm. I’d forgotten for a moment that he had his full form out for all to see. I was grateful that the contacts were gone when his slit pupil eyes met mine. They didn’t hide the love he had for me like the contacts did.

Together, we sought the curse. My hand lit up with the familiar blue glow my magic did when I wasn’t using the elements. Having the use of both types of magic was amazing! I found the problem quickly; an oily sludge around the poor baby’s heart. I could feel it slowly seeping in, infecting the heart until, finally, it would no longer beat.

This little girl was strong. She was like her big brother, my husband. Her well of magic was deep, and like Zeph, she would struggle, but she would have us as she grew to guide her. Like him, she had blue wings in an ombre effect, her feathers the color of a summer sky at the bottom, deep indigo

at the top. Her tiny horns were a marbled effect. Gods she was beautiful!

“I see it,” I told the waiting crowd. Between Zephyrin’s fathers, brothers, Mom, and the people we brought with us, the room was pretty packed. “August, give me the green topped vial there.” I’d taken a case of healing spells, tonics, and things, just in case I could identify it.

“What are you giving her?” Queen Tonantzinith asked. She was hovering over me, and really, I didn’t blame her for that.

“This is a protection spell.” I held up the vial that August handed to me. “This should block the curse going any further while we work on removing it. Since she is so small, I am hesitant to remove the poison—“

“Poison?”

“The curse acts like a poison. It infects the heart. So first I have to protect it. Unfortunately, I can’t add too many protections or it will cover the curse and we won’t be able to remove it all, giving it time to grow back like a weed.”

Tonantzinith nodded her understanding. “Do you think you can remove it?”

“May I?” August asked before placing a finger on the baby’s chest. He thought for a moment. “Yes, we can draw this out with some tonics we have.” He looked at me, “up through the chest?”

“Yeah,” I looked at the anxious queen. “This is going to look like we are hurting her.” I warned her. “We will give her pain relief first, but the curse will try to stay in there. It’s going to fight us, but she will be protected, and if you trust us, we can do this.” I wanted her to understand how bad it might get.

“I trust that Zephyrin trusts you with this.” The queen took a step back and was folded into the many arms of her husbands. I heard one advising her not to watch as we began.

First, we began with the protection of the sweet little girl in my arms. She slept so peacefully I felt horrible for starting this. I gave her a few sips of the potion and then used it like a lotion over her heart, working it into her tanned skin gently.

Once that was done, August whispered some words to activate it. I checked and immediately saw that the poison couldn't touch her heart. It started to move.

“Quickly!”

Working with August, we used a poultice to draw it out through her chest and blocked it from going anywhere else. It didn't take long for it to fight with us, making her cry in the process. “The blue lid!” I called. Zephyrin handed me the bottle after taking the stopper off. I gave the crying baby a couple of drops and she quietened. It still must have been uncomfortable for her, but she was strong and brave.

The oozing sludge made its way out of her. “Quick, wipe it and burn the cloth!” I urged whoever had hands free. August and I had our hands full, me holding her in one arm while the other drew it out with my magic.

One of Zephyrin's brothers ran to the drapes and cut them from their hanging with sharp claws. He dashed to us and began wiping, setting each segment of curse covered fabric on fire, turning it to dust.

Little by little, we labored with our magic and the fabric, until, at last, there was only a tiny pinprick of stubborn curse left.

“I can't get it!” My frustration wanted to bubble over.

“Here, let me see. You're exhausted.” Justice looked for permission to take the baby from me. Zephyrin's mother kneeled at my feet, looking horrified and as worn out as I felt. Running a marathon sounded easier than this had been. My magic, and that of Zephyrin's, was almost completely depleted.

With a nod from the queen, Justice carefully lifted the baby from my arms. Straight away, a bright golden light shone from my friend, encompassing the infant she held. “Ah, so that's what that does.” The last speck of curse lifted from the baby and exploded into sparks above Justice's head. “There. Gone for good.” Justice turned and handed the little one to one of her fathers.



