

Mardi Gras Publishing Presents...  
Stella and Audra Price

*Sire*  
*in his eyes*



**Dragon Elementals 1**

# Mardi Gras Publishing, LLC

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Dragon Elementals 1:

Fire in His Eyes

By

Stella and Audra Price



## Prologue

Char watched her cross the yard, delicately avoiding the puddles on the rain soaked path. He loved the way she moved, like a beautiful little mouse, full of purpose. She was small and pixyish and absolutely perfect. Alcyone, his Alcyone. She'd recently had her hair cut short and it spiked with the rain water. He didn't mind the loss of her long hair, she was her own woman and free to do as she pleased. The cut suited her, especially wet, a low growl escaped his throat; he loved to see her wet.

She'd been wet the first time he'd seen her, he'd fallen in love with her that day. The moment he'd seen her walk into the French hotel, she had his heart. Just out of the rain, her long hair slicked back, she was perfect. It was love at first sight, although she could never know about him. Dragons stayed away from demons, for their own safety. It was forbidden. So he watched her, learned everything there was to know about her.

"I do love it when it rains." The sharp gleeful voice pulled him from his thoughts.

He turned from the fire and stood to face his reluctant ally. "Of course you do Kael. Please tell me you didn't come all the way up here to tell me things that I'm already aware of."

Kael was tall and thin, his body lacking the strength to pose any real physical threat to Char's smaller, broader built one. However, with water dragons the threat came from within. They were intelligent and cunning, but also very aloof, they liked to sit on every fence they could. Char, on the other hand, as the only full-fledged fire dragon in their little family, gave everything to every cause. Very much like his element, everything

about him was do or die. Intense and consuming everything in his path, unlike his calmer, more thoughtful counterpart. Together they balanced each other out, kept the other in check and helped to protect the remaining six or so dragons in their house.

Apart they were a natural disaster, quite literally. They stayed together most of the time, whether they hated each other or not. There had never been any love lost between the two, who had often been pitted against each other to fight. Race against race. The demons that had full control over them and their elements were violent and untrusting. As a dog answers their master the dragons could not help but obey. Char had once been a prized fighter; he'd headed legions of fire dragons before the uprising.

Kael on the other hand had been an advisor to one of the greatest demon kings ever to walk the Afterverse. The demon had offered them freedom from the rigid traditions, had even taken a dragon as a wife. As all uprisings go, however, they were crushed; they were defeated before the fighting had even begun. The Ice King had been captured by the Fire King before the dragon and demon armies could amass.

The specifics to why, were Kael's story. A story he kept well guarded and close to his heart. There were only two alive today that truly knew the truth behind the King's demise, Char had never been interested in the particulars though. They had all been present for the King's execution, he had never seen someone look so defeated, though the taunts and torture had had no effect on the once great Ice King

But they'd had little time to mourn the king, as the cull began. Afraid of another, more successful, uprising, Furerety, the King of the Fire Demons, demanded the death of every dragon of every element, no matter of their loyalty. Few escaped him, most knelt reverently before his sword, like dogs. Those who escaped vowed never to be slaves again; they lived in permanent hiding from the demons. They interacted with humans rarely and avoided the demons and fey at all costs.

Then there were the remaining dragons of his kind, the fire dragons who believed that they could be forgiven by presenting Furerety with the heads of the transgressors. There weren't many of them, only two or three left, and they posed no threat whatsoever to Char, but a lone earth or water dragon could easily be overpowered. So

they stayed in numbers, numbers which dwindled by the century. Already they had lost the air elementals all together.

"There used to be so many of us." Char whispered. The thought of the true numbers that had been lost to the world horrified him.

The water dragon winced. "True, but there are very few females left; none of my nature, I'm afraid the water elements are already doomed. There are however, a few fire dragons out there, we could start up a breeding program for you, friend." He said, his tone whiny and mocking.

"I have no interest in saving my species. Unless that's a royal order, Highness?" Char smiled. As one of two water elementals left, Kael was, by extreme default, king of his race. A fact that Char knew he hated above all else.

Kael rolled his eyes. "No, it was not. We both know it's pointless, even with the seven or so fire elementals left, it would be pointless. Then again, inbreeding never seemed to be a problem back in the day, you're living proof of that."

Char narrowed his eyes, ignoring the flickering hatred that he felt for his comrade in arms. In purely elemental form they didn't mix, having a conversation with Kael was like banging his head off a wall; painful and completely pointless. "Did you want something?"

"Nothing important. What are you doing up here all by yourself? You've been doing it more and more lately, almost obsessively."

Char frowned, keeping his face blank. "Nothing, watching the fire. You know how I abhor the gas flame."

"Really? Fire is fire I guess. So, what are you watching in that flame?"

Char shrugged. "Outside. Humans are amusing."

"I guess they are, but not really worth our time."

"What is worth our time? If there's no one left to mate with and the other races don't know of our existence...what is left for us to do?"

Kael's eyes narrowed, whether in thought or suspicion Char didn't know. "We survive. That's all we have left."

Char shrugged. "We have survived. For two thousand years we have survived, I'm tired of surviving."

"You've been thinking again, haven't you?"

"No, I wouldn't dream of it, far too depressing." Char sighed.

"Good, you're flame; it's not built for thinking or control. Leave the thinking to me, we exist, that's what we do."

"Sometimes it happens though; I think we would have been better off with the demons."

Kael spat. "You'd be dead with the demons. We all would be. You'd rather be dead?"

"Well, we're hardly living now. Death would have been kinder on us."

"On you perhaps, all you ever do is lock yourself up here and stare at that candle. Seriously, you should get a hobby, even Spiria has her plants."

"And you have your water sports. What would I do Kael?"

The taller dragon shrugged. "Maybe you should get a job at a crematorium."

Char growled and pushed past the dragon, walking down the stairs before they got into another fight. It would do no good to hit him. He was right though, as much as it pained him to admit it. Char needed something to do; he was fed up living in fear and running. He knew just what he needed to help him out of his slump. He needed her to know he existed.



## Chapter One

The main room of Pinkys was bustling with activity, the staff and the rest of the newly hired helpers were trying to make the room perfect for the Masquerade party that Queen Camions was throwing later that night. Alcyone stood at the bar, clipboard in hand, trying to seem as officious as possible. Her foot tapped on the ebony lacquered floor, the heel of her pumps making an echoing sound that was drowned out by the din of voices. She shook her head and looked at the checklist. The people Camions had hired were indeed efficient, her staff was going above and beyond the call of duty; she realized she was just hanging around for show. The bartender Mic was behind her, rattling off a checklist on a clipboard of his own when she turned to him. "Mic, everything all five by five?" she asked as she put her own clipboard on the newly polished bar.

"Indeed Ms. Sterling. The Queen will be well pleased when she arrives."

She smiled at him and nodded. "Thanks Mic. I want you to personally make sure the masks are all accounted for and numbered. I didn't pay a hundred dollars a pop so that we can lose them." The masks she was talking about were a custom job for the party tonight, and each was unique. When it came to her sovereign, she never spared any expense.

"You can count on me."

She smiled and left the bar, taking in the sights of the room as she did. While what she called the "main showroom" was normally done in black and pink, black walls,

black leather seats and floor, pink lights and curtains on the stage and the railings, it was now being transformed with shimmery silk and crepe material, all silver and graphite, bright blues and purples. By the time the doors were ready to open for the invitation only event, the entire place would be a thing out of a dream, complete with dry ice fog on the floor.

She sighed as she made it to her office door and walked through. Her heart was heavy as she realized that this was yet another function she would attend alone. It was true, she was young for a bargained succubus, only twenty-five in human years, but the fact that she didn't even have any prospects was disconcerting. She knew that most males saw her as a Royal retainer, which she was because she was in favor with the Succubus Queen. It didn't mean she was happy with it. Since graduating high school and starting her life as a succubus, she had been on four dates, and they had all ended badly; while she wasn't one to complain about her raucous sex life, it left something to be desired in the emotional area. She saw how many others had recently found love, were happy in the arms of someone and jealousy ruled her heart. Being single to her was beyond torture, and each function she went to alone made it more and more apparent, seeing all the others around in love.

She shook her head, fighting back tears as she closed the door of the office and leaned against it. *It's just another function Alcyone* she told herself as she had so many times before. *Maybe you'll meet someone this time.*

"Right, that will happen." She said to herself as she moved towards the large, dark desk in the center of the room when she noticed a package, and a blue rose that hadn't been there when she was in the office the night before. "What the hell?" She picked up the rose and sniffed it, the aroma was heady, reminding her of English gardens in a time she had only read about. The package was a black box and she opened it, finding a beautiful black pendant on a crystal-strewn choker. Confused but surprised, she picked up the paper that was attached to the box and read it. The sweeping scrawl was elegant, the ink was a lovely reddish purple.

*Alcyone love,*

*I've been watching you for some time now and must say that I can't get you out of my head. I'm completely enamored of you, love. This is a very belated valentine, I hope you'll accept it and truly be mine. I'll look forward to watching you wear it.*

*All that I am.*

She stopped reading and blinked. “An admirer? What the hell?” she smiled and giggled, looking around, realizing she was still alone in the club, aside from Mic, though she was quite sure he didn’t leave the note or gift. Mic’s boyfriend might have had issues with that. How the package got there was anyone’s guess. The choker was beautiful, and it would match perfectly with the shimmery fairy dress she was wearing for the party. “So they will watch me wear it will they?” The thought of whoever it was watching her and being at the party, for surely that’s what he meant, was an extreme turn on. Whoever it was, they had obviously been watching her for some time. She looked at the choker once again and whistled. It must have cost a fortune, the intricately entwined jet and clear crystal beads were of the highest quality, and she was still confused as to why anyone would spend that kind of money on her, when they didn’t even know her.

It wasn’t like she wasn’t a beauty, most succubi were. She was usually just lost in the throng of beautiful women in the courts, nothing special, nothing unique. That someone had singled her out, well, it made her smile. Wearing the choker would show whoever it was that she appreciated the gesture, and hopefully bring them out of hiding. Having decided to wear it, she picked up the flower and sighed, her mind on this mystery admirer and for the first time in years, letting herself hope for something good without the back draft of despair. She smelled the flower, with its lush floral and slightly citrus smell.

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As she stepped out from behind the back room door, the party was already in full swing. Camions was already holding court to the left of the bar, about ten men obstructed Alcyone's view of her queen. She smirked and shook her head. *This has got to be the reason she plans these things.*

With so many people milling about, all in masks and costumes, she wasn't sure who the invited regulars were and who were the individuals that Camions has specifically invited. She was sure, however, that not everyone here was on the guest list, which was the beauty of it. Crashers at a party such as this were an everyday occurrence, the anonymity their safety net. Surely, her admirer would be here by now. She made sure her own mask was in place, a white domino with what looked like dragon scales and rubies around the eyes, the bottom of her face exposed.

The crowd was dense, the dance floor peppered with bodies moving in time to the music. Alcyone, having entered the dancing throng, surrendered herself to the beat of the music, gyrating in the center of the floor. *So? You're watching me are you?* She thought to herself as she raised her arms above her head, *Goddess I hope you like what you see... whoever you are... join me, please join me.*

She danced some more, gaining anonymous partners here and there, but none were what she was waiting for. The dancing was working her up, the hands touching her, bolder for the anonymity, heightened her awareness of her body, of the sensitivity that was climbing as her temperature rose. She was hitting that aerobic high, her endorphins and her lust threatening to break through from just beneath the surface.

As a succubus, this was dangerous in a normal setting, but tonight, well, she could let go without the worry of setting a crowd of unwitting revelers into an out and out orgy. She felt eyes on her, penetrating, from somewhere in the room. She felt it, coming from all angles, and her body responded to the unseen force. She moved just for the one watching her, her hips gyrating, making the dress whip and sway, beckoning whoever it was to her, daring them to touch her.

Somebody behind her slipped their arms around her waist pulling her against a very hard, masculine body. The stranger inhaled the scent of her hair then rested his hot lips on the side of her throat. "You smell wonderful little one."

She smirked and moved against him, rolling her hips. "Do I?" If this wasn't him, then she hoped her admirer was watching, and hoped what she was doing was making him extremely jealous.

"Yes, you do love. Like fire..."

*Fire eh? I can do fire.* She turned and wrapped her arms around the man that caught her, looking right at her mask's twin, just in blue. She drew in his scent as well, still moving in his arms, her hips making seductive passes, teasing his own. "And you smell like a hot summer night in the Cotswold's."

He smirked down at her. "Really? You think?"

She giggled and nodded. *Is this him? My admirer? Goddess, I hope so...*

He pulled her closer to him as they danced for a while in silence. His body so close to hers, moving with hers, she almost lost her mind. He was large, and she could feel the muscles under his long sleeved grey shirt. Her hands roamed his body as he kept them always touching from the waist down. She could feel him, how aroused he was, his thickness riding low on her belly. *Goddess he feels good. It's got to be him.* She looked up and kissed his warm lips, clutching him close and rotating her hips into his.

He slipped his tongue through her parted lips, and the kiss was explosive. Heat, searing and sexy, ran through her as his tongue danced with hers, the soft feeling of flames licking at the inside of her mouth as he plundered her body and soul. Her body thrummed in time with the rhythm of it, and she used everything she had to hold back a moan. The stranger broke the kiss and smiled down at her. "So my little pixie, do you like what you see? Or were you expecting someone else?"

She shuddered and nodded. "I like what I feel too." she ground her hips into him again and then turned, rubbing her body down his. She felt him everywhere, her body responding to his nearness.

His large hands tightened around her hips, crushing her into him. "Well I always like what I see when I watch you." He whispered into her ear biting teasingly on her lobe.

*It is him... Goddess this luscious man was the one that sent the flower, and the choker.* Her heart was palpitating as she tried to figure out how it was she got so lucky, she turned her head to his ear and purred. "And do you watch me a lot?" His voice was so smoky and thick, all she wanted was to hear it as he touched her, the effect of both sending her into a frenzy she would have had to keep in check were she not at this party.

"Ummm hmmm, I watch you a lot." She could hear the smile in his words, and his hand began to leave her hips. One slid lower and the other higher to cup her breast. "I watch you always. Even when you're alone at night, love." He gently pinched her nipple as his other hand slipped low to cup her through her dress, adding pressure to her clit. "I know where you like to touch yourself..." he whispered, kissing and biting at the sensitive flesh on her neck. "I know how to touch you." He all but growled into her ear.

She shuddered, leaning into his hands. His caresses were bringing her to the edge and the situation, this strange man touching her, telling her such things with such a sexy voice... she shook for him. "You... you do?"

"You're a goddess Alcyone... my goddess. You should be worshipped, let me..."

Her name rolling off his tongue made her whimper. She nodded and licked her lips. "Anything you want, just don't stop touching me."

"Oh, I don't plan to; it's not in my nature. But I'm not into public shows..." A deep chuckle escaped him. "Well, at least not on this dance floor. Should we allow the shadows to provide more cover?"

She nodded and motioned to one of the darkened alcoves. He slowly guided them over, the pounding beat of the music providing enough cover for them both. She followed him, her eyes on his ass, hugged nicely in his dove grey pants. This was crazy; in her life as a succubus, she never had something this out there happen to her. The

corner was dark and void of life as they settled in and she wrapped herself around him, both their masks still in place.

He kissed her deeply, lifting her with ease, and she shuddered and whimpered as he did, wrapping her legs around his waist with a smile.

He growled as he broke the kiss. "You taste just as good as you smell, my love."

She kissed him again, words eluding her. All she could do was feel, and boy, did he feel good. She moaned, her body keening with energy.

He slipped her dress up, his hands kneading her thighs.

"Gods... please..." she bit out as she whimpered, loving the feel of his hands on her bare skin.

He pressed her small frame against the wall, letting her feel his need.

"Baby... please don't tease..."

"Teasing?" He guided his hand between them, and slipped a finger inside of her. "Love, I haven't even begun."

She whimpered again, riding his hand as he touched her, his thumb pressing on her clit. If she had been standing, she wouldn't have lasted long, as it was; her legs were shaking as they were wrapped around his waist. She bucked, trying to get him to move, to touch and caress her wet and wanting flesh.

He tortured well, and he didn't lie when he said he knew just how to touch her. She wondered, idly, just how he was able to watch her alone in her room. She didn't have any windows that faced anything remotely useable to peep from, and unless he was a Caligo, which was entirely possible, he could use the shadows for transport and spying like the shadow court did. *Shit, maybe he is a Caligo* she thought as she moaned into his mouth, a bruising kiss the object of their mutual enjoyment. *Can't be a Caligo, I think I have met all the men, well except for Amaro, but it can't be him.* When he finally slipped his fingers into her willing flesh she surrendered conscious thought. He moved away from her lips and found her neck, biting down hard, and she moaned in response. He growled into her skin, working her harder, his finger raising in temperature and thumbing hotly on her clit.

"Goddess!" she cried out, her body shuddering, her orgasm building. Being a succubus, she often had to feed first to get this worked up and aroused and wondered why it was different tonight. *Probably the sex in the air, that's got to be it, fuck that's so hot, really hot, God he's playing my clit so fucking good.*

"Oh love, that's it, let it go... Ummm, let it all go." He pinched her firmly.

She came hard and panted, purring as she did, surprised. She felt her body shake from what he was doing to her and she licked her lips. "Fantastic" she murmured, her head thrown back, her mask slightly askew.

Removing his finger he smiled smugly. "Told you." He grinned before kissing her and unbuttoning his pants.

She panted, her eyes heavy lidded behind her mask. She reached up and righted it, feeling his knuckles brush her wetness as he undid his pants. She arched to get a better feel of the light caresses he was giving her as he worked his fly open, moaning as he touched her slick and swollen flesh.

He growled, his eyes flashing under his mask a second before he sunk deep into her.

"Fucking Christ!" her body welcomed his cock easily, even though she could feel herself being stretched and quickly. He was big, very big, bigger than she had ever had, and fuck if he didn't fill her perfectly. *God this guy is so perfect, so fucking long and thick; how the hell did I get this lucky?*

"Call me anything you like love." He kissed her hard as he pounded her into the wall in time to the driving music.

She shuddered and moaned, throwing her head back, her eyes to the ceiling. He touched and fucked; his movements deliberate and precise, her body pulled taut like a string.

He nuzzled at the straps of her dress, pulling them down with his teeth, dragging them down and exposing her breasts to the air and his gaze. Her nipples grew hard with exposure, perking up, begging for attention, which he was only too happy to deliver. He sucked one into his mouth, worrying it gently with his teeth.



"Gods!" she panted as he paid such careful attention to her, doing everything she liked. *This man is made for me, Goddess thank you.* Her orgasm was rising again, and she clutched at him harder with her legs around his waist, lowering her head to his ear. "You make me so fucking wet, don't you dare stop."

He grabbed at her back, forcefully pulling her deeper onto him. "Like I said, it's not in my nature." he answered from around her nipple.

She whimpered as her orgasm found her, and screamed clutching him. Her body shook as her cum flowed from her, and she could feel it, hot and slick, coating his cock and herself. Her orgasm triggered his and he followed her over, pouring potent energy directly into her.

She felt him spill into her, heard his roar and the power, the energy he put out from his orgasm hit her full force, like a hot wave crashing on the shore. She arched and soaked him in, so much pure and mystical energy, she could taste it, and she knew if Camions felt this she would have a lot of explaining to do. At this moment she didn't care, the feeding was too pure. She giggled and hiccupped, completely power drunk on her lover, a man she didn't even know.

He held on to her for a moment, before setting her down on her feet. "A lot of demons will have felt that, it won't take them long to locate the source." His lips pressed against her cheek.

She nodded and her lips found his. He kissed her deeply before backing off into the crowd, leaving her with her dress still bunched around her waist.

She opened her eyes to find herself alone, against the wall, her dress askew, and her mask intact. Her lover, or rather the man that had fucked her blind, was gone. She scanned the crowd for his shirt, or the glint of his mask, which in all the time of their liaison, didn't move once. Power drunk, she giggled and righted her dress and pushed off the wall, her legs shaky. "Fuck beans he was good. What the hell was he? Demons don't taste like that." She took stock in her appearance, made it to the door to the back of the building without a hitch and slowly climbed the stairs to her apartment, smiling and giggling. As she made it into the room she knew her night was well and truly over,

nothing could top the erotic encounter, and she was most pleased. Turning she unzipped the dress and stepped out of it, going to the candle in her window and lighting it. It was her only comfort through the lonely nights and tonight, after what she just experienced, only to be left alone afterwards, she was going to need the comfort.

## Chapter Two

It had been a few days since he'd touched her at the ball. Watching was no longer enough; he had to feel her again. To hold her close and take in her lush scent would be more than he deserved. Char knew that he had to take it easy, slow down; he was going to get himself caught. He was getting himself deeper and deeper; he'd been in a room full of demons just to get to her. If any of them had been a controller of fire, he would have instantly been ensnared, helpless. Kael wouldn't have come to his rescue, would Alcyone have? He shook the thought off, his pride not letting him admit the serious danger that he would be in if one of them ever got a hold of him.

Control had never been his strong suit, especially so far away from the ever suspicious Kael. He entered the club easily, as a fire elemental he could travel through a flame of any size as easily as he could breathe. The guilt racked through him as he looked around the empty club, he was selfishly exposing his kind to the demons. They would kill him if they knew, or they'd try and he would have to retaliate.

He hated the thought; he knew a demon and a dragon couldn't work. It could never work between them; it would be fair to all parties if he left. But he couldn't leave her, he was obsessed and she was his. Char would never allow her to be anything else; he knew she felt for him as well, they shared each other. She was his mate, his true mate, regardless of race. In all his long empty years he'd never found anyone like her, she was made for him and he'd be a fool to not go to her, caress her, love her like she was born to be loved.

The candles flickered to life as he walked by, encasing the room in a warm glow. There was a note on the bar waiting for him, written in simple black script. Even her handwriting attracted him. He lifted the note and read it quickly.

*It's been too long. Where are you? Have you been watching? If you have, you know where I stay... I'll be there tonight wishing you were with me, blindfolded.*

*Yours forever.*

He grinned and thrust the note in his pocket as he silently made his way to her room in the upstairs office. He crept into her bedroom for the first time, before he'd only ever watched her through the candle that she kept lit by her window. Sure enough, just like she'd said she was there and wearing a blindfold. He smirked as he soundlessly fell to his knees next to her.

He alerted her to his presence by whispering softly in her ear. "The blindfold comes off, I leave instantly, and I won't come back... understood?"

She nodded and whimpered.

He breathed hotly against her skin, before gently kissing her neck and slipping his tongue down her salty soft chest to her exposed nipple. He sucked it into his mouth hard then released it. "You taste like fire, my love. Did you miss me?"

She cried out and giggled. "Ummm very much, though I don't know who it is I have been aching for. Aren't you going to tell me your name?"

"My name? Is it important to you?"

She nodded. "I'd like to put a name to the pleasure, to the fantastic man that has..." she arched and purred as he kissed her skin just below her breast "Lord that's good. I wanna know you. Since I can't see you, I have to have something to scream when you make me come."

He chuckled, "You make a very convincing case, love." His hot breath ghosted over her. "Very well, there is nothing in a name. You can call me Char."

"Ummm Char... I like that... and gods I like what you're doing to me... Ummm so do I get to touch you love? Or no?"

His hand touched her other breast, gently kneading her while he considered. "I'm not so sure that'll be such a good idea. I wouldn't want to hurt you, sometimes I get carried away, it's my nature."

"You could never hurt me Char, ever."

"Well I wouldn't want to take the risk."

She arched up into him and giggled. "So I'm getting tied up then? You'd better; I don't think I can keep my hands off you."

He chuckled and glanced up at her, she was perfect. "I'm afraid you'll just have to try extra hard to keep your hands to yourself. If you touch me I'll leave, understood?"

She groaned the sound of frustration. "Poo. I got to touch you last time. I'll try baby, but your body is a treat."

"Good girl. You did, but we were in a room full of other demons."

"Umm and God was it hot... Penthouse Forum hot."

"I suppose..." He kisses her belly button.

"I don't think it's possible to do better, the last two days I have been power drunk on you."

"Sorry love. I didn't mean to release so much... I was trying to hold it back."

"I loved it. So pure, you're so pure."

"Well, next time I'll give it all to you then."

She sighed. "If I could grab for you I would kiss you right now."

He made his way up to her mouth, pulling her head back to allow him deeper access. "Umm, like this?"

She moaned and moved closer, kissing him fiercely, her tongue sweeping into his mouth.

He broke the kiss gasping. "You are perfect, you know that?" He kissed her lightly.

She giggled. "Ummm I'm glad you think so Char."

"Me too." He kissed back down her soft neck, to her quivering breasts.

She moaned and wiggled under him, trying to touch more than just his lips with her own flesh.

He growled a low growl, vibrating against her skin. He licked her slowly with his hot tongue.

"Gods baby... you just love to torture don't you."

"A little." He answered teasingly.

She moaned and sighed. He sucked gently on her flesh. "God, you're erotic." He licked past her belly button and down onto her thigh. She whimpered and shuddered. "Ummm, baby your mouth is so hot..."

"It gets like that." He gently bit down on the soft flesh inches away from her sopping pussy.

"Char!" she cried out and shuddered. "Tease."

He growled again, and inhaled her sweet scent deep into his lungs. "Ummm, you still smell like fire love... pure molten lava." His tongue flicked out to taste her, and he groaned. "Perfect... you taste like it too."

She cried out again this time arching up. "Gods Char!"

He spread her legs wider, pulling her forward into his waiting mouth as he suckled gently at her sweet folds. She panted and clawed at the bed, mewling and whimpering. He thrust his hot tongue into her, impaling her.

"Oh fucking God!" she screamed as she came hard, her body shaking as he held her hips off the bed.

Char lifted her higher, working relentlessly at her, nibbling and suckling her clit.

"So good... so good..." she panted, her hands balled in the sheets.

He purred into her, tasting her sweetness. "Truly amazing." She panted and gasped. He lapped her up in long slow lines from front to back taking his time, learning her body.

Her breathing grew shallow and she growled. "Oh God baby... don't stop... please..."

He answered her growls with a deep one of his own, vibrating deep into her. She came hard again and called out his name, her body breaking out in a sweat. He pulled back slightly, lapping her clean. "You are divine, my love."

"You're amazing... My gods... Baby... that tongue of your should be registered as a lethal weapon."

He moved up and laid a playful kiss on her belly. "You never know, it might actually be."

She frowned. "God, I wish I could see you... Ummm that was so good..."

"Maybe I'll let you see me some other time, but it's safer this way, for now."

She sighed. "I'll hold you to that lover."

He smirked as she called him lover; the words from her mouth were beyond anything he could have dreamed. "I know you will lover." He said, using the same words she did, reinforcing what he already knew.

She giggled and smiled. "So? Will you stay?"

He thought about it for a few moments, they would miss him, he'd most likely been gone for too long as it was. He shook his head before realizing that she couldn't see him. "No, I'm afraid I can't stay much longer."

She sighed. "Does it matter than I don't want you to go?"

"It does, but I'm afraid that I can't afford to be any longer. Much later and I won't be able to come back at all."

She frowned again. "But I'll see you again right?"

"Yes, you will love. You will indeed."

She smiled. "Soon. Please. Now kiss me love," she breathed, a tear escaping from behind the blindfold.

He tenderly kissed it away. "I'll come as soon as I can."

"Please hurry."

"As soon as I can." He kissed her once more then left as silently as he entered.

## Chapter Three

She was still riding high on the memory of her and Char's encounter two nights before as she went down to the club. The man, her secret lover, was beyond fantastic, everything she'd ever wanted, dreamed of, and she was enjoying how things were progressing. The cloak and dagger shit was amusing to her, but she felt the loss of him when he left that night and had been ever since. Her body was craving his attentions, and strangely, his heat.

She knew he wasn't a demon, and it was possible he was a fey, they did give off energy like that, or so she was told. It didn't matter to her either way; all she knew was that her body and her heart craved him more each hour. She was looking forward to their next encounter, and giggled as she fantasized about what would happen the next time they were together. She was so engrossed in her thoughts she didn't notice Queen Camions behind her desk in her office.

The Queen sat with her long legs propped up on the ebony desk, her red spike heeled feet crossed at the ankle. She was dressed with impeccable taste, the red wrap dress the same shade as the shoes and her pouty lips, and it fit her snugly. Her hair was wild around her shoulders. As the succubus monarch, she had dominion over everything that her subjects held dear, and she was a silent partner in Pinkys.

Alcyone was close to her, Camions considering her a sort of daughter in her own right. Alcyone supposed it was because she was ambitious, and a complete one-eighty from her three other daughters, Fiona, Iris, and Lila. They were friends, like sisters



almost, and Al counted her elevated standing in the court as a stroke of luck. She smirked at Alcyone. "Wild party the other night."

Cam had taken her under her wing when she bargained at eighteen, turning, seemingly overnight, from a plain wallflower to a beautiful woman living up to her potential, becoming one of the most beautiful half succubus demons in the past age. The entire Sterling family had bargained with some demon or another, her sister Tiffany was part of the Strigo court, Lydia, her eldest sister was an Opacus and both parents were part of the pleasure courts as well. She owed all she was to Camions, and all she had. Keeping her lover a secret, something she felt she had to do, was going to be hard, especially when she knew that was the reason why the Queen was here. Her absence at the party was probably well noted, and Cam wanted the goods on the evening.

Alcyone blinked and remembered the wild sex with Char, as if she could forget, and the rush of energy that came from him. She smiled and tried to shake off the low clenching feeling she was getting, her body getting the ghost feeling of him slipping in and out of her. "Oh. Um yeah Cam, it was fun. How many guys did you end up with?"

"Oh, one or two." She smiled. "How about you?"

"Oh, um, you know me, I have my admirers." Which was completely a lie, other than Char. For a succubus she was sorely lacking in the bedmate department.

