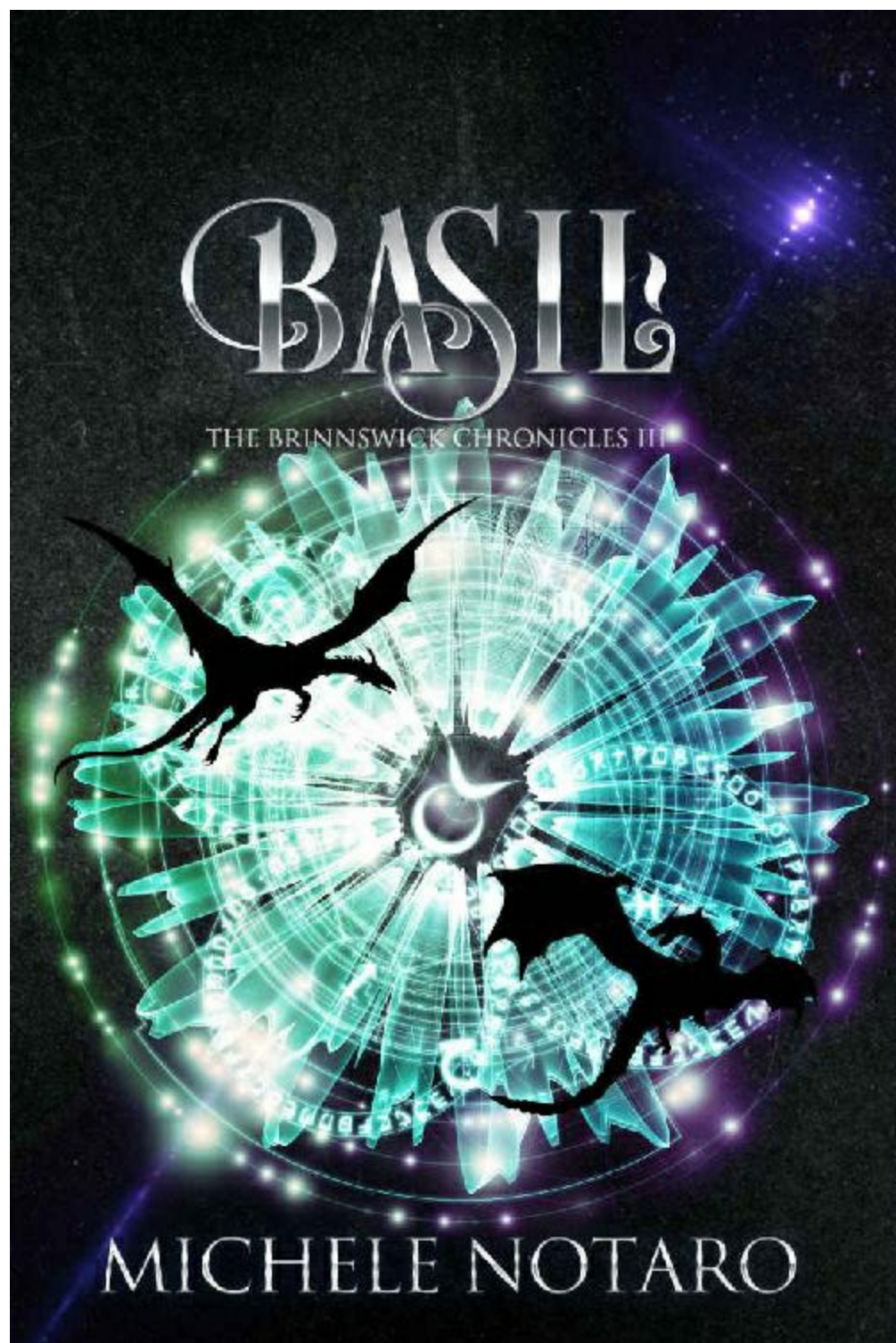


Basil The Brinnswick Chronicle

Michele Notaro



BASIL

THE BRINNSWICK CHRONICLES III

MICHELE NOTARO

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This is a gay romance that contains adult language, adult situations, and sexually explicit material between two men. It is

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C H A P T E R O N E

B A S I L

My perp was about three hundred feet away, and I needed to get closer to assess the situation

before I took him down. This guy was wanted for murder, rape, assault, burglary, and a list of

other crimes. He was dangerous and needed to be taken in. Well, I wanted him to just be taken out, but

my brother-in-law made me promise to bring him in *alive* unless the guy was threatening my life. If

Alec wasn't in charge of the Brinnswick Central Agency, I probably wouldn't listen, but he could get

me in some serious trouble if he wanted to—not that he'd ever go through with it, but still.

Keeping my footsteps as silent as possible, I crept up a hill. Once I got up there, I should have a

clear view of the perp. As I crested the top, movement to my right made me freeze. Scanning my

surroundings, my eyes widened as a man stepped out in a ghillie suit. The

suit made him blend so

well with the bushes, I hadn't even known he was there.

When the guy lifted his crossbow at me, I narrowed my eyes.

"Who are you?" he asked, his voice low and rumbly with an accent I couldn't place, but he was

quiet enough that my perp shouldn't be able to hear. When I didn't respond, he lifted his crossbow

higher and said, "I don't like to repeat myself, and I never miss my target."

Tilting my head to the side, I let a little of my magic reach out to see if I could figure out what kind

of creature this guy was. I wasn't worried about him shooting me. Even if he did, my magical shield

would stop the arrow from hitting me, not that I was about to tell him that. As soon as my magic

brushed across the guy's aura, I gasped. He felt warm and tingly and... safe. The man gasped, too, but

after only a few seconds, he ground out, "Your charms won't work on me, witch."

Swallowing thickly and trying to shake off the strange feeling, I pulled my magic back. Maybe it

was only reacting because he had some kind of rune or something for protection against magic.

"Who. Are. You? I won't ask again."

"Basil Ellwood. Who are you?"

The guy's crossbow lowered just a tad, but he narrowed his eyes. "Ellwood, eh? Am I really

supposed to believe that?"

My eyebrows rose. "Believe whatever you want. It doesn't change the truth. If you want, I can

pull out my license, asshole."

"Don't move your fuckin' hands."

I sighed. "Who are you?"

"The name's Grim."

What a dickhead. "You seriously think I'm going to believe that's your name?"

His gaze darkened. "It's Hiro Grimsby, not that ya have any right to know, *Basil*. I'm a hunter, and

you're in my way. Turn around and go back to whatever Hell you came from so I can take out my

mark."

A hunter? Hunters were *always* huge assholes, but they usually worked in groups of two or three

—sometimes more if needed—not alone. "Where's your partner?"

"Don't got one. Now go back the way you came and let me take out my mark."

He could be playing me, there could be another hunter around us, but I didn't think so. "If you

mean that ugly old gnome over there, you're mistaken. He's my perp."

The guy lifted his weapon again and took a step closer to me. “I’ve been followin’ this guy for

twenty-four hours, and I finally have him alone. I’m not lettin’ some stuck-up little witch ruin this for

me.”

“Yeah, well, I’m on official BCA business, so why don’t you go back to your little hunter club

meetings and let the big guys take care of him.”

He took another step, his crossbow almost touching the edge of my shield.

“You’re not taking ‘im.

He’s mine.”

I shot him a smug smile and wiggled my fingers as I let my magic seep out from me. I didn’t need

to move my hands, but it was kinda fun to play with the bastard. My affinity was shadow, so my magic

had a black quality to it which only made me seem like I dabbled in dark magic to anyone that didn’t

understand how witches worked. My shadow magic was the magic I was born with, but about six

years ago—at the end of the Berserker War—two of my brothers and I took on the Mantle of the

Three, which made us the most powerful witches in any realm, and also gave my magic a stormy feel.

That probably added a more ominous feel to my magic. Which was perfect for spooking asshole

hunters.

The guy narrowed his eyes at me and lifted his crossbow higher. I only grinned in response before

I wrapped my magic around his body, knocked the crossbow so it was facing up, and pulled my magic

tight around him like rope. He was right that my magic couldn't harm him—it couldn't touch his skin

or anything like that, not that I would do that—but it was easy enough to control the air around him.

When I dragged his ass backward by manipulating the wind and pressed his back against a tree, I

said, “He’s mine now.”

The anger storming in his eyes was so fierce, I was surprised they didn't start glowing and

shooting lasers out at me. “Fuckin’ witches always thinkin’ they can walk all over everyone.”

I lifted a shoulder. “Don’t get in my way, and I’ll leave you alone.”

He narrowed his eyes again, clenching his jaw harder. “Your little power display tipped the mark,

asshole. He already made a run for it.”

Jerking my head to the side and finding the perp gone, I cursed. “Motherfucker!”

“Now let me the fuck down so I can do my job.”

“Nah, I think I’ll leave you there to rot.”

Basil, my brother Jorah chastised through our link. He and Thayer were the other two thirds of *the*

Three, so the three of us had a bond unlike any other, and because of it, we were able to communicate

telepathically. It also meant that unless I was doing everything in my power to block them, I had zero

privacy whatsoever.

What?

Let the hunter go. I think you bruised his ego enough for one day. Jorah was always the voice

of reason between us. Which was a scary thought since he was just as much trouble as me. Thayer had

calmed down a little since meeting his *viramore*—his soulmate—a few years ago, but he still had a

wild side. Truth be told, all three of us did. Probably how we ended up with this magic in the first

place.

Fine. Focusing on the hunter, I sighed. “Shoot me in the back, and you’ll regret it.”

“I don’t go around harming people for no reason, unlike you fuckin’ witches seem to.”

My eyebrows rose. Maybe where he came from was different, but here in Brinnswick, witches

were known more for saving people more than harming them, so I had no clue what the hell he was

talking about. With a sigh and a wave of my hand, I released him from my magical hold.

Immediately, he aimed his crossbow at me but started backing away in the direction we'd last

seen the gnome. "If you follow me, I *will* shoot you. And don't think my arrows can't get through your

shield, Basil Ellwood. You're not the only one that knows what he's doin'."

I lifted my hands in mock surrender, then saluted him with my middle finger and turned my back

on him. I was going to find my mark, but I was going to use my magic to do it, and I didn't need that

asshole watching me do a tracking spell.

After a minute, I turned around to see if he was still aiming his crossbow at me, but he was

nowhere in sight. I sighed. That guy was a piece of work, but I couldn't help but wonder what in the

hell he was doing around here. I thought I knew most of the hunters in this area, not that I was friends

with them or anything, but we were at least amicable. Maybe this guy was new, or maybe he was

simply good at his job and hadn't yet been caught by me. Whatever. Hopefully I'd never see him

again.

Even as that thought ran through my head, a strange tightness in my chest momentarily took my

breath away. It was gone almost as quickly as it had come, so I easily brushed it off and continued

doing my job.

MY BONDED DRAGON TRANSFORMED INTO HIS SMALLER FORM, A BEARDED DRAGON—ALL BONDED HAD

multiple forms. Instead of hanging out with me, he rushed into the nearby trees to hunt for his dinner.

All witches had a Bonded One, a magical animal that we formed a magical Bond with. A Bonded

could share magic with you and you with him, and one of the coolest things was that we could pull

ourselves to our Bonded's location, no matter how far away they were, same with them to us. I was

lucky enough to have Bonded with a dragon when I was pretty young, and Blaze was sweet yet fierce.

Stretching my arms over my head, I walked up the driveway to the big house on my coven's land.

When I was six, my parents and all the other adults in our coven were killed in a horrific attack. My

older brother Ailin had only been sixteen at the time, but his full power had come in that night when

he'd protected all the kids from certain death. There had been fifteen of us, not counting Ailin, and

when the magical government had finally showed up—too late to actually help us—instead of letting

them take us, Ailin had claimed the title of coven leader and taken

responsibility for all fifteen of us.

At only sixteen, he started raising us as his own.

In every sense of the word, Ailin was my father, but since he was technically my brother, I didn't

let him know my true feelings on the subject. It was my right as the little brother to be a shit, a right I

took advantage of.

All of us still lived on coven land, though all of the original fifteen of us were in houses of our

own around the property—it was a huge property so there was plenty of space. Many of my siblings

—also not by blood but in every way that mattered—had found their viramores, so they lived on the

land as well. Basically, my family was fucking huge.

The big house was where I grew up, where Ailin had moved all us kids after that fateful night. It

was also where everyone gathered for meals several times a week. It was always open for any of us

to come and go, and there was always food being cooked and served. My younger brother Tio was a

chef, so he cooked for everyone a lot, and my older sister Opal did as well.

Ailin lived in the big house with his viramore Sebastian, and because my brother was actually

insane, he and Seb adopted three kids a couple of years ago. As if he didn't already have enough of

us. So the five of them lived there, and everyone else came and went as they pleased.

All our homes were also made out of living trees. As in, Ailin used his earth magic to ask the

trees to move and reform into functioning homes, and inside the homes, there were plenty of pieces of

furniture also made from living trees. Growing up, I hadn't realized what a big deal that was since it

was normal to me, but after seeing the homes others lived in, I knew it was actually pretty awesome.

I'd been told by some of our coven members that didn't grow up here that our houses looked like they

belonged in a fairytale. I'd have to agree.

My family was huge and crazy and everyone was always in everyone else's business. It was

annoying as fuck, but I couldn't imagine living any other way, and I honestly wouldn't want to. Not

that I'd ever tell Ailin that.

"Hey, kiddo," Ailin called over from the yard where he was watching his two-and-a-half-year-

old Remi play in a little baby pool. "Tio's almost done with dinner, are you staying?"

I shrugged as I made my way over to him, then plopped into a lawn chair and said, "Sure. I'm

starving."

“What did you do today?” he asked as he smiled at his son and gave Remi a little splash.

“Tracked a gnome wanted for murder and a whole list of other terrible shit.”

“Did you get him?”

“Yeah. Just dropped him at BCA Headquarters.”

“That’s good to hear.” He splashed the baby again, then eyed me. “What’s wrong?”

I shook my head. “Nothing. I ran into a hunter.”

“Okay...?”

“He was by himself, and apparently, hates witches.”

Ailin smirked at me. “You sure he didn’t just hate you on sight? With that scowl and that crazy

hair, you look like a mean fucker.” He had no filter, even in the presence of a two-year-old.

I snorted. “Gee, thanks.”

He pushed my arm, then leaned down to tickle Remi’s belly for a minute. The little boy giggled

like crazy, making me smile at him, before he moved away from his dad to catch his breath. Ailin was

smiling so wide and bright it almost hurt to look at it.

As I put my hands on my head and stretched my legs out in front of me, he said, “I heard they

found a dead witch over in Owentine, but they haven’t released a name yet.”

“Yeah, I heard about that. They’re being really hush hush about the whole thing.”

He nodded. “I called Petunia to find out who it was.” Petunia Crane was a friend of his and also

happened to be the leader of the whole damn country. Well, there were others on the board with her,

but she was the top dog.

“Did she tell you who?”

“Of course. It was Chilton Morelli. I didn’t know him too well, but as far I know he wasn’t a bad

guy. The crazy thing is that they think he was assassinated. Probably about forty-eight hours ago.”

“Are you serious?”

Ailin nodded. “Yeah, found a fucking arrow through his skull.”

My eyes widened. “Arrow?”

Ailin narrowed his eyes at me. “What? Do you know something?”

I shook my head, but I couldn’t stop picturing that crossbow aimed at my head. How many people

even used those things anymore? Most people went for a gun if they didn’t have magic to back them

up. “I… maybe. That hunter had a crossbow.”

Ailin tilted his head. “Petunia said there was evidence that Chilton Morelli had a shield up and

whoever killed him broke it.”

“Holy shit.” That hunter had said, *“If you follow me, I will shoot you. And don’t think my arrows*

can’t get through your shield, Basil Ellwood. You’re not the only one that knows what he’s doin’.”

Holy fucking shit.

I stood up, and Ailin grabbed my forearm to stop me from running off.

“What’s going on, Bas?”

“I think that hunter might’ve killed Chilton Morelli. I need to go down to HQ and do some

research, maybe get more details on that case.”

“You need to eat something first, Bas.”

I stared at my older brother who looked so much like me. We could almost be twins if not for the

eyes. He had bright green eyes that matched his earth magic, whereas I had black eyes to match my

shadow magic. I also had some black eyeliner under my eyes and shorter hair than him—hair that was

apparently sticking up from traipsing through the woods all day—although we both had one side of

our hair braided back with some beads and things braided through it. We were even about the same

height and build, also known as short and lean, but I worked out so I had more muscle mass than him.

But I recognized the concern etched on his face, and since I didn’t like when he was worried

about me, I relented. “Fine, but I have to go back to the office after I eat.”

He nodded. “Let’s get you fed, then. Come on, Remi, we gotta get your big brother some food.”

I smiled at that. Ailin and I didn’t really acknowledge the brother-but-he’s-also-my-father thing

very often, but I had to admit that I liked when he referred to Remi as my little brother and not my

nephew. Ailin put me in the same category as all the other “kids” except Opal and Aspen. They were

closer in age to Ailin than me, so it made sense that he called them his sisters —since they were

already teenagers when our parents died.

“Can I carry him?” I asked.

“If you don’t mind getting wet.” Ailin passed me a towel, so I scooped my little brother up into

my arms and playfully dried him off, making goofy sounds and kissing his round cheeks every chance

I got. He was an adorable little kid, and I was happy Ailin and Seb brought him into our lives.

Ailin patted my shoulder and pushed me in the direction of the house as I continued making Remi

giggle. When we walked inside, I heard Seb’s voice in the living room, so I automatically went in

there.

Seb and Ailin’s adopted daughters were in there with him, and Seb looked

exhausted. He was

helping them with their homework, but when we walked over and Seb saw Ailin, his eyes lit up. I'd

never admit it, but I might be a little jealous of the love they'd found together. They deserved it, and I

was happy for them, but sometimes I wished I had someone to look at me the way Seb looked at Ailin

or vice versa because he was just as heart-eyed as Seb, maybe even worse.

Seb walked over, smacked a kiss to Ailin's lips, and smiled at me. "Hey, Bas. Staying for

dinner?"

I glanced around and saw a couple of my other siblings laughing around the dining room table,

and I could hear Tio and Opal in the kitchen. I wanted to find out more about that hunter and that witch

that was killed, but everyone was so happy in the house, it made me want to stay.

"Bas!" my little brother Delaro called from the table. "Come help me beat Gray and Nik at cards.

I swear they're cheating." His two viramores started laughing.

I smiled over at Seb and said, "Yeah, I think I am."

"Good. Want me to take that little booger out of your arms?" Seb held his hands out to Remi, who

started laughing at the booger comment.

I grinned and passed the kid over. Remi wrapped his arms around Seb's neck and yelled, "Papa,

Daddy kept splashing me!"

Seb chuckled and wrapped the two-year-old tighter in his towel. "Of course he did, little man.

Did you splash him back?"

Ailin chuckled and wrapped an arm around Seb's back, leaning in to kiss the baby's cheek, then

Seb's temple. I decided to leave them to it, but ruffled the hair of my thirteen-year-old little sister on

the way to the table. She yelled at me and smacked my arm, then threw her pen at me, making me

laugh.

When I settled in the seat beside Delaro, he immediately pulled me into the card game they were

playing, and I decided to let my family wrap me up in their craziness for a little while. It was a good

kind of crazy to be wrapped in.

C H A P T E R T W O

B A S I L

"It's not in our jurisdiction, Bas. The BCA out in Owentine has it covered," Alec said. He was the

Chief of the Brinnswick Central Agency, which meant he was in charge of everything agent-wise

regardless of jurisdiction. He was also the viramore of Aspen—my sister—
and therefore my brother-

in-law and a part of my family and coven. And he was being a total asshole. I
swore he was

becoming grumpier and grumpier as he aged.

“Why are you being such an asshole about this?” I yelled at him.

He sighed and rubbed his forehead. “I can’t just give you any case you want,
Basil. That isn’t how

this works.”

I held in the growl that wanted to work its way out. “Why?”

“Because you work in Arronston. Period.”

I let the growl out that time and started pacing his office for a few minutes. I
understood what he

was saying, but I wanted that fucking case.

Alec sighed. “Look, I’m sorry. I don’t want to have another station war over
this when there’s no

reason for you to be brought in.”

“A witch was assassinated, Alec. And I think I know who did it.”

“Owning a crossbow isn’t evidence of a crime. I passed your information
along to the Owentine

station. If they need help, I’ll send you, but until then, you’re needed here. I
need you to bring in a

vampire that’s been on a rampage down on Truin Street. Can you handle
that?”

Blowing out a frustrated breath, I asked, “If Owentine doesn’t get this case solved by next week,

will you put me on it?”

Alec stared at me for several beats before nodding. “Fine. But only if you catch this vampire

first.”

I shot him a cocky grin. “When have I ever let you down?”

“Jesus, you look like your brother when you do that, and usually when he makes that face, things

get blown up.”

I laughed. “I’ll try not to blow anything up.”

He shook his head. “I don’t believe you. You’re worse than Ailin is.”

With a snort, I took the case file he was handing over and headed out the door to go catch me a

vamp.

SITTING IN THE CORNER, I NURSED MY BEER AS I WATCHED THE PATRONS DRINKING THEIR FILL AND

having a merry old time. The vampire in question was currently shooting pool with three other vamps

while drinking glasses of blood. The bar we were in was on the seedier side of town and served

magical creatures and humans alike, so they had all kinds of weird and disgusting things on their

menu.

This vamp was a real ass. I'd watched him try to compel three different humans in the past two

hours, although whether it was for the purpose of draining them dry or for just a sip they wouldn't

otherwise have permission to drink, I didn't know for sure. The only reason he hadn't gotten away

with it was because one of his friends kept stopping him. His friends kept exchanging looks, too, so it

was clear that they knew he was becoming a problem. Most dens wouldn't take kindly to one of their

vamps taking advantage of humans—it was illegal to kill, and even illegal to drink from someone

without their *uncompelled* permission. It wasn't surprising that his friends were trying to stop him. If

word got out that a vamp in their den was breaking the law, the den leader could be prosecuted, and

the den would be under investigation. I didn't think they realized that the guy had already broken

several of their laws and that the BCA was going to be in their business as soon as I brought this guy

in anyway.

As I scanned the bar, my eyes were drawn to a figure in the corner opposite me, and as soon as I

realized who it was, I muttered, "You've gotta be kidding me."

Hiro Grimsby—also known as Grim The Asshole Hunter, also known as my suspect for the witch

murder—pulled his hood off his head and stared right back at me. I could see the anger in his gaze. It

was as if his entire body was humming with it.

He took a last swig of his beer, slammed the bottle on his table, and got up, marching right over to

me. Without the ghillie suit hiding his body, I realized that he was, in fact, *a lot* bigger than me. Not

only did he have a good five or six inches on me, but he was also covered in muscles. Lots of

muscles. He was the sexiest damn thing I'd ever seen. He wasn't bulky by any means, but it was

obvious that the man took care of himself. His body was full of muscle you get from hard work, not

from a gym, and even under his shirt, I could see them rippling with every move he made. Every angry

move he made toward me. Shit.

I swallowed my tongue as he stopped in front of me, gorgeous and pissed.

“What the fuck are you doin' here?” he hissed.

And the image was ruined as soon as he opened his mouth. He might be the hottest thing I'd seen

in this realm, but he was a total dick, and probably a murderer to boot.

“Minding my own business.

Now please, get away from me.”

He narrowed his eyes and grabbed a chair, spinning it, and sitting on it backward. He leaned

forward, draping his arms over the back of the chair as if he didn't have a care in the world. I noticed

he had his gloves on so there was no skin showing except from the neck up. "You can't have this one,

Basil Ellwood."

I stifled a sigh. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't play games with me, witch. I know you're here for the vamp. I'll tell ya again, this one's

mine."

"And I'll remind you that I work for the BCA, and I'm here on official business. I don't give a shit

what you're here for, I'm going to do my job. Just stay out of it."

He narrowed his eyes. "You're gonna get hurt if you get in my way."

"I'm sure that's a great concern of yours, witch killer." As soon as the words were out of my

mouth, I wished I could take them back. Nothing like letting the enemy know you were onto him. Fuck.

This guy had me out of sorts and blurting shit I shouldn't be sharing.

His eyes narrowed as his head tilted to the side, his brown hair falling over his forehead. "You

think I killed that witch up in Owentine." It wasn't a question.

"Did you?"

"If I did, you think I'd confess to you?"

“No.”

He stared at me for a few more seconds before saying, “I didn’t kill him.”

I scrutinized his face for a minute. He was either a very good liar or he was telling the truth.

Something was telling me he wasn’t lying, but I wasn’t ruling it out.

The guy sighed and leaned back in his chair, tapping the end of it a few times. “If you lose me this

bounty, you and I are gonna have a big problem, Ellwood.” He stood and leaned forward so his face

was close to mine. “May the best man win.” He patted my cheek, straightened, and strolled away

before I could get a word in.

What a fucking asshole.

“I TOLD YOU I’D ONLY PUT YOU ON THE CASE IF YOU CAPTURED THAT VAMP,” ALEC SAID THE NEXT DAY.

We were back in his office with the door shut so he could yell at me. And I could yell back.

“It’s not my fault a hunter got to him first!”

Alec stared at me with that stoic expression I’d come to hate. “The same hunter you think

murdered Chilton Morelli?”

“No, well, yes, but I’m not sure he did it.”

Alec sighed and lifted his eyes to the ceiling like he was asking for patience. He did that a lot

around me. After a few minutes, he seemed to compose himself and said,
“You feel like taking a trip

into Brinnswick Forest?”

“Sure, if you won’t let me on the witch murder case.”

He sighed but otherwise ignored me. “You remember that bear shifter that
was wanted for arson

about six months back?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“She was spotted in Windfell Village, right inside the forest. Can you check
that lead and bring

her in if you find her?”

“I can do that.”

He nodded. “Get the file from Thompal.”

Since I recognized the dismissal, I left his office, picked up the file, and
headed for my truck to

look at it. After reviewing the case and memorizing the shifter’s face, I
plugged in my destination in

the GPS and was off.

It didn’t take long to reach the little town. And it *was* little. One main street
with only a couple of

stores and several homes off of it, and of course there was a bar. I parked my
truck in front of the bar

since that was usually the best place to go for information. It wasn’t late, but
there were still a few

people inside that eyed me warily when I walked in. A stranger in all black with black hair, black

eyes, and some eye makeup. I was quite the sight, I was sure.

The bartender handed me my soda—I didn't want to drink in case I came across this shifter and

had to fight. It was always harder to capture than to kill because I had to be more careful of my

power. That sounded terrible, but it was the truth, at least physically. Emotionally, killing wasn't

something I ever wanted to have to do again, but I didn't exactly live a safe and peaceful life, so I'd

have to deal with it when it inevitably happened again.

Since these people were the ones who had called us to come in, I got straight to the point with the

bartender. "Someone called BCA about the wanted bear shifter. Do you know who that was or where

they saw the shifter?"

She eyed me. "You're not with that other one with the hood?"

"Other one?"

She gestured toward the door. "That other agent that came looking for the bear. He left maybe

twenty minutes ago."

Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath before refocusing on her. I pulled out my BCA badge,

saying, “I’m the only BCA agent on the case. Whoever that was, wasn’t with us.”

She inspected the badge with a nod, then shrugged at me. “Alright.”

“Do you know where he went? What information did you give him about the bear?”

“There’s an old shack down Manor Way at the edge of town. Tara saw the bear hiding out there

last night. Everyone’s been warned to stay away, so I don’t know if she’s still out there or not, but I

imagine that’s where this other fella went.”

“Thank you.” I threw some cash on the bar to pay for my drink and a hefty tip, and with a nod, I

headed back out.

It took me nearly fifteen minutes to find the road she was talking about, but when I did, I parked

my truck at the bottom and headed down it on foot. The last thing I needed was to scare the bear

shifter off with the sound of my truck on the gravel.

Using my shadow magic, I hid myself from sight easily, then pulled on my magic a little more to

cover up any sounds I might be making, like breathing and footsteps. Shifters had enhanced hearing,

so I didn’t want to give her a chance to hide or get away.

As I came up to the shack, I heard a lot of cursing, and when I heard another voice answering the

curses, I said, “For fuck’s sake,” and dropped my magic.

Pushing the door open with a shield already in front of me, I took in the scene.

The bear shifter I was here for was on the ground, lying on her side with ropes around her torso,

and sitting on top of her was none other than Hiro Grimsby. Even with his hood covering his head, I

could tell it was him.

He had his gun aimed at me the second I came inside, but when he realized who it was, he

lowered it a tad and said, “You’ve gotta be fuckin’ kidding me.”

Then the bastard punched the shifter right in the face, knocking her out in one hit. It happened so

fast, I didn’t have time to react for a second. But then my anger ramped up. “What the hell, Grim? You

already had her tied up! She was subdued.”

He laughed as he pulled his hood down, apparently no longer caring to hide his face from me. “If

you think that sly bear was subdued, be glad I was here to take her down first. She would’ve killed

me the second she got the chance.”

“So you just knocked her out?”

“Yes.”

I sighed and waved my arms around for a moment. It would be one thing if

she was attacking, but

she'd been tied up and wasn't going anywhere. He'd punched her because he wanted to hit something,

I was sure of it.

His jaw clenched. "You can't have this one."

I sighed. "I have to take her in for questioning."

"And I have to take her in for my bounty."

Of course the asshole would only care about his money. Didn't care what he had to do to get it, he

just wanted his reward. And hey, if he got to knock around a few people, all the better. "I'm taking her

to HQ for questioning."

"Like hell you are. I caught her, I keep her."

"You knocked her out. You're lucky I'm not arresting you."

He narrowed his eyes at me. "She had a knife."

"She was tied up."

He kicked the woman on the ground, making me yell out as she rolled over, but I caught sight of a

knife in her hands, cutting through her ropes. Well. "Why didn't you take the knife away?"

"I don't fancy being stabbed. Safer to knock her out first." He bent down to retrieve the knife, then

patted her down, removing four more knives and seven lighters. If I didn't

think she was my arsonist

before, I sure as hell did now. Grim bent down and threw the shifter over his shoulder and stood as if

the huge fucking *bear* shifter was a big bag of feathers.

“I told you I need to take her in,” I said, moving toward him.

“And I told you, you catch ‘em, you keep ‘em. Fair’s fair, Ellwood.” He moved past me and

patted me on the shoulder like a douche. “See ya around, witch.”

Before he could get out the door, I pulled on my magic and set an invisible barrier right in front of

him, then took some sick joy in watching him walk into it, then bounce off.

He whipped around to face me with that stormy glare. “What the hell do ya think you’re doin’?”

“I’m taking her in.”

“You’re fuckin’ not.”

“You can either give her to me, or I can bring you both in.” I crossed my arms over my chest,

trying not to lose my patience.

He stared at me for a second, then snorted, removed a dagger from his thigh—for a moment, I

thought he was going to try throwing it at me—and turned his back on me. He sliced the dagger

through the air, and to my utter surprise, it knocked my shield down.

I'd never seen an item able to knock my shield down so easily. My brothers and I had developed

new and improved spells after some anti-shield weapons were used against us one too many times.

My shield should've been impenetrable, even if it wasn't the strongest I'd ever made, yet he'd cut

through it like paper.

I was so shocked, I stood still for several beats before I realized the bastard was getting away.

Running after him, I threw another shield in front of him, and he growled but sliced that one away,

too.

"Where the hell did you get that dagger?" I asked as I followed him. If he kept breaking through

my shields, I'd just get him to carry the shifter down the street and take her from him when we got

closer to my truck. I knew I could still win this round.

"Family heirloom."

I wasn't sure I believed that, but I let it go and continued on our trek. Just for fun, I threw up a

couple more shields and watched the dagger cut straight through them. I was going to have to get

Jorah to help me do some research on that thing.

When we got to the bottom of the road, I said, "Hand her over."

“No.”

“Last chance. We can do this the easy way or the hard way, up to you.”

He snorted but didn't respond.

“Hard way it is then.” Instead of putting up another shield, I called on my magic, asking it to lift

the bear shifter away from Grim. My black magic that smelled like an oncoming rainstorm poured out

of me, and the hunter backed away with wide eyes.

He said, “Don't you dare hex me, Ellwood, or I'll make your life a livin' hell.”

My brow furrowed. “I'm not gonna hex you, asshole.” Then I scooted the bear shifter right out of

his arms and floated her to my truck bed and used more wind magic to push him away against a tree.

His dagger slashed through my magic, but I'd been prepared for that and had a constant stream

coming. For every slice, more came flowing toward him, and I had enough power to keep at it for

hours.

“You can't fuckin' do that!” he yelled. “I caught her, I keep her!”

I rolled my eyes. “And BCA trumps hunters. End of story. Hope I never see your ass again.” I

ignored the weird twinge in my chest that the statement caused.

He narrowed his eyes at me. “You're gonna be sorry you did that, Ellwood.”

I waved him away and hopped in my truck. “Have a nice life, hunter.” After slamming the door, I

drove away. I didn’t release my magic from him until I was five minutes down the road.

I made it back to BCA in record time.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

B A S I L

Stifling a yawn, I turned into a little village. It had been one hell of a long week, and even though

I’d brought in a bunch of perps, Alec still wouldn’t put me on the witch murder case even though

another fucking witch was killed a few days ago. So here I was, chasing down another random perp.

A loud roar made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, so I slammed on the brakes and

hopped out of the car, making my way toward the noise. Screams were heard from the townsfolk, and

I cursed under my breath. I’d been looking for this giant for two days since he killed a family of

incubi that lived in Brinnswick Forest.

A giant on a rampage was a serious matter. Giants usually lived peacefully out in the forest,

minding their own business. It was rare for one to harm another creature, but when they did, it was

always messy. If this giant started rampaging, it was only because he was

reacting to something.

Someone must've hurt him or one of his family, or stole from him. They were very territorial and

protective when it came to their belongings.

Guys, there's a fucking giant. I need you here, I called out to my brothers.

Jorah said, *We're on our way.*

Be careful. Don't do anything stupid, Bas, Thayer said. *Just keep it away from people, and we'll*

figure out how to carry it home when we get there.

As I rounded the corner where another loud roar sounded, I slid to a stop. Right there in the

middle of the open field stood a man. A really motherfucking stupid man. What kind of magicless

person took on a fucking *giant*? Fucking idiots, that's who.

I watched in stunned silence for a few seconds as Grim shot the giant in the leg with his

crossbow, then rolled behind a boulder. What the hell did he think his little tiny arrows were going to

do?

"For fuck's sake," I muttered as I ran out toward the pair, then dove behind another rock so I

could see the idiot hunter. When Grim shot the giant in the leg a second time, I yelled, "Hurting him is

only going to anger him, you fucking idiot!"

Grim spared me a glance, and his face hardened as he yelled back, “And how exactly do you plan

on taking down a fuckin’ giant?”

“I’m going to bind him.”

“You can’t. His hide won’t allow it.”

I knew that, I knew that a giant’s hide would repel any magic I threw at it, but Ailin had taught me

a few things, including how to work around shit like that. Ignoring the hunter, I closed my eyes to

concentrate. The giant was big enough—as in I was probably only as tall as his pinky finger—that it

would take a lot of power for my plan to work. Luckily, I was a powerful witch.

I drew on that power, manipulating the air around us, but a scream had me opening my eyes.

Horried, I watched Grim’s body fly through the air and land hard enough on the ground that he

bounced a few times, his head swinging in a way that made me think he might’ve broken his neck.

“Holy fuck.”

The giant had a rock in his hand—the one Grim had been hiding behind—and it took a step

toward Grim, lifting his hand as he went. Grim was alive and unable to move, but I could see the

absolute terror in his gaze.

My spell would take too long to help him. I had to draw too much power to hold the giant still, so

instead, I released that spell and used my shadow magic to throw a shield up around Grim. The

giant's arm came down on my shield, but the rock bounced off it. The giant stood, confused for a

moment before he started pounding on the shield. I could feel each pound of its strong fists since my

magic was an extension of myself. Wincing with each hit, I ignored it as much as possible, keeping my

magic steady against the attack.

While the giant was busy trying to kill Grim, I concentrated on my power again, pulling it to me,

then pushing it out and willing it to do what I wanted. The Power of Three that I held inside me was a

wild thing that didn't like taking directions. It wanted to shoot lightning bolts and make storms in the

sky and quakes in the earth, so sometimes asking it to do something different was a tad difficult. But

not impossible.

The magic pushed the air around the giant into a swirling wind and lifted the heavy beast off the

ground. It started flailing and wailing and screaming, confused and scared, so I also asked my magic

to soothe the beast. Taking a breath, I sent out calming waves, and the giant stopped freaking out,

although it was still scared.

As I came out from behind the rock, I yelled to the giant, “It’s alright. I’m not going to hurt you. I

want to take you home.”

It watched me with big, huge tears in his eyes before he started blubbering like a baby. That was

basically what a giant was, a big baby that threw tantrums when its favorite toy was taken away. The

sight made me feel sorry for it even though it had killed people in its rampage.

That wasn’t really his fault, though. He was a wild animal, so to speak.

Continuing to keep him in the air and send calming vibes his way, I slowly made my way to the

idiot hunter. When I got close enough, I dropped my shield—the giant couldn’t reach him anyway—

then I winced. Grim was lying on the ground with blood coming out of his head, his body covered in

scrapes and bruises.

“What did you do to yourself?” I asked as I kneeled beside him.

As I reached for the guy’s shoulder, he managed to move away a little and ground out, “Don’t hex

me.”

I jerked back at that, then rolled my eyes and grabbed his shoulder. “I’m not going to hex you, you

fucking idiot.”

Then I ignored his protests and pushed. Without letting go of the giant, I pushed some of my magic

into Grim. His body resisted at first, but after a moment, Grim’s charm or whatever allowed my

magic through. It was slow going because the last thing I needed was to lose control of the giant spell,

but I continued pushing healing energy into the hunter. Healing wasn’t my forte, but it would do in a

bind. At first, he tried to get away, but once he realized what I was doing, he held still and just stared

at me with wide eyes.

When I finished healing him, I released his shoulder and sat down on my ass, exhausted from all

the magic use. I rested my arms on my knees and stared up at the giant floating in the air.

Grim sat beside me a few feet away, in a similar seated position, feet on the ground, knees bent,

elbows resting on them, gloved hands hanging loose. He even stared up at the giant. After a few

seconds, he said, “I didn’t know the mark was a giant.”

“Would you still have come if you did?”

“Nah. Probably why they didn’t tell me.”

I nodded. At least he wasn’t as much of an idiot as I thought. “Still should’ve stayed out of it

though.”

He shrugged and a few more seconds passed by. “Why didn’t you kill it?”

“I don’t kill innocent beings.”

He barked out a laugh. “That thing is far from innocent. It’s killed eight people in the last two

days.”

“It’s a wild animal that was either hurt or messed with. It can’t help it. Giants don’t go out trying

to murder people, they react when people harm them or their families. It’s terrified and grieving

someone.”

“You can tell that?”

“Yeah. My magic’s linked to him right now. I’m trying to calm him down so he’ll stop freaking the

hell out.”

He nodded and blew out a breath. “You saved me.”

I glanced at him. “Yeah... so?”

“*And you healed me.*”

I turned my head to him. “Well, yeah.”

He faced me and blinked. “But you’re a witch.”

That made me roll my eyes. Where did this guy come from? I scoffed. “You really think I’d let

someone die when I can save them? What the fuck, man?" I stood and walked away from him. Fucking

asshole.

Luckily, Jorah and Thayer rounded the corner, took one look at me, then pushed some of their

magic into my spell to give me a break. My brothers hugged me and asked if I was okay, and by the

time I turned around, Grim was already gone. Scowling at the spot where he'd disappeared from, I

shook my head. Why did I care where that jerk was, anyway? Why should I care if he was healed

enough to drive home? Why was I even thinking about a jerk that thought I'd let him die just because I

was a witch?

Why couldn't I stop thinking about those blue eyes of his?

Motherfucker.

I sighed and focused on my brothers before discussing what we were going to do with the giant.

We wanted to set him free, but since he'd harmed people, we were going to have to set up a barrier to

keep him from traveling this way again, and to keep people out of his territory.

We worked well into the night, but I was distracted the entire time since I couldn't stop wondering

if Grim made it home okay and worrying that he hadn't.

As we walked up to our houses on our coven's land, Jorah put his hand on my arm and asked,

“Are you okay?”

I nodded and ran a hand through my hair. “Yeah.”

“What is it? You're purposely blocking me, so you're obviously thinking about something. Talk to

me.” He crossed his arms over his chest.

“It's nothing. Just thinking about that fucking hunter.”

Jorah's brow furrowed. “The one you keep running into?”

“That's the one. He got hurt by the giant. I healed him, but it was a bad injury.”

“He was there today?”

“He disappeared right when you guys got there. He wanted me to kill that giant.”

“Of course he did, he's a hunter, it's what they do. They hunt, they kill. It's in their nature.”

I shook my head. “Hunters are human, so that's a bunch of bullshit that the books say to try and

make it seem better or something. He could do it differently, but he doesn't want to. It's a choice.”

“It's also the way they're trained from birth. They're trained to hunt to kill.”

“Doesn't make it right.”

“Didn't say it did.” He sent me a gentle smile. “Why are you so worried about this hunter, Bas?”

I shrugged. “He keeps getting in my way and saying ignorant shit because I’m a witch. He’s got a

vendetta against witches, and he uses a crossbow.”

Realization flickered through Jorah’s eyes. “You think he’s the witch killer?”

“I think there’s a possibility, yeah. It wouldn’t surprise me if he was.” I didn’t want to believe

Grim was the one murdering witches, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t. He fit the, albeit vague, profile,

so he *could* be the murderer.

I cringed as my chest tightened at the thought. What if Grim *was* the murderer? If he was, he’d be

executed.

Another sharp pang shot through my chest, and I gasped as I pressed my hand over the pain. Holy

fuck. If he was the murderer, he’d be killed.

My chest tightened further at the thought, making it hard to breathe.

“Bas?” Jorah asked, wrapping his arm around my shoulder. “What’s wrong? What’s going on?”

I shook my head. Why did the thought of Grim being killed hurt so badly?

I let Jorah lead me into my house and plop me on the couch. He kneeled in front of me with a

worried expression and asked, “Why does your chest feel so tight?”

I shook my head, and the worry on his face grew.

After hesitating, he gently asked, “Basil, is this about Rebe?” I blinked at that, but he kept going.

“I know it must be hard seeing them do the mating ceremony with that fae, but you told me yourself

that Rebe isn’t your viramore and that you want them to be happy. I’m really sorry you’re still hurting

over them.” He pulled me into a hug, and I let him because I was a little shocked by his words.

Rebe was a kelpie I’d been with for over a year when we’d lived in Faela, the land of the fae. I

hadn’t wanted a commitment, and they had, so we’d stopped seeing each other, but that had been years

ago. It was true that the last time we were in Faela, we’d gone to the mating ceremony for Rebe and a

fae, and admittedly, it had hurt to be there because I still cared about the kelpie. But that wasn’t what

this was. It wasn’t surprising that was where Jorah’s head went though, not after I’d been so

distraught over Rebe when we’d broken up.

I sighed and said, “I’m fine, Jor. I just need some sleep.”

He leaned back. “Do you want me to stay?”

I shook my head. “No, I’m good.” He could tell I wanted to be alone without me having to say the

words.

He nodded and squeezed my shoulder. “I’m right next door if you need me.”

“Thanks, Jor.”

He smiled before walking out the front door. His house was right beside mine
—between mine and

Thayer’s—so he literally was next door and only a few feet away.

I made my way up the stairs, got ready for bed, and climbed under my covers
before everything

Jorah had said hit me. He’d said that I knew Rebe wasn’t my viramore... but
why would he even

bring that up? Of course Rebe wasn’t my viramore, we all knew it, but that
didn’t mean it didn’t hurt

to not be with them anymore, but...

And then it hit me.

He’d said it because I’d been holding my chest and hurting. Because that was
how it was

described in all the books. When you found your viramore, if you separated
from them or saw them in

pain, it supposedly made your chest tight and caused physical pain. Like you
were stabbing yourself

in the heart, one of the books said.

Had I seriously been behaving that way?

I thought about it. I mean, yeah, I guess. But why? Why would my chest be
tight like that and

hurting when all I was thinking about was Grim being the witch killer?

Grim being executed.

Pain laced my heart again, making me gasp out.

Oh.

Oh shit.

No. That... that couldn't be right.

I cringed and pushed the feelings away because what the hell? *Grim? Ha! I don't think so.*

Asshole. Just... no way. No fucking way.

CHAPTER FOUR

BASIL

“A gain? Seriously, Basil, what the hell’s your problem?” Alec roared loud enough I had no doubt

the entire station heard. “First it was the vampire, then the basilisk, then the group of kobolds, the king

of the gnomes or whatever the hell he was, then the orc, then the satyr, let’s not forget the fucking satyr

catastrophe—” I wished *I* could forget the satyr catastrophe, I still had nightmares about that one “—

then the mind-bender—” he forgot the wendigo, but I wasn’t about to remind him about that horror

“—and now you couldn’t even catch a cat shifter!”

“It’s not my fault.” As excuses went, it was a horrible one.

“Not your fault? It hasn’t been your fault for two months! Two fucking months I’ve been dealing

with your bullshit excuses. You need to get over this fucking rival bullshit you got going on with that

damn hunter—the one that *no one else* has ever even seen! I’m starting to wonder if this hunter of

yours even exists or if you’re just using this as some kind of crazy ploy to make me insane.”

I blinked at my brother-in-law and stifled a sigh, then I crossed my arms over my chest and sent

him a glare because he was being a total asshole. “He exists.”

Alec waved that away. “I don’t give a shit if he’s real or a figment of your imagination. I only care

that whatever or whoever he is, he’s messing with your fucking cases.”

“I told you that I don’t know how he keeps ending up with the same marks as me.”

“Marks? Now you’re even speaking like them.”

I waved that away. “Perps. Whatever. You know what I mean.”

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don’t know what to do with you.”

“Put me on the witch case.”

He laughed out humorlessly. “You think that after only closing half your normal amount of cases

over the past two months that I’m going to put you on a case as important as that one? There’s a serial

killer on the loose. I can’t have you running around half-cocked like an asshole with a fucking hunter

on your tail. You're a witch, you could be a target. And this is a high-profile case after the media got

word of a serial killer. They've been on me for weeks." In defense of his assholeishness, that was

true. There'd been eight witches killed in a little over two months, and now that the public knew

about it, they were demanding results. Which was why he needed me on that case.

"That's why you need me on it."

He sat down, sighed, and shook his head. "Not a chance, Basil. Not when you have this... this

hunter problem going on."

I sat across from him and kicked the desk. "I would be good there."

"I'm not saying you wouldn't. But you've had a hunter on nearly all of your cases for the past two

months. I can't take the chance that he's tailing you. He could disrupt the case. I'm not doing it."

I grumbled even though I knew he was right.

"Look, a hobgoblin has been spotted near Arronston Market. Can you go check it out, please? Try

not to get bit or let anyone else get bit. They're dangerous enough with their venom that you might

have to shoot it on sight."

"Now you're giving me grunt work?"

“This isn’t grunt work. You think I’d send in just anyone for a hobgoblin?
Their venom kills

within minutes. I trust you can take it down without letting it close enough to
hurt you.”

I sighed. “Fine.” I stood up and headed for the door, then turned around to
say over my shoulder,

“I’m sorry my cases keep getting so screwed up. I’ve only ever wanted to do
a good job here and

make you and Ailin proud of me.” I slipped out the door before he could
respond.

I knew he wasn’t trying to be a dick on purpose, I knew he was stressed, but
he didn’t have to

keep making me feel like the asshole here. I was doing the best I could. It
wasn’t my fault that fucking

hunter kept getting in my way. And excuse me for not wanting that asshole or
anyone else to get hurt in

the process. Yeah, everything ended up messier, but I was bringing in more
of the perpetrators than

Grim was taking from me—mostly because I stole them from him when I
could—so that had to count

for something, didn’t it?

With a sigh to myself, I asked Blaze to transform into his dragon form and fly
me over to

Arronston Market to take care of this stupid hobgoblin. Luckily, my Bonded
did as I asked, so I

climbed on his back. He was just about the only one not pissed at me for

something I had no control

over.

It only took a few minutes to get there, and I wasn't surprised that the entire street in front of the

market was void of people. It was a good thing they went inside the surrounding buildings to avoid

being bit. I wasn't too sure how easily I could save someone from a hobgoblin bite. In fact, I probably

couldn't save them. One of my younger brothers or my brother-slash-dad would be better for that kind

of thing, to be honest.

As I slid off Blaze's back, I scanned the area for any sign of the pest. It was clear it had been on

the street because there was goo all over the place, but I didn't hear or see it.

Blaze transformed back into his bearded dragon form and climbed up my body to settle on my

shoulder. I absently scratched his little head as I walked. Then I heard it, grunting. Since everything

else on the street was silent, I followed the noise down a small alley between two buildings. I

expected to find the hobgoblin eating a human, but I stopped short at the sight before me.

The hobgoblin was there alright, but he was very clearly dead. Unfortunately, that meant the

fucking hunter that seemed to be every-fucking-where was hovering over it.

Bile came up my throat as I watched Grim cutting one of the hobgoblin's fangs out of its mouth.

He had chopped off the thing's fingers—its claws—already, and now was working on its fangs.

Why in the fuck would someone want its venomous fangs? Unless... holy shit, he wanted to

poison someone, didn't he?

“What the fuck are you doing?” I finally said.

Grim froze, slowly tilted his head up to me so I could see his eyes under that damn hood, and

said, “What's it look like?”

“It looks like you killed the fucking hobgoblin—good on you, asshole—and now you're fucking

desecrating its body.”

Grim's jaw clenched. “Why the fuck do you care what I do with its body? It's dead, it's not gonna

hurt anyone anymore. Your work here is done, witch. Go home.”

“I'm not going to let you chop up a body in the middle of the fucking street!”

“Then I'll take it with me.”

“No, you won't.”

His entire body tensed as he stood. “Why?”

“Because it's a dangerous creature that needs to be cremated after the BCA takes a look at it.”

He rolled his eyes and said, “I have a use for it, yet you’d rather see it go to waste?”

I wrinkled my nose. “It was a living creature, not an inanimate object. What the fuck could you possibly need it for?”

More anger flashed behind his eyes. “Clearly, a witch wouldn’t fuckin’ understand.”

I crossed my arms over my chest. “Do you wanna leave now or do I have to take you in for questioning?”

“Questionin’ for what?”

I gestured to the hobgoblin. “You’re chopping up a body, Grim, what the fuck else do you think I mean?”

He clenched his jaw, shook his head with a humorless laugh, then nodded once. “I hope you get

cut by his other fang, shadow boy.” Mother of All, I hated when he called me that. He’d started about

a month ago, and as soon as he’d realized I hated it, he’d been using it more often. Ass.

“Fuck you.”

He started walking by and chuckled. “You wish.”

I gaped at his retreating back, but couldn’t think of a response before he disappeared. Such a

fucking asshole.

When I glanced at the hobgoblin's body, I cringed at all its missing body parts. What the hell was

he going to do with them? What if he hurt someone with them because I didn't force him to empty his

pockets of fingers and fangs? I shuddered as I pulled out my phone and dialed Alec's cell.

"What's wrong this time, Basil?"

I rolled my eyes. "The hobgoblin's down. I'm gonna throw a shield over its body that Jor can

knock down if you send him."

"And why can't you just bring the body back here?"

"Because I need to follow a lead."

He sighed. "Do I want to know?"

"Probably not."

He huffed. "Fine. Be careful, call if you need backup."

"Will do." I hung up and pushed a shield out to cover the body, then said to Jorah through our link,

Can you take care of a hobgoblin body for me? I need to follow someone.

Sure, but... do you need help?

Nope, I'm good. Following people is my specialty.

You realize that sounds stalkerish, right?

I snorted out loud as I walked down the street to find Grim. *Whatever, you know what I mean. My*

shadow magic comes in handy, makes it easier.

I know. Be careful.

I will.

I cut off the conversation since I sent Jorah a mental image of the body's location as I finally

caught sight of a brown-haired head making his way down the street.

Pulling my magic over myself, I sighed as I sank into the shadows. This was probably a bad idea.

A very, very bad idea.

But I didn't care because I had to know more about the asshole who was making my life hell. I

had to know more about why I couldn't stop thinking about him.

C H A P T E R F I V E

B A S I L

This guy was making me crazy, and I had a feeling he was bad news. What kind of person

desecrates a dead body like that? It was sick.

Clearly, I was a very rational person, seeing as I'd decided to follow him. I rolled my eyes at

myself. I was being a fucking idiot, and I knew it, but whatever. Sometimes you just had to do crazy

shit. It worked well for me, anyway.

Please be careful. Jorah's voice was concerned in my head, and I rolled my eyes at him.

You know I will be.

Why are you following that guy, Bas? Thayer sounded annoyed.

He was tearing the fangs out of the hobgoblin body when I ran into him. I need to make sure he

isn't dangerous.

Thayer sighed in my head, but dropped it with a, *Don't do anything stupid.*

Who me? I asked innocently.

Jorah chuckled and Thayer ignored me—both made me grin. Since taking on the Mantle of Three

with Jorah and Thayer, my magic came to me even more easily. My shadow affinity magic still came

from the shadows around me, but because I was filled with the Power of Three, I could simply draw

from that endless resource *or* pull it from the shadows. Either one worked, and both were easy for

me. I'd always had a lot of power—Ailin thought that one day I might surpass him with my natural

abilities—and now my power was bigger than I ever imagined. Which was why Jor, Thay, and I still

trained all the time. We never wanted our magic getting out of control, and sometimes it felt like the

Power of Three was trying to do just that.

Pushing my will into the magic so it not only kept me from sight but kept anyone from hearing my

sounds, I took off after the hunter. Lucky for me, I was able to hide Blaze from sight and sound as

well, so I hopped on him and we followed the hunter's truck. Blaze flew lower to the ground than

usual so we wouldn't lose Grim.

The hunter drove into the city to a shady part of town, and a smirk formed on my face. I'd known

he was a shady bastard. When he pulled up behind a shitty bar in an alley, got out of the car, and

walked up to a back door, knocking, I hopped off Blaze's back so I could hear what was said. I was

going to figure this fucker out.

A very short woman opened the door, saw Grim, and asked, "Did you get it?"

Grim sighed and ran a hand through his hair, then pulled a vial out of his pocket. "This was all I

could get. I'm sorry it's not more, Betdresli. I tried, but a witch showed up and—"

"It's better than nothing," the short woman said before taking the vial from him. "This is

wonderful. Thank you, Grim. It means the world to us. This is going to help Thebrouk so much."

"How is he feeling? Is the pain still bad?" Grim asked.

The woman, who I now realized was a dwarf or possibly a half-dwarf, turned pale. “He’s in a lot

of pain, but the hobgoblin venom will help with that.”

Grim nodded with a frown. “I’m sorry, Betdresli. If you think of anythin’ else to help him, please

call or text me. If I come across another hobgoblin, I’ll do my best to get the venom for ya.”

“This will be a great start. It should be enough to make a couple of weeks’ worth of medicine.”

Medicine? He’d pulled out the hobgoblin’s fang so someone could make medicine? I felt my face

pale as I thought about the fact I’d not only stopped Grim from getting it all, but had been a total

dickhead about it. I’d even tried to make him feel guilty for doing that to a dead creature. Oh Mother, I

stopped someone from getting *medicine* for someone else.

The woman gave Grim a hug, and he awkwardly patted her back, and once she’d gone back

inside, he sighed and went back to his truck. Climbing back onto Blaze’s back, I did my best to push

the thoughts of how horrible I was away and concentrated on my target. Just because he did one nice

thing did *not* mean he was a good guy or in the clear. Not at all. For all I knew, *medicine* was code

for poison or something.

I followed him through the streets to what most people called the poor side of town, and I cringed.

What was a big-time hunter doing here? Maybe he already had another bounty.

He parked his truck in front of a house that was in serious need of a makeover. I was pretty sure

the roof was falling apart and leaking in several places, and I even noticed the one side window was

boarded up. It made me cringe because it was cold out, so it had to be freezing inside that house.

Grim surprised me when he hopped out of the car, and instead of going up to the house he parked

in front of, he walked across the street to another house that was just as bad off as the first.

As I followed on foot behind him, I watched the front door open up before Grim got to it, and a

huge smile spread over his face. I didn't think he even knew how to smile like that, but I had to say

that it was a good look on him.

Shaking that stupid thought away, I watched with wide eyes as a little purple blob jumped into

Grim's waiting arms while squealing, "Daddy!"

Grim laughed—and holy shit, were those *dimples*? he had motherfucking dimples—and said, "Hi,

peanut. Gimme some sugar."

It took a minute for my brain to catch up with what I was seeing. The purple blob was actually a

little girl of around six, although she was awfully tiny so perhaps younger, and she gave the hunter a

kiss and squeezed his neck, clearly excited. And she'd called Grim *Daddy*. Oh holy Mother of All,

Grim had a kid. A little girl.

Grim started placing kisses all over the little girl's face as she giggled away, and I noticed

something around her ears and under her nose that hooked up to a bookbag on her back. I gasped. She

was hooked up to oxygen. Why would she need to be hooked up to oxygen? What could possibly be

wrong with her that a healing tonic wouldn't help?

"How was your day, peanut?" Grim asked her.

She started reciting everything she did today, including exactly how many bites of her sandwich

she ate, and how many times she used the bathroom today—three.

Grim let her talk as he held her in his arms, even when an older woman walked out onto the porch

and glared at him as she leaned against the beam holding the porch roof up.

Grim ran his fingers over the tube on his daughter's face and asked her, "How long have you had

to use this today?"

“Since right after lunch,” the older woman answered for the little girl.
“Rasha, how about you

collect your workbooks and all the pictures you made today so you and your father can head home?”

“Yes, Ms. Ulma,” Rasha said as Grim set her on her feet. The little girl said,
“Be right back,

Daddy.”

“Okay, peanut.” As soon as Rasha was inside, Grim held up his hands and said, “I’m so sorry,

Ulma.” He reached into his back pocket and passed her a wad of cash.

“This is less than half of what you owe me, Hiro,” Ulma said. “You promised me you’d have

enough to catch up last week. I can’t keep watching her for free.”

“I know.” Grim ran a hand through his hair. “I’m sorry. There was an issue with my bounty this

time ‘cause a witc—”

“There’s *always* an issue lately. If I’m watching her, I can’t be working the register at the store on

the corner, and I got rent to pay, too.”

“I know. I promise—”

“Don’t make more promises, Hiro. You’ve been late for months. I love Rasha, you know I do, but

I’ve got to have a place to live, I gotta have food to fill my belly, too.”

“I know. I’m sorry.” To my horror, Grim’s eyes filled with tears. “After her

last stint in the

hospital, I used up all my savings. Ya know I'm tryin' here, Ulma. I'm doin' everythin' I can." His

strange accent became stronger the more upset he got. Holy shit. I'd done this. I'd taken away his

bounty so many times because I'd thought he was being a dick, but all he'd been doing was trying to

take care of his family, his daughter. My stomach felt like lead.

The woman sighed and walked down the three porch steps and pulled Grim into a hug. This time,

he easily went and returned it. The older woman patted Grim's back and murmured, "You're a good

boy, Hiro. I know life ain't easy for the two of you. I have enough to get by for a few more weeks, but

that's all I can promise."

He nodded into her shoulder. "Thank you, Ulma. I'm going to find a way to pay you, I promise."

She patted his back again before they stepped back, and Grim wiped his cheeks and eyes, offering

her a shaky smile.

Rasha came rushing back out and straight into her father's arms, asking, "What's wrong, Daddy?"

"Nothing now that I'm with you, baby girl. Absolutely nothing." He took the extra bag she had

from her and kissed the side of her head, then waved at Ulma before carrying

the little girl back

across the street to the house with the boarded-up window and leaky roof.

When he opened his front door, he set Rasha on the ground and said, “Go wash up for dinner,

peanut. I’ll be right in.”

“Okay, Daddy.” She disappeared inside.

Grim set the bag of her belongings just inside the door, and quick as a flash, he had a gun out and

aimed straight at me, saying, “Show yourself.”

My eyes widened. How the hell had he known I was here?

He cocked his gun. “Show yourself before I start takin’ shots.” He stepped closer and ground out,

“Ellwood, I know it’s you.”

Well, shit, guess the gig was up. But... how in the world did he know someone was here? And

how did he know it was me? That didn’t make any sense. Maybe if I stayed hidden, he’d think he

wasn’t feeling anything.

“I swear to god, if you harm one hair on my daughter’s head, if you even come near her, you’ll

regret it for every painful second of your very short life.”

I believed that. He was terrifying in that moment, yet I couldn’t help but see him in a different

light. He was a father, he cared about people, he was trying to help them, or at least help that dwarf.

He was strong and fierce, and... even though I was loathe to admit it, he was sexy as hell when he

was being protective—sexy all the time, really, but this was... different.

And all I had done was mess with his plans, mess with his life. I needed to do something. I

needed to fix this somehow.

But if I revealed myself now, he wouldn't accept my help. He was a proud person, I could already

sense that about him, so I knew he'd turn me away thinking it was charity. So I'd have to figure out a

way to help without him getting angry or dismissing me.

"I will fuckin' kill you slowly." Grim kept the gun aimed at me as he stepped over the threshold of

his home. "This entire house is warded against evil spirits and anyone intendin' harm to my daughter

or myself. Her babysitter's house is warded as well. If ya don't leave now, I'm going to set off my

wards in the yard, and you're gonna get fried."

"Daddy?"

"Everything's fine, peanut. Go sit at the table. I made crock pot mackers for dinner."

"Yay!"

Grim muttered, “Stay the fuck away from my family.” Then he slammed the door.

Resting my hand on the door, I felt the ward he spoke of. It was a decent ward, but not super

strong, so I pushed my magic into it to strengthen it, then I ran across the street and did the same to

Ulma’s house. With that settled, I climbed onto Blaze’s back again and headed for home. I was going

to ask Delaro about a tonic for that dwarf, and I was going to run to the bank, pull out all the cash I

could, and drop it at Grim’s doorstep. It was the least I could do after everything I’d done to the man.

Holy Mother, I needed to fix this.

C H A P T E R S I X

H I R O

As I shut the door and locked it, I blew out a breath. Someone had followed me home, and I had

no doubt it was that witch, Basil Ellwood, the bane of my existence.

But I couldn’t figure out the reason he’d followed me in the first place. Was he here to hurt me and

my family? Was he coming to collect the hobgoblin venom? Was he trying to scare me off?

