Carry On Together

by Losemyhead

Summary

"I don't want any of it." Simon says, his face is empty as he stands up. Then he turns and walks out of the room, down the stairs and out the front door.

A year has passed since Simon ended the Humdrum and lost his magic. He's moved into his flat with Penny, started uni and even has a job. Simon's relationship with Baz is still going strong and there are no dark creatures after him (for now). Life is pretty good, until Simon's past catches up with him, shattering everything he thought he knew about himself.

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First ever fanfic.
Simon

I walk to work in the rain by myself.

There's no snow yet, but it's cold and windy. I still run pretty warm so I'm fairly comfortable despite the crap weather, but I don't run as hot as I did when I had my magic. My hands are stuffed deep in my pockets because I forgot my gloves. I'm wearing my waterproof down jacket (that Penny's mum bought me) over my jeans and hoodie with a tee shirt underneath (Baz's I think), and a black wool beanie (that I stole from Baz).

I stifle a yawn as I walk. I didn't sleep that well last night, another nightmare. I notice the Christmas decorations on the street and shop windows, their reflections make shimmering patterns on the wet pavement. Makes sense, since it's almost Christmas. I've been ignoring this fact for a while now given what happened last Christmas, and Penny and Baz haven't talked about their plans yet which makes it easy for me to ignore. They haven't talked about their plans in front of me anyway.

I don't usually make a habit of not thinking about things anymore. My magickal psychologist says I should think about everything, even if it hurts, so I know I'll think about it eventually. There's still a whole week to go, plenty of time to think and to shop.

My magickal psychologist has helped me work through all the things that happened last year. We talk a lot. Between her and Penny and Baz, I get loads of talking done so it's impossible not to think about things. We spent the first six months discussing what happened last year in detail, and by the summer we'd moved onto talking about my nightmares which I still have most nights, like last night. She rattled off a list of random things to try out, to tire me out so maybe I could sleep better. I scoffed when she said them; running, dancing, mediation, yoga, life drawing, sex.

I blushed when she said the last one. I think she could see me blushing through my laptop.

Baz and I started running that summer. He's still just as fast as ever and my wings and tail don't get in the way that much so I can usually keep up. And I do sleep better after a run, but that's probably because I'm so exhausted.

Penny and I tried meditation for a while. We found a Mindfulness Meditation class at university that fit into both our schedules so we thought we'd give it a go, if nothing else I thought it might be good for a lark. We weren't that great at it though, because every time I tried to relax and let my mind go or whatever I was supposed to do, I could hear Penny huffing and mumbling about it being such a waste of her valuable study time and then I would start giggling and then she would start giggling and then the instructor would give us serious (but mindful) looks. We made it through the six weeks but only barely.

We tried yoga for the next six weeks and I realised that even though I have wings and a tail that should help my balance, they didn't, which made Penny giggle even more than the meditation class and made me fall over a lot. Penny must have enjoyed it enough because she enrolled for the full year. I didn't bother.

After the yoga class I found a beginners life drawing class. It was on at the same time as Baz has football practice so I thought it was worth giving a go. (He's playing for his uni, of course he made the A grade team.) I didn't tell Penny or Baz about it because I felt a bit naff taking the class, but since the weather's gotten colder Baz and I haven't been running as much I needed the distraction.
Turns out I'm pretty decent at it, which came as a bit of a shock to me. The teacher explained what to do, how to break down the work into easy steps; how to look at a figure, plan the drawing, sketch it out and draw the whole pose, and to add shadows and highlights. The first week our model was a girl, probably a student or something, and then the next week it was a bloke. By the end of the six weeks my teacher said my drawings were pretty good and I was enjoying it and after an hour and a half I was exhausted from concentrating and I didn't have any nightmares after. So I re-enrolled for the not so beginners' class and bought myself some pencils and charcoals and a blank art book. I haven't told Baz or Penny about the art class yet. I don't think they'll take the piss or anything, I just want to make sure I'm going to stick with it before I tell them.

And I didn't mention the dancing or the sex to either of them yet. I'd never hear the end of that.