"That's my girl, anyone I know?"

"Maybe, then again, I'm not sure who they were; it was a masquerade party after all." It wasn't a lie, not outright. Char has only told her his name recently, so she didn't feel like she was really hiding anything.

"True. So did you get his number? That, of course, is assuming that it was a he."

Alcyone blushed. It was well known in the succubus ranks that most were bisexual; after all, energy didn't have a gender. Alcyone was notorious for her scrump's with women, not because she didn't enjoy men, but because she took her feedings where she could get them. "Oh it was more than a he... Lord I couldn't walk the next morning, but um, no I didn't," For some reason, guarding the clandestine liaisons with Char was more important to her than being honest with her Queen.

"Well that's a shame; he was quite the feast no doubt. You're looking very well fed."

She blushed. "He was."

Camions smiled and uncrossed her legs, pulling them smoothly down and under the desk. "Now that's what I like to hear."

"So, um, to what do I owe your visit to? After a party like that you're usually holed up for at least a month with various admirers."

"Well, I do hate to be predictable." She answered with a graceful shrug. "But, in truth, I wanted to know how you'd gotten on; you have been looking miserable of late. It's good to see some color on your face."

She knew. She knew and she wanted her to fess up. This was the problem of being in the inner sanctum of the courts, The Queen knew everything, and no doubt she felt the power the night of the party, and she wanted Al to talk about it, and possibly share. Cam was nothing if not opportunistic. She decided to be somewhat honest. "It was my suitor at the party, he was pure and powerful, and I'm still flying on him."

"Ah, of course. It's a pity that you didn't get a contact number; he would have been good for you. I always said you needed a powerful match."

"Well thank you Highness. Though I don't know why you're so interested all of a sudden."

"I'm always interested. I like to have my subjects happy, not... sulking around the place, as you have been doing for the past few months. Why do you think I had the party? Darling you can be quite the little cloud of gloominess sometimes."

She shrugged. "I don't mean to be Highness. Sometimes things get to me." It was true, she had been glum for a while now, but after seeing so many people she knew and loved happy with their soul mates, and she was still alone, things took their toll on her.

"Well, I can hardly order you to cheer up."

"That is true, but I'll try. So, you played the good and concerned friend and monarch, so lets cut to the chase, you want to know about the guy I was with, don't you? You felt it, didn't you?"

"It was spectacular." Camions admitted.

"And that's why you were asking for a number right?"

"First and foremost my concern was you; it is good to see you smile Alcyone."

"And he made me smile, so you'll forgive me if I don't share what I know Cam."

The queen's smile widened. "You like him don't you?"

"Yes." she said simply. "He's fantastic."

"That's good to know."

"I just don't know who he is."

"You will, he can't hide who he is forever."

"What is that supposed to mean Cam? Do you know something I don't?"

She shook her head. "Not at all. It means that you cannot hide from true love. You can hate it, and fight it, and punish it, but you can't ever hide." Her words held a sad tone.

Al sighed. She knew the old argument, Cam and the Incubus

King Asmodeus, had been in a love affair for a little over an eon, and while they hated each other and the things they did, while they took other lovers and played head games, Alcyone knew that Camions loved old Asmo. "True love? I don't know about that, but he does make me float."

"That's always a great sign."

"Love is fleeting Cam, especially with our kind, so I'm not going to worry. He's a good distraction, and generous." she motioned to the exotic blue rose that was sitting in a vase on the desk in front of the Queen. There for a while now, and alone in the dark most of the time, it was thriving. She would have to ask Char about it. "And he's got good taste."

"He does indeed."

"So? Anything else new?"

She shrugged. "Not that I know of. But then I rarely keep on top of the latest gossip."

"That makes two of us. Look Cam, I'm sorry for being so hot over my mystery man, but, well it's not often I'm singled out." The bitter truth stung her. She was always the

last picked, always the last thought of. Char was special to her for so many reasons, but mostly because he pursued her. Called her 'love' like he meant it. She hoped he did.

"Through no fault of your own, you're perfect. It's about time someone came to their senses and realized it."

She smiled at her sovereign. "Thank you for that Highness. Still, he's a mystery, and I don't know if I will see him again."

"I'm sure you will."

She shrugged. "I hope so. So, what do you have going on today for lunch? I need to dish about him."

"Nothing that can't be shifted around."

She grinned. No matter what, Camions always had time for her, something she loved most about the monarch. She could trust Cam only so far though, as the succubus queen she could change her mind and then bid Alcyone to bring her man to her, but in truth, no matter what, it might happen. She couldn't dumb down what Char did for her, or to her, or how pure his lust was, she was too elevated on her feeling and aching need for him and his attentions. "So? Umbrellas? They make great sangria?"

"Perfect. I haven't had sangria in a while."

"Same here. And I'm thinking some shopping is in order too. Maybe stopping by Belts and Baubles."

She nodded. "I have been meaning to stop by, see if they have anything to liven up my bed play."

"You?" she laughed. "I didn't think you needed your sex life livened up any."

"Not at the moment, but one must always be on the lookout."

She laughed again and shook her head. "Come on lets get there before the crowd." Alcyone walked closer to the desk and grabbed her blue rose, inhaling its intoxicating scent and sighing. *God baby, you better come visit me soon.*

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Kael cursed loudly as his footing slipped, just managing to grasp the eaves of the house, before the ladder clattered to the ground below. Thankfully, he'd been checking the lower parts of the house instead of the full four stories. Storm damage was something that they'd all gotten used to dealing with. Living in northern England for as long as they had, it had become almost second nature. It was hardly ideal but the location suited them; it was close to the sea, for him, and was surrounded by plants, for Spiria and Keegan. Char, unlike the others, could take his element with him at all time; he would be comfortable wherever he lived.

He was judging the distance when the eaves cracked and gave way, dropping him to the ground. He landed in a cat-like crouch next to a very startled Spiria; he passed her the cracked wood.

"This house is falling apart."

Her green eyes sparkled with mirth. "Well, it will if you keep swinging from the eaves."

"It's hardly my idea of a good time. I'm just lucky it wasn't one of the higher roofs that lost slates; the last thing I need to do is heal a broken limb."

Her long auburn hair shone in the dulling light as she placed a hand stubbornly on her hips. "Well, you wouldn't have to at all if you just gave in and hired someone to properly fix things." She was always following him around nagging, why should he have suspected that today would be any different.

"Yeah, that's a great idea Spiria. Why don't we just invite the world out to see us?" He all but shouted at the gentle earth dragon.

"You're paranoid, it's just a few slates, and humans fix slates all the time. The worst thing that'll happen is we get overcharged."

"Paranoid am I? So what happens if a demon comes?"

"And what business would a demon have repairing roofs?"

"Demons get everywhere."

"You're insane," she told him angrily. "Finding demons on a roof, it's not your bed that the leak is over."

"Then, quite simply, move your bed. The mansion is old, there's bound to be one or two leaks."

"Or three or four."

"Do you have a point? I've got better things to do."

"Like what? Lock yourself in a room, and hate demons? Get over it; it was thousands of years ago Kael. We've all changed, and not for the better...well not the most of us. There are those who are more significantly better off now." She ran her hands through her hair and sighed.

He narrowed his eyes. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well you're no longer the sneaky advisor, whispering lies and deceit into the others hearts and Char looks much healthier; no longer the mindless slave blindly following the orders of his master. He's come a long way."

"Lies and deceit?" He puffed up. "I did a lot more than that. And Char has seen the error of his ways; self preservation tends to kick in. Not even that stupid lump could stand in the execution line."

"And have you seen the error of your ways Kael?"

A familiar stab of guilt crept though him, but he quickly squashed it with practiced ease. "I did nothing wrong."

"So you keep saying, yet I see that look on your face every time I mention the old days."

"Then maybe you shouldn't mention them."

"The Conglacio king was your friend, wasn't he?"

"He was, until he gave up on us and allowed himself to be executed." He told her showing no emotion.

"That was very out of character for him wasn't it? I only met him once, but he seemed very... passionate."

"What is your point?" He asked through gritted teeth.

She shook her head, "No point, merely an observation. He was a demon and your friend, proving that not all demons are worthless. I don't know what happened to him

but I do know that you blame yourself for it. Maybe that's why you hide so far from them, maybe you're hiding from your guilt."

He opened his mouth ready with a biting remark but forced it shut again with a snap of his jaws. "You should swap rooms if the drip bothers you that much." He finally said turning away.

She sighed, her hands habitually running through her hair again. "All I'm saying is that we can afford to live a little. I don't think it will kill us. You and Char are big strong boys, perfectly able to look after yourselves."

She was irritating. "Indeed, we can. But you, my dear, are not built for fighting, nor defending yourself. Neither are the other two. Without us, it wouldn't be life that kills you. What's brought all this up anyway?"

"I think we're all a little tired of cowering in the shadows. I needed to make sure that our actions are based on real need, and not your fear of bad decisions."

"You're beginning to sound like Char."

"Good at least he seems to be happy."

"Happy? When was this? Last time I saw him he was miserable, all suicidal and what not."

"Char? He's been giddy for a few days now; obviously he doesn't have a leak over his bed."

"Oh, obviously," His sarcasm was thick. "I nearly broke my neck fixing it, why am I the bad guy?"

"Because you won't let me get it all fixed properly." She rolled her eyes. "So, are you going to go and ruin Char's day too?"

"I didn't come looking for you." He defended to the annoying dragon.

"No I guess not. You just dropped out of the sky." She giggled a little.

There was no arguing with her; Kael had learned that a long time ago. "Sure, next time I'll announce my arrival."

"See that you do that, and my room?"

“I’ll buy you a bucket to catch the drops in.” He told her before walking away into the house.

He ignored her loud sigh and went off in search of Char. That dragon hadn’t been happy in centuries, Spiria’s admission of his recent cheerfulness had certainly peaked his interest. He fully intended to find out the exact cause of his friend’s recent mood change.



## Chapter Four

Lunch went quickly and pleasantly, and between the two of them, they finished two pitchers of Sangria, and Alcyone's tongue had gotten considerably looser. They had made it to the boutique an hour later, still perfectly tipsy and giggling, enjoying each other's company. Propriety was forgotten, as Alcyone and Camions both disregarded Camions' rank as monarch while they were out shopping, making the atmosphere more relaxed. "So Cam? What do you think of this?" she held up a pair of black boy shorts with flames embroidered on them and a baby doll cotton shirt with the same design. "I don't know, it just kinda calls to me."

"I like it... and there's nothing to lose buying it."

"It just speaks to me." she looked at the cute pair of underwear Cam was holding and gushed. "Ooh those are adorable. Anyone in particular for those?"

"No one in mind. But you never know what opportunity might present itself."

"Very true. I think I will get this little outfit, never know if I'll see him again."

"It'll be perfect on you, even if he never sees it on."

"Well I should hope I will get a chance to see him again to show him." she blushed and giggled. "He tells me I taste and smell like fire."

"Fire?" She laughed.

"That's what he says. Though I haven't heard that before."

"I've never heard of anything that could smell fire."

"Well, your guess is as good as mine Cam, but he's not human, not with that energy. I was thinking maybe fey?"

"Maybe. Though I've never heard of a fire fey."

"Stranger things have happened. Last I heard there weren't sex fey, but low and behold we have passion fey running around..."

"True."

"I'm not ruling anything out at this point. He told me I was his last time, and wouldn't let me touch him."

"Hmmm... sounds hot." She giggled.

"He is. I mean like physically hot. His mouth... gods it was like the sun on my clit," she giggled and picked up another red lacy bit of lingerie. "He's very erotic. And you know, I'm really not one for heat, or wasn't until now, but God it just felt so good."

"I bet. He sounds very special."

"And someone I don't deserve. I don't even know if I'll see him again Cam." she sighed.

"Well he seems to have claimed you. You do deserve him, you deserve someone."

"I always figured I would marry Arcady, and then that fell through. I didn't and haven't had any serious prospects Cam... let alone someone that is romantic, and generous and mysterious..."

She laughed. "You wouldn't have been happy with Arcady, that boy has broken so many hearts."

"Yeah I know, and he's like my brother, but he is one wild ride."

"Indeed. There's definitely talent there."

"And you ain't just whistling Dixie. So? Who's your new plaything?"

"At the moment? I'm revisiting a few of the old ones; you know I have my favorites."

"I'll have to take your word for it. I don't think I have ever revisited anyone but Arcady."

"No? Well maybe you should start, there's nothing sexier than a lover who knows your body."

Alcyone considered it. Most people that she knew intimately weren't people she associated with, and a good portion were strictly one night stands. Char was the only man to ever see her more than once except Arcady. As a succubus, she should have had a string of adoring lovers just waiting for her attentions. It saddened her that she had never experienced that. "You're probably right."

"Probably? Darlin' I'm your Queen, I'm always right."

She laughed. "I keep forgetting that."

"Hmmm, only when it suits you. So, what else should we buy?"

"I think I need some stockings and some toys."

"You can never have enough accessories."

"Or toys. Something he might like, I think. Too bad I don't know what he likes."

"He's a man; they all have the same basic tastes. You know he likes you."

"Yeah, he does like me." she laughed and hugged Cam. "Thanks for this."

"Anytime, I enjoy spending time with you. It gives me time away from everything."

"Yeah I know what you mean. So? What are your plans for tonight?"

"I was going to see my husband."

Camions' admission floored her. "Asmo? No kidding?"

She smiled tentatively. "It can't hurt...well not much."

"I think it's a good idea. Something in that pile there just for him?" she motioned to the small load of stuff Camions had on the counter of the boutique.

"Maybe. We'll have to see how things go."

"Well I'm rooting for you."

"Thanks, I am as well."

They paid for their purchases, Alcyone, trying to figure a way to see her lover. He didn't leave a way to get in touch with him and she wasn't sure when he would come to her again, but she knew that she needed him, and nothing was going to sate her hunger until she was in his arms again.

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Char let the boiling, hot water scour down his body with a deep sigh. He loved showers, especially hot ones. He smiled letting the powerful jets clean him, his one luxury, well, his second next to Alcyone. She was perfect and just as he imagined, just knowing that she was waiting for him cheered him to no end. She not only knew he existed, but longed to see him. Each night he would watch her through his flame. She would light a candle next to her bed and think of him; it warmed him to think that she thought of him. She was never out of his own thoughts.

Reluctantly he turned the water off and braced for the cool breeze to wash over his body in its absence. He sighed as it hit and grabbed a towel, wrapping it around his waist and stepping out of the shower. It had been far too long since he had seen her, held her. He needed her to see more of him, know his face, his body. He wanted her to gaze up into his face with adoration. The urge wasn't something that he could fight; he'd fought it for so long it would only get stronger. The memory of their already substantial time together made his cock harden and caused his breathing to become labored. He needed to take her, make her wholly his.

He finished drying and slipped on his jeans, carefully zipping himself in. By nature(,) he was impatient, but every moment away from her soft voice and spicy scent was torture. He needed to go to her, and soon. Someone cleared their throat behind him. *Kael*. He turned with a growl.

"Any particular reason you're watching me dress?" He snapped, unable to keep his temper. The other dragons' mere presence sullied her memory. *Kael* spoiled everything; Char would swear blind that he could turn milk sour.

"*Spiria* mentioned that you've been fluttering in a cloud of happiness lately, I came to investigate."

He casually picked up a shirt and shrugged into it, keeping silent. *Kael* hated it when he held his tongue, not that he normally could, but Char just didn't have much

reason to be irritated today. He had his Alcyone, and would again soon. Kael waited for a reply from him, irritation leaking from his presence.

Cracking Kael broke the silence. "So?" he gestured to Char. "What brings on this sudden change of heart? Last time I saw you, you were practically ready to throw yourself into the belly of the beast."

Char faced him with a cool smile. "I found my calm. I suppose I'm no longer at war with myself."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"It is as it sounds. Let's just say that I've found my water sports, and I guarantee that it's a hell of a lot more rewarding than..." he frowned, trying to remember Kael's fix. "Whatever it is that you do out there to keep yourself sane."

"Spiria was right; you are in a nippy little mood, Charcoal. Dare I hope you've enlisted in that breeding program after all?"

"Nope." He refused to rise to the bait. He knew what Kael thought of him, of his intelligence, or lack there of. It was half true, Char wasn't the brightest, but he had learned a thing or two in his time. Keeping silent was always a good way to avoid conversations that he didn't like. It was just a bonus that it pissed off the water dragon.

"Pity," Kael sneered. "You could do with the action; frankly I'm surprised you're not still a virgin."

"How do you know I'm not?" Char asked smugly enjoying, for once, seeing Kael so off put by him. He would have to remember to be in a better mood more often, but for that, he would have to see Alcyone.

The taller dragon put his hand to his chin in pretend thought. "Hmmm now you mention it, I've never seen you with a woman, maybe I've been jumping to the wrong conclusions all these years."

"You know sometimes things you don't see actually do happen. Like when Spiria, contracted the human to fix the roof."

His eyes narrowed. "When was that?"

“My guess is, just before you fell off the thing. He was having tea in our kitchen as I stepped into the shower, she sent you up here to distract us both,” Char smiled at Kael, he’d missed something big and he was livid about it. “Spiria is one to keep a closer eye on in the future.” He told him, hoping that Kael would spend more time watching her than himself. “But remember that you can’t just run out there screaming about dragons and demons.”

“I know that.” Kael growled before charging out the door.

Char chuckled and shook his head. Spiria and Kael would be fighting for hours over this one. It was perfect, and it would give him plenty of time to see Alcyone. Spiria’s sneakiness had just come in handy for something. He obviously had a little more brains than the others gave him credit for. He smiled smugly checking his appearance in the mirror. He would show her what he was tonight, all night and hope that she truly wanted him.

## Chapter Five

It had been days. He hadn't visited, that she knew of, hadn't left any notes, no calls, nothing. Alcyone was beginning to think he wasn't as interested as she first thought. Her body was missing him terribly. The dregs of his release were still in her system, and she felt like she was going through withdrawal.

Char was all she thought about the past week since she had seen him last, Char and his attentions and the silky smooth voice he used when he talked to her, the rumbling she felt from him when he was happy. He consumed her; she couldn't go long without wanting him, no matter how hard she tried, and tonight was no different.

Alcyone stood at the large window in her room and lit the large red pillar candle she had taken to having in the room. The flame was a comfort for her, the soft glow made her calm and she wasn't sure why, but she thought of him as she looked into it, felt he was there with her. She knew it was stupid, but it got her through the nights without his touch.

The flame burning bright she sighed and shook her head, looking around the room that was bathed in the orange glow. She stood there in the center of her room wearing a white cotton cami and thong, looking at the bed. Not long ago, she loved that she slept alone, that she didn't have to give up her sanctuary for someone else. Well Char wasn't just someone else. "What I wouldn't give to have you stay through the night with me lover. Or even just know you're here, even see you." She chuckled bitterly to herself and the empty room. She had always talked to herself, but as the days went on, it was

happening more and more. "Where are you Char." The whisper was barely audible, as she moved across the room, to the bedside table and sighed.

The room brightened a little as the candle flared. "Where would you like me to be love?" His voice caressed from behind.

She turned quickly and gasped, tears in her eyes. "How did you?" she looked at him in the dim light, still cloaked in shadow. "Char?"

He nodded briefly. "I did miss you, my Alcyone."

She didn't move closer, just stood and blinked, tears slowly rolling down her face. "I thought you had gone."

"No, did I give you that impression? I didn't mean to."

"It's been a long time since I saw you. I thought you had forgotten me."

"It's been a week, but it has felt like forever. I'm sorry; I tried to get away sooner but..." He cut himself off. "This was the first time that I could escape prior commitments. I'm sorry."

She smiled. "So are you going to walk out of those shadows? I'm itching to jump into your arms and kiss you."

"Yes, I think I'd like that very much." He answered without moving.

She giggled and smiled, taking the space between them in four strides and pulled him to her planting a very passionate kiss on his warm mouth.

He lifted her easily, deepening the kiss. She could feel his warmth through his clothes.

"Baby I missed you. That feels nice." she pulled away from him and looked at his perfect face, the strong nose, perfect lips, his eyes closed to her. He looked like an angel, and his body was like granite under her hands. He was all muscle in all the right places, and he smelled divine. "God, baby you are perfect. Why are your eyes closed love?"

He smiled. "Because my eyes are somewhat daunting and I would hate to frighten you."

"You could never frighten me Char..." She nuzzled his neck and inhaled. "Show me."

"As you wish." He slowly opened his eyes and looked down at her.



She couldn't believe what she was seeing. His eyes were bright, red and orange and yellow, flickering like flame, his pupils like slits. It should have scared her, he was right, but it had a calming effect on her. "They are so beautiful, like fire." she said as she touched his face, partially mesmerized.

"They are fire, at least my essence is. Eyes are the window to the soul, at least mine are." He smiled blinking.

"I love them. Don't hide them with me." she smiled and kissed him. "So what are you love?"

"I'm something very old and very rare."

She pouted and then giggled. "Well I didn't think you were a spring chicken baby, you don't get talent like yours being young. So you're old and rare? Rare is right, you like me, that's pretty damn rare. So tell me love, your secret is safe with me."

"Even if I do there is the possibility that you won't believe me," he said frowning. "I've never really told anyone before, most were like me or already knew," he sighed. "I'm what they call a fire elemental. I'm a red dragon."

She heard him and nodded, nuzzling him and nipping at his warm skin. "A dragon? I thought dragons were extinct." her hands roamed his body. "So where do all your dragony parts go when your sexy and standing here with me? I think I should get these clothes off you and inspect." she giggled again and looked into his eyes, licking her lips.

"Inspect all you like." He purred softly. "We are extinct, the demons killed us all. To the best of their knowledge we don't exist, myths and legends."

She stopped and looked at him. "And you sought me out. Why?"

Confusion fluttered across his face. "I thought we covered that already, I couldn't bear to not be part of your life. I needed to have you, to be with you. I love you."

She smiled and kissed him. "You don't even know me Char, and I'm what you hide from love, why would you take the chance?"

"I don't hide from you. You aren't a fire demon; you can't control me, not with power. I trust you to keep my secret, and if you don't then it doesn't matter. I've lived in hiding for a very long time; I'd gladly die for a night spent in your arms."

She heard it but didn't believe it. A man, a dragon, someone that had hidden himself from the world wanted her, would die to be with her. If that wasn't love, she didn't know what was. She kissed him again, her fingers making quick work of his shirt and jacket, finally looking at him half naked, in all his magnificence. He had a few scars, small but stark on his golden skin, some dipping down to disappear under his jeans, two in particular on his sides caught her eye. She liked them. They told of battles and a whole life before her, one where he was searching for her. She figured she would inspect them closer at a later date, maybe get the stories of each out of him. Her dragon, she could tell by his scars, was a warrior and she was starting to feel like a heroine in the romance novels her sisters loved to read. "So you'll stay tonight? I don't think after unwrapping the full package I'll be able to let you leave Char." she moved back and looked at him in a bit more, then came close and walked around him, kissing his very hot skin. "Fire baby? That's what you are? Goddamn how did I get so lucky?"

"I ask myself the same thing every time I lay eyes on you."

His words rocked her. He did love her; she could see it in his unusual eyes, and the way he spoke to her. "So you'll stay tonight?"

"I will. I don't think I could leave you. I just don't have the will power."

"Good, cuz I don't have any to allow you to leave. I need you."

"I think we need each other." He smiled as he kissed her.

She leaned into him, her hands on the button of his pants, working them open and slipping her hand in. "I need you Char, please."

Growling, his hands went to her thong, slipping it down her hips and thighs to fall at her feet. Kissing her again, he backed her towards the bed. "You are so perfect, my love."

She whimpered, the man was indeed doing what she asked. He was so damn warm, and sexy, and he wanted her. "Baby, you are so fucking hot."

He nodded simply. "That's just the way I am." He kissed her grinning.

"Ummm I love it." she arched in his arms, as he set her on the bed. "So. Am I yours?" the question was one she was scared to ask. Past research into the dragons, the little she did when she asked her parents about the other inhabitants of the Afterverse, revealed that dragons mated for life, sort of like wolves or the snakes. How they mated was a fuzzy subject, as the old records books didn't say much, except that it was always done behind closed doors. To be a mate was a coveted thing apparently.

"Would you like to be?"

She nodded. "Is that bad?"

"No, I want you to be mine. I would be honored."

She smiled and crooked her finger at him. "I think those pants need to come off, and this bed is pretty lonely without you."

He smirked predatorily down at her, as his large hands unzipped the pants and pulled them down. "Well, I'm sure I can provide some company."

*Wow. Oh wow. That's mine? Goddess thank you.* Seeing something and feeling something were two different things, and as Char stood there, naked, with that satisfied look on his face, she couldn't keep her eyes off his perfect body. He was muscular and lean in all the right places. She looked him over, making a real show of it, licking her lips, showing him exactly how bad she wanted him. Her body clenched in low places, and she could feel herself getting wet all over again.

"I trust you enjoy the view?"

"Who wouldn't? I get to play with you? Anytime I want? Ummm I likie a lot." She giggled and smiled. This man was just too good to be true.

"Good." He knelt beside her kissing her deeply. "Because I want you to be mine."

She shuddered and laughed. "I have been since the party. No one else will satisfy me Char."

"Good, because the thought of you with anyone else makes me... unhappy. To say the least."

"Door swings both ways Char. You're mine..." she said as she bit her bottom lip, hoping that she wouldn't have to share him.

"For all of time."

She pulled him down to her and they rolled, Alcyone ending up on top. She reared up and straddled him, his thick length nestled between her thighs as she sat on him. "So, I'm yours?" the question wasn't one of confirmation, but genuine. She wasn't sure what would happen for her to be his, but she was sure that the kiss wasn't it, as satisfying as it was.

He stroked up her thighs hold her hips firmly in hand. "You are, all mine, forever."

"I really like the sound of that." and she did. The man wanted her, only her. It felt good.

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She was perfect and his. He didn't even want to consider what Kael would do when he found out, if he ever did. Char couldn't hope to keep her a secret from him, he found out everything. She would be his mate, complete him in everyway. If the others couldn't accept that, then he'd have to leave them. He would miss them though, over the years they'd wormed their way into his heart and earned his respect. He'd especially miss Spiria, with her gentle nature and soothing voice, he knew she'd approve of Al. There was just one thing left to do before she was truly his. "You know, in my time, once we'd found our life mates, we used to mark them as ours. Could I? It would bind us together; mark you as mine for any of my kind to recognize."

"Your mate? I'm yours Char; I want the world to know."

He smiled in surprise; he'd half expected her to ask if it hurt. But not his Alcyone, she wanted to be with him, no matter what. He knew this, and he loved her for it. He loved her for so many reasons. "And they will, it will sting a little."

"Small price. And I like a little pain baby, you'll learn that soon enough." she winked. "So what do I have to do?" she wiggled on him, slipping a little as her wetness coated both of them.

The sensation caused him to growl. "Nothing, I can do it now or during," he bucked himself against her to make sure she knew what he was talking about. "The result is the same."

"Oh God." she whimpered, wiggling again. "God, I need you."

"During it is then." He lifted her and gently eased her onto him.

She sobbed as he filled her and threw her head back. "Char! Baby that's so good..." she shuddered. "So deep. Baby..."

She felt amazing as his hands left her thighs to tease her soft breasts. "Ride me, my Alcyone."

She groaned and looked down at him, doing as he asked and sobbing. "So good... Um Char, I needed this. You..."

"I know. You feel so amazing."

She rode him hard and deep, but slowly, the feelings between them building. Their eyes were locked almost the entire time, the link severed only when she would throw her head back and purr for him, coming hard as she did. "Char, oh baby!"

He felt her come around him, and struggled to keep his control as his body bucked into hers. His instinct told him to flip her over and take her hard and fast until they were both spent, but he kept himself in check. He wanted to mark her, make her his. He lifted his hands up to either side of her waist where he had decided to place the mark. "God, I'm close Al." He managed out as his orgasm built, he clutched at her side tightly, hoping she truly did like the pain.

"Yes! Baby, fuck that's so good."

All thought of keeping her safe vanished from his thoughts as he pistoned harder into her, feeling his energy build inside of him. She threw her head back and moaned, the small sound tipping him over the edge. He came hard, feeling his fire spill into her as surely as his seed did. He struggled to keep his eyes open watching her.

She screamed and arched hard under his hands, clawing at his thighs. "Char! God I love you!"

"I love you too." he whispered watching his brand take form over her hips. It was a scrolling red and yellow dragon that snaked around her waist like a belt, his tail ringing round her belly button. It looked like a beautifully detailed tattoo, which stared out at him with ruby eyes. "Perfect." he proclaimed.

She panted and sobbed, her orgasm subsiding, the feel of her body quivering around him lessening. She looked down at her waist and then at him, love showing in her eyes. "Oh my God. That's your mark?"

"It is. It'll heat up whenever I'm near."

"It's beautiful. So I'm your mate, dragon?" she giggled and kissed him. "Will you stay with me? I mean is it safe?"

The answer to that was simple, No, It was never safe. Not from the others or the demons. He smiled. "As it will ever be my love. I'm not going anywhere tonight."

"Ummm, good cuz I haven't had my fill of your delectable body." she nipped his bottom lip. "I love the way you look at me Char."

"And how is that?"

She laughed. "Like you wanna eat me alive. I love your eyes, they are so soothing."

He laughed, "I've never heard that before, and I think we've already established that I want to eat you."

She shivered and licked her lips. "God I love that. Ummm, you're so talented baby."

He kissed her. "As are you." He pulled her down into a kiss, holding her close.

They cuddled in quiet for a while. "So, do I still smell good?"

"Mmm, always like fire."

"That's why you wanted me? Cuz I smell like fire? Have I always smelled like fire?"

"It's one of the many reasons I want you. You're perfect."