It wasn’t as if I’d been running into him on purpose. He just kept showin’ up at my jobs, and there

was shit all I could do about it. My handler claimed she didn’t know how all

my jobs ended up being

BCA cases that Basil Ellwood handled, but I wasn't sure I believed her. Though, I didn't have any

proof saying she did. There had to be a reason for Ellwood's sudden appearance in my life every time

I turned around.

He wasn't like any witch I'd ever met, if I was being honest with myself. He'd saved my life or

helped me get out of a bad situation more than once. But I didn't understand his angle. Why did he

keep helping me from being injured or killed? What did he want from me? Besides stealing my marks,

I knew there had to be another reason. There had to be somethin' he wanted for him to behave this

way, and now that he'd discovered my daughter, well... I'd put an arrow in him before he could get

close to Rasha again.

“Daddy?”

“You ready for some mackers, peanut?” I walked farther into the house and finally took my gloves

off, throwing them on the table near the door. It was necessary to keep them on outside of here, but I

couldn't deny how much of a relief it was when I got to take them off.

“Yes!” she squealed, and seeing the happiness on her face at something as simple as her favorite

meal settled me a little. If that asshole intended any harm to her, he wouldn't be able to get inside the

house. She was safe here, we were safe, and I could enjoy the few hours I had with her before she

needed to go to bed.

So I smiled at my sweet little girl and went to make us plates. Once we settled at the table, she

began telling me more about her day and every little thing she did. She was a chatterbox, and I loved

it. She didn't show this side of herself to other people because she was typically shy, but here at

home, she never stopped talking. She was either talkin' or asleep, no in between. And I loved that her

voice filled the air and stabbed away at my own loneliness in this house. She was my everything, so

my time with her was precious to me.

The passion on her face when she talked about the drawings she made reminded me so much of

her mother that I had to take a deep breath.

Reaching over, I pushed the bangs off her forehead and asked, "How are you feelin'?"

She frowned and poked at her food. "Fine."

"I'm gonna need more than that, peanut."

She sighed. "I feel better now."

I nodded. “Good. You up for a bath tonight?”

She smiled and nodded before shoveling the biggest bite I’d ever seen in her mouth. My eyes

widened, but to my surprise, she chewed it up and swallowed it. With a chuckle, I went back to eating

my own food and listening to her talk in between her giant bites.

Once she was bathed and in her jammies, I tucked her in, read her a story, then kissed her

forehead and said, “I love you, peanut.”

“I love you, too, Daddy.”

“Gimme some sugar.” I pursed my lips, and with a little giggle, she gave me a peck and settled

back in the bed. “You good?”

“Yep!”

My mouth perked up. “Alright. I’ll see ya in the mornin’.”

“Can we have chocolate chip pancakes tomorrow?”

“After three plates of mackers, you’re still thinkin’ about food?”

“I’m always thinking about food.”

I laughed, shaking my head. “I can do the pancakes, but I think Ms. Ulma would have my hide if I

sent you over there hyped up on sugar, so no chocolate chips.”

“Please?”

“Sorry, peanut. Maybe this weekend when I don’t have to work.”

“Okay.”

“G’night, baby girl.”

“Night.”

I pulled her door, leaving it cracked open, then walked down to the first floor. Opening the hall

closet, I pulled out the oxygen tanks to check our supply and sighed in relief. We had enough to get

through the next three days, even if she had to use it all day. Which was good news. The bad news

was that I’d just given Ulma every extra cent I had, only leaving us with enough to buy food for the

next week.

Which meant I had three days to find and complete a job, and get paid for it. All without running

into that fuckin’ witch that was making my life a living hell.

Putting the tanks back, I went into the kitchen to check our cabinets and assess our food situation. I

grimaced as I searched because it didn’t take long to see we were running low on everything. As I

searched, I calculated how long we could make it stretch, and if I only ate one meal a day, I’d be able

to feed Rasha three meals a day for the next week. That made me sigh in relief. I didn’t mind bein’ a

little hungry if it meant she'd be well fed.

But if I didn't get a bounty in the next few days, I wouldn't even have enough money to feed her.

Millayna would kill me if she knew what a bad situation we were in. I was surprised her ghost

hadn't hunted me down yet.

I sat at the kitchen table with my elbows on the tabletop, and buried my hands in my hair as I tried

to take a few deep breaths.

We were still okay. I'd figure somethin' out. It always worked out, right?

My heart clenched in my chest as emotions clogged up my throat. How had I let it get this bad?

What the hell was I goin' to do?

And now Rasha had been discovered on top of everything else.

Fuckin' Basil Ellwood.

I took a deep breath. Basil Ellwood. I shook my head. I couldn't seem to stop thinkin' about that

witch. Every night, all I'd think about was how much he drove me crazy, but that somehow, he always

looked amazin' doing it.

With a sigh, I pushed that away.

First thing was first, I needed to talk to that witch to be sure he didn't come back. He needed to

understand that I'd do *anything* to protect her, including killing that sonofabitch if I had to.

How the hell I was going to find him, I didn't know, but I was a hunter, and a damn good one at

that, so I'd figure it out. I'd go to my handler, get my next mark, and track down that little jerk.

With a plan in place, I felt a little better, so I ignored the empty pantry shelves and headed

upstairs, peeking in on Rasha along the way. She was asleep, holding her stuffed duck in her arms, her

hair splayed out on her pillow. I snuck in to press a kiss to her forehead before I walked to my room,

changed, and climbed into my bed.

Of course, the last thing I thought of was Basil Ellwood. But that was because he was my next

target, no other reason at all.

The lie worked well enough to let sleep claim me.

MY NEXT TARGET WAS AN INCUBUS THAT HAD PULLED IN SOME GUY'S WIFE AND SUCKED HER DRY.

Most incubi were pretty good at only using willing energy donors, so I was a tad surprised by this

assignment, but I'd take it 'cause the guy that hired us was willing to pay big. This was exactly what I

needed, but first, I needed to get that witch off my back so I could collect my bounty.

Since I didn't know where Basil lived, I went to the only place I could think of for information.

There was a magic shop with the Ellwood name on it, so I figured if anyone could give me Basil's

number or get in touch with him, it was them. As soon as I finished here, I'd go take down my mark.

Walking into the magic shop, I felt wards wash over me, but I knew they weren't meant to harm.

They were meant to protect anyone inside. Smart.

A tall, lean man with blue hair, bright blue eyes, and pale, bluish skin called over from the front

counter, "Welcome to Ellwood Magical Items and Apothecary, can I help you find anything?"

"Perhaps," I said as I moved forward.

The man took a step back, his eyes running over me and calculating all the weapons he could see

—I had plenty he couldn't. His nervous energy reached me, and I took a breath to get a sense of the

man. He didn't seem harmful, but I wasn't stupid enough to believe he wasn't dangerous.

Still, I wanted information, and if he was scared of me, that wasn't going to happen. So I halted,

lifted my hands to show him I wasn't dangerous, and said, "I was hoping to speak to an Ellwood."

The man blinked and said, "What can I help you with?"

I tilted my head to the side, taking him in again to figure out what he was. It only took a second.

“You’re not a witch; you’re fae.”

“This is my store. If you need help finding something specific, I’ll be happy to show you.”

I sighed and rubbed my forehead under my hood, to keep my face hidden.

“Do you know where I

can find Basil Ellwood?”

His eyes narrowed. “I can certainly tell him you’re looking for him. Who should I say needs

him?” Shit. He was too wary of me to give me information, but I needed to talk to that little witch

before he tried somethin’ with my daughter.

I hesitated before saying, “Can you tell him Grim needs to see ‘im?”

“Grim?”

I nodded once. “He can find me at the bar tomorrow night.” He’d know which one I meant.

After a moment, he said, “I’ll give him your message.”

“Thank you, and... sorry to bother you so late.” I hadn’t meant to scare the fae. I turned and

walked out the door without another word.

At least the word was out that I was lookin’ for Basil. Hopefully he’d show.

Pushing that out of my thoughts, I concentrated on my new assignment.

Taking out incubi was no

easy feat, so I'd need my wits about me. I aimed my truck in the direction of the incubus's last known

location.

I hated working nights, but from all the info I'd gathered about this incubus, he was a night owl, so

I'd have no luck findin' him during the day. Luckily, Ulma didn't mind sitting with Rasha while she

slept. Ulma was actually going to take my bed for the night, and I'd sleep on the couch if I got home

early enough to do so.

But I knew I was in for a long night.

“DADDY!”

My eyes snapped open only a second before a bundle in princess jammies jumped on my stomach

and knocked the wind outta me, making the piercing pain in my ribs hit me in the worst way. “Peanut,”

I gasped.

She giggled, not realizing she actually hurt me. “Ms. Ulma left since you're home now.”

“She did?”

Rasha nodded. “She just walked out the door.”

“Crap. Okay, gimme a sec, peanut. I need to give Ulma something.”

“Can I have cereal?”

“Sure. I’ll help you in a minute.” I sat up as she climbed off my lap, then I stood, grabbed the

envelope of money from the table—being sure not to bend over because my ribs were killin’ me—and

ran out the front door, yelling, “Ulma!”

She was already on her own porch, but she turned around at the sound of my voice.

I ran across the street and up to her steps, and said, “Thank you for sittin’ with her last night,

Ulma.”

She waved that away. “It’s fine. You need me again tonight?”

Cringing internally, I asked, “Is that a problem?”

She sighed. “Nah. I got you, Hiro.”

“Thank you so much, Ulma, really.” She waved me away again, so I held out the envelope and

said, “This is everythin’ I owe ya, plus enough for tonight and the rest of the week.”

“You got a good bounty last night, huh?”

“Yeah. Sucker got me good in the ribs, but it was worth it.”

She eyed me. “You need me to take a look?”

“Nah, but thanks anyway.”

She hesitated as she took the envelope from me. “You still got enough for food?”

For food? Yeah. For rent? Nah, not even close. But I nodded. “Yeah, it’ll do for now. I’m gonna

grab another assignment tonight.”

She eyed me for another moment before sighing. “Yeah, yeah. Thanks, Hiro. I’ll see you in a few

hours.”

I sent her my most charming smile, which made her roll her eyes at me and snort, then I chuckled,

headed back to my house, and called out, “Alright, peanut, we’re gonna eat some cereal, get dressed,

and go grocery shopping.”

“Can I push the cart?” Rasha was sitting at the table with a bowl of cereal in front of her and milk

spilled all over the table.

Stifling a sigh, I asked, “Did you make yourself cereal?”

She grinned and nodded. “Ms. Ulma taught me how to pour.” The gallon of milk was practically

the size of her, so it was no wonder she’d spilled it everywhere.

“Good job, Rasha.” I kissed the top of her head, then grabbed a rag to clean her mess up. We’d

buy some groceries and get her oxygen tanks refilled today, and then I’d have to get another bounty

before buying anything else. At least last night bought me a little more time.

WALKING INTO THE BAR, I GRIMACED. IF ELLWOOD DIDN’T

SHOW UP TONIGHT, I WAS GOING TO BE

pissed. I didn't want to waste any time not working on my next mark, but I had to make sure Ellwood

wasn't going to come near my family again.

I couldn't even afford a drink, so I asked for a water—in a cup so they didn't charge me for a

bottle—so I didn't look like I was just prowling the place as I waited. With the cup in hand, I found

an empty table in the back corner so I'd see when the witch walked in.

Thankfully, he only made me wait about ten minutes before showing up. As he scanned the bar and

found me in the corner, I couldn't help but admire his physique. He was lean but muscled in a way

that showed he worked for it but likely didn't lift weights. He was thinner and shorter than me by a

good half a foot, which I admittedly liked. I liked my partners smaller than me, whether they were

men or women. *Partners? Why the hell would I even be thinkin' that word in the same sentence as*

Basil?

Shaking that away, I kept my eye on him. To be honest, Basil's body wasn't the only thing he had

going for him, either. His long dark hair, braided back on the left side, framed his pretty face and

brought out those dark eyes. He had a menacing feel about him when you

first laid eyes on him, but

when you got up close, you could tell that was only a front and that he actually seemed to care about

people.

But he was a witch, so even if he wasn't one hundred percent evil, he still had it in him. Witches

weren't good. They were evil bastards that manipulated you and ended up hurting everything you

loved. They *always* did.

"Grim," Ellwood said as he made it to my table and sat across from me.

"Ellwood." I leaned on my elbows and said, "I know it was you."

He actually winced and stared at me with something that looked like an apology, like he was

ashamed of himself. But witches didn't do shame, so it must've been fake. He said, "I'm really sorry,

Grim. I didn't..."

"You didn't, what? You didn't mean to follow me home?"

He cringed. "No, I did, but I didn't realize..."

I tapped the wooden table with my finger. "Listen to me. If you come near my daughter again, I

will kill you."

He didn't even blink at that, he only nodded. "I know... I'm sorry I followed you, and I'm sorry I

took so many of your bounties. I didn't realize... it's just, you're always such an asshole, so I decided

to be a jerk back, but if I'd known you had a kid you were taking care of, I never would've taken your

bounties.”

I blinked at that, sifting through everything he said before I ground out, “I don't need your charity,

Ellwood.”

He lifted his hands in surrender. “I wasn't talking about charity. You took those people down, and

I took them from you. You should've gotten the bounty for them, and I'm sorry I didn't let you.”

My eyes narrowed as I stared at him, trying to figure out his angle. Was he just sayin' all that to get

me to let my guard down? Probably. But to what end? “What do ya want from me?”

His brow furrowed. “What do you mean? I don't want anything.”

“Everyone wants somethin', witch. I'm just tryin' to figure out your play.”

“I'm not... Mother of All, Grimsby, I'm not trying to get anything from you. I followed you

because I wanted to make sure you weren't going to hurt anyone with that damn hobgoblin venom.

When I realized you were only trying to help those dwarves—”

“Half-dwarves,” I corrected, though I didn't know why I cared.

He blinked at me, then slowly gave a nod. “Yeah, them. After that, I kept following you because I

honestly thought you were bad news. I never meant to... I never wanted to make you feel unsafe in

your own home.”

He actually sounded truthful, but for all I knew, he was a good actor. Still, some part of me

wanted to believe him.

Basil pulled a pouch off his belt, and I tensed, waiting for attack, but all he did was pull out a

bundle of money and said, “Here. All yours.”

“What the fuck do ya think you’re doin’?”

He sighed. “Helping make up for the things I took from you.”

“I don’t want your money.”

“So what? You need it, so take it.”

Every cell in my body tensed as anger overtook me. How dare he come in here, riding on his high

horse, and throwing money at me. Who in the hell did he think he was? “I’m not takin’ your fuckin’

money.”

Basil jerked back at my anger. “Why not? I don’t need it and you do. Take it.”

“I’m not some charity case for you to throw money at to make yourself feel better. I don’t want it.”

“Grim, that’s not—”

“No!” I growled. “Take your fuckin’ money and shove it up your ass.”

His eyes narrowed in anger, and he said with clenched teeth, “Fine, asshole. Have it your way.”

I needed this to be done, I needed to get away from this witch that was driving me mad in more

ways than one. I leaned forward again. “If you ever come near my daughter again, I will end you,

witch.”

He sighed. “Whatever, *hunter*. I’m not going to hurt your daughter. I know you hate me or

whatever, but I’d think that by now you’d know I don’t hurt innocents. I try to help everyone I can—

even you, asshole.” He stood up and slammed his hands on the table. “You’d think after two months,

you’d know that. Especially since you... you feel it, don’t you? This...” He waved between us. “This

thing... you feel it.”

It wasn’t a question, but even if it was, I wasn’t about to answer it.

When I didn’t respond, he huffed and shook his head. “Whatever. Your silence is answer enough.

I’ll see you around, Grim.” He walked away and through the front door before I could reply. Not that I

wanted to.

What had he been talking about? Did I feel what exactly? This... weird feeling when it came to

him? The fact I couldn't stop thinking about him? Or the fact that whenever he was near, I wanted to

be closer to him, and whenever he left, it left me feeling strangely hollow. Was that what he meant?

Because I did fuckin' feel it, but it didn't mean anything. It couldn't. He was a fucking *witch*, and I

promised myself a long time ago that I'd never get involved in witch affairs again, that I'd never let

one get close to me.

With a sigh, I took a sip of my water, stood, and walked out the door to find my next mark. I

pushed thoughts of Basil Ellwood out of my mind, even if doing so made my chest hurt.

C H A P T E R S E V E N

B A S I L

Stupid fucking asshole hunter. I was only trying to help. Maybe I didn't go about it the right way,

but I needed to fucking help him and his kid. It was like this feeling inside of me that I just

needed to help them. I hadn't been lying when I said I felt a pull to that man, and I could see it in his

eyes that he felt it, too.

I honestly didn't want to think about what that meant because Hiro Grimsby

hated me. Absolutely

hated every fiber of my being.

And wasn't that just the worst feeling in the world.

I was used to being a disappointment; I was used to being yelled at; I was used to getting into

trouble; I was used to being disliked. But I wasn't used to being *hated*. Maybe a lot of people didn't

like me very much, but for someone to dislike me enough to hate me, for them to hate me enough that I

actually disgusted them... well, that was just about the shittiest feeling in the world.

My phone rang as I got into my truck, and when I saw who was calling, I answered with a "Yo"

thrown in.

"Hey, Bas. Your brothers and I were talking, and we think we should train tomorrow. Are you

up for it?" Nikolai asked through the phone.

"Yeah, sure."

"Great... did you take care of that Grim guy?"

I sighed. There was the true reason for his call. As if I didn't already have one father figure up in

my business all the damn time. Not that Nik was a father figure, because freaking ew, but he liked to

pretend he was. "Yeah, I just met with him. Everything's fine, don't worry

about it.”

“I can’t help but worry about it, Bas. That’s kinda my job.”

I sighed again. I supposed that was true. Nikolai and his twin brother Talon were the guardians of

the Three, also known as the babysitters of Jorah, Thayer, and me. I loved them to death, but they

didn’t need to be so nosy all the damn time. “Whatever, Nik. I’m fine, okay? I’m coming home now to

get some sleep. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Alright, Bas.” Because he’s an asshole, he made kissy noises into the phone.

Rolling my eyes, a reluctant smile spread over my face. “You’re an idiot.”

“At least I made you smile—I can hear it in your voice.”

I sighed. “I promise I’m fine.”

“Okay, I believe you. See you tomorrow.”

“See ya tomorrow, pretty face.”

He snorted before hanging up the phone.

Even though I was confused and pissed by the whole Grim situation, Nik’s phone call actually

made me feel better. Yeah, it was annoying as hell to have basically zero privacy from my family, but

at least I knew they all cared about me, at least I knew they had my back. Unlike Grim, who from the

looks of it, didn't have anyone. *Ugh. I can't even go two minutes without thinking about him.*

Thinking about who? Jorah asked in my head, clearly overhearing my thoughts. Perfect example

of never having privacy.

I sighed. *No one. Nothing.*

You okay, big bro?

Yes, Jor, I'm fine.

He didn't respond, but I felt a little of his concern through our bond. There was really nothing I

could do to help with that.

When I got home and settled into bed, I sighed and tried to push thoughts of an angry hunter out of

my mind— it didn't work.

HITTING THE GROUND WITH A HUGE "OOMPH" COMING OUT OF ME WASN'T EXACTLY PLEASANT.

Thayer's laughter at my pain made me flip him off, but that only set him off more.

For some reason, Grim's face flashed in my mind's eye, but I pushed it away. Now was *not* the

time to worry about that asshole of a hunter. I needed to concentrate, so I pushed away thoughts of his

gorgeous face and those damn dimples I wanted to see again. *Dammit!*

Stifling a sigh, I rolled to my side and sat up. Grayson—Nikolai and Delaro's

other viramore—

held his hand out to me and helped me to my feet, saying, “I’m sorry. Are you alright?”

“I’m fine, Gray,” I said, brushing myself off. He grimaced, so I waved him off. “Go beat up on

Jorah or something.”

His lips twitched into a small smile before he nodded and moved down the line.

We were training, which meant that we not only trained our magical abilities, we did hand to hand

combat as well. It was good to have, at the very least, defensive capabilities in case we’re ever in a

situation that requires more finesse than our overbearing magic allows or on the off chance that we

can’t use our magic. Which was highly unlikely, but you never knew. Especially with that witch serial

killer still on the loose.

Toby—Thayer’s viramore—came over to stand in front of me, making me groan as I said, “Now I

have to fight you?”

He chuckled. “Yep.”

I grunted. Grayson was an ex-Warrior of Tempest, so he was a motherfucking badass that could

take down just about any opponent. But Toby was a damn hundred and twenty-something-year-old

vampire that had been training and fighting since he was a teenager.
Vampires were hella fast and

strong, and Toby was hella talented. To say we were being trained by two of
the best warriors in

Brinnswick was probably an understatement.

Which was really great. Except that it meant I got the shit kicked out of me
every damn time we

trained. Which was a lot.

Toby grinned. “Don’t worry, I’ll take it easy on you.”

I rolled my eyes. “Uh huh, sure.” The thing was, I knew he actually would,
and I’d still end up flat

on my back or with my face in the dirt.

“No magic,” he said.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know the rules.”

“And yet, you still like to break them all the time,” Nik said from the
sidelines of the training area

we’d set up on coven land a few years back.

I flipped him off, too. Asshat.

Nik laughed and said, “Go.”

Toby swung a punch at me that I blocked with my forearm—luckily my
bracer caught most of the

impact because even with him holding back, he was hella strong. He swung
his other hand toward me,

so I deflected that punch, and the next one before using his momentum against him. Ducking, I side-

stepped him and elbowed him in the ribs, but Toby was on me again immediately. He attacked, and I

went on the defensive until he somehow flipped me around with one arm around my chest, keeping my

arms still, and the other on my throat, gripping my jaw, proving he could legit break my neck if he

wanted. Ugh.

“Dead,” Toby said before releasing me.

I sighed and brushed myself off before waving him away. “Yeah, you win, vamp. Obviously.”

He rolled his eyes at me, but offered a small smile. It was kinda amazing how comfortable he was

with us all now compared to a few years ago when we’d first met him. He used to be so shy, and I

guess he still was around new people, but here with his family, he seemed to be thriving.

Thayer walked over, put his hand on Toby’s back, and leaned up to press a kiss to his cheek.

Toby’s answering smile was so bright and full of love, I had to look away because something in my

gut twisted, and for unknown reasons Grim’s face flashed in my head again. But I tamped that shit

down immediately and thought about the twisting sensation instead. I was honest enough to realize it

was a burning jealousy that seemed to be happening more and more around my family. Everywhere I

looked, there were happy couples—or throuples—and while I was beyond happy for each and every

one of them, I was also a little sad for myself.

Which made me feel like shit because I should be celebrating their happiness, not feeling sorry for

myself because of it.

You're allowed to be sad, Jorah's voice suddenly filled my head, and only my head, keeping it

from Thayer.

My eyes widened, and I shot a glance at Thay and Toby to make sure Thayer hadn't heard my

selfish thoughts.

Jorah walked over and bumped me with his shoulder, whispering, "You hid it, but I saw your

face. No one else is paying attention, but... you're allowed to have feelings about that, Bas. It's

totally normal."

I eyed him. "Do you?"

He shrugged. "Sometimes, yeah." To my knowledge, Jorah had never had a boyfriend or

girlfriend. I was sure he'd messed around before—or at least I assumed he had, although I could be

wrong about that—but he'd never dated anyone, so his admission was a little shocking.

“You have?”

He nodded. “Yeah, of course. I hope I find my viramore one day.” A sad expression overtook his

face, and it made me frown at him.

“Me too.” I pulled him into a hug. “You okay?”

“Yeah, I'm good. Wanna run some exercises?”

“Only if you mean the magical kind and not that actual running kind.” I fake shuddered.

He chuckled. “Like you've ever cared about running.”

“It's not my favorite thing in the world.”

“You literally went running with me almost every day when we lived in Faela.”

I lifted a shoulder and admitted, “That's because there wasn't anything else to do, and you like

running.”

He stared at me for several beats, then asked, “Are you telling me you only ran because I wanted

to?”

“Uh, yeah?” I had no idea why that sounded like a question.

A soft expression flitted over him before he gave me a quick hug and walked away.

Shaking my head at that strange exchange, I turned to find Nik and Talon watching me, so I said,

“We’re gonna do some magic shit.”

Talon rolled his eyes, and Nik snorted and said, “Eloquent, as always.”

I grinned at him, then searched out my other brother, calling over, “Come on, Thay. Let’s practice

our aim.” I didn’t need to explain further than that for him to know exactly what I meant.

He shot me a grin and ran over to join Jorah and me at the edges of the training area. Nik and

Talon pulled their magic together to make floating targets all around the yard—their illusion magic

was flipping awesome.

I said telepathically to my brothers, *Start on the outside in front of Jorah and make our way to*

the middle.

Sounds good, Thay said.

Ready? Jorah asked with a nod. After we nodded back, he said, *Go.*

Together, we called upon the Power of Three, and I felt the electric-like magic filling my veins

and connecting to my brothers. It was almost like being filled with electricity, except instead of

hurting, it made me feel powerful and strong, and the link with my brothers seemed to expand so we

were more like one strong magical entity instead of three separate people.
The magic was

intoxicating, but it also made me feel a little destructive. The power was wild,
so it wanted to be

free, but if we let the energy control us instead of the other way around, it
could destroy anything and

everything in its path.

So taking a deep breath, I held myself together and raised my arms as my
fingers sparked. A storm

began brewing over the top of our training area, our magic pulling together
and flowing from each of

us. The Power of Three magic mixed with my shadow magic, Thayer's light
magic, and Jorah's earth

magic, making it even more powerful. When our hands were raised, without
needing words and only

feeling each other's intentions, we struck a lightning bolt down on the first
target. Then we hit the

next, and the next, and the next, until all the targets were incinerated.

When I gazed over the wreckage at Jorah and Thayer, I couldn't help but
smile. They looked crazy

with their hair sticking up from the electricity, their eyes flashing with tiny
lightning bolts, and sparks

rushing over their skin. To be honest, they looked badass, and I knew I did,
too. Not to be cocky or

anything.

Okay, I was totally cocky when it came to our magic, but that was because I had a reason to. The

Power of the Three was probably the most powerful magic in all the realms, and my brothers and I

were lucky to have access to it.

That whole thing about ‘with great power comes great responsibility’ was true as hell here.

Because if my brothers and I ever decided to let the magic control us instead of the other way around,

our entire realm would be screwed.

There was a reason we had to take the magic on in order to save Brinnswick and everyone in it.

And there was no way we would ever let something like the Berserker War happen again.

With that in mind, I called over to Nik and Talon, “Let’s go again.”

They smiled at me, and somehow, I read that as them being proud.

Thank the Mother, they couldn’t tell I was only half concentrating since my mind kept wandering

back to that hunter and how I could help him. *Damn you, Hiro Grimsby.*

C H A P T E R E I G H T

H I R O

As I watched the jinn suck the soul out of a fellow human, I knew I was in deep shit. There was

no saving that guy. The jinn already had him in its thrall, and I had no way of

severing that

connection. I knew jinns were terrifying creatures when you pissed one off, but seeing it take

advantage of a human that didn't know better and knowing I could do nothing to stop it, put its strength

in perspective. I'd already shot at the jinn with arrows and bullets and everything else I could think

of, but nothing was getting past its shield, not even my special dagger that was made for shields. The

jinn's magic was too different from the witch magic that the dagger had been made for. Without magic,

I was as helpless against that jinn as that poor human soul it was consuming.

It made me wonder if the theory that jinns came from an unknown realm was true because my

dagger worked on creatures from Faela as well.

I glanced down at my bloody stomach and grimaced. If I didn't get out of here now, that crazed

jinn was going to make me its next victim. I was a hunter, sure, but I was still magicless—in the magic

user sense, anyway—so fighting against a creature like that was... impossible.

Saying a prayer for the human I couldn't save, I got to my feet and stumbled away. Luckily, the

jinn was... bathing in its victim's blood right now, so I had a window to escape. And a window to

beat myself up over losing that innocent human to that evil creature.

If I couldn't beat it, how were regular humans supposed to? I couldn't leave that creature out on

the loose. I couldn't let it kill again. But I couldn't stop it alone.

Once I'd stumbled to my car and drove a few miles away from that thing, I pulled out my phone

and dialed my handler's number, putting it on speaker.

"*Grim?*" Jasmyn asked.

"Yeah, it's me."

"*What's the matter? You hurt?*"

"Yeah... my mark was a jinn."

"*Oh shit, Grim, I didn't know. There were only reports of a man murdering humans, but there*

wasn't a description. How did you get out of there alive?"

"I barely did, but it was... playin' in a human's blood. I couldn't save the human, and—"

"*Of course you couldn't save him! That was a jinn ! Their magic isn't like anything we*

understand, and they're powerful. There's no way to get in close to them, not without magic."

"But I can't let it kill more innocents."

She sighed. "*You're right, but we need someone with magic to beat that thing."*

“What are you sayin’?”

“That there aren’t enough hunters in the city to take a jinn on without some magical backup.”

I paused before groaning. “Do ya have someone in mind?”

“No, but let’s talk after you get here. I’ll use a healing spell I bought to fix you right up.”

“Most witch magic doesn’t work on me,” I reminded her.

“This spell is meant to heal, not harm. It’ll work.”

I sighed. “Alright. Thanks, Jasmyn. I’ll be there in about ten minutes.”

“See you then.”

I HATED WHEN JASMYN WAS RIGHT, BUT I WAS RELIEVED THE HEALING SPELL WORKED ON ME BECAUSE I

didn’t have time to wait for my wound to heal. Plus, I hated seeing Rasha’s face when I came home

hurt. After Jasmyn healed me, I changed out of my bloody clothes and into fresh ones I had in my

truck, I sighed. Jasmyn didn’t have any good, reliable contacts she trusted to help with the jinn job,

and since I didn’t make friends with magic users, I only knew of one other person that could possibly

help me.

And I really really didn’t want his help. But what choice did I have? Let the jinn kill innocent

people or suck it up and deal?

I walked into the magic shop and found that same blue fae at the front counter. This time, I took my

hood off to help ease his worry and hopefully seem a little more friendly.

The blue-haired fae stared at me as he straightened up and asked, “Can I help you with

something?”

“Yes, actually. I need to speak to Basil Ellwood again.”

He stared at me before sighing. “It would be a lot easier if the two of you exchanged numbers.”

He pulled out his phone.

“I’ll make sure to ask him the next time I see him.”

The fae’s lips quirked up into a half-smile as he dialed a number on his phone. “Why hello, pretty

youngling.” He paused with amusement in his eyes. “Would you be a dear and come down to the

shop? There’s a man here to see you.” Another pause, and the fae eyed me. “It’s that Grim fellow.

Yes. Alright, see you soon.” He made a kissy noise into the phone—my eyebrows rose at that even as

something I refused to acknowledge soured my stomach—before hanging up and staring at me. “Bas

will be here in about fifteen minutes. Feel free to have a look around the store in the meantime.”

“Thank you,” I said as I backed away to look at a few items near the counter.

“Nik, Del finished the batch of shield talismans,” a deep voice said before a hulking man even

bigger than me walked out of the back room carrying a box. He stopped short at the sight of me and

narrowed his eyes.

The fae—Nik, I assumed—put his hand on the big man’s arm and said, “Thank you, darling. This

man is waiting for Basil.”

The big man nodded and said, “No funny business or you’ll be sorry.”

I lifted my gloved hands up. “I’m not here to start trouble. Just need Basil’s help with somethin’.”

He nodded, then pressed a kiss to the fae’s lips before he carried the box past me to a shelf and

began unloading it. The fae smiled after him for a moment, and I examined the big man. It took me a

long moment to figure out what type of creature he was, but that was likely because I’d never met a

half-werewolf, half-cyclops before. Cyclops were a rare breed to begin with, and there weren’t many

half-cyclops anywhere—especially ones with two eyes. A were-cyclops was unheard of. It wouldn’t

surprise me if that man was the only one in existence.

I began perusing the aisles, surprised to see how many protective charms, spells, and tonics there

were. It made me curious if they really worked, but I’d been hearing great

things about this store for

years. Everyone that shopped here always told me their talismans and everything worked wonders. I

believed them, but I didn't trust witches enough to buy anything and try it out myself. They probably

had hidden agendas or secret spells in their products, so I wouldn't risk it.

"Hey, sweetheart," a very tiny witch said as he walked out from the back and wrapped his arms

around the fae's waist. "Are you ready for your lunch break?"

The fae pressed his lips to the witch's with a grin. "In a few minutes, sweetness. Bas is on his

way to meet this... man."

The tiny witch turned his silver eyes on me and asked, "How do you know my brother?"

I blinked at that. Brother? They looked nothing alike with this man's short blond hair and tiny

stature—even smaller than Basil. It took me a second to recover from the shock of that and answered,

"We met at... work a few times."

The witch narrowed his eyes at me, but nodded, although I could tell he didn't believe me. But he

looked over at the were-cyclops and asked, "Is there enough, Gray? I was going to make some more

tomorrow."

“There’s plenty, little imp. We can probably wait until next week to work on more,” the big guy

replied before walking past me again and going behind the counter to give the little witch a kiss on the

lips, too. It surprised me at first before I realized all three of them were in a relationship together.

Having multiple partners was more common in the magical world than the human, so it still shocked

me at times, but when they smiled at each other, I could tell they cared about one another. So

whatever. You do you and all that. As long as no one was harming another, I didn’t care who you

were with.

“Grim?”

I turned at the sound of Basil Ellwood’s voice. He was standing close to the door, wearing his

normal all black attire, and looking like a goddamn demi god with the light spilling over his gorgeous

features. My dick did a jump in my pants despite myself. The traitor. When Basil licked his lips, I had

to hold in a groan.

“Grim?”

I blinked when I realized I was staring and forgot to respond to him. Get it together, man, he’s a

frickin’ *witch*. “Hey.” Did my voice normally sound that husky?

Basil's brow furrowed. "Are you okay?"

Giving myself a mental shake, I asked, "Can we go somewhere to talk? I have a job I need some help on."

He gave me a concerned expression, obviously not believing me.

I held my hands up. "If I wanted to kill ya, do you really think I'd come into a store your family owns and show my face?"

He sighed. "No, I guess not."

"Look, I haven't had lunch yet. You wanna walk next door and get some food so I can tell you what's goin' on?"

He smiled a little. "Sure."

"Don't forget to exchange numbers!" the fae yelled from the counter.

Basil waved him off. "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

The other witch asked Basil, "Are you sure you're okay?"

Basil rolled his eyes. "I'm fine, Del."

The other witch narrowed his eyes first at Basil, then at me and said, "If you hurt him, I'll come after you."

Since the were-cyclops and the fae were standing behind the small witch with their arms crossed,

making it obvious that if that Del witch came after me, I'd have to deal with them, too, I said, "I won't

hurt 'im. Not unless he tries hurtin' me or... someone else."

The witch nodded, then said to his brother, "Be careful."

Basil sighed, but nodded at him before jerking his head to the side and saying, "Come on or

they'll never leave us alone."

I nodded and let him hold the door for me as I passed through.

Before he shut the door, I heard giggling from inside the shop, and Basil ground out, "Shut up,

Delaro!" Then slammed the door shut, or tried to slam it, but it only closed slowly. Which had me

stifling my own laugh.

Then I realized I was entertained by *witches*, and I cussed myself out.

Basil walked beside me on the sidewalk to the next building over, neither of us saying a thing. A

hostess sat us at a small table near the kitchen, and a waitress came over to get our drink order, and

Basil said, "I know what I want, but have you been here before?"

I waved that away. "I'll take a burger and fries." Basil wrinkled his nose and ordered some weird

veggie dish, so once the waitress walked away, I asked, "What's wrong with a burger?"

"Nothing, if you like eating innocent animals."

My eyebrows lifted. “You’re a vegetarian?”

“Yes. Most witches are.”

My brow furrowed because I knew that wasn’t true. The witches I’d known back home all ate

meat. “They do at home.”

“Yeah? Where’s that?”

I mentally cursed myself for giving up this information, but I still answered honestly. “Gauhala.”

On the other side of the world.

Basil nodded. “What made you move here?”

“We needed a change of scenery.” Not exactly the truth, but hell if I was gonna get into *that* right

now.

“Never been there.” A small laugh came out of him. “I’ve actually never traveled out of the

country. Out of this realm? Yes. But not out of Brinnswick.”

“Outta this realm?”

“I lived in Faela for a few years, and I go back every few weeks.”

My eyebrows lifted again, surprised he was offering up so much personal information. And

Faela? I didn’t think they allowed anyone but fae to even visit them. “Faela?”

He nodded. “It’s peaceful there.”

I had no clue what to do with that, but luckily, the waitress brought us drinks, interrupting us.

Once she was gone, Basil asked, “What do you need?”

I sighed, happy to get straight to it. “My current mark is a jinn. He’s wanted for murder, rape, and

assault. I found him, tried to take ‘im on myself, and was nearly killed. Not even my dagger worked

on his magic.”

“Yeah, no kidding. Jinns are no joke.” He took a sip of the water the waitress had given him.

When he said nothin’ else, I added, “I lost an innocent human in the process.”

Basil frowned. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

He obviously wasn’t getting it. “I need your help to take it down, shadow boy.”

The witch froze. “You’re seriously asking for my help?”

I huffed out a frustrated breath. “Not ‘cause I want to, but you’re the only magic user I know that

hasn’t tried killin’ me in the last year, so...” I trailed off with a shrug.

“Such high standards you have for your friends.” Before I could point out that we weren’t friends,

he kept speaking. “I’m in, but do we need more backup? I can call my brothers or my... dads to come

help if you think we need it.”

I blinked at that. I’d barely told him anything about the job and he was

jumping in anyway, *and*

offering to bring in more help. I was immediately suspicious. “Why are you helping me?”

Basil rolled his eyes. “Because you asked.” My eyes widened, and Basil stared at me before

sighing. “I don’t want a wild jinn on the loose, either. The last thing we need is some crazy-strong

lunatic hurting innocent humans for the hell of it. Give me the run down so we can make a plan.”

Trying to take him at his word, I nodded and started laying out everything I knew about our perp.

Our food came out while I was talking, so I spoke in between bites of delicious food while silently

praying I could actually afford the meal I was indulging in.

When I finished talking, Basil asked, “Are you still injured?”

“What?”

He rolled his eyes again. “You said the jinn hurt you, so are you still injured? I can heal you if you

need it.”

My shocked eyes felt like they were buggin’ out, but I shook my head. “I’m healed.”

He nodded and opened his mouth to speak, but a voice called over, “Basil?”

Basil sent me an apologetic smile before turning in his seat toward a man in a chef’s uniform who

walked out from the kitchen and said, “Hey, Tio.”

The chef guy made his way over and surprised me by flicking a towel in Basil’s face as he said,

“You didn’t tell me you were here, asshat.”

Basil batted the towel away with a laugh, and the sound shot right through me. I didn’t know if I’d

ever heard him laugh before, at least not a true one, and though I’d never admit this even by pain of

torture, he had a hellova laugh. Holy shit.

Basil said, “Didn’t plan ahead, and I didn’t want to bother you. You on break?”

“Yeah, just for a few minutes.” The chef turned to me and said, “Hey, I’m Tio, Basil’s brother.”

My eyes widened yet again. *Another* brother? And the chef... what if... I glanced down at my

food, and Basil snorted and muttered, “He didn’t fucking poison you, hunter.”

Tio jerked back in offense. “I would never do that to someone.”

“I know, little bro, chill,” Basil said. “He’s just a paranoid fuck.”

Tio’s eyes jerked back and forth between us before he leaned close to Basil and whispered, “Are

you in trouble?”

Basil sighed. “No, I’m fine. Grim’s my... friend. I’m helping him out with something.”

Tio didn't look convinced, but he straightened and nodded, then turned to me again. "Don't fuck

with my brother."

"For fuck's sake, the poor guy was already threatened by Delaro and his guys, you don't need to

threaten him, too, Tio."

Tio turned to Basil and shrugged. "It wasn't a threat. It was a warning. He should know if he

messes with one Ellwood, the rest will come after him." The guy turned a smile on me. "Hope you

liked your meal." He patted Basil's head—making Basil smack his hand off—then turned and walked

back into the kitchen.

Basil sighed. "Sorry my family is insane."

"They care about you," I said slowly. That was... different than what I'd seen in the past from

witches. Back home, witches were only about number one: themselves. They didn't give two shits

about anyone else, not even the other witches in their coven. I felt like I was watching aliens interact

together.

"Are you okay, Grim?"

I blinked at the witch in front of me, then took a deep breath and blew it out slowly. "Yeah, fine."

You about ready for our check?”

He waved me off. “Oh, they don’t charge me here.”

“Because your brother’s the head chef?”

“And because my other brother Delaro and his viramores—those two other guys that looked like

Del’s guard dogs—they all own the place.” He grinned. “They own the whole block.”

I tilted my head. “Even the shoe store run by dwarves at the other end?”

He nodded. “Yeah, and the flower shop run by a succubus. Why does that matter?”

I shook my head, a little amazed and dazed by this entire day. I’d never seen witches working in

harmony with other creatures. Although... for all I knew they were slave workers, forcing these

people to work for them. As I scanned the restaurant and observed the waiters and waitresses, I had a

feeling they weren’t being forced to work here at all. They seemed genuinely happy for the most part.

Did I enter some kind of alternate universe or something?

“Grim?”

“Yeah, let’s go. Are you sure I don’t need to pay for my food?”

He waved me off. “My brothers would kick my ass if I even asked if we could pay. Trust me, it’s

easier this way. Del might be small, but he’s formidable, and Tio would be

sneaky about it so I'd

never see it coming until I tasted a pickle in my ice cream or something equally as gross."

I couldn't help but snort. "He'd put a pickle in your ice cream?"

He wrinkled his nose. "He's done worse, many *many* times."

A smile quirked up on my lips as I followed the witch out of the restaurant.

"So I didn't drive down here, so can I catch a ride to this jinn?"

"How did you get here, then?" I asked as I led the way to my car.

"I flew."

I stopped in my tracks. "You can fly?"

He laughed—and it hit me in the gut again, but I tamped that shit down—and he said, "I wish. No,

my Bonded is a dragon, so Blaze brought me and dropped me off in the alley around the back, then I

walked around to the front."

"You're Bonded to a dragon?"

"Yep. Hold on." He fell silent for a second, and before I could ask what the hell he was doing, a

bearded dragon popped out of nowhere, right on Basil's shoulder and chest.

Startled, I said, "What the hell."

Basil snorted. "This is Blaze, my Bonded. I'm sure you saw him a few times before, but I don't

think you ever asked his name.”

I hadn't. I'd seen a weird lizard on Basil's shoulder before, but I didn't ask because I didn't want

to know anything else about the witch. “I thought you said he was a dragon, not a lizard.”

“Bonded animals can change form. Blaze's natural form is a huge, black dragon, but he can change

to a bearded dragon like this or any other reptile easily. He likes being in lizard form so he can be

lazy and catch a ride on my shoulder.” He kissed the lizard's head when it made a weird noise in his

direction. “Like it isn't true,” Basil whispered to Blaze, and I shook my head at them.

I knew about Bonded Ones, but I'd never been close enough to one without it trying to kill me, so

I wasn't all that familiar with them. “Gotcha. Is he coming to help with the jinn, too?”

“Sure. A dragon's hide is pretty good at repelling certain magics, so having him with us could be

beneficial. He can act as a shield if mine don't hold up against it. I've never gone up against a jinn

before, to be honest.”

“Right.” We reached my shitty truck, so I waved at it. “Here we are.”

Basil nodded and hopped into the passenger seat without comment. I kinda expected some mean

commentary, but it didn't happen. This witch wasn't following any of the normal witch behavior I

was used to, and it was putting me through the wringer. I didn't know how to handle a witch that was

seemingly nice because it went against every single thing I knew about them. But witches were

tricksters, so maybe he was attempting to lure me in to get into my good graces before he struck.

Although, that made little sense considering how strong his magic was. He'd caught me with his

magic many times, held me back away from himself or my target, but never once had he hurt me. In

fact, he'd been keeping me safe wherever we ran into each other. It really made no sense at all. What

in the world did this witch want from me?

With a sigh, I put my car in drive and headed back toward the jinn. Hopefully my mark hadn't

moved far from where I'd left it, but I guess we'd see when we got there.

He was quiet until I was parking the car again, and he said, "I'm glad you came to me. Let me put

my number in your phone so you can call me yourself next time." My initial reaction was to argue, but

instead of doing that, I pulled out my phone and passed it over. Basil entered his number, dialed his

own so he'd have mine as well, then passed me back the phone and said, "Thanks for going to lunch

with me.” He got out of the car before I could respond. What the hell had that been about? It wasn’t

like I took him out on a date or somethin’. We didn’t even pay for the damn food.

I sighed and got out, too, then silently led the way to the jinn. Hopefully it hadn’t killed anyone

else in the hours I’d been gone. I’d feel terrible if it had.

When we reached a good recon spot and had eyes on our target, I asked, “Can you trap him in a

shield?”

“I can try, but I won’t know until we try it. As soon as my magic hits his, he’ll know we’re here,

so we have to be ready for it.”

I pulled out my dagger and my chakram—a circular blade that could be thrown or used in close

combat. Basil eyed my weapons, but didn’t comment, so I said, “I’m ready when you are.”

He hesitated before making eye contact. “I know you don’t trust me, but I want you to know I have

your back. No matter what happens in there, I’ll be sure to get you out so you can go home to your

daughter.”

The thing was... I believed him. I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to trust a witch, but... after

everything I’d seen of the man, I didn’t think he was evil. He’d always tried

to help me and others, so

why wouldn't he now? I hated that I believed him, but I did. So I said, "I'll try to get you home, too."

And I would. Yeah, witches had screwed me over in the past, but Basil hadn't, so I would do

everything in my power to protect him if need be.

He nodded, then closed his eyes and called on his magic. The wind picked up, smelling like a

summer storm, and when Basil opened his eyes again, lightning was flashing in them. He shot me a

cocky smirk, then pushed his arms forward and a howl of wind rushed by, almost knocking me over.

A second later, a glistening shield, with only a few spots of cloudy black shadow magic,

surrounded the jinn.

The evil being let out a loud screech, so Basil and I nodded at each other before we stood and

charged.

C H A P T E R N I N E

B A S I L

Ididn't know what happened in the past hour and a half with Grim, but something seemed to have

changed. He was being... kind. And he kept staring at me like he'd never seen me before. It was

unnerving, but since he wasn't being a dick, I'd take it.

Giving myself a mental shake to get back in the game, I nodded at Grim, and we took off toward

the target. The jinn was pushing its magic against mine, and my magic was *bending*. What the hell? It

wasn't breaking, but the fact that it could even push my magic like that made me nervous as hell. If the

jinn kept it up, it might puncture a hole in the shield that was holding it inside.

Blaze hopped off my shoulder and grew into his full dragon form. He stepped in front of me to

help block me, just in case, but I moved to the side so I could keep my eye on the jinn. That didn't

make Blaze very happy. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Grim eyeing the huge-ass dragon, but he

didn't comment.

"Is there any chance of transportin' the jinn?" Grim yelled over the sound of my wind magic as he

shifted his weapons in his gloved hands.

I shook my head. "Not as long as it's fighting me."

Grim nodded and stepped forward, then yelled at the jinn, "You have one chance here, Saral. You

can come with us peacefully, or you can fight us 'til one of us kills ya. What'll it be?"

The jinn cocked its head to the side, regarding Grim in a way I wasn't

comfortable with, then it

cackled and hissed, “Hunter and witch together cannot beat me, silly child. I’ll give you a choice. Run

and live, or stay and die.”

Grim sighed before facing me. “Guess it chose option two. Ready?”

Unfortunately. “Yeah. Jinn, last chance. You’re fighting the Power of Three.”

The jinn roared at us, slammed its hand against my shield, and broke free. Before I could erect

another shield, the jinn tackled Grim to the ground. Blaze stepped forward to grab the jinn with his

teeth, but Grim and the jinn were grappling, and I could tell that Blaze was afraid he’d hurt the hunter.

Grim yelled out, slashing his dagger and chakram at the thing. I saw blood flying, but I didn’t

know whose it was. In a moment of panic, I drew on more magic than I normally did, wrapped it

around the jinn, and yanked with everything I had. The jinn flew off Grim, but it kept chopping through

my magic to get to him. It was like a wild beast, and nothing like the civilized creatures jinns usually

were. It must’ve been hopped up on blood magic. That... was damn terrifying.

The creature made a wild jump toward Grim, and without thinking—and even quicker than Blaze

could react—I called a lightning bolt down from the sky, hitting that bastard

straight in the chest. The

lightning my brothers and I called upon looked like normal lightning, but it was anything but. It had

magic, power beyond what was typical in this realm, it was so strong, nothing could fight against it.

So I blasted that asshole straight in the chest, frying it after only a few seconds. As the jinn fell

forward, lifeless, a few wisps of magic floated out of its back. At first, I assumed it was the jinn's

magic, but after I observed it for a moment, I realized that it was the souls of the people the jinn had

consumed.

“Holy shit,” Grim said as he walked over to stand beside me, limping a little.

“Are you alright?” I asked as Blaze went back to his bearded dragon form and crawled up my

body to my shoulder.

He waved me away and pointed to the souls. “Are those...?”

“Yeah, they are. Not only did we take down this asshole, we saved a few souls that haven't been

digested yet. I might need to call my brother in to help them pass over.”

“What?”

I waved him off and called Delaro. “Hey, I just killed a jinn and a few souls he'd consumed came

out of him and are sorta floating around. You and Nik think you can set them

free?”

“*Yeah, sure. Where are you?*” Delaro asked.

“I’ll text you the address.” I hung up, texted him, and turned to Grim. “My brother’s on his way.

You want to haul the body into your truck so you can get paid?”

“But you took him down.”

“And I stole a zillion bounties from you already. Plus, you helped. You pulled me in to begin with.

I don’t care about the body or the bounty. Let’s get it in your truck.”

He stared at me for several long seconds before sighing and nodding. We got the body in his truck,

and he walked off to make a few phone calls.

Delaro, Nikolai, and Grayson arrived a few minutes later. Del took one look at the scene and

grimaced. Because of his Bonded cat—that was a bakeneko, or something like it, basically a ghost cat

—Delaro was able to move between this realm and the ghostly plane. He even saw ghosts on this

plane. Nikolai helped him figure out how to free the spirits so they could move on, so the two of them

helped souls whenever they came across them. I was pretty sure my little brother was like a fucking

saint or something.

Because of that, I let him do his thing while I stood back with Gray and

watched. A minute later,

Grim walked back over to watch as well, but he asked, “What are they doing?”

Gray answered, “Freeing the spirits so their souls can move on.”

Grim eyed him for a second before nodding. “They’re freeing them? Not... capturing them?”

Gray turned angry eyes on the hunter, and who could blame him? Grim was being a dick, but what

was new? I was used to it after a few months, but I didn’t really want Gray to kick Grim’s ass, as

entertaining as that would be. So I stepped between them, shot Gray a smirk, then turned around and

sighed at Grim, saying, “You really still think we’re evil, huh?”

He shook his head and shrugged at the same time, as if he couldn’t make up his mind. Considering

he’d thought I was demon spawn or something before, I’d take his indecision as a step in the right

direction.

Waving him off, I turned back to Gray and asked, “Do you guys have this or do you want us to

stick around?”

“No, you can go. Nik called Alec on the way here, so BCA agents should arrive any minute.”

“Right. Thanks. Tell them I said thank you. I’ll see you guys at home.”

Gray gave me a nod before turning away to stare at his viramores with laser eye focus.

Turning to Grim, I absently pet Blaze's neck as he stuffed his head into my collar, and I said, "We

should head out before the others get here and confiscate the body for evidence."

Grim's head cocked to the side. "You're comin' with me?"

"That okay?" I didn't really need to go with him, but... I wasn't ready to leave him either.

Especially since he'd been amiable today.

"Yeah, sure." Once we were in his car and driving away, he asked, "You live with your brother?"

"Huh?"

"Back there, you said 'see you guys at home' to that Gray guy, so does that mean you live with

them?"

I was shocked he was bothering to ask anything personal, but I kept my shit together enough to

answer. "My whole family lives on coven ground. Del, Nik, and Gray have their own house, and so

do I, but we see each other in the big house a lot. Most of us eat dinner there, or we try to as many

nights a week as we can."

"The big house?"

I nodded. “It’s the house my siblings and I grew up in. Our coven leader, his viraamore, and a few

of my younger siblings still live there. It’s where we tend to congregate.” I shrugged, not really

wanting to go into the whole Ailin being my kind-of-dad thing.

He nodded, but fell quiet for a few minutes. Totally randomly, he pulled the car over, put it in

park, then angled his body to face me and asked, “Why did you help me?”

I blinked at him. “Because you asked.”

His eyes narrowed. “I can’t figure you out.”

“Me? Seriously? You’re the one trying to kill me one second and asking for help the next.”

He sighed and ran his gloved hand over his hair.

Since he seemed as out of sorts as I felt, I changed the subject. “I can’t take you seriously while

calling you Grim.”

He stared at me for several beats before sighing. “That’s not my name, anyway.”

“Is that your weird way of saying I can call you Hiro?”

He lifted a shoulder, but since he didn’t deny it, I grinned.

“Hiro... I like that. It fits you.”

His brow furrowed. “I’m not sure why you think I look like a Hiro, but whatever.”

“It’s a lot better than *Grim*.”

He tilted his head. “I’ll give ya that.”

That made me smile wider.

He wrinkled his nose. “Stop smiling at me like that.”

“Aww, come on, you like it. It’s okay to show emotions other than *stoic asshole*, you know.”

“Is that what you see? A stoic asshole?”

I shrugged as I continued staring at him. “Not really, but I think that’s what you want everyone to see.”

He sighed and surprised me by saying, “Yeah, I guess so.”

“Wow. Are you feeling alright?”

“What? Why?”

“Because you’re being nice and agreeing with me and shit. Are you dying? Did you get hit? Were

you poisoned and something terrible is eating away at your brain and turning you into an entirely

different person?”

A reluctant laugh came out of him. “Shut up. God, you’re annoying.”

“But you like me.”

“I wouldn’t go that far.”

I ticked things off on my fingers as I listed them. “You came looking for me.

You took me to lunch,

you drove me around, you're sitting in a car with me for long periods of time like a teenager dropping

off his date, and the biggest thing of all."

When I didn't continue, he tilted his head toward me and said, "I can't believe I'm fallin' for this,

but what?"

"You haven't tried to kill me in weeks!" I said loudly, throwing in a little jazz hands.

Hiro chuckled, a deep husky sound that resonated with me and woke something up inside of me.

His eyes were bright and filled with amusement, his lips were spread in a pretty smile—those damn

dimples were on display—his entire face was lit up, the sound infectious. He was gorgeous. And I

really wanted to lick his dimples. Was that weird? Probably, but I so didn't care.

When he laughed, all I could do was stare at the beauty of it. And then it hit me, right there, sitting

in his car with a dead body in the truck bed, it hit me, and I breathed out, "Holy shit."

Grim blinked at me, still with a smile on his face. "What?"

"You... holy *shit*, I get it now."

"You get what?"

My eyes widened and I blurted, “You’re my viramore.”

He froze and the amusement of a moment ago was wiped clear off his face.
“What did you say?”

“You’re my viramore. Holy shit, that’s why I can’t stay away from you, and
why I can’t stop

thinking about you, and—”

“I’m not your viramore.”

I stopped short. “What? Yes, you are. It’s the only thing that makes sense,
and now that I’ve said it

out loud, it’s like... it settled in my chest, and now I just... I just *know*.
You’re my fucking viramore,

Hiro Grimsby.”

“There’s no way I’m a viramore to a witch. No fuckin’ way.”

“But you are. I know you can feel it.”

“I’m human, Basil. We don’t have viramores.”

I rolled my eyes. “Humans do too, they just can’t recognize it as easily.”
Pursing my lips, I

narrowed my eyes at him. “Maybe that’s why you’re being weird right now,
although you’re more

than a simple human.”

“I’m human.”

“Whatever. Viramore can b—”

“I’m not your fuckin’ viramore!” he yelled.

I snapped my mouth shut with a frown and took him in. He was seething, anger brewing beneath

the surface, his face turning red, his jaw clenched, his whole body tense. Blaze unstuffed his head

from my collar, his entire body going tense and ready to pounce as he eyed Hiro. I pushed myself up

against the car door to put more space between us and asked, “What’s wrong?”

He turned and leaned over, getting in my face. “What’s wrong? A fuckin’ *witch* just told me I was

his *viramore*, that’s what’s fuckin’ wrong. Witches hate humans and only look out for themselves. A

witch my *viramore*? You must think I’m stupid ‘cause there’s no way witches even have real souls.

Witches don’t care about people. They use them and throw them away when they’re finished with

‘em.”

I jerked back as if he’d slapped me. “I don’t know what witches you’ve known before me, but not

all of us are like that.” My voice was softer than I intended. It almost sounded a little hurt, but that

couldn’t be right, I didn’t know him well enough for that yet—yeah, going with that for now.

He snorted and sneered. “Right. You just want to use my heart for some evil deed. Well guess

what? I don’t fall for that shit, and I sure as hell ain’t fallin’ for some fuckin’

witch.” He sat back and

turned to look out the windshield. “Now get out of my car.”

“Hiro—”

“Get the fuck out, *witch*.”

He seemed just as hurt as I felt, but I could tell that he’d lash out even more if I tried to force the

issue. He needed some space to clear his head. So I got out of the truck and started shutting the door,

but paused and said, “For the record, I’ve been wishing for a *viramore* my entire life. There’s no

scenario where I’d hurt him, or anyone he cares about. I’d protect him and everything and everyone he

loves, even... even if he hated me.” I shut the door before he had a chance to respond.

Then I moved into the shadows and watched with my heart in my throat as he drove away.

C H A P T E R T E N

H I R O

“So you kicked him out of the car and left him there?” Jasmyn asked. It was unfortunate I’d had a

dead body in the car and had to bring it in when I’d left Basil Ellwood on the side of the road because

Jasmyn took one look at me and knew something was wrong.

“Yeah.”

She lifted a brow. “If he was as evil as you say he is, do you really think he’d let you kick him out

and drive away?”

I opened my mouth, then snapped it shut and grunted. “It’s not like he can’t get home on his own.”

“True, but an evil person wouldn’t have reacted well to what you said to them.”

“So you’re on his side, then? Figures.”

She sighed. “I’ve said it before, but I’ll say it again. Not all witches are the evil beings you’re

used to. The Ellwoods in particular protected and saved many lives during the war here, not to

mention the fact that three of them ended the war altogether.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. I’ve heard the stories.”

“But have you listened to them?”

“Witches manipulate people. There’s no way the stories are true.”

She shook her head. “But maybe if you’d listened, you’d know that Basil Ellwood was one of the

witches that took on that dark magic and made it possible for the berserkers to be beat.”

I blinked at her. “Basil was?”

“Mhm.”

I stared for another minute, then sighed. “Doesn’t matter.”

She made a disgruntled sound in the back of her throat. “But he told you he was your *viramore*,

Grim... you’re his soulmate.”

“You’re telling me I should believe him, and what? Go out with the asshole? He’s a *witch*.”

“I’m telling you that maybe you need to give him a chance. You had bad experiences with witches,

but do you really believe all witches are the same?”

“Yes.”

She sighed, exasperated. “Grim, when one gnome attacks and kills an innocent, do you go back

and kill its entire family?”

“What? ‘Course not.”

She gave me a look.

I stared back for a minute, then grumbled.

“If you don’t judge all gnomes on one’s actions, why do you judge all witches based on a few?”

I clenched my jaw. Logically, that made sense, but they were witches, and witches were evil

creatures that did evil things. An image of Basil running in front of a vampire to shield me from its

attack flashed through my mind followed by another image of him taking a hit from the basilisk instead

of letting it hit me. So maybe he wasn’t *all* evil, but that didn’t make him

good, either. My jaw tensed

further. Maybe Jasmyn was right, but that didn't mean I wanted to fuckin' date a witch. How would

that even work? There was no way I was taking him around Rasha.

Jasmyn patted my hand and stood. "Think about it, Grim. Viramores are the most important thing

in the magical community. If someone's calling you theirs, well, that's not something to take lightly.

Those creatures live for centuries, and sometimes they wait that long to find that one person that's

meant to be theirs... this isn't some simple crush, it's much more than that, and it's not going to go

away any time soon."

I didn't respond because I had nothin' to say to that.

"Leave the body in the back. I'll grab your money so you can be on your way."

Grateful for the subject change, I hopped up and went to retrieve the dead jinn. With this payout,

I'd be able to keep the electric on for another month and maybe even buy a pack of cookies to share

with Rasha.

But no matter what I did, I couldn't get Basil Ellwood out of my head, especially the sad

expression on his face when I left him on the side of the road.

AS I MOVED TOWARD THE COMMOTION AND FLASHING LIGHTS,
I WASN'T EVEN SURPRISED TO SEE BASIL

standing twenty feet away, watching the scene as well. It had been two weeks since he'd told me I

was his viramore, and even though I'd felt his presence more than once in that time, I hadn't seen him.

He looked as tired as I felt, like maybe he hadn't been sleeping either.

I'd thought about what Jasmyn said so much over the weeks, but... I hadn't been able to bring

myself to see Basil again. I was... thinkin' about it, though. I couldn't believe it, but I was.

Trying to ignore him, I held my grocery bags in one hand and focused on the crime scene.

Listening to the officers, I grimaced. From what I could tell, they'd found yet another dead witch in

the alley beside my normal grocery store. That meant this serial killer was uncomfortably close to my

home.

"You shop here?" Basil's voice reached my ears as he came to stand beside me, still starin' at the

scene.

I grunted in response, not really wanting to talk to him, but also not willing to tell him to go away.

God, what was that? Why did I feel this weird... thing toward some witch? There was no way what

he said was true, but the longer I'd been apart from him, the more I thought...
no. It wasn't true. He

wasn't my fuckin'... *that*.

"It's another witch."

"I know." Against my better judgment, I asked, "Why are you on this side of the tape?"

He sighed. "Alec still won't put me on the fucking case."

I lifted a brow at him, figuring Alec was his boss. "Why not?"

"He's being a dick, but it's whatever. I just want this guy caught."

I nodded and frowned at the white sheet covering a body. "Are you followin' me?"

"Psh. My life doesn't revolve around you, Hiro." His eyes did somethin' weird, almost like a

flash of lightning as sorrow drifted over his face. But it was gone so fast, I thought I might've

imagined it. "I came when I heard about the witch, but it's a surprise you're here... it's almost like

fate wants us together."

"You believe all that shit?"

He ignored me, and after a moment, he said, "I knew him."

"Who?"

"The victim. I went to school with his son, so I met the guy a couple of times at school functions."