Still glowing, Justice joined the queen on the floor and wrapped her arms around the sobbing mother. Tonantzinith was beside herself. I could only imagine the relief of knowing that her baby could now grow up to rule as she was supposed to.

The glowing magic grew in intensity until it covered them both and got so bright that I could no longer see. I shut my eyes against the glare as a percussive wave of magic went through the room.

When I opened my eyes, still stinging from the brightness before, both Tonantzinith and Justice were slumped on the floor, unconscious. There was a puddle of the black goo I'd spent so long fighting on the floor above the queen's head. As I spotted it, the icky substance tried to return to Zephyrin's mom.

Zeph must have spotted it quicker than me, as he had a fireball in his hand, ready to fire. He launched one, and it stopped the progress of the stuff, but didn't destroy it. He shot a few more, taking pieces of it off as he did.

"Grow it," I urged. "Hold it a bit longer, make it hotter." This was going to take most of what we had left.

Our friends moved the sleeping women out of harm's way, as Zephyrin dealt with the remaining curse.

"You've got this," one of his brothers encouraged. Another scoffed and earned himself an elbow in the ribs. "Fuck off, Terran."

Okay, so one of them was nice, and the other was a dick. Guess families were like that. My parents hadn't even been in touch since Tabitha and I had left the coven, so I got that.

My husband put more power into his fireball, pretty much all that he could spare. I pushed more of my magic into him to make the flames hotter. They burned blue and then white.

He let it go. It hit the curse perfectly. When the smoke dissipated, the curse was gone.

I threw myself into my husband's arms. "I am so proud of you."

Then I kissed him.



WHEN WE BROKE APART, I felt the effects of giving so much magic. I stumbled a bit, feeling lightheaded. There had never been a time when I'd used so much in one go. Never in my life had magic—any sort of spell outside of potions—gone so well. To work a spell for so long had been a dream to me. My magic had always overwhelmed my meager control. Having Zephyrin in my life had changed everything for me.

I had to sit and let Raiven and Lori, two of the witches that had come with us, look after me. They coaxed sweet tea and a couple of potions into me with promises of cakes.

“Another couple of bites of that sandwich,” Lori cajoled. “Then you can have a piece of this. It's a macaroon!” She was so sweet when she whispered, “I couldn't resist having one earlier. Stress eating is a bitch.” My lips lifted a little. Gods, I was so tired. The food and the potions were working.

“Here.” Raiven handed me another potion. “Last one, I promise. Then you can have a snow-cone.” She dropped her voice. “The magic they've used to keep them frozen is cool.” Raiven giggled. “No pun intended.”

The remark, and the care, brought a smile to my face. “I'm so glad we're joining your coven.”

Raiven patted my hand. “Us too, sweetie. Great work there.” She went off to take care of Justice, who was coming around.

The queen was already up and holding her baby as she reclined on a comfortable-looking sofa. She patted the space next to her. “Come over here, boys.” We did as commanded, sitting on either side of her. “I cannot—“ a sob tore from her throat. “You saved us.” Her soft crying sounds filled the room as she hid her face under silky, dark brown hair.

One of her husbands came and took the baby, who was calm once more, her tear-stained cheeks not as red as they were. I hated that we hurt her in order to heal her, but it was the only way. Thankfully, she was young enough that she wouldn't remember any of this. Only we would.

As soon as the baby was out of her mother's arms, Zeph pulled his mom to him. He whispered sweet words to her and smoothed her hair. Though Zeph sometimes felt like an outsider; it was clear they loved him. His family had missed him.

Tonantzinith's hand landed on mine. She took hold of my hand and yanked me into the hug. In a small voice, she said, "I can never repay this kindness. Whatever you want is yours. A castle of your own? Done. Ask and you shall have."

"All I want," I told her honestly, "is Zephyrin."

The Queen straightened, and when she spoke it wasn't only to us, but the whole room. "Then that's what you shall have. Tomorrow we will hold a wedding for you! A celebration that my son has found love and we no longer live under the shadow of this curse because of you all."