"How can I smell like fire Char? Before you, I didn't even like the color red."

"I have no idea, but you do."

"Maybe it's fate." she said in a small voice, her hands spanning his broad torso. "So? Will you be here a lot?"

"Yeah, I will. I can't stay away from you for long."

"Good mate, because I'm going to always need you. I don't like being apart."

She sighed and settled on top of him. "My perfect dragon."

"My Alcyone." He kissed the top of her head.

"I love hearing you say my name."

"I love the way anything of mine rolls off that clever tongue of yours. So do you change often? I mean can I see?"

"It's hard to change; I don't really need to. But I could for you, if you'd like."

"I would like to see it, but that's some foreplay for another day don't you think."

"Definitely. It's far too exhausting to change; I'd be out for a long while."

"Umm then we should do that one day, when it's convenient to do so. In the meantime love, I should very much like to get to know you better, starting with this small patch of skin right here." she kissed his chest, just below a flat, slightly golden nipple and licked up, her tongue circling around the disk of flesh.

He groaned, arching towards her warm mouth. "You can know anything you like."

She giggled. "You taste so good."

"That's something else I've never heard."

"Well, then the women you have been with are fools."

"I suppose." His fingers drew lazy trails over her bare back.

"Oh trust me Char, they were."

## Chapter Six

The warmth radiating around her woke her slowly, the dregs of sleep lifting as she was enveloped in Char's pure smell and energy. The man was insatiable; loving her well into the wee hours of morning, filling her body with energy, leaving her with a lot to spare. She nuzzled his neck and kissed him. "God baby, I have never felt so good waking up."

"I feel exactly the same way, everything seems better with you."

"Ummm and you're a feast baby. I feel like I should share the energy you poured into me." she giggled and cuddled closer.

"It's all for you, no one else." He kissed her gently on the top of the head.

"True, but the queen will feel it and either want to meet you, or get some of her own."

He sighed heavily. "That is always the way with demons, but I will not be passed around. I only want you."

"I know baby... and I only want you." she bit her bottom lip, trying to figure out how to breach the subject. "I can give her a taste, I have done it before. It's not at all unpleasant."

"How?" He asked, his voice a deep rumble in his huge chest.

She giggled. "Sex with Cam." she cuddled him and sighed. She was bisexual, most succubi were, and it usually wasn't a problem for a man, most wanted in on that action,



but with Char, she knew it was going to be a sore spot, but she couldn't give him anything but the truth.

"No." He shook his head. "I will not." He said with a certain finality to his voice.

She laughed. "Not you baby, me."

"Oh." He fell silent.

She took his silence as a bad sign. "Char?" she sat up and smiled. "Did that upset you?"

"No. Well, not really. Why must your queen taste my energy?"

Honesty was the best way to put it. No games, no half-truths. Her mate deserved to know that truth. "She felt it at the party, and she wanted you actually, but she's my friend and I told her I wouldn't share you, you're mine. But a scrump with her and she gets a little of your energy. It's a small price to pay to keep her from pursuing me to get to you. And Cam is a lot of fun. Char, as a succubus I take energy where I can get it, but I do happen to enjoy playing from time to time with women, Cam is one of them." There. It was said. If he had truly been watching her for a while, he knew what her appetites were, and wouldn't be too upset.

He nodded. "She would never get me. Normally I handle my own problems, but I understand that the sudden, fiery disappearance of the succubus queen might raise a few questions."

She giggled. "That is more than true. So it looks like I'll have to share some energy then. You should watch it's really quite hot." she giggled chuckled and nipped at his chin.

"Mmm I might. It does sound like it'll be quite a show."

She relaxed, realizing that he was indeed male enough to wish to enjoy the scene she was talking about. If he could handle that side of her nature, well, they would get along fine. In the long run it came down to recreation, and not feeding. She could have all she wanted from him, and she would get it, but sometimes... "The thought turns you on, dragon? Me and another woman?" she licked her lips and kissed down his chest slowly, nipping and licking.

"Honestly? The thought of you with me turns me on more."

She chuckled, reaching his belly button and dipping her tongue in. "Ummm? I love the thought of the two of us as well baby. I say your name and I get wet."

He groaned under her ministrations, "Well that's always a good thing."

She reached his hips and gave a small contented purr, his body reacting to her nearness. She looked up and grinned. "Can I?"

"You can do anything you wish, my love."

With his words, she slipped her mouth down his hardened length and moaned; her hands on his strong thighs working his flesh.

His body arched into her with a contented sigh. "Oh Alcyone, you are beyond perfect."

Her body clenched as he said her name, the need to have him overwhelming. She pulled off him and panted. "I don't know what it is, but you say my name and..." her words trailed off as she blushed. "Your voice almost made me come."

He smiled adoringly up at her. "You are so beautiful, especially with that pink flush to your face."

She blushed harder and smiled.

"Yeah, just like that."

"God you make me feel so good. So? Shall I continue?"

"If you like... I did enjoy having those lips of yours wrapped around my shaft."

She shuddered. "I do wish to please you baby." Her mouth once again around his cock, she swirled her tongue around his head and moaned.

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Kael was livid. Livid or concerned, he wasn't quite sure which. Char had been out all night without so much as a phone call. The dragon had snuck out just after the human had fixed the roof and he hadn't been home yet. It was now late afternoon and still no sign of him. Stupid fool. Spiria sat next to him tapping her foot nervously. She was convinced that he was hurt, or worse. Worse for Kael meant that the demons knew

about them and were on their way to round them all up. Worse for Spiria was that he was dead or dying.

Whatever this new hobby of Char's was, it was a liability and it would have to be stopped. Sure, Kael went surfing at night but he knew he was ok. He always made sure somebody could contact him and his whereabouts were known. Those were the rules. It was how they stayed safe, alive and most of all undetected. He sighed; Spiria's tapping growing ever more annoying. It was all he could hear in the normally peaceful mansion. She still wasn't talking to him after their argument from yesterday. Originally, that was why they thought Char had left. He hated it when they both fought. Now sitting down and thinking things through, as much as he could with her tapping, he realized it was Char who had directed the argument.

What was that dragon playing at? He shook his head. Char was up to something and he didn't like being in the dark. Char never had a purpose. He didn't believe in it. The other dragon just was, he wasn't clever enough to work on anything but instinct. He did have very good instincts though. Well, most of the time, the dragon did have his off days.

His temper flaring he growled, "Oh for God's sake, will you stop making that noise?!"

She huffed and shook her head. "You know Kael, you're not the only one worried. This is how I deal with it."

"By annoying the hell out of me?" He growled considering the consequences of breaking her leg. "Why don't you eat cake and ice cream like a normal woman?"

"Because I'm NOT a normal woman Kael, that's why."

"Fine. Your buddy will be fine anyway. I'm not lucky enough to have him die. You just drove him away with your insistent whining and bringing humans to our sanctuary. He hates both demons and humans as well you know."

"Yeah, and I'm not too fond of the creatures either Kael, but sometimes we should try to act like normal people. I hate this house. There's only so much the two of you can do to keep it in repair and my greenhouses are in serious neglect. We should have

abandoned this place years ago, set fire to it, started over. Do you realize we have been here, unmoving for the past four hundred years? This house is well past its decrepit prime."

"No, absolutely not. We're perfect where we are. Look at the sea, it's right there." He gestured in the direction of the sea. "And your greenhouses are old; we can get you new ones. This is our home; the others have no problem with it. It's safe."

"It's falling apart!" she said, completely exasperated. "And if you insist on staying here, we should really have some humans doing the grounds and the menial work. We don't change often, hell Char hasn't changed in almost three hundred years, and I haven't in longer than that. You, well, Lord knows what you do on your nightly visits to your element. The others..." she sighed. "The others probably don't even remember how to change. We are more human than you know Kael."

He frowned at her. Longer than three hundred years? He hadn't known that they'd all stopped shifting. He shifted often, his dragon form felt as natural as his human. "Do you think that will stop them? Do you think they won't still use you if you can't change? That will only make you all more vulnerable. Besides, you're an earth dragon; I thought you liked working the grounds."

"I hate it here. The earth is dead; it needs new life, children, reasons to grow again. We can't give it that. It needs rebirth."

"Children?" He quirked an eyebrow at her. There was no way in hell she was mating to him.

"Yes Kael, children. This ground needs youth and the young. A reason to bloom in spring. As it is, I'm barely coaxing the trees to bloom. It is tired of us. Nothing is meant to be somewhere as long as we have without renewing life. Soon it will be all dead, and I might be along with it."

Why were all earth elementals so damn flaky? He thought, wisely keeping it to himself. "Well...we'll just get more grass. Or trees, I know you like trees. I have no problem with the garden center. There are no demons there, so that's safe. We can do that tomorrow." He smiled helpfully.

She got up and shook her head. "Kael I'm tied to the earth, it's been dying here for decades. We need to relocate, and we need to do it soon." she closed her eyes, her body shaking. "I haven't lived this long to die of neglect."

"Well you could have said something before now. This isn't crap that your telling me just so that we have to move is it? Because if needs be I could live as long as there was a tank of sea monkeys in the house. Which there isn't." He cleared his throat. "So now we have to move, not because you hate it here, and you always have, but because we're killing the land." He said dramatically. "Give me a break Spiria; the other earth dragon is fine."

"Keegan is not fine. How blind are you? She doesn't leave the house, barely leaves her room, and clings to that fern you brought her back from that trip to Bali. We need to find a place where there's still water access and the land is able to be lived on. But that's it isn't it? You have to be close to *your* precious element. Spare me Kael. No one is thriving here, we merely exist. Maybe Char found something to kill the monotony. I wouldn't begrudge him that."

He sighed. When did everyone become so hard to please? "So would you like a fern?" He asked smirking. Deliberately missing her point would only get him so far. He knew she was right, but this was their home. They had never been caught here, it was his security and he didn't want to give it up without a fight.

She sighed. "All I'm saying is let's look for another sanctuary. We have nothing but time, and honestly we shouldn't have been here this long. It's not like we don't have the funds or anything, but we need to look. We can be picky too. It will have to be perfect. Please Kael?"

Reluctantly, he nodded. "Once Char returns, then we'll vote on it. If things are as bad as you say then we'll start looking."

She smiled and nodded. "We will have to vote on it then. Consensus rules."

He nods "Of course, that's the rules."

## Chapter Seven

Char reluctantly left Alcyone napping. He hated leaving her; he knew he couldn't keep doing it for much longer. She was his mate. The thought of the binding made him smile. They would be together for all time. He never thought that he would have someone, let alone her. She was his and always would be. He'd been through a lot in his long life but being with Alcyone made it all worthwhile. She made him a better person, gave him the strength to face life and now they were a couple. He felt they could face everything, together.

He flame traveled into the kitchen of the mansion where there was always something burning for him. Yawning, he checked the fridge looking for something to eat. There was nothing as usual. He needed to do his own shopping, maybe Alcyone would go with him. He grinned, thinking of her. She was perfect. Closing the door, he turned coming face to face with a very irate Kael.

"Where the fuck have you been?" He demanded, crossing his arms as Spiria came up behind him.

"Christ Char! Ever think of calling home?" she shook her head and muttered. "Lord, we sound like human parents."

Char smirked, "Indeed you do. I've not been gone that long." He checked his watch. "Not even a full day. But it is late; I need to get some sleep."

"What were you up to that you didn't sleep Char?" Spiria shook her head and then her eyes went wide. She nodded and turned to Kael. "Let him sleep."

Kael gazed suspiciously between them both. "Hell no! I want to know. He distracted us to run out. Where the fuck were you?"

Spiria looked at Kael once more. "Kael just let it go" she said quietly.

"No, I thought you wanted to do your vote."

Char frowned. "Vote? What vote?" He yawned covering his mouth with his arm.

"We can vote later..." She sighed. "Char... We are going to vote on moving."

"Moving? From here?" He frowned. "But we've always lived here."

Kael turned to her triumphantly. "See? I told you."

Char growled. The thought of siding with Kael left a bad taste in his mouth, but he hated the thought of leaving their home. He shook his head slightly. He'd just been thinking of leaving himself, hadn't he? "We'll talk about it once I wake up."

Spiria smiled. "You hungry? I made roast beef earlier, I can bring you up a sandwich?"

He nodded bumping past Kael. "Thanks Spiria." He walked up to his room knowing that Kael would leave him alone until he woke. The dragon needed his vote, but then so would Spiria.

Spiria walked in just as he was taking his shirt off, carrying a tray with a large hoagie sandwich on it, barbeque potato chips and a beer. She smiled at him and set the tray down on the side desk and stood, her hands clasped together, not saying a word.

Dropping the shirt he grabbed the sandwich taking a bite. "Thanks."

She nodded and took a seat on the wingback chair. "Who is she?" she asked quietly.

He shrugged, trying to decide just how much to tell her. "She?"

"Your different tonight... lighter... only a woman would do that... So?"

He shook his head. "You wouldn't know her."

"Apparently you do. And it's not another dragon." she scented the air. "I would know if she was. She makes you happy, you didn't try to rip Kael's throat out... so she's obviously worth it."

"Kael's not worth it...you all need him."

"We need you too Char. the two of you keep us safe."

He nodded then sighed. That was the problem; he couldn't leave them or Alcyone. "We do."

"So who is she?"

"Who? Or what?"

"What doesn't matter to me Char, she has changed you, and for the better I think, if you not trying to kill Kael is any indication. Who is much more important I think."

"She's very special to me. Her name is Alcyone, and she's my mate." He said proudly with a smile.

Spiria smiled. "Mate? Char I'm so happy for you. When?"

"Last night." The tension left him. He'd always known that Spiria would be the easy one. Kael, on the other hand, would be difficult.

"Congratulations. You got lucky Char. When do we meet her? You are bringing her here right? I'm surprised you left her where she is now."

He took a deep breath. "She'll never come here. Kael wouldn't let her and this is no place for her. She has her own life and business."

She stood exasperated. "How are you going to manage? Char I know you, have known you for almost a thousand years! You won't let your mate stay away from you, so what gives?"

"I haven't figured it all out yet...but I will." He told her his mind and heart knowing what he would have to do. He just didn't want to tell her now that he was planning on leaving, it would leave them vulnerable.

"Well I want to meet her. You're different and I have her to thank." she went to Char and hugged him. "There's something you're not telling me though."

"I've answered all your questions truthfully." He took a swig of the cold beer.

"Yeah I know, but there's still something you aren't telling me, something that is stopping you from being completely happy about this."

"Other than Kael constantly breathing down my neck?" He shook his head. "What's this talk of moving? Did you not get the roof fixed?"



"It's more than that. Keegan is dying." she sighed. "Even if we move I don't think she will make it. The earth here can't support two earth dragons, not anymore. I tried to tell Kael in a round about way, Keegan was lurking about, but he just doesn't get it. You and he can be anywhere; you can take your element with you. Keegan and I, well, we get our life from the soil, and there's no life left in the soil here anymore Char."

He had known the other dragon was fading, but not that she was dying. "Ok, we'll vote on it later, but I think Kael will be the only one voting to stay."

She smiled. "Thank you Char." she kissed him on the cheek. "Finish eating, sleep. We will vote when you wake. I'll be back later to clean up." she turned to leave the room.

"Thanks Spiria. If I'm sleeping try not to wake me up."

"I won't, hun. You look like you need to recharge." she called over her shoulder as she closed the door.

He ran his hands through his hair, sighing heavily. It wouldn't be long before Kael started knocking on the door. He needed to sleep. He pulled his jeans off sitting on the bed. With his thoughts firmly on his Alcyone and her scent still faintly on his skin he drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter Eight

Alcyone woke with the spicy smell of her mate surrounding her like an erotic cloud. He was fantastic last night, her body protested as she moved, a deliciously dull ache setting in. She stretched and giggled, her body tender. She touched her waist, the beautiful mating mark he had given her warm like a burn without the discomfort. "Mate," she said absently as she stroked it, the sensations sending jolts of pleasure through her. She blushed and shook her head. "Guess I have another erogenous zone for him to play with, though I'm sure he knows about it, he did create it."

She rose from bed reluctantly, loathing leaving his perfect scent. Forgoing a shower she pulled on a pair of track pants and a cami, then padded into the kitchen of her apartment. She looked at the far door, the one that lead to the stairs to the other apartments that the girls lived in. Cole was probably around, no doubt already up and back from her workout with Thisbe at the gym. She would have to go over the next few days of routines and lineups, just in case she wasn't around, in case Char wanted to spirit her away for a long weekend.

She chuckled and blushed, grabbing a cup of tea and went quietly down to her office, opening the door to see Cole on the computer. She smiled. *Just the girl I was looking for.* "Hey sexpot. Wild night?"

Cole looked up grinning, her delicate features lit up by the light. "Not really. Just the usual. You?" The witch smiled knowingly.

"I had a night indeed." her cami covered her mating mark sufficiently, as long as she didn't bend over. It wasn't that she didn't wanna tell Cole, she would, but she loved this clandestine feel when it came to her and Char. She smiled at Cole. "You're on the net?"

"Yep. Thisbe wanted to try something out, I just wanted to make sure it was even possible to get that amount of lube in before I agreed to try." She grinned. "Plus I'm answering some email."

She grinned. Thisbe and Cole were her star attractions, always pushing the limits at Pinkys. "Well you know what I say; if it's hot it's in."

Cole giggled. "Oh it's hot Al. So," She looked over her scrutinizing the way only a witch could. "Quite a night? He must have been some guy."

Al blushed and giggled Sitting on the couch and sighing. "I'm surprised I can walk this morning."

"Oh yeah? Is he a keeper?"

*More than you know.* She giggled and nodded. "Well he's keeping me, and that's all I care about."

Cole beamed. "Great, a new addition. When do I meet him?"

Al sighed. "I don't know. It's complicated."

She shrugged. "Fair enough. Well he's got a catch in you." She sat back shutting the computer down.

She nodded. "Thanks for that Cole. Listen, I wanted to talk with you, about some stuff with the Club. You have the list of who is being featured this week?"

"Yep, I printed it off." She motioned to the printer where the papers lay.

"Good, cuz I have no clue." she got up and went to the printer, bending to get the paper. The cami rode up and Cole noticed.

The witch looked curiously at her. "You don't know? Al that's not like you."

"I know. I'm just preoccupied right now. Have been for a few days. I guess it's being in love that is doing it." she smiled in a wistful way. She noticed then that the mating mark was exposed and she quickly moved to correct it.

"I love the new tat. Where did you get it done?"

She blushed and shook her head. "It's not a tattoo." She caressed it through her shirt, thinking about the prefect man that gave it to her, and how he did. She blushed hard and closed her eyes, gasping. Reliving the memory was so vivid; she would have to ask him about that.

The stripper frowned. "Ok...so what is it? Because it looks like a tat. Al what are you getting into? Does Cam know?"

She shrugged and blushed again. "It's sort of a tattoo. It's better than a tattoo. She picked up her shirt and showed Cole the intricate dragon that wrapped around her waist, the color of flickering flame, like her lover's eyes.

"Oh wow!" Cole gasped standing. She inspected the mark with awe, bringing her hand to it. "It's warm..."

"Second degree burn warm actually." She giggled and shuddered as Cole touched it, her knees buckling.

She pulled her hand back. "Sorry, are you ok?"

She gave the stripper a lazy lust filled smile. "Oh yeah. It's turned into one of my spots. Touch it enough and I'm sure an orgasm will follow." she giggled and looked at Cole. "It's beautiful isn't it? It was a gift."

"I don't know whether I should be pleased or worried." She looked dubiously over the dragon. "Tell me this is a good thing Al."

She chuckled. "A very good thing Cole. He's fantastic, and this mark proves he's mine... and I'm his." She giggled and touched the end of the tail, tracing it as it circled her bellybutton.

"Good." She smiled hugging her. "You're my best friend Al...If you ever need anything I'm just along the hall, you know?"

"I know Cole, and I'm glad you said that. I'm not sure what's going to happen with him, but I feel like I always need to be with him. I might not be here a lot," she smiled, happy to have something in her life other than her work. "I'll have to rely on you to keep things running smoothly."

"Well I'm here anyway, so there's no point in you keeping yourself cooped up. I'm honored that you trust me to help." She smiled softly.

"I always trust you Cole, always have. And maybe you will meet him soon. I just don't know when he'll be back..." she hugged her friend and smiled. "But we have a slew of things to do before tonight. So we should get going, I think we'll order in for lunch... my treat, your choice."

Cole grinned. "Ooh Italian, I'm in the mood for pasta smothered in cheese, or we could have pizza?"

Al Laughed. "Anything you want. Call Ametello's, they deliver..."

## Chapter Nine

When Char got up the sky was dark. Nothing too unusual for this time of year, but his need to go to her was only amplified. He needed to hold her, to make her his again. Unfortunately, skipping out wasn't an option, they had to vote and he had to somehow tell them that he was leaving. Staying with them wasn't something he could do. If he was discovered then they would think of him as a curiosity, something to be studied and used before his eventual death. However, if the demons followed him back to the others, they would all die. He would take the risk for Alcyone, and he was big enough to look after himself. But the others could never be allowed to suffer for his choices.

He showered quickly, rinsing the grime off him with the boiling hot water. Once he was dressed, he made his way back down to the main room. Everyone was already seated at the table. There were only five dragons in their household and eight that they knew had survived the demons. The three absent dragons were all fire elementals, all who believed that they would one day return to the Afterverse. They believed that by killing the ones responsible for the uprising then they would be welcomed back by the Fire King. Even at that, holding on to that solid belief they stayed under the radars of the demons. Char had often suspected that they were only after revenge for the uprising.

The dragons were not much of a danger to them as long as they all stayed together. Which of course they wouldn't. He would leave and one water dragon, no matter how powerful, could never take on three fire elementals. Char had to wonder if he was

condemning them all to death. He sat at the head of the table, at the opposite end from Kael. He leaned forward, placing his hands on the large oak table in front of him. Spiria was to his left watching him intently. Kael was glaring at him, but it was the other two that interested him the most.

Keegan was looking drained. In fact drained was an understatement, she looked deathly. She'd been keeping to herself mostly, Char couldn't remember the last time he'd seen her out in the fresh air. *Why had nobody said anything about this before now?* He wondered, taking in her state of health. She was wearing a robe, obviously not having enough strength to dress herself. She was all bones, her skin pale where she had once sported a healthy glowing tan. She clung to Perrin for support, who in turn glared at Char, silently blaming him.

Perrin was the youngest of them all, having been born after they left the Afterverse. He was another fire dragon, but a harmless one. The boy had never been to the fire planes, never seen them and so he had never come into his full power. Spiria and Keegan had brought the boy up as their own and although both were mothers to him, he had always leaned on Keegan for support and she had doted on him. Even Kael had taken his turn at teaching the boy, finding himself a very surprised, but not reluctant father figure. It was only Char that the boy resented and he never quite found out why. Maybe the child had expected more from him than a basic run down of his powers. They may have shared an element but that was all. In his eyes, if Keegan didn't make it, it would be Char's fault. Maybe he was right.

So he sat looking at each one in turn, finding a range of emotions from hostility to regret. He sighed deeply. "So what's the verdict?"

"We can't come to a verdict until we vote, Char, and the vote has to be explained. I won't have everyone making a decision just on a statement." Spiria said as she looked down the table at Kael.

Kael rolled his eyes, but not before giving Keegan a sideways glance. He must have been as shocked at her appearance as Char himself was. "Then by all means Spiria, make your statement, I have all ready come to my decision." He answered harshly, but

with the tone of resolute defeat to him. Char knew then for certain that they would all be leaving this place for good, despite however long Kael would string this conversation along for. There would only be one decision that could come from this.

She nodded and got up from the table, walking around them. "This house, this land, is dying, I can feel it, and so can Keegan." she motioned to her elemental sister and the other dragon nodded. "Things here are not as they once were. The house is dying as well, the amount of work it will take to bring it up to code again monstrous. I looked into it, and thank God for the internet, but we are looking at a new foundation, new framework, even new plumbing. This house is almost 400 years old." she sighed and stood against the wall. "We need to relocate, somewhere where the ground is fertile, and there's water, and hills..."

Char nodded wondering why she had bothered to stand up, she, Perrin and Keegan would all vote the same way. Kael would not sit by and watch another dragon die and he had no ties to this place now. He cleared his throat, "Then we will leave. There is no point in staying where the land does not want us." The words felt strange coming from him. Fire does not care for the land; it burns and leaves nothing but charred ground. That was his nature. But living with earth dragons for so long had obviously taken its toll on him.

Keegan shook her head and held up her hand. "No. This is my home, has been ever since I left, even before the house was built. I won't leave, not the memories and the security, none of it."

Spiria shook her head. "Keegan, let's be honest, we all love this place, but it's dying here with us. Our best hope for the future is to raze this place to the ground and move elsewhere. That way the ground has a chance to renew itself." she looked pointedly at the other dragon. "And if we stay here, you'll die," she said the last with no form of malice, just resignation and a sigh.

Char sighed; he had wondered why she'd stayed hidden for so long. This was going to be more difficult than he'd first assumed, the boy would side with Keegan, and they needed Kael to vote a move. "We can come back Keeg. Once this land holds life again,



we will return. But until then we are all safer elsewhere." He told her ignoring Perrin's glare.

Keegan looked at Char and shook her head. "This is my home Char. I'm dying, and I know that. Nothing is going to save me."

He saw the helplessness in her eyes. She knew she was dying, perhaps even beyond saving. "How long have you known?"

"It doesn't matter Sparks." she said using her old nickname for him. "What's done is done and there's nothing I can do."

He smiled sadly. "Then do not condemn Spiria to share your fate. Vote to move; at least let us try to help you." The boy glared at him and he couldn't help but feeling that he deserved that glare. He had killed her, him and Kael with their paranoia and rules.

She shook her head. "When I am gone, I don't care what you do. But until that time I wish to remain here, with my memories. You can leave if you want to, but I'm not about to make a life change so close to my death."

He looked worriedly to Spiria. "You can not stay by yourself...I will not have you die here alone." He sighed hating where this was going. "You cannot be giving up so easily."

"I gave up a long time ago Sparks. I just want to die in peace."

"No...There is much you haven't seen." He spoke thinking of Alcyone; the two of them would get along well. "Please. Please just give life a chance."

"Life left me a long time ago Char. Not that this was any life to lead." she shook her head. "You and Kael did the best you could for us and I have never said anything about it."

"How long do you have left?" He asked sadly, as he mentally counted up how long it would take for them all to move.

She sighed as Spiria went to her with tears in her eyes. "I don't know. I feel myself fading though, and it gets worse every day."

"And you won't even try to walk on fresh earth?"

"I just want to die here!" she said her voice finally reaching above her light treble. "It's not worth me leaving, I can't even leave the house!" she put her head into her hand and cried, Spiria and Perrin comforting her. It was then that Spiria said the wrong thing.

"Keegan, you have to hold on. There's hope, hope for us all. Char found his mate Keeg, you know what that means?"

Kael growled the noise vibrating through the room and Char mentally slapped himself on the head. Spiria was an idiot. "No, what exactly does it mean Spiria?" Kael's deep rumble came from the other end of the table. Char avoided eye contact with him.

She looked at Kael with a smug satisfaction. "It means we aren't all damned and cursed to die. Why does it bother you so much Kael? Jealous?" her words were like venom, a sting to them Spiria rarely had. She was the sweet one, the serene and refined one, she didn't get emotional without cause, and it just proved what dire need they were all in. "Keegan?"

Keegan sobbed into her hands and looked at Char. "Truly? You found your mate?" The look in her eyes was pleading; hope surfacing for the first time.

He nodded. "I have and I would love you to meet her. We're not all damned Keeg, don't give up. Please."

She nodded and smiled for the first time that night. "I should like to meet her." she said with faint hope in her voice. "When?"

"Anytime you would like, tomorrow maybe? I could bring her by," he winced, not wishing to bring Alcyone into their sanctuary and anywhere near Kael. "Or perhaps we could go out? A picnic somewhere nice?"

She touched her hair and face clearly upset. "I don't think I would be ok outside, it's rejected me for a while. But I do wish to meet her. Where did you meet this dragon?"

He froze. Not sure how he could tell his old friend that he had mated to a demon, or how she would take it. "She's in America, although she was originally from England." He took a deep breath. "But she's not a dragon." He could feel Kael's rage. He was holding it in check, most likely for Keegan's sake.

"Not a dragon?" she chuckled to herself and looked up at Spiria who merely shrugged. "Well, I suppose it would be hard finding one. So, if she's not a dragon what is she?"

He smiled softly. "She is my mate."

Spiria smiled at him. "And we can't wait to meet her Char." Keegan broke in then and looked at him. "Why be so elusive Sparks? You never beat around the bush, so why now?"

Char sighed. "Because her safety is paramount to me and there are those of us here that might try and do something foolish."

Kael growled lashing out. "Demon! No, you're not that stupid!" He shouted to Char who sat meeting his eyes but refusing to deny it. They would find out sooner or later.

Spiria moved away from the table and in between the two males. "Kael! Give Char a chance to explain! He wouldn't put us in danger, not when he's helped keep us safe for so long!" her voice echoed in the large room, and Keegan and Perrin, who had not said anything up until that point moved away from the table.

Char shrugged, still sitting where he was. "She is a succubus, no threat to us at all. She's barely noticed at all in the demon community." He lied, knowing that they wouldn't know whether Alcyone has relations with the queen or not. "The succubi have no control over us, they aren't a threat, the pleasure courts never were."

Kael glanced at the other demons as they stepped back. "That is not the point, they are still demons." He growled so low that he could barely be heard.

"Kael! It's a moot point. If Char has mated with her and she bears his mark, there's nothing that can be done about it. Demon or not, she's his, and he has to be with her. Does she bear your mark Char?"

He nodded. "She does."

"Then she must be brought here. If it's true, that she bears no threat, she has to be accepted."