I turned to him. "I'm sorry."

He sent me a sad smile. "Thanks." Another minute passed before he said, "I'm glad you haven't

run away or punched my lights out yet."

A snort came out of me before I could stop it. "There's still time."

He chuckled, then sobered and asked, "Why do you hate witches so much?"

"They're manipulative and always out to get you. Dealing with them only ends in heartbreak,

blood, and broken bodies."

He made a disgruntled sound in his throat. "That isn't true."

"It has been in my experience."

He fell quiet for a long time, but for some reason I didn't move away, and neither did he.

Eventually, he said, "Hiro?"

"What?"

"I would never hurt you. And I meant what I said. I know you don't want to hear it, but I meant it."

My jaw clenched in anger and frustration. "Yeah, well, I don't believe it."

He rolled his eyes, then refocused on the crime scene. "Of all the people fate could've picked for

me, they gave me the biggest asshole I've ever met."

"You're one to talk."

He wasn't facing me, but I still saw a small smile perk up on his lips. "Is that your way of

admitting I'm your viramore?"

"Hell no," I growled, shaking my head.

"Hiro..." His voice was so damn miserable.

Something twinged in my chest at that misery, and I decided I needed to get the hell out of there

before he said anything else. Turning on my heel, I rushed through the growing crowd, ignoring Basil

calling my name.

I didn't understand what was happening to me, so I needed to clear my head.

After sitting in my car for a few minutes, I went back home to my kid for dinner, grateful I'd had a

chance to get my groceries.

After I tucked Rasha in bed for the night, I was putting the leftovers in the fridge and my phone

beeped with an incoming text. It didn't even surprise me to find the text from the witch.

BASIL: I'M SORRY I MADE YOU MAD EARLIER. I KNOW YOU HATE ME, BUT I MEANT WHAT I SAID, AND I

hope you know I would never hurt you.

EVEN THROUGH HIS TEXT, I SWEAR I COULD FEEL HIS DISTRESS, AND IT HURT MY FUCKIN' CHEST.

“Motherfucker,” I said under my breath, and another text came through.

BASIL: *I KNOW I’M THE LAST PERSON YOU WANT TO SEE OR TALK TO, BUT I’M HERE IF YOU NEED ME.*

Basil: *Before I stop bugging you for the night, I have to say my peace. I get that you don’t like*

witches, but being a witch isn’t the only thing about me. I can’t help what I am any more than you

can. I may be a witch, but I’m other things too. Just... think about it. Goodnight, hunter.

MY HEART POUNDED HEAVILY IN MY CONSTRICTING CHEST. MY KNEEJERK REACTION WAS TO WRITE

that I never wanted to talk to the fuckin’ witch again, but the pain in my chest, the grief residing there,

the heartbreak... I wasn’t sure if it was only my imagination, but I kinda thought those feelings

weren’t my own. Or at least not all of it belonged to me. And if he was that heartbroken, well, I didn’t

want to be the cause of more.

So I set my phone down and took a beat to think things over. I didn’t want to believe his words. I

didn’t want to believe that he was my viramore or whatever the hell they called it in Brinnswick. But

the more I examined my feelings and this strange *thing* I felt toward him, the more I knew there was

something goin’ on. God, what if he’d hexed me? But no, he couldn’t. Harmful witch magic wouldn’t

work on me.

There was somethin' there though. I couldn't deny it any longer.

Every time I thought about cutting off contact, about moving far away, and blocking his number,

pain constricted my chest and made it hard to breathe. The fact was, I didn't want to cut him off,

which was fucked up because I also wanted nothin' to do with him and his evil ways.

The past two weeks had been a special kind of hell since a part of me was longing to see him

again while the other part wished he'd fall off the face of the planet.

A hiss came out of my lips as pain made my heart seize up for a moment. Rubbing my chest and

tryin' my best to push *all* thoughts of Basil out of my head—yeah right, he was fuckin' always on my

mind—I finished in the kitchen and walked upstairs. My emotions were all over the place, and the

thought of lying in my empty bed all alone was crippling, so I found myself wandering into Rasha's

room.

As I climbed into Rasha's bed, she rolled toward me and sleepily said, "Daddy?"

"Sorry, peanut. I didn't mean to wake you up."

"That's 'kay." She rolled over and snuggled into my side. "Did you have a bad dream?"

“Yeah, baby girl... you could say that.”

“Don’t worry, Daddy, I’ll protect you.”

I closed my eyes as emotions gripped my throat making it hard to speak. I kissed her forehead and

held her tight. “I know you will, peanut.”

She said, “Gimme some sugar.”

I chuckled and kissed her lips, her cheek, and her forehead.

She sighed as she fell back to sleep, and I simply held her long into the night.

IT HAD BEEN THREE DAYS SINCE I LAST SAW BASIL, AND I COULDN’T STOP THINKIN’ ABOUT HIM. THE

only reason I could believe was that he’d hexed me. Why else would I be going this crazy over not

seeing him?

I had to know. I had to figure this out.

Pulling out my phone, I shot off a text.

ME: MEET ME AT THE BAR TONIGHT.

Basil: 8:00?

Me: Sure.

Basil: See you then.

I CERTAINLY HADN’T EXPECTED HIM TO RESPOND SO QUICKLY, BUT FINE. THAT WAS SET. I ONLY HAD

three hours to kill. Groaning to myself, I finished making dinner for Rasha

and me. Luckily, Ms. Ulma

had already agreed to sit tonight.

I WAS TWENTY MINUTES EARLY, AND NOW THAT I WAS SITTING
HERE WAITING, I WISHED I HADN'T COME

inside yet. I thought being in here would help, but now, I couldn't stop
bouncing my leg, ripping up a

napkin, staring at the door, and annoying myself in the process.

But then Basil walked in and my breath caught. He was wearing his normal
combat attire, all

black, with one side of his hair braided back, but somehow, he looked more
beautiful than usual.

Despite myself, I'd always thought he was sexy, anyone with eyes would, but
after not seeing him for

a few days, he blew me away. That tight, muscular body, his broody attitude
that I wanted to kiss

away.

Wait. What? I did *not* wanna kiss Basil Ellwood. *Who the fuck am I kidding?*

Fuckin' hell, I couldn't even lie to myself anymore, could I?

Jesus, he really had hexed me, hadn't he?

When he spotted me, he smiled, making his whole face light up in a way that
made him even more

beautiful, and he aimed that smile right at me. A stupid hopeful smile that
pierced my heart in a way I

didn't know he could.

“Hey, Hiro,” he said as he slid into the booth across from me. “I’m glad you texted me.”

I blinked at him for several seconds, but didn’t say anything. I couldn’t. My heart was in my throat.

His brow furrowed as he stared at me still with that smile on his face. “You okay?”

I opened my mouth, snapped it shut, and stared for another beat before blurting, “Did you put a hex on me?”

His smile vanished, and he jerked his head back, a look of sorrow forming on his face. When he spoke, his voice was broken. “I would never do that.”

My chest hurt. It fucking hurt because I’d been the one to dash that hopeful expression off his face.

“You swear on your brothers’ lives that you’re not lyin’ to me? That you didn’t hex me?”

He nodded, but his eyes looked glassy. “Yeah... of course.”

“Say it.”

He swallowed and blinked a few times before staring me straight in the eye. “I swear on my

brothers’ lives, on my parents’ grave, on my own fucking life, that I didn’t put a hex on you... *and* that

you’re my *viramore*.”

I sat back in disbelief that he'd done it, and disbelief that I actually fuckin' believed him.

He hardened his resolve and asked, "Do you want me to do a promise spell, or I dunno, you could

get a fucking lie detector test or some shit. Would that make you feel better?" He leaned forward with

one elbow on the table. "I don't fucking lie. I might be a dick, I might break a few rules, but I'm not a

fucking liar. I've been messed with too many times to do that to another person." He slid out of the

booth and stood, but I didn't miss him wiping his eye before he faced me again and tapped his knuckle

on the tabletop. "See ya around, Hiro." Then he turned on his heel and walked out.

I sat there in shock for about fifteen seconds before my sense kicked in, and I ran after him. It took

me a second to figure out where he was when I ran out of the bar, but then I remembered that he liked

to fly his damn dragon, so I rushed around the side of the building, praying I wasn't too late.

When I reached the alley behind the bar, Basil was leaning against the brick building, one leg

propped up behind him, an arm crossed over his chest with the other hand covering his eyes. It

would've been a sexy stance if I hadn't *felt* his pain.

"Basil?"

He jerked upright, dropping his hands and standing in a defensive position.

Slowly, I approached him and said, “Don’t go.”

He lifted his arms up wide. “What do you want from me, Hiro?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know.”

He clamped his lips together and nodded a few times before turning and walking away a few

more steps. When he turned back around, there was anger in his gaze. “Why are you being like this?

What the hell is your issue with witches? I’ve never done anything to you to justify you treating me

like shit.”

My jaw clenched, but I knew he was right. I knew deep down that he’d never done anything to

deserve this anger, he wasn’t the one to blame. And the fact that I could fuckin’ feel his hurt, that made

my mouth open up with the truth. Or part of it anyway. “Witches murdered my wife.”

All of his anger flew out of him as he sagged and went back to that saddened look again. “I’m

sorry, Hiro.”

Nodding, I stepped closer to him and met his eyes. He’d meant that. He was sorry. But I didn’t

want his sorry, I didn’t want any of it. I didn’t want to think about Millayna, I didn’t even want him to

know about her.

What I wanted was to stop thinking about this little witch in front of me, to stop caring about what

was going on in that head of his. But I couldn't seem to stop myself. And that pissed me off.

So I stepped closer until our chests were almost touching.

He was making me crazy. Out of my damn mind, pull my hair out, crazy. Why, out of all the people

in the world, was it this little fuckin' witch that I couldn't stop thinking about?

Those dark as hell eyes were staring up at me, and how he managed to look vulnerable when I

knew he was anything but, I didn't know. His eyes were glossy again, his cheeks a rosy pink, his lips

parted as he stared up at me. When his tongue peeked out to wet them, I had to hold in a groan.

Before I could second-guess myself, I surged forward, grabbed the back of his neck, and pushed

my lips against his. His gasp allowed me the entry I sought, and I forced my tongue into his mouth.

Grabbing his hip with my other hand, I held him in place and pressed harder against his mouth. I

wanted to punish him, I wanted to hurt him for making me feel this way, I wanted to show him that he

had no right claimin' me as his viramore.

But instead of fighting back like I expected, he accepted the punishing kiss, melting into me. When

he whimpered into my mouth, I almost pulled back, but I didn't. Instead, I stepped into him and

walked him backward until he hit the brick wall.

When I broke the kiss, he breathed out, "Hiro," and my heart squeezed in my chest. He wasn't

supposed to take it, he wasn't supposed to blink those vulnerable eyes up at me, he wasn't supposed

to accept my punishment. I couldn't take him like this. He already had a grip on me, but I needed him

to let go of it. I needed him to forget me. I needed him to move on.

I needed him out of my fuckin' system.

When he leaned in to kiss me again, I grabbed his hips and spun him so his mouth couldn't reach

me. If I kept kissing him, I might melt into him as much as he was melting into me.

"Hiro, I—"

"Shh." I cut him off as I pressed my forehead against the side of his neck, taking a breath.

"Hiro, please—"

"Shh." I cut him off again. "Do you want this?"

"Yes."

"Say it."

He paused, then breathed, “I want you. I want this.”

I grunted. “Then keep your mouth shut, baby, unless I say so.” How that *baby* slipped in there, I’d

never know.

He gave me a short nod, but I could see his expression harden as he looked over his shoulder at

me. Good. That was what I was looking for. No more of those vulnerable fuckin’ eyes. Still, I pressed

a quick kiss to his lips as I unbuckled his pants and pulled them down only far enough to expose his

round ass.

After I rubbed a hand over it, I undid my own pants and pulled my cock out. I pressed him to the

wall so his cheek was flat and he wouldn’t be able to look down, then I took off one glove where he

couldn’t see. I went to spit in my hand, but Basil stopped me without moving his cheek off the brick.

Reaching behind himself, he grabbed my hand and whispered a spell, making my hand slick with

lube, then he braced himself against the wall. Not wanting to think about the random spell, I smeared

the lube on my hard cock, then buried my fingers in his ass without another word. I wanted to fuck him

out of my system, but I didn’t want to truly hurt him, so I started opening him up.

He knocked my hand away after only a minute, so I lined myself up and pushed in, stilling for a

moment and breathing against the back of his neck before sliding farther inside his tight heat. I sucked

on the skin of his neck, biting and bruising it as I slid all the way in, then stilled again so he could

adjust. I didn't want to be careful, but no matter who he was, I would get no enjoyment out of it if my

partner was in pain.

He nudged his ass back, so I leaned away, grabbed his hips, pulled out, and thrust back in, hard.

He moaned loudly, so I did it again and again until I knew he could take more. Then I leaned my chest

against his back, held his hip tight with my bare hand, and grabbed his hand with my other, slamming

it against the brick over his head. He laced our fingers together and pushed back into me.

And then I pounded into him the way I wanted, the way I'd been dreaming of, as I sucked on his

neck and ignored the tiny gasps falling from his kiss-bruised lips. I set a punishing pace, putting every

bit of my frustration and annoyance into it, every bit of anger toward him. Everything I gave him, he

took with pleasurable moans that were making my balls draw up tight.

It was fast and dirty, but he screamed out and painted the wall, his quivering hole sucking an

orgasm out of me. I roared as I came, and something in my chest heated in an unexpected way. I hadn't

even realized I'd closed my eyes until I opened them to see Basil's black magic swirling around us.

My chest tightened even as something inside of me started melting. I looked down at the little

witch, his magic like a fresh breeze surrounding me, and pieces of the wall I kept around my heart

broke off, making me gasp out loud.

I could feel him there in my chest. I. Could. Feel. Him. And every-fuckin-thing he felt was floating

through my body.

This man had helped keep me safe for months, and here I was treating him like he was nothing.

Like he meant nothing to me.

But that wasn't fuckin' true, was it?

He'd gotten under my skin a long time ago, and somehow burrowed even further in.

Maybe he was a witch, yeah, but... he was more than that, too, and I was a fuckin' idiot for not

seeing it sooner.

I could *feel him*. I could feel everything inside of him, and he was so much fuckin' more than I'd

ever imagined. Not only that, but I could feel his soul. And it was beautiful, much like the man

himself. The hardened exterior he showed the world was nothing like his interior. His soul was kind

and generous and selfless, and it was reaching for me as if I was a long-lost friend.

My chest tightened further, and I slid my hand from his hip up to his chest so I could hold him tight

to me as this myriad of emotions swirled inside me.

Basil was breathing hard, forehead resting on his forearm against the brick, his other hand still

holding onto mine. I rested my forehead against the back of his head, holding him as tight as I dared,

trying to catch my breath and get my thoughts and feelings in order.

We stayed there for a few minutes until his magic pulled back inside him, and I pulled my cock

from his ass. I kept my arm around him and our hands laced because I still needed a minute.

But then suddenly he pushed away from me, dropping our combined hands and pulling up his

pants in angry movements. As he tucked himself away, I did the same before he faced me.

When his sorrow-filled eyes met mine, when I saw tears beginning to form, when I saw one fall

from his eye, my heart clogged up my throat.

“Are you happy now, Hiro?” Basil asked angrily as he straightened his shirt and fixed the

weapons on his pants.

Another tear slid down his cheek, and he angrily wiped it away. Seeing the true pain on his face

made my heart pound and no words came out. What had I done to him?

“You proved your point, okay? I know you hate me, I know you don’t want me, I know you don’t

even fucking like me. But did you have to...” He seemed to choke on his words for a moment before

he found them again. “Did you want to show me you could do the very thing you’ve been accusing me

of? Did you have to... did you have to break my fucking heart so thoroughly? You kissed me, and I

thought it meant... but it wasn’t...” His voice cracked and another tear fell down his cheek, then he

pushed me again, making me stumble back a few steps. “Congratulations, Hiro Grimsby, you got what

you wanted; you’ve figured out how to break a fucking witch.”

Before I could respond, he used his shadow magic to seemingly melt into the wall and disappear.

And all I could do was stare at the spot he disappeared from and realize he was right. I’d been

playing with his emotions since the day we met.

He wasn’t the asshole, he never had been; I was. And I had no idea how to fix it.

C H A P T E R E L E V E N

B A S I L

Tears kept falling as Blaze flew us back home. Sorrow and despair were gripping me hard.

When he'd kissed me, I'd had hope. I thought he was finally going to accept what he was to

me. My heart had fluttered, and felt light for the first time in years. But then I realized he wasn't

kissing me, he was fucking *punishing* me. He didn't care about me; he wanted to show me that I

meant nothing to him. He wanted to use me.

And I'd let him.

Some sick part of me had wanted it even though I knew it would break me.

I'd known he was going to rip my heart out and stomp all over it, but I hadn't known just how bad

it would be.

Basil, where are you? What the fuck's wrong? my little brother asked through our link.

I'm fine. Be home in a minute, I managed to send telepathically.

Like hell you are, Thayer said. *What happened, Bas?*

I shook my head even though they couldn't see it. *Nothing. Absolutely nothing.*

Bas... Jorah sounded sad. Talk to us.

I... I can't. Not right now. Not yet.

They didn't say anything back, but I could feel their disappointment, concern, and resignation. I

could also feel their love for me, but that wasn't the type of love I was wishing for.

Since we weren't far from home, it only took a few more minutes for Blaze to land on the

overlook near my house. As soon as his feet hit the ground, I slid off him. He transformed into his

bearded dragon form, I picked him up, and I rushed to my house.

I should've expected it, but it still surprised me when I found Jorah inside my doorway. Blaze

hopped out of my arms just in time for Jorah to pull me into a tight hug. As soon as his arms were

around me, a sob wracked my body, and I clung to my little brother and cried.

I cried so hard and so long, no more tears came out. My eyes actually hurt, but not as badly as my

heart.

Jorah pulled me into my bedroom, laid me on the bed, and came in with me to hold me through my

silent tears. He didn't ask what was wrong even though I knew I'd have to tell him. He just held on

tight and let me know he was here for me. Not only did he say the words, but I could feel them through

the link we shared with Thayer. Thayer was there with us in spirit, but Jorah asked him to stay away,

which was fine by me because I didn't want another person watching me break apart.

After who knew how long, I whispered, "I found my viramore, and he... he doesn't want me."

"Oh, Basil... that's..." Jor trailed off, unsure of what to say. Maybe because there really were no

words to express how horrid that was.

I cried again and again until I eventually cried myself to sleep.

RINGING WOKE ME, AND I WAS CONFUSED FOR A FEW SECONDS UNTIL I REALIZED IT WAS JORAH'S

phone. I was in my bed on my stomach, and Jorah was snoring beside me, sprawled out on the other

side of my bed. My heart hurt, but I tried to ignore it as I pushed Jorah and said, "Wake up. Your

phone's ringing."

He groaned and reached blindly for it, holding it up to his ear. "Yo?" After a pause he said, "He's

right here," then held the phone out to me. "For you. Dad." As I took the phone from him, he fell back

asleep. I'd had my phone on silent, so I guess Ailin called my brother since he lived right next door.

"Lo?"

"Bas, there's a guy here banging on our fucking wards, saying he needs to talk to you. Said he's

been calling and texting and that you won't answer." Ailin sounded irritated.

I sat up in the bed. “There is? Who is it?”

“*Is that Basil?*” I heard a voice call in the background, and my heart stopped.

“*Tell him I need to*

talk to him. It’s important.”

Before Ailin could say anything else, I said, “I’ll be right there.”

“*Bas, I—*” I hung up on him and climbed out of the bed.

One glance in the mirror had me grimacing, so I quickly used a spell to clean myself up a little.

Unfortunately, nothing could fix the dark circles under my red and swollen eyes. It was clear I’d been

crying my eyes out, but... there wasn’t anything I could do about it.

As I rushed out the door, Jorah called after me, but I ignored him and quickly made my way down

the path, past the big house, and to the front of the long driveway where the border of our wards was.

My breath caught in my throat when I came around the bend and saw Hiro standing there. His hands

were on his hips as he paced back and forth on the other side of the border, arguing with Ailin. I was

too surprised at seeing him to pay attention to their words as I rushed over.

As soon as Hiro saw me, he halted his pacing. His eyes ran the length of me, and when they

reached my face, he winced and ran a hand through his hair. He didn’t look much better than me. His

eyes were red-rimmed, too.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, though my voice croaked.

Hiro dropped his arm and stared at me for a long moment before asking, “Can I talk to you in private?”

I looked at Ailin, and he crossed his arms over his chest, shaking his head as he said, “You

shouldn’t go somewhere with a goddamn hunter, Bas. Not when they think it’s a hunter killing

witches.” Ailin shot Hiro a glare.

“He’s not going to kill me,” I said. Break my heart further? Yes. Absolutely. But he wasn’t going

to kill me or kidnap me or anything like that... I didn’t think. I turned to Hiro and asked, “Right?”

He blew out a breath and groaned. “Jesus, Basil, you really think after all that, I’d turn ya in?”

I lifted a shoulder in a shrug.

“Fuck!” he yelled and started pacing again. “I fucked this up.”

“What do you want?”

“To talk to you!” he yelled before wincing in my direction again.

“Yeah, like I’m going anywhere with you when you can’t even talk to me without screaming.”

Fucking asshole.

He yelled and mumbled something I didn't understand with his hands on his hips, walking back

and forth with that muscular body like some kind of irritated deity. "Dammit, Basil Ellwood, come

out here."

I shook my head. If I went out there, he'd only end up hurting me worse than he already had.

"Who in the fuck is that?"

I whipped my head around when I heard Willow's voice, then narrowed my eyes when I saw at

least eight of my siblings standing there, and I yelled, "For fuck's sake! Why is the whole family

here?"

"Who is that guy?" my big sister Willow asked.

I rolled my eyes. "Does everyone have to be in my business all the fucking time?"

"Yes," Thayer, Jorah, Delaro, and Tio all said at the same time.

Willow added, "When there's a hot piece of ass banging on our wards, hell yes."

I stomped over to her, sticking my nose in her face and ground out, "Stay. The *fuck*. Away from

him."

Willow's eyes went wide, and she stepped back with her hands held up in surrender and

whispered, “Sorry, Bas. I didn’t know.”

Hiro growled behind me. “Will you come out here and talk to me, witch?”

I faced him, crossed my arms over my chest, and said, “No.”

He growled again, and I pretended the sound didn’t shoot right through me as he asked, “You

really wanna do this right here with all your family watchin’?” When I didn’t respond, he snarled.

“Fine! What gives you the right to run off five seconds after we fuck?”

“Oh shit,” one of my brothers said, but I ignored them all as red-hot anger filled my veins.

“Me?” I yelled back.

“Yes, *you*.”

“You’re seriously blaming that on me?”

He laughed humorlessly and waved in my direction. “You’re the one that left, aren’t ya?”

“Are you fucking kidding me, Hiro? You’re the one that’s been messing with me! You’re the one

that’s treating me like the dirt on your shoe!”

Ailin started yelling at everyone to give us some privacy, but I wasn’t paying any attention to him.

Hiro yelled, “You didn’t give me the chance to treat you any differently, Basil! You ran off before

I could get a word in!”

I walked up to the barrier, grinding my teeth together. “Don’t pretend that what we did last night

was anything more than a fuck for you, Hiro. Don’t fucking mess with my feelings any more than you

already have, and don’t treat me like I’m stupid. I know a hate fuck when I see one.”

Something in his gaze softened just a hair as he quietly said, “You’re right. It did start out that

way, but something changed... I can’t get you outta my fuckin’ head, Basil Ellwood, and I’m pissed at

you for it.”

“It isn’t my fault you’re my viramore, Hiro, and it isn’t my fault you can’t stand the thought of

having one or that you hate witches. I can’t control it.”

“I know that.”

“It isn’t my fault that you don’t want me—”

“I never said that,” he growled.

“Yes, you did.”

“Basil, please come out here.”

“No.”

He closed his eyes and sighed. “Please, Basil... I need... I need to touch you.”

To my horror, my eyes filled up at those words. “Why?”

Those bright blue eyes connected with mine and he whispered, “Because I’m sorry, and I want to

kiss you.”

My heart pounded in my chest, and my throat felt too clogged with emotions for any words to

come out. A stupid thing like hope fluttered in my heart even though I knew it was idiotic. He didn’t

want me or even like me. It was never going to work.

He sighed. “I don’t want to hurt you anymore, Basil, but I don’t want you to hurt me either.”

Hope warmed my chest further, but I tried to tamp it down. “I won’t.”

“Please, baby, please come out here.”

It was that sweet ‘baby’ that did it, but I would never admit that to him. I stepped through the

barrier, and before I could blink, Hiro pulled me into him, buried his gloved hand in my hair and

yanked me into his chest. When his lips met mine, I expected a hard, punishing kiss like he’d given me

last night, but instead I was met with something so tender I was afraid he was going to make my heart

burst in my chest.

His lips were soft, his tongue gentle, and the hold he had on me was tender.

I didn’t know what happened between last night and today, but it was like night and day, like he

was an entirely different person.

I broke the kiss, stared up at him, and asked, “What are you doing?”

He shot me that cocky grin. “I was hoping I was convincin’ you to give me a second chance.”

“I don’t even know what the hell that means.”

He sighed. “We’ll talk. Come out with me.”

Of course he couldn’t phrase it like a question. Why would he? He was Grim the hunter, and

people always did what he demanded of them. I sighed. “Come with you where?”

He stared at me for several beats before barking out a laugh. “Of course you can’t do nothin’ the

easy way.” He shook his head.

“Do you know me?”

He chuckled, hooked his arm around my neck, and stepped up in my space as he nibbled on my

lips. “Maybe we should go for a round two and skip the whole dating shit.”

I pushed out of his arms. “If you think I’m going to let you fuck me again so soon after what you

did last night, you’re out of your damn mind.”

He sighed. “Fine, fine. I’ll take you out to breakfast, then.” He nodded to his beat-up little truck.

Was that a blood stain on the side? “Come on.” He started walking away.

“What makes you so sure I’m gonna follow you?”

That cocky grin made an appearance again as he walked backward to face me. “Because I *do*

know ya, witch.” This time he made *witch* sound like an endearment and not a curse. “Now come on,

I’m starving. I’ve been banging on your wards for damn near thirty minutes. I called you at least ten

times before that. Why the hell didn’t you answer?”

“I had my phone on silent. How did you find my house?”

He shrugged. “I’m a hunter, Basil, I know how to find things.”

I rolled my eyes at that non-answer, then sighed. I guess he did know me because hell if I didn’t

follow that bastard to his car.

When I opened his car door, Ailin called over, “Basil.”

I sighed. “What?”

“You’re not going with him.”

I turned to face Ailin and rolled my eyes. “You do realize that I’m an adult that works for the

BCA, right? I face scarier things than him every day.”

“Not true,” Hiro mumbled.

I shot him a look and said, “Not the time,” then faced Ailin again. “I promise he’s fine.”

Ailin’s jaw ticked as some of his green magic swirled around him. My

brother-slash-dad had

always had issues keeping his magic locked down when he was pissed. He ground out, “I know

nothing about him. I’m not letting you go.”

Straightening my shoulders, I faced him and said, “His name is Hiro Grimsby, and he’s my

viramore, Ailin. I’ll be fine.” I shot Hiro some side-eyes, ready for him to deny it, but to my surprise,

he didn’t say a thing.

Ailin’s eyes widened for a moment. “Your viramore?”

“Yes, so you have nothing to worry about. He can’t hurt me.” Physically, at least. Hurting your

viramore went against your nature, so I was safe in that regard. My heart was another matter entirely.

Ailin’s eyes narrowed as he focused on Hiro, saying, “If you hurt my kid, I’ll fucking rip you

apart.”

I opened my mouth to yell at him, but Hiro beat me to it. “I’m not gonna hurt him.”

“My family has a long reach, hunter. I promise you you’ll regret it if you hurt him.” Ailin’s eyes

flashed green. I stifled a sigh at his display even though I knew he wasn’t flashing his magic on

purpose; he was just concerned.

Hiro nodded once. "I understand."

Ailin gave him a nod back, then turned to me and said, "Be careful, kiddo."
He threw a phone at

me that I automatically caught. "Jorah brought your phone over. Call me if
you need me, or at least

talk to your brothers."

I nodded in understanding. "I will, but I'll be fine."

Ailin offered me a small smile, sent Hiro a glare, then walked back through
our wards, so Hiro

and I got into his truck.

"Guess I already met the famous Ailin Ellwood," Hiro said as he put the
truck in drive. "He

was... intense."

I snorted. "Yeah, but he seems to be mellowing out now that a bunch of his
kids have found their

viramores."

"That was him mellowed out?" Hiro's voice went up an octave, and I
couldn't help but chuckle.

"Yep. Definitely mellowed out."

He shook his head, then said, "So... didn't realize you were his kid."

"Kinda."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"My family is complicated."

“So explain it.”

I turned to him and waved off the question so I could ask one of my own.

“Why are you here?”

He sighed. “I told you I wanted to talk.”

“Why?”

He hesitated before quietly saying, “Because I believe you.”

I froze. “You believe me about what exactly?”

“That... that you’re my viramore.”

My heart leapt in my chest. “You do?”

“Yeah, Basil, I do.”

My heart started pounding so hard in my chest, I thought it was going to jump out.

Hiro pulled the car over, put it in park, and angled himself in his seat to face me. “I’m sorry for

last night.”

I couldn’t say anything, but my jaw clenched.

“I shouldn’t have treated you like that, and... despite what I did, I still felt it.”

He tapped his

chest. “I felt you.”

I nodded and closed my eyes to take a deep breath so I wouldn’t spill my emotions all over him.

He might mean that, but I doubted he was ready for it. Leaning my back against the window, I stared at

him and said, “I felt you, too.”

“I’d like to see where this feeling goes... I know... I know I’ve been a dick to you, I know I don’t

really deserve another chance, but I’m hopin’ you give me one anyway. I can’t make any promises,

but... I’d never forgive myself if I didn’t at least try. After last night... when I felt how badly I hurt

you, I... I don’t wanna do that again.”

“Me either,” I whispered.

He nodded and hesitantly removed one of his gloves, then reached over to grab my hand. My eyes

widened as I caught the first hint of his skin. In all the time I’d known him, he’d never removed his

gloves before. Not when we ate, and when we’d fucked, he’d hid his hand from me.

I turned my hand over so we were palm to palm and ran my thumb over the back of his hand, then

whispered, “They’re runes.”

He nodded. “Yeah.”

His hand was covered in tattoos. Like every inch of skin was covered in tiny markings. They

looked tribal at first glance, but when I examined them closer, I recognized many of the symbols. They

were runes—tattooed spells. I met his eyes as my thumb continued rubbing over his inked skin. “You

hide them so your enemies don't know how well you're protected."

"Yeah."

"But you're showing me now."

He took a breath. "Yeah, I am."

I tightened my hold on his hand. "Thank you." It was more than simply showing me his hands, it

was him giving me a little of his trust. Maybe just a small part, but it was a start.

He nodded and cleared his throat. "You still want breakfast?"

"I'm hungry. I missed dinner last night." Because I'd thought I'd be eating at the bar with him so I

hadn't eaten before going out—but I didn't say that out loud.

From the frown on his face, I was pretty sure he knew that anyway. "Okay, let's go eat."

I squeezed his hand before he released me and put his glove back on, then started driving again.

After a minute, I asked, "Do you have a lot of runes?"

He didn't answer right away. "I have runes from every culture I've ever come across."

My eyes widened before I ran them up and down his muscular body, imagining what he looked

like out of his clothes. I hadn't gotten to see his skin last night, and I was regretting that right now. I

licked my lips and asked, "Does that mean you're covered in tattoos?"

“Pretty much, yeah.” He shot me a glance before his lips quirked up. “Like that idea, huh?”

“Uh...” I ran my eyes over him again. “You could say that.”

He snorted and shook his head, then sighed and ran a hand through his brown hair. “I gotta warn

ya that I’m still having trouble with this whole thing.”

“Because I’m a witch?”

He nodded. “Yeah, partly.”

“What’s the other part?”

He didn’t say anything for so long I figured he wasn’t going to answer, but he finally spoke softly.

Not quiet, but more gently than usual. “I loved my wife, you know? When I lost her, I never thought

I’d have that again. I thought... I thought Millie was it for me, so even considerin’ this... thing

between us, sorta feels like a betrayal to her memory.”

I didn’t respond right away because I didn’t want to get it wrong. I didn’t want to dismiss his

feelings or make him feel guilty, but I also wanted him to give me a chance.

“Do you think she

would’ve wanted you to be happy?”

“Yeah, ‘course.”

I nodded even though he wasn’t looking at me. “There’s no rule that says you only get to love once

in your lifetime. I'm sorry you lost her. I can't imagine how horrible that must've been for you... but

maybe I was destined to be yours so you could find happiness again... and maybe even love."

He didn't say anything for a minute, and I was afraid I'd said the wrong thing, but then Hiro

reached over, took my hand in his gloved one, and pulled it into his lap. He didn't speak any words,

but that action made the hope in my chest flutter to life anew.

Maybe he was really going to give me a chance, give us a chance.

We were quiet for the rest of the drive, and I found that I didn't mind because he held my hand

there the entire time. A million questions ran through my mind, but I didn't want to disturb this

peacefulness we'd finally found between us.

He parked outside a little diner and had to let go of my hand so we could get out, and I followed

him inside. A waitress sat us at a small booth near the back, and it didn't escape my notice that Hiro

sat in the seat where the front door was in his eyesight. I'd prefer sitting there, but I was surprisingly

okay with him keeping watch.

"I've never been here before," I said after an awkward minute.

"Their breakfast food is good, so you can't really go wrong there." He set his menu down and

frowned at me. “Is there anythin’ on the menu that you can eat?”

I waved him off. “Yeah, no problem. I’ll get some pancakes or a waffle or something.”

“Right, good.” He nodded. “Maybe I’ll eat a waffle, too.”

I sent him a small smile. “What’s your favorite food?”

He pursed his lips. “Probably risotto. I have a couple family recipes that are pretty good. What

about you?”

“I like these falafel things that my brother makes sometimes. He serves them at his restaurant,

too.”

The waitress came over to take our orders and when she walked away, Hiro asked, “Are you a

picky eater?”

I smiled. “Not really. No meat, but other than that, I’ll eat whatever.”

“Why no meat?”

“My family’s never eaten meat, and living in Faela re-established that. Fae don’t eat meat because

the animals in Faela all have magic of their own—so do the plants, but they’re safer. The fae don’t

want the animals’ magics messing with their own. I figured it’s a good policy to have, especially

since I have the Power of Three which originates from Faela.”

He nodded his head. “I’ve heard a few things about this Three stuff, but I’m not sure I understand

it.”

I sighed. “During the Berserker War, there was a vessel carrying the Power of Three. It’s a magic

that came from Faela. Thousands of years ago, it was divided among three vessels, and everything

was fine, but along the way, someone started using the power for evil and it turned dark. It’s what

brought on the whole war.” I took a sip of my water. “When Ailin and Sebastian—my sorta dads—

managed to release the magic from the vessel, my brothers—Jorah and Thayer—and I pulled it into

ourselves, but we couldn’t contain it. At least not in this realm. The fae you met the other day,

Nikolai? The blue-haired one? He and his brother pulled us into Faela. We trained our bodies to be

able to hold the magic inside us and trained to be able to use it.”

His eyebrows were high on his forehead. “So... you really did help stop the war, huh?”

I shrugged. “Yeah, I guess. I mean, we were stuck in Faela for three years, so we didn’t even

really know what was going on here at home, but once that dark force was removed, Ailin and the rest

of our army were able to defeat the berserkers and centaurs.”

“That’s... okay, wow.”

I sent him a half-smile. “We just did what we had to do. We didn’t know we’d be stuck in the fae

realm so long, though. That kinda sucked.”

“But you lived there to help the magic?”

“Yep.”

“And you still have it?”

“Yeah. Jor, Thay, and I took on the Mantle of the Three. We go back to Faela every few weeks to

ensure the energy stays pure and isn’t tainted by dark magic.”

“Really?”

I nodded. “We live on the Pink Isle when we’re there. It’s kinda pretty, and our house is nice

there, but I’m glad we’re living in Brinnswick full-time now.”

“You don’t miss living there?”

I shrugged. “I miss it sometimes, but when we were there, I missed my family more, so staying

here makes more sense to me.”

He nodded and tilted his head to the side. “You said your family is complicated and that Ailin

Ellwood is kind of your dad. What’s that mean?”

I blinked at him. “Wow, you really aren’t from around here, are you?”

He shook his head. “Nah. Only been here about three years, well, kinda close to four now, I

guess.”

“It’s weird for me to run into someone that doesn’t have their own opinions about my life and the

things that have happened to my family.”

He lifted a shoulder. “Will you tell me?”

“Sure. Uh, when I was six, every adult in my coven was murdered by a group of wendigos and

orcs, along with some warlocks.”

His eyebrows rose. “Every adult?”

I nodded. “Yes. My coven was strong, and my parents, aunts, uncles, and my parents’ friends—we

called them aunts and uncles, too.” I waved that away as unimportant. “They all fought, but they had

sent a small army after us. It was... it was really bad. They were slaughtered. My parents, aunts, and

uncles brought all the kids to the big house and put us in the basement because that was the most well

protected place on all of our land. Ailin... he was sixteen at the time, and the oldest, so he was in

charge.” I swallowed hard.

I didn’t like talking about this. I didn’t remember much from that night, but I sometimes had

flashbacks of my parents panicking, and of Ailin trying to keep everyone calm. I knew some of my

siblings had been unlucky enough to see some of the carnage that day, but I'd already been in the

house when it started, so my parents had simply pushed me into the basement and told me to stay with

my brother. That was the last time I'd seen them alive.

Hiro surprised me by reaching across the table and squeezing my hand. That gave me a little

boost, so I cleared my throat and continued, "Once they killed our parents, they came for us, and..."

that was the night Ailin came into his full powers. His magic shielded us while he basically set a

magical bomb off in our house. He killed anyone close to us, and the house came down on top of us.

But his shield kept us safe."

I took a sip of my water, stared at the table, and sighed. "When the Supreme Assembly finally

showed up the next fucking day—of course those assholes were too late to actually help or save

anyone—but they helped us out of the basement and rubble. Ailin was the oldest, and since his power

came out, at the time, he was the most powerful witch in the world. When they wanted to separate us

into foster care, he told them no, that he was the coven leader now and that he was going to take care

of us.”

After a few seconds, Hiro quietly asked, “And he was only sixteen at the time?”

I nodded and finally met his eyes. “Sixteen with fifteen other kids to take care of.”

“*Fifteen?*”

“Yeah. He... he claimed responsibility for fifteen other kids, and because he was more powerful

than the asshole leaders, they let him take charge of us—and I’m grateful for that, otherwise we

would’ve been split up.”

Hiro sat there with wide, blinking eyes.

“So anyway, Ailin is biologically my older brother, but he’s also the only parent I had growing up

after that night. My older sisters Aspen and Opal helped raise us, too, since Ailin was also Sage—a

witch leader—when he became so powerful, but yeah... so it’s complicated. And my brothers and

sisters aren’t all blood related to me, but that doesn’t make them any less my siblings than the ones

that are blood.”

He nodded. “That makes sense.”

“So yeah, that’s my fucked-up childhood story... or one of them, anyway, but maybe one’s enough

for today.”

“Yeah... ‘course.” He squeezed my hand. “I’m sorry if I upset you.”

“You didn’t.”

He scrutinized my face for a moment before nodding. “My parents died when I was young, too.”

“They did?” I was a little surprised that he was offering up any information about himself, to be

honest, but I’d take anything he gave me.

“They were killed by a vampire they were hunting when I was ten. My uncle raised me after that,

but he died when I was seventeen—that was the same year I met Millie.”

The way he glossed over the death of his parents and uncle made me think that he didn’t want to

talk about it, so I went for an easier topic—well, maybe not easier, but different. “How did you and

Millie meet?”

A soft smile spread over his face, and a small flare of jealousy hit me. Which was stupid. I

shouldn’t be jealous of a dead person, and certainly not one that he’d obviously loved deeply. No, I

shouldn’t be jealous at all. He said, “In a bar fight.”

A chuckle came out of me without permission. “That... isn’t what I thought you were going to

say.”

His smile grew. “Millie was crazy, and I mean that in the best sense of the word. She had a short

temper and tended to fight first, ask questions later, but she loved hard and fully, and was very

protective of her inner circle.” He took a sip of his drink and squeezed my hand. “Since my uncle had

passed away, I kept sneaking into bars and shit, so I got to see Millie in action. A guy—an incubus—

wouldn’t leave her best friend alone, and when the guy tried to cop a feel, Millie attacked him. It was

late into the night, and at a pretty seedy place, so when she attacked half the bar joined in. Another

incubus was trying to attack Millie from behind while she took care of his friend, so I stepped in and

stopped the guy, and got an elbow to the stomach from her as a thank you.” He snorted. “Even years

afterward, she claimed I was trying to grab her ass and that’s why she elbowed me...” He shook his

head. “She never was one to apologize easily.”

I smiled at that. “I wish I could’ve met her.”

His eyes met mine. “Me too. You two would’ve hit it off, and probably gotten into trouble every

other day.”

I snorted. “I do like a good bar fight.”

He chuckled and shook his head, but the waitress came back over with our

food—finally. We fell

quiet again as we stuffed our faces, but Hiro eventually said, “I don’t know how to do this.”

“Do what?”

He waved his fork between us. “This. This viramore thing.”

“Oh, um... I don’t really either. It’s not like there’s a rule book.”

“So do we just... date?”

I nodded. “Sure.”

He pursed his lips for a moment, then nodded. I could see that he wasn’t entirely comfortable with

this situation, but at least he was trying and not attempting to punish me or pretend that I didn’t exist.

I’d take it. A baby step in the right direction.

The rest of the meal was pretty quiet until the waitress left the check on the table. I snagged it

before he had the chance, and he immediately turned a glare on me, so I said, “I’m paying.”

“No, I don’t think so. I invited you, I pay.”

“Nope.”

He clenched his jaw. “I’m no one’s charity case, shadow boy.”

“I never thought you were, Grimsby. Stop being so dramatic.”

His nostrils flared. “Witch, I swear to god, if you don’t—”

“I’m paying, so stop with the empty threats.” I threw some cash on the table, leaving a hefty tip,

and stood up. “Come on, hunter. Stop sulking.”

As he stood up and crowded me, I could see how angry he truly was, and I worried for a few

seconds that maybe I’d done the wrong thing. But then the memory of his little girl with an oxygen

tube came flashing through my mind, and I decided I’d rather him be angry at me and not hurting for

money than for him to pay now, suffer later, his pride be damned.

I pushed his chest, although I didn’t push too hard since I liked having him close, and said, “Back

off, Grim.”

Something flashed in his eyes, but I didn’t catch the emotion before it flitted away, and a tiny bit

of his tension eased. “Don’t call me that.”

“What? Why not?”

“Because outside of my job, I’m Hiro.”

It seemed like there was more to that than he was willing to admit, but I nodded. “Fine. *Hiro*, stop

hulking out over top of me so we can leave.”

“That eager to get away from me?” He flashed me a smirk, proving he was trying to joke around

and let go of his anger.

“No, that eager to have the humans in this diner stop staring at us like we’re putting on a show.”

He stepped back and glanced around the restaurant before shaking his head in disgust when he

saw how many people were watching us. “Fine. Let’s go.”

I followed the difficult and frustrating man out of the diner to his truck, hopping back into the

passenger seat. When he sat in the driver’s seat, I asked, “You taking me home now?”

“Don’t really want to, naw. You wanna go home?”

“Not really. Where to then?”

He ran a hand down his face and shook his head. “I honestly dunno.”

Since he wasn’t offering up his house, I figured that was a no go, and since I knew there was no

way Ailin would let him on coven land yet, I couldn’t take him to mine.

“Um... what about the curve?”

We can hang out there for a little while?”

“Sure, okay. What time do you have to be home?”

“Doesn’t matter. I have off work today.”

He nodded. “I haveta be home in about two hours to relieve the babysitter.”

“Okay... how old is your daughter?”

He paused with his keys halfway to the ignition and stared at me. “We’re not talking about her.”

I jerked back, then sighed and turned away from him. He didn't even trust me enough to tell me his

daughter's age. What the fucking fuck?

"Motherfucker," he said under his breath. "She's eight, okay?"

She was *eight*? She was so tiny. I'd thought she was six at the oldest. "Okay." Deciding to drop it

for now, I asked, "How old are you?"

He turned on the truck and put it in drive. "Thirty-seven, you?"

"You're seriously thirty-seven?"

He glanced at me with a furrowed brow. "Yeah, why?"

"Didn't think you were that much older than me."

"How old are you?" He glanced at me with a worried expression, so I smirked at him.

"Twenty-four."

He relaxed a fraction. "Good."

"Good?"

"Good that you're not younger than that." He chuckled. "Freaked me out for a second."

"There's no possible way you thought I was a teenager."

"I didn't until you called me old!"

I snorted. "What's your favorite color?"

"Uh... gray."

I wrinkled my nose. “What the hell kind of favorite color is that?”

He sighed and shook his head, but didn’t answer. “What’s yours?”

“Pink.”

His head jerked toward me as he let out a bark of laughter. “Liar.”

I snorted. “Everyone assumes I hate pink for some reason, but I actually really like it. I wouldn’t

want to wear it, but... in Faela, pink sorta... made me feel safe... home, I guess.”

He reached over and took my hand again, giving it a squeeze. “I know I’m being a dick, but I’m

trying.”

“I know. I’m trying, too.”

He squeezed my hand tighter. We were quiet again, which was kinda nice since he kept holding

my hand until he turned into the curve and parked the car. Then we sat there and looked out at a group

of teenagers goofing off—pretty sure they were humans—and a couple having a picnic. I couldn’t tell

what kind of supe they were, but I knew they had magic, I could feel it.

“Two shifters. Huh.”

I tilted my head at him and asked, “You can tell they’re shifters all the way from here?” As far as I

knew, many hunters could do that, but no one really knew why since they were human.

“Yeah, can’t you?”

I shook my head. “Not from here. I sense their magic, but I can’t tell what type of magic it is.”

“Really?”

“Are you... sure you’re only human? You’re not like half shifter or something?”

He snorted. “I’m human.”

“Then how can you sense other creatures so easily?”

He sighed and released my hand. At first, I thought he was angry at me, but then he took off his

hooded cloak, threw it in the back seat, and began rolling up his long-sleeved Henley.

“Hot?” I asked even though it wasn’t hot in the car with the AC running.

“Nah, I’m showing you somethin’.”

I stared at the skin he was exposing on his forearm, and my eyes widened. His arm was just as

covered in tiny runes as his hand. Holy shit balls.

He chuckled. “Holy shit balls?”

My eyes jerked up to his and widened. “You read my mind.”

“Nah. You whispered it.”

I blinked at him. “I did?”

He chuckled again. “Yeah.” He ran his gloved finger down his arm, pointing out what looked like

words, but I didn't recognize them, which was unusual considering I spoke like six languages and was

pretty good in a few others. Grabbing his arm, I moved it closer to my face to get a better look. As I

ran my finger over the words, he sucked in a breath, and I felt the power, the magic, in his skin.

I licked my lips because now that his skin was like *right* in my face, I really wanted to lick him,

but I refrained and asked, "What's it do?" It was obviously a spell.

"It's a spell from the ancient cynocephalys. It helps identify other creatures and magic." He

shrugged, and my eyes widened. There wasn't a lot known about the cynocephalys since they'd been

extinct for centuries. I didn't think any of their culture had been saved, let alone a spell still being

used. "It used to only work when I touched someone, but with practice, it's grown more powerful.

It's... it was the first tattoo I ever got. My dad put it on me. It's a rite of passage for hunters." He

sighed.

"I didn't think any of the cynocephaly spells survived their fall?"

"This isn't a known spell. It was passed down in my family, and many other hunter families, for

generations. We... it helps to know who you're surrounded by in case they attack you... you'll know

how to fight them.”

“That’s really amazing, Hiro. Thank you for showing me.” I sent him a small smile.

He only shrugged and turned to stare out the window like my gratefulness was embarrassing him.

Whatever.

Not wanting him to cover his skin up quite yet, I moved closer still, and all it did was make me

want to lick him more... and it made me wish I could see the rest of his skin, see how much of him

was covered in tattoos. On his forearm alone, he probably had fifteen spells and runes on him. I

recognized a lot of them, and even had a few of the same ones on my body, but mine were larger than

his. I’d have to ask Ailin if that would affect its potency or not.

Before I had a thought of what I was doing, I closed that final distance and pressed my lips to his

skin. I didn’t lick him, but it was a close thing. I did however linger there because I liked the way he

sucked in a breath from such a simple and innocent, all things considered, kiss. His warmth felt good

under my lips, and I smiled before pulling back and sitting up.

When I made eye contact with him, I licked my lips to catch any small flavor of him, and I

hummed when his smoky sandalwood flavor hit my tongue.

His eyes widened for a moment. Out of nowhere, he reached over, grabbed the back of my head,

and pulled me into a kiss. This one wasn't the sweet one he'd given me earlier, but it wasn't the

punishing one of last night either. This kiss was somewhere in between. It was demanding and

intense. He controlled the kiss, deepening it further, and I moaned in the back of my throat and let him

take control. My hands fisted his shirt, holding on for dear life as he kissed the hell out of me, sending

tingles of pleasure all throughout my body.

He pulled back after several minutes, and to my surprise, he rested his forehead against mine. We

were both breathless, but I watched him as he panted with his eyes closed. He was so handsome, and

right now he seemed relaxed. That wasn't a look I often saw on him. He was usually scowling or

angry and tense, so getting to see him calm took my breath away even more.

His eyes opened, and he offered me a small smile, one that reached his pretty blue eyes. Lifting

my hand, I ran my thumb over his cheek, and he turned his head to kiss my palm before taking my hand

and sitting back in his seat.

As he glanced at the clock, he sighed. "We should probably head back so I can get home in time."

He met my eyes. “Sorry we didn’t even get outta the car.”

I snorted. “I don’t care.”

With a smirk, he released my hand and put the car back in drive. A minute in, he sighed and asked,

“When can I see you again?”

My head jerked toward him in surprise. “Uh... whenever.” I’d change my schedule if I had to.

Alec could yell at me all he wanted if it meant I got to spend more time with Hiro.

“I have to work tomorrow, but if I finish the job tomorrow night, we could go out the next day.

Gotta check with Ulma to be sure she can sit, but that shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Okay. I can shuffle things around and do that.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, no problem.”

He shot me a small grin. When he pulled in front of my coven’s land, he turned off the car and got

out, coming around to my side. As soon as I was out of the car, I found myself pressed up against it

with Hiro’s tongue down my throat. I laughed against him, but it turned into a groan as he sucked on

my tongue.

He kissed the hell out of me again, but pulled away too soon.

As he stepped back, I grabbed his shirt and yanked him back to me, and this time it was Hiro that

smiled against my lips. When I kissed him hard enough to make him groan, I chuckled.

He pulled back, and we stared at each other for several beats before he offered a tiny smile and a

nod, then walked back to the driver's side. I watched him climb into his car, then sighed and headed

into my wards. Turning around, I realized Hiro was staring at me, so I waved at him, getting another

nod in return before he drove off.

With a big sigh, I walked back to my house in a daze and plopped onto my couch.

I was going to have some kind of emotional whiplash after today. Hiro was a confusing man.

IT HAD BEEN TWO WEEKS SINCE HIRO DECIDED TO GIVE ME A REAL CHANCE, AND WE'D ONLY BEEN OUT

three times, and only for a couple of hours total. But we'd been texting throughout the day, every day,

and talking on the phone every night, so that was something.

I was already in bed when the phone rang, and I answered it with a "Hey."

"*Hey,*" he said, sounding tired.

"Everything alright?"

"*Yeah, yeah. Been a long week, though.*"

“For me, too. It seems like every other day, I’m getting a new case of murder or something. Makes

no sense.”

He hesitated before saying, “*Did you hear that they found another witch dead?*”

My throat tightened for a second, but I blew out a breath and said, “Yeah, I did. I, uh, I saw the

body today.”

His voice was gentle. “*Are you okay?*”

“Yeah. Not my first body.” I chuckled. “Fought and lived through a war, remember?”

He sighed. “*I know, but I heard she was really... torn up.*”

Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes. “She was. They tortured her really badly before killing

her. It, uh... it wasn’t... it was real bad.”

“*I’m sorry you had to see that.*” His voice was a low timbre that I wanted to get lost in after the

stress of today. “*Do you need anything?*”

You. In my bed. With your arms around me. “No, I’m good.”

“*You sure?*”

“Mhm.” Wanting to change the subject, I asked, “Is your daughter asleep?”

He hesitated, then sighed. “Yes.”

“Can you tell me... why she has that breathing tube?” I wanted to figure out

what was wrong with

her so I could heal her, or if I couldn't, have Ailin do it.

"We're not there yet, Basil."

That... hurt. That fucking hurt. He still didn't trust me, but I nodded to my ceiling and whispered,

"Okay."

"Basil..." He trailed off with a long sigh.

"It's fine, Hiro. Don't worry about it."

He grunted, but didn't say anything for a minute. *"Are you working tomorrow?"*

Holding in the sigh that wanted to escape at the subject change, I replied, "No. Alec told me to

take a day since I worked nine straight." Every time I brought up his daughter, he clammed up,

changed the subject, or got angry at me for asking. It was starting to piss me off a little, mostly

because it hurt every time he didn't trust me.

"Can I take ya out to lunch?"

"Not breakfast?" I smiled a tad.

"I want you to sleep in."

Even though he'd hurt my feelings two minutes ago, that made me melt a little. "Lunch would be

great."

“Good. Text me when you wake up. Don’t set an alarm or anything, we’ll go whenever you’re ready.”

“Okay.”

He hesitated again, then said, *“I’m sorry I hurt your feelin’s.”*

“It’s fine.”

“No, it’s not, but... I’m not there yet, Basil.”

“Are you ever going to be?” I tried to keep the hurt out of my voice, but it seeped through anyway.

He sighed again. *“I’m tryin’ to be. I know that ain’t fair to you, but that’s all I got right now.”*

“Okay... that’s... that’s better than nothing.” I lifted my shoulder even though he couldn’t see me.

He grunted but didn’t reply.

An awkward moment passed before I asked, “Where do you want to go for lunch?”

“Wherever ya want.”

“You are like the king of non-answers.”

He snorted. *“If you say so. Hey, what are you wearin’?”*

I chuckled. “Not telling you.” He’d made sort of a game out of trying to get into my pants again.

And even though I really fucking wanted him, last time he’d hurt me so badly—not physically,

physically he made my body fucking sing, but emotionally, he'd cut me deeply. So maybe I wasn't

trusting him as much as I should, either. Reluctantly, I acknowledged that maybe, just maybe, I could

understand him not wanting to talk about his kid.

"Aw, come on now. You wearin' just underwear to bed?"

"Wouldn't you like to know."

"Yeah, I would, ass. That's why I asked. If you want to know, I'm in a really sexy pair of

sweatpants and a huge tee that's two sizes too big. Total turn on."

I snorted. "You'd look sexy in anything."

His deep chuckles reached my ears, and suddenly, my briefs were a little too tight—yes, I was

only in briefs, but I wasn't gonna tell him that. *"Glad you approve."*

"Oh yeah, I totally do. You should wear that outfit to our date tomorrow."

He chuckled again, and I grinned. I loved hearing his laugh, and I loved knowing that I was the

one making him happy.

Before he could respond, I heard a high-pitched voice call, *"Daddy!"*

There was movement on the other end as Hiro said, *"Shit, babe, I gotta go. Sounds like a*

nightmare."

"Okay, goodnight, call if you need anything," I rushed to say before he hung

up. I knew from

experience that if his daughter yelled for him a second time, he'd hang up on me. Not that I blamed

him, his kid came first, and I was glad for it.

"Text when ya wake up. G'night, love." He hung up.

Despite the worry I had for his daughter, who seemed to have a lot of nightmares, I still smiled at

the *babe* and *love*. I'd always hated when my past hook-ups called me baby or some other pet name,

but coming from Hiro, it made my heart flutter.

Closing my eyes, I sent out a small prayer to the Mother of All to keep Hiro and Rasha safe.

C H A P T E R T W E L V E

H I R O

The last two weeks had been a series of ups and downs. Everything seemed to be going well with

Basil, which was... unexpected, to say the least. But I was grateful for it.

Unfortunately, it had been hard to give Basil the attention he deserved because Rasha was having

a lot of issues lately. She needed to use her oxygen more and more each day, which was worrisome. I

took her to the doctor yesterday, and he couldn't tell me why she seemed to be getting worse, but he

was supposed to be contacting another doctor that worked in northern

Brinnswick to see if he had any

ideas. But he'd also told me to keep her routine as normal as possible, so...
I'd sent Rasha to school

this morning. And Ulma agreed to pick her up afterward if I needed her to.

Since I'd acknowledged that Basil was my viramore—even if I still
questioned it occasionally—I

had an awareness of him. Even when we were miles apart, it was like my
body could sense him. And

when we were together, those senses went up ten-fold.

On my way to Basil's, I called my handler to see if she had any new cases for
me, so she emailed

me a file. Thank god because I needed the extra cash to make my rent this
month, not to mention

paying Ulma and the electricity. I couldn't let them turn the electricity off
again. It was too hot without

the AC on.

My passenger side door opened and Basil plopped into the seat with a "Hey."

I grinned at him, pushing away my negative thoughts, and grabbed the collar
of his shirt to pull

him in for a long kiss. I never thought I'd crave the taste of another person's
lips the way I did with

Basil. Never thought I'd kiss a witch to begin with, but I didn't regret it one
bit.

As his flavor hit my tongue, I groaned and slid my hand up and around to the
back of his neck,

being sure to brush his skin along the way. I didn't have my gloves on for once, so I was soaking up

the feel of his soft skin against mine. Then I held him in place as I kissed him deeper, prying his mouth

open with my tongue so I could explore and suck and lick and taste. God, he tasted so fuckin' good,

and the fact that he so often submitted to my control made it difficult to keep my hands from stripping

off his clothes.

Every time we were near, every time I heard his voice over the phone or read a text from him, my

chest tightened and warmed in a pleasant way that I was beginning to desire more and more.

When I finally released him and broke the kiss, his kiss-swollen lips quirked up in the corners,

and he said, "Well, hello to you, too."

I snorted, pecked his lips, then sat back in my seat, putting the car in drive. "You didn't sleep in

very late."

"I was too anxious to see you."

My heart skipped a beat. He said things like this all the time, and I wasn't sure if he knew it or

not, but every time he did, it seemed to chip away at my walls a little more. "I didn't sleep much last

night, either."

He hummed, a happy sound that made me grin. When this man got under my skin enough to make

me smile so much, I'd never know, but... I couldn't deny that it was nice to have a little bit of

happiness for myself. Having Rasha was the best thing to ever happen to me, and the time I spent with

her was precious and made me the happiest father in the world. But... I'd been goin' at this dad thing

by myself for the past eight years. Without anyone to share the pressure with, it'd been weighing me

down, and I could admit to myself that I'd been lonely. Really fuckin' lonely when I was lying in bed

at night by myself.

So as much as I was unsure about this thing between Basil and me, I decided to let myself enjoy it.

Maybe it would last, maybe it wouldn't. Maybe I'd trust him enough to share my daughter with him,

maybe I wouldn't. But I wanted to see where this thing went.

"You okay?"

Basil's voice brought my attention back to him. "Hm? Yeah, fine."

I could feel his eyes on me as I drove, but all he said was, "Okay."

Stifling a sigh, I asked, "What's your schedule like for the rest of the week?"

"Uh, working a million hours every day." He leaned back in his seat and sighed. "There's a serial

killer on the loose, so it's an all hands on deck situation. Alec won't let me on that case, but since

there's a billion agents working it, there's a million other cases for me and a few others to handle.

The only reason I have off today is because I've worked so much overtime in the past two weeks that

the department can't pay me." He snorted. "Alec called me about an hour ago and asked if I could

come in anyway, but I told him I'd have to wait until after our date. So... I'll be working tonight, most

likely."

"That sucks. I can't believe the BCA hasn't been able to catch this guy yet."

"Me either. The body count just keeps going up, and we don't know what to do about it. Witches

have been notified to stay alert and not to travel by themselves. Hell, the news has been playing our

plea of people staying in groups whether they're witches or not since this guy's violence seems to be

escalating. But somehow, he keeps grabbing witches anyway. I don't know what to do." There was a

sadness in his voice that I hadn't expected, but... I should have. For all his outer appearances and

angry demeanor, Basil was actually pretty damn soft-hearted.

"I'm sorry. If you need any help, you know ya can ask me, right?"

He turned in his seat. "Would you really be willing to come into the BCA as

a consultant?”

I thought about it, then shrugged. “As long as it doesn’t interfere with my jobs, I don’t see why

not.”

“They’d pay you.”

I sighed, but didn’t dignify that with a response.

“I’m gonna text Alec and let him know. You’re better at finding people than anyone else I know.

Alec should hire you.”

I snorted. “You really think a government agency is gonna hire a hunter?”

“Why wouldn’t they?”

I shot him a look before refocusing on the road and shaking my head.

“Hunters aren’t exactly

known for stayin’ within the bounds of the law, now are they?”

“I guess not, but if you saw the shit my brothers and I get away with, you’d be surprised.”

“Is it ‘cause Alec’s in your coven?” He’d been trying to explain his family to me, and if I

remembered correctly, Alec was married to his sister and was a... werewolf, I thought.

“No, it’s because we bring in the most criminals, and when we’re involved, we help keep the

other agents safe with our shields and stuff.” He shrugged. “We bring results, so he tends to look the

other way when we do something shady. As long as no one's getting hurt, he ignores it. Except when I

have a hunter taking out all my perps and bringing my success rate down more than half."

I smirked at that. "Sorry."

"No, you're not."

I chuckled. "No, I'm not."

He punched my shoulder, but laughed a little, so I shot him a small grin back as I parked the car in

front of a good sandwich place I'd found a few months ago.

As Basil reached for his door handle, I stopped him with a hand on his forearm. When he lifted a

brow at me, I smirked and grabbed his chin to place a lingering kiss there. As always, he melted into

me, so I deepened the kiss, but only for a few seconds since there were people walking around on the

sidewalk in front of us. No need to put a show on for the nosy fuckers.

I pulled back, but pecked his lips one last time before slipping my gloves on and getting out of the

car. Basil seemed to be in a trance and was slower to get out, making me smirk at him. He finally got

out and followed me inside the small restaurant. To my surprise, someone said, "Basil?" as soon as

we were through the door.