Everyone broke out in congratulations to us. Justice just smiled from where she sat being attended by Raiven and Lori, though she mouthed, "well done."

My heart felt too full. I wanted to sob; I wanted to scream. I just wanted to get all the feelings out. Overwhelmed. All of this was too much. The acceptance, the love, the joy that they all had for us. For me. I was part of something here. They were welcoming me into the family just hours after meeting me for the first time.

Zephyrin appeared at my feet as I tried to get myself together. I didn't want to be seen crying. I didn't want them to think something was wrong. No, everything was right. So right that I just couldn't process it.

"Toby? You are overtired, love. Let's take you to my room so we can rest. Let's face this tomorrow, right?" His hands were gentle as they took mine. The simple touch of his fingers

was soothing. With Zephyrin touching me, all felt normal again.

“Please,” I croaked.

His mother must have overheard us. “Zephyrin, see to your darling husband. We will have a breakfast feast and finish up the planning for your celebration. Toby, dearest, sleep well.”

We were almost out of the door when Tonantzinith had a final announcement for us. “I’ve decided on the name of our new princess. Her name shall be Zeraphatobanith. So that her two favorite brothers are there in her name. We’ll call her Zera for short.”

It was my turn to be the strong one. I hugged Zephyrin close as he broke down. They brought little Zera to us so we could kiss her goodnight before we left for our rooms.

**CHAPTER  
TWENTY-SEVEN**

**M**y mother wanted to hold a wedding for us, but I would convince her to have a welcome party for Toby instead. In her gratitude, she would have forgotten that Toby's family wasn't all present in our realm. He would not want to have a wedding without his sister or niece.

Nerioyrin followed us out into the hall. "Hey, Zeph, your husband is pretty cute. Great witch, too. Is he looking for a second husband?"

A growl left me. "Nerio, back off!" I tucked Toby closer to me. He turned his head on my shoulder to look at my brother. I felt his curiosity, and it made my jealousy spike. We had already decided we were it for each other. Was Toby changing his mind?

Nerio held up his hands. "Hey, cutie," he directed at Toby. He saw my temper flaring and grinned. "I'm just asking, okay?"

"No, thanks," Toby stated flatly. "Zephyrin is all I need. Maybe ask in a decade or two. Just don't hold your breath that I'll change my mind, okay?" His tone ended saccharine sweet, making my brother's grin turn to a laugh.

"Oh, I like him even more, Zeph. Congrats, really. I'm happy for you both." Nerioyrin patted me on the shoulder and turned to leave.

I stopped him, grabbing his arm carefully. "Could you ask mother to change the party to a celebration and not a wedding, please?"

Toby backed away from me forcefully. “Why? Don’t you want to marry me properly?”

Fuck, he looked for hurt. His emotions were clouding his judgment. Nerio waited for my answer with a smirk. I knew I needed to tread carefully.

“That’s not it, my love,” I said, going to him and taking his hands. I implored him to see the truth, to feel it down our bond. “I want you to have all your family here. That will take more planning and portals.” He stepped close again, leaning down a little to rest his head on mine. “We will either need to teach someone else on the other side to open a portal up so everyone can return, or learn how to do it from this side.”

“Zeph... you know me so well. Sorry, I guess I’m—“

“It’s been a long, emotional day. We need rest like mother suggested. Nerio will ask her to change the party and explain that you would like your kin there. She will understand.”

“She will.” Nerio nodded. “I’ll get that done for you. See you both at breakfast.”

Once my brother was out of sight, I tugged Toby towards my rooms. “How did you know what I wanted before I did?” I nearly laughed at Toby’s incredulity.

“Because it’s my job. It’s what I’m here for, and it makes me happy to give you everything you want.”

We paused outside of the door so that Toby could kiss me sweetly. “I love you. Our life is strange, but perfect. I am so thankful that I summoned you.”

“And I’m grateful for that, too. If not for that spell, I would never have met you. We wouldn’t have saved my sister, and any future sisters. I love you so much, Toby.”

I leaned up and kissed him again, pouring all of my feelings into it. Then I took my husband to bed. Only to sleep, though. He was much too tired for anything else.