Winter break has started so I'm working more shifts at the café. It's not like I have anything else planned, and I need the money. I found this part time job just before summer and worked like mad to save for rent and stuff. It's not much, just making coffees and sometimes helping with the food but it pays the rent and lets me buy food and just about covers the bills and it's only a five minute walk from our flat.

Penny has a part time job too, two jobs actually, or really three. She's working at the university library and she's tutoring students from the local high school on weeknights and she's also tutoring Watford students on weekends. She figured she tutored me all the way through for free so she may as well get paid for it. She's very good at it and her students seem to like her. All three jobs fit in with her studies and she says she misses Micah less when she's busy.

First semester at uni went well but I still don't have a clue what I want to do. I picked some general subjects to see what I like or what I'm good at, it was great to finally start after seven months of not doing very much of anything.

The coven organised a scholarship to cover my fees and books. I said no at first, but Penny and Baz and even Professor Bunce talked me down.

"You need this." Penny said.

"You deserve this." Baz said.

"You saved our realm, it's the least we can offer." Professor Bunce said.

In the end I just gave in, it was easier than arguing with them. And I couldn't really afford to say no.

I didn't actually save our realm. I think I was just cleaning up my own mess. I got rid of the Insidious Humdrum, which was just a super-villain version of me that I created anyway. I got rid of it by filling it with my magic, all of it. Not that my magic ever felt like mine anyway, it always felt too much, and borrowed.

I'm almost at work now. If I still had my magic I could cast a weatherization spell to keep my legs dry, where the umbrella doesn't cover, but since I lost it I've had to do things the Normal way. Not that I ever used magic on myself anyway, that was way too risky. If I tried to keep the rain off me I probably would have blown the entire storm half way across the continent.

And I probably could have done that without my wand. I didn't even use my wand in those last few months. I just had to think things and they happened. Penny says that that I shouldn't have been able to do that. (You're not a genie she said.) I shouldn't have been able to just wish things and make them happen. Like my wings and tail, there's no spell for that. There were no spells for most of the stuff I did towards the end, I had so much power, it's like I was magic.
I get to work and get ready in the staff room, shoving my wet jacket on a hanger. I give my wings one big stretch before I close them tight. I can usually keep my wings and tail out of everyone's way while I work. Not that anyone can see them, Penny spelled them invisible before I left as usual, but they're still there which means people can trip over them so I still have to be careful. That's easier said than done sometimes, I can control my wings but I swear my tail has a mind of its own.

I gave myself the wings and tail before I lost my magic, then I couldn't get rid of them because I lost my magic. Who knew?

When I get to work I say hi to Alex and the others. My boss's name is Alexandra but she hates it, says it takes too long to say. (Too many syllables.) She owns the café and she's a great cook and she's a decent boss too. She's small and energetic and has short black hair like a pixie, but she's not a pixie, Penny said.

We talk about the rain but we don't bother with any proper conversation today. She's like that, not fussed if I don't want to talk so we get along fairly well. And there are lots of customers today so I need to get to work. I like the people I work with well enough and I've made a few friends in my classes (acquaintances anyway), but I must be turning into Penny because I don't really want any more than two friends anymore. I've been working here for five months and have been at uni for a semester and I haven't made any other friends. I get to work making coffee and listen to the hum of customers chatter.

Baz

"Baz?"

"Bunce."

"We need to talk about Simon and Christmas."

Simon just left for work and I was about to head back to Oxford to visit my family and hunt but Bunce corners me as I'm putting on my coat.

"I think you mean we need to talk to Simon about Christmas Bunce." I correct.

"Don't be a smartarse Baz." She retorts.

"Simon is an adult, he can do whatever he likes." I say, not looking at her as I wrap my scarf around my neck, I don't want to get into this now.

Bunce is standing, she probably has her hands on her hips and I assume she is glaring at me but I still haven't look at her. "Simon can't be left alone at Christmas Baz, even you know that! He's been avoiding talking about it and you know Simon doesn't not talk about anything so it must be bothering him." This has a strange logic to it and I can't deny that she's right. I take my time buttoning up my coat, still avoiding her eyes.

