



Prelude

To journey means to be present in the moment, gain wisdom from the past, and release expectations for the future.

IT HAD BEEN FOUR MONTHS since the Spirian clan leaders had met on an island off the coast of Brazil. Despite the Shadows' rebuttals, it had been decided upon to return to the Father's law. Territories were to be respected by all Spirians and the act of taking another's mate resulted in death. Each Spirian was to have only one mate of pure blood, and all other mates, humans, and halflings were to be set free. An exception was granted to Spirian/human unions that were already established.

The risk of my pregnancy with twins was vastly becoming apparent. I was large, uncomfortable, and still had six months left of my term. My mate, Khalen, worried that I would not survive the birthing. In the dark shadows of my mind, I was too, but I would not reveal it to anyone, not even Khalen.

The issue of Aidan and Sunjia had yet to be resolved. Her templar, Dirk, wanted her back, which meant Aidan could

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not claim her. It was clear to me, however, that Aidan and Sunjia were perfect for each other. If Khalen would just feel the same, I knew he could change Dirk's mind, but Khalen was stubborn and still believed that Sunjia, his late brother's mate, was a threat to the clan.

Khalen, was designated to head the North American Continent and become the regional leader of the Pacific Northwest. It was his duty to ensure that his clan members selected the proper mate. Despite Aidan's feelings for Sunjia, he would not be able to go against Khalen's decision without severe repercussion.

The Shadow clans had been warned that if they did not heed the new laws, Khalen would personally see to the release of their women and halflings. It was time to follow up on his decree.



Chapter 1

Even the darkest clouds cannot shadow the brilliance of the sun.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEW order, Spirian mates had been paired with single men of the Shadow clan—haphazardly, no doubt. Khalen admitted that acquiring my ability to read intention had proven to be quite useful when dealing with the Shadows.

He had approached Sage, the Shadow leader of Washington, but the spineless bugger had no intention of enforcing the new law completely. There were still halflings and human females that had not been released. Sage's father, Victor, was sure to catch wind of it after Khalen took action, he assured me.

“What will you do with the captives?” I asked, as Khalen quietly reflected over a cup of coffee. He had been silent for most of the morning, keeping his thoughts to himself.

“Without a clan, they will be vulnerable,” he admitted.

“What are their choices?”

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He looked at me with soft golden eyes and I could feel the pain in them. “The humans are a danger, Skye. The females have had a taste of Spirian affection and will crave it. That cannot happen any longer. The humans will not understand. They will continue their destructive patterns, despite the tragic outcome.”

“Destructive patterns?” I asked, confused.

He raised his brow as if curious about my confusion. “You have loved both a Spirian and a human. You know the difference now. Could you ever go back to loving a human and be completely satisfied?”

“No, but I’m a Spirian. Surely it is different for humans. You said so yourself that they would not be able to survive the full power of a Spirian lover.”

“This is true. Perhaps you should ask Eve or Ember what their feelings are on the matter?”

My face grew warm with the thought. I sipped my coffee in silence.

He chuckled in response. “God, I love your innocence.”

“So, to humans, Spirians could be like an addiction that was difficult but not impossible to ignore?”

“Yes, a very strong addiction. It would be like gorging on fine wine, and then forced to endure grape juice in its stead.”

I smiled. “Fine wine, huh? Is that how you describe your lovemaking skills?”

Now it was his turn to blush. I could not see it, of course, but his silence and sudden draw of energy was proof enough.

“How would you describe it?” he cleverly countered.

I set my coffee down and thought for a moment. “I suppose I would compare it to a lavish meal with several

fine wines, all carefully selected to compliment each course with perfect balance. And just when you believe the meal is over, and you're satisfied, dessert arrives, accompanied by a twenty-year tawny port. When you take your first bite, the dark chocolate coats your tongue like a soft blanket of rich and delicate flavor. The port adds to the sensation, and your mouth explodes with ecstasy as the combination slides down your throat to tantalize your stomach."

He laughed. "And how would you describe loving a human in comparison?"

I cleared my throat. "Aside from my late husband, Derrick, of course, I would describe it as a happy meal with cold, soggy fries, a flat soda, and no surprise."

His laugh deepened. "Now you understand."

I didn't completely understand but was ready to let the matter go. "What about the halflings?"