Kael shook his head. "No, hell no..." He snapped off looking over Keegan's distressed form. "This isn't over Charcoal." He spat then stormed out of the room.

Char sighed. "No. I don't suppose it would be." He turned to Keegan. "So you will meet her tomorrow?"

Keegan, despite the scene that just took place, smiled and nodded. "She's yours Char, it doesn't matter what she is. She will bear you sons and that is what is important. Dragons need to live on, even when most of us are not going to," she looked at Perrin. "Love, take me back to my room, and Spiria? Please bring me some earth from the greenhouse."

Spiria nodded and watched Perrin lead Keegan out of the room, then turned to Char. "I'm sorry, I truly am, but I can't lose her, she's all I have left. And I am sorry for the outburst. Kael will see she's not a threat, you'll see. But honestly? What will you do with her? She will live with us right?"

He shook his head. "I just don't know. I would never ask her to leave her home."

"She's your mate Char; I think you should ask her. I know what you're thinking, you and I both know you can't live without her; even now I know you're itching to get to her, to hold her. We can't live without you either, not when the threat is still there."

She was right; he couldn't leave, not with Keegan as she was. "I will speak with her. We will decide what to do, together." He smiled faintly at the closeness of making such a decision with his mate.

Spiria smiled and nodded. "I envy you your mate Char. You bring her home, and everything will be well. I will make sure of it."

He nodded and smiled at her, how could he not? She had just promised to make everything ok. Not that she could, but it did make him feel better, no matter the lie. "I will. I must go to her tonight; I'll bring her here in the morning."

"And I'll look forward to seeing her." she hugged him. "Now I have to go and find that earth Keegan was talking about. I'm not one to waste Afterverse soil, and this is definitely not a waste. Have fun with your mate darlin'." she walked out of the room quickly, the task on her mind.

He sighed, his shoulders slumping despite the fact that he would get to see Alcyone. He would need to ask her to meet the rest of the dragons. Although sure that

she would agree and that they would get on he couldn't help but worry at Kael's reaction. He refused to kill the water elemental. Forcing himself to stand to his full height, he flickered to the flame in her bedroom in search of her.

## Chapter Ten

The day went like most others for her while she was at work, setting appointments for the girls that worked the parties, setting the schedule for the in-house girls, watching the rundown of the weeks' routines... but it was all half hearted. Cole teased her all afternoon about Char and about the dopey grin she had on her face every five seconds. She couldn't help that she was in love with him, couldn't help that he was perfect for her. Cole thought it was cute, a real fairy story, which they laughed about actually knowing a few Fey, as it were.

The evening had her skipping up to her rooms, in the shower to get ready to see him. Her body knew the instant he was awake, and after that she felt a subtle anxiety, as if something bad was happening. She knew it couldn't be that bad, she still felt him, and the mark pulsed with a life of its own as she stroked it.

The second he was there she knew, the flame of heat around her midsection was unmistakable. She had just gotten out of the shower and was drying her hair when it flared and her knees buckled, the flare registering on her body like a mini orgasm. She cried out and then giggled, panting. "Ummm. Not even touching me and I'm already ready for you. So clever dragon." She murmured and shook her head. She knew he would find her; the mark was like a homing beacon.

He opened the bathroom door letting the cool air in. "Alcyone." He smiled looking her over.

His voice rumbled through her and she turned, a smile gracing her lips. "I missed you." was all she said before she jumped into his arms, wrapping her legs around his waist, and kissed him. His mouth was as hot as the rest of him and she moaned, reveling in the heat.

He kissed her hard, pressing her against the damp cold tile. "I missed you too."

She giggled and held him close. "Are you ok? I have felt such anxiety all evening," she giggled again. "I felt you wake too."

"You did?" He asked clearly pleased. "I felt you sleep."

"Umm I did... and I think that I like that you felt me sleep. I did miss you. So why were you upset before, my love?"

"Well..." He sighed. "Much has happened. The others know about you, they want to meet you. If you wouldn't mind?"

She smiled. "Others? Oh baby, yes, I will meet them, I am glad you asked me," and she was. She had wondered throughout the day about the others he lived with, if they would accept her as his mate, if they would deal with the fact that she was a demon. He had obviously been fighting for her, for them. That she meant so much to him already spoke volumes.

He relaxed visibly. "Thank you. I have a very old friend who's all but given up on life. I think meeting you might give her hope." He looked away. "She's determined to die."

Her hand went to her mouth. "Oh no. Char, we can't let that happen." she held him close and comforted him. "Anything you want me to do to help I will my love. She's now my family too."

He smiled up at her. "She is." He hugged her tightly.

She sighed. Being in his arms made everything ok. His warmth rejuvenated her, made the world seem brighter. "So when? Is that all that happened tonight? Surely you didn't have that much anxiety over the fact of telling them about me."

"Well no. I did find out that Keegan would die."

"That is terrible. Why is she dying?"

"Because our land is dying. She's a green dragon, they live off the earth. Apparently the land has been dying for years, only she has chosen now to tell us."

"Oh Char..." the news hit her hard. Why would someone choose to deal with things in such a way? Choose to die and not fight? She didn't know what the dragon was going through, but she felt for her. "The land dying? Surely that can be fixed, right? I mean can't it?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so. It's not my thing, but I think it needs new blood." He shook his head. "We've lived there for so long."

She nodded. "The pleasure gardens have begun to die recently. Fiona, the princess, says it's because the land can't abide the death of its monarch's love affair."

"I'm sure it's the same thing, but you can talk to Spiria about it tomorrow if you like. Although I would not mention your closeness to the queen."

"Understood. And I will. So I'll be going with you to your home?" she asked with an excited note.

"Yes, you will. You'll get to meet everyone."

Her heart swelled. He wanted her to be there, in his life, part of it. She was to help him fix his family, to try to make it all better. She would do anything to help him, to feel her mate in pain hurt so bad; she only wanted to feel the elation of their union. "Ummm. Well then, I'm looking forward to it. We should bring presents."

He laughed. "Yeah, if that's what you want."

"Well what are we going to do tonight? Other than each other?" she giggled and kissed him "We should go shopping maybe?"

"Shopping?" He smiled. "I'd like that, I think" He pulled her close to him kissing her. "And then we can do each other."

"Perfect. Let me get dressed."

They left fifteen minutes later peeling out of the garage in her red Porsche Carrera, Char driving. She giggled as he reveled in driving the car, her hand on his thigh. "Like the car baby?"

"Yeah I do, it's fast."



She giggled as he took another turn at breakneck speed, calling out the window as they rounded the corner. "Umm yeah it is, course it depends on the person driving it. So who are we getting presents for?" She leaned in and nibbled his neck, her hand still on his thigh. She nipped his ear as she whispered to him. "If it wasn't for the gear stick my mouth would be in your lap right now..."

He grinned at her. "Well that sounds perfect, maybe on the way back." He blinked. "There are four others. Spiria and Keegan, they're earth dragons. Perrin is another fire dragon, but he's young. Then there's Kael," He sighed. "He's a water elemental."

"Water eh? So he's into being right? Thinking he's always the smart one?" she saw his look of surprise. "I'm speaking from an astrological point of view. It's one of Thisbe's hobbies. She asked about my mystery man and what sign you were," she grinned. "I told her you were a fire sign."

He laughed. "I am that. So yeah, that's Kael. He's a real pain in my ass."

She laughed. "Let's get him sea monkeys then."

"Sure why not, I'm sure he'll love them."

"Do you have any clue what I'm talking about mate?"

He shrugged. "Those little shrimp things."

She giggled and nodded. "Well maybe it's not such a good idea..."

"No we're getting them for him. It's perfect."

She moved closer, the need to touch him overwhelming. "Am I supposed to always feel the need to be on top of you?"

"Well, it's a good feeling on my part."

"Oh don't misunderstand love, it feels good, but it's like a craving... my body wants me to make you pull over and take me."

He shrugged. "We are mated; I guess that is what it does."

"I like it." She told him as he pulled into a parking spot at the mall. "Well, what does everyone like love? You have earth dragons? They like plants right?"

"Yeah, plants and earth. Kael can have sea monkeys and that leaves us with Perrin...I don't really know what he'd like."

She smiled. "Do you have the internet?"

"So I'm told, although I'll never understand the mechanics of it."

They got out of the car and she went to him wrapping her arm around his as they walked. "Perfect. We'll, get him a gift card... Can't go wrong with a gift card."

"Ok, fair enough. He hates me anyway so that should work out well."

"Hates you? Impossible. You're wonderful, and sweet, thoughtful, strong, and you think of your family. What's not to like?"

"Ask him." He shrugs. "The boy just never did."

"Maybe I will. Ok, so we need to hit the plant exchange, it's this way."

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Their day together had been perfect, just as a day spent with your mate should be. Guilt racked through him at the thought of Keegan. She was dying and she hadn't told any of them. She hadn't wanted to leave their home and he saw her point. Leaving would be hard on all of them. If there was still a chance that she could be saved, then Char would take it. For a dragon that had lived through the execution of almost his entire race, he was surprisingly optimistic. Although, it could have just been his blatant refusal to face the truth.

Alcyone had spent the day showing him just how good life was going to get, now that he had someone to share it with. They'd picked up the gift certificate for Perrin, along with a catalogue complete with web site addresses. The whole idea of ordering things from the computer sounded a little far fetched, but she assured him that it would work once he voiced his opinion. She then finished by promising him that she would show him how to work the thing.

They'd bought Spiria and Keegan some plants. He'd remarked telling her that earth dragons were easy to buy for; they were the only creatures that he knew of that were happy to get a bag of dirt. He'd found over the years that he could bring them almost the tiniest amount of moss and they'd be content with it. Kael, on the other hand, was the worst person to shop for. Most years he settled for snow globes, after all, they contained liquid of some kind. This time he reckoned Al had cracked it with the sea

monkeys that she'd picked for him. They'd bought them jokingly, but he had a feeling that the water elemental might just like them.

After their shopping expedition they'd returned back to Pinkys where Al had ordered dinner. They'd had wine and talked about everything and nothing, just glad and secure to be in each other's company. He loved her whole attitude towards life, she was easy going and free. The more time he spent with her the more he knew the others would love her. They'd ended their perfect day by making love several times, until both were sweaty and spent, too exhausted to do much more than lie holding each other. Her warmth beside him was a constant reassurance to him as he lay, his mind racing over their day and the day that was set out before them and of course Keegan's fate.

He felt Alcyone stir beside him and he pulled her up to a kiss. "Have a good nap?"

She chuckled. "Nap? I call that passed out. Umm one thing's for sure mate, you are not selfish."

"And neither are you, that's one of the many reasons I love you."

"Such a sweet talker. Can't sleep love? It's all still bothering you isn't it?"

"A little." He admitted. "The land is dead. They will all have to move, myself included."

"I'm sorry my love." she rubbed her cheek on his warm chest. "Where will you go?"

"We will have to look for somewhere that suits all our elements. I'm not sure if Keegan can be saved, but we have to try."

She sighed. "And what of us? I won't see you much will I?"

He debated how much to tell her. "Once they are settled in and safe I will leave and live with you here. If you'll have me?"

She smiled at him, sitting up and going to his mouth and kissing him. "Char, I'll always have you, but it's not safe for you or them, I couldn't ask you to leave your family."

"No, but I will." He sighed kissing her. "I want to...no; I need to be with you."

"And I need to be with you. I couldn't live with myself Char. Family is important."

"Then we'll work something out. You have family too."

"My family isn't important Char, my family doesn't count on me for survival." she snuggled closer to his body. "I could move in with you?"

He looked down at her surprised, would she really leave everything for him? "Would you? Alcyone, you have a life here."

She laughed. "A life? Char; do you know what I do for a living?"

"I do. But it's your living, your business. I could never ask you to leave it for me."

"There's nothing I don't do here I can't do from a computer Char. And it's just a job, not my life. I haven't had a life up until now. It's been feedings and parties and payroll, that's about it."

He smiled disbelieving, how he loved this woman in front of him. "Then you'll come with us, if that's what you truly wish."

"What I want is to be with you, my love. It doesn't matter where, but if your family needs you then I'll be there. They are my family now as well, regardless of what they will think of me."

He grinned. "They will love you."

She snuggled into him again. "I'm nervous to meet them. And Lord knows, I'm nervous for you to meet my parents. They'll find the mating mark interesting though."

He laughed, not sure how he felt about meeting her parents. "We'll take it one day at a time. Tomorrow will go smoothly; they will love you as I do." He chuckled. "Well not quite as I do, but they will love you."

"I hope so Char. I hope they don't hate me," she sighed and kissed his chest. "And don't worry about my parents; they have ascended recently so they haven't left the Afterverse in a while. Cam though, she's going to wanna meet you, and taste you most likely."

He nodded. "I know, I'm sure we'll be able to arrange something that will please her."

"I love you Char, we'll get through all of this. It won't be easy, and shit if I'm not kicking myself for bargaining away my soul. Had I waited a little longer you might have found me."

"I might have, but I'm glad it happened like this. I love who you are, demon and all."

She smiled hugely and kissed his nose. "You do? God, I love you mate," she giggled and stroked her mating mark. "You know, when Cole touched it this afternoon it felt so good."

He chuckled knowing that if the mark was touched by the right person it could prove almost orgasmic. "I bet." He stroked his fingertips over it.

She moaned and shuddered, arching and biting her lip. "Char..." she panted and looked at him, her eyes heavy lidded.

He kissed her his hands moving to cup her buttocks. "You're perfect Al...But we should sleep. We have a big day tomorrow and we'll need to rise early."

She nodded and kissed him. "You're right love." she kissed him again and sunk down, her body firmly wrapped around his. "I love that I don't sleep alone anymore."

"Oh yeah?" He wrapped his arms around her soft body, managing to keep his worries about tomorrow's meeting at bay.

"Umm hmm. You're better than a body pillow."

He chuckled deeply, kissing the top of her head. "I guess I am. I love touching you, you bring me such peace."

She snuggled deeper into him and sighed, minutes later he heard the rhythmic breathing of sleep. He held her close to him, her steady heat a constant reassurance. He was glad that he'd found her and had bound her as his mate. Coping with Keegan's condition without her would have been hell. Things had turned out well for them; he would have his family secure and his Alcyone at his side. Kael would be a problem to be addressed tomorrow, although Char had seen the look of defeat in his eyes every time he looked at Keegan. So she would live with them and in a way, they would all have to stop hiding from the demons. It was time for a change and that would start tomorrow.

## Chapter Eleven

Alcyone's shower was hot, but not as hot as she was now enjoying everything, what with Char's essence always a part of her now that she was marked as his mate. Char's fire was all consuming, and she didn't want it any other way. It was always a dream of hers, to be loved so deeply she was consumed by it and it was coming true now. Char was taking a risk being with her, and choosing to stay with her, but in her eyes it was worth it. His family would be safe, she would be part of it, and maybe show them that all demons weren't so bad. After all, with the new regime taking shape the old ways were going to be nothing but legend to the new demon children.

She was nervous to meet the family as it were. Knowing that she would be meeting a dying dragon was unsettling, but there wasn't much to be done. The dragon, Keegan was the name Char had given her, needed hope and Al was going to give it to her. The water in the shower felt good as it sluiced down her frame, the slight pulse she was getting in her mating mark, she could see the colors change, made her body tighten.

He had had her twice that morning, waking her up with a nibble on her shoulder from behind, lifting her leg slightly to enter her, loving her long and slow as he whispered endearments to her. It was wonderful and the perfect way to wake up. After wallowing in the afterglow he had been wilder, placing her on her knees and taking her again, swift and hard, making her entire body shiver from pleasure. Sex wouldn't be the same with any other man for her now that she had Char. Feeding from him would always sustain her, and her body always craved him, like it was doing now. She

supposed she was lucky, the man she loved would be enough for her, and she wouldn't have to look elsewhere. Not even the King and Queen could say that about their relationship, not her parents.

She giggled and touched the mating mark, her fingertips playing havoc on the edges of it. She felt the sparks of pleasure trying to make it to the core of the mark, and effectively the core of her. Her body sang for him, but she fought the urge to stalk naked and wet out of the bathroom to jump on him. They had work to do today.

She sighed and turned the water off, wrapping herself in a large bath sheet and walking out to the bedroom. Char was waiting, smiling at her. She let the towel fall and giggled. "So baby? Everything ok?"

He smiled licking his lips his eyes traveling over her body. "Everything is good...or as good as things can be. We should hurry though," he checked his watch. "With the time difference we're already cutting it a little close." He smiled as tension that wasn't normally there traveled through his body.

She nodded and smiled going to the closet and grabbing a pair of jeans and knee length boots, pulling a tank top on that showed off her mating mark. She turned and grinned. "Well, how do I look?"

"Perfect as always." He stood smoothly walking to her and hugging her tightly. "Everything will be fine."

"I know it will my love, it is still unnerving. You have the gifts?"

"I do," he told her, pointing to the bags on the floor.

"Then we should go love. No sense in waiting or dragging this out." she kissed him sweetly and nuzzled his neck. "Just how are we going to get there?"

"I can take us." He grabbed the bags then returned to her, snaking his arm around her. "The flames shouldn't hurt, most of them are...they won't hurt, but close your eyes just in case."

She giggled and wrapped herself around him. "They won't hurt me baby, not now that I have you."

He smiled at her as the flames engulfed them, carrying them safely to the garden of a mansion. Once safely there, he stepped away from her looking her over. "Are you ok?"

She shook off a feeling of crawling, much like the ones she got when she used the lines to travel to the Afterverse to visit her parents and the queen. She smiled at him and nodded. "It's much like Ley Line travel, though I don't think you're bending planes of existence."

"Not exactly. I can move from flame to flame if it accepts me and allows me through." He pointed at the small garden candle. "Someone was good enough to light one for us here, most likely Spiria."

"That's very different, and nice of them." she looked around the grounds, the land looking like it was early fall. She sighed. "The land is dying." She said absently. Her eyes trained on the house and she smiled. It looked like a large looming mass of styles of architecture, and it was obvious that they had many quick renovations over the years, not anything major enough to bring the house up to code. She smiled. The house had character, like Sterling Meadow where she grew up. "I like the house Char, it's got distinction."

"Just wait till the first stormy night." He muttered under his breath as they started to walk towards the house. "Yeah distinction, it's nearly as old as I am." He grinned at her. "But I've aged much better."

"Umm. You don't look anything over two hundred baby." she giggled and cuddled him. "So I get to see the bedroom right? Your bedroom?"

"Of course." He put his arm protectively around her. "If that's what you want to see...it's a little sparse." They walked up the front steps and into the grand hall.

She smiled. "Sparse I can do, as long as the bed is big enough for the two of us. So what's the game plan, my love? I would like to meet Keegan first."

He looked around quickly as if expecting someone to jump out at them. Once assured of their safety he nodded "Of course, she'll be upstairs." His hand still at the small of her back he ushered her to a huge staircase and they both began to walk up.



The house was decadent inside, if not a bit rundown. It was in serious need of a facelift, or a blowtorch, Alcyone wasn't sure which. The staircase was truly grand, age and wear evident on it. It wasn't rickety, it was just sad, like the rest of the house. She could feel the neglect around here. They made it to the landing, walking a few steps to a side door, and she fidgeted.

He turned kissing her reassuringly on the cheek. "There's no need to worry, she'll love you." He knocked on the door edging it open and peering inside. "Keeg? We're here..."

They walked in, the room a pale and warm green, a few plants in the room thriving, but the majority was in various stages of death, like their mistress. Al saw a woman sitting in the weak sunlight that was filtering into the room through the leaded glass windows, her small frame bathed in light. She was pretty, probably once beautiful, long blonde hair, lightly sun kissed skin. She turned to them and smiled, Al seeing her eyes for the first time. The color of Kentucky bluegrass, they were beyond startling. She returned the smile and inclined her head. "Good afternoon."

Char smiled warmly at her. "Good afternoon Keegan let me introduce you to Alcyone...my mate."

Alcyone smiled again and went to her, getting on her knees in front of Keegan. She put her hand in her lap. "It's an honor to meet you, to meet someone so important to Char."

Char smiled coming up behind her and laying a warm hand on her shoulder. "Both of you are important to me."

She smiled and touched her mate. Keegan touched Alcyone's hand. "You honor me dear girl. I'm not one for reverie. Please, get up off your knees and sit with me. Char? Get us some tea please? Your poor mate needs something to calm her nerves."

Alcyone raised an eyebrow. It was true she was nervous, but she knew she was not visibly jangled. The last six years at the Incubus court had trained her to hide certain emotions, not that anything was ever unpleasant, but it was always good to live in the courts with the least amount of emotion. That the dying dragon picked up on it made

Al feel a bit more at ease. The dragon wouldn't try to play on the weakness, regardless that she was a demon.

"Of course," he smiled. "I'll be back in a second; no doubt Spiria has some on already." He paused at the door. "I shall check on Kael's whereabouts as well. If he comes in looking for me please let him know that I'm looking for him, and I will find him if he disappears."

Alcyone looked at Keegan, her anxiety setting in. Alone with this dragon, she wasn't sure what to say, or what to do. Char grounded her, and he was not here to do so now.

The old dragon smiled at her and placed her hand reassuringly on her knee. "Char shouldn't be very long. I must admit to some curiosity about you Alcyone, please tell me about yourself...it's been so long since I've spoken to anyone outside our five, let alone a demon."

This she could indulge the old dragon in. Talking about herself had never been a problem and it wasn't going to be now. She smiled. "Well, I come from a family that has all bargained for one power or another, my sisters are part of the Strigo court, and the Caligo court respectively, though both did not bargain for ascended status. I'm still trying to figure out why. I and my parents are both bargained to the pleasure courts, and my parents have ascended recently." She was happy none in her family were part of the more officious races, the ones that were part of the dragon extermination. All demons knew, through one way or another, about the great dragon extermination headed up by Furerety, King of the Cento Demons and Overlord of the Afterverse. The story went that the dragons were rising up after the supposed insurrection with the Ice King, something that was kept very hush-hush. Al suspected he hadn't wanted another threat to his power, the prick. So he started a mass extermination of the species, out of fear.

She was surprised any made it out, after she heard the stories and read the books in the Pleasure court's reliquary. It was vile, and unnecessary. That she was mated to a dragon now.... She pulled out of her reverie and started talking again. "I own a club in

Shadow Heights, that's in New York, called Pinkys. It's a strip club." she spoke of her club proudly, as a pleasure demon having a ready supply of energy spoke of wealth and standing. She might not want to tell everyone this, but with Keegan, it couldn't hurt.

"Ah yes...Sparks mentioned that you had your own business." She sighed sadly her withered hand moving through her own hair. Scraping it behind her ears she smiled at Alcyone. "So how did you meet him? You can't have known each other very long, I distinctly remember him being thundery last week. He has his moods, all fire dragons do, but recently he's been a breath of fresh air...a marked improvement, I must say."

Al laughed. "We have known each other a little more than a week. He left me a note, with a blue rose and a beautiful choker; it was very mysterious and romantic. He told me to wear the choker at the party that night, but not in so many words. I don't think he's ever actually told me to do anything." she blushed with the memory. "That night he danced with me on the dance floor, and well, we were like horny high school kids," she blushed again, harder, and felt her mating mark throb. She knew he knew she was blushing.

"I always said he had a touch of romance about him. It only makes sense; Elementals are the bare bones of their elements. Fire dragons are very passionate, about most things, Sparks most of all. Although over the years he started to lose a lot of the things that once made him great. I'm glad it's returning to him, to you both. He's never had love, never had what you both share now. It bodes well for our race. Thank you for being there for him, he'll need you now more than ever. He will not take my passing well."

Hearing the words, the finality of it, Alcyone's heart ached. "I know I don't know you very well, and it might not truly be my place, but as his mate I feel it is. Why are you so resigned to die? I mean, can't anything be done?"

She shook her head sadly. "Nothing. I have invested myself to this place; my very blood is in its roots. It dies and I must die with it."

"I'm sorry Keegan. And your family? What will they do?"

"They must move quickly so that Spiria does not share my fate."

"Where will they go? I mean I am figuring you don't have strongholds and safe houses littering the continent."

She shakes her head. "We have only here. Wherever it is it must be a place encompassed by all three elements, Earth, Fire, and Water. Fire is easy but the other two can be tricky. If we'd gotten it right the first time we wouldn't be having this conversation." She smiled weakly.

Al's heart went out to the ailing dragon. Even though she was dying she was still worried about how the rest would fare. She would help find a place for them to live out their time, but the fact that she was not going to have Keegan around upset her. "So they need a tri element area?"

"Exactly, and don't let Kael fool you. He says he only needs a fish tank of water or a running toilet, but he's only making light of a bad situation. He needs a constant natural supply, and it needs to be closer than the one he has here. I've watched him and if it weren't for his daily trips he'd be as I am now. I'm so very worried about him now that Char has you. He's very alone and still so bitter, but it's his guilt that traps him. I'm not sure what he would do if it weren't for the rest of us, he's made protecting us his life."

She nodded and then smiled. Kael wasn't going to be a problem in the way Char thought; at least she didn't think so. Keegan's words hit her and she realized that they were probably all lonely, the males most of all. She would have to wait and watch and hope. An idea dawned on her, something she would have to talk to Char about but there was no harm in giving a dying dragon hope. "I think I might be able to help Keegan. But I'm not sure that the rest will welcome it. Still, I don't know you well, but I will miss you when you leave."

"The others will be easily swayed I'm sure. Char will side with his mate, Spiria wants to leave here, and you can always use Kael's guilt against him and Perrin..." She sighs. "I truly do not know what will become of him. He doesn't understand his nature although I have tried. A fire dragon that has never stood on the great fire plain of the Afterverse is a sad being indeed. He will have to find his own way in life, as we all do

eventually." She shrugs. "I do regret not being able to get to know you better, a month ago and we would have had time. But such is the way of life I'm afraid."

"It is. I'll think on this though. Can this place be salvaged at all? I mean bringing in new soil and erecting a new house maybe? Will that give you time?"

She shook her head. "No the land is already dead; I am clinging to residual energy. The only thing that will restore it is new life and time. Time I do not have."

Alcyone's eyes stung with tears. "I'm so sorry Keegan, so sorry."

She placed her frail arm on her shoulder. "Do not cry for me. I have lived so long, I'm tired Alcyone. I'm so tired and now I finally get to be one with the earth."

"It's still not fair."

"No it is not...but, to coin an old phrase, life isn't fair."

Alcyone nodded and sighed. Keegan just shook her head. "Now Alcyone, why don't you go and find your mate. I'm tired, and I would like a nap before dinner. Tea can wait for later." Al got up, their meeting clearly over for the time being. She wasn't sure how long she would have to talk to Keegan, but she knew she would get the chance to say goodbye. If they had had time, they would have been friends, Keegan so accepting of her nature. Then there was the question of helping the dragons move to another place. Ideas were brewing, but she had to be sure before she told her mate.

## Chapter Twelve

Char made his way silently down to the kitchen where he knew Spiria would be. He could smell the brewing tea from the top of the staircase and as he got closer he became engulfed in the relaxing scent of the herbs. He felt comfortable leaving Alcyone with Keegan, knowing she was as safe as she could be there. With a little luck maybe Al could talk the other dragon out of this suicidal pact she had with the land.

The fact that Kael still hadn't made an appearance was slightly unsettling; however, Char took it as a good sign. Any time away from Kael could only be a good thing. The fact that the water dragon's presence was nothing but a faint trail only served to make Char happier. Kael would show up sooner or later, but the later would give Alcyone more time to adjust to the others before Kael brought his own brand of 'Kaelness' to their little family.

He walked into the kitchen and saw Spiria and Perrin, sitting at the table drinking tea. As soon as he felt his presence the youth glared at him, then stood, and left the room without so much as a goodbye to Spiria. Char sighed; he'd never figure that boy out.

"He'll always hate me." He commented sitting on the abandoned chair.

"He might, but that's just Perrin, we all have our moods, and he is young. So? Where is your mate?" She smiled and rose, going to the coffee pot and pouring him a cup. "Sugar?"

He shook his head. "No thanks. Alcyone is with Keegan they seem to be getting on well. I was sent for tea."

"So you were sent out of the room for girl talk?" she chuckled and brought him the coffee cup, along with a plate of cinnamon scones. "At least they are getting on, though I never expected Keegan to not accept her. She always said she would welcome any mate that was brought here, regardless of race. After Dunwinn died in the uprising... Well, needless to say she always wanted all of us to have the happiness she once had with her own mate."

"I know." He sighed heavily. "She was the easy one...well, the both of you." He quickly corrected.

"True, but Zoran and I never bonded, we never had the chance." she shrugged and gave a small sad smile. "I'm sure it's better that way; I don't know what I'm missing. I'm happy to live vicariously through you now Char."

"You can find your own damn life, and I'm sure you will. It's never too late." He answered feeling decidedly uncomfortable. Relationship advice was not something he wanted to be giving out, he wasn't qualified to. He'd only had a mate for just over a day and already he felt more responsible than he ever had in his life. Char didn't even want to be giving out advice on fire lighting let alone relationships.

"Relax Char. It does me good to see you happy, you deserve it, and it gives me hope I'll find someone of my own. Maybe you did the right thing, getting out and finding her. You sure look better for it."

"I feel a lot better. It's not so dangerous out there, as long as you stay away from the demons who can recognize us. Most believe us to be extinct."

"Well we have kept out of the spotlight. And your demon is a pleasure demon? That's not so bad. I don't think any of us had unfavorable dealings with the pleasure courts."

"No, they are quite safe. Now explaining that to Kael is another matter all together."

"Kael thinks a puppy is a demon in disguise a lot of the time. Not that we ever had issues with the Arcuo court or the Strigo. He will come around. Maybe meeting her will be the clincher. I personally can't wait, she makes your eyes spark."