I sighed when I saw that tiny witch, the blue-haired fae, and that were-cyclops guy. Apparently,

we couldn't go anywhere without running into his family.

Basil grinned over at their table, saying, "Hey, guys. On your lunch break?"

The small witch—Delaro—nodded and said, "We have Hazel watching the shop so we could

come out on a little date. We've been too busy lately."

Basil smiled. "I know the feeling." He turned to me, and I could tell that he didn't know if he

should pull me over to their table or if it would be rude not to sit with his brother. I didn't have a

fuckin' clue. Besides Rasha, I didn't have any family, and I hadn't in a long-ass time.

Luckily, the fae laughed and said, "No worries, Bas, we were just about to leave, anyway."

The three of them stood up, and I watched as the big guy pulled the tiny witch into his side and

kissed the top of his head while the fae threw some money on the table. The big guy took the fae's

hand, then led the two toward us.

They stopped in front of us and Delaro asked, "Will you be home for dinner tonight? Tio's making

veggie chili and trying to get everyone to eat at the same time."

"I'm not sure. I'll text you if I can't. Alec's not going to make it, I can tell you that much. He

already asked me to come in tonight.”

Delaro frowned, then sighed. “Yeah, okay. I’m gonna tell Dad to pick a day for a family meal next

week so everyone can plan around it.”

“That’s a good idea.”

The little witch grinned. “I have them sometimes. See you later.”

Before they walked away, the fae added, “You and your brothers need to talk to Talon and me

tomorrow. We need to decide when we’re going back. It’s been nearly a month already.”

Basil opened his mouth to respond, but the big guy said, “Let him enjoy his date, Nikolai. We have

plenty of time for all of that later.”

The fae sighed, but nodded, then gave us a finger wave followed by blowing Basil a kiss. A

growl came out of me, making the fae laugh, but Basil grabbed my hand and pulled me to him, saying,

“Ignore him. He does it just to annoy me.”

I crowded into his space, leaning over him so he had to tilt his head back to see my eyes.

Grabbing onto his hips, I growled again. “No one else is allowed to kiss you, or touch you.”

To my surprise, he smiled. “As long as you agree to the same policy, Hiro.”

I grunted. “I’m not kissin’ or touchin’ anyone else, either. Haven’t in a long

time, anyway.”

His smile was soft as he placed a chaste kiss to my lips. “Come on. You’re making a scene. In a

restaurant. *Again.*” His words were more amusement than anger, so I shrugged and let him pull me to

a booth.

When we sat down, he said, “You do realize that Nik, Del, and Gray are all viramores, right?

They’ve been together for like... over two years.”

I nodded. “Doesn’t mean it’s okay for him to flirt with you.”

He snorted. “Trust me, that was *not* flirting, that was How-To-Annoy-Bas-101.”

I lifted a brow at that.

He smiled. “Nik’s my family”—I growled, like that was a normal thing for a damn human to keep

doing—“and we’ve been through a lot together. He’s more like a brother than anything else. You don’t

have to worry about him, or anyone, for that matter.”

His words only made me feel marginally better, but I still nodded. “Yeah, okay.”

He smirked. “You’re kinda cute when you’re jealous.”

I wrinkled my nose. “Cute and jealous are not words used to describe me.”

“If you say so.”

I shook my head, but since he was smiling with a fondness in his eyes, I found myself smiling

back.

After we ordered food and it arrived, we ate a few bites in silence before Basil asked, “How’s

Rasha doing?”

I froze with my fork halfway to my mouth. “Basil...”

His jaw clenched, he dropped his fork, and sat back with his arms crossed over his chest.

“Seriously?”

“Basil...”

“You can’t even let me ask how she’s doing? I’m not even asking for details, Hiro.”

“Basil...”

His entire body was taut as he turned his head away from me and started blinking rapidly. Was

he... was he crying? His head jerked toward me with anger burning in his gaze. “I get that you don’t

want me around her, even though I’d love to officially meet her. I get it. You don’t trust me yet, and I

guess I can’t really blame you, even though...” He shook his head and took a shaky breath. “You

really can’t even let me ask how she’s doing? You trust me so little that we can’t even talk about her?

How... how are you ever going to let me in when we can't even talk about the one thing that's most

important to you?"

"Basil..."

He stared at me for a few seconds, then scoffed. "That's all you have to say?" He threw his

napkin on his plate and stood up, pulling his wallet out and throwing cash on the table as he leaned

his face close to mine. "You know what? I've been respectful of your wishes and your feelings, but

you haven't shown me one ounce of the same respect." He straightened and started walking away.

I sat there stunned for a few seconds, but when Basil reached the door to leave, I scrambled out of

my seat and went after him, knowing he'd thrown enough money on the table to cover us both.

I didn't catch up to him until he was on the sidewalk. Stepping in front of him to cut off his

escape, I said, "Wait."

He stopped before he could run into me, then glared up at my face and crossed his arms over his

chest again, sneering at me.

"Basil, I'm sorry."

He didn't say anything at first, looking like he wanted me to say something else, but I was at a loss

of words. When nothing else came, he scoffed again and pushed past me, bumping into my shoulder

along the way.

“Basil!”

He didn’t stop walking, and when he turned the corner, a sharp pain hit my chest so hard and fast,

I gasped. Rubbing at it, I followed him, but when I made it down the alley, he was already gone.

Scanning the sky above, I saw a black shadow flying off into the distance. He’d taken his dragon

home.

Motherfucker.

“YOU’RE BACK EARLY,” ULMA SAID AS SHE ANSWERED HER DOOR.

“Yeah,” I breathed out. It had only been a day since Basil walked out of our lunch date, but it felt

like an eternity had passed because the bastard wasn’t answering my calls. He texted me to tell me to

shove it up my ass and leave him alone until I could get my shit together. So I at least knew he was

alive, the dickhead.

“You alright, Hiro?”

I shook my head and lifted a shoulder. Was I alright? No, not really. “I’m fine.”

She eyed me for a minute. “Alright, well, when do you need me next? Tomorrow?”

I mentally calculated how much money I had in my account, wondering how I was going to pay

her and feed my kid at the same time, and cringed. “Uh, can I pay you by the end of the week?”

She gave me a confused expression. “You paid me through the end of the month.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Your man just gave me a bundle of cash not ten minutes ago.”

Before I could form a response to that—because what in the fuck?—my little bundle of energy

came flying out of the house, screaming, “Daddy!”

I chuckled and caught her in my arms, lifting her up into a hug. She had her oxygen tube on, which

wasn’t surprising since she’d hardly had it off in the past few weeks. “Hey, peanut.” I kissed her

cheek. “Gimme some sugar.”

She kissed my cheek, then gave me a smooch on the lips that made me smile.

“How was school today?”

“Fine.”

I rolled my eyes at the one-word answer, gave her a little tickle, then set her on her feet, saying,

“Go get your stuff so we can get home for dinner.”

“Okay, Daddy.” She ran back into the house, and Ulma and I stared at each other.

“Was his name Basil?”

She nodded. “Yes. He gave me the money, and”—she chuckled—“told me to tell you to kiss his ass.”

I shook my head at that, but a snort still came out, although I was pissed. How dare he interfere in

my life that way. How dare he insert himself like that. I didn’t want or need his goddamn charity. But

it wasn’t Ulma’s fault, so I took a deep breath and decided to save my anger for later. “Can you watch

her after school?”

“Of course.”

“Thanks, Ulma.”

She nodded, and Rasha came back out with a big smile on her face, so we said our goodbyes and

walked across the street to our house. “Go wash up and you can help me make pancakes for dinner.”

She grinned at me. “I love pancakes for dinner!”

“I know.” I kissed the top of her head, and as soon as she was upstairs, I pulled out my phone and

dialed Basil, preparing to leave an angry voicemail.

To my surprise, he answered, “*Hello?*”

“What in the fuck is your problem?”

He sighed. *“Apparently, you are my problem.”*

I pulled the phone away from my ear to glare at it. “What gives ya the right to come over here and

pay Ulma, huh? What is the matter with ya?” My accent tended to get thicker when I was angry.

“Being your viramore gives me the right, Hiro. And just so you know, I paid your fucking bills

for the next three months, too.”

I froze in shock for several beats before my entire body ignited in red-hot anger. “I’m not a fuckin’

charity case, Basil Ellwood!”

“I know that, asshole. I know you hate accepting help from other people, but I don’t give a shit

anymore. If you can’t accept me in your life as your partner, then I’ll take care of you from afar.”

“Basil, you can’t just—”

“You’re my viramore, Hiro. You’re supposed to be with me, you’re supposed to be the other half

of my soul, and you have a beautiful daughter that I already care about simply because she’s

yours. She is more important than your pride, Hiro Grimsby. I wanted to give you a little break so

you can catch up. I was going to talk to you about it, I was going to ask your permission, but you

won't even let me ask you if she's okay. You won't even give me that. Don't you understand that I

already care about you? What's important to you is important to me. Who you love is important to

me. And... I'm sorry if you're pissed, but I'm not sorry I did it. Now you can concentrate on your

little girl instead of worrying about paying bills all the time." I couldn't be sure, but I thought he

might've been crying.

I opened my mouth to respond, but nothing came out.

He breathed a long-suffering sigh out, then quietly said, "I'm here if you're ever ready to talk..."

no matter when or where you are... I'm here." Then he hung up the phone, but not before I heard a

tiny sob fall from his lips.

I stood in the middle of my kitchen, staring at my fridge for so long, Rasha was in front of me

without me realizing she'd even come into the room.

"You okay, Daddy?"

I blew out a breath. Was I? No, I didn't think I was. The anger was still there, but now there was

this understanding underneath it. Basil overstepped. There was no doubt about that, but he didn't do it

maliciously, no not all. He did it because he cared, because he wanted to help. And I really didn't

know what to do with that. Shaking away the thoughts, I offered my daughter a small smile. "I'm okay.

Let's make those pancakes."

She smiled and went to the pantry to get out the ingredients.

C H A P T E R T H I R T E E N

H I R O

"Compelling me ain't gonna work, asshole," I said to the vampire I was tying up. I already cuffed

him with some handcuffs that were meant to hold supernaturals, but I was wrapping him in some rope

that was supposed to infuse a calming energy into him. Jasmyn gave it to me to try out, but I wasn't

sure it was workin' too well.

"Let me go," he growled.

I sighed. "Not gonna happen. You got a bounty on your head, and I'm gonna collect it."

He hissed and started struggling more, so with a sigh, I hit him in the back of the head with the butt

of my knife, then watched in satisfaction as he collapsed in a heap. He was going to have a bad

headache when he woke up.

Slinging him over my shoulder, I carried him to my truck, threw him in the back seat, and slammed

the door. As I made my way to the driver's seat, I lifted my cloak to check

my side. That bastard had

been strong as hell and somehow slipped a claw between the armor at my hip. My wards helped

protect me, but vamps were fast and strong, so it still hurt like hell. Luckily, there was only a small

amount of blood.

I dialed Jasmyn right away, then drove to our meeting place to hand him over. He was still

knocked out when I arrived.

Jasmyn grinned at me. “You caught him pretty fast.”

I shrugged. “Took all damn day to catch up to the slippery bastard, but I guess it’s not bad.”

She chuckled and peeked into my back seat. I opened the door, pulled him out to the ground, and

turned the guy’s head so she could compare it to her picture. When she nodded, she said, “Good

work, Grim. I’ll forward the payment to your account.”

“Thanks.”

“I have a kobold—” she cut herself off when my phone rang.

With a finger held up to her, I checked it and sucked in a breath. “It’s Rasha’s school. Gimme a

sec.” I answered without waiting for a response. “Hello?”

“*Could I please speak to Mr. Grimsby?*” a woman asked.

“Speaking.”

“Mr. Grimsby, I’m sorry to inform you but... Rasha has been taken to Arronston Memorial Hospital.”

I gasped. “What? What happened? Is she okay?”

There was a pause. *“She passed out in the middle of recess. An ambulance was called, and they*

rushed her to the hospital. I’m so sorry, Mr. Grimsby.” She sounded like she meant it.

“Thanks for calling,” I said automatically before hanging up and rushing around my car.

As I shut my door, Jasmyn called over, “Call me later.”

I didn’t respond because I really didn’t give a shit about her in that second.

The drive to the hospital was made automatically, and when I found my feet running through the

doors of the emergency room, I didn’t remember getting there. Rushing over to the front desk, I said to

a nurse, “My daughter was brought in from school. Rasha Grimsby.”

The nurse sent me a kind smile that had me gritting my teeth, but she checked on her computer

before saying, “She’s in room three-twelve, but I need your—”

I didn’t hear the rest of what she said because I rushed through the halls, following the signs to

room three-twelve. When I got there, I stormed into the room and choked on

a sob.

My little baby girl was lying in a hospital bed with a tube in her throat and what seemed like a

thousand wires and IVs in her. She was so pale. So, so, so pale. Even from here, I could tell she was

clammy. Her skin had taken on a sickly color, and I could hardly believe the difference between now

and this morning. Some of her hair had been shaved off, and some of the leftover strands had blood

caked on them. And there were five doctors and nurses walking around her bed, checking things,

prodding her, and saying things I didn't understand.

"Oh god," I sobbed out as I tried to move closer to her. "Oh god, peanut."

A man—a nurse, I thought—grabbed my shoulders and said, "Sir, you need to leave."

"No! That's my daughter!" I yelled through my tears.

The man nodded. "I know, sir. But you need to back up and let the doctors do their job."

I shook my head and pointed as I tried to push past him. "They can't. They can't help her. There's

nothing they can do."

When I was held back, I realized there were now three men holding me. The first one asked,

"What do you mean there's nothing they can do? Do you know what's wrong with her?"

“It’s a hex. She’s hexed,” I said on a broken sob. “Please... please let me hold her hand. I’ll stay

out of the way... please.” Tears were falling down my eyes, staring at my baby girl, unresponsive

with a machine keeping her lungs going.

The nurse nodded at the other guys keeping me back, and when they let go, I fell to my knees

beside Rasha’s bed and pulled her tiny hand into both of mine. “Hey there, peanut. I’m right here with

you. You hear me, Rasha? Daddy’s here.” More tears fell and I whispered, “Please wake up, baby

girl. Please don’t leave me. You can’t leave me... please, Rasha, please wake up.”

A doctor came over and said, “She was unresponsive when she arrived, but she’s stable right

now. She wasn’t breathing on her own, so we have a ventilator helping her breathe. She hit her head

when she lost consciousness, so we had to stitch up a small wound there. It seems to be a superficial

wound, but we’ll keep an eye on it and run some more tests to make sure. We’re giving her fluids and

some antibiotics because it looks like she has an infection in her lungs—”

“It’s not an infection. It’s a hex... a witch’s hex,” I whispered. “There’s nothing we can do but

wait and see if she wakes up this time.”

“This time?” he asked gently.

I nodded. “She’s been in and out of the hospital her whole life.”

“Is there anyone we can call for you?”

I shook my head. “She’s the only family I have.”

The man hesitated, then pulled a chair over for me. “Sit. She’s stable for now, so we’ll leave you

with her. Don’t hesitate to call a nurse if you notice anything changing okay?”

I nodded. “Thanks.”

“I’ll make a few calls about this hex.”

I turned to look up at him and realized with a start that he was a shifter, which explained why he

accepted my hex explanation so easily. Human doctors usually thought I was crazy. I told him, “I’ve

tried everything to find a way to break the hex, but if you find something, I’m open to suggestions.”

He nodded and made his way out of the room.

As I cradled Rasha’s tiny, pale hand again, more tears fell, so I placed my forehead on her hand

and took a few deep breaths. She was going to wake up. She always did. She *had* to wake up. “Please

be okay, peanut.”

The ringing of my phone startled me, and I automatically pulled it out of my pocket. Keeping one

hand on Rasha's, I answered without looking at who it was. "Hello?"

"What's wrong, Hiro? Are you hurt? I felt your distress and you weren't answering."

I blinked. "No."

"I can feel your pain. Where are you? What's going on?" Basil. It was Basil.

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him to leave me alone, but Rasha wasn't breathing and

everything in me hurt, so the words came tumbling out. "Rasha passed out in school and was rushed to

the hospital. She's on a ventilator." My voice cracked.

"Which hospital?"

"Arronston Memorial," I answered on autopilot.

"Room number?"

"Three-twelve."

"I'll be there in about fifteen minutes." He hung up, not giving me a chance to protest, not that I

really wanted to.

Putting my phone back in my pocket, I stared at my little girl and prayed to whoever would listen

that she'd wake up. Her skin was cold to the touch and paler than I'd ever seen. The only movement

from her was the rise and fall of her chest from the machine. Reaching up, I brushed her bangs off her

forehead, leaned up to press a kiss there, and rested my forehead to hers for a few seconds, careful of

the stitches on the side of her head. The antiseptic in the room and on her skin covered up her natural

scent and the cherry shampoo she used, which only made more silent tears fall.

“Hiro?”

I turned toward the voice, and when I saw Basil standing in the doorway, a shuddered breath fell

from my lips.

He slowly moved into the room, coming up to stand beside me. When he reached out to grab my

shoulder, I turned to him, stepped into his space, and pressed my forehead to his neck. He wrapped

his arms around me immediately, and as soon as that small comfort registered, a loud sob fell from my

chest.

As I fisted his shirt in my hands, he tightened his hold, rubbing my back and whispering, “She’s

going to be okay. We’re going to figure this out.” Even though I knew he couldn’t know if that was true

or not, I still appreciated the sentiment.

He let me cry on him for a few minutes. I probably should’ve been pissed that he was seeing me

fall apart, but anger took too much energy, and I already had all my energy

focused on worrying about

Rasha.

Taking a shaky breath, I stepped out of his arms and turned back to my daughter without meeting

his eyes. Basil stepped closer and put his arm across my back, squeezed my shoulder, and kissed the

side of my head. I understood his silent message. He was telling me it was okay that I'd fallen apart in

front of him, that he wasn't going to use it against me—not that I truly thought he would—and he was

proving to me that I could lean on him.

“Can you tell me what happened?” he finally whispered.

“She collapsed in class and wasn't breathing on her own... it's never gotten this bad before, not

to where she's been unconscious for so long.”

He hesitated before asking, “Do you know what caused it?”

“She's hexed.”

He stilled, his body going taut against me. “What?”

“A witch hexed her.”

“What the hell kind of witch hexes a child?” He sounded pissed, angrier than I'd ever heard him,

and hearing that finally made me look at him. He was staring at Rasha, so tense he could probably cut

diamonds. “What happened, Hiro? Please tell me how this happened.” His eyes were blazing,

lightning bolts shooting across them, and I could tell he was having trouble keeping his energy in

check. If he cared this much, maybe it was time to finally tell him what happened.

With a sigh, I said, “Let’s sit first.”

Without looking away from me, Basil moved his hand toward a chair against the wall and it

looked like his shadow magic wrapped around it a moment before the thing went sliding across the

floor, stopping beside my chair. He pulled us down into our seats, and I took Rasha’s hand in mine,

but Basil grasped onto my other hand, and I let him.

“My wife was a hunter, too. When Millie got pregnant, she insisted on continuing to work even

though I protested it on a daily basis. She was very stubborn and independent. Really, it was a small

miracle that I’d gotten her to agree to marry me in the first place.” I smiled sadly and waved that

away. “We’d been hunting this coven for weeks, but we always seemed to be one step behind. Their

pattern of sacrifices was hard to follow—”

“Sacrifices?”

I met his eyes. “The witches from my home country are nothing like the ones

here. They... they

travel in covens, leaving destruction in their path. This coven had a bounty on them for over a year by

the time Millie and I picked it up. They were making human sacrifices all over the country, so we

followed their trail of bodies and finally caught up to them when Millie was seven months pregnant.”

I sucked in a harsh breath and closed my eyes for a moment. “They must’ve sensed us on their tail

because they came for us in the middle of the night. Ripped us from our bed at the hotel, dragged us by

the hair...” I took a moment to get the picture of Millie’s pregnant body being dragged down a

staircase out of my head.

Once I locked that image inside a box I never planned to open again, I continued, “I took out four

of them before they managed to bind me in their spelled rope. Mills, she, she took out six, I think. She

was always a better fighter than me.” I smiled a bit, and Basil squeezed my hand. “But they captured

us and took us to a witches circle. They... I showed you some of my runes, yeah?” He nodded. “They

couldn’t hex me, but Mills didn’t have any protection runes—she didn’t want them. Since the witches

figured out pretty quick that they couldn’t hex me, they tied me to a tree and forced me to watch.”

Basil released my hand and grabbed the back of my neck, massaging the muscles there. “You don’t

have to keep going if you don’t want to.”

I shook my head. “Nah, I wanna tell you.”

“Okay.” He kept rubbing my neck and grabbed my hand again with his free one.

“They started the ceremony, the one to sacrifice Millie, and I used their distraction to get free of

my binds, but it took me so long to get out of them since they were spelled. They... they cut her up,

bled her for their ritual, and—” I cut myself off as I remembered them lapping up her blood and—I

shook my head to free myself of that memory. It was tucked down hidden inside that box in my mind

for a reason. No good would come of thinkin’ about that. With another shuddered breath, I continued,

“When I got loose, three of the witches found it... amusin’ to keep torturing Millie while I fought off

the others. They hexed her, over and over again, and I couldn’t reach her, I couldn’t—” A few tears

leaked over my eyes, and I wiped them away, trying to ignore the heaviness in my chest, the

remembered pain of watching the woman I loved slowly dying only feet from me.

“I killed them—all of them. But it didn’t matter. The hexes were too strong and too complicated.

She was gray, her skin cracking as if it was made of glass, and when I touched her hand, it... it

crumbled, like it was made of dust, like she was made of dust.”

I stared over at Rasha for a few seconds, then whispered, “So I did the only thing I could think of,

the only thing Millie wanted in that moment. I saved our daughter. I... I pulled her out of Millie’s

belly and rushed her to the hospital while my wife slowly disintegrated, and you know what she said

to me before I left her there?” He shook his head, his big, black eyes staring at me, and a few tears

fell. “She thanked me for saving Rasha. She thanked me for leavin’ her there.”

He squeezed the back of my neck, but said nothing.

“She died alone... I left her there because I couldn’t touch her without breakin’ her further, and

she... she died alone.”

“No, Hiro,” Basil said, squeezing my hand. “She died at peace, knowing you saved her baby and

that you’d take care of her and keep her safe. She died at peace.”

A few more tears fell as I stared at him. I knew that, I knew he was right, but somehow hearing

those words from someone else helped settle something in my heart... enough that maybe we could

duct tape all the pieces together one day.

He wiped the tears from my cheeks with one hand, and I took a deep breath, nodded at him, then

turned back to my baby girl.

“Rasha wasn’t fully developed when she was born, and even though the hexes weren’t made

directly at her, she’d still been connected to Millie, so some of that seeped through.”

His eyes flicked back and forth, pain and understanding in them. “I’m so sorry, Hiro. I... I know

that doesn’t mean anything, but... I’m sorry.” He stood up and stepped in front of me, pulling my head

against his stomach, hugging me. “You did the right thing. You did the right thing, Hiro.”

I wrapped my arms around his waist and buried my face against him as he ran his hands through

my hair and kept kissing the top of my head. Having him here was helping soothe the hole in my heart.

I’d never before had someone with me when Rasha was in the hospital.

Eventually, I released him, and he sat beside me, keeping his hands on me so I didn’t lose that

connection. We sat there, staring at Rasha for a long time, but she wasn’t waking up.

After what felt like hours, Basil whispered, “Maybe I can heal her and break the hex.”

“I’ve had witches try before. Nothing’s worked.”

“I’m stronger than other witches.”

I didn’t respond right away. “That might be true, but this isn’t somethin’ your magic can fix.”

He squeezed my hand. “You sound sure.”

“I am. There’s... there’s nothin’ anyone can do. I’ve gone to every single culture and doctor and

magic user that exists. No one’s been able to help us at all.”

“Can I try?”

I hesitated, then figured there was no harm in lettin’ him see for himself. “Yeah.”

“If I hold her hand, it’ll be easier for me to sense what’s wrong.”

“Go ahead.” I didn’t even hesitate this time, which... kinda proved I was comin’ along with

trusting him.

He picked up her hand, and I felt his electric magic come to life around us. Even though it felt

stormy, it didn’t feel evil. In fact, it felt and smelled fresh, like a summer storm. His black shadow

magic draped over Rasha like a second skin as Basil concentrated with his eyes closed. He was like

that for several minutes before he finally released his magic, and the black shadow disappeared along

with the stormy energy.

“Fuck,” he whispered.

“I told you.”

His gaze met mine, the sorrow in those dark eyes matched my own, and he whispered, “I’m so

sorry, Hiro. I thought... if I could just... but it’s like there’s nothing there to heal.”

“That’s what all magic users tell me.”

“I’m sorry... we’ll figure it out.”

“There’s nothing to figure out, Basil. I’ve tried everything.”

He nodded. “My family has a lot of old texts and magical items. We might be able to find

something that others don’t have access to. I’d like to take a look at least.”

I shrugged. He wasn’t going to find anything, but I understood the compulsion to try doing

something, and it wouldn’t hurt anything for him to poke around in his old books or whatever. “Okay.”

He leaned in and kissed my temple. “We’ll figure this out... you don’t have to do it alone

anymore.”

Tearing my gaze from Rasha, I stared into his eyes and could see... I could see and fuckin’ feel

how much he meant that, how much he meant it when he said I wasn’t alone. He wanted to stick

around, and... I didn’t know what to do with that, I didn’t know how to react or what to say or what

to think. But I did know that it helped fill that hole in my heart further, so I nodded at him.

He offered me a small smile, then pulled me into a hug. And I let him. I let him because it felt

good to have someone help carry the burden, it felt good to be with someone when my world was

falling apart rather than feeling completely alone.

I let him because I needed a fuckin' hug, I needed his fuckin' strength to help pull Rasha and me

through this.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BASIL

“Hiro?” I said quietly. I’d been sitting here for hours with him, and there had been no change in

Rasha’s condition.

He lifted his red-rimmed eyes to me and raised a brow.

“Would it be okay if Ailin came to see if he can help her?”

His open expression fell as he placed his mask back over his features, and I frowned at the now-

stone-hard hunter before me instead of the man whose daughter was unconscious. “No.”

I stifled a sigh. “He’s better at healing magic than I am, so I—”

“I don’t know him, Basil.”

“But I do.”

He didn't say anything.

“He's my brother-dad-kinda person. He cares about people, and he would do everything in his

power to save a kid, even one he doesn't know. He'd definitely do everything in his power to save

the kid of his brother's viramore. He's a good person, Hiro. I promise you that.”

“He threatened me.”

I waved that away. “He threatens everyone, and he just wanted to be sure you weren't going to

hurt me. He might be able to help us.”

He sighed and rubbed his hand over his eyes.

I scooted closer, peeled his hand away, and held it in both of mine. “I would never do anything to

jeopardize your daughter, Hiro. Never in a thousand realms. I want to help her.”

He searched my eyes for a long minute, then finally gave me the briefest of nods. But that was all I

needed. I sent a message to Jorah and Thayer through our link, *Send Ailin to the hospital to help*

Hiro's daughter.

Will do, Jorah said at the same time that Thayer said, *We will.*

With that done, I refocused on my viramore, saying, “Ailin should be here

soon.”

He gave me a strange look. “What? Was he already on his way before you even asked me?”

I could feel his anger coming to a head. “No, I asked my brothers to get him.” I tapped my head.

His face morphed into confusion. “What are you talkin’ about?”

I blinked. Oh shit. “Oh, well, shit. I never told you, did I?”

“Told me what?”

“My brothers and I... we can speak telepathically—just the Three, not like all of my siblings or

anything.”

“You can speak in your head with two of your brothers?”

My brow furrowed. “Yes, and—” I cut myself off before I said too much. With the way he was

with witches, I was afraid to bring it up.

“And what?” He narrowed his eyes.

I sighed. “When we bond completely, you do know that you and I will, uh, be able to speak

telepathically, too.”

His eyebrows slowly rose on his head. “I read that somewhere, but I didn’t really believe it.”

“Well, it’s true.”

He stared at me for a few seconds before huffing and turning away.

When he didn't say anything for another minute, I gently asked, "That's it?"

"I don't know what ya want me to say. I have enough shit to worry about here."

"Okay, bu—"

He turned on me. "Will you be able to control my mind?"

"No. And even if I could, I would never do that to you or anyone."

"To Rasha?"

I jerked back as if he'd slapped me. "Of course, I'd never do that to her! I would protect her with

my life if I had to. I don't mess with people's heads. I would *never* fucking do that. I know what it

feels like to have that happen to you, and... I would never wish that on another person."

He searched my eyes for a few seconds, then nodded with a quiet, "Okay." He fell silent again,

staring at his little girl, but after a few minutes, he said, "When she's better and I have a minute to

actually think, you're gonna tell me what you meant about knowin' how it feels. I can't... I can't

concentrate right now."

Hesitantly, I placed my hand on his back. "I'll tell you anything you want."

To my surprise, he leaned back into my touch a tad. Not much, but enough for me to notice that he

appreciated the gesture. "Be ready for an interrogation."

I sent him a half-smile. “I think I can handle that.”

He bumped my chest with his shoulder. “We’ll see about that.”

Sighing a few minutes later, I asked, “Do you need anything? I can get you some food or coffee or

anything you need.”

He leaned a little more heavily into me, murmuring, “No. Stay here.” The silent gesture made me

smile. He wanted me to stay with him. Even though I knew he’d grumble, I leaned over and kissed the

side of his head because I couldn’t help myself. Hiro grabbed my shirt and yanked me closer so I was

on the edge of my seat, then he rested his head on my shoulder and whispered, “I’m so tired.” The

defeat in his voice broke my heart.

He didn’t mean that he was physically exhausted, although he was that, too. He meant that he was

worn out emotionally and mentally from all the years of dealing with hospitals and scares with his

daughter alone. He’d been all alone since the day Rasha was born, but he wasn’t alone anymore.

Never again.

But I didn’t say any of that out loud since I didn’t want him to push me away again. I wrapped an

arm around him and hauled him into me as best I could. It was awkward in the chairs we were in, but

I didn't really mind because he was hurting and it felt right to have him in my arms. The fact that he

was letting me hold him like this showed me just how hurt he was.

I stared at his little girl and felt tears fill my eyes. It was no wonder why he had a vendetta against

witches. I can't even imagine how horrible that had been, watching someone you love die in such a

horrific way while you were trying to save your newborn baby. Mother of All, my poor viramore. My

poor viramore's little girl.

Rasha was so, so tiny, I could hardly believe she was eight years old. Everything about her was

tiny, and being hooked up to all those machines only made her seem frailer than before. That poor

baby. I was going to figure out how to heal her.

"Basil?"

I turned to the door where my brother-slash-dad was standing, and I sent him a small smile. "Hey,

A."

Ailin's eyes swept the room. "Can I come in? Seb's with me, but he can wait in the hall if you

need him to."

Hiro sat up straight, stared at me for a beat, then nodded to himself and said, "You both can come

in.”

Ailin sent him a small smile and stepped inside. Seb was only a few steps behind him, and Hiro

gasped out, “What are you?”

Seb froze and blinked at him. “What?”

“You’re not a witch, but you’re some kind of magic user I’ve never come across before... what

are you?”

Seb scowled, Ailin’s brows rose, and I turned to my viramore, saying, “He’s an enchanter.”

“The last enchanter,” Hiro whispered.

I nodded. “Yeah. Seb is Ailin’s viramore, so he’s like... a step-dad or something, I guess.

Anyway, Seb, this is my viramore Hiro and his daughter Rasha. Hiro, Seb.”

Hiro kept staring at Seb, but Seb said, “It’s nice to meet you, Hiro, but I wish it was under better

circumstances.”

Hiro nodded at him and finally peeled his eyes away.

Ailin walked to the other side of the bed, asking, “What happened to Rasha?”

Hiro’s jaw ticked, so I answered for him before he could get into an argument with Ailin because

they’d probably explode half the hospital if they got into it. “When her mother was seven months

pregnant with her, she was hexed several times by witches.” Ailin’s eyebrows rose. “The hexes

killed her mother. Hiro was able to save Rasha, but she was born early, and the hexes somehow clung

to her even though they weren’t directed at her specifically.”

Ailin’s expression was one of shock, but he nodded and asked, “May I touch her forehead?”

Hiro’s jaw ticked again, so I nudged him and said, “I promise you that he would never hurt her.

He wants to help. Don’t think for one second that I would ever allow someone to harm her.”

He closed his eyes, took a breath, opened them, and said, “Fine. But I’m warnin’ ya, witch, if you

—”

“I want to help,” Ailin said, cutting him off.

My brother placed his hand on Rasha’s forehead and closed his eyes before Hiro could offer

more threats. A moment later, his green magic began softly floating over Rasha’s body. Hiro jerked

beside me, so I whispered, “It’s healing magic, Hiro. Take a breath and feel the energy... it isn’t

harmful.”

He did as I asked, and the moment he actually paid attention to the feel of Ailin’s power, he

breathed out in relief.

Another minute passed, and Rasha suddenly took a deep breath, her eyes fluttering open.

Hiro jumped up and leaned over her, rubbing her hair on the uninjured side, and whispering, "It's

okay, peanut. I'm right here. Don't be scared. You have a breathing tube in. You're okay, peanut,

you're okay."

Rasha kept her eyes on her father, and even though she looked scared, she didn't seem to be

panicking. All I could think was that they'd been through this so many times before that she knew what

to expect. That poor little girl.

Ailin pulled his magic back into himself as I hit the call button for the nurse, and he said, "I

healed what I could, but I couldn't remove the hex... it's... I don't know how to explain it, but we're

going to have to do some research to figure out how to remove it. It's like it's there, but it isn't. I'm

guessing that's because she wasn't the target of the hex. She shouldn't be in too much pain, though. I

tried to fix that, at least."

A nurse came in, saw that Rasha was awake and breathing on her own, and ran back out to get a

doctor. Hiro stayed over the top of his daughter, holding her hand and running his other one over her

hair as he whispered calming words. I didn't want to interrupt, but I also wanted Hiro to know that he

wasn't alone, so I stood behind him and rubbed his back. The motion seemed to relax him a little, so I

kept it up.

When the doctor came in to remove the tube, I had to pull Hiro back to give him room. I couldn't

watch them because it freaked me out, but as soon as the doctor gave the all-clear, Hiro rushed over

and hugged Rasha, putting his face in the pillow beside her head. He whispered to her, and her little

arms came up to hug his neck.

Ailin and Seb walked over to me. Seb gave me a hug, and Ailin hugged me and kissed my temple,

whispering, "We'll figure this out. I'm going to get Jorah to help me research as soon as we get

home."

"Thank you."

Ailin leaned back to meet my eyes. "If you need to bring them home, tell me so they can be added

to the wards."

My eyebrows rose. "Really?"

"Of course. He's your viramore, and we need to keep him and that little girl of his safe. I bet she

and Niya would have a ball playing together.” I’d had the same thought, that my little sister would

love making a new friend.

I smiled at that and nodded. “I’ll try to get them to come home with me, but it’s probably going to

take some convincing.”

Ailin half-smiled, squeezed my shoulder, and said, “Call me if you need me to come back.”

“I will. Thank you for coming.”

“Anytime, kiddo.” He and Seb walked out of the room, holding hands.

After a few minutes, Hiro stood and held his arm out to me, saying, “Rasha, I want you to meet

someone.”

I was pretty sure my heart exploded at that. He was actually letting me meet her officially. Yeah,

I’d been here, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t ask me to leave now that she was awake. I stepped

forward with a huge smile. Hiro rolled his eyes at me, but I saw the smirk he was trying to hide.

He put his arm around my back and scooted me closer to him and Rasha, saying, “Peanut, this is

Basil. He’s my... boyfriend.” He cringed at that word, and my eyebrows shot up.

“You have a boyfriend?” Rasha asked quietly, her voice a little raspy.

Hiro said, “Uh, yeah, I guess I do. Basil, this is Rasha.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Rasha. I’m glad you’re doing better,” I said, and she grinned up at me.

“How are you feeling?”

“Okay... my chest hurts a little, but I’m okay,” she whispered before yawning, her eyes getting

droopy. “Are you a witch?”

I glanced at Hiro, but he wasn’t giving me anything, so I turned back to Rasha and said, “I am, but

I promise I’m not going to hurt you or your daddy.”

She smiled up at me. “You’re like Glinda, the good witch.”

Hiro snorted out a laugh and said, “He’s exactly like Glinda. He even likes pink.”

I rolled my eyes at him, but smiled at the sweet little girl and said, “I like bubbles, too,” thinking

of the bubble Glinda floated in in the movie.

She giggled, and I could feel how happy the sound made Hiro. “You like pink?”

“It’s my favorite color. What’s yours?”

“Orange, but I like pink, too. Are you really Daddy’s boyfriend?”

I nodded. “Yeah, I am... is that okay?”

“Do you cook?”

“Uh, yes... I can?” I didn’t know why that sounded like a question, but I also

didn't understand the

eight-year-old's randomness, either.

She smiled up at me. "You can cook for Daddy, then." She nodded like that settled something.

"Uh... okay." I shot Hiro a look, and he only chuckled.

Hiro gently bopped Rasha on the nose. "You're a goofball." He leaned down and kissed her

forehead. "You need to get some rest, so try to take a nap, okay?"

"Okay, Daddy." She sighed. "Will you be here when I wake up?"

It took me a moment to realize she was speaking to me. "If your daddy wants me here, yes."

She yawned. "He does."

I lifted my brows and turned to Hiro, who smiled, shrugged one shoulder, and said, "She's not

wrong."

"Yeah, Rasha, I'll be here."

She nodded as her eyes drifted closed.

Hiro pulled me over to the bench seat thing they had along the wall instead of to the chairs we'd

been in before. Probably so we could talk and not disturb Rasha. As soon as we were sitting, I said,

"She's adorable."

He smiled. "Thanks. She likes to keep me on my toes."

“I bet.”

Hiro rubbed his face, like that could alleviate some of his stress, then leaned back so he was in

the corner of the bench and sort of facing me. When I sat beside him, he ran his fingers through my

hair, then started playing with one of the braids. I stayed very still, wondering what he was doing and

debating whether I should try leaning against him or not. He wasn't exactly the cuddliest guy I'd ever

met, and now that Rasha was out of immediate danger, I wasn't sure he'd like me leaning on him.

It was several minutes before he quietly said, “Can you tell Ailin thank you for me? I didn't get to

say it before he left.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“I can't thank him enough. She seems almost back to normal. Usually she's in so much pain, she

can't really talk for at least a few hours.”

I offered a sad smile. “I'll make sure he knows.”

“Thanks. Are you sure you don't mind stayin' here with me?”

“Of course I don't mind, Hiro. I want to be here.”

He nodded, then opened his arms up. “Then come 'ere.”

I sent him a smile, then scooted over and wrapped my arms around his waist with my head on his

chest. He moved around so his knee wouldn't dig into my stomach, then draped his arms around me

and kept playing with my hair. I closed my eyes and soaked him up for as long as he'd let me.

“BASIL?”

I blinked and tried to figure out what the hell was going on. Then the hospital, Rasha, and Hiro all

came back to me, and I realized I was still lying on Hiro's chest, having fallen asleep at some point. I

tilted my head up to find Hiro smirking down at me. “Sorry.”

“You're fine. I fell asleep, too.” He kissed my forehead. “I need to go sign some papers and talk

to the doctors before they'll let me take Rasha home. Do you mind waiting in here with her in case

she wakes up?”

“Sure.” I pushed off his chest and rubbed my eyes with a big yawn.

Hiro stretched as he stood up.

“What time is it?”

“About seven in the morning. I'll be right back. It'll take a few hours before she's actually

discharged, but I wanna get the ball rollin' so we can get home. She hates being stuck in a hospital

bed.” Before I could really respond to that, he squeezed my shoulder and walked out of the room.

I stretched, but didn't get up. Instead, I watched the sleeping girl in the hospital bed with a pang in

my heart. How could someone be so cruel? How could they harm an innocent baby? How the hell

was I going to fix this? If Ailin couldn't fix her with his healing magic, there was no way in hell I'd

be able to. How was I going to save her?

Hiro came back with a bunch of papers, so he sat beside me, filling things out and handing me the

sheets he was supposed to take home with him.

Eventually, Rasha woke up, ate some gross hospital food, saw a bunch of doctors that ran a few

more tests, and then finally she was discharged since they knew there was nothing else they could do

for her hex. I walked with them down the hall to the parking lot with a hospital staff member wheeling

Rasha out in a wheelchair. Hiro went to get his car, so I stood with the little girl. She looked happy to

be going home.

After Hiro got her settled in the back seat and the guy wheeled the wheelchair back inside, I stood

there awkwardly. I didn't know what to do with myself. Should I invite myself back to his house?

Should I tell him to call me if he needed me, even if I didn't want to leave him? Should I tell him I'd

meet him at his house? I hadn't driven here—I'd ridden Blaze—but I could get my Bonded to fly me

over if I needed to.

Hiro hesitated in front of me for a few seconds, then he sighed and asked, "Want to come back

with us?"

I grinned. "I'd love to."

He rolled his eyes. "You're only allowed in my car if you stop smiling like that."

I laughed. "Like what?"

"Like you won the lotto or some shit. You seriously look insane right now. You're gonna scare

Rasha half to death."

"I can't help it." I laughed out.

He chuckled and opened the passenger side door. "Get in, you git."

I grinned at that even more, making him roll his eyes and chuckle as I got in the front seat. Then I

watched the view as he walked around to the other side. It was a *good* fucking view, too. It was nice

seeing his entire body without that damn cloak on. His jeans were hugging his ass in all the right

places. My mouth was suddenly dry, and my pants felt a little too tight.

When he got into the driver's seat and saw me staring, he asked, "What?"

I shook my head because nothing that came out of my mouth would be appropriate with his kid in

the car.

He tilted his head for a second, then lifted a shoulder and started the car. “You buckled up back

there, peanut?”

“Yep.”

The drive to his house was pretty quiet, surprisingly. Rasha seemed like a quiet kid—or maybe it

was just because I was in the car with them—compared to my brothers and sisters. Or maybe I just

came from a family of loudmouths. That was probably it.

He parked in front of his house and opened the back door for Rasha. She started to bolt for the

door, but he caught her, picked her up with a laugh, and said, “I don’t think so. You know the rule

when we come home from the hospital.”

She sighed. “I haveta walk slow and sit on the couch.”

“You got it.” He swung her up into his arms, then glanced over at me. “Would you mind grabbin’

the bag?”

“Sure.” I smiled even though I couldn’t get over the fact that this sort of thing happened so often,

they had a rule for it.

Once I had the bag, I followed them to the door, but Hiro stopped and frowned. “I have wards,

and I don’t know if they’ll let you cross.”

“They will.”

He lifted a brow.

I sighed. “Okay, so I maybe have been stopping by like once a week to strengthen your wards here

and the ones across the street, so the wards recognize me.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Seriously?”

“I had to know you two were safe.” My voice was quiet, and I prepared myself for the anger I

was sure was coming.

But all Hiro did was sigh and open his door. When he waved me inside, I blinked at him, but went

in. He got Rasha settled on the couch and motioned me to follow him into the kitchen where I set the

bag on the little table. He crossed his arms over his chest and said, “How ‘bout this. You stop lying to

me.”

“I didn’t—”

“Doing shit behind my back and omitting somethin’ *is* lying.” When I nodded in defeat, he

continued, “That being said, I appreciate that you’re tryin’ to help. *But* you gotta stop doin’ shit

without asking me first.”

“Would you have let me?”

“That isn’t the point.”

“Hiro, I don’t know if you realize who I am, but I have enemies, and a lot of them. If word gets

out that I’m seeing someone or that I found my viramore, I can guarantee it will be used against me. I

won’t see you and Rasha hurt because of it.”

He stared at me for a long moment before sighing and dropping his arms. “I understand that, but

from now on, I need you—”

“I won’t keep things from you anymore. I promise.”

He took a deep breath. “Okay.”

“Can you make the same promise to me?”

He glanced into the living room where Rasha was watching some cartoon before refocusing on

me. “Yeah, I’ll do my best.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.” He nodded and turned around to go through his very bare pantry. “I gotta find somethin’ to

make for lunch.”

“How about I order a pizza?”

He opened the fridge before sighing again. “Yeah, okay. I’m gonna have to stop at the store at

some point today.”

“I can run to the store so you can stay with Rasha, if you want?”

“You wouldn’t mind?”

I shook my head. “Just put a list together, and I’ll go after we eat pizza.”

“Alright. Thank you, Basil.”

“Um... can I strengthen the wards today while I’m here?”

He rolled his eyes. “Yeah, fine.”

I smiled at his annoyance and moved closer to him until he had to back up against the counter.

Then I went up on my toes and pressed my lips to his in a slow, lingering kiss. After a few seconds,

Hiro seemed to melt a little. He spread his legs and grabbed my lower back to pull me in between

them. Holding me flat against him, he buried his free hand—he’d taken his gloves off at the door, *hell*

yeah—into my hair and deepened the kiss. Of course, he ended up taking control, but I honestly didn’t

mind. In fact, I liked it. A fucking lot.

He held me there, kissing me deep and slow for several minutes until my stomach felt like a

kaleidoscope of butterflies were having a party inside. This kiss was passionate and filled with so

much emotion, I was overflowing with it.

My hard cock pressed against his as he spread his legs farther apart to make us level with each

other. My hips bucked on instinct, but Hiro pressed on my lower back harder to stop me from moving.

At first, I didn't understand, but then I remembered the little girl sitting like *right there*, so I kept

as still as possible.

Giggling close by broke us apart. Hiro smiled against my lips, then leaned back, but kept his

hands on me so I couldn't move away. He chuckled as he faced Rasha and said, "What're you

giggling at?" The voice he used with her was soft and joking and made my heart flip in my chest.

"You're kissin' your boyfriend," she said before giggling again.

Hiro snorted. "I am. We're gonna order some pizza for lunch. You think your belly can handle it?"

She smiled widely. "Pizza!" She turned on her heel and rushed back to the couch.

"I'll take that as a yes," I said with amusement.

Hiro chuckled again. "Yeah." He moved his hand from my hair and grabbed my chin to bring my

lips to his again, but this time he only lingered for a few seconds. Resting our foreheads together, he

closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "You're hiding my little problem." He

wiggled his hips so I'd

feel his giant boner.

I snorted. "There's nothing little about it."

He barked out a laugh. "Glad you approve." He pressed a quick kiss to my lips again. "If you

move, she might see, but if you stay here with your sexy little body all up against me like this, there'll

be no gettin' rid of it." He pressed his cock against me again.

I groaned on a chuckle. "Definitely not if you keep doing that." Leaning back, I glanced around the

kitchen and grinned up at him. "Walk me backwards to the table."

He snorted, then ran his hand into my hair again, cupping the back of my head. When he captured

my mouth in a bruising kiss, I groaned and fisted his shirt in my hands so I wouldn't lose my balance.

He ran his other hand over my ass to my thigh, then lifted, but only for a second. He set me on a chair

and bent over to keep kissing me. After a minute, he pulled away to sit in another chair, and I instantly

missed the contact.

To my surprise, he scooted his chair over until we were facing each other with one of his knees

between mine. He stared at me for a full minute before groaning and standing a little to peck my lips.

As he dropped back into his seat, he muttered, “You’re gonna be the death of me.”

“I hope not.” I knocked his knee with mine.

He caught my knee between his and held it there with a smirk. “Order the pizza.”

Rolling my eyes, I pulled out my phone. “Would it kill you to say please every once in a while?”

“Yes.”

I smacked his leg with a laugh and made the call to the pizza place. Once that was done, I said, “I

want to tell you something, or maybe ask? But I don’t want you getting mad at me for it.”

He lifted his eyebrows.

With a sigh, I said, “Ailin invited you onto coven land... like to come stay with me or whatever. If

you want.”

He tilted his head. “Ailin wants us to stay with you?”

“No—I mean, yes, he does, but *I* want you and Rasha to stay with me. Ailin’s in charge of our

wards, so I need him to let you guys through, and he’s on board with that.”

He bit his lip. “I’m not sure what you’re askin’, Basil.”

“Do you and Rasha want to come stay with me? It’s safer on coven land than anywhere else in the

world.”

“I’m not sure I’m comfortable with that.”

I sighed. “Yeah, I figured, but this is an open invitation. I know you’re still wary of witches, but I

promise you that my family would keep you and Rasha safe. And my little sister and my niece are

both around Rasha’s age, so she’d have other kids there to play with.”

He didn’t say anything for a few minutes, but then he sighed, slumped back in the chair, and

rubbed his hands over his face. “I really don’t know if I can trust witches enough to bring my daughter

on their territory—”

“It isn’t some witch’s territory, Hiro. It’s my home, my family.”

“I know. I do, but I’m only just gettin’ used to the fact that I have one witch in my home around my

daughter.” He sighed. “I’m not tryin’ to hurt your feelings, Basil—and don’t deny it because I can feel

what you’re feeling.” He patted his chest, so I guessed I wasn’t doing a great job of keeping the hurt

away from him. “I’m sorry, shadow boy, but I need more time, okay?”

I didn’t reply right away because I knew my voice would show how much his distrust hurt. “So

you’re saying not right now, but maybe later?”

“Yeah... I am.” He reached over to take my hand in his. He didn’t lace our fingers together, but he

kept rubbing his thumb over my skin and placing tiny kisses on the back of my hand and the inside of

my wrist. “You know I care about you, right?”

I sucked in a breath. “No.”

He sighed and shook his head. “Well, I do.”

I chewed on the inside of my cheek to hold in any response because I could tell he had more to

say.

“You showin’ up for me at the hospital like you did, that... that meant a lot. I’ve never had anyone

with me for any of Rasha’s emergencies, so... thank you. And thank you for bringin’ Ailin in to help

her.”

“You don’t have to thank me for any of that. You’re my viramore, Hiro, that makes you—and

Rasha—my family. I know you’re still getting used to everything, but that doesn’t change how I feel

and what it means for me.”

He took a deep breath, nodded, then leaned over and kissed me again. This time it was me that

cupped the back of his head and wouldn’t let go. I kissed him hard until we heard giggles again. Hiro

chuckled against my lips, then broke away and turned to his daughter.

“What are you gigglin’ at this time, peanut?” he asked as he leaned closer to

her and poked her in

the belly.

That only made her giggle louder.

“Aren’t you supposed to be restin’?” he asked her.

“My cup’s empty.” She held out a plastic cup.

Hiro lifted his brow. “Is that the right way to ask for somethin’?”

She scowled at him—and the expression was so cute and so much like her father, I had to hold in

a laugh—but she still said, “Can I please have more water?”

“Much better, even if you are grumpin’ at me.”

That made her pout more and a snort escaped me.

Hiro pointed at me with a smirk. “No encouraging her.” He winked at me to show he was playing

around, then swiped the cup from Rasha and stood up, making sure to keep his back to her since his

big, giant problem still hadn’t gone away. It made me a little happy seeing how affected he was by me

since I was just as affected by him.

As he was helping set her up in the living room again, the pizza arrived, so I answered, paid, and

carried the pizza to the kitchen. Since Hiro was whispering with Rasha, I got out three plates, loaded

them up, and took them over to the couch. As I set Rasha’s down on the

coffee table in front of her,

Hiro shot me a smile that I returned.

Seeing him here with her, in his own space was... amazing. He was so relaxed and so happy and

content. He was beautiful.

And Rasha, she was... the sweetest little thing I'd ever seen. I hoped Hiro would let me come

back here once she was feeling better so I could get to know her.

Hiro turned to me, patted the open seat beside him, and said, "Course you can come back. Maybe

we can play a card game today after we eat."

I blinked at him and whispered, "Holy shit."

"What?"

Luckily, Rasha was too invested in her show to notice my curse slip. "You read my mind."

His eyebrows lifted. "Did I?"

I nodded. "Yeah."

"So that means we're connecting more or somethin', right?"

I nodded again. "Yeah."

He sent me a smile. "Cool."

Hiro turned on a movie, and after we ate, he put his arm behind me on the couch, and his other

arm behind Rasha. When I saw that she'd leaned into him and fallen asleep with his arm curled

protectively over her, I decided that she had the right idea, so I moved in and rested my head on his

shoulder. He automatically put his arm around me. And when he started massaging my scalp, I closed

my eyes and just let his and Rasha's presence wash over me.

I stayed with them until Rasha needed to go to bed. Hiro asked if I wanted to stay, but then the

sweet little girl asked him if she could sleep in his bed tonight. She must've been scared after

everything she'd been through in the past few days. So I kissed Hiro goodnight, gave Rasha a fist-

bump that made her laugh, and headed out. Once I was outside their house, I used my Bond with Blaze

to pull myself to him since he'd flown home. Luckily, my Bonded dragon was right outside my house,

so I didn't even have to walk far before I fell into bed with a smile.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HIR O

This time when I was handed a case that was made for at least two people, if not a bigger team of

them, I only hesitated for a few seconds before dialing Basil. He answered on the second ring.

"Hello?"

“Hey, Bas, it’s Hiro.”

He chuckled. *“Yeah, I caught that when I saw your name on the screen.”*

With a sigh at his smartassness, I said, “I have a case I need help with.”

He was quiet for a moment before his voice came back on softer than before.

“I can help. Where

do you want to meet?”

My chest warmed at that. He didn’t need to ask for details or why I needed help, he simply helped

because I needed it. “Are you home? I can pick you up.”

“No, I’m at BCA Headquarters. You wanna pick me up from here?”

I didn’t like going near the BCA, but that didn’t matter right now. “Sure. I’m about fifteen minutes

away. Does that give ya enough time?”

“Yeah, I can work with that.”

“Good.”

“Hiro?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks for calling me. I’ll see you soon.” He hung up before I could respond.

Shaking my head, I threw my phone in my cup holder and pointed my car toward the BCA HQ. A

little guilt niggled in my mind and my heart knowing that he’d felt the need to thank me for calling him.

He shouldn't feel that way, but I knew I'd done that to him after countless times of pushing him away

or not letting him in. I really needed to get the fuck over myself. Basil had done nothin' but show me

he was a good man; it was time I offered a little trust. Especially after everythin' he'd done to help

with Rasha the other day.

As I drove, a plan came into mind.

Pulling up to the BCA, I smiled when I saw Basil already standing outside waiting for me with the

ever-present Blaze on his shoulder. I slowed to a stop, and he came over, jumping into the

passenger's seat. After he shut his door, I leaned over, gripped his chin, and tilted his head to bring

his lips to mine. He grunted in surprise, but sank into the kiss immediately like he always did. I was

really starting to love that.

When I pulled back, I gave his lips a last peck and said, "Hey, love."

He offered a small smile. "Hey, dimples."

I snorted at the ridiculous nickname, having no idea why he'd started calling me that. "How're ya

doin', shadow boy?"

He rolled his eyes as he settled in the seat and buckled his seat belt. "I'm fine, how are you?"

“Pretty good now.” I gave Blaze a pat on the head and caught Basil’s smile before I pulled back

out on the road.

“How’s Rasha feeling?”

“She’s feelin’ better, but she still hasn’t been able to take the oxygen tube off.”

“I’m glad she’s okay.”

Hearing the hesitancy in his voice, I glanced at him and realized he seemed uncomfortable, so I

concentrated back on the road and asked, “What’s wrong?”

He sighed. “I thought you might yell at me for asking about her.”

My jaw clenched in anger—not at him, at me. I’d made him so unsure about our relationship,

about me in general, that he couldn’t even ask how my daughter was doing without bein’ afraid I’d

lose it on him. I had no one to blame but myself. “You’re allowed to ask me whatever the hell you

want.” *There, that should do it. Hopefully.*

He was quiet for a whole minute before asking, “Are you sure?”

I sighed. “Yes, witch, I’m sure. I want you in our lives, okay? Both of us do.”

A happiness that wasn’t mine filled my chest, and I couldn’t help but smile. He was pretty damn

easy to make happy, it seemed.

“I wanted to ask you somethin’,” I said after another minute.

“What?”

“Ulma’s goin’ out of town to see her new grandbaby in a few weeks. She’s gonna be over two

hours away, and I don’t like the thought of Rasha not having a backup plan if I’m stuck at work or

somethin’.”

“Okay...?”

I shot him a small smile. “Is it okay if I add your number to our emergency phones and give the

school your name?” When he didn’t say anything I rushed to add, “You won’t have to do anything. It’s

a just-in-case kinda thing.”

His hand squeezed my forearm. “I would love to be added, Hiro.”

Keeping one hand on the steering wheel, I patted his hand. “Thanks.”

He squeezed my arm again. “Thank you for trusting me.”

I lifted his hand with mine and pressed my lips to his skin before releasing it. When he went to

pull away, I changed my mind, grabbed it, and placed it on my thigh. He squeezed my leg and sighed

in contentment.

“So you wanna tell me about this job or am I running in blind?”

I chuckled. “I guess that would help, huh?”

“Probably.”

If I wasn't driving, I'd poke him. “There's a few orcs on the edge of town. One of 'em's wanted

for murder. Apparently, he killed an incubus up north and now the guy's family is seekin' retribution.”

“So does that mean you want to kill the orc?”

“Nah. I don't go in with the intent to kill, at least not usually. If I can apprehend my mark, all the

better. Sometimes that choice is taken away from me.”

“Yeah, same with working for BCA.”

“Do you like workin' there?”

I saw him shrug out of the corner of my eye. “Mostly. I like when I'm working with Jorah or

Thayer better than all this solo shit Alec's been giving me, but he keeps saying the three of us make

too much of a mess, so he's separated us the past few months.”

“You miss them.” It wasn't a question.

He sighed. “I do. We weren't meant to be spread out so far. Our magic is connected, and when

we're too far apart or go too long without being near, it's like... it's like the magic becomes sad or

something. It makes us feel off.”

I didn't understand how that felt at all, but I thought I got what he meant.

“Have you told Alec

this?”

He shook his head and shrugged. “I’ve reminded him a few times, but he’s been blowing me off.”

That made me frown. “Why?”

“My sister’s pregnant again, and he’s freaking out about it. He’s taking it out on me because I’m

family, so he can.”

“That doesn’t make it okay.”

He shrugged. “It’s fine. Once they have the baby, he’ll calm down a little.”

“Maybe you should talk to him before then.”

He waved me off. “It’s fine. Jorah and Thayer already said they want the three of us to start

meeting up for lunch on work days so we can get the magic to chill the fuck out. We’re figuring it out.”

Tryin’ to remember everything he’d told me about this magic so far, I asked, “Does this mean...

you’ll have to go to Faela sooner, though?”

“Maybe. Nik and Talon will check us more often once we tell them. So far, we’re fine in that

sense.”

“Nik and Talon are your guardians?”

“They’re the guardians of the Three, yeah. They’re both fae, so they can sense the magic, and

because of their connection with us, they can tell when we need to go back to Faela to purify it.”

“How do they test it?” A small growl came out with my words.

Basil turned in his seat, and I could hear the smile in his voice. “Jealous, are we?”

“Nah.”

“Mhm.” He snickered. “They touch us and feel the magic.”

“Touch you?” My voice was deeper than usual.

“Ha! You *are* jealous.” He snorted. “Don’t worry, dimples, they only have to touch our

foreheads.” He chuckled at my answering grunt.

“Can I veto this ‘dimples’ thing that’s happenin’ right now?”

“Nope.”

I snorted. “Didn’t think so.”

He laughed. “Anyway, back to this orc. Can I read the file you have?”

“Yeah, it’s on the back seat.”

He twisted in his seat and grabbed the file before settling back and reading through it. After a few

minutes, he grumbled, “This guy’s disgusting. What he did to that incubus is horrific.”

I wrinkled my nose thinkin’ about the pictures of the incubus’s body that were included in the file.

The orc was sick, and I couldn’t imagine how horrible the incubus’s last

moments were.

Basil said, “No wonder his family is seeking revenge. I would, too.”

I nodded in agreement.

“So you want me to distract the orc’s family so you can go in and get him?”

“Distract them how? There’s at least ten of ‘em.” Orcs traveled in herds, and while this herd was

rather small, ten orcs against one hunter and one witch were not good odds.

“I’ll create a storm outside their camp. The sound will cover up your movements, and if I show

myself and strike one of their tents or whatever with lightning, they’ll come out to stop me from

destroying their stuff. You can sneak around and pick the guy off.”

“Assuming he’s on the edge.”

He closed the folder. “Eh, I can use some wind magic to push him back away from the others.”

“I’m gonna have to use a dart to knock him out, so I’ll probably only be able to pull him back a

few feet.” Orcs were big as hell, so tryin’ to carry one wasn’t an option.

“I’ll make the others come after me to give you more space and time to get situated.”

That didn’t exactly help with carrying him, but... “And once I have him, how will you get away?”

I saw him grin. “My shadow magic is pretty handy when I’m trying to be sneaky. I can get away

and sneak back to you. Once I'm with you, I can make us and the orc disappear from sight, and we can

figure out how to haul his ass back to your truck."

Snorting and remembering how he'd followed me home without me knowin' it, I didn't dispute the

statement. I pulled off the road and put the car in park even though we were basically parked in the

grass right beside the trees. Basil hopped out, and once I joined him, I walked to my trunk and piled

on more weapons.

"I'm good to go," I said once I finished.

He called on his shadow magic and covered my car in it. When I lifted a brow at him, he grinned

and shrugged, saying, "This way, you can't even get a ticket."

"Works for me."

"Lead the way, dimples."

Telling him to stop calling me that only made him do it more, so I wasn't gonna comment again,

which he clearly found amusing. I said, "You're kind of an asshole."

"Only kinda? Last I checked you thought I was all asshole, so I'll take that as a fucking

compliment."

I snorted and shook my head. "Of course you'd take that as a compliment. That shouldn't even

surprise me.”

He grinned at me.

“Before I forget, do you wanna come to dinner at my house after this? I know you said you’ve

been feelin’ off being away from your brothers, so I understand if you need to go home, but—”

“Hiro?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m feeling off more than usual because, not only have I been away from my brothers, I’ve also

been away from my viramore. I’d love to come over.”

I stopped walking to examine him. “Great. Rasha will be happy.”

“But not you?”

I rolled my eyes. “Don’t go fishin’ for compliments.” When he frowned, I sighed. “Yes, obviously

it makes me fuckin’ happy, too.”

He bumped my arm with his shoulder and tried to hide his smile.

Since we had a bit of walking to do before we reached where the orcs could hear us, I asked, “Do

most people stay near their viramore once they find them?”

Basil nodded. “Yeah, especially if they’re both magical creatures. Some people get really

possessive, so being away from each other isn’t a good idea.”