WAKING with a sleepy Toby in my arms was the best part of any day. Knowing that we were in my lands and my family was free of the curse made everything so much better. My shoulders felt free of a weight I hadn't realized I was carrying.

I guess that with my magical control being pathetic, I had always considered myself as another stressor for my already struggling family. When they had found out that my sister was coming, that was when I had decided to be better for them. To take up some of the strain from the family and prove my worth to the kingdom.

“Are you awake?” Toby muttered against my chest. He tightened his hold on me and rubbed his whiskered chin over my skin. He hadn't shaved in a few days and was scruffier than usual. It suited him, though I wasn't sure my mother would appreciate the look for the party.

Instead of answering, I brought our mouths together, morning breath be damned, and kissed him soundly. I rolled onto my back, pulling him to drape over me as I hardened against him. He groaned and began moving against me, grinding our cocks together.

Reaching between us, I clasped us both in my hand, making a tunnel for us to fuck into. I moaned at the feeling of his hot skin on mine, his biting kisses on my neck, as we worked our bodies into a sweat.

With some muttered curses and laughter, Toby added a slickened hand—he'd found my stash of oil—and ramped up our mutual pleasure. “Zeph!” he cried just before he came. The feel of him spurting over me and his tightened grip pushed me over the edge.

He lay with his head on my chest as we caught our breath and cursed again. “Eww, cooling cum. Please tell me you have showers here because we are all sticky.”



“We do,” I assured him. “Let’s get cleaned up and go for breakfast. I’d like to pamper you today before the party.”

Toby propped himself up on my chest, his hands supporting his chin, and stared at me. “What kind of pampering?”

“Well,” I said, playing with strands of his hair. “A massage for a start. We’ve been through a lot of stress recently.”

“Hmm,” he murmured, his cornflower blue eyes drew closed as he relaxed into my touch. “That sounds nice.”

“Because of the celebration, I think we should have someone trim your hair.”

One eye opened. “Is this your way of telling me I look unkempt?” He raised one eyebrow. I’d never noticed the notch in it before. There was a scar there, probably from magic related mayhem.

“You are married to a prince. A certain level of grooming is required,” I challenged playfully.

“All right,” he said as he relaxed and set his head under my chin. “I’ll allow it. Do you think they would shave me, too?”

I ran the tips of my fingers over the scruff on his face. “They will if you want them too. Either just to tidy up your beard, or they can remove it altogether.”

“What would you prefer?” He was running his fingers over the tuft of my tail. I enjoyed him being so comfortable with me.

“I have no preference. It is whatever makes you feel most comfortable.”

“Good answer!” he said approvingly. He traced his fingers over my jaw. “I like how smooth you are. I think I will stand out in a bad way with a beard.”

“They will do whatever you like.”



BREAKFAST WAS A ROWDY AFFAIR, like it usually was with so many of the males in my family in one room. With our guests in residence, we used a more formal dining room, so there was enough space.

Justice and August were fully recovered from their magical use, his familiar ever present at his side. The man was called on more than once to tell stories of Toby's childhood as my parents tried to get to know their new son-in-law better. Their eyes lit up when they heard how powerful my Toby was. Though they sympathized with him for having no one to teach him or understand him, they wanted a strong husband for me. Someone who could match my power, and Toby did that.

Toby spent much of his time holding Zera. My little sister was as enamored of him as I was and quieted in his arms more quickly than anyone else other than Mom. He grinned each time she was taken from him, only to be returned minutes later. They had a sweet bond. I just hoped that we wouldn't be parted for too long. We had to go back tomorrow.

I fed him in between kisses and stories of my time with the humans. My family wanted to know everything that I had experienced, but I sugarcoated much of the early hours for fear of their anger. I wouldn't put it past one of my fathers to journey back with us to sort the coven out, or set fire to the rest of the buildings.

As promised, I made sure that Toby was appropriately pampered and then dressed as befitting a prince for the celebration. Mother had renamed it our engagement party. It didn't matter to her that we were already bonded. She wanted it recognized by all in our lands.