He chuckled. "She does and I hope you're right."

"Me too. So what about moving? Think your mate can talk her out of the decision? And if not, after she passes, what will we do? Where will we go?"

"I think I can answer that, or at least help." Alcyone's voice came softly from the door as she walked in, going to her mate quickly and settling on his lap. She smiled at Spiria and then nuzzled Char.

Char held her against him, her warmth relaxing him. "Oh yeah? Coming house hunting with us love?" He nuzzled her back.

"I don't think you will need to house hunt."

Spiria smiled at the two. "He has no manners, I'm Spiria, and you must be Alcyone. You are as special as he said. Would you like some tea?"

Alcyone nodded and cuddled into Char. "It's wonderful to meet you Spiria. I'm sorry to be rude, but when I'm near him I need to be touching him."

Spiria nodded and got the tea kettle and teacup off the counter and poured Alcyone some strong tea. She sat and took a scone.

He chuckled, knowing the effect it would have on her mark. He knew he probably shouldn't be teasing her like this here in front of Spiria but he just couldn't help himself. "So, no house hunting love? Care to explain?"

"Well, I did tell you about my parents recently ascending, right?"

He groaned a little, that was something he was still not looking forward to doing. In fact, he'd rather face Kael. "Don't remind me."

She nuzzled him again. "Well they left Sterling Glen to me. And I hadn't thought about it until now, but it's perfect."

That got his attention, "A glen?"

"Well it's an estate, on the coast. You know how we people name estates, well ours is Sterling Glen. It's close to the ocean, hell, it has a private beach, the land is fertile,



Mum had a small greenhouse and garden, and about a ten minute walk into the east hills, there's a hot springs. I grew up there, and now that it's mine, it's just going to molder alone. I mean I have been the executor of the estate for about seven years now, and haven't even been there, not that I take vacations much. It should be used, the house is huge."

Char nodded, the place sounded ideal. Perfect for them all and he was looking forward to visiting the hot springs, despite whatever decision that they all came to. He looked at Spiria over Al's shoulder; he didn't want to be the first to agree to it. If Spiria liked the idea then he would push it, but not before.

Spiria got up and went to them, looking down at Alcyone. "Truly? A garden and a greenhouse? Our garden went barren years ago. You would let us live there?"

Alcyone smiled and nodded. "You're my family now as well, and I have what you all need. I would be honored for you all to be caretakers of Sterling Glen."

Char hid his proud smile behind Alcyone, they were family and she would live with them. Even Kael would have a hard time turning the place down. "It sounds perfect. Of course we will need to speak with the others, maybe Kael and I could visit tomorrow? We'll check the place out I'm sure the two of you can come along as well...act as a buffer." More like to stop him ripping Kael's throat out.

Alcyone and Spiria both nodded. Spiria spoke with a quiet excitement to her voice. "I would love to go and see, feel the good earth. Alcyone? Will you show me about?"

Alcyone smiled and nodded. "It might need some work; my parents didn't live there for the past five years before I inherited it, so it's been empty the past decade or so. We'll have to have things fixed before anyone moves in. I think it'll be nice. Maybe we could bring Keegan something green?"

Char smiled, knowing how much Keegan would love that they thought of her. "Good idea, so it's settled then. Tomorrow we'll go out and see Sterling Glen."

Alcyone smiled. "Perfect. Will we stay here tonight? I would love to get to know everyone a little better."

He grinned at her, happy that she wanted to stay longer with them and more than happy at the prospect of getting her into his bed. "Of course, it'll be easier for us all to go out tomorrow if we all get an early start."

She kissed him sweetly and sighed. "Wonderful, now, why don't you show me around?"

"I can do that." He eased her off his lap and stood beside her. "The place is falling apart so we'll have to be careful."

"You'll keep me safe, I trust you."

Spiria smiled and laughed. "Well, I'm going to see Perrin and Keegan, tell them the good news. Watch for Kael Hun, I'm sure he's lurking about."

Char growled. "I don't doubt that. He has a nasty habit of lurking." He put his arm around his mate and ushered her into the house fully intent on showing her his room first, the one place he was sure the water dragon wouldn't lurk.

## Chapter Thirteen

Kael knew she was here; the whole mansion reeked of demon. A sweet scented, bright, helpful demon. She already irritated him and he had no intention of meeting her, or addressing her. He hated her and he hated that stupid fire dragon for doing this to him, to them all. She would be the death of them.

Guilt washed through him briefly. This place was the death of them, or at least the death of one of them. They would have to leave, although Keegan had already pleaded with him to let her die here. They needed a new place to live. He would see to that first and only then would he deal with Char's new demon mate. She would just have to be ignored until then.

The only problem with that line of thought was that he needed to talk to the dragon if they were to arrange a house hunting expedition. He sighed climbing the staircase that would lead to Char's room. He was not looking forward to exposing himself to the demon.

Knocking briefly on the door he opened it, only to have his senses immediately assaulted by the smell of sex. He suppressed a shudder, walking past the bed without looking at its inhabitants.

"You should open a window Charcoal it's stifling in here." He told the bed as he opened the window, fresh air gushing in around him.

He heard Char sigh. "Well I do enjoy stifling."

"No doubt." He said looking out the window.

"Kael, we're covered you know." Kael looked round to the bed where Char and the pixie-like demon were laying. "This is my mate, Alcyone, Al this is Kael."

The woman sat up and bowed her head. "Good evening Kael. I had hoped to meet you this evening."

He looked her up and down. "Well now you have." He grinned baring his teeth. "Char, we need to talk about moving to a new place."

Char growled under his breath, but kept his smile in place. "Of course, Alcyone had a suggestion about that, didn't you love?"

Alcyone blushed. "My family's estate, Sterling Glen, it's vacant and I thought I would offer it to all of you, as a refuge."

He growled. "A demon house? Oh hell no..." He shook his head. "And you support this? Char, how the hell can we take refuge in a place where demons dwell?"

Char grinned infuriatingly turning to his mate. "See? I've had to put up with this for longer than you can imagine. Kael, calm down, like Al said it's vacant. The demons aren't looking for us anymore. We voted, pretty much, and we decided to look at it tomorrow. Now you can come with us, like I know you're going to, or you can fly into one of your huffs and then come with us...why don't you do us all a favor and not huff."

Alcyone looked at Kael. "Neither I, nor my family are a threat to you or yours, I swear it."

"Like I would take the word of a demon." He shook his head.

"Of course you wouldn't." Char sighed. "We have an early start tomorrow so you better let us rest, oh and Alcyone insisted that we get you something, Al...?"

She giggled and got out of the bed, completely unabashed at being naked in front of the other dragon. Her mating mark a vivid swirl of color. She sauntered over to the table and picked up the small bag with the dragon emblem on it, and stood in front of him and smiled holding it out to him. "Here Kael, its kind of hokey, but..."

He looked into the bag and then did a double take. "You've got to be kidding me." His lip quirked despite himself. "Sea monkeys? What the hell am I supposed to do with these?"

Char shrugged his eyes firmly on his mate's body. "I don't know, raise, and nurture them...protect them from demons?"

He opened his mouth then closed it, speechless. He shook his head having nothing more to say to the dragon. Turning on his heel(,) he walked out and slammed the door behind him the little bag still in his hand. *Sea monkeys indeed.* The prick was making fun of him; he didn't like the way Char was acting recently. He needed to put a stop to it just as soon as he set the sea monkeys up with some nice water.

It didn't take long before Spiria found him. He'd just gotten the sea tank rinsed and the water right when she leaned up against the kitchen wall smirking. Ignoring her, he poured the packets in and started to watch them in fascination. He could practically feel them coming around, their little arms waving happily to him. She cleared her throat and he ignored her watching his little creatures swim around in the habitat he'd created for them.

She cleared her throat again obviously seeking his attention. Making sure everything was okay in the tank he turned to her. "What?"

"I see Alcyone's gift was well received."

"Not entirely." He sneered. "I just couldn't leave them imprisoned like that."

"You and your aquatic soft spots. Are you going to name them?" She smiled and went to the tank and looked into it. "Well I'll be, Kael, you're a daddy." she laughed and looked up to him. "But seriously, I take it you in all your brooding wisdom don't like her?"

"Of course I don't like her, she's a demon." He shrugged looking at the tank. "And I'm only growing them so I can feed them to my fish upstairs." he lied.

"Right. Since when do you keep fish Kael." she shook her head. "She's not like the psychotic warlords we are hiding from. Hell she's bargained, she's not born, and she's a succubus. If I'm not mistaken, and I'm not, you yourself spent a good amount of time at the pleasure courts once upon a time, in the bed of the queen no less."

He frowned; he did indeed have many fond memories of the court. "That was then, before we were all put to death and they stood by and did nothing."

She sighed. "Camions and Asmodeus did not sit by idly as you put it. The only reason why Keegan and I are here, hell, the only reason Perrin's egg was delivered to us was because they risked their kingdom to help us, or have you truly blocked that out as well. They were never a threat to us, and they aren't now Kael."

He grabbed the monkey tank carefully then stood face to face with her, towering over her. "I block what I have to, just to keep us alive, try not to forget that." He moved the tank into the crook of his arm keeping them still. "Piss off and bother someone else Spir."

"You really are a miserable bastard Kael, you know that?" she sighed and composed herself then spoke again. "And are you going to vote against Alcyone's generous gift as well? So help me Kael if you fuck this up for everyone..." she trailed off and shook her head. "There's nothing wrong with what she's offering."

"Not at the moment...I don't want to be a slave again, Spiria. I won't vote myself into it and I won't allow myself to be voted by others into it either. I won't stick around there for long. I will not let the fire dragon's stupid choices be my downfall."

"Listen to yourself! Stubborn sod! Char has a mate Kael, something none of us have, and something that gives us hope. His mate is in love with him, I don't think she would betray us Kael, and if she did, and that fucker Fuerety came after us, I would rather die on my feet then live in hiding anymore! This isn't life, this is just existing! Damn it Kael!" she raged at him as green tinted tears ran from her eyes down her elegant face. "We need you."

He shook his head. "No you don't..." He set the tank down pulling her to him. He tenderly held her face his thumbs stroking the tears away. "You don't need me here. With the five of us perhaps. Keegan won't last much longer, Perrin wont stay, he's a young idiot." He smiled. "I'm not living with Char and his demon mate. You can't ask me to, I won't."

"You'd leave me here alone?" her voice was pleading. "Perrin won't leave, not if there's a chance... Kael, I don't want to hide anymore."

"You won't be alone Spiria you'll have his demon mate to buddy up to. Perrin will go..."

"You're a real shit, you know that. This place sounds perfect, Private beach, fertile grounds, remote on the countryside, hell they even have hot springs for Perrin and Char to enjoy... and she said the house was huge... Please Kael, A mate is not supposed to break the family up, but make it bigger. You'd understand if you ever went looking for yours."

"Family? Is that what you think we are? We're a sad bunch of refugees. I hate Char...I always have, why should I stay and watch him have something that I do not?"

"Who says you can't Kael?" she hugged him harder. "Just because it didn't work out between us... she's out there Kael... waiting."

"I don't care...I want to finally get the chance to live my life without constantly looking over my shoulder to protect the rest of you. Char will do that now...he's grown up. You don't need me and I've never needed you."

She pulled away from him and glared; she choked back a sob then straightened and pursed her lips. "Then there's nothing else to say Kael. You will do as you must, let's leave it at that." she backed up and headed towards the door.

He sighed guiltily. He did need her, he needed all of them, but it was all too much. Keegan was dying and their group was breaking up. There was nothing he could do about that. Her insistence that there was someone for them all was becoming annoying. She needed to understand that he wouldn't be there anymore. He just couldn't bring himself to live with them any longer. He needed to start looking out for himself.

She turned from the door. "You do what you have to Kael, but you will be going to see the place tomorrow, if only to not upset Keegan in her final days. Enjoy the world in your self-imposed exile Kael." she walked out of the room.

He sighed shaking his head. "Always have to get the last word." She had, and she'd been right. He didn't want to upset Keegan any more than she already was, however he also wanted to make sure they would be safe. He lifted his little tank of monkeys and headed towards his room. Tomorrow would be an interesting day.

## Chapter Fourteen

Alcyone closed the door to Keegan's suite and padded down the hall. Keegan had loved her present, a night blooming cactus, and was in the process of replanting it to go with them when she passed. She was way too calm about the entire thing for Al's liking, but she supposed when you were that old there was little you could do and actually follow through with. In the past few hours since meeting Keegan she had grown fond of the woman and it hurt her heart to see her so intent on dying.

And the young, shy dragon Perrin, he clung to her like a security blanket. With Keegan's impending demise he was not stable in any way, though, after she had given him the gift card to Best Buy he had opened up a bit to her, asking what she did for a living and what not. She was sure the dragon had never even met another woman other than Spiria and Keegan. Once Keegan was gone, and the apron strings were cut, so to speak, she would have to invite a few of the girls to the estate, for nothing other than to get him interested in something other than his movies and to help him with his transition. If he was anything like her mate, well he would take to carnal pleasures with gusto. She sighed as she thought of Char.

It was killing her to see the pain in Char's eyes as well. Her mate was dealing well, but she suspected it was only because he felt he had to remain strong for her sake. She sighed as she rounded the corner to the stairs, knowing that when Keegan did pass, Char was going to be a mess. She would take care of him, it was her place, and they would grieve together, it was the least she could do.



Now however, she had to go and find the brooding water dragon. She saw the amusement in his eyes when she handed him the present, and clung to that, hoping the memory would fuel her courage to talk to him. Kael scared her to death. In the short time she had been in his presence she had never felt such a cold and closed off personality in her life. The man was lonely, she could feel it with every fiber of her being, but more so, he hated her, no doubt for what she was by default. He didn't know her, and she was on a mission to remedy that.

She found him in the dark study, poring over papers. The room was large and cavernous, the deep rich oak desk at which he sat complimenting the rest of the wood bookshelves and trim, the thick blue curtains filtering out any outside light. She looked over the accents as she walked towards the desk and smiled. Everything, from the leather-upholstered chairs to the area rugs was blue. This was truly the dragon's haven and she realized, as she reached the desk that she was disturbing it. She decided to tread lightly. "Kael? Once Spiria comes in from her greenhouse we are going to go. Are you still coming with us?"

"Of course, have I ever said anything to the contrary?" He answered disdainfully not looking up from his papers.

"Look you don't have to be so horrible to me Kael. I'm not asking you to get into a threesome with Char and I, I just want to help. You don't like me, and that's unwarranted, given that I'm a bargained demon and have never hurt anyone in my life."

"Never? You are a succubus; you leach off other's energy. Char told us you have no influence at the courts, yet you have recently spoken to Camions." He bluffed. "What secrets were you promising her I wonder? Five little pets to sit at her throne's base with collars round our throats? You must be so upset that you can only deliver four..." He looked up at her, years of hatred swimming in his ocean-blue eyes. "Would you tell her one died in transit?"

She shook her head. "I have never hidden my nature from anyone I have shared a bed with, Kael. They all knew and gave freely to me, not that it's any of your business.

As for Camions, you can think what you like, but she knows nothing, only that I'm off on a vacation with the man who wishes to marry me. I don't have real standing at the court, my family never wanted that. Truth be told we are a narcissistic lot, and I bargained because I was not attractive and wished to be. We aren't a full family, what I say won't matter, will it? You have this notion in your head I'm truly evil and will try to hurt you. I would never do that."

He sighed sadly. "I don't trust demons and you just so happen to be a demon. Don't get me wrong, I don't believe you are a threat to me. I could kill you where you stand as could Spiria and Perrin. I believe that you are the start of a slide in the security precautions that I've spent the past two thousand or so years of my life building. You are one demon...but there's always another, and another. Until eventually there's someone who can't keep their mouth shut. There's always one who can't. Eventually those trusting fools will be executed. I say them because I refuse to be apart of this mass suicide."

"Kael, you have made your point, and I am not one to ever put anyone in danger. My estate is secure and no one but me knows where it is. Ok that's not true, Camions knows, but that's because she's my queen. She's not a threat, hell she's trying to patch things up with Amos, it could take a while. It's the best I have to offer you all, as my extended family. I don't want to see what's happening to Keegan happen to any of you. It sucks that you all had this happen to you, but I'm not from that time and I'm not that kind of demon. I'm not asking for much, just that you allow me to help."

He nodded. "I can let you do that. But if I find that you have lied to me..." He trailed off, letting the threat stand unsaid.

She nodded. "Understood. Keegan requested that I ask you to bring an earth satchel? I'm not sure what that is, but she said she wished to test the earth from the estate. Do you know what she's talking about?"

"Spiria will know. Most likely it's a satchel full of earth, in which case a Ziploc bag will do."

"Ziploc bag? Didn't think of that, you always so smart? Or is it the whole 'water and intelligence' shtick that you're going to pull on me?" she smiled.

His eyes narrowed and his mouth quirked into a small smile. "Flattery gets you everywhere. Water dragons are far more intelligent than the likes of the fire drones. I was once advisor to the king..." He smiled sadly. "Now I get to advise you on what's best to carry dirt in."

"You know, my *Gramaman* told me something once Kael. She said the wheel of time is always turning, and we all get back to where we were most happy, even if it takes one thousand years. As for your intelligence... I think I'd like to give over the job of the security system to you. The one in the manor is old and will need updating; I would feel better if you oversaw that."

"I can do that. I've been looking over the mansions blueprints all morning, it looks sound enough. The plans can no longer be easily accessed from the net and if they are, it won't be the real ones."

She smiled. "Char told me to ask you about a satellite. I asked him and he just blinked at me. The house is set up for cable internet and several phone lines," she said as she came closer to the desk and pointed out where things were. "And the pool needs a good scrubbing and filling, but you'll see when we get there."

"It all looks good, I have to say, I am looking forward to seeing the beach and Spir will just die if that's the actual size of the garden she has to play in."

"It's a little bigger, and the greenhouses are all in perfect repair, my mom loved her orchids. As for the beach, there are two entrances to it, the underground tunnel that comes out in the seawall cave and the actual trail down. I think it will need new steps, weather and all."

"The chances of me falling and breaking my neck are slim. Have you seen Spir this morning?"

"I didn't, but Char did when he went to the sauna. I love him, but I don't think I can handle the sauna with him yet." she giggled and blushed. "He said she would be in by ten." she checked her cell phone. "So any minute now."

"And when are we leaving?"

"I guess when she gets in, provided we can find that 'earth satchel'. You have Ziploc bags in the kitchen?"

"Most likely, Spiria does like to keep the most useless items just in case."

She laughed. "Then I guess I'll make myself useful and find one. Char said to meet him in the foyer, so I guess I'll see you there, cool?"

"Ok, I'll meet you all there." He stood gathering the papers. "I have a few things I need to get first."

She smiled and walked out of the room towards the kitchen. She had landed a blow for the future of her new family and despite the colorful things Char called Kael last night, she liked the water dragon a lot. He seemed lonely, like he was still searching. If that was true, then she hoped he found what he was looking for. To see such a proud dragon brought low by despair was not something she looked forward to.

## Chapter Fifteen

Char looked around the house appreciatively; the place was indeed perfect for them. It could have housed at least triple their number of dragons. Alcyone had given them the tour of the house. Spiria had remained wide-eyed and happy where Kael remained sullen yet pleasant. He had to smile to himself, he'd find out later what exactly Al had said to the water dragon, but it seemed to work for the time being.

After the walk around the house Kael had excused himself to walk down to the beach. Spiria sighed in relief as he left. Char wasn't quite sure what had happened between the two, but she was being uncharacteristically cold to the other dragon. Not that Kael didn't deserve it at the best of times; however, it just wasn't in Spiria's nature to be so frosty to him. Char wondered with dread just how much of their argument would affect him.

They left Spiria pointing her off in the direction of the gardens whether or not she would find them in her flustered state was another matter. The "aliveness" of the soil and trees had her in a daze. Char couldn't remember ever seeing the earth dragon this alive before, just another reminder of how dead and lifeless their home had become. Alcyone had dragged him out into the forest claiming to want to show him something. He followed her happily, his mind on other things.

The house didn't need as much work done to it as Alcyone had predicted. The whole place, though neglected, had managed to fare pretty well against the weather. There were a few things that it needed, Kael would set up the new security system and

a lot of furniture would have to be bought. Other than those few things it wouldn't take long before they would be ready to move into the place. Of course, then they would be waiting for Keegan. He sighed heavily, the noise coming out in more of a growl. He didn't know how to take her upcoming death; he felt that by planning ahead he was cheating her somehow. She was his friend and he was waiting for her to die so he could move on with his life and his mate. Al stopped and turned looking at him, frowning. "What?" He asked her looking around, were they here?

"You're agitated. What's wrong? It's not much further."

He shook his head. "Nothing I was just thinking about Keegan."

She nodded. "I know, I tried to get her to come this morning but she's resolute. I hardly know her and I don't want her to go. She means a lot to me already."

"Me too." And it was the truth; he owed almost everything to Keegan. He would have died with all the others if it wasn't her insistence that he stop being such an idiot. Now she was dying because of her own stubborn stupidity and he hadn't been there to return the favor.

"But, she wants you all to move on, she has hoped that things will get better, and she muttered something about being reborn, though I didn't catch it."

He rolled his eyes. "Stupid dragon lore. It has no more basis than the humans' Christ or any other pointless superstition. All made up to make the individuals feel better about dying and entering into nothingness. Pay no mind to it...unless it makes you feel better about her passing. It's all bullshit though."

She smiled. "My cynical mate."

He shrugged it off changing the subject. "So where are we going?"

"I wanted to show you the hot springs, but we could go back," she blushes and looked at the ground.

"Hot springs?" He felt a slow smile spread across his face. "Truly? That would be fun...by all means carry on."

She smiled back at him and pointed. "It's just over the hill here, there's a small copse of birch trees that hide it from plain view." They made it to where the trees stood

and she motioned him over with a wave of her hand. He came up beside her and saw the small pool, happily bubbling and gurgling, surrounded by a natural stone shelf of granite and limestone, small plants and a very small altar hidden in the crescent of rocks that kept the west side of the pool hidden and free from a west blowing wind. They walked to the altar and she smiled. "When I was little, I used to have a small dragon figure from the Orient that I kept here, when I was alone. It always made me feel safe. Now I know why."

He chuckled wrapping his arm around her. It was perfect, he could feel the water below as it circulated and was warmed by the earth. The fact that she'd had a dragon watch over her in her youth made him smile. "What color was it? Did it have wings?" He asked knowing that the Oriental impression of dragons was loosely based on the water dragon. Humans' impressions and views on dragons had always amused him.

She smiled. "My dragon had wings and was a pearly brown, with a gold underbelly. My mother always said it was a unique dragon, which is why it was chosen for me, their unique child."

"Unique? We're all a little unique love."

"Yes true, but if you ask my parents I have always been shy, liked to be alone in my youth. Really, I was just shy."

He laughed. "You're talking to a dragon that's hidden himself away from the world for longer than he can remember. I rarely talk to anyone who isn't one of our five. I can relate to shy."

"Which is why we get along so well." she grinned. "I wish I could find the dragon though, not that I need it, I have the real thing anyway. So why did you ask about the wings? Don't all dragons have wings? Do you? When you change I mean?"

"I do. Some just have other shapes. Fire dragons look much better than the others." He kissed her. "But then I'm a little biased."

"Ummm, well, I am too," she moved back from him and smiled. "Should we take a dip?"

"I think so," he began stripping off his shirt and unzipping his jeans. She followed suit, nude in seconds, she walked towards him, her mating mark a swirl of color.

Watching his mark on her, he smiled. "That is just perfect on you." He stepped out of his jeans and fell to his knees in front of her. "Mmm, it feels good too." He nuzzled his face along her belly reveling in the heat that the mark gave out. His tongue flicked out tasting her hot skin.

She giggled. "Such a naughty dragon. That feels so good."

He smiled devilishly up at her, knowing full well how good it was. "Oh yeah?" He asked her innocently.

"Ummm yes it does. I love your mouth."

"Coincidentally, I love yours." he nibbled possessively on his mark. She giggled and playfully pushed him away, stepping down into the hot swirling water.

He followed her in shivering as he soaked in the natural warmth. "Oh, I haven't felt anything like this since before we left the Afterverse."

She grinned and floated over to him wrapping her body around his. "Isn't it perfect? And they have been here forever. Apparently there's a geo-thermal vent here. A few years ago some resort wanted to buy the land from my parents, for something like ninety million, but they refused. I'm glad they did."

"Me too." He cupped her buttocks with his large hands lifting her into a kiss.

She purred as he did. "It's a wonderful place isn't it? So lush."

"Lush isn't the word." He kissed her again walking her to the edge and sitting her on a shelf.

She stretched and smiled, her nipples puckering in the cool air. "So? You like it? I mean it's part of the estate property? What do you think of the house?"

"The house is great; it has everything that we need and more." Bending down he took a nipple into his mouth rolling it around with his tongue.

She shuddered and sighed. "Ummm, so warm mate. Just like the water."

"Oh I think I'm hotter." He let his fire slip into his mouth heating her ever so slightly as his teeth worried at her.



She gasped and then giggled. "I'm never going to get used to that, that's for sure. So? You guys will take the estate then, have you chosen a sanctuary of your own yet? I saw your eyes light up in a few places when we toured the house."

He pulled back looking up at her. "Well, I had hoped to let you choose. It is, after all, your house and I don't mind going with whatever you decide. Plus I'm not a hundred percent sure what the others will decide."

"Well, I don't think anyone will naysay it if you choose the front bedroom, you know, the one with the enormous fireplace?" she giggled and ran her fingers through his short hair.

"That one did draw my eye." He smiled kissing her.

"I thought it would. I love that room, especially in the winter, the windows covered with frost and the fire blazing. It used to be my parent's room, and I remember nights sitting with my mother, reading a book, and drinking cocoa, watching the snow fall. It's just beautiful. "

"It will be." He turned his attention back to her breasts kissing and nibbling on her.

Alcyone giggled. "One track mind."

"Well my beautiful mate is naked in front of me. How else should I act?"

"I love that you think I'm beautiful. I've never brought anyone here before, Char, never. This is our special place."

"I like that," he smiled. "Our place."

"I think everyone will be happy here," she said as he laid his head in her lap, his arms around her hips.

"Mmm yeah," he purred as he nuzzled her legs open. "Very happy."

She moaned and laid back, her legs parting slightly as she did.

He licked the top of her thigh groaning, he inhaled deeply breathing in her scent. "Still smell like fire... God I love that."

She giggled. "Now what love? They will be wondering about us soon no doubt."

"Oh, I think they can use their imaginations to figure out what we're up to." He nudged her legs open wider his hands stroking her smooth skin. "Besides, I think Kael and Spir need some time to sort out their differences."

She closed her eyes and sighed. "Very true. So we do have some time then. How do you plan on spending it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I was thinking about just..." he flicked his tongue out tasting her. "Feeling it out. Unless, that is, you have an idea?" He blew on her hotly.

Alcyone gasped and writhed under him. "Um, well I can't say no to you."

"No?" He smiled his hot tongue resting on her clit for a second applying a little pressure. "You could always try."

"What's the point?" she panted. "I win out in the end."

"True." He stated, licking her forcefully.

Alcyone purred and came hard minutes later, her legs wrapping around his upper torso, just under his arms. She panted and chuckled. "I love your attentions."

He grinned and licked her juices up. "God, I love watching you come."

She blushed and shook her head. "Guess I'm going to have to get used to being adored aren't I?"

"Oh I think you'll manage." He straightened, lifting her and letting her slide down his body. "I want to show you something."

"Show me something?" she giggled and rubbed against him, then reached down in the warm swirling water and cupped him. "Anything to do with that?"

He chuckled. "Not entirely."

"Oh?" she giggled and mock pouted. "Then what?"

He grinned, her disappointment warming him. "I want you to see me in my true form...to change for you. Would you let me?" He held both her hands in his.

"I... Really?" She looked at him and smiled. "You would?"

"If I still can...you must understand it's been a very long time since I've indulged. We've never had the space." He hadn't shifted for a very long time. He didn't doubt that he could do it; it was changing back that was the exhausting part.

"Am I... I know this might sound stupid, but, is it dangerous? For me?"

"It's perfectly safe for you love. I retain full consciousness; it's just me, but a little bigger and not as sexy."

"Bullshit. You're always sexy. That you are willing to share this with me..." she let her words trail off and blushed.

He chuckled. "I'm more than willing, and I want you to know me in all forms."

"Then show me my love." she said as she sunk into the swirling water.

He smiled nervously stepping back and climbing out of the water. "Now changing back might exhaust me, I should be ok but, I'll need to sleep." The cool air hit his body, the water running in rivulets down him to pool at his feet.

She blushed as she watched him, licking her lips. "Another day love, remind me to lick that water off you. You look so good wet."

He smiled taking a deep breath. "I will. You ready?"

"Always ready baby," she swam to the edge of the pool and settled on the natural rock shelf, still fully immersed in the swirling water.

He stretched his arms over his shoulders loosening them up. He closed his eyes releasing himself. Changing was all about letting go, letting his natural state take hold of him. It was binding himself back up again that was the problem, but he would worry about that later. He found that quiet place deep inside of him and released the dam. It felt like his skin was prickling, pins and needles; he felt the fire flow over him, out of him. He was changing, his muscles and skin growing, shifting. There was no pain, never pain, but it did feel uncomfortable. Long ago, when the change occurred daily, there was no discomfort, but now it was like a muscle he rarely used and it was stiff. He felt the change subside and he looked up at her over his muzzle.

He now stood taller, his mass having almost doubled. He flapped his huge red wings out, stretching them as his claws dug into the soft earth.