I thought about that for a minute. “Are you having trouble with it?”

He was quiet, thoughtful, then said, “Honestly, yes, sometimes. I wish I could be near you all the

time, but I understand that we both have jobs, and on top of that, you have Rasha, so I logically know I

have to be okay with being away. Sometimes it’s hard convincing myself of that, though.”

That made me sad, but I was glad he was being truthful. This time, I bumped his shoulder with my

arm and said, “If you’re ever having a hard time, you can always call me so we can figure it out.”

He nodded. “Thanks. It’s usually in the middle of the night, though, so I wouldn’t want to wake

you up.”

“Like I said, you can *always* call me. I don’t give a shit if it’s the middle of the night or not.”

“You’re such a romantic.” Wow, sarcasm, much?

I snorted.

He chuckled. “Seriously though, I appreciate it.”

I nodded. Obviously, this relationship was moving in the serious-enough-to-live-together-

eventually direction, and I knew that most viramores connected quicker than we were, but I had Rasha

to consider. Until I knew for sure this was the real deal, and that Basil was able to not only stick

around but be there for my kid, I wasn’t going to rush it. Fortunately, Basil seemed to get that and

wasn’t being overly pushy.

He quietly said, “I do get that, Hiro. It’ll take time, I get it, but I’m here for the long haul.” He’d

read my mind. And that right there should’ve been freaking me out, but somehow it felt right with him.

Reaching over, I squeezed the back of his neck to show I was grateful, and he sent me a smile.

After that, we were too close to the orcs’ camp to continue talkin’, so we both silently made our

way closer. When I spotted a good place to do a little recon, I tugged on his shirt to get him to follow

me, and to my delight, he did so without argument. Once we were squatting behind a thick bush, Basil

pulled out a telescope—although I was sure it wasn't a typical human one since I could feel magic

comin' off it—and he pushed it through the bush so there was no chance of us bein' seen. He watched

through it for a few minutes, then leaned back and gestured for me to have a look.

I scooted over and stared through it, surprised by how clear it was and at the wide view.

Definitely magic, then. As I observed the orc camp, I counted out ten orcs, although there could be

more in the tents. The majority of orcs were sittin' around a fire that had a deer cooking over it, but

there was a trio off to the side talking amongst themselves. They looked younger than the others, like

teenagers. That made me frown. I didn't want any kids gettin' hurt, orc or not.

Squinting at the ones around the fire, I identified the asshole I was here for and clenched my jaw.

He was a disgusting person, and I was glad we were going to get him off the streets.

After doing another count, I sat back and held up ten fingers. Basil nodded in agreement, so he

must've gotten the same count. Before I could blink, a veil of black magic rushed out of him and

surrounded us, and Basil said, "This shield will block us from sight and no one outside can hear us."

Well, that sure as hell came in handy, didn't it? "Okay, same plan as before?"

"You able to tell which one is the perp?"

I nodded. "He's around the fire, second from the left."

"Yep, that's the one I thought as well. I can hook this shield up to you so you can make your way

around to the left side without being detected. If you give me a second, I'll hook it to a stick that you

can break when you're ready to drop the shield and attack."

"You can do that?"

Basil lifted a shoulder and said, "It isn't a common skill, even among witches, but yeah, I can. My

brother Del is a genius with creating and manipulating things, so Jorah, Thayer, and I have been

working with him to develop some new skills. Since he's been coming to Faela with us for the past

few years, he's been helping Nik and Talon with our training. He's a fucking badass."

A smile quirked up on my lips. He sounded so proud of him. "Is he your younger brother?"

"Yeah, why?"

My smile went up a notch. “You sound proud of him.”

“I am.”

The fact that he wasn’t even embarrassed by it made me melt a little. And thank fuckin’ god, he

didn’t hear that thought or realize what he was doin’ to me because that was embarrassing as shit.

He’d never let me live it down.

However, he did give me a strange look and stop what he was doing to ask, “You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good.”

He didn’t believe me, but he let it go and finished muttering a spell in a language I didn’t

understand. His shadow magic swirled around inside the shield so this black mist was floating around

us and making the grass under my feet shift. The shield itself sorta shimmered for a second before

goin’ back to that semi-transparent sheen, and Basil said, “It’s ready.” He handed me a stick that

looked like any other stick, but when I touched it, even through my gloves, I sensed the magic it held.

“All you have to do is break that when you’re ready. I’d rather you just keep the damn shield on the

whole time, but you won’t be able to get a hold of the orc if you do that, so...” He trailed off with a

shrug.

“I’ll be fine. You need to be careful, too.”

“I will.”

With a nod, I stood and turned away, then thought better of it and bent back down to kiss his lips.

“Wait two minutes for me to get into position. Stay safe.”

He grinned. “You too, dimples.”

I groaned at the name before standing and walking away. His shield allowed him to slip through,

but he was still squatting behind the bush so I wasn’t worried about him bein’ discovered before I

was ready.

I quickly moved into position, and had to admit that having some shadow witch magic over me

was really fuckin’ beneficial. Maybe I’d have to ask him to tag along more often.

Before I could truly think that through, a huge bolt of lightning struck across the sky right

overhead. It was easy to forget how damn powerful Basil was, especially when he turned to putty

under my touch so easily.

Shaking those thoughts away and concentrating on the here and now, I watched as Basil stepped

out from behind some bushes with magic, wind, rain, and lightning swirling all around him. If I didn’t

know him, I'd likely be terrified. I could feel his immense power from here, and... I could admit that

seein' him like that was sexy as hell. *Holy. Shit.*

His hair was swirling around with the storm brewing around him, his dark eyes were flashing

with lightning, and with his arms out, I had a great view of that sexy lithe body. Now all I needed was

for him to turn around so I could get a look at his ass.

An orc let out a battle cry, bringing my attention back to the campsite, and I took a breath while

deciding whether to wait a few seconds or not. Since there were so many orcs around me, I decided

to wait and see if Bas was able to push my target toward me or not. With the power display, I was

pretty sure he hadn't been blowin' smoke up my ass.

The orcs all charged as one, and panic filled my chest. Maybe having only Bas here with me

against this many opponents wasn't a great idea. What if he got hurt? Dammit, I should've thought this

through better. Fuckin' fuck!

Right before the orcs reached my viramore, a huge lightning bolt struck the ground directly in front

of him, and the orcs pulled up short so they didn't get fried.

My mouth hung open as a huge storm opened up *around* Basil, so he was the only thing not gettin'

wet from rain. He began making shadows fly around the orcs to confuse them while lightning struck

the ground all around them. He was clearly tryin' not to hurt the other orcs since they were innocent.

From the grin on his face, not to mention the giddiness I felt in my chest, I was sure he was having a

good ol' time playin' with his magic.

The magical energy I could feel in the very air around me, even all the way back here, was

unbelievable and made goosebumps pop up on my skin. He truly was a powerful witch. I knew that,

I'd seen his magic plenty of times, but somehow this time was different. Maybe because I knew what

he was to me, maybe because I could feel him in my chest now, or maybe because I was allowing

myself to ogle him.

Taking a deep breath, I stopped staring and concentrated on finding my target while readying my

crossbow. Unfortunately, the orc I needed was up with all the others, tryin' to find a way to get to

Basil.

As soon as I had that thought, a huge gust of wind swept over the entire area, and the perp flew

backward right to me. A glance at Basil showed that he was grinning wildly again. Crazy bastard.

Shaking my head, I broke the stick, and the shield dropped. Since I had my crossbow ready, I let

an arrow loose. It hit its target, and the orc swiveled around with a loud roar. As he charged me, I

stood my ground, knowing the tranq would take effect any second now. And thank fuckin' god it did.

He dropped about five feet away, and I breathed a sigh of relief as I began securing his hands and

feet.

A glance around told me Bas was still busy distracting the others, and I frowned, wonderin' what

the hell to do with this huge orc. He was even bigger than I thought, and I didn't think I'd be able to

drag him anywhere without killing my back first.

“You all good?”

I had my crossbow pointed straight at Basil's chest before I registered it was him that had spoken.

He pushed the crossbow to the side with a raised eyebrow. “Nice reaction time, dimples.”

“You should know better than to sneak up on a hunter like that.”

He grinned. “You wouldn't have shot me.”

“You're lucky I didn't.” I hooked my crossbow onto my back and stared at the orc. “Where are the

others?”

“I put up a shield so they can’t get to us. It’s not going to stay up very long since I’m not actively

controlling it, but it should be enough to get him out. Plus...” He muttered in another language and

some of his shadow magic swirled around us and the orc at my feet, then settled into a dome shape

over us. “There, now we’re covered.”

I nodded at him, impressed, though I wasn’t about to say that out loud. “Now how are we gonna

move ‘im?”

“Magic, obviously.” He shot me a grin when I made eye contact. “I can use my wind magic to

carry his bulky ass.”

“That’ll work?”

“As long as my magic doesn’t get out of control, yeah.”

“Is it gonna get outta control?”

“No.”

I wasn’t sure I believed him since he was smirking again, but I didn’t call him on it because I

didn’t want to risk a back injury. Stepping back a tad, I waved my hand in invitation, and Basil

grinned, closed his eyes, and muttered under his breath. A gust of shadowy wind blew past my face

before settling around the orc. In one hefty move, the magic lifted his bulky

form from the ground. As

Basil began walking, the magic moved with him.

“That’s handy,” I murmured after we’d walked fifty feet.

“It totally is.” Before he could continue, his phone rang. When he pulled it out, he groaned, but

still answered. “Ellwood.”

“Like I don’t fucking know that, Basil,” a voice said loudly enough I could hear him. *“Have you*

decided to go rogue?”

Basil sighed, but I could feel his anxiousness through my bond with him.

“No, Alec, I left early

for the day.”

“Don’t think I don’t know what’s going on here. You left to help that hunter.”

It wasn’t a question, but Basil still said, “That’s none of your business.”

A loud, low growl came from the other end of the phone, and I had the urge to growl back and

scream at this Alec guy who was so clearly making Basil upset. *“You’re making my life really*

difficult here lately, Bas. You can’t go on unsanctioned missions whenever the hell you feel like it!”

“I’m helping my viramore. I don’t see how that’s any concern of yours. Are you telling me that if

Aspen needed help, you’d run it through the fucking BCA first?”

The other man was quiet for about thirty seconds. *“If you do this again, I’m going to have to*

bring it to the board.”

“You do that, and I’ll fucking quit.”

“You are too much like your bro—”

Basil hung up the phone, fuming, and stuffed it in his pocket, letting out a frustrated groan.

“I’m sorry, Bas. I didn’t know you were gettin’ shit at work for helpin—”

“No, don’t fucking do that. I’m glad you called. I’d rather come help you any day of the damn

week than do something for that asshole werewolf.”

“That asshole werewolf who’s also your brother-in-law.”

“Doesn’t make him less of an asshole, especially right now when it’s close to a full moon. He’s

got a bug up his ass lately, and I’m apparently his punching bag.”

I grabbed Basil’s arm to stop him from walking. “Want me to pay him a visit? I could tranq ‘im

for you.”

He snorted. “Yeah, maybe I’ll take you up on that.” He sighed and stepped forward to press his

forehead against my shoulder. “You mentioned food?”

Since he didn’t seem to want to talk about it, I rubbed his back for a few seconds. “Yeah, let’s get

this guy back to my handler, and I'll cook you some dinner as a thank you."

He nodded, took a breath, and stood up to begin walking again.

I followed and said, "I'm sorry you got in trouble on my behalf."

"Trust me, I've been getting in trouble my entire life on my own. It's nothing new."

"Well, that doesn't exactly surprise me."

He sent me a smirk, and some of his tension released. "My brother Thayer and I were terrors

growing up. He was the mastermind, but I was the one that got caught, or at least, the one that took the

fall."

"I'm sure you plotted out enough of the shit yourself."

His smirk grew. "Maybe."

Snorting, I shook my head as we neared the car. We loaded up the orc in the truck bed—my truck

sagged so much under his weight it was worrisome. I shot the orc with another tranq to ensure he

stayed asleep during transport, then covered him with a blanket so people driving by wouldn't freak

out and call the BCA or whatever. Once we were inside the truck, and I started driving toward

Jasmyn's place, I noticed Basil shaking out his hands.

With a furrowed brow, I asked, "You okay? Did ya get injured?"

“No, I’m fine. Just a little tired. Using that much magic in a short period of time wears me out,

especially since I haven’t been training very hard lately. I’m out of shape, I guess.”

“That’s a thing? You can be out of shape from magic?”

“Yeah, or at least Jorah, Thayer, and I can. Our bodies have been trained to handle the foreign

magic we’re carrying, but if we don’t train and use it often enough, it’s harder on our bodies when we

do. We’ve been slacking a little since we’ve all been super busy lately.”

“Gotcha.” Kinda.

I pulled into Jasmyn’s place, unloaded the orc, and received payment before we headed back to

my house. Once we got there, I made Basil go sit on my couch while I ran across the street to Ulma’s

and picked Rasha up. She jumped into my arms, and when I told her Basil was at the house, she

started jumping around.

Ulma and I shared a laugh before I walked my daughter across the street. Rasha ran right into the

living room when we got there, and even though I could tell how tired Basil was, as soon as he saw

her, he sat up and said, “Hey, Rasha! How are you doing, sweetpea?”

She smiled widely and surprised me by giving Basil a hug. The witch caught my eye over her

shoulder and I could see—and feel in my chest—how happy it made him.

Rasha sat beside him on the couch, and Blaze immediately hopped off Basil's shoulder onto her

lap, making her giggle in delight. She loved that crazy lizard. She started petting him, and he curled up

in a ball after rubbing along her fingers, then Rasha started talking a million miles a minute about

every little thing she did in school today. The fact that she felt comfortable enough around Basil to

talk like that was mind-blowing. Basil listened with rapt attention, and a warmth settled in my chest

as I moved into the kitchen to figure out something to do for dinner. Rasha had never been so

comfortable around another adult before, not even Ulma, and she loved that woman.

“Did you do your homework already?” I heard Basil ask her.

Rasha sighed. “I still have one paper, but I was having trouble with it.”

“Do you want me to help you?”

I paused, hanging halfway in the pantry to listen to her answer.

“Sure... I missed a lot when I was in the hospital since I didn't get to go back right away.”

Basil said, “That's okay, I'm sure we can figure it out together. And if your daddy and I don't

know how to do it, I'll call my little brother. He's the smartest guy I know.”

“You have a brother?”

“I have eight brothers.”

“You do?” She sounded amazed.

Basil laughed. “And I have ten sisters.”

“Woah.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, and now some of my siblings are... married, so I have even more brothers-

and sisters-in-law.”

“You have a big family.”

“I do. My youngest sister is six, so she’s pretty close to your age. I bet you would get along. One

of my nieces is ten, so you’re right in between them.”

“Do you think one day, I could meet them?” My chest tightened at the hopefulness in her voice.

Basil hesitated for a second, then said, “As long as it’s okay with your dad, then yeah, I’m sure

you can. They’ll love you.”

“Okay,” Rasha said. “I like when you come over here.”

“Yeah?”

“Mhm. You’re nice, and Blaze is so cute.”

“He is.” I could hear the smile in Basil’s voice.

“Plus, you make my daddy happy. I like when he’s happy.”

I froze at that.

Basil was quiet for a moment, then softly said, “He makes me happy, too.”

“I know.”

My heart was poundin’ like crazy in my chest. The fact that my daughter could tell Basil made me

happy... Did that mean she thought I was unhappy before? Was I that obvious? Had I let my loneliness

affect her?

Basil said, “*You* make me happy, too, you know.” And then Rasha started giggling like crazy, so I

was pretty sure he was tickling her, but he stopped quickly so she didn’t get out of breath. Basil

chuckled and asked, “Where’s your bookbag? I’ll grab your books so you don’t have to wake Blaze

up.”

“It’s by the door. Does he really turn into a dragon?”

“He really does. Maybe we can show you after dinner.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, of course. Blaze loves showing off for his favorite girl.”

She giggled, and the sound was so sweet and happy, I had to stop to take a breath. He was so good

with her and set her at ease so effortlessly and comfortably. It made me feel like maybe... maybe this

really could work out somehow. Maybe he really was meant to be a part of my family.

“Hiro?”

I turned to find Basil standing in the kitchen doorway with a backpack in one hand and a

concerned expression on his pretty face. “Yeah?”

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, fine.”

He stared at me for a beat before nodding his head, though I was sure he saw through my act. “Do

you need any help with dinner?”

“Nah, I’m good here unless you don’t want to help her with her homework?” I said the last part

quietly so Rasha wouldn’t overhear.

“I like helping her.” He looked truly offended that I’d insinuate otherwise.

I grinned at him. “That’s ‘cause she actually listens to you. When it’s me helpin’ her, it’s like a

damn world war in here.” He chuckled and started to turn around, but I stopped him with my voice.

“Bas?”

“Hm?”

I stepped up to him and pressed my lips to his forehead. “Thank you.”

“It’s my pleasure, Hiro.” He grinned and kissed my lips before walking back

into the living room.

The thing was, I could tell he really meant that.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

BASIL

A sudden sharp pain pierced my chest, making me gasp and cry out as I fell to my knees. A

lightning bolt flew over my head a moment before Jorah cried out, “Holy shit! That almost hit

him!”

My chest tightened, and I couldn’t breathe.

A hand on my shoulder pushed me to the ground until I was sitting. Nikolai’s face appeared in

front of me with a concerned expression, asking, “What’s wrong, Bas?”

“Can’t. Breathe,” I gasped out.

His eyes widened before he pulled a tonic out of seemingly thin air and held it to my lips.

Someone was sitting behind me, letting me use their chest to lean on, and they tilted my chin up—

Jorah, it was Jor behind me.

Nik poured the tonic into my mouth, and I choked it down. I felt the healing magic warm in my

belly and travel through my body, but there was nothing to heal. I still couldn’t breathe, and I was

fucking terrified.

Then it hit me.

I wasn't terrified. Hiro was. I wasn't injured. Hiro was.

“Hiro,” I croaked.

Nik's eyes widened again. “This is Hiro? He's hurt?”

I nodded, relieved that he understood.

Jorah asked, “Can you tell where he is?”

I shook my head.

Jor pulled my phone out of my pocket and dialed Hiro's number. I heard it ring and ring and ring

until his voicemail picked up. He hung up and tried again.

“He's hunting. Centaur.”

Nik grimaced. Centaurs had developed a bad rep during the Berserker War because many of them

fought with the berserkers. Not all centaurs were bad, not even close, but after being on the front line

for months and seeing them in action, well, it was hard to think of a centaur as being anything other

than the enemy. I supposed that was how Hiro felt with witches.

I rubbed at my chest while taking deep breaths until I could speak. The pain and fear were still

there full-force, but knowing there wasn't anything physically wrong with me made it easier to push

through the pain. Knowing something *was* wrong with Hiro made me ready to go into battle for him.

I took my phone from Jorah and tried calling him myself. He didn't answer, but my phone started

ringing with an unfamiliar number. I blinked at it, but answered, "Hello?"

"Basil?"

My throat lurched, and I breathed out, "Rasha?"

"M-my dad i-isn't home... and Ms. Ulma isn't either... D-Daddy told me to c-call you if I n-

needed to." She was crying. Fuck, she was crying.

I mentally asked Blaze to come to me and shift to his dragon form before she even finished. "It's

okay, sweetpea. I'm on my way, okay? I'll be there in a few minutes to come get you. Everything's

going to be okay." Hearing her upset and scared made a surge of adrenaline shoot through me and

pushed the pain down.

"Okay." Her voice was so quiet. *"Is Daddy going to be mad I used th-the emergency phone?"*

"No, sweetie, he won't be mad at all." I grabbed Jorah's phone out of his hand, and he didn't even

protest. Putting the phone on speaker, I looked up Ulma's number and dialed it on Jorah's phone while

telling Rasha, "I'm going to try calling Ms. Ulma on another phone, but you stay on the line with me

until I get there, okay?”

“*Okay.*”

“*Hello?*” Ulma’s voice came over the other phone.

I’d been going over and having lunch or dinner—sometimes both—with Hiro and Rasha every

day for the past month. In that time, I met Ulma—again, since I’d paid her before—and she and I

exchanged numbers, just in case.

This felt like one of those just in case times.

“Hey, Ulma, it’s Basil.” My voice was strained and sounded pained.

“*Is everything okay?*”

“Rasha is home alone... Hiro isn’t there.”

“*I’m still out visiting my grandbaby... I’m not home. Oh no, I can try to get there, but I’m over*

two hours away—”

“I’m on my way to pick her up.”

“*You’re getting her?*”

“Yes, ma’am. I just wanted to check in case you were closer to her than I am. I’ll be there in a few

minutes.”

“*Alrighty, good. Have you heard from Hiro?*”

“I can’t get a hold of him, and... something’s wrong,” I whispered, covering

the other phone

where Rasha was still on the line.

“Anything I can do?”

“No, I got it, but I’ll text you to let you know when I’ve got Rasha and Hiro with me.”

“Thank you. Call if you need something.”

“Thanks.” I hung up the phone and climbed onto Blaze’s back.

Glancing at Nik and Jorah, I rubbed my chest. I needed to go after Hiro, try a tracking spell and go

save him. But his first priority was Rasha—as it should be—and she was my first priority as well. I

knew what I needed to do. I said to Nik and Jor, “I’m going to get Rasha.” Into the phone, I said, “You

okay, Rasha?”

“Yes.” Her voice was a quiet whisper of worry.

“I’ll be there soon, sweetpea. I’m going to call my brother, but stay on the line, okay?”

“Okay.” Her little voice was breaking my heart, but Blaze jumped into the air, and I cast a spell

around me to keep the sound of the wind quiet so I could hear Rasha. With Jorah’s phone, I

immediately dialed Ailin.

“Hey.”

“Hey, A, I need your help.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, but something’s wrong with Hiro, and no one knows where he is. I’m going to go pick up

his daughter and bring her back home, but she’s alone, so I’m taking Blaze... I’m not sure having her

ride him is a good idea.” Hopefully he understood what I meant; I wasn’t sure of the precautions we

needed to take with her oxygen and everything. “Can you drive a car to Hiro’s house so we can get

back on coven land?”

“Yeah, I can do that. I’m leaving now.”

“You already have his address?”

“Do you really think I wouldn’t look him up after I learned who he is to you?”

I sighed, but didn’t respond. “Do you think you can watch her while I go find him?”

He paused for a few seconds, probably relaying the information to Seb.

“How about Seb watches

her, and I come with you to find him?”

I wasn’t stupid enough to disagree. I’d use whatever help I could get if it meant keeping Rasha

and Hiro safe. “That would be great. Uh, Rasha has an oxygen tank, so we need to be mindful of that.”

“She’ll be perfectly safe with Seb, I promise. Plus, Niya will love having a new friend to play

with. I’ll call Aspen to see if she can bring Esadora over to play, too. Rasha will have so much fun,

she won’t even realize anything’s wrong.”

“Okay, that sounds... perfect. Thank you.” Blaze aimed his flight toward Hiro’s house that I could

now see in the distance.

“No problem, kiddo. I added Hiro and Rasha to the wards the day I saw them in the hospital, so

we’ll have no issue there.”

“Thank you.”

“Yep. See you soon.” We hung up.

Blaze landed on Hiro’s lawn, and I jumped off him. He immediately shifted into his bearded

dragon form, and as I walked, I squatted down with my arm out so he could scurry up it and settle on

my shoulder.

After knocking on the door, Rasha opened it, and to my surprise, she ran out and wrapped her

arms around my waist. “Hey, sweetpea,” I whispered as I hugged her back.

“Are you taking me to your house?” she asked into my stomach.

“Yeah... do you have a bag?” I should have asked her to pack her things while I was flying over,

but I hadn't been thinking right in my panic to get to her.

Rasha clung to my waist as she nodded. Since it was difficult to walk like that, I scooped her up

into my arms. She buried her face in the side of my neck, then jerked back in surprise when she felt

Blaze's tail. She reached out to pet the side of his body and smiled in delight. They'd become fast

friends in the weeks I'd been visiting. Even though I was terrified—my own emotions this time—the

sight still brought a smile to my face. I was so relieved to see her happy expression after hearing that

fear in her voice.

I walked into the house, set her back on her feet—Blaze clinging to my shoulder—and went to

pack the rest of Rasha's oxygen, just in case, and said, "If you have anything special to sleep in or if

you have a stuffed animal or something like that, why don't you go get them?"

"Am I spending the night?"

"Maybe. Let's get it in case you do. And grab some extra clothes."

She nodded and walked up the stairs to collect her things. I finished packing the oxygen, then

grabbed a bag from the closet and ran up to Hiro's room to pack him some clothes as well. Everything

was pretty much rolled into a ball, but it didn't matter. I could fix that with

my magic.

Rasha came out of her room, so I took her pillow and stuffed duck, then tugged her outside as

Ailin pulled up to the curb. He must've sped like crazy to get here so fast.

As I stuffed the bags in the trunk, Ailin got out and met me at the back door, saying, "Hey, Rasha,

I'm Ailin."

"Hi." She sounded shy. As soon as he'd healed her in the hospital, he'd left, so she never met him.

Ailin grinned at her and said, "It's nice to meet you." Ailin turned to me, squeezed the back of my

neck, and pulled me close enough to kiss my temple, muttering, "Are you okay?"

I nodded, scooped Rasha up, and set her on the back seat, but before buckling her in, I asked, "I

can sit in the back with you if you want?"

She nodded at me, so I pushed her over into the middle and slid in beside her. Ailin shot me a tiny

grin as he shut my door and walked back to the driver's seat. As he started driving, he asked Rasha,

"Have you ever seen a little dragon?"

She blinked up at him and shook her head, but he saw her in the rearview mirror.

"I brought Zammerra with me." He gestured to the passenger seat, but I couldn't see her from

here. “She might want to sit on your lap on the drive.”

Her eyes widened, so I said, “She doesn’t have to sit with you if you don’t want her to.”

“Can I see her?”

“Of course.” I slid forward and peeked over the seat. Sure enough, a purple and black dragon was

curled up on the seat, staring at me with bright purple eyes. She never shifted into any other animal

like my Blaze did, but she could change size, and now that she was an adult, her full size was even

bigger than Blaze—Blaze hated it. I asked the dragon, “Do you want to meet Rasha?”

Zammerra stood and stretched, then casually walked onto the console. Beside me, Rasha gasped

out, “Woah.”

With a grin, I held my arms out to Zamm, and she obligingly climbed into them and settled on my

lap, facing Rasha.

As the little eight-year-old stared with wide eyes, I said, “You can pet her. Her scales are soft on

top of her body, but the spikes are kinda hard. Pet her down, like this.” I showed her what direction to

pet Zamm that made it more comfortable for the little dragon. “Want to try?” I held out my hand, and

she placed hers in mine, so I gently brushed her fingers over Zamm’s head.

The little dragon let out a

tiny twittering sound like she was happy, and Rasha smiled widely. As she became more confident, I

released her fingers, and she continued petting the little dragon.

Blaze watched on from my shoulder for a few minutes before stuffing his face in my collar. He

was unhappy that Rasha was so infatuated with the other dragon, but I was grateful that Ailin had

brought her. When I caught his gaze in the rearview mirror and he smiled, I knew he'd brought Zamm

on purpose to help distract Hiro's little girl from her worry.

My brother-dad-kinda-guy was great like that. Not that I really ever told him that. Maybe I should,

though.

I smiled back at him and nodded my thanks.

Rasha was pretty quiet on the drive there, but she was smiling and petting Zamm the entire time.

Zamm even climbed into her lap to cuddle with her, which made Rasha so happy and excited. If I

wasn't so worried about my viramore, this could've been one of my happiest moments with her. But

my worry and fear for him was too strong.

I had the sense that I wasn't hiding my worry very well, which made me worry even more. I

didn't want Rasha upset, so I did my best, but something was seriously wrong.

I had to keep reminding myself that Hiro would've wanted me to take care of Rasha first, no

matter what. I knew this was the right thing to do. Rasha came first, always. But knowing that didn't

make it easier when I knew Hiro was in trouble. Fucking fuck.

When we made it to my coven land, Ailin drove straight up to the big house, and I heard Rasha

whisper, "Wow. It's like a fairytale." Under normal circumstances, I would've been excited to show

her around, but I didn't have time for that today.

He parked, and I got out, helping her out of the car. I passed Ailin Zamm, then squatted down

beside Rasha and said, "Sweetpea, I have to go help your daddy with something, so my... dad is

going to look after you for a little while."

"You're not staying here?" she whispered.

My chest tightened. "Not right now, but I promise I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Is Daddy in trouble?"

I hesitated, then decided that I never wanted to lie to her, and she clearly already knew something

was going on. "I think he might be. He's... he's okay right now, but I'm going to go get him."

She stepped forward and wrapped her arms around my neck in a hug that I eagerly returned. “You

promise you’ll be back?”

“Yes, of course,” I choked out. Mother, she was breaking my heart. I didn’t want to leave her here;

she was meant to be with me and Hiro.

She nodded and backed up, so I stood and took her hand to walk her inside with Ailin trailing

behind us. As soon as we were through the front door, Seb came over with a bright smile. “Hi, Rasha,

it’s good to meet you. I’m Seb. Do you want to come color with us?” He waved over to the table

where my sister Niya and niece Esadora were already coloring.

Rasha looked up at me, so I squeezed her hand, released it, and nodded at her to go. She hesitantly

took a few steps in that direction before Niya saw her. My little sister jumped off her chair, ran over

to Rasha, and grabbed her arm, pulling her toward the table and saying, “I’m Niya. You’re gonna be

my best friend.”

I snorted at that, then turned to Seb. “Thank you.”

“No problem. I already know how to do the oxygen tanks and all of that, so don’t worry about

anything here.” Seb took everything out of my arms.

I nodded, then Ailin came over, kissed Seb hard on the lips, and walked out the front door. I

rushed over and pressed a kiss to the top of Rasha's head before trailing after him. I scratched Blaze's

neck, trying to take a cue from Ailin's calm demeanor.

Once outside, Ailin said, "Do you know where to go?"

Closing my eyes, I focused on the pain laced through my heart, and shook my head. "I... can we

do a tracking spell?"

"Sure. Seb set up a circle out back after you called. Come on."

I followed Ailin around the house and found Jorah and Thayer already standing there, waiting to

help me. A circle had been drawn on the ground, so my brothers, pseudo-dad, and I rushed over.

Jorah, Thayer, and I sat in the center, Jor in front of me, Thay behind. Ailin sat on the edge and pulled

a domed shield over us to catch any loose magic that might burst out of us.

Jorah said, "Close your eyes and concentrate on your bond with him. Make it your focus." Jorah

and Thayer put their hands on my shoulders and upper arms, then began pushing their energy into me.

We'd done this spell many times before, but I'd never been the one searching for his viramore.

Since Hiro was my viramore, I would guide the spell. It was different and required a lot of power—

good thing the four of us were hella powerful.

Closing my eyes, I centered my focus on the pain in my chest, and I gasped as tears filled my eyes

from the shock of pain. Hiro was hurting, he was... he was dying. I could feel him, I could feel how

badly injured he was, how terrified he was, how scared of leaving Rasha he was.

“Fuck,” I breathed out. “It hurts.”

“I know it does, kiddo,” Ailin said. “But you have to concentrate. Use our energy to see through

his eyes or sift through his memories to find where he is.”

It wasn't hard to feel my vira more since I hadn't been able to stop worrying about him this entire

time.

In my mind's eye, I saw Hiro's terrified face, covered in blood, and I gasped. “Oh Mother.”

“Figure out where he is, Bas,” Ailin said. “You can do this.”

Taking a deep breath, I concentrated again, this time on Hiro's mind instead of his face. I needed

to get inside that head of his in order to see where the hell he was. I refocused on Hiro, and tried to

push past the pain. It gripped me hard, but I took a breath and *pushed*.

Flashes of a room, a basement came to my mind's eye, and then a bunch of images of a green

warlock sacrificing a human zoomed by. The images made me sick to my stomach, but I pushed again.

I needed to see where this basement was.

Basil, I heard Hiro's whispered voice in my head. He was calling out to me in his moment of

need, and my heart pounded in my chest.

A second later, I felt him push back and saw images of an old house surrounded by trees with a

tiny driveway. There was a mailbox that read *Harraker*.

I gasped as I released the spell, and I found myself sobbing into Ailin's chest. Hiro was severely

injured and being held captive by a fucking warlock. Warlocks were extremely savage because they

messed with demons. The gates to the demon realm were sealed, but there were still ways to open up

summoning circles and let the evil bastards pass through. Warlocks turned greener the more demons

they allowed to pass through their bodies or possess them. They tended to dabble in blood magic,

which was severe and dangerous as hell.

It was a miracle that Hiro was still alive, although I was sure the warlock was planning something

big to use Hiro's blood for, so he'd only stay alive for a little bit unless we got to him on time.

"Warlock. At the old Harraker house at the edge of Brinnswick Forest," I said

as I pulled my shit

together and wiped the tears from my cheeks. This was not the time to fall apart. There'd be plenty of

time to do that later. After I saved my viramore.

"Shit," Ailin said. "I fucking hate warlocks."

"Me too," I agreed as I let Jorah and Thayer help me to my feet. "Let's get going."

It didn't surprise me to find Toby waiting along the outside of the circle for us. He and Thayer had

been attached at the hip since sealing their viramore bond years ago.

Everyone's Bonded shifted to their large, natural forms. My Blaze into a dragon, Ailin's

Seraphina into a manticore, Thayer's Narenthea into a Pegasus, and Jorah's Kiwi into a giant eagle—

not the regular bird kind, the magical kind even bigger than Narenthea. All of us, including Toby,

climbed on their backs and took to the sky.

I'd recognized the old house—a place human children always told spooky stories about and

teenagers dared each other to go inside—and my brothers and Ailin all knew where it was as well, so

we headed in that direction.

It wasn't far, less than ten minutes flying, but knowing how badly injured Hiro was and that the

warlock had to be planning something big, had me ready to come out of my skin by the time we landed

a hundred yards away from the house. We needed to be stealthy here, and our gigantic Bonded

wouldn't help with that.

Blaze shifted to his bearded dragon form and crawled up to my shoulder. I almost asked him to

stay back, but I knew he was planning on using his body to shield Hiro from the warlock's magic if

need be. That was one good thing about having a Bonded; we could read each other's intentions

easily and without words.

I took the lead, and to my surprise, no one argued with me about it. They probably saw the crazy

in my eyes that I was feeling in my soul. If I didn't get to Hiro soon, I was going to lose it.

We quickly and quietly made our way to the house, then stayed behind some low bushes for recon.

I'd only be able to wait a few minutes before storming inside, but I logically knew we needed to get a

sense of the place first.

Should we scan the place magically? Jorah asked Thayer and me through our link.

That will notify them of our presence if they pick up our energy, Thayer said.

Well, what do you suggest then? Do we just barge in, take them by surprise,

and hope there's

only one, or do we scan, lose our surprise, and know for sure how many?

Ailin leaned in close to me and whispered, "You think he's in the basement?"

I nodded.

"There's a basement window over there." He pointed to a small window. "I'll go check to see if

there's anyone else down there, if not, we can melt the glass off the window and slip inside."

I glanced at the window—big for a basement window, but still kinda small—then at the five of us.

All of us Ellwoods should be able to fit seeing as we were rather small—Thay and Jor were taller

than Ailin and me, but they were thin—but Toby was a huge muscular vampire. There was no way

he'd be able to slip in. When I nodded at Toby, Ailin sighed.

He waved everyone close, then pulled a shield over us that would cover us from sight and sound.

Ailin repeated what he'd just said to me, but added, "Toby won't fit—"

"I'll come in through the first floor. I can clear it if there's more of them up there, then meet you in

the basement," Toby said.

Thayer chewed on his lip for a minute. "I should go with Tob in case there's another warlock or

something." He looked at his viramore. "You're fast, and a crazy good

fighter, but warlocks are tricky

and dangerous.”

“You don’t think it’d be better to stick with your brothers?” Toby asked him.

Ailin shook his head. “Thay’s right. He should go with you. A warlock took me out before, if you

remember.” His eyes bounced between Thayer and me as if we could forget the time we thought he’d

died in front of us.

“Yeah, Dad, we fucking remember,” Thayer said, rolling his eyes. “That warlock was hyped up

on blood magic.”

“Blood magic is powerful as hell,” Jorah said. Which was true. Blood magic was like a huge

sudden burst of magic powerful enough to overtake Ailin, but the thing was, it didn’t last very long.

So in a fight with someone using blood magic, you just had to survive long enough for it to run its

course, and pray that the person didn’t have access to more of it while you were fighting them. “We’ll

have to watch out for that since that’s not uncommon for warlocks. We could also have demons to

contend with.”

I sighed. Also true. The way a warlock became a warlock was by letting demons use them as a

portal from their realm to ours. Having demons pass through their bodies gave them some power, but

it also turned their skin an ugly shade of green. Warlocks were kinda nasty, truth be told... demon

magic and blood magic—they were dark, evil magics.

Ailin said, “Alright, Thay and Tob upstairs, Jor and Bas with me in the basement. Tob, give us a

five-minute head start so we can watch through the window for a minute before we go in and get into

position. Once you break down that door, the warlock’s going to know he’s being attacked. I want to

be as close to Hiro as possible by then so we can properly shield him and take that fucker out.”

Toby nodded. “Five minutes.”

After everyone nodded, Ailin squeezed the back of my neck in a show of support that I

appreciated even though I didn’t say anything. I tried to offer him a small smile, but I was pretty sure

it looked like a grimace.

Tob and Thay hung back while Ailin, Jorah, and I headed for the basement window as quietly as

possible. As soon as we got there, Ailin put another shield over us again so no one would see us

looking through the window. Normally, I’d be the one using my shadow magic to cover us, but Delaro

had been coming up with some creative spells that Ailin had apparently started using.

Peeking through the window didn't offer much since all we could see were shelves a few feet

away. So Jorah placed his hand on the window, muttered a spell, and we watched the glass melt

away. It was a much better method than breaking the glass since it didn't make any noise and there

weren't any shards left to cut us. If the warlock had been smart, he would've put wards up to stop

people from breaking in—although, there was no way he would've been able to stop the Power of

Three from coming inside, but this guy had no idea who he was messing with when he'd kidnapped

my viramore.

Since Hiro was inside, I didn't wait even a second. Once the window was gone, I pushed through

the opening and landed on my feet in a crouch. A second later, Ailin dropped beside me, followed by

Jorah. With a nod to them, I moved to the edge of the shelving unit to see what we were dealing with.

I scanned the old basement that was filled with old boxes and books and dilapidated furniture.

Everything was covered in dust and possibly mold. There were spiderwebs everywhere— Seb

would've been having a heart attack.

But then I saw it on the far side of the basement.

A small gasp left my lips.

A green warlock was standing in front of a pellet stove with a fire going inside it. He was

chanting and moving his arms up and down. In front of him was a circle drawn on the floor in what I

was sure was blood. And in the center of that circle was Hiro.

I knew exactly what that warlock was planning. He was going to bring back a demon and let it

possess Hiro, let it wear him like a human skin.

I was going to be sick.

Hold, Bas, Jorah said telepathically. Wait until Thay's in place.

I'm fucking trying to. I almost growled out loud in frustration, but I managed to hold it in.

There's no one up here, Thay said. We're at the basement door. We're ready.

I nodded at Ailin and Jorah, then quietly moved closer to the warlock and my viramore with them

behind me.

Jorah said, *Bas, shield Hiro as soon as we're close enough. I'll blast the warlock so you can*

pull him to the side. Help me after Hiro's safe.

Got it.

Thayer added, *I'll help blast his ass when I get down there.*

I didn't respond, concentrating too much on getting to Hiro.

I debated for about two seconds whether to just charge in or hide and be sneaky, but when I saw

the warlock lift a bloody knife in the air, the option was taken from me. I ran toward the warlock, and

before I had a chance to blast him, Jorah hit the fucker in the chest with a lightning bolt, sending the

warlock flying. Immediately, I threw my shadow magic over the top of Hiro, wrapping it around him

before using it to lift and pull him back.

Hiro's body came flying toward me, but I stopped his movement right by my feet, then gently

pushed him behind a shelving unit. Jorah, Ailin, and Thayer were yelling and blasting magic around,

but I couldn't look at them or the warlock right now, I had to make sure Hiro was okay.

He wasn't. He was covered in blood and oozing wounds, and he was barely conscious. I pulled

one of Delaro's healing tonics I always carried with me from a secret compartment on my arm bracer,

then tilted Hiro's head back and dumped the liquid into his throat. He gurgled, but swallowed it, and I

whispered, "It's okay. It's going to help you. Rasha's safe, Hiro, I made sure of it. Relax, baby. I've

got you both covered." There was no doubt that she would be on his mind right now.

I felt some of his panic ease, and I breathed a sigh of relief as I gently placed his head back on the

floor. My hands came away covered in blood.

“Bas,” Toby said from behind me. “Go help the others, they need you. I’ll give him another tonic

in a few minutes.”

Blaze jumped from my shoulder and transformed to a bigger size—not his biggest since he

wouldn’t fit—and I understood his intentions. He was going to protect Hiro while I helped my

brothers and dad.

“Be right back, dimples,” I said before kissing Hiro’s forehead and standing up. I didn’t want to

leave him like that, but we needed to neutralize the threat before I could properly take care of him.

Toby took my place, and with my chest tight and hurting, I turned back, stepping out from behind

the shelves.

Ailin, Jorah, and Thayer stood in a row, pushing magic out of themselves toward the green

warlock that was now surrounded by three demons. Holy shit. Three demons, three huge-ass, black

and red, smoky demons with claws and horns and ugly fucking faces.

I rushed over to them, drew my shadow magic and my Three magic up, then pushed my magic out,

willing it to disintegrate the warlock and the demons. It hit them, and adding my blast to the mix

helped make them stumble, but almost as soon as they stumbled, they righted themselves and came

back at us. A fireball from the warlock nearly took my head off.

Thayer yelled, “Dad, keep a shield up in front of us. Jor, Bas, let’s connect and take that fucker

out!”

Ailin’s green magic flew in front of us, creating a see-through barrier. With Jorah beside me and

Thayer on his other side, I let the full force of the Power of Three magic flow through me. The magic

sought out my brothers, and the three of us connected on an even deeper level than usual as our magics

flowed in and out and around each other, coming together to form something new and improved. My

body was like a hot wire, ready to explode at any second as magic danced along my skin, making my

hair stick up and my fingers spark.

The three of us lifted our arms in the air, and as one, we swung them down, bringing the full force

of our power down on the warlock and the three demons.

Pained screams filled the air as the smoky scent of burned warlock and demon surrounded us and

made me want to puke. Their screams were piercing my ears, but I ignored it

as my brothers and I

lifted our arms up, then struck them with our power again and again. After the fourth strike, their

screams fell silent.

Whenever we let our wild magic loose like this, it took a lot of fucking effort to pull it back in and

regain control. Staring at the charred body of the warlock and the ashes of the demons, I couldn't help

but wonder what else we could burn up. If we killed a warlock hopped up on blood magic that easily,

there was nothing we couldn't take out. Our power was beyond anything I'd ever imagined. Maybe

we should let it out to play. Let it out to conjure up a hurricane and see what happened.

As soon as that thought flitted through my head, I gasped and closed my eyes. *No*, I said to the

magic as if it was a living thing. *No destruction*. With a shuddered breath, I yanked on my magic,

ripping it apart from Jorah and Thayer's energies and pulling that shit back inside my body. My skin

thrummed, my muscles ached, and my limbs quivered, but I kept pulling and pulling until all of it was

back inside me.

Then I stood still for a minute to regain my equilibrium so I didn't come out of my skin.

“Bas?” Ailin asked quietly.

I held my hand up at him to stop, but didn't open my eyes. My body needed to adjust.

“Thay? Jor?” Ailin tried.

After another minute of deep breathing, I opened my eyes to find Ailin staring at me in concern, so

I said, “I'm fine now.”

“Your eyes are still flashing with lightning,” he said as Jorah and Thayer both opened their eyes,

both still flashing as well.

“They'll be like that for a while, but I'm fine.” Ignoring him for the time being, I turned on my heel

and rushed over to Hiro, dropping to my knees beside him as I pushed Toby out of the way.

Hiro blinked up at me, and Toby said, “I gave him two more vials of healing tonic.”

“Thanks,” I said, scooting closer to my viramore.

Gently, I pushed the hair off Hiro's forehead, cringing at the blood pooled around him. “I'm here,

Hiro. You're safe.” I wasn't sure if he could hear me or not since his eyes were now closed.

Placing my hand on his forehead, I pushed as much of my energy as I could into him, bending it to

my will—making it heal him as best I could. My magic wrapped around a wound on his temple and a

very large stabbing wound on his back. I knew I wouldn't be able to heal him entirely on my own—I

had never been great at healing magic—but I could at least get him stable enough to move. If we could

get him to coven land, Ailin would set up a healing bed in our yard that would be able to take care of

Hiro better than anything else. We just had to get him there first.

After a few minutes, Hiro began blinking his eyes, although he was foggy and confused. Another

minute after that, his eyes focused on me, and I knew he could truly see me, so I offered a sad smile as

I moved my face closer to him and whispered, "Don't worry, Rasha's safe. I promise she's okay."

He closed his eyes and blew out a relieved breath. I'd known that would be his first concern.

I kissed his cheek. "You're going to be okay, dimples."

That earned me a small scowl and a reluctant grin at the same time.

"I can see you smiling." I chuckled and kissed the tip of his nose, even as I pushed more magic

into him. I knew he couldn't speak yet, so obviously it was the perfect time to tease him since he

couldn't retaliate. "I think I might like you like this. Silent and sexy. Totally the way to go."

He tried to shake his head, but winced in pain.

"Don't move, dimples. You're not even halfway healed yet." I brushed back

his sweaty hair again

with my free hand. “As soon as I get you stable, I’ll take you to Rasha, and we’ll heal you up.”

He winced, and I didn’t realize why until I saw his hand open in my direction. I blinked at it

before he wiggled his fingers as much as he could, and I finally understood what he wanted. I slid my

hand into his, and he closed his eyes, sighing in relief. It may not be the declaration of love I’d always

hoped for from my viramore, but it sure as hell felt like it. Only a few months ago, if I would’ve tried

holding his hand, I would’ve received a punch to the face for the effort.

Hiro’s lips quirked up as if he’d read my mind, and hell, maybe he had.

I moved around until I could rest his head in my lap, then I stayed there, rubbing his cheek with

one hand and holding his fingers with the other. His eyes kept drifting closed, but when they opened,

he stared up at me, and while I kept trying to heal him, he still couldn’t speak.

My family cleaned up everything, and some BCA agents came to check it out since warlocks were

bad news, but I didn’t pay them even an ounce of attention. My sole focus was on Hiro. My Hiro.

When I finally pulled back my magic, knowing it would do no more good until we got him home

on a healing bed, Hiro’s raspy voice caught my attention, saying, “You came

for me.”

“Of course I did. I’ll always come for you.”

“You took care of Rasha.”

“I’ll always come for her, too.”

“I’ll come for you, too, love.” A smile reached his eyes, and I was pleased to know my healing

magic along with the tonics were helping him so much.

My chest warmed with content, and I leaned down to him with a smile. “I’m bringing you home.

Alec is letting us borrow one of the SUVs. Do you think you’ll be okay?”

“Yeah, baby, I’ll be okay.”

On a shaky breath, I gave him a nod and kissed his forehead before gently moving him and

standing, motioning Jorah over. My little brother took one look at me, and his eyes widened as he

asked, “If I help you with him, you’re gonna bite my head off.”

I shook my head. “No, I won’t, but if anyone else touches him, I can’t make the same promise.”

He nodded, and the two of us hauled Hiro off the ground with his arms around our shoulders. He

tried to help walk a little, but we mostly dragged him to the SUV. And he was heavy as fuck. He was a

big man, but I didn’t truly appreciate just how big he was until we had to carry all of that muscle.

Since I was pretty spent from healing Hiro, Jorah called on a little wind magic to help us get him

in the back seat. I went to shut the door, but Jor stopped me, saying, “I’ll drive you two home.”

“Don’t you have to stay here and help?”

He waved that away. “I don’t care about the BCA shit right now, you need me. Get in the back

seat with your viramore. I’ll drive.”

A shuddered breath left my lips as I nodded. “Thanks, Jor.”

“Anytime.”

I climbed in and moved Hiro until his head was on my lap again, and Jor shut the door and got

into the driver’s seat. Now that I was touching Hiro again, the tremble in my hands slowed. Driving

home and not being able to touch him would’ve killed me. Obviously, my brother had seen that.

Hiro’s eyes were closed as I ran my fingers through his hair, but he surprised me when he

threaded his fingers through my other hand that was resting on his chest. He didn’t open his eyes, but

once our fingers were laced, he sighed and some of his tension left his body.

After a few minutes, Jorah said, “I can set up a healing bed for you.”

“You know how?”

I saw Jorah’s scowl in the rearview mirror. “You know how to do it, too,

idiot.”

“I know, but Ailin’s always been the best at them.”

He sighed. “You’re right, but Alec’s making him help with the cleanup. So I thought I would make

one for now, and when Dad gets home, he can fix it or make it better or whatever. At least mine

would help some.”

“That would be great, Jor, thank you.”

He waved me away. “Stop thanking me, Bas. You’re my brother, and that’s your viramore back

there. That makes him family.”

At this, Hiro’s eyes shot open and flickered over to Jorah before staring up at me. I offered a

smile, and without looking away from Hiro, said to Jorah, “You’re right. That does make him and

Rasha family.”

“Yeah, she seems really sweet. I’m sure she’ll be happy to have her dad back.”

Hiro’s eyes flickered over to Jorah again, watching the side of his head as he drove, then they

moved back to me, and I saw the question and confusion there. I leaned down to press another kiss to

his forehead. “She’s safe, dimples. She’s an Ellwood now, and so are you. We protect our own.”

Jor huffed. “We try to protect everyone, but sometimes that doesn’t work out too well.”

I grinned over at my brother even though he couldn’t see it. “You’re right, we try to protect

everyone, but no one messes with our family. Ever.”

“True.” Jor gave a nod.

Hiro’s eyebrows rose up on his forehead, but after a few seconds of staring into my eyes, he

closed his and breathed deeply as he squeezed my fingers. I continued carding my fingers through his

hair as I quietly watched him for the rest of the drive.

Jor drove right up to the big house, and I gently said, “We’re here, Hiro. You awake?”

He grunted.

Jorah opened my door and said, “Let me get the healing bed situated before we get him out of the

car. I don’t want to have to move him twice.”

“Sounds good, tha—”

He slammed the door before I could say thank you, and he shot me the finger, making me chuckle.

“I like your brother,” Hiro murmured.

My eyes widened. “Yeah?”

“All of them seem cool.” His words were so mumbled they were hard to understand.

“Everywhere we go we see one of ‘em.”

I snorted. “That’s true. I have a ton of siblings. You haven’t even met half of them yet.”

“I know. I don’t have any siblings.”

I kissed his forehead, suddenly hit with a sadness in my heart. It had been only Hiro and Rasha for

such a long time. They’d been all alone in this world with no family to back them up. I had no idea

what that felt like because no matter what shit was going on in my life, I’d always had my siblings

right there with me. Even when I’d been taken to Faela for three years, I had Jorah and Thayer there,

plus Nikolai and Talon. And I’d known that the rest of my family was here in Brinnswick. I’d known

they’d have my back no matter what. I’d always had Ailin in my corner. Even when I was a spoiled

little brat of a teenager, he’d stood by my side. Sure, we used to argue over just about everything, but

he was always there for me, no matter how angry I made him.

So thinking about Hiro not having anyone like that in his life made me so incredibly sad.

But then I remembered what Jorah had said. Hiro was my viramore, which made him and Rasha a

part of our family already. *The two of them aren’t going to know what hit them.*

Hiro snorted. “Your family is goin’ to overwhelm the fuck outta us.” His voice sounded tired and

weak, but at least he was able to speak.

I smiled and kissed his forehead yet again. “You read my thoughts, dimples. And don’t worry, I

live in my own house, so we can escape my crazy-ass family anytime we want.”

“Does that mean you’re holding me hostage until I agree to live here or somethin’?”

“Yeah, probably.”

He snorted again. “I have a house, Bas.”

My stomach fluttered at the use of my nickname. “We’re not talking about this when you’re flat on

your back, half dead in my lap.”

“Yeah, good plan.”

“I think we’re ready,” Jorah said as he popped up beside me, scaring the shit out of me.

“Mother of All, Jor. Warn a guy.”

He chuckled. “I called your name like three times before I came over here.”

Not having a good comeback to that, I asked, “Can you use your wind magic to help get him out of

the car?”

“Sure.” He smirked at me, knowing I ignored his last statement on purpose.

Jor easily used some wind magic to carefully guide Hiro out of the car, then the two of us took

position under either arm and dragged him over to the healing bed in the grass. I could've helped with

the magical aspect of things, but I was pretty tapped out from our fight and healing Hiro as much as I

had.

As we lay Hiro on the grass healing bed, his eyes fluttered open, and he asked, "What the hell are

ya doin'? Why are ya puttin' me in the grass?"

"It's a healing bed. We're witches, nature is where our power comes from. Mine is from

shadows, but Jorah—and Ailin—have earth magic. Using the grass as a catalyst for healing is the

easiest way to do it. If we set you up in a regular bed, it would take three times as long to heal you.

So you're going to sleep outside for a night on this healing bed, and tomorrow, you'll be as good as

new. Well, you'll be tired from the healing, but you'll be okay enough to get up."

He didn't answer, but he also didn't complain as we placed a grass healing blanket over the top

of him. After he was settled, Jorah said, "I'll tell Rasha to come say hi, and I'll make sure Seb has a

place for her to sleep tonight. Niya might want to set up sleeping bags in the living room or

something.”

To my surprise, Hiro was already asleep—moving him must’ve worn him out—so I answered,

“That sounds good. Thanks, Jor.”

He rolled his eyes and waved me off as he walked into the big house. Only a minute later, Rasha

came running out.

Before I could stop her, she dove on top of Hiro’s chest, startling him awake and giving me a

minor heart attack. Hiro was shocked, but hugged her as soon as he realized what was happening.

I heard him whisper, “Are you okay, peanut?”

She nodded against him. “I was scared when you weren’t home.”

“I know, baby girl. I’m so sorry.”

She sat up to make eye contact with him. “I used the emergency phone to call Basil... are you

mad?”

“No, peanut, I would never be mad about that. I’m so glad and so proud of you for callin’ him.”

“You are?”

“Yes. I’m glad you knew what to do.” He tried to lift his hand, but dropped it at the last second,

and that sad ache returned to my chest. I wanted to help him, but I already felt like I was invading

their privacy by standing right here, so I hung back. “Are you having fun with Basil’s little sister?”

Rasha smiled widely and nodded. “She’s crazy! I love it.”

Hiro chuckled, but it turned into a coughing fit, so I moved closer and helped him sit up. Once he

stopped coughing and I lay him back down, he said, “I think you’re gonna have a sleepover with her

tonight, and I’m going to stay out here. Is that okay with you?”

She nodded. “Yes, but... won’t you be sad out here by yourself?”

Hiro opened his mouth to respond, but I beat him to it, saying, “I’m staying with him.”

Rasha smiled at me. “Good.”

Hiro asked her a couple more questions before Rasha gave me a tight hug and ran back inside, and

then he turned to me and asked, “You’re stayin’ with me?”

I shot him a small glare. “Yes.”

“You don’t have to.”

“Asshole, I thought you were dead a few hours ago, there’s no fucking way I’m leaving your

side.”

A smile began spreading over his face. “Okay.”

“That’s all you have to say?”

“Yep... for now.”

I huffed out an annoyed breath, then lay down beside him and placed my hand on his chest under

the grass blanket.

Ailin came home less than an hour after that, and he immediately walked over to us, pressing his

hands against the healing bed and saying, "I'm so sorry, Bas. I didn't realize you'd left until you were

already gone. Jor called me to tell me he set you guys up, but I wanted to be the one to set up the

healing bed." His magic began floating around us, green swirls floating in the air. "Actually, Jor did a

great job, but I'm still going to push some of my magic into it to help heal him faster."

"Thanks, Ailin," I whispered.

Hiro cleared his throat. "Thank you, Ailin. And... thank you for helping my daughter today and

when she was in the hospital."

Ailin smiled softly. "You're part of my coven now, Hiro. I'll help you whenever I can." He didn't

give Hiro a chance to reply before saying, "Rasha and Niya are in the living room having a sleepover.

Seb said they've been giggling for hours, so she's in good hands. You should be all fixed up by

morning." He stood up, then surprised me by moving closer to me and squatting down to kiss my

temple. “Are you injured?”

“No, I’m good. Just tired,” I said.

He nodded, squeezed my shoulder, then headed inside his house.

It was several minutes before Hiro whispered, “I’m sorry for the way I treated you when we met,

and for not believing you later on. I... I never knew witches could be so...”

Part of me wanted to be an asshole and say I told you so, but Hiro was being genuine and he

deserved a serious response from me. “It’s okay, dimples. I understand why you didn’t trust me. Don’t

even worry about it. All that matters is that you’re here with me now.”

He was quiet for another minute, then, “You’re too far away, love.”

A smile tugged at my lips as I scooted closer to him. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Well then you need to get closer because I can’t stand not touchin’ ya right now.”

My smile wanted to grow, and I couldn’t hold it back even though I tried as I moved close enough

to wrap myself around the side of his body, tucking my head close to his so my forehead touched his

temple. He lifted the grass blanket and put it over me so I was flat against him.

I kissed his cheek, and he whispered, “This is much better.”

It was.

I fell asleep with a smile on my face, content in the fact that Hiro was right beside me and Rasha

was safe and sound inside the big house—the safest place in all the realms.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

H I R O

As I woke up and started to stretch, I felt a warm body beside me, and I froze before

remembering everything that happened yesterday and last night. How Basil had made sure my

daughter was safe before coming to rescue me. If he hadn't shown up, Rasha would be an orphan right

now.

My chest tightened at the thought. I owed Basil everything after what he did for my daughter and

me.

As I blinked against the early morning sunshine, I turned my head to find Basil still asleep and

curled into me. His head was on the grass, but tucked into the crook of my neck where I felt his breath

brushing against my skin. I scooted my head back enough to really stare at him, and I couldn't get over

how beautiful he was. He had that bad boy vibe going for him, but when you truly got a closer look at

his face, he was actually really pretty. His skin was several shades lighter than mine, so his cheeks

flushed pink whenever he was embarrassed or angry—which happened a lot around me—and his lips

were plump, pink, and soft. He had long eyelashes as dark as his hair, and being this close to him, I

could see a few freckles on his nose. Gorgeous.

He must've felt my eyes on him because he yawned as he blinked those big, dark eyes at me. He

searched my face for a few seconds before whispering, "Morning."

"Morning."

"How are you feeling?"

His hand was still laced with mine, so I squeezed it. "I'm feelin' pretty good, actually."

His lips tilted up a tad. "I'm glad you're okay."

"Me too." I leaned in and kissed his forehead. "What you did for Rasha and me last night... you

saved me—us. You saved us."

He shrugged a shoulder and darted his eyes away like he was embarrassed or somethin'.

"Basil?"

His eyes jerked back to mine.

"Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me, for fuck's sake, Hiro." He rolled his eyes, making me snort and

shake my head. I should've known, three seconds after he woke, he'd curse at me and get annoyed—

he always did.

“You really like bein' difficult, don't you?”

He huffed. “Whatever. Do you think you can walk? We should go inside and get changed. You can

grab a shower if you want. Toby brought some clothes over for you since his are the only ones big

enough to fit you. I can spell you clean, but I figured you'd want to actually shower this morning.”

“I would, yeah.”

“Okay. Can you walk?”

“I think so. How do you know Toby brought clothes over for me?”

He sat up and released my hand, then tapped his head. “Thayer told me.”

“Oh. I forgot you can do that.”

“Yeah, it's annoying sometimes because I have to actively shield myself from them. It's like

they're always there though, so... uh, sorry, but it's impossible to hide shit from Thay and Jor. Fair

warning.”

My eyebrows lifted. “But you hid me from them for a while, didn't ya?”

He nodded as he helped me sit up. “Yeah, but it was a pain in the ass, and they knew something

was up since I was blocking them. I didn't hide your existence, just that you're my viramore. We do

try to give each other privacy whenever we can, it's just that we have this... awareness of each other

and what we're feeling, so it's hard to do sometimes.”

“That's gotta be confusing.”

“It can be. Sometimes I'll have a strong emotion for no reason and it'll take me a minute to realize

it's actually coming from one of my brothers. Like, a couple of nights ago, I was so pissed off for

probably an hour before I realized that Jorah was pissed at someone he was working with. As soon as

he realized he was projecting so much, he reeled it in, but the anger still lingered for a while until he

went home and calmed himself down.”

“That sounds kinda horrible.”

He shrugged as he pulled me to my feet. “Not really, it's actually nice. I have this... comfort

knowing they're always there. I don't know how to explain it. Hopefully once we complete our

viramore bond, you'll understand because it's pretty similar. It's just... on a different level because

they're my brothers, so our bond will be different—”

“Since we're lovers, huh?”

He laughed and threw my arm over his shoulders. “Yeah, I guess that’s a word you can use for us.”

I leaned in and kissed his cheek. The movement made him trip over his own feet so I ended up

helping steady him instead of the other way around like he’d intended. I guess a cheek kiss was out of

my norm, but I hadn’t expected quite that reaction.

Before he opened the front door, he said, “I’m taking you up to my old room so you can use the

shower there. I’ll use the one in Jor’s room or something.”

“You all have your own bathrooms?” Tilting my head back, I stared at the huge house that looked

like it came out of a fairytale book or somethin’.

“Uh, yeah. We didn’t when we were little, but as we grew up, so did the house. We kinda had to

add bathrooms because there were so many of us. Can you imagine what the shower schedule

would’ve been like with sixteen kids—mostly teenagers and pre-teens—sharing a bathroom?”

“No, that would be insane.”

“Exactly. So Ailin asked the trees to build bathrooms for all of us.”

I blinked at that. “He *asked the trees* to build a bathroom? What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Uh, he literally asked the trees to move and grow to his liking to make the house bigger and stuff.

All the walls are living trees. His affinity is nature, so he has a unique connection to nature, but

especially here on this land. Since he protects it, the trees and nature-things like doing stuff for him,

like manipulating their shape instead of having him have to build a house with dead trees or concrete

or whatever the hell.”

I stared at him for several beats before tilting my head up to stare at the house again. The house

made of fuckin’ *living trees*. How in the hell were those trees alive when they were shaped that way?

“What the fuck?” I whispered.