"Well?" She demands. "Have you discussed your plans with him yet?"

I sneer at the wall. I haven't talked to Simon about Christmas yet. I'm not entirely sure how to approach it. My family is expecting me to spend Christmas with them of course, and I want Simon to come too.

Things are better with my family with regard to Simon. They no longer want to kill him which is an improvement. My father can't deny that Simon saved our entire realm when he ended the Humdrum, and the Mage. (Even if that was an accident.) He also can't deny that Simon helped me discover that
the Mage was behind my mother's murder, and my kidnapping. So even though my father can't quite accept that Simon is my boyfriend, that I even have a boyfriend, he tolerates him well enough.

Daphne likes Simon because he's polite and makes me smile (a lot). And he plays with Mordelia and the twins and even my baby brother whenever he comes to the house.

Fiona likes him for all of those reasons but especially because he ended the Mage, and that he is my boyfriend.

"So let me get this straight Basil, you're dating the Mage's Heir? The Chosen One?" She smirked, one eyebrow raised.

"Yes Fiona, you know I am."

"Simon bloody Snow."

"Yes."

"And all those years we were plotting to take him down, you were actually mad for him?" She asked, smirking again.

"Yes Fiona, you already know all this."

"I still can't believe it Basil, of all the blokes in the realm, couldn't you pick another bloke to fall for, any other bloke?" She hooted again, shaking her head.

"Obviously not Fiona."

"So, the Mage's Heir?"

"Yes Fiona. Can we drop this now?"

I've had this conversation with my ridiculous aunt a number of times.

I finally look at Bunce. "No I haven't yet." I sneer (again).

"Well we need to do it tonight." Bunce says, "Because Christmas is next week. And I just received a text from Agatha, she's coming back to London for Christmas and wants to catch up."

I roll my eyes. Wonderful.

**Penny**

I just received at text from Agatha. She's coming back to see her family over the Christmas break and asked if it was okay to see me and Simon. This will be her first time back to London in a year, since everything happened.

I don't blame her when she left, after all the Mage nearly killed her. She was stupidly brave to go to the Mage all by herself and if anything had happened to her I never would have forgiven myself. I dragged her into the whole mess in the first place, making her come with me to Baz's place on Christmas Eve to help us solve the mystery of Baz's mother's murder. She was furious and fed up that we were even there - working with Baz rather than against him - and that Baz was, in fact, a vampire. I just realised that's probably the last time she saw Simon, after we left Baz's place when he jumped out of her car in the middle of the Hampshire countryside on our way back to London, saying that he had to go back and make sure Baz was okay.
I smiled when the text arrived. I do miss her. We kept in contact once she left, although not very often and she refuses to talk about what happened or magic in general. So our conversations have mainly been about our studies, California, Micah and the weather.

And I haven't made any new friends yet, I haven't really tried. I have a few study partners that are nice enough, and Normal enough, and the people at work are nice enough. I tend to have lunch on my own or with Simon if our timetables allow it. Simon is the best friend I could possibly have and Baz is brilliant company but I do miss having a girlfriend.

After Agatha text me I started thinking about all our years together at Watford and our crazy (and mostly dangerous) adventures, and then I thought about how easy it was let friendships end if you don't keep nurturing them, and I felt a little nostalgic. I suggested Christmas Eve Eve. Dinner, at our flat.

Simon hasn't mentioned Christmas to me or Baz yet. Baz hasn't mentioned Christmas to Simon yet. I haven't mentioned Christmas to Simon yet.

Agatha doesn't know about Simon and Baz yet.

This could go either way.

Simon

Baz walks in at the end of my shift, right on time. He does this a lot since I started working here and he moved to London. He moved into Fiona's flat, well it's technically his flat now, when he finished at Watford. He didn't have to move in until he started at the London School of Economics at the end of summer really, but then he took some music classes in London and it made sense. I'm glad he did, I like having him close by.

And it turned out to be a bloody good summer.