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Alcyone could hardly believe her eyes. Where her mate had been moments before a whirlwind of fire consumed him now stood an almost eight foot dragon with quite an impressive wingspan. She appraised him from her perch in the bubbling pool, amazed by what a wonder he truly was. The similarities to her dragon of long ago and Char were uncanny. His scales were iridescent, like the scales on their masks the night they met, only instead of being white or blue; they were brown with a red sheen to them. His underbelly scales were golden, and looked soft to the touch. Her hands itched to run over him, but not yet.

She looked up his body, to the long proud snout, and what looked like long whiskers on either side of his massive jaw, tipped to almost black. His eyes watched her as she assessed him. She blushed and her eyes trailed to his long and proud tail, the scales there gleaming in the weak sunlight just as bright as his chest scales. The wings were her final stop, and they moved, as if stretching, back and forth under her gaze. Their colors were the most brilliant, the gold, red, and black pearlized. She licked her lips. He was beautiful, and so like her statue. "You're so beautiful Char."

He snorted scraping the earth. He nudged his head in the air towards her. "*You think?*" His voice sounded in her head.

*Whoa.* That was something she didn't expect to feel. She had spoken mind to mind with Arcady before, but it was never as intense as this. She felt the emotion, the love he felt for her, the pride at her approval. She wasn't normally sensitive; this was very different from what she had shared with Arcady. "Char, your voice carries emotion in my head, it's powerful."

He nodded. "*That's how it is supposed to be.*" His huge body moved towards her, his muscles and scales rippling.

She nodded and smiled, rising from the water. She went to him, standing across from him just a foot from his elongated snout. She reached out and touched him, her hand smoothing down his hard scales. They felt thick, but the tops were light, like webbing. She giggled. "You feel good, warm even."

He rolled his eyes at her. "*Well, I am a fire dragon.*" He chuckled in her head. "*Last time I checked we were hot.*" He flapped his wings stretching them.

She walked around him touching and feeling him. He was power incarnate. She could feel him in her body; her mating mark pulsed and flared. "You want to fly don't you?"

"*It's been a long time, but I might get spotted.*"

"It's worth the risk love." And it was. To feel the joy he would feel in flight was enough to tell him to risk it. She would never have the ability to do it herself, but that didn't mean she would never feel the exhilaration he felt. The mating mark did a lot to bind them together and she was grateful for it. A dragon's mate would be truly able to experience it with him, but because of the fact that she couldn't do it, well, it made it all the more special. How many people can say they felt the joy of flight from a dragon? Not many.

He flapped his wings a few more times testing the air. "*It is...but it's been a while. If I crash through the trees and you laugh at me, I'll eat you.*" He chuckled again.

"Ooh again? Promise?" her eyes glinted with mischief and humor. "I would never laugh at you baby."

"*I know love.*" The dragon took a few more deep breaths before flapping his huge wings and taking to the air like a rocket.

Alcyone watched in awe. The man was in the air in seconds, and she could feel the joy he was feeling radiate to her through their bond. He was graceful in that lumbering body, and the way he moved, the way he flew, made her body clench in low places. He was so sexy, more so because she knew that monster was the other part of him, and that it loved her too.

He flew overhead twisting and turning, his body rolling with the air. He circled around her a few times before crashing back down on the ground. He stumbled, catching himself. "*Shit!*" He swore growling and spitting out fire. "*Need to work on the landing.*"

The fire spitting was indeed different, much like the dragons in the movies. The air around them was warm for a few seconds as she watched him regain his composure. As close as she was to his outburst, she wasn't singed in the slightest. She giggled behind her hand and smiled. "Well, practice makes perfect, and that was probably about the coolest thing I have ever seen."

*"I don't need practice, I just need a little work on my landing."* he shivered, his scales flexing. *"It's always cold here."* He plodded off towards the pool. It took a bit of maneuvering, but soon his hulking mass was sinking into the water. His tongue lapped out taking a drink. *"I like it here."*

She watched from the edge, his massive bulk taking up most of the pool. She was cold, but not so much as she needed to be in the swirling water, suspecting his heat was keeping her comfortable. She watched him as he moved, hearing a sound coming from him that was almost a purr. "Char, are you purring?" she asked the dragon who was now nose deep in the water.

His eyes darted around. *"Maybe... Well almost. It's a happy sound. I wouldn't really call it a purr."* He defended.

She giggled and slipped into the water, hearing his playful voice in her head. "Will you make that noise for me dragon? Tell me, where do you like to be touched?"

He chuckled. *"You know where..."*

She gave him an amused look. "I'm not touching you there as a dragon, even I have bestiality limits love. Change back and I'll touch you anywhere you want... But where does the dragon like to be touched?"

He shrugged his wings sloshing water over her. *"I'm not sure, why don't you find out...trial and error."*

She nodded, taking it as a good sign he wanted her close and floated over to him, touching his snout first. She loved the fuzzy feel of his scales on his face, as if they had peat moss on them. She moved her face to his and rubbed her cheek against the left side of his face and sighed. "You really smell of summer nights Char."

He nuzzled at her very gently, his nostrils going to her hair and inhaling deeply. *"Mmm, and you smell like fire but you also smell like me. I like that, my Alcyone."*

It occurred to her that the dragon had probably never had a female touch it, and she felt a swell of pride and possessiveness, that she was probably its first, though she wouldn't ask. She moved from his face towards his neck and touched the golden scales, they were also slick, but with a slight fuzzy feeling. She liked him like this, wasn't afraid of him, and enjoyed the feel of his natural state. As she made her way around to his left wing, she kissed it, the skin baby soft and thin. How something this delicate lifted his hulking mass into the air and kept him there was beyond her. She heard the sound again as she did and smiled. "Your wings like attention love?"

*"I guess they do."* She could hear the contented smile in his voice resounding in her head. He leaned his whole body into her, the noise growing louder.

She kissed them again, then went around him and stroked the scales on his back, the tip of his tail that was peaking out of the water swishing back and forth. "I like you in this form love; it's nice to know I have a big, bad dragon protecting me."

*"Always. Even before you knew I existed."* He flicked his tail, splashing water on them both.

She whooped and came around and nuzzled the other side of his face. It was true, he had always protected her. As a child alone here in this place, she never felt scared or alone, as long as the statue was with her. "It was you in my statue love; it had to have been. A preamble to the right choices."

*"Perhaps,"* He nudged her. *"What happened to it?"*

"I lost it. One night when I was running back to the manor, there was a storm coming, I could feel it, I left it here, forgot it in my haste, it was in the altar. When I returned the next day, well, it was gone. Never saw it again." she sighed and rubbed against him again, then floated to the side of him.

*"I'm sorry, it meant a lot to you. At least you now have a replacement and I'm far superior."* His voice rumbled in her head and she felt the love he was feeling for her.

"Far and above superior. And you can talk back to me."

"*And I can fly and keep you warm,*" he chuckled. "*I like to keep you warm.*"

"I like you keeping me warm too."

"*Well then, we should definitely do that.*" He stretched his wings out fully, letting her stroke under them as the warm water poured off his scales.

"So? You going to stay in this form all day? Can your scales get pruneey? I'm getting pruneey."

"*No we don't get pruneey. Come on and we'll walk back. I could stay like this all day but it'll be best, I think, if I change back soon.*"

"She smiled and kissed his snout and then got out of the water, getting dressed, the clothes sticking to her. She gathered up his clothes as well and watched as he emerged from the water. "You'll be tired when you shift again, right? We'll get to the house and you can shift, and I'll put you in the master bedroom, ok?"

He snorted and nodded. "*Yeah, I don't think you want to carry me back...I'm quite heavy.*"

"You're right on that account love, though I think taking care of you is on the agenda. I'm glad you shifted for me."

"*I'm glad you let me. That's why I've always loved you, there are many who would have run screaming.*"

"Not me love, I'm tough, and you would never hurt me."

"*Never. I couldn't if I tried.*"

She put her hand on his side and stroked him, reinforcing her claim on both the man and the dragon. They began to walk, slowly for her, a lumbering gait for him, towards the direction of the house. Alcyone never felt better in her life about where her future was going.



## Chapter Sixteen

Getting Char to bed proved to be no small task. After walking back to the house grounds, they went around to the front double doors and into the large foyer, Char still in dragon form. It wasn't a stretch getting him inside; the foyer was big enough to hold him comfortably with room to spare. He shifted back quickly, and the fire consumed him again, without so much as a scorch mark on the marble entryway. She watched in awe as he emerged and promptly fell to his knees. She went to him and helped him up, and then up the grand staircase towards the second floor master suite, and with his help, tucked him into bed, where he promptly passed out. She sat with him a little while, moving the hair out of his face, pleased at the smile he wore as he slept. He had put himself in a very vulnerable position, being so helpless after his change, but she loved that he trusted her. It was the ultimate act of trust, and of acceptance on his part. There was no way she would betray him. Not now, not ever.

She folded his clothes and set them on the wingback chair across from the bed and went exploring the suite that would soon be theirs, noting changes that would need to be done. The window treatments would have to be redone, and the walls needed painting. She pictured the room in a pearly burgundy or berry, the bed in steel grey and crimson silks. Her naked toes sunk into the plush five-inch pile of the carpet and she resolved to keep the black carpet exactly where it was. It was too comfortable to get rid of.

She inspected the fireplace, with the sunken pit, the slate a wonderful used blackened color. She inhaled and smelled him, along with the dregs of a fire long put out. This place deserved to be used again and it would be. Turning from the room's focus, she went to the double doors that led to the black marble bathroom, with its enormous circular tub. She walked around, noting the his-and-hers sinks, as all the suite bathrooms had in the manor and decided to put blood red towels in there, and roses, always fresh roses. The tub was the perfect size for the two of them, and the shower, a circular glass enclosure, was built for two with its four showerheads. She giggled as the workings of a seduction played out in her head. She smiled to herself in the mirror, her black hair and pale skin stark against all the darkness in the room. She blinked twice, her blue eyes still in a state of bliss from just being with her lover. *So, flowers, red and white roses for the bathroom.* She knew that Spiria was probably down in the greenhouse, and since that was where she was off to next, she would have to ask her about growing roses to liven up the place. She left the bathroom and went to the large sleigh bed Char was curled in and kissed him on the forehead, then left the room to seek out the earth dragon.

Ten minutes later she found her, digging in the garden, her face and clothes caked with dirt. She walked up; Spiria sat with a trowel in her left hand, and what looked like a tulip bulb in the other. She looked happy, content, and more radiant than when Alcyone had met her just a day before. She supposed it was the earth that did it for her. She got to her knees and caught Spiria's eye before speaking. "Having fun? There's another herb and vegetable garden a little ways down from here, Char and I saw some fall squash and pumpkins almost ready to be picked."

Her eyes lit up. "Really? Well, I'll just have to go and check on them, wouldn't want them to go to waste."

"Indeed. One is huge; it would be great for a jack-o-lantern. Do you guys even do Halloween?"

She shook her head. "Nope, apparently we're too grown up for that kind of thing." She said a little bitterly. "It does look like fun though."

"We do a big Halloween party at Pinkys every year, too bad you guys couldn't go. Still, I'm sure we can make about four pumpkin pies out of it. We used to have Harvest celebrations here when I was younger, my parents inviting the courts for a large party on the night of the Harvest moon."

"It sounds like a fond memory. I've never baked a pumpkin pie before, would you show me?"

Alcyone grinned. She wasn't much of a cook, but one thing that she could do was bake, and it was something that set her apart from the rest of her family. "I would be delighted, Spiria. I don't get to bake much back at the club, the extent of it was boxed brownies. It will be good to actually have a full kitchen to cook in, though I'm not very good aside from baking."

The dragon smiled. "I excel at cooking but baking... they don't let me bake much, but I love the smell. We'll be a good team."

She smiled a broad and satisfied smile. "I think we will. Lord knows Char and Kael probably eat a lot. It will be good to have the house filled with wonderful food smells. It was always what comforted me, made me feel like I was home."

"Well, we all are home now."

"Yes, but not all of us, though it can't be helped. I'm glad you're okay with me and Char." she blushed and giggled. "He changed for me today."

Her eyes widened. "He did?"

She blushed harder and nodded. "He did. Though it took a lot out of him, he's passed out in the master suite now."

She nodded. "Yes, he'll be like that for some time. Changing back exhausts us; it's why we've all but stopped. I'm glad he changed for you, he loves you so much," she smiled. "So what did you think?"

"I think he's beautiful, it's weird, he's almost exactly like the dragon figurine I used to have as a child, something I had pretty much forgotten until we came here. And to feel him while he was in flight," she shivered, "it was phenomenal."

"The two of you were meant to be. I'm glad you liked him, he's quite the beast."

She giggled and shook her head. "And once we are settled in, will you start changing again?"

"I might, we'll just have to see."

Alcyone thought that was a good sign. If they could get back to their former glory, things would work out better for all of them. She decided to steer the conversation to other things. "So Spiria? You're the one that grew the blue rose he gave me weren't you? I have never seen anything as vibrant or beautiful."

She smiled. "Thank you, I had noticed one was missing."

"Are they a hybrid?"

"They are." She beamed proudly. "I started trying for them when I was in the Afterverse; it's taken me a few good lifetimes to perfect." She shrugged. "But what else would I do with my time, and even at that they only take if I use soil taken from Camions' gardens. To find the right mix of soil and nutrients alone took years, let alone the cross pollination and the genetic side of things. There were hundreds of strains to start with, I wanted the scent of one and the leaves of another and you can imagine how long it took me to single out each quality. But I got there in the end, I'd say they were my life's work, but that sounds a little pathetic. They're my hobby and I couldn't be prouder of them. I just have to enjoy them while they last."

"While they last?"

"Well there's only so much soil left."

Alcyone grinned. "Technically no, I can always get some when I go and visit my parents, it's not unheard of."

She beamed. "Really?"

She sighed. "Can I be honest?"

"Of course."

"Camions and I are close friends. She will find out about this place soon I'm sure, but that doesn't mean anything bad. She saw the rose in my office. If I tell her how you did it, and bring her a cutting, I'm sure she will give you all the Afterverse soil you will need."

"I used to like Camions and I trust her."

She smiled at the admission. "She's a wonderful woman, she made me beautiful."

"You are beautiful. Is she still with the king? They were so in love when they married, and so happy."

"Well, it's been a rocky time for them the last thousand years; she's trying to rekindle their relationship. I'm sad to report the gardens are the ones ultimately paying the price."

She sighed sadly. "I worked hard in those gardens, back then they were vast and sprawling. Our men worked in the night gardens of the incubus court. Those were happy times, we weren't slaves like Char was, they cherished our skills. I'm sorry to hear they are unhappy; love shouldn't be squandered over petty squabbles. It should be cherished when you find it."

"And I think they are both realizing that. As to my beauty, I wasn't always attractive Spiria, which is why my being demon is a double edged sword. Before my bargain Char wouldn't have looked at me sideways, no man did." Alcyone remembered being in high school, shy, gawky, and well, ugly. Her hair was stringy, her skin a sallow color, her body no curves. The braces she had were terrible, she was picked on daily and it had gotten to her. Being who she was, the youngest sister in a family of beautiful women, she hadn't even registered on the scales as cute the way she looked. It was true her mother and father called her unique, and she suspected it was because they couldn't bring themselves to say a child of theirs was ugly, not when both of them were part of the pleasure courts by personal bargains. Then prom night, Arcady took her; she was greeted by sneers and underhanded comments about how she had to pay someone to take her. Even though she hadn't, she decided she wouldn't be in that position again, and bargained the night of her eighteenth birthday, leaving that other person behind.

"Char is not a man...well he's male, but we aren't demons or human. We pick our partners based on what's in here..." She reached her slender hand out touching her chest where her heart beat.

"Still, I wasn't in any way attractive."

The dragon shrugged gracefully. "So you bargained with Cam and became what you are now, he'd love you either way. Now where was this pumpkin?"

She giggled and shook her head. Spiria was probably right. The fact that neither Char nor Spiria had asked, nor pried into why she had made her bargain relaxed her. There were no pictures that she knew of, nothing to show them why. They took what she said at face value and didn't pry. That alone made her love them. Her past wasn't important, not to them. "Come on, I'll show you," she got up from the rich earth and then helped Spiria up. They walked towards the other garden, the ground spongy as they approached it. Alcyone smiled. "I think we might need a wheelbarrow to bring these all in." The amount and size of the squash and pumpkins varied, but it was clear they had an abundance.

"True. Or we can just get Char to do it when he's feeling better. I would ask Kael, but he's being stubborn these days."

"Yeah, I got that impression when we spoke at the mansion. I think he will come around, I mean, he wasn't brooding at the manor when Char and I got there, so that's a plus. Hopefully he's down by the beach." She bent and grabbed two nice sized butternut squash and snapped the stem, handing them each in turn to Spiria. "We'll let Char come back for the rest, especially that massive pumpkin." she giggled as she pointed to the overlarge pumpkin toward the far right side.

"Perfect. We'll have to cook something to bring back for Keegan, she'll appreciate it. Maybe some soup, it'll be easier for her to eat and I have a wonderful recipe that'll use the squash." She bent snapping a few more.

"Ooh, and I have a great squash and cheddar biscuit recipe. My gram used to make them all the time."

"The freshness might even perk her up a little, not much, but a little, which is all we can hope for at this stage."

"We can hope."

"We can indeed." She smiled. "Now let's go to the kitchen and start on dinner, maybe the smell of food will wake your mate up."

"Maybe? I'm almost positive he's going to be starving when he wakes." They laughed and walked back to the house, arms laden with squash, and a few zucchini that were hiding in the thick of it. Alcyone and Spiria were like a well oiled machine in the kitchen, laughing and getting to know each other. Alcyone excused herself for a moment and went to the wine cellar and came back with three bottles of wine. "I don't know about you, but I like a glass of wine while I cook." She didn't wait for Spiria to answer but grabbed two crystal goblets off the overhead rack and rinsed them quickly, then poured the aromatic vintage and handed one to the earth dragon. She was truly getting to like her.

Spiria took the glass, sniffed it, then took a sip, swishing the wine around her tongue clearly tasting it. "Oh, now that is an excellent wine. Although, I must confess, I don't drink much."

"Neither do I, a drunk succubus leaks power, and that's not something you want at a normal party. The orgies that break out are insane. It's the one major drawback to my powers," she said as she wiped down the rest of the counters as the bread was rising. It was good that the family always kept the place stocked for emergencies; the fact that they could be here on a whim to see the place and already be domestic comforted her. They talked a while more and finished the breads, popping them in one part of the double oven. She watched Spiria putter around, chopping the last of the squash for the stew. She finished the wine in her glass and stood. "Well, I think one of us should go and find Kael. Seeing that you're cooking, I guess I'm elected." She smiled.

"Oh good luck." she laughed. "And you make sure he knows that I would have left him out there to starve."

## Chapter Seventeen

Kael had left his pack on the shoreline with his clothes, but he was beginning to wonder if a swim was such a good idea. The salty water was cold, not that he minded, but the temptation to swim further into the open ocean was always there, now more than ever. Soon. He promised the white tipped waves. Soon he'd drift for as long as he wanted with nothing to hold him down.

He forced himself to swim back and lay on the tide line letting the water cover his body. He sat on the sand relaxing into the motion of the waves. The house could provide everything for them, everything that they would ever need. Not that he planned on staying, but it was good to know that the others were taken care of. He could smell Spiria's cooking which was always a good sign; she was making herself at home.

As for where he would go, he had no idea. Somewhere warm, he hated England with its cold weather. He loved the rain, but the cold had recently started to depress him. Maybe he'd go to Australia or Brazil, somewhere where he was guaranteed not to run into any ice demons. There was always Egypt; it had been a long time since he'd seen the pyramids.

He was disturbed from his thoughts when he heard Char's demon walking down the old eroded stairs. He smirked laying further back in the water and closing his eyes and letting her approach him.



"You know, if you're trying to embarrass me and play on my supposed modesty you got the wrong girl. I distinctly remember my lack of it last night, so I guess turn about is fair play." She smirked and looked him over. "And I say now it's a wonder you're single."

He glared at her for her irritating comment. "I'm single because your kind killed off my possible mates...I'm the only water dragon left, there's no point in mating."

"Correction, not *my* kind Kael, I'm a bargained demon, remember? But that's neither here nor there. You ask me, you're keeping a bit much from the women of the world," she sat next to him and drew circles in the sand. "It's peaceful here isn't it?"

He smiled at her. She gave as well as she got. He liked that. Plus, she was right about being bargained and about being a succubus, not that she had mentioned that this time. His eyes searched out over the seemingly still water on the horizon. "It is."

"Spiria is in love with the gardens, she's making a squash stew right now. So, you like the beach? That structure is for any kind of water crafts, like jet skis or small boats." she motioned towards the small building just to the left of them.

"I don't like anything that pollutes the water." He said unhelpfully, "So jet skis would be out of the question."

"Well, it's not like I have them. Though there's a small kayak and canoe in there last I saw. Look Kael, I know you are torn with staying. And maybe you're right, maybe it's time for you to see some of the world for a while, but this is going to be home, the place you come back to, to the ones that care about you. You might hate me Kael, but I kinda like you. You're a jerk and you piss Char off to hell and back, but despite it I like you. You do for your family, and you protect what's yours. I admire that, and I respect it."

He looked at her horrified. "You're not going to hug me are you?"

"If you were clothed maybe, but Char would call you out for a duel if he smelled you on me... that and I don't get that close to a naked guy I'm not about to fuck. You understand." She smirked and wiggled her eyebrows.

"Oh completely," he rolled his eyes not liking how she thought she was protecting him from Char. "Now I get to say my piece. I don't like you. I would say that it wasn't

personal, but that was before our little thing in my office, which for the record you're not allowed in, it's my personal space." He suppressed a smile. "You irritate me, like a grimy flea, but more irritating. An annoyance is what you are. I'm waiting for Keegan to die then I'm packing everyone up and moving them all to this..." he looked up to the house "God forsaken hellhole, then I am getting as far away from this sinking ship as I can. If I decide to come back at any point it's because I damn well decide to and has nothing to do with your, always have a home here, crap. I don't want or need your permission Miss Demon." He shook his head enjoying his rant, however false it was. "Oh, and I don't care if you like me or not, no matter how reluctantly it is. You're not worth me wasting any such emotions on you. You just are...and it's irritating"

She smiled and shook her head. "Fair enough. You choose a bedroom yet?"

He glared at her angrily. She'd ignored the whole thing; he'd at least wanted some sort of rise out of her. "Room? Hell no, I want the guest house." He pointed to the one bedroom house sitting separately from the main building.

She shrugged and dug her toes into the sand. "It's yours. I'm sure you know the pool is attached to it. I checked it out on my way down; it does need a good scrubbing."

"Well, I'm sure you'll have fun doing that."

"Fun? Ha!" she laughed. "I'll have a work crew come in this week and get everything done before the big move. Speaking of which, I'm probably going to have the house painted... anything in particular you want?"

"I don't care as long as it's not red or yellow. Shall we discuss china patterns next? Because I've always been fond of the little blue Chinese dragons. Look you're disturbing my quiet time, unless you're here for a reason, I suggest you go." He all but shouted.

"Well yeah, I'm here for a reason, dinner's ready," she smirked and got up, grabbing her shoes and brushing the sand off her jeans. "See you at the house Kael. Good talk by the way," she smiled and chuckled turning on her heel and heading back the way she came.

He growled standing up and stomping after her grabbing his pack and clothes. "I really dislike you."

"No you don't, and that's what's got your panties in a bunch."

"I bite you know." He grumbled knowing how childish he sounded.

"Yeah, use that line the next time you hit the bars Kael... they'll be lining up..." she turned around and looked him up and down shook her head and winked. "Such a damn shame," she laughed and raced up the stairs back to house.

It wouldn't be long before he was out on his own. He wouldn't have to put up with her much longer. A very good thing in his book. He couldn't get a reaction out of her, but he knew he could get one out of Char or Spiria. He smiled anticipating a fight; hopefully it was Char, he really needed to hit something.

## Chapter Eighteen

Char growled, kissing Al. He'd all but slept through dinner; the back lash from his change had hit him hard, much to Kael's annoyance. Now, however, his body was waking up and it didn't want food. They'd made their way back to the mansion and now stood in the kitchen. Kael had left to sort out the specs for the security system. Char thought it was mostly to get away from Alcyone.

He was glad to find that Kael liked her despite himself. The other dragon's conflicting emotions were fun to watch as he found himself having, what could pass as, enjoyable conversations with Alcyone. Kael had actually stopped himself half way through a riveting conversation about the entertainment industry to tell Al how much he disliked her before starting it back up again.

Spiria had excused herself early from dinner saying that she had to bring some food to Keegan. Things between her and Kael were still tense which really made him worry. It was okay for them to have a spat, but this had been going on for too long. He might have to stage an intervention before one of them did something stupid.

He kissed her again taking her hips in his large hands and pulling her flush against him. "Why don't we go somewhere that we won't be disturbed?"

She giggled and arched a perfectly shaped brow. "Your bedroom? Or did you have someplace else in mind?"

"Oh no, we'll be disturbed in my room..." He kisses down her neck nibbling on her silk soft neck. "Let's go back to the manor."

"You sure we won't be missed?"

"Nah, not for anything important. Although Kael might want to tell you how much he hates you and I'm sure he'd claim that that was important."

She laughed. "Yeah, he's warming up to me mate..."

He chuckled softly, warming his body and mouth and kissing down her shoulder. "He's not the only one."

She blushed and whimpered softly, rubbing against him. "You sure you're sufficiently recouped? I'd hate to put you out of action..."

"Oh, I think I'll survive."

She smirked and kissed him. "Good thing I left that candle burning then isn't it?"

"Sure is." He smiled porting them through to the lit candle.

She shuddered in his arms and gave him a lazy smile. "Well my love, you have me alone in an enormous house... what's on the agenda?" her body rubbed seductively against him and she licked her lips.

He smirked, his hands on her hips pulling her crushingly close to him. "Which room should we christen first?"

"Ummm. Ours? I'd hate to soil Spiria's Rooms, though we could go and get nasty in the guest house. Kael has called dibs on it."

"Oh we'll be making it there." He lifted her wrapping her legs around his waist. "So ours first. We'll light the fire."

She purred as he carried her. "Perfect idea, a warm and toasty room." A storm broke outside, the rain driving and thick. She smiled at him. "I love a storm in this house. This is a good omen. I lost my first dragon in this house, and it looks like I'm getting him back."

He smiled indulgently at her. "I know love," he entered their room lighting the fire with a thought. Kissing her, he lay her down on the bed as the flames started to roar.

She sighed and stretched as he stood back from her, giving her a heated look. "What?"

He took his shirt off laying it on a chair with a smile. "Strip for me. You do, after all, own a strip club." He smirked, sitting back on the chair next to his shirt.

She giggled and slowly went to her knees and looked around the room and grinned. "We are going to have to get a pole installed." she slipped off the bed and turned around, giving him her back. "And a spotlight." she turned and winked over her shoulder.

"Most definitely!" He chuckled his eyes traveling over her smooth skin. The fire flickered, its soft light over both of their bodies.

She started to sway, unbuttoning her shirt slowly, and turning to give him glimpses. She then went to her jeans, rolling her hips as she worked the denim down her legs. She bent and wiggled her naked rump at him and looked around her body to him as she stepped out of her jeans, winking. She turned, clad only in her shirt and slowly peeled it off, her hands resting on the edges of her mating mark. She looked at him and smiled.

She was perfection in his eyes, the way she moved so fluidly captivated him. He let his eyes move up and down her tight body, starting at her painted toes and rolling up her smooth calves and thighs. He let his gaze linger at her breasts, watching her slightly puckered nipples. Licking his lips(,) he met her eyes heatedly. "I'm not convinced, do it again," he chuckled heating her mating mark.

She pouted. "Poo."

He laughed; she always put things so eloquently. "I'm joking love, you were fucking hot."

She stalked over and smiled, finally standing in front of him, legs apart, hands on her hips. "I'm not the talent, I'm just the promoter. Thisbe and Cole, they are the talent. Next time, I'll do better. Once we get the pole, I'll get some tips."

He smirks. "Now that I can't wait to see."

She moved between his thighs and touched his belly giggling. "So? You going to sit there and watch me stand here all night?"

"I could if you wanted but I did plan on doing something a little more fun." He reached forward, grabbing her and pulling her towards him, his tongue running over her mark.

Her gasp was audible, the sound cutting through the quiet in the room. She shivered. "Oh baby, that tongue..." she moaned.

He sucked gently on the skin, heating the whole mark intensely. "You do seem to be fond of it."

"I love anything you do Char...gods, don't stop"

"If I do it'll only be to do something better." He stood, kissing up to her breasts taking one of her nipples into his mouth and rolling it around. He walked the both of them back to the bed.

She gasped again, wrapping her arms and legs around his body. "Mate, you're just fantastic."

He gently pushed her back on the bed his mouth never leaving her flesh. "I like to think so." He spoke around her now rock hard nipple as he freed himself from his jeans and stepped out of them.

Alcyone watched him and giggled, stretching, as his attention went back to her, she crooked her finger at him, licking her lips, her right hand stroking her mark.

He crawled up her body, his hands pinching and stroking her. Settling himself in between her knees, he smiled up at her. "Gods, you are beyond amazing."

"Speak for yourself Char, God, this is such a dream."

He smirked, positioned himself, and entered his tip teasingly inside her. "I hope not, because I'd hate to wake up round about now."

"Damn straight my love..." she squirmed, whimpering from the slow tease. "I need you, please..." She closed her eyes and bit her bottom lip.

He sank himself fully into her, his hand cupping her ass and lifting her into a better angle.

She sobbed and wrapped her legs around him. "Oh lord, Char..." she murmured, her breath hitching.

He pounded harder into her, his speed increasing with every deep thrust. "That's it love, let it all go..."

She arched harder under him, her shoulders and head the only body parts actually on the bed. Her hands were wrapped around the carved headboard, and her moans were only drowned out by the howling wind that whipped up as the storm hit the property full force.