“Uh, yeah... my house was built the same way.”

“Really?”

“Yep.”

“You live on coven land, right? Where’s your house?”

He pointed and said, “There’s a trail from the back yard that leads to the lake. My house is on the

lake right next to Jorah’s, and Thay’s is on the other side of his. After you shower and eat, I can take

you and Rasha there if you’re feeling up to it.”

I nodded. “Yeah, let’s do one thing at a time.” Not that I was about to admit

it, but I was already

feeling worn out, and I'd probably walked less than fifty feet.

"Okay." He sounded disappointed, but he still shot me a small smile that seemed genuine.

As he opened the door, I heard a little girl's voice floating toward us. I was so surprised by the

amount of words I could hear that it took me a second to realize it was Rasha speaking a million

miles a minute. My eyes widened, and I turned to see Basil grinning at me.

"Do you want to go in and say hi, or go straight up to shower first?"

"Can I pop in to say hi?" I asked.

He nodded and led me farther into the house, then turned into a large living room.

"Daddy!" Rasha yelled way louder than I'd expect when we were in someone else's home. She

ran over and threw her arms around my waist, so I bent down to hug her back without fully releasing

Basil. I wasn't ready to be separated from him.

"Are you having fun, peanut?" I asked.

"Yes!" She giggled. "Niya's letting me help decorate her new dollhouse."

I glanced into the living room and saw a dollhouse that was probably as tall as my daughter and a

little girl about the same size as Rasha standing there with her arms buried in the dollhouse.

The little girl grinned at me with her two front teeth missing, then looked at Basil and said, “You

have grass in your hair.”

Basil snorted. “I’m sure I do. Niya, this is Hiro, my viraamore and Rasha’s dad.”

“I know,” Niya said with an attitude and an eye roll that made me want to laugh.

“Okay, brat, I just wanted to make sure.”

Niya stuck her tongue out at him, and Basil did it right back at her. This time I did chuckle.

Basil shrugged a shoulder at me and said, “What can I say? She’s got the whole bratty little sister

thing down pat, and somehow I always fall for it.”

“Wasn’t gonna say a thing,” I said.

“Yeah right, asshat.” He cringed when he realized Rasha was still standing there. “Sorry.”

Rasha giggled, then ran back over to her new friend, and to my surprise said, “We should paint

that room gray and pink since that’s Daddy and Basil’s favorite colors.”

“Okay, you do that one,” Niya said with her tongue sticking between her teeth as she tried

reaching something again.

Basil said, “Do you need some help, Ni? I can—”

“No!” Niya and Rasha both yelled together—I couldn’t believe Rasha had as

well—and Rasha

added, “We’re doing it all by ourselves. No adults allowed.”

“And definitely no annoying brothers,” Niya said.

“No dads either,” Rasha said with a pointed look aimed my way.

My eyebrows rose, but I held my hands up in defeat. “Okay, have fun.” Basil led me back toward

the stairs, and as we ascended them, I whispered, “I’ve never seen her so comfortable around

someone she just met. I can’t believe she yelled at you like that when we’re in someone else’s home.

That was... kinda amazin’.”

Basil grinned at me. “I’m glad she’s comfortable here. I knew she and Niya would get along.”

When we reached the top of the stairs, I grabbed him, pushed him against the wall, and leaned

down to bury my face in his neck. My hands were fisting his shirt as I took a deep breath and

murmured, “She doesn’t make friends easily, Basil. She... she doesn’t really have any friends, so to

see her like that...” I trailed off and breathed to keep my emotions at bay.

Basil wrapped his arms around me, kissed the side of my head, and settled in, just holdin’ me

while I pulled myself together. The crazy thing was, I could actually feel his affection for me through

our bond. So even though I was embarrassed and worried that he'd see this as a weakness, I could

tell he didn't. In fact, if anything, his affection seemed to be growing with every passing second, and

feeling that, knowing that, it was making my own affection for him grow, too.

Eventually, I got my shit together enough to let him lead me to his old room and the bathroom in

there. After he showed me what to do—because apparently it was a fuckin' magic shower, which was

so far out of my norm, I was in shock—he asked, “Are you going to be okay by yourself?”

I smirked. “Are you offerin' to wash my back?”

He sighed. “As much as I like that idea...” He trailed off and chewed on the inside of his cheek

for a minute. “If you need help, I'll help you, but that's all I'd be doing.”

“I know, baby. Relax. I'll be fine.” If I had a choice, I'd wait until I could really enjoy him naked,

so I was goin' to make this work without his help, otherwise I'd devour him too quickly.

“You sure? I can stay in here in case you need help.” His voice was soft, so I focused on him to

try and figure out what was goin' on in his head.

“You okay?”

“Huh?”

“Are you okay?”

He blinked at me. “Yeah, I’m good. Do you want me to stay or go?”

“Tell me what’s goin’ on in your head, shadow boy.”

He sighed again. “I don’t want to leave you in here by yourself.”

“Why?”

“Because I thought I lost you last night, and I’m still not ready to be away from you, but this isn’t

really the way I wanted to see you completely naked for the first time. But I feel like a fucking jittery

mess because I’m worried you might get hurt or that maybe this is a dream and you’re really still

trapped by that fucking warlock or whatever, and I’m—”

“Bas.” I cut him off and stepped in front of him. “Calm down, baby.” I took off my gloves—a little

surprised he hadn’t removed them last night—threw them on the counter, then moved into Basil’s

space. His back was against the wall, and my chest was pressed to his in the small area as I lifted my

hand and cupped his cheek. As he closed his eyes, he leaned into my touch, so I lifted my other hand

and ran my fingers through the loose hair on the non-braided side of his head. I used that hand to

caress his cheek, keeping the other cupped, then I bent down to press a soft kiss to his lips. “I’m right

here, baby.”

To my surprise, a tear slipped out of his eye. He went to wipe it, but I beat him to it, using my

thumb to brush it away. “Sorry,” he whispered.

“It’s okay, love. Everything’s okay.” I kissed his lips again, and this time he whimpered and

opened his mouth to let my tongue explore him. He kissed me back with the same desperation I felt.

“Hiro,” he breathed out.

He didn’t say it, but I could tell what he was thinkin’, so I said, “I’m right here. I’m right here,

love.”

A choked sound escaped him, so I moved my lips away but only so I could pull him into a tight

hug. He tucked his head against my neck and whispered, “I almost lost you before I’ve really even

had you.”

I held him tighter. “But you didn’t. You got to me in time.”

He nodded against me, clinging to me desperately. I felt just as desperate to be close to him, too.

We stayed there for a long time, and besides Rasha, I didn’t know the last time I’d truly hugged

someone like this. But having him in my arms felt right, like somethin’ inside my chest clicked into

place, like he was a puzzle and I was the lost piece that finally found its way back home.

Eventually, he whispered, “Go take a shower... is it okay if I stay in here?”

I almost suggested that he simply jump in with me, but I could tell he was feeling too raw. The last

thing he’d want was to be stripped naked in front of me right now after letting me see him lose control

of his emotions. As much as Basil Ellwood acted like a confident ass, it was mostly a front.

Something happened in his past that made it hard for him to trust people. It seemed we both had pasts

that messed us up a little—or a lot.

“Yeah, stay.”

He blew out a relieved breath.

After kissing the side of his head, I backed away and undressed. To my surprise, Basil turned his

back to me and didn’t try to peek. It made me smirk at him and shake my head as I climbed into the

shower. It didn’t take long to clean myself off, and when I got back out, Basil kept his back to me. I

dried off, got into my borrowed clothes, and said, “Why don’t you get in? I’ll wait in here.”

He finally turned to me. “You don’t mind?”

I shook my head. “Not at all. I don’t really wanna be away from you, either.” It was the truth. The

thought of being in a different room than him with a door shut between us was actually making my

chest pinch in panic. Which was ridiculous. I knew it was ridiculous, but I also knew it was a part of

this viramore process. I'd done a little research about it, asked Jasmyn a few things as well, so... I

knew it was natural. He needed to stay close, that was all there was to it.

He let out another relieved breath, then walked past me and placed a small but sweet kiss to my

lips. I kept myself busy searching for a brush while he undressed, and I had to give myself credit for

not peeking. Under normal circumstances, I probably would've looked, but Basil was... special, and

I didn't want to break his trust. If that meant waiting until he was more comfortable with me, then I

would fuckin' wait. I already hurt him once with sex, and I sure as shit wasn't in a rush to hurt him

again. Hopefully he'd come to see that he'd never get hurt again if he gave me another shot.

When Bas got out of the shower, I leaned my shoulder on the wall, facing away from him. He used

a spell, and I was about to ask what he was doin', but he muttered, "I'm cleaning my clothes since I

didn't bring any in here."

I nodded, and when Bas finally said, "I'm ready, you can turn around," I stepped right up to him

and claimed his lips in a deep kiss. I kept it short before pulling away and walking out of the

bathroom, leaving him with a stunned expression on his face and knowing he'd follow behind me. I

slid my boots on, and tucked my gloves into my pocket—I didn't need them here. These people had

protected Rasha, so I had to believe they wouldn't use my tattoos against me. Rasha was my

everything. Trusting them with my tattoos was nothing in comparison.

“Hiro?”

I stopped walking and turned to face him. “Yeah?”

“Will you and Rasha please stay with me? At least for a few days?”

Stepping closer to him, I cupped his chin, but ran my thumb over his throat, bringing my nose

close to his. “I don't wanna be away from you either, Bas. So yeah, we'll stay. Otherwise, I'd kidnap

ya and tie you to my bed.”

His breath hitched, and he leaned into my hand a little, pushing harder against my thumb. Tilting

his head up, he lightly pressed his lips to mine, but I broke the kiss and rested our foreheads together.

If he kept kissing me, I was sure to lose control, and despite his blown pupils, despite being able to

tell he liked the idea of bein' tied to my bed, I knew he wasn't ready yet.

After a few shuddered breaths, he whispered, "Let's go get some food."

"Okay." I rubbed my thumb over his Adam's apple and let myself breathe him in for a few more

seconds, then I pressed my lips to his forehead and released him before walking out the door with him

behind me.

As we descended the steps, he said, "If you want, we can have Niya stay the night at my house

tonight with Rasha. Ailin won't mind."

I paused on the bottom step and glanced over my shoulder. "That would be great." My heart did

that squeezing thing in my chest again, appreciative of the fact that he kept thinking of Rasha. I was

pretty sure this little witch now had me wrapped around his little finger because of it.

He shot me a grin, then gave my shoulder a push, making me chuckle as I began walking again.

When we moved into the dining room, I was surprised to find Rasha there and about seventeen other

people, all of them sitting around the table with piles of food in the center and huge plates in front of

them. It was loud and chaotic, and right in the middle of it, my shy daughter was giggling with her new

friend, and Ailin was scooping food onto the girls' plates. I could only blink for a few seconds in

surprise.

Somehow Basil's crazy family was bringing out a side of Rasha I had only ever seen when she

was home alone with me, away from the outside world that made her feel like she didn't belong

because of her medical issues and her small stature.

But here, with Basil's coven, she had opened up and seemed so fuckin'... happy. She was fuckin'

happy.

My chest tightened as I watched her, and when Ailin glanced up at me, he offered a small smile

before turning his attention to Seb and giving the enchanter a quick kiss. Ailin rested his forehead

against Seb's temple for a few seconds before he sat up straight, and Seb turned to concentrate on

their toddler that was currently trying to throw food at his dads.

No one at the table seemed to think the simple affection between Seb and Ailin was anything to

think about. They didn't even spare a glance at them. This was... so far from anything I'd ever

experienced. Growing up with hunter parents, they pretty much thought affection was unnecessary and

a waste of time, so... I'd never had anything like this. I tried to give Rasha more than I'd had growing

up—including affection and telling her I loved her—but this was more than I

could ever hope to give

her on my own.

A hand on my back startled me, but I realized it was only Basil, so I leaned into his touch a little.

He stepped close, keeping his hand on my back and turning into me so his chest was pressed to my

arm as he asked, “Are you okay?”

I nodded. “I’m fine.”

“You sure?”

I bit my lip, then leaned close to whisper into his ear. No one else needed to hear our

conversation, but... I was really tryin’ with him, which meant I needed to be honest and talk about the

shit I hated talkin’ about. “My family was never like this, so it’s foreign to me, but Rasha looks

happy.”

He rubbed my back. “If it’s too much, we can go back to my house and eat alone.”

I shook my head. “Not too much, just different. And I don’t want to take Rasha away from

somehin’ when she’s thriving.”

He nodded. “Let me know if it gets to be too much.”

I offered a small smile and kissed his forehead. How had I ever thought this man was an evil

monster? He was absolutely the opposite of what I'd thought he was the first time I aimed a crossbow

at his head. Thank god I never pulled the trigger.

Basil snorted. "You never would've hit me."

Now I snorted, but I smiled because he'd read my thoughts. Before, that would've freaked me out,

but something shifted last night, and all I wanted was to let him in and for him to do the same. I

wanted to be fully connected to him. "You were five feet away."

"And my shield would've deflected it."

I lifted a shoulder. "Possibly."

He rolled his eyes, but grinned and pushed me up to the table where a pair of seats waited. Basil

picked up two empty plates and passed me one before pulling one of the giant plates filled with food

closer to us. He scooped the... breakfast goo? onto my plate, and when I took a bite, I was surprised

it tasted delicious. I was kinda expecting a barf flavor, so color me surprised.

"Opal?" Basil said loudly, and a woman on the other end of the table met his eyes. "This is really

good. Did you make it today?"

She nodded. "Yeah. Tio slept in, but I figured everyone needed a good meal after last night."

Basil smiled at her. "Thanks, sis."

She waved him away, but caught my eye and offered a smile, so I said, “Thank you, it’s delicious.”

“No problem.” She grinned some more before a guy I never met pulled her attention to him.

“Are all these people your siblings?” I asked him in between bites.

Basil nodded. “Most of them, yeah. Jorah and Thayer are the other parts of the Three with me.”

He pointed to the two guys on the other side of him, and they both grinned. Jorah saluted me, and

Thayer nodded. Basil pointed to the guy beside Thayer and said, “That’s Toby, he’s Thayer’s

viramore.” The Toby guy smiled a little shyly, and I tilted my head. I didn’t think I’d ever met a shy

vampire before. Although, to be honest, most of the time when I came face to face with a fuckin’

vampire, I was trying to stake them, so I suppose this was a little different.

Basil named the rest of the people at the table, but I was only half paying attention because I

couldn’t stop staring at my daughter giggling her head off. It was an amazing sight.

“Hey, dimples,” Basil whispered in my ear, “you need to eat your food. I know you’re hungry, and

you need the extra calories after a big healing.”

Taking a breath, I pulled my attention away from Rasha and began shoveling

food in my mouth. He

was right; I was starving. The others kept peeking at me, but they mostly left me alone, probably

because Basil was shooting daggers at everyone else. If I hadn't been so tired, I would've tried to

engage, but the truth was, I was hardly holdin' it together. Basil was saving me the trouble of acting

like a nice human being, so despite it being weird and a little annoying, I appreciated it.

When he finished eating, Basil whispered, "I'm going to talk to Ailin for a second. Be right back."

I nodded and watched him whisper to his older brother-slash-father, who was... about the same

age as me, probably younger. Jesus. That was a little horrifying. As Basil made his way back over, I

eyed him, wondering if I was too old for him.

"What?" he asked as he sat back down.

"I'm too old for you."

He snorted. "Babe, one of Delaro's viramores is over four hundred years old. There's no such

thing as too old when it comes to your soulmate."

My eyes widened. "Four hundred?"

"Yep." He grinned and pointed at Nikolai. "That pretty face over there is centuries old."

I growled. “Stop calling him pretty.”

He laughed. “No way in hell.”

My eyes narrowed. “Why do you like getting me riled up?”

He shrugged. “You’re cute when you’re pissed, which means you’re cute at all times.”

I scowled at that, but that only made him snicker more. With an eye roll, I pushed his shoulder.

When he got his ridiculous—and absolutely *not* adorable—laughing under control, he asked,

“You ready to go to my house? We can veg out on the couch and you can take a nap.” At my

expression, he rushed to add, “Healing takes energy and makes you tired. You need more sleep.”

I sighed. “Yeah, fine.”

Before he could say anything, one of the guys at the other end of the table stood and said, “I have

an announcement.” Everyone stopped talking and gave him their full attention. The guy smiled widely,

and somehow it made his black eyes light up. “I found my viramore.”

“Are you serious, Tio?” that Opal chick asked.

The guy—Tio—nodded. “Yeah, she came into the restaurant last night. She’s a witch, so she felt

the pull, too, and wants to see where it goes.” He shrugged self-consciously.

“That’s amazing, Tio,” Opal said before standing and pulling the guy into a

huge hug.

Ailin turned and shared a look with Seb, then a look with Basil, and my own vira more nodded at

his dad with wide eyes. Ailin nodded back before getting up and pulling Tio into a hug. Everyone was

loud and firing questions at Tio, but I heard Ailin say, “We need to bring her onto coven land right

away. Do you know where she lives?” I understood what he was thinkin’; there was a serial killer on

the loose, murdering witches. It was too dangerous out there.

Jorah, Thayer, and Toby stood, and Jorah said, “We’ll come with you.”

And suddenly, a ton of witches were rushing out the door. It was a little surreal.

“Do you need to go?” I asked Basil.

He shook his head. “Nope. I’m right where I need to be.” He grinned. “Well, actually, I want to

take you and Rasha to my house, but you know what I mean.”

I offered a small smile. “I’m ready when you are.”

He nodded and stood, saying, “We’re going to my house. Rasha and Niya, you two are coming

with us.”

Rasha’s eyes lit up, and she asked Basil, “Niya gets to come?”

“Of course, sweetpea,” Basil said. “I have some stuff at my house for you guys to do.”

Rasha bounced in her seat, making my eyebrows go up, but I quietly asked Basil, “You have stuff

for them?”

He chewed on his cheek for a few seconds. “I’ve been collecting stuff while I’m out in case you

guys ever came over. And sometimes I babysit my little siblings, so I always have things for them to

do even though I usually watch them here.” He shrugged and turned away, immediately walking over

to Rasha and Niya. When the girls pulled him into the living room and began handing Basil some

dolls and little trucks and a bunch of other crap, he took them without hesitation.

Since Basil had found out about Rasha, he’d done everything in his power to include her. Even

when I wouldn’t talk about her, he never gave up asking. And apparently, even when we weren’t

around, he was still thinking about her. It was kinda blowin’ my mind.

With a deep breath, I followed Basil and the girls out of the house and through the woods. Basil

called on his magic to wrap around the armful of crap the girls had given him, and he let go of them,

letting his magic carry them instead. His magic was almost like a giant black balloon filled with toys

that stayed right beside him as he moved down the pathway.

As we walked and Basil chatted with Niya and Rasha, I took in my surroundings. It didn't escape

my attention that there were sprites and a few little fairies in the trees, which was surprising. I was

shocked they were allowed on the Ellwood property.

Basil let the girls walk ahead, stepped back to stand beside me, and said, "Ailin and Seb gave

sanctuary to the sprites and fairies and stuff. Some of them have been on coven land for longer than

Seb. But yeah, my brother's always had a soft spot for little creatures, so it wasn't unusual for him to

bring home an animal or little creature and offer a safe place to live."

I nodded. These witches really were *nothing* like the ones back home. "Are there more of these

refugees in the lake you live by?"

He grinned. "Oh yeah. There's all kinds of creatures, but they're all friendly, so we can go

swimming if you want. When you're better, obviously."

"What kind of creatures?"

"Uh, water sprites, dragonettes, a water nymph. That's all I can think of, but I promise it's safe.

We go swimming all the time. The dragonettes are kinda shy, but sometimes they'll swim with you."

"Rasha would like that."

He fell quiet for a few seconds. “Can she swim?”

I sighed. “She knows how, but it really depends on how she’s feelin’. She hasn’t been able to do

much other than soak her feet in a really long time because she’s needed her oxygen so much.”

He nodded. “I’m going to figure out a way to help her.”

“Bas...” I grabbed his hand to stop him from walking and made him face me. “Don’t make

promises you won’t be able to keep.” When he opened his mouth to argue, I put my hand over it to

stop him. “I appreciate it, and it would be amazing if you figured somethin’ out, but you have to

realize that I’ve been trying for eight years, and so far, nothin’ has worked. Don’t get your hopes up,

but please... please don’t get Rasha’s up.” Quieter, I added, “Please don’t get mine up, either.”

I removed my hand, and he caught it to press a kiss to my palm, then said, “I won’t, dimples, and I

wasn’t going to say anything to Rasha, I swear.”

I nodded. “Good. Thanks.”

“Come on, we’re almost there.” He tugged on my arm to get me moving again.

When we came to a clearing that opened up to an absolutely huge lake, my eyes widened. Holy

shit. It was beautiful. The water was bright and sparkling, and the trees

surrounding it were the

biggest I'd ever seen. They were taller than I thought trees could grow around here, and there was

even a big overlook that some of the trees were taller than. At first, I didn't see the houses because

they blended so well with the forest, but then I noticed three homes that were most likely only one or

two bedrooms each, and they were miniature versions of the big house we'd just come from. Clearly,

the whole asking trees to form into a home thing really was how they built buildings on the Ellwood

property.

"Which one is yours?" Rasha asked Basil, smiling up at him. She'd really been coming out of her

shell with him.

Basil pointed. "The one on the far end."

Niya took off at a run, but when Rasha didn't follow—to my surprise, but also my relief—Niya

turned right back around and ran to my daughter again with a sheepish smile, saying, "Sorry, I forgot."

I cringed, worried that would hurt Rasha's feelings, but she smiled back. "It's okay."

Niya grinned and bounced on her toes a few times before she and Rasha began whispering again.

"Your sister is really sweet."

Basil shrugged. “She has her moments. Sometimes she’s a little shit, but she likes Rasha, so that’s

good.”

A half-smile tugged at my lips.

The girls headed inside, so Basil and I went in after them. They were already heading up the

stairs, and Bas led me to his couch. “Have a seat. I’ll take the girls their stuff, then I’ll get you some

water.”

After my nod, he rushed upstairs with his magical balloon thing following him. It was only a few

minutes before Bas came back into the living room, carrying two glasses of water. He set them down

on the coffee table, then sat beside me on the couch and found the remote for the TV.

He stretched out to put his feet up on the coffee table, so I lay out on the couch and instead of

using the table, I put my feet on Basil’s lap.

He froze, glanced down at my booted feet, then over at me with a raised eyebrow. “I’m trying

really hard not to be disgusted right now.”

A bark of laughter came out of me. “Disgusted?”

He pushed my feet off his lap. “I’m not a footrest, and I hate feet.”

I pushed one foot back onto his lap. “Too bad.”

He pushed it off again. “Seriously, Hiro, I don’t want your stinky feet on me.”

“I have boots on.” I pushed my foot back up onto his legs.

“That’s even worse. Your boots are covered in grime. Get them off my couch!” He tried to push,

but I held my foot still with a laugh.

“Nah, I think I like it right there.”

“I’m going to kill you if you don’t get your foot off me.”

I chuckled. “I was wonderin’ how long it’d take before the death threats started. Looks like we

weren’t even in your house for ten minutes.”

“You asshole, get off.” He pushed my foot hard enough to knock it to the floor.

When I went to put my foot back again, I hit an invisible force, and I couldn’t stop my laughter.

“You did not just shield your lap!”

“I did what I had to!” He looked so put-out that I laughed harder.

“I finally found your weakness. If only I’d known about your hatred of feet sooner.” I wiped tears

from my eyes.

He flipped me off, and I laughed more. He ignored me on purpose, focusing on the show he turned

on.

I pretended to watch as well, and about five minutes later, I tried to put my foot on his lap, then

started cracking up when I hit his shield again. He still hadn't dropped the shield. Fuckin' hilarious.

"I knew you were going to try again because you're a dick," he muttered.

I chuckled. "Poor baby. Such a mean partner, you have."

He shot me a look and shook his head, but I saw a tiny smile even though he tried to hide it.

"Total. Dick."

"Eh, pretty sure you knew that goin' in."

He sighed. "Pretty sure I didn't get a choice in the matter."

I snorted. "Harsh."

He shrugged, still trying to hide his smile.

I grinned. "It's so easy to push your buttons."

He flipped me off again.

With a smile, I said, "You have so many, and I have a feelin' I've only grazed the surface."

"You're going to make it your life's mission to discover them all, aren't you?"

"Obviously."

He shook his head. "This must be my punishment for always being a pain in the ass to Ailin

growing up."

I snorted. “Nah, it’s your reward for being stuck with me.”

“Lucky me.”

“You’re cute when you’re pretendin’ to be pissy.”

“Who says I’m pretending?”

A smile tugged at my lips. “The way your lips keep curving up is a good indication.”

“They are not.”

“Talking to you is like arguing with Rasha... when she was three.”

He turned to me with wide eyes. “Wow. Did you decide it’s Pick-On-Bas-Day or something?”

I lifted a shoulder. “It’s what I do best.”

He snorted. “Let’s hope you have some other talents in that sexy body of yours.” His eyes traveled

down the length of me.

I smirked. “I’d be happy to show you some of ‘em.”

He opened his mouth, but Niya’s voice yelled down the steps, “Bas, we’re hungry!”

Basil’s eyes widened as he yelled back, “We just finished eating breakfast like thirty minutes

ago!”

“We’re hungry!” his sister shouted.

Basil sighed, shook his head, and climbed off the couch. “That kid is ridiculous.” He leaned in

and pressed his lips to my forehead, whispering, “I’ll be right back. Maybe after they go to bed

tonight you can show me some of these other talents. I’ll be the judge on how good they are.” He

stood and moved away before I could respond, but I stared at his ass with wide eyes as he walked

away. His gorgeous, perfect little ass that I really wanted to bite.

BY THE TIME BASIL HAD FINISHED MAKING THE KIDS A SNACK, I HAD APPARENTLY FALLEN ASLEEP ON

the couch—healing really did take a lot outta ya. I spent the entire day in and out of sleep. Basil had

to help me up the steps by nightfall because I was so out of it. Truthfully, I mighta played it up a little

to get his hands on me, but in all honesty, I was in no condition to do anything other than sleep.

Basil had a spare bedroom that he’d decorated in shades of orange—Rasha’s favorite color—and

even though he claimed it was a spare room, nothing more, it was very clearly already set up for her.

He’d told her she could pick out new decorations and furniture if she wanted, claiming that it could

be her room while we stayed here, but she was already in heaven and happy with it. She and Niya

were sleeping in there tonight.

I lay in Basil’s bed, and when he went to walk away, I asked, “Where’re you goin’?”

“I was going to sleep on the couch.”

“Why in the hell are you doin’ that?”

“I didn’t know if you wanted me—”

“Basil, get your ass in the bed.”

A slow smile spread over his face, but he closed the door and began getting ready for bed. I

watched him remove his arm and leg bracers, his utility belt, and several necklaces and bracelets.

When he started climbing into bed, I asked, “Are you really sleeping in those pants?”

He froze. “Normally, I’d sleep in my boxers, but—”

“I’m in no shape to attack you in the middle of the night. You’re safe enough.”

He rolled his eyes. “Not you, hunter. I meant because Niya and Rasha are here.”

“Oh.” I thought about that for a second, and he had a point since Rasha was sleeping outside of

her own home for the second night in a row and might wake up in the middle of the night. “You must

have sweatpants or jammies or somethin’, right?”

He snorted out, “*Jammies.*” I rolled my eyes, but he grinned. “Yeah, I have some.”

I waved at him.

With a sigh, he walked to his dresser and faced away from me while he

changed into his jammies.

I only got to see his ass in his boxers for a couple of seconds which was seriously disappointing.

As he climbed back into bed, I asked, “Why didn’t you just magic them on or whatever?”

“Because you don’t like it.”

That made me freeze and slowly turn my gaze to meet his. “What?”

“You hate witches and witch magic, and I know you’re already... trying hard to be okay with it

all. I didn’t want to make you feel uncomfortable in my house, so I figured while we’re here, you

wouldn’t like me doing magic all the time.”

Something in my chest tightened and guilt began eating away at me. “Basil, I don’t want you

changin’ who you are—”

“But you hate witches.”

I sighed. “I... did. I still hate the ones that hurt Millie and Rasha, obviously, and I hate the ones

back at home that continue hurting people, but I don’t hate you... or your family. Bas, I could never

hate you or any part of you.”

He swallowed thickly. “You don’t?”

“Hey, I thought it was pretty damn obvious that I kinda like ya.”

He smiled, but only a little.

“And your family has been kind and helpful, so I have nothin’ against any of y’all.”

His smile was bigger this time. “You mean that?”

“Course I do.”

“You really wouldn’t mind me doing magic around you?”

“Nah. I want you to be yourself, Bas.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

He settled on his pillow as we fell quiet. I had just shut my eyes again when he whispered, “I still

feel off, so can I...”

“Can ya what?”

He didn’t respond, so I turned my head and found him already staring at me. It took all of five

seconds to figure out what it was he didn’t want to say, so with a sigh, I held my arm out. He

practically dove into my side, settling his head on my shoulder and his hand on my chest. I wrapped

my arm around him and enjoyed the sigh that escaped him.

As much as I wanted to take advantage of havin’ his sexy little body against me, sleep was already

claimin’ me. He hadn’t been kidding when he’d said going through a healing

took a lot out of you.

Hopefully I could get him naked tomorrow night.

“I’m glad you and Rasha are here,” I heard him whisper as I was drifting off.

I tried to say, “Me too,” but I’m not sure anythin’ came out before I was fast asleep.

C H A P T E R E I G H T E E N

B A S I L

W aking up with Hiro’s strong arms wrapped around me made me wish I could stay in bed all

day. I scooted as close as I could to him, tucking my face against his throat and breathing him

in. He sorta smelled like smoky sandalwood, and I sorta really loved it. When I kissed his throat

without thinking, he grumbled a little, but pulled me tighter to him, so I settled in, perfectly okay with

lying here while he slept.

“I’m awake,” he whispered.

“You’re supposed to be sleeping in.” Did he read my mind?

“How am I supposed to sleep with you rubbin’ all over me?”

I snorted into his throat. “You call kissing your neck rubbing all over you?”

“Your whole body’s wigglin’ around to reach me, so yeah, I do.” His accent was even sexier

when his voice was hoarse and sleepy-sounding.

I lightly nipped at his skin, and he groaned as he tilted his head to allow more access. “Seems like

you like it to me.”

He grunted and reached down to grab my ass and haul me even closer. Putting my thigh between

his legs and draping myself over him, I could feel his hardening cock. And I knew I couldn't resist

him anymore, I didn't want to. I nibbled my way up his throat and across his jaw, then pulled his

earlobe between my teeth.

The bedroom door flew open, slamming against the wall and scaring the shit out of me. I jumped,

and Hiro yelped out an “Ow” as I turned to find my little sister storming into my room.

“Ever heard of knocking?” I asked her as I pulled the blanket over both my and Hiro's laps.

“We're hungry,” Niya said.

I rubbed my hand over my face. “You're always hungry. Do you have a tapeworm or something?”

She wrinkled her nose. “What?”

I waved her away. “Never mind. I'll be downstairs in a minute. Is Rasha okay?”

Niya nodded. “Yep! Now come feed us!” She ran out before I could tell her not to speak to me

that way. She was such a brat sometimes, although she didn't say shit like

that to anyone but me.

Turning to Hiro, I winced when I saw him holding his ear. "I'm so sorry."

He snorted and pulled his hand away. "Not your fault. No blood, we're good."

"First sex injury."

"I don't think it counts since we weren't havin' sex."

"Yet."

His amused expression met mine before he pushed my shoulder. "Go feed the starving children."

"You coming down?"

"I'll be right behind you."

Nodding, I got out of bed, then changed my mind and leaned over to kiss Hiro's cheek. The look

he gave me was softer than usual, so of course, I ruined it by poking him in the side and making him

laugh while swatting at me. Somehow, he got a slap to my ass that made me yelp as I ran away,

laughing.

My chest was light and content now that he was here with Rasha, and the two of them were

comfortable and seemed happy. Nothing could get rid of my smile.

After the kids ate breakfast, and Hiro was well-fed, we all walked down to the big house so the

girls could keep working on their dollhouse. Ailin and Seb were inside, so I asked them to watch

Rasha while I showed Hiro around the property.

“You sure she’s okay with them?” he asked me as we walked out.

“Yeah, she’s fine, dimples. They like having her there.”

I could see his reluctance, but he nodded and followed me anyway.

A minute into our walk, I asked, “You can feel the wards, right? So you’ll be able to find the edge

of the property and not cross over?”

“Yeah.”

I glanced at him and said, “There’s a secluded spot I used to go to when I was a kid. Thayer

knows where it is, but no one else would think to look for us there.”

His lips twitched. “Witch, are you tryin’ to get me alone?”

“Maybe.”

He chuckled, then pulled me into his arms and kissed me hard and deep before pulling away and

saying, “Lead the way, love.”

It only took a couple of minutes to get to a small clearing near the edge of the property on the north

side. No one usually came this close to the border, so whenever I wanted to be alone when I was a

kid, this was where I’d hide out. There was really nothing special about it, to

be honest, just a break

in the trees. It was pretty at night when I could sit on the grass and stare up at the stars, but... that

didn't matter now since it was still morning.

I stopped walking and turned around to face Hiro. He stopped, staring back at me. His lips

quirked up on the side, and he tilted his head, asking, "You okay, shadow boy?"

I rolled my eyes. "I hate when you call me that."

"That's why I do it."

I snorted and shook my head.

"You don't hate it."

"What?"

He stepped closer. "I can feel you, and you don't hate it. You used to, but now"—he put his hand

over my heart—"your heart speeds up whenever I say it."

"It does not."

He leaned in so his nose was almost brushing mine and his lips were only an inch away. "You're

my shadow boy, Basil Ellwood, and I think it's time I show you." He was right, my heart did speed

up, but that was more to do with him being near me than his actual words. Although those took my

breath away.

I didn't have time to reply because he pushed his lips against mine and hauled my body into his.

Then he started taking off my clothes without releasing me. I was putty in his hands, but after he got

my arm bracers and shirt off, I wanted to see his skin, so I pulled on the hem of his shirt. He broke the

kiss, reached back, and yanked his shirt over his head, letting it fall into the pile of clothes on the

ground.

My eyes widened as I took in all his skin. All his tattooed skin, and *ho-ly shit*, there were a ton of

them. There were runes and words and symbols all over him, covering his arms and chest almost

entirely. And he was muscled. Like even more than I'd thought or realized since he wore that cloak all

the time. So many muscles I couldn't wait to explore. I probably looked like a toothpick compared to

him.

"Holy shit," I breathed, then met his eyes. "You're hot as hell."

He laughed and pulled me to his chest, burying one hand in my hair as he walked me backward

until I hit a tree, then whispered, "And you, my witch, are sexy as sin. I can't wait to get my mouth all

over you."

He claimed my mouth again, then broke away and began kissing down my neck to my shoulder.

His teeth dug into my skin lightly before he kissed his way to the center of my chest. Both of his hands

rubbed along my skin as he kneeled and licked and nipped down my stomach. My nipples pebbled as

he ran his fingers over them, and I groaned loudly.

He smirked up at me as he undid my pants and pulled them down to my thighs. My cock was

tenting my briefs, so Hiro mouthed over it through the fabric, making me even more desperate for him

—and he knew it. When he slipped my briefs down and wrapped his lips around my head, I bucked

and almost came undone right there. In fact, my magic blew out of me and began swirling around us,

but Hiro didn't stop. He licked and sucked, and flattened his tongue and swirled around my head, and

I thought I was going to fall to the ground because my legs were barely holding me up.

Hiro grabbed my ass and pulled me into his mouth, encouraging me to fuck his face. So I did. I

abandoned all thoughts of what I looked or sounded like, and I let myself *feel* as his hands roamed

and he hollowed out his cheeks. My lust kept building, pleasure filling my gut, but right before I was

about to explode, Hiro pulled his mouth away.

“No, no, no,” I whined.

He stood, wrapped his arm around me, and whispered, “Shh, I got you, baby.” He took my cock in

his hand, and when I glanced down, I saw his monster of a cock in his hand, too. I had no idea how he

pulled himself out while his hands were all over me, but I was glad he did. The silky skin over his

hard cock felt amazing against my dick. “You’re fuckin’ killin’ me,” he whispered before pumping us

together and claiming my lips.

The new sensation sent a shiver down my spine as I fucked his fist, and he tongue-fucked my

mouth. He was intoxicating and filling every sense, every cell. His body, his skin, against mine was

bliss, his hands touching me and building pleasure was exhilarating. And as the euphoria built, I felt

his soul reaching for mine.

We were wholly connected, and our souls were intertwining while he brought our bodies

pleasure.

A gasp fell from my lips as stars flashed in my eyes, and my cock exploded between us. Hiro’s

long, loud moan filled the air, and knowing he was feeling that same bliss as me made another round

shoot through me. Over and over again, shock waves of pleasure ripped

through us.

We rode out our ecstasy together as my magic swirled around us.

He broke our kiss and rested his forehead against mine, stilling his hand but not letting us go. We

stayed there, breathing each other in for a few minutes. If Hiro didn't have his bulk pressed against

me, holding me to the tree, I'd likely fall to the ground in a heap.

He gripped my chin with two fingers from his free hand and tilted it up to press a soft, lingering

kiss on my lips that had me melting even further. Leaning back, he stared into my eyes and asked,

“You okay, baby?”

I nodded.

He tucked my hair behind my ear and kissed me sweetly again. “I'm gonna find somethin' to clean

us up.”

“I can do it, if you don't mind me using my magic,” I said.

He stared at me for a beat, then blew out a breath and shook his head. “Jesus, Bas, I told you not

to hide yourself, didn't I?”

I nodded, seeing the truth there, then muttered a spell to clean away the cum on his hand and our

chests and stomachs.

“Love, you gotta stop second-guessing me at every turn,” he muttered.

Taking a deep breath, I leaned up to kiss his chin. “I’m trying.”

He draped his arms around my shoulders and tugged me to his chest, tucking me under his chin. “I

know you are, *cherub*.”

My eyes widened when the nickname registered, and I held in a laugh, leaning back to stare up at

him. “Did you just call me an angel?”

He snorted—I was glad he was letting me lighten the mood—and he said, “You wish, witch. You

have a fuckin’ baby face, ergo, ‘cherub.’”

“You think I’m an angel.” I sighed.

He chuckled, and those damn dimples popped out. I almost couldn’t resist leaning in to lick them.

I wanted to lick them, but... he’d probably think I was crazy and hella weird. Still...

New goal in life: Lick the shit out of Hiro’s dimples.

You aren’t blocking, asshole, Thayer suddenly said in my head, scaring the crap out of me. *I don’t*

need to hear all your fucking Hiro thoughts.

Like you’re one to talk, I said. *I know way too fucking much about Toby’s coc*

—

Okay, okay! He yelled. *I got it, just wanted you to know you’re not blocking us, dimple licker.*

Fucker.

Hiro tilted his head, studying me. “What was that?”

“Thayer being an asshole and reading my thoughts. I wasn’t blocking them very well.”

His eyes widened. “Was he listening when we were...?”

I shook my head. “No! Mother of All, gross. No, I was blocking and so was he. I normally don’t

have to think about it too hard, but sometimes things slip through.”

He smirked. “What exactly slipped through this time?”

“No way in hell am I telling you that.”

He snorted. “That good, eh?”

“Stop.”

He gripped my chin again and started pressing light kisses around my lips and on my cheeks.

“Come on, love, you can tell me.”

Shaking my head, I sighed, then opened my eyes, leaned in, and licked his dimple, making him

chuckle. I poked his ribs and said, “There. That’s what I was thinking about.”

“Lickin’ my cheek?”

“Licking your *dimple*, dimples. I’ve wanted to do that forever.”

He snorted and tucked me into his chest again. Apparently, coming made him cuddly. I kinda liked

it.

As I wrapped my arms around him, I sighed and relished all his skin on display. I hoped one day I

could trace all his tattoos with my fingers *and* with my tongue.

He put his lips by my ear and whispered, “One day you will.” He kissed my hair. “But not today

because we need to get back.”

“You read my mind.”

He grinned as he stepped away and picked up our clothes. “I know.”

As I tucked myself back into my pants, he threw my shirt at my head, and I laughed.

I hadn’t felt this free, this at peace in... years.

“Come on, slow poke,” he said. “It’s almost lunchtime, and we gotta figure out what we’re doin’

about school and all that tomorrow.”

“You can stay with me. I’ll drive her if you can’t, and if one of us can’t pick her up after school,

one of my siblings will or maybe Seb.” I slipped my shirt on, grabbed my arm bracers, and followed

Hiro as I hooked them onto my forearms.

“You really want us to stay?”

“Yes,” I replied without hesitation. “For however long you want, but at least for a few days in

case there's backlash over that warlock." Sometimes those bastards traveled in groups or pairs.

He paused for half a beat, then said, "Okay."

My grin was out of this world and totally ridiculous as we walked toward the big house. But I

didn't care one bit. Hiro took one look at me and rolled his eyes, but I saw his lips quirk up even

though he tried to hide it.

HIRO AND RASHA HAD BEEN STAYING WITH ME FOR ABOUT A MONTH NOW, AND I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER

about it. They even stayed in my house when I had to take a quick overnight trip to Faela a few weeks

ago. I loved having them in my space, and it seemed like they liked being here. Rasha was loving

being around my younger siblings. She and Niya were best friends and never apart unless they were at

school, and my niece joined in with them often as well. Hiro couldn't stop smiling at the girls and

how happy his daughter seemed.

The only problem was that Rasha's breathing seemed to be getting worse every day. She was

happy, but her health was declining at a quicker rate than before. We didn't know what changed, but if

we didn't stop it... well, I didn't want to think about what would happen if we didn't get rid of that

hex.

We'd tried fucking *everything* we could think of, everything Jorah, Seb, and I researched. Nothing

was working. But I wasn't giving up yet. No fucking way. I was going to find a way to save that sweet

little girl that had already carved a huge place in my heart.

"Nik and Talon need to talk to me, so I'm gonna run over to the big house really quick. Are you

good to stay here for a bit without me?"

"Yeah, yeah, it's fine."

"Alright, be back soon."

He leaned toward me for a kiss and muttered, "Gimme some sugar."

With a huge grin, I leaned back and said, "Did you just say, 'gimme some sugar'?" He'd said it

enough times to Rasha before, but never to me.

"No, I don't know what you're talkin' about."

I laughed as I moved my mouth close to his but didn't quite close the distance entirely. "Gimme a

little sugar, baby."

He groaned and laughed at the same time. "Shut up." Then grabbed my collar and pulled me in to

finally capture my mouth with his. Almost as soon as our lips met, he pushed me away. "Now get

outta here so I can get some research done.”

“You got a new mark?”

“Mhm.” He made a shooing motion at me, so with a sigh, I left him to it.

I didn’t like the thought of him going out there and hunting dangerous creatures, but he was a

hunter, and I wasn’t about to ask him to stop. It was a part of who he was.

Talon and Nik were in the library at the big house, and when I walked in, they waved me over to

the table. As soon as my ass hit the seat, Talon said, “I have an idea.”

“Okay...?”

He bit his lip for a second, looking uncharacteristically nervous, before he said, “What about the

kelpies?”

I blinked at him. “The kelpies...” After a few seconds, my eyes widened. “The kelpies!”

Nik smiled and said, “It would heal her and take away the curse.”

“But,” Talon said, “you know how it works, right?”

“A little.” I lifted a shoulder. There was a lot of mystery around the kelpie culture, but I honestly

probably knew more than most since I dated a kelpie for a year.

They exchanged a look, then Talon patted my hand and said, “It strips you down and turns you into

something new, something immortal. It would strip away the hex, but it

would also strip away—”

“Her humanity,” I finished, then stared at the table for a few minutes while I thought about

everything. Taking a deep breath, I stared into the green fae’s eyes. “You and I both know that if we

don’t remove that hex soon, it’s going to kill her. You’ve felt it.”

Sadness filled his eyes as he nodded. “I have.”

“It’s a miracle she’s survived this long. All the things Hiro’s tried have kept her going, but...

time’s running out.” I scrubbed my hand over my face.

“You think Rebe would help?” he asked.

“Yes.” I didn’t hesitate because I knew they would help me. “They’ll help Rasha, I know they

will.”

“This is a big decision, Bas,” Talon said softly. “And I don’t think it’s yours to make.”

“I know.”

Nikolai moved closer and rubbed my upper arm. “You also have to think about... if she does this,

will Hiro, too?”

“I can’t ask that of Rebe.” I shook my head.

“Bas, Hiro’s a human. They only live for—”

“I know,” I cut him off. “I... I know.” It was something I didn’t want to think

about, something I'd

been ignoring. But the truth of the matter was that Hiro's lifespan was a hell of a lot shorter than mine.

I'd already decided I was going to beg him to let Toby turn him or let Alec give him a werewolf bite,

but... I was pretty damn sure he wouldn't allow either. It wasn't something I wanted to think about.

Talon patted my hand again. "There's still time. Talk it over with Hiro, and if you guys decide to

go through with it, we'll go to Faela and speak to Rebe."

A tiny flicker of hope took root in my heart, but I wasn't stupid enough to let it grow because I

knew how Hiro was going to react. It was going to take a lot to convince him, but this was the only

good choice left.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

HIRO

"No."

"Hiro—"

"I said no, Basil. It ain't happenin'."

"But this could fix her, Hiro. Nothing else has helped. None of the spells we've tried have done

anything. Taking her there would fix her."

Rasha and I had been stayin' with the Ellwoods for over a month now, and I'd eventually let Basil

try every one of his experiments, but this was one I absolutely did not want to do. He'd been begging

me for at least a week. Rasha had been sent home from school early nearly every day this week

because she was getting lightheaded and in pain, and every time, Bas brought up this crazy-ass plan of

his. Crazy-ass, stupid, fuckin' *terrifying* plan.

“What makes you so sure, huh?”

Basil's jaw ticked. “I told you. Faela is made of magic, it *is* magic. Going there is our best bet.

The kelpies have magic unlike any other. Rebe will help, I know they will. Their people have this—”

“There ya go, talkin' about this Rebe fucker again! Are you sure you don't wanna go back there

just to fuck them?”

Basil's entire body went rigid, and the flash of anger I felt from him before he managed to block it

from me was like a fuckin' tidal wave. “You are my motherfucking viramore, Hiro. I don't want

anyone else! How many damn times do I have to tell you that?”

“I've been hearin' about your fuckin' ex nonstop all goddamn week! Rebe this, Rebe that. If you're

so over them, why do ya keep talkin' about them?”

“Because they’re the only fucking kelpie I know that might be willing to help us! You fucking

asshole. I can’t believe we’re having this fight again. What is the matter with you?” Some hurt seeped

into his words, and I suddenly felt like the asshole he was accusing me of bein’.

With a sigh, I rubbed my eyes with my fingers. “Every time you say their name, this anger takes

over my fuckin’ mind. I’m not doin’ it on purpose.”

He sighed. “Are you resisting this so hard because of that?” His words were soft, more

questioning than accusing, so I took a beat before I answered.

“Maybe.”

He rolled his eyes. “I’ll take that as a yes.” He walked closer to me. “I know this is weird, but

Rebe’s a good person, and I know they’ll help us. They’re our only shot at getting to that spring. It’s in

kelpie territory, through this crazy confusing cave system under the fucking island, deep in the ocean.

We won’t get to it without their help.”

Even though anger was burning in my chest at the thought of this person with Basil, I tried to push

it down because I knew he was right. “You really think they’ll help us?”

He smiled softly and said, “Yes. They’re still my friend, even after everything, and they love

kids.” He placed an open hand on my chest. “Easy there, dimples, you don’t need to go ripping off

heads and growling like a beast.”

“I’m not growling, asshole.”

“Could’ve fooled me.” He smirked. “Chill, Hiro.”

“I don’t wanna chill.” I grabbed his hips, stepped closer to him to rest our foreheads together, and

closed my eyes for a moment, then opened them to refocus on him. “If you think this is worth tryin’,

then we’ll do it, but we need to speak to Rasha about it first. If what you say is true, she should know

what she’s getting herself into.”

“Do you think we should wait until I ask Rebe? I’m like ninety-nine-point-nine percent sure

they’ll help, but I don’t want to get Rasha’s hopes up, just in case.”

I sighed. “Yeah, okay. She’ll be excited about goin’ to Faela with you anyway. Let’s tell her after

dinner. But, Bas?”

“Yeah?”

“When we get to Faela, you’re not fuckin’ talkin’ to that fuckin’ kelpie by yourself.”

He snorted. “Alright, hunter, you can come with me as long as you promise not to try killing

them.”

“I’m not makin’ that promise.”

He leaned back and lifted a brow.

“Fine. I promise I won’t as long as they keep their fuckin’ hands to themselves.”

Basil grinned. “I knew you liked me.”

“Don’t let it go to your head, witch.”

He went up on his toes to press his lips to mine. As he went to break away, I grabbed the back of

his head and held him there so I could give him a proper fuckin’ kiss. I deepened it, devouring him,

my tongue tasting every inch of his mouth, and he groaned and draped his arms over my shoulders.

The furthest he’d let me go with him was some heavy petting and blow jobs—lots of blow jobs—

and it was really starting to frustrate me. I couldn’t blame him exactly, but it didn’t feel good knowin’

he still didn’t trust me fully. Not to mention sleeping next to him every night was really wearing on my

patience. Part of it was due to the fact that Rasha was in the house, I knew that, and also because he’d

been busy as all hell. This week, he’d finally been assigned to the witch-killer case. There had been

four more witches killed in the last three weeks. And they were no closer to catching the serial killer.

Basil broke our kiss and whispered, “I’m glad you’re coming with me this

time.”

“Me too.” I kissed his forehead before resting mine there again. When he’d gone to Faela a few

weeks ago, he’d only been gone for two nights, yet it had felt like it had been two years. “Yeah,

you’re not doin’ that by yourself anymore.”

“You putting your foot down, hunter?”

“Hell yes.”

He grinned up at me and pecked my lips. “We’re leaving in the morning, so we need to pack. I

have some clothes and shit there, but I still like to take a bag. And I have no idea what all Rasha

needs.”

I sighed and captured his lips for a few more seconds. “Alright, baby, let’s go pack.”

“Should we go grab Rasha now?”

“Yeah, let’s go.” After one last little kiss, I moved away from him and headed toward the big

house where Rasha was playin’ since we’d just had dinner there. Bas and I had gone for a walk so we

could argue freely without upsetting her—apparently, we had to go for lots of walks, which wasn’t all

that surprising, I guess.

When I stepped into the big house, I had to take a beat. It was always so loud

and crazy in here,

yet somehow also inviting, and the fact that my daughter and I had been welcomed with open arms

still surprised me at times.

“Hey, Hiro,” one of Basil’s siblings named Pumpernickel—who in the fuck named their kid

Pumpernickel?—said as he walked past me. He was one of the Food Twins, as the rest called them.

Two sets of twins with food names. So odd.

I nodded at him. “Hey.”

“Are you going to Faela this weekend?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

He nodded. “Never mind, then. The rest of us are going swimming on Saturday, so I was going to

see if you and Rasha wanted to join.” He offered a smile that I returned.

“Thanks anyway.”

“No problem, man.” He walked away.

All of these witches were... fuckin’ *nice*. It was weird. Good weird, but weird nonetheless. And I

still couldn’t believe I was living among them. I never would’ve believed it even three months ago.

Not that we’d officially moved in here, but considering we hadn’t been home for longer than it took to

pack up a few bags, we'd basically moved into Basil's place. It was kinda good timing considering

Ulma decided to move closer to her son so she could help out with her grandbaby. I dunno what I

would've done if it weren't for Basil.

"You okay?" Basil asked as he stepped up beside me.

"Yeah. Just thinkin'."

"Uh oh. No wonder you look constipated. It must be difficult to use your brain after going so many

years without it."

"Smartass." I bit my lips to keep from smiling.

He grinned at me. "You do know I can see your smile, right?"

"I'm not smiling."

"Your dimple says otherwise."

A snort came out before I could stop it.

He pointed at my face. "Ha! I knew it."

"Shut up." I lightly punched his shoulder.

"Never."

Shaking my head, I walked into the living room where I heard Rasha giggling. Lately, that was all

she did, and I had to admit that it was a good fuckin' sound to hear. It was the main reason why we

hadn't gone back home yet. I didn't want to take her away from this place that made her so happy.

With a glance back at Basil, I sighed to myself. Despite how much the little witch drove me

batshit, he made me happy, too.

Basil's dark eyes met mine as he smiled at me and said, "I totally heard that."

With a groan, I ignored him. He'd been pickin' up more and more of my thoughts lately, and I

occasionally heard his as well. It was strange as all fuck. Shaking that away, I said, "Rasha? Time to

go."

She frowned at me. "I thought I was allowed to stay until nine?"

"It's literally five of. Bas and I wanna talk to you about somethin'."

Her expression became worried before she muttered a goodbye to Niya and headed toward us. As

she quietly made her way out the door with us behind her, I had to wonder what was going on in her

head. What had her so worried?

Once we were on the trail that led to the lake, Rasha said, "Daddy, you're not making us go home

are you?"

I faltered in my steps. "What?"

"I don't want to go home. I like it here," she added.

“I’m not takin’ you back to our house,” I said.

In my head, I heard Basil’s voice say, *I wish he’d sell that place and never leave here.*

I shot him a wide-eyed glance. Yeah, I knew he wanted us to live here with him, but... for some

reason hearin’ it confirmed in his head made me realize how badly he did. I’d have to talk to him

about it in private. I couldn’t imagine sleeping away from him now that I’d had him beside me so

many nights in a row, but what would happen if he decided he was done with us? Rasha would be

homeless.

Basil suddenly grabbed my arm and spun me to face him, a mixture of anger, confusion, and hurt

on his face. “I would never do that.”

I blinked at him until I realized he’d overheard my thoughts again. “You can’t know that.”

“What the fuck?” he whispered. “Even if you decided you were done with me, do you really

believe I’d ever let you or Rasha be homeless? Mother of All, Hiro.” The hurt took over his

expression, and I felt it through our bond. He was hurting worse than I would’ve expected.

“You know it’s still hard for me when it’s just been the two of us for years.” I tried to keep my

voice down as Basil's house came into sight. Luckily, Rasha quickly walked ahead like she couldn't

get away from us fast enough.

"That may be true, but I thought you'd at least know I'm a decent fucking person, Hiro. Like I

would ever do something so cruel to you and Rasha. How can you even entertain that thought?" Now

he was the one rushing away from me at a fast pace.

I sighed and trailed behind them.

When I walked into the house, Rasha was sitting on the couch with her legs drawn up, and Basil

was nowhere to be seen, so I asked, "Where's Bas?"

"He ran upstairs. Were you mean to him?"

I held in a sigh. Of course she'd ask that. "I guess so."

Her little face frowned and the expression was so much like Millie, my breath caught for a

moment, and when her words hit me, it was like my wife was sitting in front of me. "You shouldn't be

mean to him when he's always nice to us. He always wants to help us."

Taking a deep breath, I sat beside her on the couch. Sometimes I'd swear she was older than eight,

but she'd always been mature for her age. "I know, peanut. I'm goin' to apologize after I talk to you."

"I don't want to go home."

“I know. I’m not takin’ you back there.”

“Ever?”

I swallowed, and since I needed to speak to Basil about this first, I ignored the question and said,

“Basil invited us to go to Faela with him tomorrow.”

“The land of the fae?” Her eyes widened. “The pink place he told me about?”

I nodded. “Yes. That’ll be fun, right?”

She nodded and grinned. “Yes! He said they have butterflies bigger than me there, and that I can

pet them!”

“Um, I’m not sure about that.”

“But he said they’re nice, like giant, flying puppies!”

“Okay...” I didn’t know what to say about that since I didn’t have a clue about giant butterflies.

But that sounded gross.

“And fairies.”

“I think you’re supposed to stay away from them.”

“And pixies. And a really pretty queen that’s friends with Basil. He said some of the flowers eat

people. Do you think we’ll get to see a flower eat something? Ew.” She giggled. “There’s a waterfall

that’s made of flowers, but *those* flowers don’t eat you, you can swim in them. And pink sand! Do you

think we can see the pink sand?”

I nodded and lifted a shoulder, silently wondering how my eight-year-old seemed to know more

about Faela than I did.

“And kelpies!”

I scowled. *Not the fuckin’ kelpies again.*

As Rasha continued listing the billion things she and Basil had apparently talked about, I caught

movement out of the corner of my eye. Basil was standing at the bottom of the steps with his shoulder

leaning against the wall. He’d already changed into jammies, and even though he was pissed at me,

the sight made me grin. He was wearing a pink shirt and blue pants that had pink flamingos on them.

Rasha had picked them out for him when we’d gone to get her new shoes. I was pretty sure it was the

only outfit he owned that wasn’t black. He kinda looked adorable in them.

Rasha noticed that I wasn’t paying attention to her chatterin’ and turned to see Basil standing

there. She got up and walked over to him, asking, “You’re taking us to Faela?”

He nodded. “Yep. I missed you guys too much last time, so I asked Queen Roshia for permission

to bring you and your dad.”

She started bouncing. “Can I see the butterflies?”

Bas smiled widely at her. “Of course you can. I’ll show you as much as I can this time, but

hopefully you’ll get to come more than once with me.” He shot me a glance, like he was worried he’d

said too much, but I nodded encouragement and shrugged. Basil refocused on Rasha and brushed her

hair behind her ear, fixing the tube so it wasn’t pulling on her hair. “Do you think you can pack some

clothes? Or, um, actually, can you put some outfits on your bed and some jammies so your dad can

make sure you have everything you need?”

She nodded and wrapped her arms around Basil’s waist, barely giving him enough time to hug her

back before rushing up the steps.

“Take it easy, Rash,” I yelled after her. The last thing we needed was having her wind up in the

hospital again because she was too excited.

Once she was upstairs, Basil crossed his arms over his chest and glared at me.

I sighed and walked over to him. “I’m sorry, Bas, I wasn’t thinkin’ clearly. Obviously.”

He rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

Grabbing his hips, I stepped closer and pushed my nose against the side of his neck. “I know you

would never let anything bad happen to either of us. It's just a knee jerk reaction, love."

He sighed and some of his tension left his muscles. "You're always so difficult."

A bark of laughter left me. "Me? Damn, Bas, you're like an impossible fuckin' jigsaw puzzle.

Difficult? There ain't even a word strong enough to describe you."

"I can't decide if that's the worst insult I've ever heard or if you were trying to compliment me

and doing a terrible fucking job of it."

I chuckled. "Maybe a little of both."

"Dickhead."

"Yeah, I am. I'm sorry."

He sighed. "If you're having doubts or whatever, next time, can you please just talk to me about

it?"

I nodded against him. "I'll try."

"Okay."

"Are ya done hatin' me now?"

"I've never hated you."

I leaned up and lifted a brow at him. "You sure about that?"

"I didn't like you, I thought you were a major asshole, but I never hated you. I was... intrigued,

even when I didn't want to be."

I grinned.

"Don't be smug, asshole."

"Too late."

He snorted, then pressed a kiss to my throat. "When we get back, do you think you can help me

track down this witch-killer?"

"I thought Alec didn't want me anywhere near your case?"

He scowled and a lightning bolt flashed behind his eyes. "I don't care what he wants anymore. If

anyone can find this guy, it's you. I'm well past the point of caring about regulations and shit if it

means catching this guy and putting a stop to the murders."

I searched his face for a few moments before quietly saying, "I'll help you with whatever you

want." Hopefully he knew I meant more than just this case.

He smiled up at me. "Thank you."

I kissed him, and before I could stop myself, I pushed him against the wall, grabbed one of his

hands to push it above his head, and laced our fingers together. When I rutted my hips against him, he

groaned and tightened his hold on my hand.

"Daddy!" Rasha yelled from her room.

I broke the kiss with a groan. “Goddamn, it’s like she knows when I’m trying to cop a feel.”

Bas laughed. “She does have uncanny timing.”

“Right? It’s not just me thinkin’ that?”

He shook his head. “Definitely not just you.” He pecked my lips. “Now let go of me so I can calm

down. I refuse to be caught with a boner.”

I snorted and nuzzled into his neck. “I don’t wanna let go.”

He pushed my chest. “Too bad.”

I shook my head. “But—”

“Daddy!”

He laughed and pushed my chest again. “Go, hunter. I’ll be up in a minute.”

“I’m goin’ to die of blue balls.”

“I’m sure you can survive a few more hours.”

“I’m not sure of that at all.”

He grinned and pushed me again. “Go.”

With a groan, I released him and backed away before yelling up the steps, “I’ll be up in a minute!”

I lowered my voice and said to Bas, “You need to move at least twenty feet away so I can’t pounce on

ya.”

He snorted and patted my cheek condescendingly as he walked by and

headed for the kitchen.

After a few deep breaths and thinkin' about dead kittens and shit, I willed my cock into

submission before going upstairs. I seriously needed to ask Basil to get one of his family members to

babysit overnight one night soon so I could take my time exploring every inch of his skin.

Dammit. Stop thinkin' about it!

Basil's deep chuckle reached my ears, and I had no doubt that he'd heard my thoughts. Fuckin'

fantastic.

WHEN JORAH OPENED THE PORTAL UP, I INSTANTLY REGRETTED AGREEING TO THIS. THERE WAS NO WAY

I was letting my daughter walk through the fuckin' tear in the goddamn air.

Jorah took one look at my face and said, "Hold on, I'll prove it's safe." Then he stepped through

until he disappeared entirely. About thirty seconds later, an arm reached through the portal a moment

before Jorah popped back into our realm, saying, "See, perfectly safe."

I could only blink at him.

Basil waved at Jorah, saying, "Thanks, Jor. Go on through, guys. I'll get him through and close it

up behind me."

Talon, Jorah, Thayer, Toby, Nikolai, Delaro, and Grayson all went through

without hesitation.

Rasha was vibrating with excitement, and I felt like I might puke.

Basil's hands cupped my face and forced me to look down to meet his eyes.

"I promise you this is

safe. I would never in a million fucking years let Rasha do something unsafe. Never."

I nodded. "I know."

He kissed my chin since he couldn't reach my lips, then asked, "Do you want me to hold her and

walk through that way? Or do you want to hold her?"

"I got her."

He nodded and grabbed our bags while I picked up Rasha, placing her on my hip. She was getting

so big, even though she was still tiny for her age, but I liked carrying her this way. As Basil took a

step toward the portal, I reached down to grab his hand with my free one. He seemed surprised but

laced our fingers together easily enough. Then he pulled us through.