He says he comes to my work because he wants a coffee and to walk home with me. I think he just wants to make sure I get home safe. I think he thinks that because I don't have magic any more I'll be in some sort of mortal danger on my five minute walk home. Sometimes he forgets I grew up in an orphanage (lots of different orphanages) and can take care of myself.

And it's not as if any dark creatures are after me anymore. The goblins elected their king finally without killing me off which was a relief, and with the Humdrum gone there's nothing around to send dragons or flibbertigibbets or any other creature after me. Things have been blissfully quiet for the last year.

I can't help grinning at Baz when he comes in. My tail swings towards him and I have to grab it before it knocks anything over, which looks kind of weird because it's invisible. I make him a Pumpkin mocha breve and hand it over to him. (I think it tastes like crap but he likes it.) I tell him I'll just grab my stuff as I walk to the staff room. He smiles at me and leans back against the wall, drink in hand, legs crossed. He's wearing his black wool coat and a new grey scarf and nice leather gloves. But no hat (I've got that), so his hair is in soft black waves down to his cheeks. He looks so handsome, as usual. He obviously cast a weatherization spell on himself because he's not carrying an umbrella and it's still raining lightly outside.

I say goodnight to everyone as I grab Baz's hand and walk out of the café. He bins his empty drink on the way out. I think the spell is still working because I don't need my umbrella. He hands me my gloves.
"You forgot these." He says, smiling.

"Oh yeah, thanks Baz." I grin back, putting the gloves on and relinking our hands. Then I give him a quick kiss on the cheek. His eyes widen a little bit and then he smiles at me.

"You're welcome." He says, still smiling. "Nice hat."

"Yes isn't it?" I smile back.

"How was work?"

"Normal." I say. "How was your day?" This has become my standard response, it means I didn't knock anything or anyone over with my wings or tail.

"Fine, Mordelia says hi." I smile at that, and we walk for about a minute in easy silence. "So," He starts, "Bunce cornered me the second you left today-"

"What about this time?" I cut him off, still smiling. I can't help it, Baz makes me smile.

He glances over to me and hesitates for a second before he speaks. "She wants to talk about your Christmas plans when we get back."

"Oh." I frown. I knew this conversation was going to happen eventually, but I didn't think it would be tonight. I stay quiet for a few more steps. "I haven't really thought about it yet."

"I know." Baz says quietly. "We don't have to do anything if you don't want to."

I'm quiet for a bit, so is Baz, and I know he's waiting for me to work out in my head what I want to say, which I appreciate. "No, it's not that. I want to, do something that is, but..." I trail off, looking at the Christmas decorations in the shop windows again while we walk.

"What is it Simon?"

I love it when he calls me Simon.

"It's just that," I start, "I'm not that sure what I'm supposed to do this year. You know?"

"Simon-" Baz starts.

"Baz," I cut him off. "It's just that, for years I spent Christmas with the Wellbeloves. It was like a tradition." I feel Baz stiffen next to me. "No wait," I say quickly, "I don't want to do that anymore. I mean, I really like them but I know that's not where I'm meant to be anymore. It's just that I'm not sure where else I'm supposed to be. It's not like I have any family-"

He stops us then, tugging my hand as he turns to face me. He's staring at me, pinning me with his eyes and I shuffle uncomfortably. "You do have family, Simon. Me, Penny, my family, the Bunces."

"Your family hates me. Especially after the mess I made last Christmas-"

His lip curls into a small smile. "They don't hate you, they're growing to like you, especially Mordelia."

"She's eight."

"And Fiona."
"Fiona doesn't like me."

"Yes she does. You're a hero in her eyes you know," Baz says confidently. "She specifically said for you to come for Christmas lunch."

I scoff at that, although ever since everything happened she does treat me differently. She still calls me Chosen One, but there's no malice when she says it, more like a term of endearment? And once she dropped off a pile of sour cherry scones to Baz's place, and she doesn't try to spell my feet into the dirt anymore. I guess that's progress? Maybe, but I still don't believe him.