We had snuck into a corner just to have five minutes to ourselves when Toby asked, "why is it you only have queens as rulers but you call it your kingdom? Shouldn't it be queendom?"

A laugh burst from me and I had to wait a moment to get myself together before I replied. Except my mother interrupted, clearly having found us. Luckily, she looked amused. “That’s a good question, Toby. It really should be queendom.” They shared a grin before she sobered. “Of course, our realm wasn’t always like this. Men ruled in a society where only a few would have wives and those females were their property.”

“Oh. That’s horrible.” Toby’s expression sobered.

Mother nodded. Her crown slipped a bit since it was the highly decorative one she wore for events and was exceedingly heavy. “It was. Eventually, some of the lower ranked males and all the women they could find banded together and rose up against their oppressors.”

“Wow!” It impressed Toby. I’d grown up hearing this story since my great-great-grandmother was one of the warrior queens that had reshaped our world. I was likely missing a couple of generations. Our history was long.

“Yes.” Mom’s eyes were lit with fondness. “We lost many on both sides, but the females, and the males that had helped them, won the day and changed how our society was shaped. We decided we could love more than one man.” My fathers, Shenanryn and Ciroryn, approached, each wrapping an arm around my mom. She beamed under their attention. “I think it helps a family to have more than two parents. I know that when the boys were younger, it was a relief to send them off with whichever husband had displeased me that day.” Mother let out a bubbling laugh as Shen squeezed her and Ciro tickled her.

Elioryn called to us as he came closer. “My queen, or perhaps, Baby Whisperer, I need one of you to take this one. She misses you.” He held out a grizzling Zera.

“Oh!” Toby held out his hands for my sister. Elio handed her over gratefully and kissed my mother on the cheek.

Somehow I ended up separated from my husband and stuck speaking to a handful of knights and lords who were dreadfully boring until one spoke. “Say, Prince Zephyrin, I

don't suppose your husband is looking for another, is he? I think he's quite handsome. I hear he's a powerful witch."

I didn't even think it through. Didn't even blink. I just stole the idiot's air until he was turning blue on his knees in front of me. Nerio clapped me on the shoulder. "Don't punish him for a question, Zeph. Just tell him no. Use those words now."

"No," I said firmly, releasing my hold on the magic. "Toby does not require another husband. We have an agreement to wait before we reconsider that." I glared at each of the knights and the fallen lord until each nodded. Then I turned, only for my anger to spike again.

My husband was feeling anxious as he tried to fend off two men. They had him pinned between them. He was trying so hard to be polite whilst removing wandering hands. These minor royals felt they could take what was mine. Worse, something that Toby did not feel comfortable giving. He clearly didn't want them touching him. Why was no one else noticing? Why weren't they helping?

I looked around for someone closer to step in on my behalf. Mother and my fathers were seeing to Zera. Nerio was smoothing the feathers I had ruffled and Llyrin was with his wife and husbands. They had come especially for this event.

I looked around again and found Terranyrin watching it happen. My temper flared. In the corner was a plant pot, the soil covered with ornamental rocks. With earth magic, my least used element, I picked up a rock and sent it hurtling off Terranyrin's forehead, leaving a pretty pink mark.

Beside me, Nerio spat out his wine and choked out, "nice shot!"

Terr whipped his face in my direction and scowled. I pointed at him and then at my floundering husband. "Help him!" I ordered.

Our brief argument had, unfortunately, caught my mother's attention. She interceded quickly, moving to stand next to Toby and sending the men away. She and Toby had a brief

conversation before my mom called for the crowd to quieten. “I would like to make an announcement.” Everyone hushed and drew closer. Toby hid his embarrassment by ducking his face and looking at Zera instead.

“I am so proud of Prince Zephyrin. He has a splendid match with Toby. I am looking forward to Toby calling me Mother. We are here to celebrate their impending union, however some of you seek to join them. Prince Zephyrin and the future Prince Toby wish to remain monogamous at this stage. They are not looking for anyone else to enter into a union with them. If that changes, they will be the ones to ask. If I see another person attempting to persuade either of my sons otherwise, they can spend a week in the dungeon, or a month performing hard labor.” Her smirk was wicked. “Enjoy the rest of the party.”