He heard a noise on one of the lower floors. He growled, ignoring it and kissing her hard, his body shiny with sweat. He worked faster and faster every movement bringing them both closer. The room door slammed open and he jumped with surprise moving to place his body between Al and the intruder.

"Ah, so this is where you've been hiding, you little whore." The queen of the succubi spat out nastily as she strode into the room.

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Alcyone recognized the voice, but not the tone. *Cam? What the hell?* Her body was on the verge of release and this intrusion was not something she was prepared to deal with. Cam was seething; she could feel the energy pouring off her. She wasn't sure if she was mad at her, or if she was just the focus of her anger. She came around Char and looked confused. "Cam?"

Her queen sneered. "Who else would you be expecting? Another dragon for your harem?"

Shit. "Cam what are you talking about?"

"And now you're treating me like an idiot...you think I don't know a dragon when I see one? Or a mating mark? You've bound yourself to it you stupid whore."

Now that was uncalled for. "I know I'm mated Cam, and I'm not treating you like an idiot. I'm just confused as to why you're here, and why you're so upset?"

"I'm here because I came looking for you, and now it seems I've found you. Finding you with that," she pointed behind her to Char who shifted uncomfortably, "is somewhat upsetting."



As her sovereign, Camions could say what she liked about her, but her mate, well, that was something she wasn't going to stand for. "Now hold it, Keep your ire focused on me, and leave my mate out of this!"

"Your mate! Listen to the words coming out of your mouth girl. That is a dragon...a dangerous one. There's a reason they should be extinct. I should go to the Fire King right now with this...are there others?"

"Cam, I'm not telling you shit. What the fuck is your problem?"

"Never ask a question of me girl...I've been far too lenient with you, you're spoiled. Just when were you planning on sharing this discovery with your queen?"

"I wasn't planning on it, Camions."

She slapped her hard causing Char to growl threateningly, the only thing stopping him was Al's hand firmly around his wrist. "Such insubordination...I can take it all away you know. I owe you nothing."

"You're right, you don't owe me shit. And if the price I pay for having him is my beauty I'll gladly pay it," she touched her face again and shot Cam a look with venomous eyes. "And if you ever slap me again Cam, I won't be responsible for what I will do."

She took a deep breath holding it in, her eyes searching over Char. "You'll never have him; I'll make sure of it," she growled, fury clouding over her beautiful face.

"I already have him Cam, he's mine, I'm his, and the mark proves it. So what is your fucking problem?"

"My fucking problem is you with that...beast!" She sobbed venomously. "You've been sneaking off to meet him, bringing him here of all places."

"Cam, I told you, don't you fucking dare attack him in any way. And I didn't sneak off, you bitch. Just because I wasn't at the fucking club? He's mine Cam, *mine*. I don't disrespect Amos don't you fucking do it to my mate!"

At the mention of the king's name she sobbed, tears spilling out of her large heavy-lashed eyes. "Don't you *dare* mention his name again in my presence. That man is dead to me!" She screamed lifting a vase and throwing it against the wall, smashing it.

Seeing where this was going she moved from Char towards Cam. "What did he do?" she went slowly, Cam in a rage was always unpredictable.

"I was looking for you; I couldn't find you when I needed you." She sobbed harder, ignoring the question.

"I'm here Cam, I'm sorry," she hugged her sovereign, the fact that she was completely naked going unnoticed. "What happened Cam?"

She shook her head clinging to her. "He was supposed to meet me. It's our anniversary, he always meets me," she howled. "But he's not with me...he's with her..." She moaned despairingly, her beautiful voice distorted and hoarse.

Oh no. Cam and Amos were notorious for having their affairs, they were after all the king and queen of sex in the Afterverse, and such standing made them sexual gods on earth. It was well known that they had their time together, and apart, but certain days were considered holy to them, their anniversary being one of them. As far as Alcyone knew, they had never missed one, regardless of their conquests. That he left her said a lot about the present state of their relationship. It didn't matter who he was with, just that he wasn't with her. "Shit, Cam honey, I'm so sorry."

"I'm his wife, not her, my bitch of a sister." She cried nastily.

Alabaster, Amos's concubine was Cam's sister, and while most would think it was a truly horrible situation, it was justified, as Cam had taken Moni, Amos' best friend and her sister's betrothed, as a lover first. Alcyone always suspected that Amos took Alabaster, or Baster as she was called, to keep her safe and to not make her feel unwanted, but with this new development, well, who knew? "Why is he with Baster Cam? And if he is, why aren't you with Moni?"

She shrugged gracefully. "I don't know why he's with her and I don't care anymore. This is our day; I would never be with anyone else on our fucking day! And Moni doesn't want me...he loves his fey, and now you have *him* for all time. It's just me that's by myself."

There was talk that princess Alabaster, was secretly seeing Sallos, a Cento, and that it was true love, she only needed to have her freedom from the incubus king. Unlike

Moni, she was a branded concubine and couldn't leave the service of her king unless he officially let her go. "You sure she's with him... I mean rumors say..."

Her gaze snapped up to her. "I'm not as stupid as he is, know what the rumors say, but he's with her. I know he is."

She wasn't going to fight with her; at this point all she could do was comfort her and hope to help her through it. She looked at Char. "Baby get dressed... and can you get me a bottle of red from the cellar? I think Cam needs it."

"Sure. If she hits you again let me know." He growled getting up and leaving taking his jeans with him.

Her mate's protectiveness warmed her, and he sent her reassurance to her, warming her mark in a comforting manner. She moved Cam to the bed and sat her down, grabbing Char's forgotten shirt and putting it on. "I'm sorry Cam, and I'm sorry you had to find out about Char and I like this. I was going to tell you, come to you with something, but now, Lord knows he's wary of it all."

"I bet. Dragons tend to be mistrustful. Not that they can be trusted themselves."

"Your snippy shit isn't going to fly Cam. I trust Char implicitly, he's never given me a reason not to, and I don't think he ever will. You on the other hand..."

"I've always had your best interests at heart. I've looked after you as if you were my own! How dare you say that to me," she growled, her face showing hurt.

"You insulted my choice in men Cam. Insulted the man I love."

She sighed. "And here was me thinking you trusted my judgment or was at least interested in my opinion. Obviously not, obviously I'm just the old wicked queen that you need to humor now and again to keep your favor."

"Oh spare me Cam. I love you and I listen to your opinions, but when you're hurtful because you had a bad day, then I know better. And favor doesn't mean shit to me, it never did. I bargained to be attractive, not to have your ear, our friendship is a bonus. Don't think because you're queen I won't tell you your out of line with your hateful comments to the man I have chosen, and who has chosen me. A week ago you

were all for this... now because you found out he's a dragon you're not? Have the dragons ever hurt you? Said horrible things about you? I highly doubt it."

"The dragons I knew were always pleasant. But a fire dragon? *That* fire dragon? He's not safe and I will say no more on that matter. What if the Fire King finds out, I will not see you tossed into a fire pit, or worse." She sighed.

"Who the fuck is going to tell that lunatic? Surely not me, and if you're so concerned then you won't either. I have never known the pleasure courts to give up and go tattling to Furerety. You didn't do it when you found the exiled prince, and you won't now."

She smirked. "Ah, but Cassiel and I have an arrangement. He has a lot of arrangements does that one, not that I mind."

She saw the smirk on Cam's face and knew what it meant. Cash was known for a lot of things in the demon world, his cunning, his ruthlessness, and most importantly when it came to the pleasure courts, his prowess in the bedroom. Cam dealt in sex, for everything. She sighed. "An arrangement? Well, he's not one of your subjects and not one you supposedly hold in high regard. So cut to it Cam, what is it you want?"

She shrugged, "Cassiel will always have a special place in my standing, as I'm sure I do with him. Despite his exiled status, I believe in him...although he's not Overlord Al, Furerety is. As for what I want..." She smiled standing. "What do I always want? I want a taste, straight from the vessel."

Al squared her shoulders. She wouldn't share Char, she couldn't. Something in her life had to be pure. Sharing herself with Cam wasn't something she minded, hell, she enjoyed it normally. This though, this was too much. "Cam, I won't ask him. I'm going to have something in my life that is all mine, something no one else has known. He's mine and for once I'm not sharing. I love him, and I will not share the man I love."

"I think I said those words once and look how that turned out."

"Yeah? Well, no offense Cam, but I didn't take my husband's best friend as a live-in lover."

"None taken, our relationship was dead long before Moni." She flinched slightly as the words came out. "Now Al dear, you seem to be under the impression that I've given

you a choice, which I haven't. I want the dragon, just once, but I do want him. I'd have to tell Furerety otherwise, as queen it is my duty. I'm thinking here at midnight tomorrow?"

That the woman she considered her friend would stoop so low hurt Al, truly upset her. She wouldn't cry, wouldn't show Cam how much it hurt her. Change had begun, and the woman she thought she could trust wasn't anything of the kind. It wasn't fair that she had to share the one thing that meant something to her, but what could she do? Exposing Char and the others was not an option, and she would sacrifice her happiness for the good of her new family. She had to, exposure was not an option. "Fine you bitch, take the one thing that matters to me. I'll end up just like you, which is what I suppose you want. Misery loving company and all," she smirked at her. "Fine."

She grinned, ignoring Al's words. "Perfect," she checked her watch. "Well, I have things to arrange for tomorrow but I did enjoy talking to you both. It's always a pleasure." She said falsely with a satisfied smile.

"Just get the hell out of here Camions. You got what you wanted, no need to rub it in. Our friendship is well and truly over, Highness." She gave her a disdainful look and shook her head.

Cam matched her look adding malice to her eyes. "Don't be so melodramatic. You're not the first or the last, the trick on your part is not to let me know how much you hate it or I'll do it again. Being the focus of my amusement is a very dangerous thing Alcyone."

"You and I are through regardless, friends don't do this to each other. I'll have everything for Pinkys put in your name by midnight tomorrow. And trust me, if I could have you rescind my bargain I would, but since I know you won't, well I'll just deal with it. You'll have what you asked for. Now leave."

"Again with the melodrama. I don't want the club, you keep it, or give it to Cole. I have no need of it." She chuckled. "Anyway I'd love to stay and chat, but I do have more important things to do." Smiling she blew Al a kiss before blinking out of the manor.

Alcyone stood there in shock. She never knew that Cam could be this petty, and Christ, what was she going to say to Char. The situation was too much to deal with. She would have to share him, and it was killing her on the inside. She sunk to her knees, tears streaming down her face. She was going to lose him. He wouldn't do it, he would leave her, and hate her for handing him over to the queen, and she would be alone. She cried softly into her hands, despair taking over.

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Char had heard parts of Alcyone's conversation, although he'd hated to eavesdrop, so he'd stayed out of hearing distance for most of it. He didn't think the queen would hurt her, Al always spoke highly of her and he was more than sure that Al could hold her own, even against her queen. He remembered, not so fondly, what it was like to have sovereigns, but from all accounts Camions was always fair to her people and a good queen.

It was when he heard Al crying that he started to worry, exposure be damned if the old bitch had hurt her. He raced up the stairs taking them two at a time. He burst through the door to find Al naked on the floor by their bed. She was sitting and crying with her head cradled ever so softly in her beautiful hands. His heart broke and he instantly wanted to kill the woman who had caused his angel to cry. He'd never thought such sorrow and tenderness was capable at the same time as burning rage. He held back a growl. First, he needed to make sure Al was okay, and then he'd wring the spoiled bitch's neck.

"Al, love?" He walked over to her sinking himself down beside her. He snaked his arm around her waist and pulled her closer into his side, keeping her warm. "Will you be okay?" He asked her not prying and knowing well that she wasn't okay now.

She sobbed harder and shook her head. "You'll leave me."

"Leave you? That's insane...I'd crawl across ice shards for you. Alcyone, nothing matters but you. I love you, not the person you are on the outside. But the real you. I don't care what the jealous bitch has done, we'll work through it together."

"She demanded she have you Char, or she'll go to Old Firepants and tell him you're still alive. I agreed, I'm sorry, so sorry, I didn't want to, but she gave me no choice. Please don't leave me, I didn't mean to..." she cried anew and buried her face into his chest.

He almost choked but hid it from her, not wanting to upset her more. He took a deep calming breath, holding it, then letting it out. When that didn't work he tried it again, when that failed he focused on Alcyone. She was all that mattered, and right now she thought he'd leave her because of her spiteful queen. He cleared his throat, "You did what you had to Al, and it seems so must I. I won't ever leave you, my love."

"I don't want to share you, you're mine, mine alone, the one thing in my life..." she shuddered as her body was wracked with sobs. "Why can't I have anything just mine. I don't want to share you, Char."

He growled softly, if Al didn't want to share him then she wouldn't. He only wanted her; he'd made that perfectly clear to her already. "We'll work something out Al. She can't rape me..." He smirked slightly at the absurdity of that idea. "And you don't hold my leash, no one does. You can't be held responsible for my refusal. When is she supposed to have me?"

She looked up at him, her eyes red and glittering. "Tomorrow, here at midnight. The bitch, I thought she was my friend."

He nodded pulling her close. "She does have an odd way of showing it, but she didn't seem like she was in a friendly mood tonight. If I was Kael I'd make the observation that she'd been hurt badly and couldn't find a way to hurt him back. So she turned to the next closest person to her, someone who'd care." He cleared his throat. "But I'm not Kael, so I'd just say that she wants to make everyone else as miserable as she is. We're not going to let that happen love." He smiled, kissing her. "Although I do find the image of her trying to rape me amusing, I don't think it will come to that, nobody will miss a bitter old succubus queen."

She chuckled softly and shook her head. "We can't kill her Char. I'll just deal with it, it's what's best. Give her what she wants."

He kissed her lightly on the head, the thought of being forced to have sex with anyone left a bile-like taste in his mouth. "We'll talk about it in the morning, once we're back at the mansion. So, what do you feel like for now? Finishing what we were doing before we were so rudely interrupted? Maybe sitting up a little longer? I did get the wine. Or we can always sleep till morning; I think we could both use the sleep."

She cuddled into his chest and sighed, the action obviously her answer.

He smiled gathering her in his arms and lifting her onto the bed. He pulled the covers around them both and held her to him. "Very well love, sleep well." He kissed the top of her head.

She sat up quickly and shook her head. "I'm sorry, so sorry. Maybe we are a bad idea, I'm a danger to you, and to the rest of your family Char."

He jumped, startled. "No you're not. Don't ever think that."

"I am, and this is not fair." her eyes filled with tears again and she shook back her hair. "And nothing is going to change that."

He shook his head wiping the tears from her face with his thumb. He hated seeing her like this, all because of one spoiled, jealous bitch. "No, what's not fair is you beating yourself up over it. None of this is your fault, you hear me? None of us would say so. Now don't carry that train of thought on because you are my mate it's far too late for you to try and back out. I knew what I was getting into Al, I watched you for years. I made my choice." He kissed her. "And that choice was you, I need you. We're a mated pair, we'll just have to work through the bad with the good. Understood?"

She nodded and sighed, kissing him, her tears slowly drying with the nearness of his heat. "I love you Char."

"I love you too...with every essence of my being. All that I am is yours." He kissed her tenderly, tasting the faint salt from her tears. "Now, don't worry about a thing, everything's going to be okay."

She nodded and gave him a small smile, cuddling into him once more and sighing.

"Sleep well love, it seems we have a busy day tomorrow."



## Chapter Nineteen

"I know there's nothing that can be done about it, that doesn't stop me from hating the situation. I haven't had anyone since you, and I don't plan on it, at least not unless you wish it." She smiled and drank her tea. "That's my gift to you love, and it's not like it's too unselfish, I mean you can more then sustain me, hell I haven't had to feed as often since we have been together."

In the past days since their first liaison, she had drank fully only twice and even that was more then enough. If this kept up she would only need to feed once a month, and sex wouldn't be about survival anymore, it would be what it was meant to be, a beautiful action between two people. She sighed. "I hate that you'll be in her arms."

They had woken at the manor in a melancholy mood, though Char had done his best to make her feel adored. Their lovemaking was slow and wonderful and her body still felt him. They had gotten some more earth for Keegan and then flared back to the mansion. Spiria had left tea and cinnamon scones waiting, a staple of the dragons' household, and they had sat down to have breakfast and chat like civilized adults about the problem at hand. Alcyone, now calmer for the sleep and reflection time, was thinking more rationally. "And I hate that she doesn't care."

"She doesn't, but you shouldn't let her get to you. If it has to be done..." he sighed. "I dislike blackmail, especially this kind."

"I just can't believe she would do this!" she stood and walked over to the kettle, Char and her own teacups in hand. She refilled the cups and turned to her lover. "Gods,

what if she wants more after this? I don't want to share you, not ever, and especially not like this.

He sighed more heavily this time. "Which is why I have to talk to her. She's being petty and she's going to get herself hurt. I gave up being a slave a very long time ago and I don't plan on volunteering for it again."

She went to him and touched his face, his stubble tickling her hand. "What I don't get is she had such major disdain for you personally, like she was really put out that of all dragons it was you in my life. It's like you're not good enough for me, and I have no idea why, you're perfection, but she's not beneath a night in your arms. Why is it she doesn't like you baby?"

He looked away. "She doesn't like me very much, I never met her. She...I may have refused her bed before." He coughed. "It was a very, very long time ago. Furerety made me fight in the pit and in his legions...I guess you could say I commanded his dragons." He winced turning from her. "Sometimes requests were made by the noble ladies of the demon court...and sometimes I could refuse." He took a deep breath. "How much do you know about the rebellion?"

His question and the information floored her. She didn't know anyone who had refused the bed of the Succubus Queen, ever, yet her mate was saying he had. And now he was asking how much she knew about the rebellion. "The rebellion? Just that a good king died, an asshole killed him, and an entire race of beings was driven to extinction. I think that's what most who weren't there know."

He sighed clearly uncomfortable. "Well, it's fairly simple, as dragons we were abused by our demon masters. It was the way things were, the way things always had been since the beginning. We were drawn to them, would have done anything for them with a smile on our faces and we couldn't say no to them. Until the Ice King, Montrose, married one of us. A beautiful water dragon by the name of Sybille. He gave his dragons rights to protect themselves and punished any of his kind who mistreated them. He doted on his younger wife and sympathized with the dragons. He himself was born Conglacio to a Cento mother, so he knew what it was like to grow up with

prejudices. He and Fuerety had a long standing truce, they weren't related, Fuerety and Montrose, but they'd more or less grown up together, but giving dragons rights really irked the Fire King."

She nodded and sat across from him, waiting for him to continue.

"Fuerety had his dragons, his property, defecting to the ice kingdom. Fire dragons living with Conglacio could not be ignored, but on the other hand Montrose was the most powerful Ice demon in centuries. I believe the Fire King began to sweat, he needed his dragons, if they rose up against him," he shook his head. "There would have been no stopping them. Years passed before a certain advisor managed to convince Montrose to rise up against his old friend and there was war. They could have won, but they needed their leader, but something, which we don't talk about in this house, happened to him. Montrose lost his fight, his will to live, something killed him long before Fuerety's men dragged him out in front of thousands and crucified him. He condemned all who had challenged him to death. Fuerety could never allow such a threat to his power to survive. Anyway what I'm trying to say is..."

"What he's trying to tell you," Kael interrupted snapping at them. "Is that that fool of a dragon wasn't on our side, he fought against us. Loyal to that bastard king. Hell, the only reason he missed the mass executions was because he was hunting us all down like dogs."

The words sunk in slowly. Her love, the man she loved... "Oh Char..." she closed her eyes and a lone tear ran down the right side of her face. "I don't know what to say."

He shrugged. "Nothing, it was a long time ago and, we're all free now. Well what's left of us..."

"I know... but..." she sighed and looked at Kael. The water dragon looked like hell, his color was off and he bristled with despair. She noticed him fidget. "Kael? What's wrong?"

He sighed deeply; if he had any curiosity about their conversation he ignored it. "Its Keegan, she's taken a bad turn...she's not got long left."

Al gave a bitter chuckle. "Why is today determined to be the biggest shit storm ever?"

"I don't think she's dying just to fuck your day up, Al dear." Kael sneered then frowned. "Why, what else has happened today? Why were you talking about the old days?"

Char growled at him. "Al dear? Would you like to field that question?"

"I'm sorry if it seemed like I'm being a brat Kael, I didn't mean to come off like that. I just meant that bad things all come in threes, and I'm just waiting for the last bomb to drop. Keegan getting worse isn't something anyone wants to hear. I guess the earth isn't helping at all?" she shook her head. "I don't think Kael wants to hear about our other little problem Char, he will blame me, and I can't get all emotional again, not when I feel like I have to be strong for Keegan."

Kael rolled his eyes. "Oh fuck, what have you done? When are they coming with the pitch forks and torches?"

Char cleared his throat angrily. "Not right now Kael, we'll do this later, Keegan needs us and I for one plan on being there for her." He turned his back on them both walking up the stairs.

Kael nodded, "He's right, whatever it is it can wait, but for the record I really hate pitch forks." He tried to joke. "I wouldn't worry too much about Char; he hates that story almost as much as I do. There's no doubt he would have been executed if it wasn't for Keegan...so it's a little hard for us all. It's good that he has you to look after him now." He said reluctantly.

Kael's words stunned her. That he approved of the match, and said so in not so many words meant the world to her, still, it didn't help the fact that there was a dying dragon just one floor up and in less than eighteen hours her mate would be in the arms of another. She smiled at him. "Well I don't know how well I'm looking after him Kael, he's slated to fuck the succubus queen tonight, and it's entirely my fault."

"Cam? You're kidding? He volunteered for that?" He smiled almost fondly.

"No, no he didn't at all, she is forcing this," she caught his tone and then smiled at him. "Kael, is that amusement I hear in your voice?" She stood and walked out of the kitchen, Kael hot on her heels.

Kael chuckled. "Not at all, it's concern. I'm clearly concerned for him..."

"Right. And why is that?"

"Because... the idea of being passed around like meat has never appealed to him." He smirked again before looking at her face, the smile dropping instantly. "Are you ok with this?"

"Honestly Kael, no, I'm not. Char is mine, the one thing purely mine, that sought me out that didn't have ties to my life or family. What we have is more real to me than anything because I have never had to share it. His love, his body is strictly mine, and I liked that. I'm the ugly duckling youngest child of a beautiful family Kael, nothing for me has ever been mine, because they always used me to go to my sisters, for everything. Char is mine, and not because of my nature or enslavement, but because he loves me, and wants me. I don't want to share the one thing I have." Laying that little admission on a dragon she was not even sure she liked, let alone trusted wasn't something she was happy to do, but he was failing to see the gravity of the situation. His face after she stopped speaking though, well, she wasn't sure if it was pity or outrage that was so plain there.

"Fucking hell woman!" He held his hands up to stop her. "It's ok, I don't need your fucking sob stories... seriously I don't, I have enough of my own. A simple no would have done."

Apparently, it was outrage. She shrugged. "Sorry." Her feet hit the top landing as she turned to look at him. She could feel the anxiety from Char, who she knew was already in the room. There was a profound sadness, and a feeling of regret coming to her from her mate. Keegan wasn't long for this world. "Kael, we need to hurry."

## Chapter Twenty

Char couldn't take much more of this. Keegan was deathly pale, she didn't have long and he just couldn't deal with it. He wanted to shout, rage, and scream, anything but sit and watch her fade away. It was all her fault, she could have warned them. Instead, she'd opted to force them to watch her die. She was being selfish. There was a lot of that going on today.

Perrin was pacing frantically, occasionally stopping to moan or wail then start up again. It was taking all of Char's self control not to just deck the younger dragon right there. Well, self control and Spiria's death grip on his shoulder. He bit back a curse, his ears straining to hear Kael and Al he could have sworn they were right behind him. He wouldn't have left them alone by choice.

He looked helplessly at Keegan unsure of what to say. "They were right behind me... I don't think they'll be long, you know how Kael can be."

The door opened and Alcyone walked in, followed by Kael. One look at the dragon in the bed and she went to it, kneeling and holding her hand. The tears welled in her eyes.

Char looked over her to Kael who gave him a knowing smirk before letting the seriousness of the situation affect his features. He grabbed Perrin, putting a consoling arm around the boy and stopping the pacing much to Char's delight.

Keegan looked at everyone and gave a half hearted smile. "Thank you for all being here."

Char's throat tightened and his eyes glazed over, he had to bite down on the inside of his jaw just to stop it from trembling. He heard Kael sigh, but didn't dare look around. This moment was for Keegan; this was the last time they'd ever see their friend alive and everyone in the room knew it. He smiled weakly at her.

She sighed and gave Alcyone a small squeeze as the woman sobbed. "Don't cry, please don't, any of you. I am leaving, yes, but I will return, life always comes around."

Char nodded, he so desperately wanted to believe that she was telling the truth. Kael cleared his throat and Perrin, it seemed, remembered how to breathe as he took in a deep rasping breath. But most of that went unnoticed by Char who was forcing himself to believe she'd come back, at least for her sake if not his own. But the words just didn't ring true; he'd been around too long. Sadly, he nodded. "I know you will Keeg." He lied to his dearest friend. "If you don't you know I'll come after you." He reached his hand out laying it tenderly on her knee.

"I would expect it of you Sparks. You never have given up. Take care of this gift you have, she gives me hope for the future for all of you," she coughed and then tried to smile, Spiria coming to her to give her some water. "You will all find your mates, I know you will. And that's another reason why my time is up, I have had my happiness, Dunwinn and I knew many years before the holocaust. You are all due, and Char was the first," she looked over at Alcyone and smiled. "Kael, Perrin, Spiria, it will happen. You won't be left alone," she closed her eyes and breathed deeply, making a pained face.

Char winced, watching her, still not sure what to say. Kael nodded. "I think it will, and when you come back you can tell us all you told us so." His words were light, but his voice was heavy and labored.

"Now come and kiss me goodbye. It's about that time," she sat up slowly and Alcyone, crying, hugged her and kissed her on the lips. "It's not fair we couldn't know each other better, perhaps in our next meeting." Alcyone gasped and sobbed and moved away, allowing Spiria and Perrin to each go to her. Perrin whispered something and kissed her sweetly on the forehead and then looked over at Alcyone, smiled and

then moved so that Spiria could have her turn. It was heart wrenching, but her long minutes in the embrace with the other of her kind, the last of the earth dragons was finally over. Then Kael came up and smiled.

Kael kissed her on the cheek hugging her tightly, Char watched as they whispered to each other then he stood, kissing her again and walked over to Al and Spir. It was Char's turn and it took everything he had to walk those few steps to her. He fell to his knees his face inches from hers unable to speak.

She smiled at him and touched his face. "Well Sparks? Are you going to be ok?"

"Better than you Keeg." His eyes filled up again, his vision blurring. "Or maybe not, I'm going to be a mess..." His vision cleared as the first of his tears spilled down his cheeks. "See?"

"No love, never a mess. You have your mate, she will take care of you, she always will. You'll be fine, and you'll have fond memories Sparks. You will see me again, this I vow my friend."

"You better...Because I'm going to miss you a hell of a lot." He sniffed concentrating on breathing even. "So you think you'll know me?"

"I know I will, and you'll know it is me, all of you will. I am not leaving you, just going away for a while," she smiled and shook her head. "This body doesn't wish to be here much longer."

"Then I won't keep you Keeg." He bent low kissing her on the lips, then lifted her upper body into a fierce but gentle hug. "Go be with your mate, my friend."

She smiled at him, her eyes lazy. "Yes, yes it is about time," the light died in her, the room growing cold quickly, her plants, the ones that were struggling to live suddenly turning brown and shriveling. All that remained alive in the room was the dragons, the demon, and the night blooming cactus they had bought her. Alcyone saw it and sobbed, falling into Kael's arms. Spiria looked at Char and smiled. "She left it for us."

Char nodded guiltily taking deep breaths. "She did."

Kael wrapped his arms around Al looking at them both. "Wow, Spiria, that's just what you need, another plant." He rolled his eyes then looked down at Al as if just



noticing the demon in his arms. "And if you just want an excuse to touch me; you have a perfectly good mate over there. Go cry on him." He said as he shoed her away.

Spiria smiled and shook her head, watching Alcyone notice who she was clinging to and blushed, then turned to Char and burrowed into his arms.

Char, grateful for someone to hold, clutched her tightly. He kissed her, unable to stop the tears running down his cheeks and very glad that nobody had mentioned them.

"You can't go to her tonight love, not now, I need you, and you need me." Alcyone sobbed into his chest. "Please don't."

He shook his head. "I have no intention of going anywhere but to our room here."

Kael sighed loudly. "I'll talk to Cam for you both, I'm going to need something to keep my mind off things. Plus, it beats the hell out of getting drunk and fighting with Spiria." He winked at the remaining earth dragon.

Alcyone smiled at him. "Really Kael? You don't fear her outing you? We... I owe you, and I owe you big."

Spiria looked at the other dragon with shock on her face and shook her head. "Fighting with me tonight Kael, won't end pretty." she smiled. "Enjoy your evening."

"I sure will," he smirked at Spiria then winked at Al. "And you sure do...Although Cam is always a delicate pleasure, especially if she's wound up. But she wouldn't out me, him maybe, but not me. For me she's a pussycat." He smirked, licking his lips.

"I don't wanna know, I really don't." Alcyone smiled at Kael, moved out of Char's arms, and went to him. She hugged him and went on tiptoe, kissing him full on the lips. "Thank you."

He smirked down at her. "That's you touching me again...we really have to work on that." He chuckled. "I'll be off then; I need to start wiring the security system in anyway."

She moved back and they watched him walk out, leaving them alone with Perrin and the rapidly decaying body of the earth dragon. Alcyone looked at her mate. "Is that supposed to happen?"

Char nodded and sighed. "She becomes one with the earth," He looked to Spiria. "What should we do?"