He tugs at my hand and we start walking again.

"She did not." I scoff again. "What did she really say?"

"She said 'Make sure you bring the Chosen One, liven up this dreary Christmas lunch for a change.'" Then he rolls his eyes because he thinks Fiona is ridiculous. "She's just messing with your dad you know, make him uncomfortable ..."

"Father said its fine too." He says easily.

"Really? I don't know, he's always looking at me funny, it's kind of creepy."

"That's just him. Anyway I think my step-mother had a word. She's expecting you to come. She likes you too you know."

"What about Penny then?"

"I'm fairly sure she likes you too, Snow."

"Ha ha Baz."

We walk the last block in an easy silence.

"So?" Baz questions as we approach the entrance to my flat. "Christmas day, sorted?"

"Yeah okay Baz, I'll go to your posh Christmas lunch with you."

"Good" he smiles, ignoring my jibe. "You can sort out the rest of your plans with Bunce. She'll be ready to pounce as soon as we get in." He gives me a quick kiss as we head into my building. We climb the stairs, taking off our gloves and relinking our hands as we climb. His hands are cold, they're always cold like the rest of him, vampire cold, but they start to warm up when I hold them. Baz takes off my hat and quickly puts it in his pocket, smirking at me. I comb my free hand through my hair, it gets matted whenever I wear a hat or sleep. I still wear it short on the sides and back and longer on top because I don't know what else to do with it, and I comb my fingers through it now until my curls bounce around.

I'm just about to unlock the door when Baz takes me by my waist and spins me and gently pushes me against the door with his body, holding my forearms. He's smiling at me because he knows he caught me off guard. He looks down at my mouth and then back to my eyes. I'm starting to get a little short of breath as I look into his grey eyes, they're the colour of the deep ocean on a stormy day, not that I've ever actually seen the ocean but I've seen pictures, anyway they're kind of striking. He brushes his lips against mine, gently, and then pulls back a little and looks at me again, pinning me with his eyes. He knows this drives me crazy. We stay like that for a few seconds, neither of us in a hurry to go inside. Then Baz lets go of my forearms and moves his hands down to my waist so I
reach up and rake my hands through his hair, because I know that drives *him* crazy, and because I want to. Then I clench my fists in his hair and pull him back to me for a long, deep kiss.

I know I'm blushing when we get inside my flat.
Chapter 2

Simon

I don't know why I was so worried about Christmas, it actually worked out without any bother. I don't know why I ever put off thinking about it. Micah arrives on Christmas Eve from America so Penny's mum is having a big Christmas Eve dinner as well as Christmas Day lunch. Sort of making up for last year I think. Baz and I are spending Christmas day at his family estate in Oxford and Christmas Eve at Penny's house with her family, Penny's mum insisted. Honestly she's like a mum to me ever since last year. She's still a tough nut, being principle at Watford's now, but she's always nice to me and a little protective (okay a lot). She's even nice to Baz which is saying something given he's a Pitch and a Grimm. And Professor Bunce, her dad, still acts like it's his fault that he didn't solve the Humdrum after all the years he spent studying it (him). I mean he was unquestionably thrilled with all three of us for solving, like, everything, but he was also really rattled that we almost died doing it. Which is reasonable I guess.

I'll stay the night at Baz's flat before we drive to Oxford in the morning. The Oxford place is not as grand as the Hampshire estate but since I caused the biggest hole in the magickal atmosphere in Hampshire last Christmas Eve they had to move to their hunting lodge at Oxford. It's still huge though, just not as palatial and Gothic mansion like. (Not Gothic, Victorian according to Baz, but still.)

I caused a lot of holes in the magickal atmosphere across the UK back when I still had magic. The magic got sucked right out of these dead spots so mages lose their magic when they're in one but they get their magic back when they leave. I didn't know I was doing it of course, but Baz and Penny worked out that they started appearing when I was born and they appeared whenever I went off. (Baz also worked out that I was the Humdrum or the Humdrum was like an echo of me or something.) (He's so fucking smart, they both are actually, I never would have worked any of it out by myself.) The holes are still there, but at least there are no new ones since I ended the Humdrum.