Everyone did as they were told. Queen Tonantzinith had spoken, after all.

Toby’s eyes found mine. We crossed the room to each other. He wrapped his arms around me and clung to me. “I couldn’t get away. You were too far.”

“I know,” I soothed. “Let’s just stick around a little longer and then head to bed, okay?”

“Please.” Toby took my hand. Together, we went over to one of the food tables so I could ply him with treats and make him feel better. We had some of the best cooks in the kingdom working in the castle, and I wanted him to have good memories here.

“Have you thought about where we will live?” I asked an hour later as I led him to my rooms.

“Well, we have to return home, but only until I learn how to make return portals from this side. I think we should split as much time as we can between here and there, don’t you think?”

I grinned. “I think you might not be Zera’s favorite for long if you don’t.” Stretching up, I kissed the end of his nose before stepping into our room.

“I better hurry and learn, then.”

# EPILOGUE

TOBY



## ONE MONTH LATER

**M**y heart had never felt so full, nor been so torn. I needed to find a way to have the best of both worlds.

Over the last month, I'd spent at least one full day a week in Zeph's queendom as his mom insisted on calling it. The new word was catching on quite quickly. The curse being lifted had mellowed out the queen and her subjects were seeing her in a new light.

I loved my time there. It was never quite long enough, especially with how many visits we had to make and spending time with baby Zera. Demon babies grew fast. She could already fly! Zera was the most precious thing and I could never have guessed how much I would grow to love her.

When I wasn't in the queendom, I was working with Tabitha on the new store premises, fulfilling the online orders, and working on a way to make small portals. Trying to find a way so that they weren't too taxing and didn't rely on the moon. At first, it had seemed like an insurmountable task, yet I'd just had my first breakthrough.

"Okay, so it'll be draining at first, but it's like a muscle. The more we practice putting magic into the ring, the easier it will get. We charge the ring and then all we will have to do is say the spell words and a portal will open up for a few seconds. We'll get a couple of uses out of the ring each time before we need to recharge it." I bustled about the store as I explained this to my sister and her husband. Zephyrin was working in the back, organizing everything to my sister's exacting standards.

Tabitha was giving me a dubious look, but August stepped in. "Have you thought about using moonstone instead of quartz? We can recharge the stone much like the quartz, but in salt and herbs in the moonlight."

Flummoxed, I stared at my brother-in-law for a moment. “That would work.” Actually, it was genius! It gave me hope that I could have everything that I wanted. A thrill ran through me. A feeling that a plan was coming together.

“Oh! How about before we mount the rings in silver, we split a bigger stone to make two rings?” Tabitha joined in the planning, taking a stone from Bandit. The ferret liked to help in the store. “Twice the amount of power, then. We can inscribe the metal and the stone with glyphs to make it hold power better and to pair to its other half.” The prospect excited Tabitha. I could see it plainly.

“Yes, to both ideas! Seriously, this solves a lot of problems and makes life easier for me.” I ran a hand through my hair as I made the calculations in my head. Zeph, being my familiar, could use spells like a witch since he could draw my magic, or I could share it with him. The two of us doing the spell together would make it much more effective and cut the drain.

“I’m sure Raiven and Lori would like to help. They both said they’ve missed out on some of the training we got from grandma, so they’d be happy to pitch in with stuff.” Tabitha was looking through her phone and started typing. She was likely making spell notes.

“Won’t they be needed? Andras has his hands full running things with Justice away,” I mused. Our mutual friend was spending as much time as I was in the demon realm. We had an agreement to not be away at the same time if we could help it for fear of retribution from my old coven. The longer we went without hearing anything from them, the more relaxed we became.