It felt like all the air was sucked out of me as I passed through, and complete and utter silence

surrounded us, but it only lasted a few seconds before I was stepping out into a land of pink. Like *all*

the shades and then some, pink.

Rasha giggled in my arms as she said, “Woah.”

“Woah is right, baby girl.” I kissed her cheek.

Basil smiled at us. “Just a reminder. Everything about half a mile around the house in any

direction should be safe, as in, it won’t eat you. But that doesn’t mean you should touch anything—you

hear me, Rasha? Don’t touch *anything* without asking me or one of my brothers first, okay?”

“Okay.” She nodded with a serious expression.

“I mean it. It could be poisonous. The plants and things around the house are safe, but we can’t

keep bugs and animals out without messing with the ecosystem, so we don’t. Bugs and animals can

travel freely. Also... don’t even swat things away. Some of the bugs look small, but when they open

their mouths, they have like a bazillion sharp teeth.”

My eyebrows went up. “Should we even be here?”

He snorted. “I’m sorry, I’m making it sound worse than it actually is, I just don’t want you guys

getting hurt. Rasha, until you know the area and creatures better, I don’t want you going anywhere

alone, okay?”

“Okay.”

I added, “I don’t think I wanna go anywhere alone, either.”

Basil smiled at me. “I like that plan.”

“Good.” I gave him a nod. “Is it safe for Rasha to walk?”

He laughed. “Yeah, yeah. I promise it’s fine. Just don’t touch shit and you’re good.”

Rasha giggled. “You said a bad word.”

“I always say bad words,” Basil said, but still added, “Sorry.”

Rasha giggled again.

Shaking my head, I put Rasha down and asked, “Where’s the house?”

Basil pointed up a tiny hill to a small cottage. It was so small and blended in with the very pink

area so well that I hadn’t even noticed it at first. “All of you fit into a one-bedroom cottage?” Jesus,

we were going to be sleeping on top of each other. I didn’t want anyone sleeping that close to Basil.

He laughed at my frown and said, “Nothing in Faela is what it seems. The

land, people, and

creatures here are pure magic, and illusion magic is very prominent. Nik specializes in it, actually. He

set up our house to look unimpressive so it would be looked over if anyone came searching for the

Three. The inside of our house is actually really big. We each have our own room, and last time I was

here, I, uh... I added on a bedroom so Rasha would have her own room if she didn't want to sleep in

ours." His cheeks flamed, and I couldn't help but lean in to kiss one.

"That sounds good, love," I said. "Right, Rasha? You can stay with us or in your own room if

you're comfortable."

She smiled up at me, then at Basil. "Can you take me to the butterflies now?"

Basil laughed. "How about we take our bags into the house first and make sure everyone else is

settled?"

Rasha pouted. "And then we can go see the butterflies?"

Basil turned to me, and I nodded, so he said, "Sure, sweetpea. We'll go right after."

She grinned so big you woulda thought he promised her the moon.

We made our way up to the cottage, and Rasha asked what every single thing we passed was

called. Every pink blade of grass, pink tree, pink bug, pink bunny-looking

thing that was fluffy but

apparently evil. And Basil answered her each and every time, even helping her sound out the strange

Fae'lee words, and not once did he show any sign of being frustrated or annoyed. He was really good

with her, which... he had so many siblings and obviously a caring father figure, so it wasn't all that

surprising once I knew him. My first impressions of him had been so far off base.

Walking inside the cottage was a strange event. I knew he'd said it was bigger than it looked, but

holy hell, it was huge. It was like a goddamn mansion. Seeing the tiny building from the outside, then

walking into a huge house had me reeling. It was like a kids storybook or somethin'.

"You okay?" Basil asked quietly as Jorah helped Rasha with her bags.

I nodded. "Yeah, just takin' it in."

"Fae magic can mess with your head."

"Yeah... damn."

He grinned at me, so I leaned in and pecked his lips, making his smile grow.

Once everything was set, Basil led Rasha and me outside down a path that led under the fairy

arches—trees that made an archway where a billion fairies lived, apparently—to the butterfly garden.

I'd known the butterflies were going to be big, but actually seeing them was an entirely different story.

Giant butterflies, they'd called them. They were more like *gigantic* butterfly monsters that looked big

enough to eat Rasha. Trusting Bas, I stayed to the side when he had one on his shoulder and kneeled

down for Rasha to pet it. It nuzzled into her hand, climbed onto her lap after she sat, and stayed there

for almost an hour. She was in love. I gave it a pat and was surprised how soft its furry body was, but

one pat was enough for me.

When Rasha was hungry, we went back to the house, and Bas continued answering every single

question she had. She didn't stop talkin' the entire time. A smile pulled at my lips as I walked behind

them and listened to my two favorite people in the world gettin' along so well.

RASHA WAS STAYIN' AT THE HOUSE WHILE BAS AND I WENT FOR A WALK. LEAVING HER WITH BASIL'S

family was becoming easier and easier, especially because they all seemed happy to stay with her.

She was staying with all of them, but Delaro had assured me he wouldn't let her out of his sight,

which made me feel better since he seemed to be the most responsible one out of his entire family.

When we walked onto the pink sand, I exhaled loudly, and Bas halted and

turned to me with the

large piece of fabric he'd brought with him draped over his arm. His eyes searched my face before he

asked, "You know I'm with you, right?"

I nodded. "I know." My voice came out lower and harsher than I meant.

He pursed his lips. "Are you going to be able to handle this?"

Reaching for him, I grabbed the back of his head with one hand and wrapped my other arm around

his waist to pull him flush against my body. As I tilted his head back, I leaned down so our noses

brushed and our lips were only a hair away and said, "Just remember who you belong to and we

won't have a problem."

A flash of lust ran through his eyes, and through our bond, before he cut it off and whispered, "I'm

yours, Hiro."

Before I had a chance to revel in that, I was pushed backward. Confused, I stumbled back a few

steps, then stared at Basil with wide eyes. His magic was swirling around him, a storm of wind and

shadow and lightning. His eyes were almost glowing and lightning was flashing through them. He took

a step toward me, saying, "I'm yours, Hiro, but you better fucking remember that you're mine, too,

you possessive, crazy, asshat.”

I smirked at him. “Did you seriously just blast me backwards with your magic?”

He lifted a shoulder, letting his magic die down. “You’re covered in giant muscles, and I’m not an

idiot. It’s the only way to get one up on you.”

With a chuckle, I stepped forward, then paused. “Can I kiss ya now, witch?”

He rolled his eyes. “I might make you beg.”

I groaned and took another step. When he didn’t move away or blast my ass again, I stepped up to

him and pressed my lips hard to his, but didn’t push any further. As I leaned back, he frowned at me,

so I said, “If I start now, I won’t be able to stop from devouring you right here in the sand, and I want

to get this shit outta the way so I can have you to myself.”

He sighed, but nodded and began walking again. “If we walk along the shore, we might see them.

If not, I’ll call them.”

“How are you gonna call them?”

He shot me a smile. “Magic.”

I snorted, shaking my head as I kept pace with him.

We walked along the edge of the water for a while before Basil went to the edge and pressed his

hand in. He closed his eyes and whispered a spell. Unfortunately, I heard him say “Rebe” in the

middle of it, so I was already growling.

When he finished, he stood and shook his head at me. “You’re being ridiculous.”

“I can’t help it, Bas. I’m not doing it on purpose!”

“I know.” He pinched his lips together, and when I saw his eyes filled with amusement, I knew he

was trying not to laugh at me.

“I’m glad you find this funny.”

“I do not.” He laughed.

I flipped him off.

And of course, that was the moment a giant, sparkling rainbow horse with giant fins for legs

popped out of the water. Their mane was a beautiful dark blue with black undertones and light blue

highlights that shined in the sun. My eyes widened as I took in the huge creature. I knew a kelpie was

a horse made for water, but seeing it wasn’t what I expected. I had honestly been anticipating a weird,

gross-looking sea creature, not this beautiful thing in front of me.

Before my eyes, the horse shimmered and began to shrink and change shape. It only took a few

seconds for the horse to shift into a humanoid that was just as gorgeous in

this form as the other. Their

hair was the same blue and black colors, and their skin seemed to shimmer so it was a rainbow of

colors that sparkled in the sun and changed with every small movement. When they blinked their

crystal blue eyes at us, with their high cheekbones and pouty lips, I had to hold in a gasp.

This... *this* was who Basil had before me? And now he was stuck with me? I was basically an

ogre compared to the beauty standing in front of us.

Basil passed over the fabric he was carrying, and the kelpie wrapped it around themselves

quickly, then they moved closer and whispered, “Basil,” a second before my viramore stepped up to

them and rested his fuckin’ forehead to theirs.

A growl tore from my chest as I stepped closer, ready to rip him away.

The kelpie stepped back with wide eyes, those blue orbs bouncing between me and Basil before a

smile—and goddammit, if that smile didn’t make them even prettier—appeared on their face and they

said, “Basil, you found your viramore.” A soft laugh bubbled out of them. “Congratulations, my

friend.” Then they said a bunch of words in another fuckin’ language that I had no hope of interpreting.

Basil smiled at them before turning to me and placing his hand on my chest,

saying, “Relax. That’s

how kelpies greet old friends.”

I clenched my jaw, but admittedly, having Basil’s hand on my chest was cooling my temper a

little. As I gave him my nod, I placed my hand over his and pressed it there so he wouldn’t lose

contact with me. If he did, I couldn’t guarantee I wouldn’t punch that fucker in the face.

Basil said somethin’ in another language—I assumed it was in Fae’lee—and I was about to

complain before the kelpie replied in English. “Yes, English is fine.” I was hit again with their beauty

as they turned those blue eyes to me and said, “I’m Rebe, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Before I could respond, Basil pushed my chin up, snapping my mouth shut as he muttered, “Stop

drooling over them, for fuck’s sake.”

I smirked at Bas for a second before refocusing on the kelpie and saying, “I’m Hiro, it’s nice to

meet you, too.”

They smiled, and Basil stepped in front of me and covered my eyes with his hand. “Stop. It.”

I laughed, and so did Rebe.

Basil pushed my chest playfully as he dropped his hand, then turned back to the kelpie—who was

smiling at us—and said, “I have a favor to ask of you. It’s a really big one, so I’ll understand if you

can’t, but... I’m hoping you can help us.”

“What is it?” Their brow furrowed, prettily of course. Damn, how was Basil with me right now

instead of this gorgeous creature?

Bas said, “It’s Hiro’s daughter. She’s sick.”

Rebe went from a gentle smile to a serious expression. “What’s wrong with her?”

Just from that simple sentence and the expression on their face, I knew exactly why Basil had

insisted on talking to them, and... I had a feeling they might actually help us.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y

B A S I L

A fter explaining things to Rebe, I was beyond relieved that they were willing to help us, and

Hiro and I didn’t want to waste another second. We had raced back to the house to grab Rasha,

and were running back down to Rebe with her in tow, all of us in our bathing suits. Although, Hiro

was mostly covered, still unsure about people seeing his tattooed skin. He’d have to get over it.

Rasha thought she was only coming to meet my friend and swim, but we were going to have a lot to

explain to her as soon as we got there.

Rebe was still down by the shore, patient as ever, and when they saw us coming, they smiled

widely at Rasha. They had always had a soft spot for kids. Hopefully one day, they'd have a few of

their own because they'd make a wonderful parent.

Rasha stopped ten feet away from Rebe, staring at them with huge, wide eyes. Rebe squatted

down so they were at her level and said, "Hi, I'm Rebe. You must be Rasha. I've heard so much about

you."

Rasha leaned back against her dad, obviously scared of them.

Walking over to Rebe, I put my hand on their shoulder—ignoring Hiro's growl—and said to

Rasha, "It's okay, sweetpea. Rebe wants to help us."

Rasha's eyes flicked up to mine. She seemed like she maybe wanted to come to me, but was still

too cautious of Rebe.

Stepping around my friend, I held my hand out to Rasha, and she didn't hesitate to take it. I bent

down and scooped her up into my arms, kissing her cheek, before turning to Rebe. They stood up, but

didn't move any closer, trying to smile at Rasha as she gripped my hair in one of her fists

subconsciously.

Hiro came over and put his arm around Rasha and me, kissing his daughter's hair and offering me

a smile before he said, "Rasha, there's a spring we want to take you to. It has healing properties that

will help you."

Her eyes went wide as she turned to her dad. "It'll fix me?"

Hiro nodded. "It will, but..." He sighed and ran his hand through his hair, so I picked up for him.

"The healing spring will make you part fae, in a sense." I didn't want to say that they'd strip her

of her humanity because that sounded scary as fuck. "You know how fae and witches and other

creatures live longer than humans?" She nodded. "If you do this, you'll live as long as them."

Her eyes widened. "Forever?"

I shook my head back and forth. "Perhaps. But, yes, for a very long time." She could still be

killed, but her body wouldn't die of natural causes, at least not to our knowledge. I'd never met a

being over two thousand years old, but that didn't mean they didn't exist. "You would grow up like

normal, and once you're around my age, you'll stay that way for the rest of your very long life."

"What about Daddy?" she asked.

A pang shot through me because I'd been avoiding thinking about that. Hiro was human. No way

could I go on without him, but deep down, I knew Hiro would never want to be turned into a vamp or

werewolf. Swallowing all that down, I said, "He'll be with you as long as he can."

She stared at me for a few seconds, then whispered, "What about you?"

And that right there almost did me in. Even if Hiro wasn't with me a hundred years from now,

Rasha was a reason for me to keep on going. I'd keep on living for her because I already loved this

little girl more than I had any right to. If she needed me, I'd be there. Period. So I whispered, "I'll be

with you as long as you need me, sweetpea. Forever, if you want."

"Forever," she whispered with a nod, making my throat clog with emotion.

"Peanut," Hiro said, drawing her attention. "You'll be able to breathe." He reached up and ran his

finger over the tube on her face. "You won't need this anymore. You'll be able to run and play...

you'll be free, baby girl."

She and Hiro stared into each other's eyes for several seconds before she reached over to hug

him. He pulled her into his arms and hugged her tight, walking away a few steps to whisper to one

another.

Rebe stepped up beside me and said, “He’s lovely, Bas.”

I shot them a small smile as I wiped my cheek, refusing to acknowledge the tear that slipped free.

“That isn’t a word I’d use to describe him, but thanks.”

They laughed, and I was hit with a strange feeling in my gut. Once upon a time, making Rebe laugh

was the only thing on my mind. I’d always loved hearing their laugh, how free it sounded, how joyful.

And now, well, it was still beautiful, but I no longer had that deep need of making them happy.

Rebe shot me a glance and smirked. “There was a time that I wished I was him.” They nodded at

Hiro.

“What do you mean?”

“I used to wish I was your viramore.” Their voice was quiet and a little hurt, and somehow it

brought tears to my eyes because I was already raw and I knew how much I’d really hurt them.

“I’m sorry, Rebe. I’m so fucking sorry for everything.”

They offered a sad smile. “I know you are. I am too. It wasn’t only you that messed up, Basil, you

have to realize that. I made mistakes, too. I broke your heart, too.”

With a nod, I turned back to watch my viramore and his daughter, and to get my emotions under

control. After a few seconds, I said, “You’re happy now though, right? With your mate?”

“Very happy,” Rebe said, although the words sounded a little sad.

I turned to them. “What is it?”

They shook their head. “He’s not my viramore, Bas, but I love him anyway... I’m scared he’ll

find his viramore and leave me one day.”

“Oh, Rebe, you can’t think like that. You can’t think about all the what ifs. All that’ll do is make

you miserable. You need to enjoy the now.”

They smiled, and this time a little happiness reached their eyes. “You never would’ve said that to

me when we were *not* dating.”

I groaned and chuckled a little. “Mother of All, don’t remind me what an idiot I was. Obviously,

we were dating.”

Their eyes lit with amusement. “You finally admit it, then?”

I sighed. “Yeah.”

They chuckled. “A few years too late, but I’ll take it.”

Offering a smile, I asked, “Are you okay?”

“I’m good, Bas. Happy. Really happy, but seeing you always...”

“Yeah, I know. I’m sorry.”

They shook their head again. “No, don’t be. I’m glad you called on me to help you. I’m glad we

can still be friends after everything.”

“Me too.”

They smiled again. “Do you think he’ll drink from the spring also?”

My brow furrowed. “What?”

“Hiro. Do you think he’ll drink from the spring as well?” Rebe’s head tilted to the side.

My eyes pricked with tears, and my voice came out hoarse. “You’ll offer it to him, too?”

Now Rebe’s brow furrowed. “I thought that’s why you asked me?”

“I...” I rubbed my eyes. “I didn’t want to presume or take advantage. Our number one priority is

helping Rasha, so... I didn’t ask for Hiro.”

“Basil...” They trailed off with a sigh. “Of course, I’ll offer it to Hiro. Of course, he’s welcome.

He’s your viramore, Bas. The only thing I ever wanted when we were together was to make you

happy. I still want you to be happy.”

Instead of answering, I pulled Rebe into a hug and squeezed my eyes shut so I wouldn’t start

crying. After several long seconds, I whispered, “Thank you.”

“Of course.” They chuckled. “Your Hiro is about to beat me up for touching you.”

“Oh shit.” I laughed as I released them and offered a watery smile before turning and walking

straight over to an angry-looking Hiro who was holding Rasha. He opened his mouth to yell at me

probably, but I stepped right up to him and wrapped my arms around him and Rasha, burying my face

in his chest. One good thing about being short was getting to press my face into his chest and neck

without bending down. It had become my favorite place to be.

Hiro’s arm came around me, and he kissed the top of my head, growling out, “What was that

about?”

I almost laughed at the anger in his voice, but I would’ve been in the same boat if the roles were

reversed, so I didn’t point it out, instead saying, “Rebe offered you the water as well.”

He leaned back to meet my eyes. “What?”

“They said you can drink the water, too... if you want, I mean. Then we wouldn’t have to worry

about the fact that you’re human.”

He cupped my cheek with his free hand while Rasha stared at me, listening intently. Hiro asked,

“Is that what you want?”

I swallowed thickly. “Of course that’s what I want, but this is your life and your body, so it has to

be what you want more than anything else.”

His lips quirked up. “You really want to spend the next few hundred years with me?”

“I mean, we’ll probably try to kill each other again at some point, but yeah, I do.”

He chuckled. “I do too.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, Bas, ‘course I do.” He kissed my lips hard and fast, then kissed Rasha’s cheek. “A chance

at spendin’ centuries with my family? Hell yes.”

My chest grew warm at that. He’d called me his family. “That sounds perfect.” I kissed Rasha’s

other cheek. “Are you okay with this, sweetpea?”

She nodded. “Yes, but Daddy said it’s underwater. How will we get there?”

“Rebe has a spell they’ll use on us,” I answered.

She nodded, and Hiro said, “I’ll go first.”

I rolled my eyes, but couldn’t help but smile. “Rebe’s used it on me probably a hundred times. It’s

safe.”

Hiro set Rasha on her feet, then grabbed my hip and leaned in so his mouth was right beside my

ear as he rasped out, “Will ya stop talkin’ about the fuckin’ kelpie like they’re your best friend... stop

remindin' me that you were together. I'm barely holdin' on here."

"Okay." I almost apologized, but honestly, I wasn't sorry at all because I liked seeing this side of

him come out, especially when his accent got all thick and sexy like that.

He snorted and shook his head, likely reading my thoughts. Hiro released me and stepped up to

Rebe, saying, "We're ready. You can do your spell on me first."

Rebe grinned. "I have to place my hand on your forehead."

"Have at it." Hiro held his arms out for a second. If I didn't know him better, I would've thought

he was calm, but I could see the tension in his back.

Rebe put their palm on Hiro's forehead and whispered a few words. I saw the spell shimmer

around Hiro's entire body before settling in place. It was almost like the air around him blurred for a

few seconds, then covered him like a second skin. The spell not only helped you breathe underwater,

it also protected your body from any change in water pressure.

Hiro shook out his limbs and met my eyes. "Feels weird, like somethin's tickling my skin."

"You'll get used to it. It won't feel so weird once we're in the water," I said as I stepped up to

Rebe and grinned at them. "So you can use your hand, huh?"

Rebe lifted one shoulder. "What can I say? I used any excuse I could to get

my lips on you.”

I snorted, and Hiro growled, but I waved him away and said to Rebe, “I can’t believe you told me

you had to kiss my forehead for this spell.”

“I’m surprised you believed me.” Rebe grinned and set their hand on my forehead before

muttering the spell.

The air around me shimmered and blurred before it settled over top of my entire body. Once it

was in place, Rebe dropped their hand, and I shook myself out. Hiro was right, it did feel weird and

almost itchy. It had been a long time since I’d had this spell on me, but at one time, it had been totally

normal.

Hiro knelt down beside Rasha, then stared up at Rebe and said, “I’ll kill you if you hurt her.”

Rebe hummed. “I know you will, hunter. I only plan to help her. Once the spell is in place, she

won’t need the oxygen tank.”

“Are you sure?” Hiro asked.

I said, “Yeah, dimples, the spell keeps oxygen in your lungs, so she’ll be perfectly safe.”

“Okay.” Hiro nodded.

Rebe pressed their hand to her forehead, the air shimmered, and it settled

over her.

Rasha began shaking out her limbs, and Hiro asked, “You okay, peanut?”

She nodded. “Yep.”

I smiled and bent down to take the tube off Rasha and pull the bookbag that carried the tank off her

back. After she took a few breaths, I whispered, “You okay?”

She nodded. “It feels the same, except itchy.”

“Okay, perfect. The itch’ll go away in the water.” I kissed her cheek as Hiro rested his hand on

my shoulder. “Are you sure you want to do this?” It was a huge decision to make at only eight—

almost nine—but we honestly couldn’t wait until she was older. She didn’t have the time. This poor

baby. I didn’t want to lose her, but we needed to be sure.

“I can stay with you and Daddy, right?”

“Of course, sweetpea. You can *always* stay with us.”

She grinned. “I’m sure.”

I took a deep breath and nodded. “Ready to go?”

Everyone nodded, so Rebe stepped back, putting their feet in the water and throwing their cover

onto the sand. I pointedly kept my eyes on their face as they shimmered in the sunlight, slowly

growing in size as their skin became scaly and their face elongated into a

horse-like shape. They

stood on their fins, but I knew from past experience that they could only stand that way for a few

seconds before it started hurting.

Stepping forward, I said, “Go on out, Rebe, we’ll be right behind you.”

They dipped their head in a nod, then leapt into the air, twisting around before diving into deeper

water.

“Woah,” Rasha said.

I chuckled. “Wait till you see them and the other kelpies swimming underwater. They look like

they’re dancing.” I stepped closer to Hiro. “Time to take your clothes off.”

He rolled his eyes. “It’s really okay for them to see my runes?”

I nodded. “Rebe isn’t our enemy, and honestly, they’ve lived in Faela their whole life. When we

first met, they only spoke Fae’lee, so I doubt they’ll recognize even half of what’s on your body.”

With a single nod, he stripped down to his bathing suit—and I pointedly looked the other way so I

wasn’t rocking a boner on this trip underwater in front of my damn ex—so I did the same, and Rasha

took her little cover off.

I knelt beside her and asked, “Are you ready? We won’t be able to talk in the water, not until we

get through the caves to the spring.”

“Okay.” She looked nervous.

“Rasha?” I waited for her to meet my eyes before continuing, “I promise that I’ll protect you.

Always. No matter what.”

She searched my face before nodding. She was still nervous, but my words seemed to ease her

worry a tad.

When I stood, Hiro placed a hand on my upper back and pulled me in to kiss my temple. He didn’t

say anything, but I knew he appreciated everything I was trying to do.

With a nod to him, I grabbed his hand in one of mine, then grabbed Rasha’s in my other and said,

“We’ll have to sit on Rebe’s back and hold onto their mane as they swim. Kelpies swim really fast, so

we’d get left behind otherwise.”

“Won’t that hurt them?” Rasha asked.

“No. They’re used to it. I promise they’ll be okay.” I shot her a smile, then dragged them into the

water. “Don’t be scared. You’ll be able to breathe just like normal.”

“Daddy,” Rasha said.

“It’s okay, peanut. Want me to go first so you can see?”

Rasha nodded, so Hiro released my hand, stepped in front of us, and dipped

his head underwater.

He stayed there for a long time before Rasha knelt down and went under herself. Hiro grabbed her

hands, so I released hers, and he pulled her around. It was pretty shallow here, but Hiro managed to

keep them under for a while. Eventually, he popped up with a grin. "I think we're ready."

I nodded toward Rebe, who was gently swimming around, waiting for us. "Let's go."

Hiro nodded and pulled Rasha up until she was holding onto his shoulders, and the three of us

made our way over to Rebe. The kelpie swam closer and gave us their back. I pushed Rasha onto

Rebe's back, saying, "Hold onto Rebe's mane. Hiro get behind her, I'll go behind you." They

followed directions, and since I couldn't reach Rebe's mane, I wrapped my arms around Hiro's waist

and whispered, "You okay?"

Hiro squeezed my hands before wrapping his strong arms around Rasha and gripping Rebe's

mane. "Everyone good?"

I nodded, and Rasha said, "Yep."

Hiro said, "We're ready, Rebe."

My friend let out a noise that sorta sounded like a whinny, then dove into the water. I squeezed my

eyes shut because this part always made me woozy, at least until I had time to adjust. After a minute, I

opened my eyes, and just like every other time Rebe had taken me in the water, I was blown away.

The water here was crystal clear so I could see far into the distance. There were fish swimming

everywhere, and so many magical creatures I didn't know where to look first. Some of the sea

creatures were similar-looking to the ones from our realm, but just like the rest of Faela, things

weren't always what they seemed. Sometimes you'd see a tiny fish eat one as big as a person, and...

yeah, Faela had a way of playing mind tricks on you.

Nevertheless, it was beautiful under the water here. Where each individual land above stuck to

mainly one color, in the oceans, rivers, and lakes, all the colors were mixed together. And the fish

were *bright* and sparkly. A few even seemed to be covered in glitter— like someone dipped it in glue

and rolled it in multi-colored glitter. They came in all different sizes: big, small, fat, thin. Some had a

billion fins or octopus-like arms. Others had none and didn't seem like they'd be able to move, but

they did. Every time I peeked in the water here, I saw something new.

There were plenty of humanoid-esque creatures under the water as well, but they didn't tend to

come near us, either because they were scared or maybe because they were pissed that we were in

their space.

And then there were the plants. Most of them were harmless to us, but there were a few that

bloomed beautiful flowers that were actually deadly. But whether they were dangerous or safe, they

were gorgeous and just as colorful as the fish. The coral under the Pink Isle matched the land, a bright

pink with white little flowers blooming in certain areas, and even though it was hard when you

touched it, somehow, it seemed to move in the water.

Everything in Faela was gorgeous, and under the sea was like a whole new world. I hadn't visited

this area in a few years, so it was almost as if I was seeing it again for the first time.

When I saw a bright orange fish swimming in our direction that had seven fins and something on

its head that looked like a dragonfly but was really its extra fins, I tugged on Rasha's arm and pointed

it out. Over Hiro's shoulder, I saw her smile widely.

The whole way down, I spent the entire time searching for orange fish to point out to her. And she

was smiling and giggling.

When Rebe swam us into the tunnels, I took a shuddered breath. They'd

brought me in the tunnels

only one other time—but not all the way to the sacred waters, only to an offshoot from the main one

where their living quarters were. I wasn't a huge fan of the enclosed spaces, but luckily, the main

tunnels were wide enough to let more than one kelpie pass through at a time.

It was dark in the tunnels, but there were pink flowers lining the walls that glowed and

illuminated the space. The flowers naturally grew beneath the Pink Isle, so there was an abundance of

them. There were also plenty of fish in the tunnels and caves, but not nearly as many as out in the open

water. It felt like Rebe was twisting and turning through the complicated caving system for hours, but

it was probably only twenty minutes before they slowed, turned into a cave, and surfaced.

As soon as my head popped out of the water and I sucked in some fresh oxygen, I said, "Oh, thank

the Mother. Are you two okay?"

"I'm fine," Hiro said. "Rasha?"

The little girl turned her smile on us. "That was so cool!"

We all chuckled at that.

As we climbed off Rebe's back, I asked Rasha, "How's the breathing? You feeling okay?"

She nodded.

Rebe shifted back to their fae form and grabbed a piece of fabric from the ground—kelpies left

fabric all over the place so they could cover themselves no matter where they shifted, which was how

I'd had some to give them earlier—and said, "I made sure the spell helped her breathing so there was

no worry for her."

"Thank you," I said.

They waved me off. "Follow me."

Rebe headed down yet another tunnel, so Hiro grabbed Rasha's hand and followed with me right

behind them. It took a few more twists and turns before Rebe led us into a very large cavern. It was a

lot taller than I'd expected, maybe a hundred feet or so in the air, and the cave walls were a sparkling

purple. In the center of the cavern was a huge pool of pink and purple water. It appeared like someone

had swirled paint together to make a pattern. I took a step closer and realized it wasn't water at all,

but more of a mud-like substance.

There were two other kelpies in the cavern, and Rebe walked over to them and quietly said in

Fae'lee, "Can we have the room for an hour, please?"

The two looked at each other, and the one on the right said, “Of course, Rebe.” Kelpies were

always so polite. They nodded, and the one that spoke rested his forehead to Rebe’s for a second

before they walked out with nods to us. I didn’t know either of them, which was strange since I knew

most of Rebe’s friends, but I suppose it had been a few years.

Turning to Rebe, I pointed at the strange mud stuff and asked, “Is this it? This is the spring

water?”

They smiled. “Everyone assumes it’s water when we call it a spring, but it’s more like mud. A

combination of Faela sea water and the dirt from beneath the Pink Isle. Magical properties from

both.”

“And it’s safe?” Hiro asked.

“Of course. If you drink—”

“More like chew,” I said out loud by accident.

Rebe chuckled. “Right, if you eat or drink it, its magic will travel through your body, strip away

some parts, then build you back up and make you whole.”

“And it lasts forever? We don’t have to keep coming back?” Hiro asked.

“Correct. The magic is that potent.”

When Hiro didn't make a move closer, Rebe stepped up to the spring and scooped a handful into

their mouth. After swallowing it down, they said, "It's safe, I promise."

"Faela creatures take their promises seriously," I said quietly.

Hiro nodded absentmindedly.

Rebe said, "My people are the protectors of this spring, did you know that? Only a lucky few

have ever been brought down here and offered the chance to take a sip"—they glanced at me—"or a

bite." They smirked.

I snorted, but cut it off when Rasha asked, "Do kelpies drink it?"

Rebe lifted a shoulder. "Some do, but we mostly use it to help injured creatures out in the sea. If

it's rubbed on the outside rather than ingested, it still maintains a healing quality, but it doesn't make

the creatures immortal that way."

Hiro asked, "Are kelpies immortal because they drink this stuff?"

Rebe pursed their lips. "I... don't know the answer to that question. I would say no, that's how

we're born, but to be honest, I'm unsure whether any of us has ever not drunk from the spring. So that

begs the question, are we immortal before we drink or only after?"

Hiro didn't seem bothered by the non-answer he received since he said, "I'll drink first, Rasha,

just to be safe.”

Rasha seemed nervous, so I walked over to her and sat on my ass, then pulled the little girl next to

me. She leaned into me, and since she still seemed scared, I pulled her onto my lap. Hiro smiled at

me, then kissed the top of my head and the top of Rasha’s. Before he walked to the spring, he met

Rebe’s eyes and said, “I’m not sure why you’re doin’ this for us, but I want you to know I’m grateful,

and... if this works, I’ll be forever indebted to you.”

Rebe smiled. “You don’t need to repay me for a thing. It’s my pleasure to help you and your

daughter.”

Hiro nodded, then knelt beside the spring. He scooped some in his hand, muttered, “Here goes

nothin’,” and drank it. His nose wrinkled in disgust as I watched his throat swallow.

I held my breath, waiting for something to happen, and when nothing did after a few seconds, Hiro

turned to offer a small smile. He opened his mouth to speak, but before any words came out, his entire

body locked up as if he was frozen. Panic gripped me, and I stood to go to him, but Rebe grabbed my

arm to hold me back.

“Hold on, he’s alright,” Rebe whispered.

“Basil,” Rasha said, so I scooped her back into my arms, and she held on tight, shaking in fear.

A strangled sound came out of my throat as purple and pink waves rippled across Hiro’s skin, and

a purple and pink glow surrounded him. Hiro made a choking noise as he closed his eyes and began

trembling. The glow brightened and brightened to the point that I had to shut my eyes and turn away

before a small blast of energy shot out of him. It wasn’t hard enough to knock me back, but it did feel

like a strong wind hit me in the chest. Just as suddenly as it came, it disappeared and I was able to

stare at my viramore again. Hiro grabbed his chest and took a few deep breaths with his eyes closed

before he opened them and stared at me with wide eyes.

I began approaching him, but Rebe held my arm tighter, saying, “Give him a minute. He needs to

readjust to his senses.”

“What?”

“He’ll likely have better sight, sense of smell, and hearing.”

“You left that part out,” I murmured.

“I didn’t think about the fact that he and Rasha are human. We don’t have humans here, so I didn’t

remember until now. I’m sorry.”

I nodded, only half paying attention to them.

Hiro blew out a shaky breath before his expression changed, and I knew he needed us. I shook off

Rebe's hand and rushed over to Hiro with Rasha still in my arms. Stopping in front of him, I tilted my

head back to make eye contact, and without a word, Hiro engulfed us both in his arms. He tucked his

face against my neck, breathing deeply as he rubbed Rasha's back and held us close. After a few

seconds, I realized he was sniffing me, and I wrinkled my nose, but didn't say anything because of the

whole new senses thing. Figured it'd be rude to point out that he was smelling me like a dog.

He snorted. "I'm not a fuckin' dog."

"Daddy, you said a bad word," Rasha said.

He chuckled. "Sorry, peanut."

"Are you okay?" I whispered.

"Yeah. I feel weird, but also... healthy? I dunno."

"Do you need anything?"

"No, love, I'm okay." He lifted his head to rest our temples together for a few seconds before he

kissed the side of my head, then pulled Rasha out of my arms, saying, "You still want to do this?"

She nodded. "Did it hurt?"

“A little, but it was over quickly. It felt kinda tingly more than anything.”

“Okay.”

Hiro glanced over at Rebe and asked, “Can she sit in my lap while she drinks it?”

“Sure.” Rebe gave him a nod.

Hiro stepped closer to the edge of the water-sludge hole, and I took a step back toward Rebe, but

my viramore grabbed my wrist and pulled me over with them. As he sat down, he pulled me down

beside him, so I scooted close. Rasha stared at the water with a frown.

After several seconds, she nodded to herself, dipped her hand into it, then scooped some into her

mouth. “Ulgh,” she muttered in disgust, but still swallowed it down.

Hiro hugged her tight and whispered, “Don’t be scared. I’m right here, and so is Basil.”

Watching Rasha freeze and tense, and seeing her skin ripple with pink and purple waves was even

harder to watch than it had been with Hiro. The glow around her kept getting brighter and brighter

until I had to hold my arm in front of my eyes to prevent being blinded by it. When it dimmed again,

Rasha was breathing heavily, and Hiro was whispering encouraging words to her, but all I could do

was stare at her with wide eyes.

Her skin had taken on a shimmery tone, not entirely unlike Rebe's, only Rasha's wasn't as glittery.

She was sweating and shaking, but had the biggest smile I'd ever seen on her face.

"I can breathe," she said in awe. "It doesn't hurt, Daddy."

A noise came out of Hiro's throat as he squeezed her and tucked his head down onto her shoulder.

Rasha stared at me and whispered, "Am I really fixed?" The hopefulness in her voice almost

broke my heart, and all I could do was pray that this had worked.

"I'm going to check, okay?" I placed my hand on her forehead and released my magic. As soon as

it touched her, I gasped. She *felt* like a fae, like her body was thrumming with magic, like it ran

through her very cells. Quickly, I used my shadow magic to scan her, searching for any issues in her

lungs or anywhere else, and all I could feel was healthy organs, healthy everything. A huge smile

spread across my lips as I whispered, "You feel healthy. I don't detect any of the hex."

She grinned at me, but it was Hiro's reaction that caught my attention. He was hugging and rocking

her, his eyes squeezed tight, but I didn't miss the tears running down his cheeks. He was trying to stay

quiet, probably so Rasha wouldn't worry, but his tears of happiness and relief and all those years of

stress were making my own eyes want to leak.

I got up on my knees and hugged them both to me, whispering, “I hope you know this means you’re

never getting rid of me.”

Rasha giggled, and Hiro snorted. “Like we’d want to.”

That might’ve been the nicest thing he’d ever said to me.

We stayed in our tight hug for a long time, but once Hiro had his emotions under control, we stood

up. He put Rasha on her feet, then marched straight over to Rebe and surprised the hell out of me

when he pulled them into a huge hug. From the look on Rebe’s face, they weren’t expecting it either.

Hiro said, “Thank you, thank you,” over and over and over again until Rasha walked over to him

and tapped him on the back. As soon as he released Rebe, he picked Rasha up and threw her in the

air, caught her, then hugged her to his chest as he started crying again.

I gave them a few minutes before walking over and rubbing Hiro’s back. He managed to get an

arm around me and pull me into their hug, so I relaxed into him and let him ride out his emotions.

He didn’t seem to be capable of speaking anything other than, “Thank you,” so after a while, Rebe

silently led us back through the tunnels so they could swim us to the surface. Hiro was practically

vibrating for the entire swim, so I kept placing kisses to his back and rubbing his chest. I was so

happy and relieved that I didn't bother to open my eyes under water, I kept them closed and simply

concentrated on Hiro as I held him tight.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - O N E

B A S I L

By the time we made it to shore, Rasha was having trouble keeping her eyes open. As soon as

Rebe shifted and covered themselves, Rasha gave them a huge hug and thanked them, and the two

rested foreheads together. Then Hiro gave Rebe yet another hug and a million more thanks before

resting his forehead to Rebe's—and yeah, I totally got why he'd reacted that way earlier because I

did *not* like seeing that—then Hiro scooped his daughter into his arms and walked a few steps away.

When I stood in front of Rebe, I said, “Thank you, Rebe. You have no idea how much this means

to me. I could never repay you for this, but—”

“Seeing how happy Rasha and Hiro are is payment enough,” Rebe said, cutting me off.

“No, I—”

“No, Bas. You don't owe me a thing. I'm glad I could help. Maybe the next time you're in Faela

we could have dinner. The three of you and my partner and me.”

“I’d like that.”

They smiled, then leaned down to rest their forehead to mine and whispered,
“It’s nice seeing you

happy, Bas. Stay safe, my friend.”

“Stay safe, Rebe. May the stars watch over you,” I whispered.

“And the moon over you.” They smiled before stepping back into the water.

I lifted my hand in a wave a moment before they jumped into the air and shimmered into their

horse-like form before landing in the water and disappearing below. When I turned back, Hiro was

watching me with a sleeping Rasha in his arms, so I asked, “Is she okay?”

He nodded. “Yeah. She’s tired from healing, I think.”

I nodded, picked up our discarded clothes, and stepped up to him, and we began the walk back to

the house. We were quiet along the way, but Hiro knocked my arm with his elbow a few times,

making me smile every time. Once we made it inside the house, we headed straight up to Rasha’s

room where Hiro lay her in bed and covered her up after I used magic to get her jammies on so she

wasn’t sleeping in her wet bathing suit.

As soon as she was set, Hiro grabbed my wrist and dragged me into our room, shutting the door

behind us. Before I could ask if he was hungry or anything, his mouth was on mine and his arms were

wrapping around me. I groaned into his kiss and draped my arms around his neck, going up on my toes

to better reach him. Hiro's hands ran down my back to my ass, and I felt his intention before he lifted

me into his arms. Wrapping my legs around his waist, I moaned because I loved how easily he took

control and manhandled me.

"Basil," he breathed into my mouth before reclaiming it and groaning deeply.

When he pressed my back against the wall, I expected him to be aggressive and demanding, but

instead, he slowed down and kissed me softly while one hand lightly trailed over my skin. His mouth

was gentle but heartfelt, and it warmed my chest more and more the longer he kissed me like that. He

kissed me so long and so soft and passionately that I was trembling with need and overwhelmed with

emotions.

He started kissing his way down my jaw and neck and sucked a bruise onto my skin just under my

collarbone. I loved that he liked marking me that way. Even though he was conscious of not putting the

marks where others could easily see them, I still loved knowing they were there, that he'd marked me

as his.

He leaned back to meet my eyes. “You *are* mine, Basil; and I’m yours.” He kissed me before I

could respond, and I moaned into his mouth. He truly was claiming me in the way I’d wanted since I

realized he was my *viramore*.

Wrapping me tighter in his arms, he pulled us away from the wall and carried me to the bed,

laying me down before kissing his way down my chest. As his fingers hooked under my waistband,

his mouth covered my nipple and his tongue flicked out, causing me to moan as he pulled down my

bathing suit. My fingers found his hair and dug in, his mouth kissing and licking over my torso.

I wanted so badly to reach down and pull his bathing suit off, but I couldn’t reach him and his

mouth was doing too many exquisite things to make him stop. Luckily, he pushed his suit down

himself, then tucked one arm under me, leaned up, and lifted me higher on the bed. His muscles

rippled over me, making my mouth water and my tongue ache to trace all his tattoos.

He kissed my mouth hard and groaned into me before lowering his body over me as he tucked his

face against the side of my neck and took a deep breath, saying, “You smell so fuckin’ good. I can’t get

enough of ya.” He took another deep breath. “I can smell myself on your skin. So fuckin’ hot.” He

licked a stripe on my neck and growled. His new senses were definitely affecting him, but I loved this

possessiveness coming out.

Rocking his hips and rubbing our lengths together, he nipped at the skin on my neck, making his

way to my mouth before claiming it again in another bruising kiss. The friction between us was

making pleasure build in my core, and I couldn’t help but meet his soft rocks, trying to push for more.

Hiro smirked against my lips before kissing along my neck as he dragged one hand down my side

to my hip. He was heavy over the top of me, but I loved the solid weight of him. He pulled my leg up,

so I wrapped it around his hip, giving him access to my ass. Rolling us just a little, he grabbed my

ass, then grazed his fingers over my hole, and I moaned loudly.

I grabbed his hand and did the spell to create some lube, and he smiled against my skin before

pressing his finger inside me. I’d been nervous to do this again, but I wasn’t anymore. He’d made it

abundantly clear that he was in this for good, that he was in this with me for the rest of our lives.

“I am, love,” he muttered as he pushed another finger inside me. “I’m not goin’ anywhere.”

“Me either,” I breathed, then moaned as his fingers found my prostate. I tried to push his hand

away. “Please, Hiro.”

“Another minute, baby. I don’t wanna hurt you, and it’s been a while.”

A groan of frustration fell from my lips, and he chuckled as he caught my nipple between his teeth

and sucked. I noticed my magic swirling around the room at a casual pace, but I ignored it, unable to

control it while he was making me so crazy. I only let him continue for another few seconds before I

pushed his hand again, and this time he listened, covering himself in lube. Hovering over me, he lined

himself up, staring into my eyes as he pushed past the tight ring of muscle. It stung, but also felt so

fucking good I thought I might burst already. I tried to speed him up by pulling on his ass with the

heels of my feet, but he held strong and smirked at me, knowing he was torturing me as he took his

good old time. When he was finally fully seated, he gripped my hip so I couldn’t move and leaned

down to kiss my lips, so I buried my hands in his hair and tried to relax.

“You’re so sexy, shadow boy, I—”

I slapped my hand over his mouth and said, “Do *not* call me that while we’re having sex!”

Amusement danced in his eyes, and he somehow nipped at my hand, making

me jerk it away

before he said, “Any other rules you wanna share with the class?” He sounded breathless, and before

I could yell at him some more, he pulled his hips away, then slowly pushed back in.

Both of us moaned together, and I pulled his lips to mine as he began his slow, deep thrusts. My

hands found his back, and I held him as close to me as possible. Hiro rested his chest on mine,

holding himself up on his elbows as our mouths collided. My cock was trapped between us, but it

was rubbing against his stomach with every one of his thrusts. Fuck, he felt so good. He was

everywhere, yet I still didn’t have enough of him.

He held me tight in his arms, like he couldn’t get me close enough, and I held him just as tightly.

He maintained that slow and deep pace, showing more control than I had. Each pass hit my spot and

made me wish I could take him even deeper, made me wish we could stay connected in this way

forever.

My fingers dug into his back, clinging to him, pulling him closer. Hiro tucked his nose behind my

ear, his breath brushing over my neck as his lips grazed my skin with every thrust. He murmured,

“Basil... Bas.” And that was all it took for my body to explode in a sea of ecstasy. Warmth shot

between us as my body quaked and quivered. Hiro roared his own release, and I fucking felt his

pleasure along with my own. That feeling, that knowledge that I made him feel good, that he enjoyed

this as much as I did, it sent another wave of pleasure through me, my cock twitching as my ass

squeezed and sucked his dry.

My magic was still swirling around the room, mixed with a blue-ish color that was Hiro’s magic,

a representation of his soul. The two were waltzing around us, getting a feel for one another and

mixing, becoming one. I could freaking feel him, all of him, and I knew he could feel me. The amount

of affection for me I felt pouring from him was... overwhelming and so fucking surprising. He cared

so deeply for me, and... it was a fucking heady feeling knowing that.

His body was quivering as much as mine, but it only made us cling to one another harder. We

stayed there, breathing each other in for a long time, not saying a word, but basking in the glow of not

only post-coital bliss, but of feeling one another on a deeper level than before.

He nuzzled his nose near my ear, whispering, “Basil.”

I sighed and squeezed him tight, then brushed my palm over the strong muscles of his back and

into his hair, holding him there, not ready to let him go yet.

“I’m not gonna let you go, love,” he said against my skin.

“Never?”

“Never, baby, fuckin’ never.” He kissed my neck. “But I do want to roll us so I don’t squash you. I

kinda wanna keep you around.”

A smile graced my lips. “Okay. I’ll clean us up.”

“No.”

“No?”

He hesitated for a moment, then said, “I want you to smell like me.” He let out a strangled laugh.

“That’s the fuckin’ new magic talkin’, isn’t it? I sound like a fuckin’ psycho.”

I tried to shrug, but it didn’t work with his weight on me. “Possibly.”

He snorted. “I’ve never wanted to spread my fuckin’ cum all over someone before.”

I laughed. “You’ve never had a viramore before me, so maybe that’s all this is.” It definitely

wasn’t, but I didn’t want him to freak out on me now.

He grunted and pulled his softening cock out of my ass, making me frown at the loss of him. But

then he kept me tight against him as he rolled us to our sides so my head

ended up on his shoulder, our

chest and stomachs still flat together. He kissed my forehead, fixed a pillow under his head, and

said, "You can get the cum off our stomachs 'cause I know you don't wanna be sticky, but don't clean

anythin' else."

"Oh, I have your permission to clean myself, do I?" I leaned back and lifted a brow at him.

He grinned at me. "Yes, you do." I narrowed my eyes, and he laughed, rubbing my back. "Relax,

shadow boy. I know you don't need my fuckin' permission."

"Now I'm going to clean off everything just because you're a dick."

He smirked and moved his lips close to mine but didn't close the distance.

"Please don't?" I felt

the breath of the words brush across my lips, sending a shiver down my spine, just like he'd planned.

"Cheater."

He chuckled lightly and pressed a lingering, close-mouthed kiss to my lips.

"Please, beautiful?"

"Like you mean *that*." I flicked his shoulder and rolled my eyes, but muttered the spell so it only

cleaned the cum off our stomachs and chests, but left the sweat for tomorrow. As soon as it was done,

Hiro leaned in and nuzzled against my neck, placing a kiss there.

“I did mean it.” He kissed my throat, then licked his way over to the other side of my neck.

“You’re beautiful, Basil.”

Not wanting to dignify that with a response, I tilted my head to allow more access to my neck. “If

you keep that up, I’m going to expect a round two.”

His deep chuckle vibrated through my chest. “Exactly what I was goin’ for.”

A soft moan fell from my lips as he thrust his hips at me.

“You’re not too tired from the water stuff?” I asked, my eyes falling shut as his lips continued

their ministrations on my skin.

“Nah. I have you naked in my bed. I’m not givin’ that up for anything.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

He pulled back, tilted my head down, and stared into my eyes. “I’m okay, I promise. I just want to

enjoy feelin’ you here”—he pushed his hips against me again, brushing our half-hard cocks together

—“and here.” He rubbed his hand over his heart.

I smiled at him and pushed my thoughts toward him. *Can you hear me, dimples?*

A smile spread over his face as he stared into my eyes. *Yeah, I can, shadow boy. It’s easier to*

talk to you like this now, huh?

Yeah, it is. As a thrill ran through my entire being, knowing that we were finally connected the

way viramores were meant to be, I slammed my lips to his and rolled him onto his back, covering his

body with mine. He laughed into my mouth at my eagerness and wrapped me in his strong as hell

arms, kissing me deeply.

My magic joined the fray, pulling his out of him as well, and I knew we weren't going to get any

sleep tonight. And I didn't give one fuck how tired I was going to be tomorrow. I was going to enjoy

every moment with Hiro, and every beautiful inch of his skin.

“RASHA AND I WILL MOVE IN WITH YOU... OFFICIALLY.”

My eyes sprang open, and I couldn't help but wonder if I'd been dreaming those words or if he'd

really said them. “What?”

He grinned, and it was that soft smile he'd been using on me. Hiro was lying on the bed beside

me, in only sweatpants, on his stomach and propped up on his elbows. One hand brushed the hair out

of my eyes as he said, “We'll move in with you. I already talked to Rasha this morning while you

were sleepin', and she's excited.”

My eyes widened. “You mean it?”

An earnest expression crossed his face. “Yeah, Bas, I mean it. As long as you’re still okay with

it.”

A laugh bubbled out of me. “Are you kidding me? This is the best news ever.”

I launched myself at him, and he chuckled as our mouths met, but rather than let me roll him onto

his back, he pulled me half under him and deepened our kiss, but he pulled back far too soon. He ran

his thumb along my bottom lip as he stared into my eyes, those pretty blues sparkling in the early

morning light coming from the window. “I love you, my witch.”

I sucked in a surprised gasp.

“I never thought I’d find another partner in this lifetime, and I definitely never thought I’d find a

witch I could trust. But I’ve found both, and thank fuckin’ god I have. I love you.”

I swallowed thickly as my eyes prickled with the need to shed tears. I gasped in a few breaths

before I managed to whisper, “I love you, too, hunter.”

He grinned widely, then covered my mouth with his.

Reaching down, I grabbed his ass and hauled him farther on top of me, making him chuckle

against my lips, and my smile grew. I had plans to examine every inch of his skin. I hadn’t had enough

time with his many, many sexy tattoos yet. Before I could even get comfortable, there was a knock at

the door.

I huffed out an annoyed breath, and Hiro slid off me and covered my naked body with the blanket

before I yelled, “What?”

The door cracked open, but no one came in. Nik called through the crack, “We’re getting ready to

go home in an hour. Is that good with you two?”

I exchanged a look with Hiro, then said, “Yeah, that’s fine.”

“Good. Delaro already helped Rasha pack. She ate breakfast and is with your brothers, so you

guys don’t have to worry about her until you’re ready to come out.”

“Thank you, Nikolai,” Hiro said.

“No problem. She’s adorable, and such a sweet kid.” He shut the door without waiting for a

response.

Hiro stuffed his face into my neck, blew out a breath, and muttered, “I guess we have to get up and

check on her. It’s only been a half-hour since I did, but I don’t want to take advantage of your

brothers.”

How’s Rasha? I asked Jorah and Thayer.

They answered, *She's building tree sprite houses with us. We're planning on hanging them*

before we leave so we can see if anything moves in the next time we visit.

My heart warmed at the fact that my brothers were being so sweet with her and making long-term

plans. *Thank you.*

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I could tell that they'd already blown me off and were concentrating on Rasha.

I smiled and said to Hiro, "She's building tree sprite houses with my brothers. Like birdhouses,

but for tree sprites."

"Yeah?" He hadn't moved his face away from my neck.

"Yep. She's fine. Wanna take a shower with me?"

He leaned up with a grin. "Hell yes, I do."

I pulled him in for a deep kiss before pushing him away, making him laugh. In retaliation, he

grabbed me, threw me over his shoulder, slapped my naked ass, and carried me into the bathroom

where I got to take my time, exploring every inch of his skin while he did the same to me.

AFTER WE CAME BACK HOME TO BRINNSWICK, HIRO AND I DECIDED TO HEAD TO HIS HOUSE TO START

packing it up and so he could get whatever paperwork he needed to break his lease. Since we were

stopping by, Hiro had called Ulma to see if she wanted him to grab her mail and take it inside her

house. She'd already moved up with her son and grandkid, but it was more expensive to break her

lease than to just let it run out since she only had a few months left.

Rasha thought she'd left a stuffed animal at Ulma's house, so we headed there first, and luckily,

Rasha found her toy right away.

As we walked out of the house, Hiro's laugh carried through the air, and all I could do was stare

at him. He had a beautiful laugh. So full and joyous and loud, his whole face lit up, even his eyes

sparkled. It was as if he transformed from the tough, stoic guy, to a gorgeous, happy man right before

my eyes. And I loved how freely and how often he was laughing around me now.

His daughter was giggling with him, and I realized she had his smile, bright and wonderful. But

her eyes were gray rather than blue. My gaze snapped up to Hiro's, and I grinned as I said, "That's

why your favorite color's gray."

He smirked and nodded. "She has Millie's eyes."

I bumped him with my shoulder, and he poked my side, but I squirmed away with a laugh, glad I

hadn't ruined the light mood.

Rasha grabbed my hand since we had to cross the street, and my heart did a flip, too excited for

words that she'd so easily reached for me. She began swinging our hands between us, and I laughed.

“Look both ways.”

She did as I asked, but I got distracted by Hiro looking all... Hiro-like and hot as hell. He had that

soft expression on his face as he watched us, and I found myself drawn into his orbit.

When Hiro noticed me ogling, he aimed his smile at me and asked, “What?”

I shook my head because I didn't want to blurt out how beautiful I found him.

He turned to face me, his eyes scrutinizing my entire body as he tilted his head to the side. “What

is it, Bas?”

The corner of my lips twitched. “Nothing, dimples.”

His smile perked up as he tried to scowl at me and failed, and something in my chest fluttered at

the sight. Hiro stepped closer to me, he brushed the loose hair from my forehead, and whispered,

“You know I owe ya for this, right?” He nodded down at Rasha.

Rasha started bouncing her stuffed puppy over my legs and stomach since we still hadn't crossed

the street—her dad was too distracting—but she didn't let go of my hand. I shook my head at Hiro and

finally found my voice. “No, Hiro, you don’t.”

“I do. You—”

“No. That isn’t why I took you and Rasha there.”

“I know, baby.” He brushed his thumb over my cheek, then bopped my nose.

“You’re a really

good person. You amaze me, Basil Ellwood.”

My eyebrows shot up. That was a compliment. Had Hell frozen over?

I glanced up to the sky, and Hiro followed my line of sight, asking, “What do you see?”

“I was checking for pigs flying since Hiro Grimsby just gave me a fucking compliment.”

He barked out a laugh, punched my shoulder, and said, “Dumbass.”

I shot him a grin.

“Daddy! You said a bad word!” Rasha yelled.

Hiro cringed. “Sorry, peanut... you know Basil said one, too, right?”

Rasha waved him off. “He’s allowed.”

Hiro’s eyebrows rose, and I bit back a laugh as he asked, “Why is he allowed, and I’m not?”

“He’s a witch, duh, and you’re my Daddy,” she replied as if that answered the question. Which to

be fair, it kinda did. She’d been around enough cursing witches for that to make sense.

Hiro’s eyes met mine again, and I couldn’t help but chuckle. Luckily, his

eyes were filled with
amusement.

We finally headed across the street and as soon as we hit the sidewalk, Rasha let go of my hand,

and asked Hiro, “Can I play outside?”

“Sure, peanut. You know the rules; stay in our yard, and no running—”

“In the street!” she finished.

Hiro grinned at her, then stepped closer to me and grabbed the back of my neck. His thumb rubbed

the back of my neck as he whispered, “Want to have dinner here with just the three of us?”

“That would be nice.” While we had meals at my house often, we usually had Niya there, too.

Plus, it’d be nice for them to do one last dinner here, and kinda sweet that he wanted me with them.

“Of course I want you with us, witch.” He rolled his eyes. “For fuck’s sake.”

I snorted. “Are you cooking?”

“We haven’t been here for a month, there’s no food in the house.”

“Guess we’re ordering.”

He leaned in for a kiss, but right before our lips met, he whispered, “Do you feel that?”

It took me a second to figure out what he meant— having him this close meant my libido was in

overdrive—but I took a breath and ignored him. As soon as I did, I felt it. A dark, ominous presence

nearby.

Pushing away from him, I said in my head to Hiro, *I feel it. Can you tell what it is?*

He was still getting used to the telepathy thing, but he answered easily enough. *It's not anything*

I've ever come across. I can tell ya what it's not, but not what it is, if that makes sense.

It does. Shit. The strange dark presence seemed to move closer, so I said, “Get Rasha and get

inside.”

“Basil—”

“Now, Hiro!”

“I can't leave you out here alone. Come in with us.”

“No, I gotta see what's coming. Get her inside.”

He hesitated, then nodded, ran over, and grabbed Rasha from the other side of the yard, and they

disappeared inside the house.

Jorah, Thayer, I might need you.

We're already on our way, Jorah said. It didn't even surprise me.

I brought my power to the surface, ready to fight whatever this thing was, but almost as suddenly

as it appeared, it seemed to disappear entirely. Pulling my magic back, I glanced around, but the thing

was gone.

Guys, it disappeared, and I don't want to leave Hiro and Rasha unprotected.

Thayer said, We're almost there, so we'll scan the area and see if we can find anything. Stay

with your family.

Thanks.

Hiro's voice made me jump. "It's gone."

I turned to find him on the porch. "I know. What the hell was that?"

"I'm not sure, but maybe we should get back to coven land and do this another day?"

I nodded. "Yeah, let's get Rasha home."

A half-smile pulled up on his lips. "Yeah, baby, let's go home."

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - T W O

H I R O

A fter making my way out of the big house unnoticed—I'd grabbed a basket of bread to take back

to our house—I rushed all the way back to Basil's house— *our* house—ready to fix some

sandwiches for lunch. It had been a week since we felt that weird energy at my old house. Bas and I

had gone back a couple of times to pick up our belongings, but we hadn't

taken Rasha with us, just in

case.

I heard whispers coming from the back porch, so after setting down the basket, I followed the

sound and found Basil and Rasha sitting on the top step with their heads together, speaking quietly.

Basil knew I was there, but he didn't turn around because his entire focus was on my daughter.

Leaning against the doorframe, I watched them with a small smile on my face. Every time I observed

Bas with my daughter, my heart seemed to grow, and the feelings I had for my viramore exploded. He

was so good with her, and the fact I could feel how much he loved her... meant the world to me. He

loved her like she was his own, and it was a beautiful thing to see.

Basil pulled out something from his pocket and told Rasha, "My brother Delaro helped me make

this so I wouldn't mess up the spell."

Rasha glanced at whatever he held in his hand and asked, "What is it?"

Bas grinned at her as he turned so I could see his profile. "It's a bracelet, one that Del and I made

for you... if you want it."

Rasha angled herself to him, too. "You made me a bracelet?"

Bas nodded. "Mhm. I wanted to be sure you had a way to get a hold of me if

you ever needed me,

even if you don't have a phone. Do you like it, sweetpea? I can make you one with different colors, if

you want, or change it to a necklace or something.”

My heart melted at that.

Rasha held out her wrist with a grin. “I love it. You put all my favorite colors in it.”

Basil said, “Of course I did. You want me to put it on you?”

“Yeah. How does it work?”

Basil began wrapping a long cord around her wrist. “No matter where I am in this world or in any

other realm, I'll always know if you need me. All you have to do is touch the bracelet and say my

name, and I'll come to you no matter where you are.”

“Even if you're in Faela and I'm here?”

“Yes, sweetie, no matter where I am.” He tied off the bracelet, then pressed his forehead to hers

as they stared at it. “I will always protect you, squirt.” He squeezed her hand. “I will always keep

you safe.” He leaned up and kissed her forehead. “And I will come to you no matter what you need,

even if it's just help with your homework.”

She giggled, then threw her arms around him in a hug and whispered, “Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome, sweetpea.” He closed his eyes as he hugged her tight, and I didn’t think

my heart could get any fuller.

When they let go, Rasha looked up at him shyly as she said, “Leilani told me that *pthair* means

‘father’ in Caillea.”

“She’s right.”

“And she said *paelie* means ‘father’ or ‘Dad’ in Fae’lee.”

“Also correct.” Bas nudged her with a grin.

She bit her lip for a few seconds, then hesitantly said, “Now I’m kinda like a fae, right?”

“Yes.”

“And so are you a little because of the Three stuff?”

“Yep,” Bas said.

Rasha nodded. “I think I like Paelie better.” She glanced around, biting her lip for a second before

she faced him and asked, “Would it be okay if I called you that... Paelie?”

Basil’s eyes widened and shot over to me as if seeking permission. My throat was clogged with

emotion, but I nodded to him because this was Rasha’s choice, not mine, and Basil breathed out, “I

would love that.”

Rasha grinned up at him. “Paelie.”

Bas smiled, and I knew he was having trouble keeping his emotions at bay as he pulled her back

into a hug. I still couldn't speak, but I pushed off the doorframe and sat on the other side of Rasha,

rubbed her back, and kissed Bas's hand.

Never in my life did I imagine I'd have another partner in this life, and I certainly didn't think

Rasha would ever have another parent. My life had been turned upside-down since Basil came into it,

and I couldn't have asked for anything better. He loved me, but more importantly, he loved my

daughter—our daughter.

That was going to take some getting used to, but that was the truth of the matter. I wanted Bas to be

my partner in life, in all ways, and that included raising Rasha. He loved her the way I did; he

deserved to call her his.

In fact, he deserved to be an official member of this family.

“Daddy, look what Paelie gave me,” Rasha said, holding out her wrist.

My heart stuttered and flipped in my chest at the casual way she called him her father. “That's

beautiful,” I finally said after clearing my throat. I threw my arm over her shoulders and grabbed the

back of Bas's neck so he'd stay close. “Your Paelie is pretty great, huh?”

She nodded. “He is!” Then she proceeded to tell me everything Bas had said about the bracelet

while I massaged Basil’s neck and sent him a soft smile.

Over the top of her head, I mouthed, *I love you, witch.*

He grinned, then said through our link, *I love you, too, hunter.*

“YOU SURE YOU’RE UP FOR THIS?” I ASKED BASIL AND RASHA.