So the conversation about Christmas went rather smoothly with Penny. I thought I would just hit it head on as soon as we walked in. Penny was sitting at the kitchen table, probably starting next semester's assignments or something equally as stupid.

"Baz says you want to talk about custody of me over Christmas Penny." I say when we get to the kitchen. Penny glares at Baz, her silver and purple curls shimmering in the light when she stands up. She's still spelling her hair a different colour every year but this year she got creative and added pale purple highlights over silver. I quite like it - it makes her look commanding, not that she needs any help with that. (She tried to spell my hair white once but Baz scoffed at that one, "You do realise you're name's 'Snow'? So you'd be Snow White" he said.) (That was the end of that.)

Baz just shrugs "Just trying to hurry things along Bunce."

"So who's night for dinner?" I ask, my stomach rumbling as I make my way to the couch. I assume the Christmas planning is sorted so I've already moved on. I know it's not mine, I cooked last night. (pasta) I drag Baz to the couch with me and we sit, I put my feet on the coffee table, crossing my ankles. Baz cringes but doesn't say anything, he's used to it and I did kick my shoes off first.

When we moved into the flat it was obvious that we needed to sort the food issue out quickly or risk starving. We couldn't afford to eat out every night so we started taking turns cooking. Our first few attempts were pretty basic but edible enough, but we got sick of egg and bacon butties and sausages and mash fairly soon. It was Penny who came up with the idea that we both had to learn to cook a
few decent dishes that we both like. Penny picked biryani (thanks to Penny's mum) and I picked pasta. (Thanks to Penny's mum's neighbour, who showed me how to make a half decent sauce from scratch, and google because I forgot to write half of it down.)

I was still living at Penny's when the neighbour knocked on the door one day. Pen was in the shower and her dad was upstairs in his study and I was sitting on the couch texting Baz who was back at Watford, so I answered the door. The neighbour handed me a tub of sauce to pass onto Penny's dad. She probably felt sorry for him, ever since Penny's mum became headmistress at Watford she wasn't around much during the week and the neighbour was afraid he'd starve. (And it's not like they have any set meal times at Penny's house. Everyone seems to wander in and grab what they need whenever they want it. I thought I was going to starve for a while there.)

She brought over more containers once or twice after that. One day I was so bored that I asked her how she makes it. I'm fairly decent at it now and I'm working on my second dish, lasagne (I googled that too) because there's only so much spag bol that Penny and Baz are prepared to eat.

But Penny's not finished. "There's something else Simon," she starts. She looks meaningfully at Baz and then back to me, her eyes look tense.

"What Penny?" It doesn't sound good so I want her to hurry up and get it out.

She clears her throat and she's wringing her hands nervously. This can't be good. I'm getting really worried now. "Agatha's coming back." she finally blurts out.

"Agatha's coming back?" I repeat back.

"Yeah."

"Yeah?"

"And she wants to see us." Penny says. She looks nervous, like she doesn't know how I'm going to react. Baz is looking at me worriedly.

"She wants to see us?" I repeat again.

Honestly this conversation isn't actually going anywhere but I'm a little surprised so I guess I just need a bit of time to process. I think about Agatha. I haven't spoken with her since last year. We hadn't spoken that much before everything happened, since we broke up actually. I found out later that she went to the Mage that night, just before I got there, and the Mage nearly killed her. I never thought Agatha would be so brave to do that. Then she bolted to America and I didn't talk to anyone other than Penny and Baz for a long time.

I realise I want to see her, to thank her maybe, or tell her never to do anything that stupid ever again.

"You don't have to, if you don't want to." It's Baz this time, ever protective. He's watching me, rubbing his thumb back and forth across the back of my hand.

"It's okay," I finally say. "I want to see her. I think it would be good to see her." I'm nodding to myself now, resolving it in my head.

"Um, that's great" Penny says, "Because she's coming for dinner on Christmas Eve Eve."