“They aren’t coming with you to test it. Just to see it put together.” Tabitha shrugged and set her phone down. “Like you said, they’re needed here. You know they’ll want to at least watch you put it together.” She picked up some fresh herbs, huffed, then put them aside again, and began rifling through a box. “Oh, here! I knew we had a chunk of moonstone.” She grinned at me. We had the same smile, one we got from our mom, since we found out for sure we had

different dads from a DNA test. I was not thinking about who my dad could be. I'd only make myself ill with stress.

“We could make a few rings like this. Break it down further, start the spells, and then divide them in two. I think pairing the spells is safer.” I could see her brain working. “Justice probably wouldn't need a twin for her ring, but I think everyone else should travel in pairs.” Tabitha continued, unaware of where my thoughts had gone. She didn't care that we had different dads. To her, I was her brother. The half bit didn't matter.

“Yeah.” I nodded and ran a hand over the scruff on my chin. I was looking forward to my trip to my other home, and not just so they would shave me properly. Zeph's lands felt more like home to me than Justice's clan or coven. His mom had welcomed me into their family without blinking. I'd saved Zera and future princesses, so that was enough for her to trust Zeph to me.

Honestly, each time we went, it got harder and harder to come back here. If it wasn't for Zephyrin's insistence that I needed a coven and my family, then I would have suggested just staying there. It had everything else I wanted.

I looked for my husband. He'd worked up a sweat in the small back room and had removed his shirt. He made such a feast for the eyes. I ate up the view of him, the tanned, hairless skin, the muscles, and beads of sweat making their way down his torso. Screw working. I wanted to lick him! I could lick him, which was always shocking to me. We belonged to each other. He was my husband, and I was his. I wouldn't want it any other way, even when some had suggested severing our bond so I could summon my animal familiar.

Zephyrin's anger over the suggestion had put an end to any further discussion about it. He loved being both my familiar and my husband. Soon we would make it official in front of all his people back home. I couldn't wait.

August's phone dinged with a message. He picked it up and frowned at it. “Another Oscar sighting. Guess he didn't go back. He's gone in the opposite direction.” He kept his tone

neutral, though I knew how he felt about my former best friend. Charles, his beagle, let out a snuffling sound, likely from August's agitation, and moved closer to his master.

There was a prickle of worry in my gut. I still didn't know how I felt about the Oscar situation. Try as hard as I might, I couldn't get past that he had willingly sabotaged me at one point. Even if later he was brainwashed or bespelled. It didn't matter. He had gone along with Avery at the start. Truthfully, I would never know which version of the spell swapping story was the truth, Avery's or Oscar's. I knew which I wanted to believe, but neither version was good or made me feel happy about continuing a friendship with Oscar. Made me feel good that I'd trashed my old house with Zeph, though.

So, I mourned my friendship with him. He stuck around until we got back from Zephyrin's home. Then one night, after a tense conversation where he asked if I could forgive him again, he just up and left.

While I missed the old Oscar, the boy I grew up with and had a bunch of firsts with, I was fucking relieved not to have to be confronted with his betrayal on a regular basis. We might live in the city now, or on the outskirts of it, but the coven was small. There was no avoiding him. I could live without the awkwardness.

Tabitha and August exchanged a speaking glance, and I rolled my eyes. "Look, it all sucks, but I'm glad Oscar didn't go back to Avery. I hope he finds happiness wherever he ends up."

That was magnanimous of me, right? I'd be rewarded with good karma or a blowjob later for that, for sure.

August crossed the room and clapped me on the shoulder. "Since you're so calm about it now, I can finally say it."

"Don't say it," Tabitha warned.

"I'm gonna," August teased. When he acted like this, the years fell away from him. I saw the man my sister had always seen. Someone kind and caring—

“Told you so,” he actually said it. It had sat between us for weeks and finally, he’d said those words. August ended up bent double with his laughter. He would calm, then look at my shocked face, and start back up again. I could see Tabitha struggling to keep her giggles in.

“I take back everything nice I’ve ever said about you!”



## ONE WEEK LATER - ZEPHYRIN

We'd had our last fitting of our wedding suits just the week before when Toby had his breakthrough over how to make portals much more easily. This new way would allow us to travel back and forth more often too, so that Toby could have all that he wanted.