Rasha nodded, and Bas sent me a sad smile, saying, “Yeah, dimples, we’re ready.”

Taking a deep breath, we stepped through the portal. Nikolai and Talon had been to my homeland

before, so once we were all in Faela, they pulled up a portal as close to our destination as possible.

The others were stepping through with us—since the Three shouldn’t be realms apart and all that—

but only Bas, Rasha, and I were movin’ on from there. We were all going out to eat afterwards, but...

I had somewhere to take Basil and our daughter first.

I led the way, instantly recognizing the place when I stepped through. We were on a popular street

in the country’s capital, but tucked back in an alleyway. Basil and Rasha came out behind me, so I

grabbed my viramore’s hand with one of mine and Rasha’s with my other while the others came

through.

I gave them a nod, then pulled my family out of the alleyway and down the road. It only took us ten

minutes to get to the front gate, and when I stopped, Rasha pulled on my hand and asked, “You okay,

Daddy?”

I smiled down at her, hoping to convey more bravery than I felt. “Yeah, peanut, I’m okay. Let’s

go.”

Basil was my quiet strength on the winding walk inside the gates, and when we arrived about ten

feet away, I stopped short.

He stepped up beside me, pushing his shoulder against my arm and quietly asked, “Is this her?”

I nodded.

Basil released my hand to rub my back, then gently pushed me forward.

It had been nearly four years since I’d visited my dead wife’s grave, and seeing it again made

unwanted memories rush back. Her smile; her smirking expression when she was about to start

trouble; the way she’d never take my shit; how happy she’d been when we found out she was

pregnant. I missed her, more than I’d like to admit, and I was suddenly feeling overwhelmed.

But then I saw Rasha kneel down and run her fingers over her mother’s grave, and I released a

breath. This wasn't only about me; it was about Rasha and sharing this part of myself with my

viramore.

Millayna Rasha Grimsby

Through the darkness, I am the light

With that light, love is born

BASIL PULLED ME AGAINST HIS SIDE AND KISSED MY CHEEK, WHISPERING, "THAT'S A BEAUTIFUL

saying, Hiro. That's a hunter phrase, right?"

I nodded. "She always liked that poem, especially those two lines." A small sob came out of my

throat, and Basil pulled me into his arms.

Only a moment later, Rasha wrapped her arms around my waist and whispered, "Mommy's safe

and happy, Daddy. You don't need to be sad for her."

I closed my eyes, then leaned down to pick her up and pulled her into my and Basil's hug.

She put her hands on my cheeks, squishing them together. "I had a dream about her last night. She

told me that she's happy you found Paelie and that she's proud of me and happy and free now that I'm

safe."

More tears silently fell freely down my cheeks. "She did?" I had no idea if that was even

possible, but it was a beautiful thought either way.

Rasha nodded. “She’s really pretty.”

That made me smile. “You look just like her.”

Her eyes widened. “I do?”

I nodded. “You’re gorgeous, just like Mommy.”

Basil said, “You’re the most beautiful girl in all the realms.”

Rasha smiled at him, then giggled. “I think you’re pretty, too.”

Basil’s eyebrows went up, and a burst of laughter came out of me. Kissing Rasha’s cheek, I said,

“I think you’re right, Rash. Paelie is very pretty.”

Basil’s eyes looked like they were going to bug out of his head.

Rasha nodded solemnly.

After a moment, Basil chuckled, then scooped Rasha out of my arms, asking her, “Do you need to

stay here for a little while longer?”

“No, I’m okay,” she said. “I think Daddy needs to stay.”

“I think you’re right, sweetpea. Why don’t you and I go take a peek at the bird’s nest in that tree

over there so we can give Daddy a few minutes with Mommy?”

She nodded. “I want to see the nest.”

Basil sent me a sweet smile as he placed Rasha on her feet and took her hand, then he went up on

his toes to peck my lips and asked telepathically, *Do you need me to stay here with you or should I*

take her over there now?

Show her the nest, and... thank you, love.

He smiled sadly. *Let me know if you need anything, dimples.*

The use of that ridiculous nickname made me shoot him a smile before he led Rasha over to a

batch of a few trees. With them focused over there, I knelt in front of my wife's grave and ran my hand

over her name.

"I miss you, Millie," I said quietly. "These past few years haven't been easy, but..." I glanced

over at Basil. He had Rasha on his shoulder so she could peek at the bird's nest, and I couldn't help

the small smile that quirked up on my lips. Turning back to the tombstone, I said, "You would like

him. You two would've caused so much havoc." I chuckled, then sighed. "No matter what happens,

you know I'll always love you, right? So will Rasha. But having Basil in our lives has been a gift."

A tear ran down my cheek, so I wiped it away. "I hope you really are happy wherever you are,

Millie." Another tear fell. "I just wanted you to know that we're going to be okay now. Basil... he

helped us, he cured Rasha, and he's brought us into this huge, crazy family.

We're okay... finally,

we're okay.”

A hand on my back startled me, but when Basil knelt beside me, I didn't hesitate to pull him in for

a hug. He wrapped his arms around me, ran his hands through my hair and down my back, and simply

held me... always there for me when I needed him.

Over his shoulder, I saw Rasha blowing dandelions in the air with a smile, and everything in the

world felt right.

Millie was a piece of me that I would always miss and love, but that Millie-sized hole in my heart

was sewn up tight, no longer a bleeding wound. The scar would always be there, but I could truly

move on from here knowing that my viramore would help carry my burden whenever that scar ached,

and knowing that no matter what, I was allowed to be happy. All three of us were.

“I love you, Hiro,” he whispered.

I squeezed him tight and kissed his neck. “I love you, too.”

NOW THAT BAS AND I WERE CONNECTED SO FULLY, EVEN WHEN I WAS OUT WORKIN', HE WAS

constantly in my head. I'd thought that I'd hate it, but it was comforting knowing he was there. It

wasn't like he was constantly talking to me, but even in the silence, I could sense him and his

emotions. It was nice to know that I'd be able to tell if he needed me and vice versa.

Jasmyn called me half an hour ago with a lead on a new mark. Bas didn't really want me off

coven land by myself, and since I felt the same about him, I'd compromised. Blaze was riding on my

shoulder so Bas could pull himself to me using his Bond with the dragon if somethin' happened. The

little bearded dragon stuffed his head inside the collar of my shirt as I parked the car, and I gave him a

few scratches while I got out.

My mark was a werewolf that was hiding out in a local park, so I needed to canvas the area. It

was light out, so the guy would be in his human form, which meant he'd be pretty easy to capture with

a tranq dart. At least in theory.

Reports said there was a naked man running around one of the baseball fields—a pretty good

indication that it was my mark. But even if it wasn't, he was a pervert running around where kids

play, so I'd take him down either way.

You make it to the park? Bas asked.

Yep.

Good. Rasha's painting my nails pink. She's actually pretty good at it.

Yeah, she's had a lot of practice on me and Ulma. Now leave me alone so I can concentrate.

If he was in front of me, I was pretty sure he'd be stickin' his tongue out at me.

I totally would, he said, making me roll my eyes before he pulled back and let me be.

Takin' advantage of my enhanced senses, I took a deep breath to see if I could catch anything odd.

I didn't at first, but as I moved closer to the backstop on the other side of the baseball field, I caught a

whiff of blood. Maybe the werewolf had caught something last night during the full moon.

Rushing, I made my way closer to the stench and quickly realized there was a body on the ground.

"Shit," I muttered as I ran and dropped to my knees. Her back was to me, so I gently pulled her

shoulder to roll her over. The second I got a look at the front of her, I jerked my hands back and fell

on my ass in shock. The girl was so torn up, I could see bone—lots of bones—and there was blood

everywhere. I was pretty sure she was missing a shit-ton of her skin.

"Holy shit," I whispered as I opened my eyes, wishing I could unsee the very, very dead body in

front of me. Unfortunately, even my eyesight was jacked up to ten, so I could see the grotesque

mutilations in detail. There was no way a werewolf did this. There were no teeth or claw marks.

Where the hell did this body come from if it wasn't from the were?

What's wrong, Hiro? Basil yelled in my head, sounding as if he'd been tryin' to get my attention

for a minute.

Dead body. A witch, I think. I could still sense a faint witch-like essence to her. *She's torn up,*

Bas.

Fuck, it's the serial killer. Fuck, fuck. Okay, stay there, I'll be there as soon as I get Rasha to

the big house.

Okay. I lifted a hand and wiped my nose, then jerked it away when I smelled blood on it.

Goddammit, I had blood all over my hands and pants. I must've sat in it.

The hair on the back of my skin rose as an ominous essence filled the air around me, making me

freeze to the spot, feeling like the prey to some terrible predator. Whipping my head around, I

searched for whatever it was that was watching me, but I couldn't see anything. All I could do was

feel darkness. The same darkness I'd felt outside my house with Basil.

As suddenly as it had come, it disappeared, and it was as if the sounds of the birds and bugs and

wind rustling trees came back to life. I scanned my surroundings again, but nothing seemed out of

place. With no tangible evidence of which direction it went, no way to follow it, I decided to refocus

on the poor dead girl in front of me.

Moving closer, I examined the wounds to see what kind of weapon was used. As long as I didn't

stare at her young, fear-stricken face, or breathe through my nose, I was fine. The wounds didn't seem

to be made by a knife. They were kinda round, almost like she'd been poked with a sharp stick all the

way through her bones, but with her skin missin'—

“Put your hands in the air!”

I jerked my head around to find four BCA agents aiming guns at me. I'd been so focused on

cataloguing the injuries, I hadn't even heard them. Liftin' my hands in the air, I called out, “My name

is Hiro Grimsby, I'm a hunter. I was sent here to find a werewolf.”

What the fuck, Hiro? Basil asked, fear lacing his words.

Just some BCA agents. Don't worry, love.

“Hands behind your head! Don't move!” the woman yelled as all four moved closer to me. I did

as she asked, and she jerked her head at the guy beside her and said, “Unload his weapons.”

The guy wore a fearful expression, so I said, "I won't hurt ya." That didn't seem to help, so I kept

my mouth shut.

When the man approached, Blaze hissed at him, and before I could tell the little dragon to chill

out, there was a popping sound beside me. I only had half a second to realize it was Basil having

pulled himself to Blaze before my viramore threw a shield over us.

"You're not helpin' the situation," I said.

Basil ignored me and yelled over top of the agents shouting at him. "Anita, he's my viramore, he

found the body. Put your damn gun down."

The woman agent said, "It's not your call, Ellwood."

Basil rolled his eyes. "We need to search the area for the actual perp, not arrest my partner!"

"He was found over the body, covered in blood. He's coming in," she said.

"Bas," I said. "Don't worry about it."

He turned stormy eyes to me. "Don't fucking tell me not to worry about it when they're trying to

arrest you for something you didn't do!"

Calm down, love.

I am calm!

I winced at his shout in my head.

Anita said, “We have backup arriving in about two minutes, Ellwood, including the Chief himself,

so unless you plan on killing us, you’re not getting away.”

“For fuck’s sake, stop being such a bitch,” Bas said, and I cringed. “We’re not going anywhere.

Alec’s gonna be pissed at you when he gets here.”

“You’ll keep him in there with you?” she asked him, ignoring his Alec comment.

“Yeah. I wouldn’t want your meaty paws touching him, anyway.”

She ignored him again, but ordered one of the other agents to check the body. It was right behind

us, but luckily, Bas hadn’t covered the body with his shield, so the other agent was able to look at it. I

kept my hands on my head, still on my knees so no one freaked out and did somethin’ stupid.

Basil turned his gaze on the agent checkin’ the body, and I heard him mutter, “Sweet Mother of

All, that’s Armina.” He made a choking noise. “I’m gonna be sick.”

“If you puke on my crime scene, Basil Ellwood, I’ll murder you,” Anita said.

Basil turned around to face her with wide eyes. He took a few deep breaths, and I could feel a

myriad of emotions going through him, but after a moment, he said, “The victim’s name is Armina

Hallawelle. She’s a witch, light affinity, she’s twenty-four—no, she would’ve turned twenty-five last

month.”

I eyed him. *You know her?*

Uh, yeah... we dated in high school. She was... not a nice person.

Anita made a phone call and began reporting everything Basil told her to whoever was on the

other end of the line, but she hung up when three SUVs began driving toward us on the grass. They

stopped behind Anita, and Alec got out of one, but he had his phone up to his ear.

Basil crossed his arms over his chest as he stared at his brother-in-law, and the werewolf Chief

of the BCA frowned over at us. When he hung up the phone, he closed his eyes for a few seconds,

then headed in our direction and said, “Hiro, you can relax and stand up, but you’re going to have to

come in.”

“What the fuck’s the matter with you?” Basil yelled as I dropped my hands and stood.

“It isn’t my call, Bas,” Alec said.

“What the hell’s that supposed to mean? You’re the damn chief! You know Hiro didn’t do it!”

“I know,” Alec said.

“Don’t be a fucking idiot, you know he didn’t—what? You know? Then why the hell are you

making him come in?”

“I had to call Petunia Crane as soon as I realized Hiro was the person they found here. It’s a

conflict of interest.”

My eyes widened a little. Petunia Crane was in charge of the whole damn Brinnswick Union.

Alec legit answered to the top dog of the whole damn country.

Bas said, “He found the body, Alec. He didn’t kill her.”

“I *know* that. I know, Bas. Please calm down. I know, but he’s family, and the fact that it’s

Armina’s body he found... it doesn’t look good.”

“What? Why would that even matter? I haven’t talked to her in years,” Bas said.

“Basil, after what she did to you, it gives Hiro motive,” Alec said.

“After what she did to you?” I asked Basil. “What did she do to you?”

Basil kept his eyes on Alec, but waved a hand at me. “See? He doesn’t even know anything about

that. I never even told him.”

Alec’s eyes darted back and forth between us for a few seconds. “Both of you need to stop talking

right now. Not another fucking word. Hiro, I need you to come in, right now. Bas, I know you’re not

going to stay away, but you can’t ride in the same car as him—”

“Like hell I can’t.”

Alec’s nostrils flared. “Basil, if you want any chance of clearing Hiro’s name quickly, you’ll shut

the fuck up and listen to me for once in your goddamn life! I’m trying to help you.”

I said through our link, *It’s fine, love. It’ll be okay. We have nothing to hide.*

Basil’s eyes met mine. *It’s not fine. They can’t do this.*

Seriously, baby, it’s easier to let them do their thing. I’ll keep Blaze with me if that makes you

feel better.

It does.

“Fuck, no speaking telepathically, either,” Alec shouted, then quieter, “This is a nightmare. Hiro,

get in the first SUV. Now.” He pointed to one. “Bas, get in the other.” He pointed to another one. “No

bloody talking.”

Basil growled out in anger, but dropped his shield, and the two of us followed Alec’s

instructions.

RUBBING MY TEMPLES, I SAID, “I’VE TOLD YOU A THOUSAND TIMES ALREADY. I GOT A CALL FROM MY

handler, and she sent me to the fuckin’ baseball field. I dunno where she gets my marks from, that’s

why I go through her.”

“Jasmyn Borly confirms your story,” Agent Asshole said. That was what I decided to name the

one on the right. They’d introduced themselves when they’d walked into the room, but I honestly

forgot their names ten seconds after the fact. Plus, I liked my names better: Agent Asshole and Agent

Dick. Fitting.

“You brought Jasmyn in?” I asked as Blaze tucked his head farther into my collar. He’d been

sleeping on my shoulder the entire time. He must’ve been the laziest dragon in existence, but I could

admit I appreciated him bein’ in here with me.

Agent Dick said, “Yes. Her prints brought up a few warrants from down south, so we’ll be

holding her for a while.”

I groaned internally. The last thing I wanted to do was get Jasmyn in trouble.

“If she confirmed it, why am I still here?” I asked.

“We’re waiting on confirmation from a reliable source for your alibis,” Agent Asshole said. “So

far, we’ve confirmed everything you’ve told us, so I’m sure you’ll be released soon.” Asshole was

my new favorite agent.

Basil interrupted my interrogation by speaking telepathically. *I spoke to Petunia Crane myself*

and told her that we weren't even in this fucking realm when the last murder happened. He was

pissed.

Told her or just yelled it at her?

I fucking yelled it at her and may have called her a few names.

I sighed, but there was no use in complaining since he'd already done it. Hopefully that'll help.

She said they still have to confirm it with someone else, which is bullshit. I've been working

here for over three years, I fought alongside her in the fucking war, helped end the fucking war, the

least she could do is show me a little respect. I've never lied to her or Alec.

My gaze shot up to the flickerin' lights on the ceiling, and I realized Bas was pissed enough that

his magic was out of control, and I muttered, "Oh shit." Through our link, I said, Take a deep breath,

love. You're gonna bring the whole building down if you don't calm yourself.

Basil ignored me, and I could feel his magic everywhere even though we weren't in the same

room.

I pushed my affection for him through our link and said, Basil Draven Ellwood, calm the fuck

down.

That got his attention. You know my middle name?

A snort spilled out of me at the absurdity of his question. I ignored that strange looks from

Asshole and Dick, and said to my viramore, *Yeah, shadow boy, I do. Now rein it in before you level*

the building, yeah?

I could feel him taking calming breaths.

Don't be stupid, Basil, this isn't a fight you need to take on.

I'm not stupid.

Then don't act like it. Chill out before someone gets hurt.

He started pulling his magic back inside himself and murmured, *I hate you.*

No, you don't.

APPARENTLY SOON MEANT SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT TO AGENT ASSHOLE THAN IT DID TO ME

because I wasn't let go for another two hours. But finally, I was free.

When I walked out of the interrogation room, I stopped short when I saw my viramore standing

there. His ass was leaning against a desk, his arms were crossed over his chest, and he was still

fuming, but at least he was keeping his magic under control.

Once I was within hearing distance, he called over, "Rasha's spending the night with Niya. Seb

and Ailin are home with her." He sounded pissed when he spoke again. "You know how we never

figured out how we kept getting put on the same cases?”

“Yeah, ‘course.”

“Apparently, an agent here has been feeding your handler my cases for months.”

“Why the hell would someone do that?”

Bas sighed. “He hates my brother—Ailin, that is—and he wanted to mess with our family.”

I came over and leaned against the desk beside him. “That’s real shitty.”

“Yeah.”

I bumped his shoulder with my arm. After a few seconds, I said, “At least it brought us together,

yeah?”

He took a deep breath, and his whole body seemed to release tension. “Yeah, true.”

“Come on, shadow boy, let’s get out of here before Agents Asshole and Dick decide to ask me

more questions.”

He snorted and pushed off the desk with me beside him. “You up for finding out who the hell set

you up today, dimples?”

“Hell yeah.”

He smirked and walked through the front doors. “Your handler got the tip thirty-five minutes

before an anonymous call was made to the BCA to say someone was murdering a girl on the baseball

field.”

“So they waited for me to show up before they tipped the agency.” He nodded as he hopped into

the driver’s seat, and I got into the passenger seat, Blaze still snuggled in my collar. “Why would they

want to set me up?”

“I’m not sure, but my brothers are going to meet us at the park to help out.”

“Sounds good. So ya finally gonna tell me who the hell Armina is?”

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - T H R E E

B A S I L

Iblew out a breath, then started driving back to the park. This day had been a huge clusterfuck and

the last thing I wanted to do was talk about this, but Hiro needed to know.

“Uh, she was my

girlfriend from high school, but she kinda messed me up.”

Hiro began loading all his weapons back on that had been confiscated when he’d been taken in.

I’d brought them out to the car earlier. He asked, “How? You’ve hinted at things, but have never said

exactly what happened.”

“When I was sixteen and seventeen, Armina hired a mind-bender to mess with my memories and

to try and make me her... servant-slave-person, I guess.” Blaze moved from Hiro’s shoulder to mine

to offer me comfort, so I gave him a few pats as he nuzzled into my neck.

I felt his gaze on me as I drove, then a flash of anger rushed through our bond. “What the fuck? She

did *what* to you?”

“Yeah, she messed with my memories, made me do some pretty shitty things to Thayer. I guess to,

I dunno, split up our family or something. Then once I did the shitty things, she had the mind-bender

erase my memory of it so I’d think Thay was the one being an asshole and... I don’t know, it was

really messed up. And she did it so many times it sorta backfired, and I started getting confused a lot,

even in the middle of conversations. It was... scary, to be honest.”

He paused his movements to lean over the console and tuck my hair behind my ear. “Were you

able to get your memories back?” He was trying to keep his anger at bay, but I felt it through our bond,

anyway.

“Uh, yeah. My family noticed me being forgetful and acting strange, so Ailin checked me and

figured out what was going on. He hunted Armina down, then the mind-bender, and forced him to fix

everything. I... I thought the mind-bender was my friend, and I thought

Armina loved me, so... yeah...

it was really fucked up.”

He was quiet for a moment, then said, “I guess that’s why you didn’t want a commitment before

me.”

I sighed. “Yeah. I was kinda shitty about dating and all that crap for a while.”

His jaw clenched. “Armina’s lucky I didn’t know about this sooner or I would’ve hunted her

down myself.”

“Not so lucky, since she... uh, you know, since she was murdered.”

“Fuck, baby. I’m sorry. That was such a shitty thing to say. I’m just—”

“It’s fine. It’s... this day has been crazy as hell.”

He asked, “Are you sure you still want to go back?”

“Yes.” I answered without hesitation because someone was messing with my family, and I was

done playing games. We were going to catch this guy and end this.

Toby, Thayer, and Jorah were already there when we arrived, so once Hiro and I got out, we all

headed into the park where the body was found. Armina’s body had been near the backstop, but it had

already been taken away. The area was still blocked off, but no one else was around anymore, which

kinda made it easier for us, to be honest.

We started where the body had been, then began searching outward to look for anything that

shouldn't be there or to sense any magic. Hiro and I headed toward the other baseball field while the

other three went closer to the surrounding trees.

Hiro squatted down in the dirt, saying, "Does this footprint look weird to you?"

Before I could answer, a strange clicking noise filled the air, and a chill ran through me as dark

energy seemed to seep into the park. Hiro and I moved back to back as we searched for the source,

and I cursed internally for moving away from my brothers.

What the fuck is that? I asked Hiro and my brothers, somehow tapping into both connections in

my panic.

Jorah said, *I don't know. All I see are shadows. Does Hiro know?*

What the hell? Hiro said. *I can hear you, Jorah.*

We can hear you, too, Thayer said.

Basil, how are you doing that? Jorah asked, too curious for his own good sometimes.

Not the fucking issue right now! I yelled.

Hiro said, *I dunno what it is, but Bas and I felt the same energy near my old house a few weeks*

back. It feels close to a Faela creature, but I've never felt somethin' like it

before.

Before anything else was said, the energy seemed to thicken and ten feet in front of me a giant...

insect-like humanoid seemed to walk out of thin air. It almost looked like a gigantic ant with giant

pinchers and antennae, a really freaking gross hard shell-like exterior, and a bunch of skinny, pointy

as all hell legs and arms. But this thing was walking on two legs, right toward me with those giant

black eyes focused on me.

“What in all hell is that thing?” Hiro asked. “Oh fuck, there’s about twenty of ‘em.”

“Shit,” I muttered before pulling a shield around us. “What is it?”

“It feels like a... fae, but it’s a fuckin’ bug, so I dunno.”

The one in front of me reached the shield and started using two of its arms to feel around the

edges. Two more joined it and began doing the same thing.

“What’re they doin’?” Hiro asked.

“I think they’re trying to figure out how to break the shield.”

In our heads, Jorah said, *Insectoid fae. I didn’t think they fucking existed!*

They said, *It seems like our Three magic likes to attract rare creatures.*

Jorah said, *I read about them. They eat magic user’s souls and steal their magic. They collect*

them for months at a time, then use the stored magic to take out entire communities at once so they

can feed on them and lay eggs and... Mother of All, when I read about them, I thought they were a

damn horror story.

The insectoid thing in front of me tilted its big head and its mouth opened in what I thought was its

version of a smile—totally gross—then its left arm stabbed forward and pierced my shield.

“Oh shit!” I yelled. *How do we kill it, Jor?*

The smile on the thing in front of me grew as its arm made a grab for me. I bumped into Hiro, who

was also trying to back up, and to my horror, the other insectoids around us had their arms through the

shield, too. Six of the things, so a lot of fucking arms.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.” We weren’t close enough to pull our magic together for the Power of Three,

but I could at least use the Three magic alone and try to fry the bastards.

“Hiro baby, don’t touch me

or you’ll get electrocuted.”

He grunted and scooted half a step away as he pulled a blade out and started chopping at the arms

and legs coming through the shield. A screech filled the air and raised the hair on my arms—Hiro had

chopped off a leg—as I closed my eyes and let my Three energy rush through

me. I felt the electricity

tickle my skin, and my hair rose from my neck, the magic filling me up.

Opening my eyes, I sent the gross creature a smile of my own and released the magic. A huge

lightning bolt shot out of my hand, passing through my own magic shield easily, straight at the

insectoid, but the creature was smarter than it looked. It jumped and rolled to the side—who knew

it'd be athletic?—then got up and dove at me. Its arms pierced my shield first, opening a small hole

that it ripped open.

As it flew through the air, Blaze jumped from my shoulder, shifting mid-air into a huge dragon,

and grabbed the gross thing in his jaw, biting down with a loud crunch and a pained screech from it.

Blaze shook his huge head, chomped a few more times, and dropped it on the ground, dead. His jump

had taken him out of my shield—he was connected to my magic and able to move in and out freely—

so I began throwing the shield over him again, but four of the insectoids jumped on Blaze. My dragon

screamed out in pain as he was sliced and stabbed with their many arms.

Fly, Blaze! Fly away!

He tried, but they kept cutting up his wings. I stepped forward and shot lightning at them as best I

could, but I didn't want to hit him. When I realized my magic distracted them, I kept it up to draw

them away from my Bonded, and Hiro helped by shooting arrows at them. The arrows bounced off

their hard exteriors, but it made them come at us. As the four insectoids rushed at me, I prepared my

magic for attack.

The closest one to me got a lightning bolt to the chest, and its awful screeching filled the air, so I

hit it with another bolt, and it fell to the ground, shaking. As it stilled, I shot another one, but it threw

its own shield up to block my attack.

"Dammit!" I hit its shield a few times before trying for another one, but it also had a shield up.

Bastards were using stolen magic.

"Basil!" Hiro yelled.

I turned in time to see another insectoid piercing my shield and diving at me. It took me by

surprise and hit me right in the gut, knocking me flat on my back. I threw my arms in front of my face,

but that left my stomach open, and it stabbed me, its arm slicing through my armor like it was made of

paper. Sharp, burning pain shot through my stomach, causing me to cough and groan as it stabbed me

again.

It lifted its arm to keep stabbing, but Hiro went flying through the air, tackling the thing off of me.

He landed in a tumble of limbs—human and insect—but grappled until he was on top of the thing.

Hiro lifted his chakram—that round circular blade—and sliced it across the insectoid's neck.

He kept chopping, but more of them were coming for me, seeming to give up any hope of saving

their friend, or maybe not caring enough to save it, and no longer caring about Blaze now that he was

down for the count. Jorah, Thayer, Toby, and their Bonded were all fighting the other insectoids, but I

couldn't focus on them with so many around Hiro and me. I was bleeding everywhere, but I

concentrated on my magic anyway.

As I called on the storm above us, I felt the power of a familiar magic hit my own, and I gasped. It

was Armina's magic. The insectoid charging me had killed Armina and swallowed her soul and

stolen magic.

I threw up another shield, then forced myself to ignore the stomach wound, sitting up and throwing

a shadow fireball at the thing. It brought up its own shield to block my magic. I threw a lightning bolt

at it, but the thing had enough stored stolen magic to block me.

Hiro stood and faced the others, the dead insectoid lying at his feet, and my viramore pulled out

his special blade, the one that brought down shields, and charged. My heart was in my throat as I

watched him cut down the shield of the one charging me and attacked. The thing was so shocked, Hiro

managed to get a good slice across its chest before it retaliated, throwing a fireball at my viramore.

A scream wanted to make its way out, but I didn't have to worry because Hiro had enough runes

and spells on his body that the fire didn't even singe him. As he continued battling the thing, I called

on my lightning again and focused on the other insectoids. They didn't have shields up because they

were trying to attack Hiro from behind.

I started firing blasts of shadow magic at them to at least slow them down while I charged up my

Three power. I needed to build up as much as I could so I could take them out at the same time,

otherwise, Hiro would be hurt or—nope. Not thinking about it.

Thayer suddenly yelled in my head, *I'm close enough to you, Bas! Let's give them hell. Push!*

So I did. I pushed with everything I had, calling on the storm that lived within me as I used

whatever strength was left to lift my arm.

The wind picked up, hail began to fall, and when the three of us, when the Power of Three,

brought down our arms together, lightning struck the insectoids behind Hiro, and the others

surrounding my brothers. Loud screeching screams filled the air, so we brought another strike down.

The insectoid fighting Hiro was too close to my viramore to chance it, but I didn't need to worry.

He was a fucking badass and was slicing the shit out of that thing.

My brothers and I brought down two more strikes before they were all fried to crisps.

Hiro finished off the last one, then stood, covered in splattered blood. He stared down at the

insectoid he just decapitated and kicked its head so it rolled away from its body. Then he turned to

me, gross and covered in grime and cuts and bruises, yet beautifully dangerous, and his eyes widened

before he ran at me, dropping to his knees beside me.

He had a vial of healing tonic up to my lips before I could even blink, and he whispered, "Don't

you fuckin' die, witch. Don't you fuckin' die."

"I'm not gonna die," I murmured.

"Bas, you're... there's so much blood, baby," he whispered, and I realized he was truly scared I

was going to bleed out.

“Blaze?”

“He’s moving a little,” Hiro said. “I’ll get him after I know you’re okay.”

Jorah and Thayer rushed over, and Jor kneeled beside me, placed his hand over the wound, and

started pushing his earth magic into me. It felt warm and tingly, but also kind of hurt because the

wound was so deep.

Jor said, “Toby’s giving healing tonics to all the Bonded. Blaze will be okay. As soon as he’s able

to transform into his small size, we’ll bring him over.”

Thank you, I said in my head so I didn’t have to use my mouth.

Hiro moved to put my head on his lap, and he rubbed my cheeks and hair to distract me. Jorah

forced Hiro to drink a healing tonic, to my relief, so Hiro’s wounds were closing up, thank the

Mother. While Jor helped us, Toby called Alec, so I figured a BCA team would be showing up soon.

Jorah finished healing me, but said, “I can’t get it all. You’ll have to get Dad to help.”

Hiro asked, “But he’ll be okay?”

Jorah sent him a smile. “Yeah, Hiro, he’ll be just fine.”

Hiro blew out a breath, sagging a little, and kissed my forehead. I heard him mutter, “Thank god,”

to himself.

Thayer walked over, carrying Blaze in bearded dragon form, and set him on my chest. My Bonded

was still hurting, just as badly as me, so he snuggled his head under my chin and rested there. I gave

him a few weak pats and said through our Bond, *Thank you for saving me. Are you okay?*

He sent me waves of affection and love, so I sent them back and settled, knowing he'd be okay.

Thayer held up something that looked like a coin for everyone to see and said, "Found this on one

of them." My vision was a little blurry from blood loss, but I knew what it was immediately and

groaned, making Hiro tense.

Jorah made a disgruntled sound in his throat. "They were the Order of Salvation: Faction Sixteen.

Mother of All, how many factions are there?"

"What in the hell is that?" Hiro asked.

Since I was having trouble breathing fully, Jor answered, "They're an ancient order set out to

destroy the Three and claim the power for themselves. They keep sending factions after us, each one

with a different plan, but this is the highest number faction we've seen." He sighed and rubbed his

forehead. "All the witch murders, you felt their energies, right?" Thayer and I nodded, and Jorah blew

out a breath. “They must’ve been trying to collect as much energy as possible to take us down.

They’re smarter than they look. They somehow placed phone calls earlier or had someone else do it,

and they waited until Bas walked away and we were separated to attack. Choosing Armina this time,

it wasn’t a coincidence. It was a trap.”

I felt Hiro’s concern grow, but a bunch of BCA agents arrived on scene, so everyone was hustling

and bustling around us. Hiro helped me sit up, using his chest to lean on, but we didn’t otherwise

move. They had called Ailin as well, so I figured we could just wait here for him.

After we were questioned, Hiro whispered, “How do you feel?”

“Like I got stabbed in the fucking stomach.”

He frowned. “What can I do to help?”

“Sit there and be my eye candy while we wait for my dad to come save my ass like he always

does.”

A gasp to the side made me turn my head as much as I could to find Ailin standing there with wide

eyes. When those greens met my gaze, he whispered, “Did you just call me your dad?”

I held his gaze. “Yeah... I did.”

He walked over to me and pulled me into a hug—I ignored the pain—and whispered, “I love you,

kiddo. You know I’ve always considered you mine... my son.”

“I know... I know... Dad.” That felt foreign on my tongue, but also sort of right. Weird for sure,

but I think I liked it.

He squeezed me tighter, and I felt his magic wrap around me. It was familiar and had always

made me feel safe, and this time was no different as he healed me, then healed Blaze further. Once

Ailin healed us, he went to help a few other people, but Hiro and I had to answer a bunch of

questions. Since I was exhausted from magic use, being injured, and being healed, Hiro stayed behind

me, holding me up and letting me use him as a chair.

Alec came over to me and pulled me forward a little, out of Hiro’s arms and into a hug, muttering,

“I’m glad you’re okay.”

I awkwardly patted his back because what the hell?

He released me—Hiro pulled me to his chest again—and I sighed. “I’m sorry for earlier. I tried to

talk Petunia out of taking him in, but she wouldn’t listen.”

“She listened to me,” I said.

He snorted. “I think calling her ‘The Bitchiest Bitch to Ever Bitch’ probably

did it. I'll remember

that for next time.”

I snorted and Hiro said, “Please tell me he didn’t really say that to the fuckin’ leader of the

country.”

“I totally said that,” I said.

Hiro groaned.

“What? She knows me, so it’s not like she was surprised. She’s known me since I was a teenager.

Trust me, I’m much better now.”

“That’s what you think.” Alec chuckled before sighing and saying, “Listen, Bas, I owe you a huge

apology. I know I’ve been coming down on you a lot over the months, and I just want to say sorry. It

isn’t an excuse, but once your numbers went down, I was getting a lot of shit from Petunia and the

other officials for letting things slide with you. You’re expensive sometimes when you blow shit up,

but I’ve always been able to justify it because you bring results. When that stopped happening, they

cracked on me even harder than usual about spending costs. They kept saying I was biased because

you’re family, and no matter how many times I said it had nothing to do with that, they didn’t believe

me.”

“You should’ve told me that to begin with. You were acting like you hated me,” I said.

“Bas... Please tell me you don’t really think that. You know you’re like my little brother, right?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“I’m sorry.” He scrubbed his hand over his face. “When I found out Aspen was pregnant again, I

was stressed. You know her last pregnancy wasn’t an easy one, so I’ve been worried about her on top

of work shit. I didn’t mean to take it out on you.”

I could tell he meant it, so I said, “It’s fine, Al.” I shot him a grin. “But now you owe me about a

million favors.”

He sighed. “That’s probably fair.”

“Or just one big one.”

He eyed me. “What do you have in mind?”

“Hire Hiro as my partner.”

Alec stared at me for a few seconds, then nodded. “Done.” He slapped me on the shoulder and

stood. “Hiro, come to my office next Monday to fill out the paperwork. Bas, take the rest of the week

off to relax. Come in on Monday with your viramore.”

“Thanks, Al,” I said.

“Thank you,” Hiro called to his retreating back, then said to me, “Glad he finally apologized to you.”

“Me too. So I told you I’d get you a job at the BCA.”

“You sure that’s what you want?”

My head jerked around, trying to see him. “What? Yeah, it is, but it’s more about what you want. I

know you’ve been working alone for a long time, so is this what you want? You’d still use your

hunting skills, but you’d be all official.”

He squinted his eyes.

I added, “Okay, *mostly* official. You know I like bending the rules when I need to.”

“You crazy rulebreaker you.”

“Would you answer me, dimple face?”

He snorted out a laugh, pressed his nose to my hair so his mouth was by my ear, and whispered,

“The only problem I see is bein’ able to keep my hands off ya long enough to catch our marks.”

I snorted. “I’m sure you’ll manage.”

He groaned. “We’ll see about that. Maybe you’ll have to wear a giant sweatshirt or somethin’ to

cover yourself better around me.”

“Not happening.”

“Doesn’t matter, I’d still want to bone ya.”

I put my hand on my chest and mocked, “Mother of All, you are just so fucking romantic, Hiro.

How could I possibly resist you?”

He rolled his eyes and chuckled.

Once we were all set, only tired and a little sore, Hiro helped me to the car and took me home.

Even though it was the middle of the night, Seb had texted and said that Rasha was worried about us

and was pacing the living room. She came running out of the big house as soon as we parked and gave

us each a huge hug before we headed to our house. It felt like it took an eternity, but eventually, we got

up to my bedroom. Hiro used a stored spell to clean us up, and when we climbed into bed, Rasha got

in, too.

She moved to the middle of the bed, and Blaze climbed on her chest, so I settled on my side,

facing her. Hiro lay on her other side, propped up on his elbow to watch us. Rasha grabbed my hand,

so I scooted closer to put my arm around her stomach.

She met my eyes and whispered, “I was scared you weren’t coming home.”

“Oh, sweetpea, why in the world would you think that?” I asked as I hugged her. It wasn’t like she

would’ve known we were attacked. We had only told her we were working today, or yesterday at this

point, because no eight-year-old needed to know all the shit that went down.

“I could tell you were hurt,” she whispered.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“When you got hurt, my chest kinda got tight, and I somehow knew it was you and not Daddy.”

I met Hiro’s wide eyes and whispered, “Maybe it’s from the kelpie spring?”

“Is that possible?” Hiro asked.

I shrugged. “Probably. She has fae magic in her now, just like you, anything’s possible.” I bopped

Rasha on the nose. “Sweetpea, you don’t ever have to worry about those things, okay? I’m so sorry

you were scared, but I’m okay. Daddy and Blaze protected me.”

She scratched Blaze’s neck. “You have to live forever with me, remember?”

My throat clogged with emotion for a moment, and I had to clear it a few times. “I remember.”

“Good.” She gazed up at her dad. “You have to live forever with us, too.”

He smiled down at her. “I know, peanut. That’s the plan.”

She nodded. “Okay.”

Hiro and I said, “Okay.”

Hiro ran his finger over her cheek. “Go to sleep, baby girl. We’ll be right here when you wake up.”

As she drifted off, Hiro started running his fingertips over the arm I had draped over her, and I

closed my eyes, but opened them when Hiro spoke. “You better give me forever, shadow boy.”

I met his eyes. “Like you said, that’s the plan.”

He nodded at that, then bent down to kiss Rasha’s cheek, then my hand before settling in for sleep.

Despite the craziness earlier and the emotional rollercoaster of the past few hours, this right here with

my little family, was the perfect ending to the day.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - F O U R

H I R O

As soon as I shut the front door, I took a deep breath, then smiled when I heard Bas curse from

up in the bedroom. Perfect. Right where I wanted him.

Pushing off the door, I took the stairs two at a time, and when I strolled into the bedroom and

kicked the door shut, Bas turned to me with a curious expression, asking, “What are you doing?”

Without responding, I stepped up to him so we were nose to nose, not quite touching, but almost.

Considering we hadn't been able to really mess around all week, my dick was already interested

from just bein' so close to him.

When Bas sucked in a gasp, and I felt the instant he went from curious to lustful, I quickly grabbed

his arm, turned him, and pressed his chest to the wall with his arm in my grasp behind his back. I ran

my nose along his shoulder, up his neck, and to his ear and tugged it between my teeth.

"Wh-what are you doing?" he whispered.

Keeping a firm hold on his wrist, I used my other hand to brush the skin under his shirt along the

waistband of his pants. When he sucked in another breath, I pushed my hand inside and wrapped it

around his thickening cock.

"Oh fuck." He rested his forehead against the wall. "I thought you were taking me out on a date?"

"I'll take you out for breakfast tomorrow." I nibbled on the back of his neck.

"Rasha's staying the night with Ailin?"

"And stayin' through lunch tomorrow, at least, though the girls informed me they were goin' to

have a two-night sleepover, so we'll see." Not exactly what I wanted to be talking about right now,

but I wanted to get everything out of the way so he wouldn't be distracted tonight. Rasha was stayin'

in the big house for the first time in weeks, and I planned on taking advantage of every damn second.

“Hiro,” he whined when he tried to move to get a little friction but couldn’t because my body was

holding him in place.

“Any more questions before I get ya naked?”

He shook his head.

“Good.” I released his wrist and turned him to lean his back on the wall, and I couldn’t help but

grin at his hooded-eye expression. Grabbing his chin, I pressed a hard kiss to his lips and whispered

against them, “I’ve been dyin’ to tie you up all day.”

He gasped again, and I smirked as his lust shot up a few more notches. Perfect.

As I kissed along his neck, I slowly started stripping him. Luckily, he hadn’t finished getting ready

or I would’ve had a hell of a time with all his bracers. Even so, he still had too many clothes on.

I pushed his tactical vest off his shoulders, letting it fall to the ground before wiping his shirt over

his head and throwing it to the side. As I unbuttoned his pants, I started kissing my way down his

chest, taking his nipple between my teeth. He buried his fingers in my hair, so I turned my head to kiss

his wrist before kneeling and pulling his pants down. I groaned. “Goin’

commando?”

“You said it was date night,” he said breathlessly.

I grinned at him and started kissing his stomach, hips, and thighs, never touching the one place I

knew he was dying for me to touch as he helped me get his pants all the way off. I gave a nip to his

belly before standing, and Basil reached for my shirt, but I caught his wrists.

“You have on too many clothes,” he whimpered.

I smirked, stepped closer, and pulled his hands behind his back. I hauled him into my chest, turned

us, and walked him backward to the bed while he nuzzled into my neck and kissed me there. Pushing

him back, I lifted his arms above his head, then flattened him out and pulled him into the center of the

bed. He was putty in my hands, still watching with those dark-hooded eyes—curious, excited, and

turned on.

Seeing him naked in the middle of the bed was making my cock strain against my zipper, and part

of me was regretting still wearing pants.

I crossed his wrists over his head, kissed his lips, and said, “Keep ‘em crossed.”

Bas nodded, so I got up and grabbed the long silk ties I’d bought the other day. I tied one end to

the bedpost, and the other end to his wrist, then did the same on the other side.

His breathing kicked up a notch, so I moved closer to him and whispered, “Okay?”

He nodded, then jerked his head to his hard cock that was leaking precum on his belly and thigh.

“Please tell me you’re gonna take your clothes off.”

I chuckled. “Don’t you worry, love, I’m going to be inside you tonight, but I’m gonna torture you

for a bit first.”

“Like I couldn’t tell from the smirk on your face.”

I pinched his nipple hard enough to make him yelp, but he chuckled as soon as I let go. Bending

down, I gave it a little kiss before making my way down his body with tongue, lips, and teeth.

Crawling between his thighs, I lifted one leg and began kissing and licking my way up from his ankle

all the way to the crease at his groin, then I lifted his other leg and gave it the same ministrations.

When I reached the top of that leg and skipped over his cock to suck a hickey on his hip, and he

groaned in frustration, making me laugh.

“Hiro,” he moaned, sounding like a curse and a prayer at the same time.

I kissed his hip with a smile, then pushed his legs up so I could kiss the back of his thighs as close

to his hole and balls as possible without touching them. He groaned again and pulled on his restraints,

and I finally sucked one of his balls into my mouth. The moan he gave me was a thing of beauty.

After sucking in the other one, I finally made my way up to his cock and took him to the back of

my throat. He screamed out, bucking his hips, but I placed an open palm on his belly to keep him still.

I sucked and licked until I felt him ready to come, then grabbed the base of his cock and squeezed to

stop him.

He whimpered and wiggled beneath me, then glared at me. I caught his foot before he could kick

my shoulder, and grinned at him. “You’re just askin’ for more punishment, aren’t ya?”

He glared harder, so I bent down to take him into my mouth again, my hands wandering over his

warm skin, playing with his nipples, his balls, everywhere. I brought him to the brink before pulling

off and squeezing his base to stop his orgasm.

“Hiro,” he complained. “Please. Please, please, please.”

I did it one more time, and this time when I stopped, he was actually pissed.

“I’m going to murder you if you don’t let me come.”

I chuckled. “You’re pretty when you’re angry.”

He nudged my shoulder with his knee, so I caught it and kissed it before I held my hand up to his

mouth and thought, *Wet it*, at him. He licked and sucked on my fingers with a glare, obviously still

pissed at me. With a chuckle, I pulled my hand away and pressed a finger into his ass as I took him to

the back of my throat again. It didn't take long before he was ready to orgasm, and he pushed my back

with his foot as if that would keep me from pulling off too soon again.

This time I let him come, and seeing him, feeling him, fall apart had me groaning around him. I

swallowed every last drop and let him ride out his orgasm. Because of our connection, it felt so good

to me, too, that I almost came in my pants without even touching myself.

As soon as he finished, I flipped him over onto his stomach so his wrists were uncrossed now,

then I tucked a pillow under his hips, spread his cheeks and ran my tongue along his crack, making

him quiver beneath me.

"Hiro," he breathed.

"I'm not even close to being done with you."

He whimpered at that.

My own cock was begging me to free it, but if I pulled my clothes off, I wouldn't be able to stop

myself from burying my cock inside his sweet hole, and I wasn't ready for this to be over yet.

I used my tongue and fingers until he was ready for round two, then I kept going—licking, sucking,

and biting on his hole. When he was close, I pulled his hips up and reached around to tug on his cock,

and then he was coming again, falling apart beneath me, his magic was shooting out all over the place,

and he trembled. Again, I felt his orgasm through our link and almost came again untouched.

This time, I gave him a few minutes to catch his breath, mostly because I knew if I kept playing

with him, I was bound to come in my pants. He was just too beautiful like this.

“Mother of All, Hiro,” he said, still panting.

“Still not done with you.”

He groaned. “I think you already killed me.”

I smacked his ass lightly, then started pressing kisses along his skin. Since I knew he was

sensitive right now, I gently caressed his skin with my fingers and mouth, running them along his back,

the curve of his ass, and his thighs. I worshipped every inch of his skin, even turnin' him onto his back

again to worship his front. I could tell how much he was enjoying every second I cherished his body,

and it made me smile against his skin.

He was gorgeous, and I was dying to be inside him, but I wanted him to enjoy it, so I took my

time. I needed time to calm down, anyway, otherwise, I'd be coming the second I was inside him. It

seemed that hours passed as I caressed every part of him.

I stood from the bed and stripped, watching as his eyes raked over me.

When his cock started to fill again, and I felt his lust stirring, I flipped him back onto his belly,

then pushed him closer to the headboard and pulled him up to his hands and knees. He held onto the

silk ties that were still connected to the bed and pushed his ass back in open invitation.

I held my hand in front of his face and said, "Lube," so he muttered the spell, fillin' my hand with

lube. I slathered it on my leaking, hard cock, then pushed my fingers inside his entrance again, making

him groan and push back, fucking himself on my fingers as I slicked him up.

Fucking hell, if he didn't stop, I was going to come before I had a chance to feel his tight warmth.

"Then you better fucking get inside me now," Bas said, obviously overhearing my thoughts.

I smacked his ass. "I'll fuck you when I'm ready."

He groaned. "Why are you such an asshole?"

That earned him another ass slap, but he didn't seem to mind if the smirk on his face was anythin'

to go by.

Lining myself up with his hole, I held the base of my cock with one hand and his hip with the

other, then pushed my way inside. His body easily accepted me since I fucked him as often as

possible, even if we normally had to be much quieter.

He pushed back on me, so I slowly slid all the way in and groaned at his tight heat. No matter how

many times we did this, it would never be enough. Holding still to allow him time to adjust was

difficult, so the second he shifted to tell me he was ready, I slid almost all the way out and slammed

back home. He moaned prettily, so I did it again and again. With each rut of my hips, little tingles of

pleasure spread from my cock outward until I felt that pleasure in every cell of my body.

Grabbing his hips, I changed my angle to be sure I was hittin' his spot with every thrust, and he

moaned and groaned even louder. I picked up the pace, being sure to slam as deep as possible.

My orgasm was building in my gut, and I felt Bas's building again, too, so I reached between his

legs to pump his cock and used my other hand to hold onto his shoulder, applying a little pressure on

his throat with one finger. It made him whimper and keen, and hearing that sweet sound pushed me

over the edge until I was seeing stars. The room seemed to light up around me as euphoria filled my

veins a second before the dark blast of Basil's magic blacked out the light and sent another wave of

bliss through me.

My body quivered as I emptied into Basil's ass, and he emptied onto the sheets again.

I stilled as I came down, then fell over him, kissing his shoulder. He flattened on the bed,

breathing heavily, but I couldn't move.

After a few minutes, I pulled myself out of his ass and reached up to untie his wrists. I frowned at

the slight red marks on his wrists, but he turned his head and shot me a lazy smile that I kissed, and he

said in my head, *It's fine—no, it's good, promise.*

When he was free, I pulled him into my arms and treasured having his sated, warm body pressed

against my skin.

“I think you killed me. Am I dead?”

I chuckled. “Nope, still kickin’.”

“I’ve never come that many times so close together... I don’t even know how you managed that.”

I preened a little under the compliment, and he smacked my shoulder in protest.

“Don’t get cocky.” When I snorted, he added, “Cocki *er*.”

I kissed the top of his head and buried my nose in his hair.

Another minute passed before he muttered a spell to clean the mess off the sheets. I was pleased

that he left our skin alone because I loved smelling our scents mixed together. That was somethin’ I’d

had to adjust to since drinking that kelpie water. My senses were on overdrive all the time, and I had

an even deeper need to make sure anyone that came near Bas knew who he belonged to. Irrational?

Yes, but he told me many times that he liked people knowin’ who I belonged to as well, so as long as

my viramore didn’t mind, what-the-fuck-ever. My hum of appreciation must’ve told him how I felt

about him leaving our mixed scents together because he chuckled.

“You’re such a weirdo.”

“No weirder than you.”

He snorted and scooted in to press his nose against the side of my neck.

“Hiro?”

“Yeah?”

“I love you.”

I smiled. “I love you, too.”

“I like when you’re like this.”

“Like what? Sweaty and covered in your cum?”

“Gross.”

“You said it.”

“I did not.” He smacked my shoulder, then buried his fingers in my hair. “I mean when you don’t

mind me cuddling up against you.”

I frowned at that. “I never mind that.”

He sighed and started tracing my tattoos like he tended to do anytime I was shirtless around him.

“You, my dear Hiro, are absolutely not a cuddler.”

I kissed his forehead and murmured, “Sorry.”

He scooted closer. “Don’t be. Your sexiness makes up for it.”

I snorted. “Sometimes you’re so sweet, I don’t know what to do with you.”

“Sarcastic much?”

I grinned and pressed my lips to his forehead again, then repeated, “Sorry,” because I wanted to

give him everything he needed, and it seemed like maybe I wasn’t.

“You’re sometimes a little cuddly if we’re sitting on the couch, and sometimes I sneak close when

you’re asleep, but you don’t hold me too much.”

I was quiet for a minute. “Do you wish I did?”

He shrugged. “Maybe sometimes, but I kinda like you the way you are.”

I snorted at that and pulled him closer. “I kinda like you, too.”

He chuckled, making me smile, then he leaned up and licked my dimple and hummed.

“You’re such an oddball.”

“Your oddball.” He snuggled back into me and went back to tracing my tattoos. “I think I could

trace them for ten years straight and still discover new ones. They’re beautiful.”

“Thanks.” I nuzzled into his hair and sighed. “I like yours, too.” He had a lot less than I did, but as

with everything, they were sexy on him.

He kissed my chest in thanks. “You’re going to take me out in the morning?”

“Yes. I promised you a date, but I wanted to take advantage of bein’ alone in the house first.”

“I’m glad you did.”

“Me too.” I kissed his forehead again. “Go to sleep, love.”

He hummed and scooted in further, somehow. I reached down awkwardly to grab the newly

cleaned blanket and covered us both, bein’ sure to hold him tight. I never wanted to let go.

E P I L O G U E

B A S I L

FIVE YEARS LATER

“But she’s only thirteen,” Hiro said, grinding his teeth together.

“She’ll be fourteen in a month, babe.” I rolled my eyes and lined up my next shot. Rasha was

definitely at that age where one minute she was the sweet little girl she’d always been, and the next,

she was an angsty teenager who thought her parents were wrong about absolutely everything. She and

Hiro had been arguing constantly all week—both of them were hotheads, and for me of all people to

be saying that was a little crazy.

“Yeah, but she *likes* this boy.”

“She’s going to have crushes, babe. She’s a teenager.”

He grunted. “Argh. Don’t remind me. We shouldn’t let her go. Boys are assholes.”

“That kid is actually pretty sweet, if you remember when you scared the shit out of him at the

school play last month.” It was hard not to laugh at the memory of Hiro towering over a little thirteen-

year-old and basically interrogating him—okay, I’d totally laughed at him as I’d dragged his ass away

from the poor kid.

Hiro grunted again. He knew the kid was sweet, he just didn’t want to admit it.

“It’s a birthday party at the kids’ house with his parents home and a bunch of other kids. I already

talked to his parents to make sure they’ll really be there, and they assured me they will.” I released

my throwing knife and hit the bullseye, although it was just a *tad* off center.

Hiro sighed, stepped up, and threw his throwing knife without hardly aiming, and the fucking thing

went smack center.

“How are you so good at this?” I asked.

“I will never reveal my secrets.”

I snorted. We were in Faela for the weekend, and since he was frustrated, I thought a little

competition would help. So far, he was kicking my ass.

He sighed with a big frown on his face. He was practically pouting, and I sort of wanted to make

fun of him, but instead, I said, “We can always spy for a few minutes to make sure the parents really

stay home. We’re dropping her off, anyway.” I threw a knife at the second target.

“She’ll kill us if she catches us.” He threw his knife and hit center again.

“For fuck’s sake.” I sighed. “Then we won’t spy, and we’ll trust her instead.”

Hiro groaned. “Why does she have to keep growing up?”

I dropped the rest of my throwing knives on the ground and moved closer to him to grab his neck

and pull him down to kiss me. After a few seconds, he dropped his knives and wrapped me in his

arms, deepening our kiss and holding me tight.

When he broke our kiss, I said telepathically, *It's going to be alright, Hiro. She's smart and*

strong and brave, and she has a shit-ton of spells in her jewelry and bracers if she ever needs

them. Rasha wasn't a witch, obviously, but she could still release stored spells, and because of her

Faela blood, magic responded well to her. Magic, water, and sometimes a bit of some psychic ability

no one understood. We were going to start doing some lessons with water to see if she had an affinity

for it. Hiro had mostly gained extra senses, strength, and speed, but nothing like what Rasha had.

"I know," Hiro said. "I know you're right, but I don't want her to grow up."

"I know." I leaned up to peck his lips.

"Dad! Paelie!" Rasha yelled from the side of the house.

Breaking apart, I turned to find Rasha coming up the pathway that led to the butterfly garden, so I

asked, "What's up?"

"Uncle Jorah's acting really weird," she answered. "I think you should come see him."

My brow furrowed, and I felt Hiro's concern, so the two of us quickly followed her down the

pathway, through the fairy archway, past the butterfly garden, and to the pink beach.

Rasha pointed to Jorah, who was at the edge of the water, and she said, “He’s been doing that for

like an hour, but now he’s mumbling to himself.”

Hiro tilted his head to the side, but I stepped closer to see what the hell my little brother was

doing. He’d been blocking me all day, but now that I concentrated, I could feel that he was agitated. I

hadn’t noticed before because I’d thought it was only Hiro’s agitation I was feeling.

As I moved closer, I realized Jorah was pulling any fallen or dead trees he could find to the edge

of the water, making a pile. And it didn’t seem like he was simply doing it to clean up the beach.

“Whatcha doing, Jor?” I asked.

Without looking up from his ministrations, he said, “Something’s wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can feel it. I can...” He trailed off and finally stared at me, and I was taken aback by how

haggard he looked. It had only been a few hours since I saw him, and he hadn’t been like that. “I can’t

wait any longer.”

“Can’t wait for what?” I asked.

He flung his arm out, pointing toward the sea. “I have to go there. I can’t wait anymore.

Something’s *wrong*.” He was visibly upset now.

I stepped closer to him with my hands out, then gently grabbed his shoulders to get him to focus on

me. “Okay. Do you feel like your magic’s messed up or—”

“No, Bas! I’ve always felt drawn to the north, you know that. But something is *fucking wrong*.”

He was almost vibrating with frustration and impatience. I could feel it under my hands and through

our link.

That made me pause. “You want to travel north?”

Jorah’s green eyes filled with unshed tears, and he whispered, “I *have* to go. I. Have. To. I can’t

wait any longer. Something’s wrong, and if I don’t leave now, it’ll be too late.”

“I don’t understand.”

He wiped at his face. “I don’t either, but I have to follow my gut, Bas. I have to.”

I nodded. “Talk to me.”

“I’m building a boat, and I’m going whether you guys like it or not. I don’t care if I have to go by

myself, but I have to go. I *need* to.”

“Okay,” I said softly. “I’ll help you.”

A single tear slipped out of his eye. “You will?”

“Yeah, Jor, I will.” I stepped closer and pulled him into a hug. “Of course I will.”

“Thank you, Bas.” He squeezed me, then pushed away and wiped off his face again before he

started hauling a large tree trunk closer to his pile. I’d start helping with... whatever the fuck that was

once Thay, Toby, Nik, and Talon got here so we could make sure our Three magic was okay. I felt

fine, though.

Thayer, I called him. You guys need to get to the beach. Jorah is—

We’re already on our way. Be there in a few minutes.

Hiro and Rasha came closer, and Hiro said, “Guess we’re going on an adventure?”

“I guess so.” I stepped into Hiro’s side, and he put his arm over my shoulders.

Rasha said, “If you guys think I’m going on some weird sea adventure with you and Uncle Jorah,

you’re crazy.”

I chuckled, and Hiro snorted, saying, “I’m sure Ailin and Seb won’t mind if you stay with them for

a few days, but remember we can and will portal back to check on you at any given time.”

She rolled her eyes. “I know the routine.”

“And if you set one little toe outta line, you won’t be goin’ to your boyfriend’s party next

weekend.”

“He’s not my boyfriend.” She scowled.

I said, “Yet.”

She gave me a look like I was a traitor. “Paelie, stop it. Don’t make it worse.”

“Sorry, sorry. I was only teasing you, sweetpea.”

She sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “I know.”

Hiro said, “I’m serious, Rasha. You have to behave and listen to Seb and Ailin.”

She dropped her hand and glared at him. “I *know* that, Dad! You do realize I’m a straight-A

student, and I *never* get in trouble, right?”

Hiro tilted his head. “Yeah, but I’m still tryin’ to figure out if you’re really that well-behaved, or

if you’re just that good at hidin’ things.”

She smirked, definitely a Hiro expression if I ever saw one. “And you’ll never know.”

A laugh came out of me before I could suppress it, and Hiro pinched my side as he said, “We’ll

figure out details tonight.”

“Thank you.”

“She is so your daughter,” I said.

“Poor kid.”

With a snort, I glanced up at my viramore. “You’re really going to come with me?”

He rolled his eyes. “Of course I am. I’m always with ya, witch.”

I smiled. “Yeah. I know, hunter.”

He kissed my hair, then released me, and the three of us went to help my brother with his crazy-

ass plan.

The End

A U T H O R ’ S N O T E

Thank you for reading Hiro, Basil, and Rasha’s story. Bas, Hiro, and Rasha took me on a very wild

ride while writing and ended up doing things in a totally different way than I’d planned. It probably

isn’t that surprising considering how stubborn Bas and Hiro are, and how they have no problem

making their opinions known. Despite the sleepless nights and pulled-out hair, I’m very, very glad

they shared their story with me because I ended up falling so in love with their little family. I truly

hope you enjoyed it.

Up next will be Jorah’s adventure to northern Faela in *Jorah: The Brinnswick Chronicles IV*.

After Jorah, Talon will be getting the final full-length book in this series. I

say full-length, because

Mother knows that I'll want to come back to this world and write a few other side characters at some

point! I've loved writing this world and all of these characters so much, so I highly doubt I'll ever

really leave them for good.

Thank you again for reading, and until the next one, as the fae say, may the stars watch over you.

Love,

Michele

A B O U T M I C H E L E N O T A R O

Michele is married to an awesome husband that puts up with her and all the characters in her head—and there are many. They live

together in Baltimore, Maryland with their two young boys and two crazy dogs. She grew up dancing and swimming and taught dance—

ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, & modern—for ten years before her kids came along. Now she stays home to write about the sexy men in her

head and does PTA everything—as long as coffee is involved. Two other tattooed moms run the PTA with her, and though she wants to

rip her hair out from it, she still loves it.

MICHELE'S LINKS:

[Website](#)

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Join my [Newsletter](#) to keep up to date on my upcoming books!

Facebook Reader Group: [Notaro's Haven](#) ~ stop by for exclusives, updates, and lots of fun!

If you're interested in more paranormal books and fun, check out the paranormal Facebook group, [Reading Past the Realm](#), for more from me and many other authors!

Feel free to contact me on Facebook or email. I'd love to hear from you!

A L S O B Y M I C H E L E N O T A R O

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[*The Witch's Seal*](#)

[*The Enchanter's Flame*](#)

[*The Enchanter's Soul*](#)

[*The Witch's Blood*](#)

[*The Enchanter's Heart*](#)

The Brinnswick Chronicles: (Witch Romance)

[*Thayer*](#)

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More to come in this series

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[How We Survive](#)

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Interlocking Fragments: (Contemporary Romance Collab with Sammi Cee)

[Heart Strain](#)

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[Liberating Love](#)

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Malachai Brothers: Behind the Veil: (Paranormal- Ghosts- Collab with K.M. Neuhold)

[Akasha Sanatorium](#)

Audiobooks:

[*The Enchanter's Flame*](#)

[*The Enchanter's Soul*](#)

[*The Witch's Blood*](#)

[*The Enchanter's Heart*](#)

[*How We Survive*](#)

[*Rescuing His Heart*](#)

A L S O B Y B O B B I E R A Y N E

My Young Adult books under the name Bobbie Rayne

The Crazy Adventures of Cass & Star: (Paranormal Young Adult)

[*do you think we should've glued it first?*](#)

More to come in this series...

The Triumphs of the Everette Brothers: (Contemporary YA collab with Steph Marie)

[*Genuinely Extraordinary*](#)

More to come in this series...

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