Penny

That went easier than planned. I'm still a little nervous about how easily it went. I thought Simon
would not only not want to make a big deal of Christmas, but also not see Agatha, both are such an obvious reminder of every shit thing that happened. I hope next week goes just as smoothly, for Simon's sake.

I glance at Simon again just to make sure he doesn't look worried, but he looks relaxed and not at all anxious like I thought. He has a small smile on his face and he looks over to Baz who smiles at him, then he leans into Baz's shoulder and Baz plants a small kiss in his hair. God those two can't leave each other alone for a second!

It makes me miss Micah, I think I'll Skype him later.

I get up from the table and flop down on the armchair next to the couch. Simon looks at me then, still smiling. "So when's Micah arrive?" he asks.

"Day after Agatha."

"Looking forward to seeing him again Pen?" He asks gently. He knows I am, it's been too long between visits this year.

"Yeah, I am."

"What are you going to do while he's here?"

"I'm not sure yet. After Christmas with my family I think we'll spend some time seeing the sights, we may even squeeze in a short trip somewhere." I say, thinking out loud. I haven't had time to plan much, what with swotting and work and everything.

"You know, I can make myself scarce while he's here. Give you two some space." He says.

I smile at him. Since we've been living together I've found out just how sweet and considerate he is. He's always bringing me cups of tea when I study and I know he throws a blanket over me if I fall asleep on the couch, and he makes a pretty mean breakfast too. Although I'm fairly sure that's because he got so sick of Weetabix which is practically all we ate at mum's. (And he's remarkably tidy for a boy, but that probably from all that time being roommates with Baz.)

"Thanks Simon." I say.

Then I realise he's probably just looking for any excuse to stay at Baz's. I narrow my eyes. "Afraid Micah and I are going to catch you two going at it on the couch again?"

He blushes straight away. "That hasn't happened for ages." He mutters. "Ever since you came up with that rule anyway."

"Yeah yeah, I bet." I say, but I'm smiling now. It's so easy to make Simon blush.

"A bit of snogging is hardly cause for alarm Bunce." Baz says uninterested, probably to save Simon from more embarrassment.

"Yeah, but snogging in various stages of undress is." I retort.

Baz shrugs indifferently. He stands and walks to the kitchen and starts poking around in the fridge. I can embarrass Simon easily enough but Baz cannot be intimidated at all, it's maddening. Simon jumps up to help him, probably to bring an end to this conversation. Tonight is Baz's night for dinner, I'm sure he didn't make it himself.
I stopped off to visit my family while Simon was at work, and to hunt. The forest is stocked with plenty of deer and if I hunt there a few times a week I can get by on the meagre rodents and pests I find in the city on the other nights. I picked up a shepherd's pie from the fridge on my way through.

I'm not even supposed to be part of this ridiculous dinner schedule arrangement and I was not going to offer up my culinary expertise needlessly. I don't even have any culinary expertise. I grew up with a nanny, a cook, a cleaner and a gardener for Crowley's sake.

I don't even think my step-mother cooks.

I don't need to eat as much as humans but vampires still need some food, so I've had to master a few meals since I moved to London when I'm not at Simon's or visiting my family.

I've become rather expert at breakfasts thanks to Simon and his voracious appetite. So I'm rather good with eggs; poached, scrambled, fried, even French toast and pancakes have made it to my repertoire, again thanks to Simon.

That night, when Penny came up with the idea, Simon looked straight at me. "You can make that Shepherd's Pie Baz." He said, looking at me with those extraordinarily ordinary blue eyes that I can't say no to. And we both remembered that night, in the forest, when he kissed me for the first time, and then later at my house, where he kissed me all night until my mouth was sore.

I couldn't say no.
Chapter 3

Penny

I picked up Agatha from her parents' house an hour ago. It was a little awkward at first with her mother and Dr Wellbelove hovering and fussing over both of us, and I was worried that she would still be as pissed off with the whole magickal realm as she was in those last few months, but Agatha and I just looked at each other and then she smiled and I closed the distance between us and we hugged like we hadn't seen each other for twenty years instead of just one. And any awkwardness disappeared just like that.