"Without the support of a clan, they will soon perish like any Spirian. Unfortunately, any clan who harbors a human or halfling female that is not mated will be breaking the Spirian law." He lowered his head. "Gregg and Ro are fortunate to have found one another. They are both halflings with a good clan to live under. Though they are sterile, they have a good chance at having a long life together."

My stomach lurched. "What will happen to Ember and her sisters?"

He sipped his coffee. "They must leave, Skye."

"No," I cried. "They can't, Khalen, there must be another way."

His shoulders dropped and slumped forward. "Are you going to find them a human mate?"

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“If I must.”

His eyes turned hard. “You cannot save the world, Skye. The clan must remain pure. We made some horrid mistakes in the past and have left damage in our wake. Now is the time to change, difficult as it is.”

“We will figure something out.”

He stood from his chair and set his mug on the counter. “This burden is mine to bear. The law must be enforced.”

“Khaleen, this is wrong, and you know it. Spirians created the halflings and now they want to leave them for dead? Halflings or no, they are people, not just the spoils of a bad idea.”

His eyes were closed when he turned to face me. I knew he was keeping his anger in check and that I was stepping over a volatile line. “As my mate, Skye, I’m asking for your support. If you cannot offer it, I understand, but I really could use it now.”

Slowly I wrapped my arms around his waist and laid my head against his warm chest. It was obvious that he did not agree with the humans’ and halflings’ fate, but he also had obligations to the clans and the Spirian law.

He kissed the top of my head. “Thank you,” he whispered against my hair. “If we could form a commune for the halflings, they might stand a chance. Those who are mated will be able to join a Spirian clan.”

I nodded. “I like that plan.”

“I’m taking Aidan and Ian with me. We’ll be back by nightfall.”

I kissed him softly. “Stay safe.”

He squeezed me tight then grabbed his keys from the

counter and left. I watched as the three men climbed into our new silver Escalade. Maiyun pressed against my leg and released a low howl. I scratched behind her ears. A long walk was in order for both of us, I thought.

The twins were growing swiftly in my belly and I could feel their every move. My term with them was half over. In six more months, I would be able to hold them both. The discomfort of carrying them made me wonder how I would ever survive the remaining months. I grabbed my coat from the peg by the door and headed out for the day.

Eve met me near the first fire between our yurts. The dusting of flour that scented her face and shirt indicated that she had been busy baking for the evening meal. She carried an air of sadness about her as she warmed her hands by the glowing coals that lingered throughout the day.

I stood beside her, waiting for her to speak first. When she didn't take the hint, I bumped into her and smiled. "What has you so glum, Eve?"

A small smile tugged at her lips. "Are you going for your walk?"

I nodded, and then glanced up at the cloud-covered sky. "Yeah. I was kind of hoping the sun would be out, though. It was earlier this morning."

"Typical fall weather," she said. "Mind if I join you?"

The request caught me off guard. Eve rarely joined me for my walks. She preferred working in the garden over traversing the woods. "Not at all. I would love to have your company."

Eve dusted herself off before approaching my right side. "Where to?"

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Maiyun and I lead her toward the north side of camp. She intended to talk, that much was clear, but what about was a mystery I was sure would unfold in a flash flood of emotion.

“Are your pains easing at all?” she asked. Her weak attempt at small talk did not escape my notice. Her thoughts were a trap of pain, frustration, and yearning all wrapped up in a bundle of confusion.

I shook my head. “Not at all. Khalen is concerned with their rapid growth, but that’s expected with how much food he expects me to eat at each meal.”

More silence followed as we took the right trail that bordered the small lake. The scent of rain lingered in the air. Bright maple leaves that marked the middle of fall cushioned my bare feet, their coolness a welcoming comfort. Instinctively knowing that my vision was weak in this light, Maiyun stayed close by my side and guided me over and around the many obstacles that littered the path.

“It’s important for you to stay strong,” Eve finally said, though her words were distant.

I finally touched her shoulder and led her to one of the many logs that overlooked the lake. I laid down my coat and urged her to sit, thinking that stillness would encourage her to reveal what weighed upon her mind like wet sand.

“What’s on your mind, Eve?” I asked. “Your heart and mind are far too heavy.”

“Case wants us to return home.”

“Home?”

She twisted her hands together. “Yes, to England. He is worried about the clan.”