"I will take care of it," Perrin said in a very steady voice. "You both do not have to worry, though Alcyone, I would like to speak with you tomorrow."

Alcyone smiled and Spiria nodded. "It's your right Perrin, I will leave you to it." she smiled and walked out, and Alcyone nodded. "You know where to find me Perrin, when you would like to talk."

Char followed them out sparing one last glance for the body; he nodded at the boy then turned to Al. "Well now I think I have seen it all. Kael self sacrificing, the boy being responsible..." He sighed heavily, wrapping his arms around Alcyone and kissing her neck. The three of them walked down the hall and Spiria excused herself, needing to be out in the garden. It always amazed him how the garden, even in its dying state, calmed her. He looked out the window noting the mist hanging low over the grounds. Keegan had always loved watching it swirl around the statues. It seemed fitting that she should pass on a night like tonight.

Unable to fight his tears or the sorrow he felt, he buried his head in Al's neck inhaling her fiery scent deep into his lungs. He let the breath out, releasing it over her neck fascinated as he saw her nipples harden. He smirked, muttering for them to move up to their room and she agreed. He let go of her waist, leading them both up the decaying staircase and into the room. Sighing, he shut the door behind them.

She moved against him and kissed his lips sweetly, holding him. "My brave, sweet love."

He smiled stroking her short bangs out of her eyes. "I'm not the brave one, love." He told her sadly.

"Yes you are love. You sought me out, took the chance at us, regardless. You stood up to your family for us, and you let your friend go without raging. I would say that's pretty damn brave."

"I suppose." He hugged her tightly to him. "I don't really feel like raging, Al. I failed her, we all did I think."

"Don't think like that love, she made her choice, and she's happier now. She said she had her happiness, and wishes you all your own."

"I know that, but knowing and believing are two different things. I suppose we'll all just have to wait and see. In the mean time, we have to move on with our lives and our location. Kael mentioned that he could have the security wired up in a week. When would you like to move?" He smiled, knowing that talking about their future would take their minds off things.

"As soon as you all wish to. I made the calls to a contractor and a pool guy. They should have everything done by next week. And I think the painting and the general stuff will be fun to do with everyone, really make the house ours, you know?"

"I think everyone needs that, something of their own. Everything's going to change now."

She smiled at him and kissed his nose. "Yes my love, for the better. A new home for a new life."

"A life I'm more than looking forward to," he kissed her soft lips gently. "A new life with you, my love."

She giggled and rubbed against him, kissing him and running her hands up his thighs.

He grinned at her nuzzling the side of her face letting his hands travel up to her breasts running lightly over them. "So what do you think the boy wants?"

"Me?" she asked hopefully.

Chuckling he shook his head. "Not this boy, Perrin," he kissed her. "Of course I want you."

She blushed and shrugged. "I don't know, but he's never really spoken to me love, I'm interested in seeing what he wants."

"Hmmm...Fascinated I'm sure." He pinched her nipples tugging on them through her shirt.

She shuddered and licked her lips, her eyes fluttering. "That's nice. I'll deal with Perrin tomorrow, but tonight, we have a celebration of life to tend to, my love."

"We sure do..." He kissed her damp lips soundly.

She giggled and moved away from him took her clothes off slowly, then slid onto the bed and laid back, arching her naked body to him in a form of enticement.

He grinned watching her body writhe on the red sheets, her body framed by his color and his scent. She was all his, every single curve. He licked his lips, undressing slowly, letting her watch him, knowing that she got the same enjoyment out of watching him as he did with her.

She purred and sat up on her knees, running her hands down her own body, her fingers once again ending up on his mark. "Come to me baby."

He hissed as he felt her touch his mark, instantly sending warmth to her. He stalked over, kneeling on the bed before her. "I'll always come to you love."

"Yeah, you will, won't you baby? I won't be alone anymore will I?"

He shook his head. "Never." He bent down to her kissing her softly. "We have each other now, we'll never be alone."

She looked at him, love in her eyes, her body shaking slightly. "Don't tease me... please."

"No teasing tonight love." He took her in his arms kissing her passionately. Sitting her on his knees, he let his hands wander her familiar body, by now he knew every inch of her by heart.

"Ummm good, God I love you."

"I love you too," he told her as his hands parted her legs stroking her deeply.

She gasped and Char smirked as he felt her more than ready for him.

"Mmm, just perfect." He cupped her buttocks and lifted her inching her down his cock. He growled as he felt her slick heat envelop him.

Her breathing hitched as he seated himself inside her, her legs wrapping around his waist, her right hand resting on his heart, her left around his neck, fingers buried in his hair.

He smiled loving the effect he had on her. His grip on her hips tightened as he worked deep up into her heat.

She sobbed and rode him, her body breaking out in a glistening sheen of sweat. Her hand was still on his heat, her breathing in time with his heartbeat.

He lowered his head to her breast taking a small, hard nipple into his mouth.

"Oh God... Char!" she moaned as she came around him, her body shaking with pleasure.

He growled, her noises of pleasure driving him wild. She felt so good, so right, as she tightly contracted around him. He needed this, her. He tilted her forward, driving harder and deeper into her as his teeth worked on her nipple.

"Goodness! Char!" the sweat trailed down her body and she threw her arms back, pure joy on her face, her eyes closed in abandon. She was surrendering herself to him.

"Oh that's it Al... Give it all to me." He moaned pounding faster and harder both their bodies heating up.

She sobbed again, her hands grasping at the sheets under them, her mouth going to his as they kissed fiercely. The candles positioned about the room all lit at once and she came hard for him, the orgasm shuddering through her, making her body quake uncontrollably. She cried out and the flames got higher, her eyes transfixed on Char's.

He came hard following her over the brink. The flames exploding outwards in sparks as her body milked him, leaving them with only the light from the moon shining in through the window.

"Wow, that was... wow" she panted and kissed him hard, giggling. "I think the earth moved."

He chuckled watching her beauty bathed in the moon. "I think it might have."

They cuddled, him easing them down to lay on the cool sheets, still motionless inside her. She purred and licked the sweat off his shoulder. "God, you taste so good."

He kissed her, his tongue slipping inside her mouth. "Mmm you too," smiling, he nuzzled her cheek.

He felt the soft rhythm of her breathing indicating she had slipped quietly into a deep slumber. He grinned down at her pulling her sleeping body closer to him before drifting off himself.

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Kael fished inside of the drawer looking for a bottle opener. He'd found, much to his surprise, a rather nice selection of wine in the cellar. Her family might have all been demons, but they certainly did know their wine. The thought changed them a little in his eyes, towards the better end of the spectrum. He sighed, hating that life couldn't ever let things be a simple black and white.

Demons were evil, it was in their nature. They were conniving, misleading, spiteful, and untrustworthy and some of them just happened to be good people. He ran a hand through his hair. For as old as he was he still didn't have a clue how things worked. By now he should have had all the answers but, if anything, he had less then when he'd started off. Everything led to questions. Cam, for example, she was a friend even though she was a demon. She'd been the first demon to truly treat their race like equals, but her recent actions had been uncalled for and out of place. Why? He didn't have a clue.

Things had changed, their lives had all changed, and all the answers were still unknown. He opened the bottle, setting out two glasses, but only filling one.

"White or red?" He asked the beautiful demon behind him.

"Red. Why are you here Kael? I asked for the fire dragon."

He filled the second glass, lifting it and turning. He leaned up against the counter with a knowing smirk. "Who would you rather have Cam?" He held the glass out to her, the wine swishing about the glass its scent filtering up to both of them.

"I thought you were dead. At least, I thought you were when you refused my calls to you. I waited in our place for you, you never came Kael, so I assumed. The fire dragon was here."

He shrugged. "You assumed wrong. Besides, you think I would risk answering a demon messenger? Or even venturing into the 'verse?" he tisked. "You know me better than that."

"True, but I even called for you when I was topside for a while, knowing you wouldn't come to the 'verse. I mourned you."

"We all mourned. Times were bad." He sighed. "So how's your court?"

She waved the question away. "Fine as usual. We do what we do best, we survive," she looked him up and down and took a sip of her wine. "You look good."

"Thanks, though I can hardly say things have been easy. You don't look half bad yourself," He looked her over. "Although you look a little bit tired, have you been sleeping well?"

She shrugged. "As well as can be expected," she smirked and licked her lips. "You however, look extremely pent up."

He coolly sipped his wine. "Do I?"

"How long has it been Kael?" she asked as she moved closer to him, her hand coming up to trace a line down his chest slowly. "Is that why you're offering to take the fire dragon's place? I'm surprised you even consort with his kind."

"It has been a while." He caught her hand, bringing it up to his mouth. "But Char's not bad for a fire dragon, he's like a big ugly dog, we trained him well."

"Yes, it seems Alcyone has too. Tell me Kael, Do you like her?"

"Al?" He sighed. "I've met worse. I suppose she's the adopted little sister that I never wanted. Kinda like penicillin, humans didn't want it, it was an accident, but it solved a lot of their problems."

"She's a peach Kael, a sweetheart. She deserves her happiness."

"So why are you so determined to take it from her?"

She sighed and shook her head. "I was upset. You know how I get."

"I do, but I thought you would have learned by now that taking it out on others isn't the way to go. They only put up with it because you're queen and pull rank, the moment you do that they stop being your friend. Keep going like this and you'll have no friends left."

"I have always hated the fact that you're usually right."

"It's a curse."

"Tell me about it. So you're here, I'm here..." she gave him a knowing look, "what shall we do?"

"Drink some wine; maybe reminisce about the old days?"

She smiled at him and shook her head. "You know very well what wine does to me."

"I do," he grinned. "And there's a full cellar of bottles."

"The Sterling family always did have a stocked cellar. I'm glad nothing has changed," she moved closer and teased him, her lips extremely close to his, her breath misting his mouth, but not touching. "I suppose you're a worthy substitute."

He raised his eyebrows. "You suppose?"

"Well, how do I know you're up to par?" She teased and licked her lips.

"Well, the same could be said for you love." He smiled.

"I'm the succubus queen Kael, you think I'm out of practice? Or is it you think I can't handle a dragon anymore?"

"Well, you do seem to be losing your touch a little."

"How do you figure? You haven't touched me yet..."

"I can tell...demanding Char in your bed? Lashing out at your friends? Not the actions of someone who's in full possession of all her marbles."

She moved back and frowned. "Maybe."

"Just maybe?" He shrugged. "Not that it bothers me; in the end it only affects you. But I take offence to being threatened; I do hope you wouldn't have outted us. The thought of execution never did settle well on me."

"Why would I out you!? I told you I was upset! Hell, I helped the green dragons to safety, even gave them the egg we found," she looked at him. "Have you news of them? The gardens miss them."

"I have. They all seem to be the bane of my existence, although Spiria finally perfected her blue roses. Keegan passed on though."

The regret was apparent in her face. "I'm truly sorry for that, she was a wonder. The egg? What of it?"

"Perrin's doing well, although I'm not sure how he'll take Keegan's death. I'm not sure how it will affect any of us."



"They named him Perrin. I always liked that name. I'm truly sorry for the loss Kael, truly."

He shrugged. "It's just one more, honestly, I'm surprised we all lasted this long."

"The fire dragon finding Al bodes well for you all. You never found your mate did you?"

He shook his head. "I don't intend to."

"Never say never Kael. So? Are we going to talk about depressing things all night? Or are we going to enjoy each other's company?"

He felt his lip twitch into a smile. "Enjoy...definitely enjoy."

## Chapter Twenty-one

Alcyone closed the door on a softly snoring Char, giggling to herself. They had made love on and off throughout the night, alternately waking each other up with kisses and desperate touches, loving each other thoroughly each time. He was insatiable, his attention to what her body needed and craved was exemplary. Her mate loved her, showed it in everything he did, and she was grateful for it.

Things with the family were going well. She would still have to tell her parents, Lord knows if she went to the Afterverse they would see the mark. Though her happiness would squelch any feelings of distrust in the man she loved. She was a pretty good judge of character, and she judged her mate to be first rate, honorable and loyal. Cam, well Cam was another matter.

Kael had yet to return from the manor, but she took that as a good sign. She saw the look on his face when he agreed to seeing Cam, and knew it wasn't too much of a hardship for him. There was history there, dark, sweaty, fuck till you pass out history and Al would get the dragon to tell her about it one day. Her and Cam, well she wasn't ready to speak to her sovereign any time soon, especially when she had such disdain for the man she loved. If her favor was pulled, it didn't matter, she could live without using line travel, live without seeing the Afterverse, and though her parents would have to come topside if they ever wanted to see her, it would be well worth it. It didn't matter though, what mattered was that she was loved, and a part of something larger.

They would move soon, back to her childhood home, a new sanctuary for them, teeming with life and opportunity. It was the best she could hope to give to her new family, and she hoped it would be enough to get them ready to face the world. With the amount of demons that were topside, the ones that were regular visitors to the Afterverse, they were safe. If they crossed paths with a full demon, well, odds were the secret would be kept, as most topside were exiles and had no love for the Fire King.

She moved towards the rickety old stairs and smiled at the sight she saw at the bottom. Perrin stood there with a smile on his face, a large glittering glass bowl in his hands, filled with a dark, liquid mixture. Curious she took the stairs slowly, and he stood and waited for her. He was a curiosity himself and she was determined to see what exactly he wanted with her. "Good morning Perrin. I was just on my way to the kitchen to make some tea, would you join me?" she moved closer and kissed him on the cheek. "And what's that you're carrying.?"

He smiled at her blushing a little at her kiss. "I would love to join you, if you don't mind," he motioned to the bowl with his head. "This is a mixture of Afterverse soil and Keegan's ashes." His smile turned sad. "She showed me how to make it; I'm supposed to give it to Spiria for the new land. It will help the plants and gardens grow lush and thick."

Alcyone heard the despair in his voice and the urge to comfort him was astounding. She went behind him and put her arms around his waist and sighed. "That's wonderful Perrin. She was a wonderful woman, and I'm so sorry for your loss. But you have the future to look forward to, a life of your own," she detached from him and walked around him again, smiling. She took the hand that wasn't cradling the makeshift urn and pulled him towards the kitchen.

He followed her silently holding her hand. "Which was what I wanted to talk to you about," he said once they were in the kitchen.

"Oh? Well, I'm not sure why you would want to talk to me about it, but I'm all ears."

"I don't wish to move with you or the others. I understand that I wasn't around back when everyone died. I don't see the reason for the paranoia, from what I've heard, the demons have stopped looking for us. Plus, I've never been to the Afterverse, I'm not even a dragon in his full power and both Char and Spiria doubt I'm a full blooded fire dragon." He looked at her hopefully.

"Ah, I see." she turned and put the kettle on pulling the mugs down out of the cabinet. "So that's why you come to me. Well, what is it you want to do Perrin?"

He shrugged. "I want a normal life...college, a career, my own home. I'm fed up with this sneaking around, and I don't want to be 'the boy' any longer...I'm ancient in my own right."

She laughed. He wanted his own life? Well, that was something she could help with, something she could very well enjoy doing. "Very true. So I think I can help, on two conditions."

He nodded. "Of course, anything."

"I'll hook you up, Christ, my parents left me more money than I can ever spend in a lifetime. I'll get you a place and a small allowance until you get on your feet. We'll get you documents, passport, and a birth certificate, that sort of thing. I only ask that you come home to the estate for holidays. As much as they are paranoid and all, they are still your family."

He nodded, "That sounds good. I'd never leave them for good, I'd miss Spiria."

"Second, and this is really important to me, ok?"

"Ok."

"Do something grand with your life. I don't care what it is, but don't waste your life Perrin, it's a gift and I know Keegan would want that."

"She did..." He nodded again sadly. "And I will."

The kettle began to whistle and she pulled it off the range, pouring them both a steaming cup of tea. She turned and brought them over to the table and rooted around in the side cupboard until she found some muffin mix. She pulled out the ingredients and went back to the counter. "Then it's set. Where were you thinking of going Perrin?"

I'm thinking we can get you all set up about a week after we move to the estate, anywhere you want."

He nodded. "I think I'll stay in England, at least for a little while, I've never been anywhere else."

"Then we'll set you up in London. A single guy at large will do well there." she giggled and finished the mix, looking for the muffin pan and finding it, then greasing and filling the little cups. She put them in the oven and set the timer. Kael walked in, looking quite pleased with himself.

Kael smiled. "Good morning both of you...isn't it a nice day?" He asked brightly.

Perrin nodded his face still showing his pain. "It is Kael. Excuse me, both of you; I need to get this to Spiria." He stood leaving the room taking the ashes with him.

Alcyone smiled at the door he'd just exited. It was obvious the males in the household intimidated him, and she hoped that after he went on his own he would be better around them. She would have to tell Char that the boy didn't hate him, he just wasn't as Alpha as he and Kael were. She brought her attention back to Kael and shook her head. "You're entirely too chipper Kael, you eat a small child or something? No, no eating children is beneath you, I know! You stole a lolly from a baby?"

He laughed. "No I've never been ones for lollipops, and children are too mucky to eat. I'll have the boy's tea," he sat at Perrin's empty seat.

She shook her head recognizing the look on his face. "Pipes clean Kael?" She asked as she sipped her tea.

"Pipes? Oh Al, you have no idea..." He smirked.

She chuckled and then fidgeted. "So what happened with Cam?"

"We talked," he shrugged. "We fucked, we talked some more."

"Well I'm sure it was a mystifying experience, sex with Cam usually is. What did she say? Was she okay with the switch?"

He nodded. "She was. Actually thought I was dead..." he laughed.

"Well, that's what you wanted all along isn't it? So the irrational hiding has been warranted, you guys are dead to the demon race...except to Cam and myself I suppose."

"Which is a good thing, Al, I'm not going to stay for very long once you all move."

"You said as much before. Perrin and I were talking about the same thing. I'm going to set him up in London with a place. He wants to go to school.

"Good he'll need looking after, but he needs to get the hell away from Char and I."

"Yeah, I think he needs to grow up a bit on his own. So he promised that he'd stay and help with the move, then we would move him. It's going to take some time to get the proper documentation, and Arcady is good, but he can't produce it in mere hours," she shrugged and sighed, getting up and getting the muffins out of the oven. "You will be back though, right?"

"Couldn't keep me away for long if you tried. Plus, I have the guest house to decorate...but you'll have to feed the sea monkeys and I'll warn you they're all named, I'll know if you kill any." He grinned. "Maybe you should ask this Arcady to get us all the documents we need, you never know when it might come up."

She chuckled. "It was on my list, Lord knows if Char and I are going to get married we need some proof he's a living being. Your sea monkeys are safe with me Kael," she smirked and shook her head offering him an apple cranberry muffin. "So Cam isn't going to spill? She's not going to come after Char is she?"

He frowned at the muffin. "Well, that was my next thing." he paused to take a bite out of the muffin as Cam walked into the kitchen somewhat gingerly.

She sat down on the seat next to him looking at Alcyone. "Oh, Al, I'm so sorry. Of course I'm not going to go to Furerety." She shook her head. "I wouldn't have gone through with it...I was being irrational and cruel. I truly am sorry."

Completely taken aback at Camions' apology, Alcyone dropped the muffin she was holding to the floor. She looked down and shook her head. "We're going to need a dog," she muttered to herself then looked up and gave Cam a tight smile. She accepted her apology and nodded, after all it wasn't often Camions gave them out. She offered her a muffin. "That's fine Cam, but don't ever threaten me again, or I will let Char take you out in a blaze of glory. The dragon is mine, and I don't share," her resolve was set, and

quite clear in her words, but her eyes, unblinking and unfeeling bored straight into her sovereign.

Cam looked away. "Of course, I was hurting you because I couldn't get to him. I tried to ruin things for you and I'm sorry. I wish you both the best, and I've never been prouder of you," she met her eyes with a smile. "You've turned into a strong woman."

"I always have been Cam, I just never had a reason to show it."

She nodded. "Of course... you'll always have the favor of the Succubi court, I made sure of that and I wish you well."

"I thank you Highness. There is something I wish to ask of you however. Remember that blue rose in my office?"

She smiled. "Yes, Spiria's, I believe."

"Well, they require Afterverse soil. I would ask for a supply of soil for Spiria, in exchange, of course for cuttings or long stems to grace the succubus halls and gardens." She knew Camions was envious of the roses, something she herself had never been able to perfect. If she could have the trade, she would gladly do it.

Cam nodded. "Of course, she'll have all the soil she needs. I've spoken with Fiona, after talking with Kael, I told her you wanted some for your garden so you're able to take all you need. No questions asked."

She smiled a very warm and inviting smile at her queen. This was Cam's way of making it up to her, making sure all her wishes came true. "Thank you Camions. Spiria will be very pleased. Roses like those should be shared."

"Yes," Cam agreed. "They'll look beautiful at the court."

Alcyone's knees buckled as she felt the delicious heat from her mate approaching and she closed her eyes and licked her lips, gasping softly. Seeing her in the kitchen with a very self satisfied Kael and a very apologetic queen was going to floor him.

Char walked into the kitchen instantly seeing Cam and Kael. He walked to Al putting an arm around her and pulling her into a deep lingering kiss. "Morning love."

"Umm a very good morning. Muffin? Tea?"

"Tea sounds good."

Kael smirked. "Tell me about it, I asked for some ten minutes ago."

Char growled at him. "Well, you should have poured some then." He poured the tea into two mugs Cam declining a cup.

"Don't let him rankle you love, he slurped down Perrin's tea." she rubbed her bottom into his groin behind her and kissed his cheek, then sat down again, munching on a muffin.

He smirked sitting next to her. "I know, but Perrin has baby tea, far too much sugar." Char dabbed a little milk in his then took a sip.

Cam cleared her throat. "I better go."

Alcyone looked at her and nodded, getting up from the table and Char and embracing Cam as she stood. She kissed her on the lips as was their custom and gave her a small smile. "You know where we will be, where I will be, should you need me."

She smiled. "Yes, I know darling." Cam hugged her tightly.

"Then don't be a stranger, Highness." she smiled and patted Cam's ass. "It's good to have secrets, Cam."

She sighed sadly. "I might pop by in a little while, but I think I'll be away."

Alcyone nodded and let go as Cam went to Kael and hugged him, whispering something in his ear. She went and sat in Char's lap as she watched and seconds later, after a soft chaste kiss on Kael's lips, the queen was gone, blinking out of the mansion and back into oblivion. It was time to tell Char about Kael and Perrin. "Char? Perrin and I spoke."

She instantly had both their attention, though Kael was hearing this for the second time. "Oh yeah?" Char asked.

"Perrin wishes to leave once we move, he asked and I agreed to help him. I think his problem stems from the two of you. All that testosterone and he's still a kid by comparison. Hell, he's no doubt still a virgin. So I'm hooking him up with an apartment and what not. He wants to go to school. So both of you, fuck all that noise about hiding. You both know it's useless now, and completely unnecessary."



Kael made a noise as if he was about to argue but Char kicked him under the table making him yelp and grab for his shin. Clearing his throat Char smiled. "Sounds great and I'm sure Spiria would enjoy visiting him to check on how things are going."

"We will as well Char. I love London, as well you know." she nuzzled him and then looked at Kael. "And it seems Kael will be leaving us as well."

"You will?" Char asked.

Kael nodded "Of course. You don't expect me to stay with you two forever? Hell no, I'd rather...well I'd rather do something a hell of a lot worse. Don't worry about it Charcoal...I'll visit, and I'm not going until everything's installed and you've all moved in. That's plenty of time. Now I'm going to bed," He smirked. "Some of us haven't been to sleep yet."

She smiled at the new easy peace the two had. Things were working out well, the family might be breaking apart, but they were growing closer. She watched Kael wink at her and turn stalking off into the house. He might be all frosty on the outside, but he was okay by her.

She turned to Char and grinned. "So love? You okay? I feel like things are not so oppressive."

He kissed her sweetly. "No, everything does seem to be lightening up. I like this new life we seem to be making for ourselves."

"Me too love. And I have you to thank."

"No thanks needed."

She giggled and turned in his arm kissing him thoroughly. He tasted like the strong tea he was drinking and she sighed. Strong. Her strong and wonderful man, the reason why everything in her life had turned upside down and on the other hand, the reason she now had a real life and purpose. He loved her, he always would, and it would be like that for all time. "Come on mate, we have work to do."

## Epilogue

Alcyone roared down the highway, sunlight in her eyes as she swerved through traffic, the wheels of the red Porsche she was driving squealing. Kael was in the passenger seat gripping the seatbelt for dear life and she inwardly grinned. She wasn't a bad driver at all, Char had told her on countless times she drove like a seventy-five year old with a vision problem, but messing with Kael and seeing him squirm was one of her favorite pastimes. She indulged heartily now, knowing the chances of getting them after today, this hour would be few and far between. She grinned at him and popped the gum she was chewing. "Hand me those sunglasses will ya? Unless you want me to drive straight into oncoming traffic. I can't see shit."

He scrambled, grabbing the glasses as fast as he could, fumbling them a few times before thrusting them in her direction. "I'm never getting in a car with you again, and I'm immortal more or less."

She whooped her laughter and cut across six lanes of highway to get off the next exit, flipping off two cars and swearing like a sailor at another. "Fucking people, can't they see I'm driving here?"

"Is that what you're doing? Oh I thought you were trying to cause a pile up and get us arrested." He said caustically. "I really don't like you, how the hell is this supposed to be a treat?"

"You'll see, darling, you'll see." In the past month since Keegan's death they had all gone through some major changes. The house had gone through a renaissance of sorts,

and everyone was seemingly content. Everything there was new and different and Alcyone was looking at the house and property with open eyes and a new sense of belonging. Things with Char and Kael had calmed down as well, once Kael actually warmed up to Alcyone. They had found out they had a lot of things in common, especially when Alcyone made baklava. Apparently, Kael fell in love with her right there, if only for the pastry. Everyone was getting along better, and Perrin, well the young dragon was coming out of his shell as well. Al and Char were taking him to his new place in a couple days, once everything was finished being installed in the flat, mainly the security system that Kael had insisted on. Spiria was more than content in the green houses, now numbering five, cultivating her blue roses and experimenting with a new strain she was keeping under wraps. Al was sure it was going to be an award winner, and when Spiria was talking about the plant expos, well, Al was more than happy to encourage her to attend, even go with her, much to Char's dislike. Everyone was taken care of in her book, except for Kael.

When they had set out on the journey, Kael a reluctant addition on this jaunt, she had told him that she has a surprise waiting for him, just for him. Kael, she realized, was more like a dragon of legend than he cared to think, enjoying gifts, and hoarding precious things. She hoped the surprise was going to fit into that category for him. They pulled into the marina parking lot and she shut off the car, turning to him. "We're here."

"Oh yeah?" he asked looking around his curiosity clearly peaking.

She grinned and got out. "Follow me, oh Captain, my Captain."

He watched her carefully getting out of the car. "Have you been drinking?"

"Not any more than usual, come on," she was enjoying dragging this little scenario out, knowing the end result was going to be well worth it. They walked down the pier, through the boat park, past yachts and speed boats, towards the very end. The largest of the boats that the harbor could sustain were tied up there, and Alcyone stopped dead in front of a large sailboat, one that rivaled the grandness of the pirate galleons of old. "Surprise." she said to him over her shoulder, waiting for his reaction.

He looked around, over the boat, then to the end of the plank. "Surprise what?" he asked, the waves splashing up the side to meet them. "Did you bring me here to see the sea? If you did I'm going to drown you." He looked at the ship skeptically. "Is it the boat?" He asked uncertainly.

She grinned and nodded. "Seeing as you're so hip to leave us, I figured you should go in style. And I know how you hate to fly."

He grinned. "Well, that is a good idea...I could take the sea monkeys with me." He walked across the plank onto the huge boat. "It's a good size...and I can dock it at the manor."

She nodded again and walked to the gangplank. "She needs a name, I figured since she's yours, you would want to name her. Want to take a look? The bedroom is enormous."

He laughed. "Al, how many times do I have to tell you, I respect Char's claim on you, but I'm not going to be able to say no if you start cuddling into me again."

They flirted, a lot. It was Alcyone's nature, and oddly it was Kael's as well. She could see why the Succubus Queen had taken a liking to him. If she had never met Char, well Kael would have been fair game. Char never got too pissed with it, after all, it was his bed she was in each night. "You really are sick. If I was coming on to you Kael you would know it, believe me. The entire area below decks is fit for a king, I just wanted to make sure you approve before I hand over the keys."

"Buying me gifts, getting us alone, driving me around in your sexy sports car..." he shook his head smile in place. "I know alright."

"Gifts? No this isn't a gift really. I owed you one, for the situation with Cam last month. And I never thanked you properly. Seeing that my usually thanking someone properly would have my mate trying to rip your throat out, this is me thanking you, giving you something you'll appreciate and use. Just like the sea monkeys."

He smiled. "Well, thank you, it was very thoughtful. I know it didn't come from Char."

She giggled. "Actually, he's the one that suggested it, probably to get you out of the house. I just hope you're happy here Kael. So what are you going to name her?"

"Oh, that'll come later; I need to get to know her first."

"Well, it's bad luck to sail her without a name, or so I was told by the salty sailor that was older than Christ I bought her from." She stayed on deck as he went below and ten minutes later he came up a smile on his face. "You approve?"

"I do, she's a keeper alright." He grinned, "And what do I care about luck? The seas and I have an arrangement. What was her name? It's bad luck to rename a ship..."

"Wonderful. I don't think I have to tell you we will miss you. I'll miss you storming around, you grew on me, like fungus," she smiled and left the boat slowly, the tide making the boat and the gangplank move. "And her name was Morningstar. You know, like Satan?"

He laughed shaking his head. "Perfect!" He exclaimed. "I'll race you back to the car, winner drives back to the manor." He smirked.

She smirked and threw him the keys "Eh, you drive back. Lord knows when you're going to be on dry land again."

## The End