I knew my husband's heart, and it was here, in my mother's queendom, as he called it. Our people loved Toby. They had grown to love me for bringing him home. So once they had heard the new name, they began adopting it themselves, much to Mom's amusement.

My family adored him. Here, in my world, he was never the outsider. He was part of my brother's pranks, my mother's gossip circle, and one of the few that could settle my sister. When we were away, I knew it was hard on them as much as it was for us.

My heart had been heavy with not only Toby's sadness, but my own each time we went back. So I had resolved to convince Tabitha and August to make their own set of rings and visit us. I would ask Toby to make the queendom our permanent home, and the human realm would be where we spent weekends and holidays. Maybe it was selfish of me to want to be in my realm most of the time, but I really felt that Toby was happier surrounded by demons. Certainly more so than he was with witches, shifters, and vampires.

Justice had given him a clan, a coven, but Toby, having been an outsider all his life, wasn't ever going to be comfortable there. He was grateful and cared for them, but they weren't his people. No, his people were demons.

When I finally put it to him, this morning whilst we were in bed, he was over the moon with joy and I felt stupid for being so worried about it. Of course, he was going to love my

plan. It gave him whatever he wanted, with very little compromise.

“You’re the best! I’m so excited to tell Mom that we will be staying! Should we look at getting a little house, or should we stay in the castle?” I fixed him with a flat look. “Of course we are staying here. Mom needs us while Zera is little.”

I didn’t argue with him that she just wanted us both close and Zera was only an excuse. They’d formed such a strong relationship in such a short time. The castle had everything that we needed, and it wasn’t unusual for the family to linger there. We didn’t need to move out to be independent. I would ask for a marital suite, so that we could have a small kitchen. I knew Toby liked cooking. It would make it feel more like a home for him if we had that extra space.

Today, we had more pressing things to attend to than our living arrangements. The clan, Justice’s strange coven, Tabitha, August, and Star, were all visiting for our wedding.

Demons liked to have a feast before and after the ceremony. Toby and I would mix with visiting dignitaries and many of the people of the queendom. Llyrin and his spouses had returned for the event.

Together, Toby and I would showcase our magic. We would demonstrate to our people that we were compatible, a force to be reckoned with. Then we would say our vows with our families watching.

The last part would be a display by our friends and families. They would express their joy for us with their magic. It would be the first time that many in our court had seen a shifter in the flesh, let alone see one change their form. Chloe had promised to scare my brother Nerio for all his teasing.

“Are you sure we can do this?” Toby asked as he finished dressing in preparation for the first part of our wedding day. His suit was a pale blue that made his eyes stand out. It was like they were glowing. I wore a similar outfit with pieces of indigo to match my hair. As was traditional, my wings were out, with special flaps in the suit to make way for them. We had decorated my wings with silver chains. Toby wore silver

chains on his hands. They connected to rings he wore and a bracelet.

“Do what, love?”

“Live here, make it work there.” He worried at his lip.

Reaching up, I pulled it free and bopped his nose as I’d seen him do as a sign of affection. “We can do anything when we are together. Look at all we’ve done already!”

Toby laughed. His eyes lit up with a happiness I hoped would never fade. “Escaped a shitty coven, found a new one —“

“Got control of our magic. Saved a demon princess. Fell in love.”

“Well, when you say it like that, then I guess you’re right.”

“All will be well as long as we are side by side.”

THE END



# POSSESSIVE LOVE

My Demon Husband is supposed to be a standalone, but I'm not sure that I'm ready to let go of some of these characters just yet. One or two might pop up elsewhere.

If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review. It helps books be seen.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jax Stuart is a Scottish-born author, mum of two and owner of a menagerie (two cats, a tortoise and 3 fish tanks of fish!).

She started writing her first book at age eleven, but gave writing up for years. A big birthday prompted her to finally go after that publishing dream.

When she isn't writing, Jax is an avid reader and likes to spend time with friends and family.

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