My close-knitted brows marked my confusion. “Why?”

“Tetris, the man he left in charge, has not responded to any of Case’s messages. The clan has been out of touch for several weeks now—very unusual.”

I studied her expression. It was not one of concern, but one of sadness. “And you don’t want to leave?”

“No, I don’t. Our clan in England lives in houses; together yet separate from one another. I feel my family is here.”

“Perhaps once Case sees that all is well with his clan, he will choose to return?”

She shook her head. “No, he believes that our place is in Europe, not here. This is Khalen’s domain now.”

I wrapped her hand in mine. “Khaleen wants me to birth the twins in Scotland.”

Her eyes widened with surprise and perhaps a bit of hope. “Shanuk’s place?”

“Yes, he thinks it would honor the old man.”

“That it would,” said Eve. She laughed a bit. “Darius will be thrilled to see his brother again.”

“Brother?”

“Darius is Shanuk’s first grandson and Dirk’s older brother. He and Khaleen grew up together. They were inseparable until each of them left for college.” A smile stretched across her face and her eyes regained their sparkle. A quiet chuckle escaped her throat as she slowly shook her head with remembrance. “Lord, those two knew how to find trouble.”

With sadness, I realized there was so much about my mate I had yet to learn. Khaleen rarely talked about his past. Oddly enough, nor did I. In that respect, we were very much alike. “Does Khaleen keep in touch with him?”

“Oh yes, frequently. Darius’ mate, Lenore, is a midwife.”

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Khalen has been asking her many questions about pregnancy and the birthing process. He wants her to be there when you are ready to give birth.”

I felt a cold rush wash over me. “So the real reason for going to Scotland has nothing to do with honoring Shanuk?”

“I think it has a lot to do with it, Skye. Khalen would never tell you something that was untrue. It would be just as easy for Darius and Lenore to come here as it would be for you to travel, would it not?”

I smiled and rubbed Maiyun behind her soft ears. She placed her huge head on my thigh. “Yes, it would.” I paused in thought for a moment. “I certainly hope he doesn’t plan to allow Lenore to deliver the girls.”

“Khalen is not schooled in midwifery. I’m sure he feels uneasy about your request.”

I glanced at her, firm in my decision. “I will not reconsider it, unless our daughters’ lives are in danger.”

“It is not your daughters that worry him, my dear. It is you.”

“He worries too much about me. For pity’s sake, it’s nearly stifling.”

“To me, it is refreshing.” Her eyes sparkled again. “I have not seen him care for anyone for such a long time, this is a true delight, I assure you.”

“Will you be there?” I asked. “For the birth?”

She swallowed hard, opened her mouth as if to speak then swallowed again. Her dark eyes glimmered like polished obsidian as she met my gaze. “You would allow that?”

I squeezed her hand. “Absolutely. I cannot imagine doing this without you.”

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Eve half laughed and half cried, making a sound that resembled an excited chipmunk. “I would be honored.” Whatever sadness that had followed her here had quickly turned tail and ran away. I hoped it would stay away for quite some time. Seeing her so hollow was nothing I wanted to experience again.

I stood and offered her a hand up. “Come, it’s getting chilly.”

She placed her hand in mine and we continued our walk with idle chatter. “I will miss you when you go,” I said, staring down at the ground.

I heard the subtle flutter of Eve’s lashes and the slight constriction in her sinuses. She was holding back the tears that wanted so badly to flow. “Ro said she and Gregg would stay here more often, and you have Dania, Caleb’s mate to talk to.”

“Oh, I have many females to talk to, Eve, but none of them are you.”

She squeezed my hand.

Since Khalen banned all Shadows from the island, it was refreshing to be able to walk outside the camp and not be on high alert.

One of the twins kicked my ribs, nearly dropping me to my knees. “Oh!” I yelped as a sharp pain ripped at my side.

Eve supported my arm. “Skye, are you all right?”

I nodded and clenched my teeth while trying to encourage the little tyke to shift her position. “Honestly, I cannot imagine another six months with these two inside me.”

“Now you know why it is so dangerous for you to carry twins.”

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The babe moved and I was able to stand up straight again and continue walking. “My decision to keep them both was the right one,” I assured her.

Her silence and lowered head revealed her doubts, but I was not in the mood to discuss the issue.