It's obvious that her parents haven't mentioned the whole Simon and Baz dating thing to her yet. I think Mrs Wellbelove is leaving that to me, and I'm leaving that to Simon. I don't think her mum ever got over the fact that Agatha broke up with Simon, the Mage's Heir, the most powerful mage ever, and she's probably secretly hoping they get back together so her daughter will return to London. It's not my place to tell her there is no chance of that happening, I'll leave that to Agatha.

We're sitting on the couch back at the flat, trying to catch up on a year's worth of missed moments and making a fairly good go of it. It's less awkward now that there's just the two of us. She looks relaxed and not as polished as she used to look at Watford. Her hair's up in a lose ponytail and there are lose strands falling around her face. She has her feet tucked behind her on the couch and her shoes are on the floor.

Agatha's been filling me in on California and her studies and I have to say, she seems a lot more mature and sure of herself. She knows what she wants to study and has been working hard towards it. She mentions a friend (Emma I think) that she's made and all the things they've been doing together like swimming at the beach and dancing. Merlin, she's even tried rollerblading on the boulevard near the beach, without a helmet or magic! And she hinted that there's a boy that she's interested in but she doesn't say very much about him.

Simon made a lasagne before he left. (It was his turn, he's getting very good at it.) We'll put it in the oven when the boys get back, then Baz and I are going to pop out to get the bread and some wine that we conveniently forgot. The three of us decided that we should give Agatha and Simon some time to talk, alone. Well, Simon and I decided, Baz is still as reluctant as ever to leave Simon alone with his ex-girlfriend even for a second. For someone as brilliant and clever as Baz, he's an absolute sap when it comes to his boyfriend.

Simon and Baz went to see a movie and should have been back half an hour ago but leave it to Simon to be late. Honestly I don't know how he arrived at his classes on time last semester. Actually, I do know, it was me. And Baz.

I specifically told Baz to get Simon back here on time today and I can usually rely on him but of course they're late today. It's only a matter of time before Agatha wants to talk about Simon. I warned her earlier that Baz would be here. I'm starting to fidget.

"Why are they still friends Penny?" Agatha questions again. We've exhausted the California conversation a while ago and the conversation is heading into territory that I really need Simon here for.

"You've been gone for a year you know Agatha, a lot's changed-" I start.

"But Baz is a vampire," she says, cutting me off. As if I didn't know. "And a Pitch for heaven's
"I know that Agatha. But he's actually a very sweet vampire when you get to know him-"

"Sweet!" She scoffs. "There's nothing sweet about vampires Penny! They're dangerous!"

"Not Baz." I scoff right back. "He won't hurt anyone. And besides, the war with the old families is over and most of that was just propaganda spread by the Mage to keep everyone fighting against each other anyway." I go on.

She pulls her chin back and raises her eyebrows at me. "He's still a vampire Penny, can you even hear yourself?"

"Just give him a chance Agatha, please? And give Simon a chance, to explain." I plead. I can see Agatha frowning again, I swear she's going to get a wrinkle between her eyes before she turns twenty.

I'm saved from any further explanations when I hear the key in the lock and Simon and Baz barrel in, mid-way through a conversation about something - probably the movie. Simon is waving one hand in the air while holding Baz's hand with the other and they are both smiling (as usual). I look first at Simon then Baz. "You're late."

"Yes, well we had to go to three different bakeries before Snow here found dessert that met with his especially discerning palate." Baz explains, letting go of Simon's hand to put the box of desserts on the coffee table.

"Hey!" Simon says straight back, starting to unzip his coat "We're talking about dessert here, it's important stuff."

"Agatha's here." I remind them.

**Agatha**

I stand nervously. Penny moves out of the way and then I see Simon and Basil. Simon is smiling as he hangs up his jacket and I wonder if he's pleased to see me. Then he's charging towards me and practically crashes into me.

"Agatha!" He cries, grabbing my arms.

"Simon!" I say, relieved. I guess I wasn't entirely sure how this meeting would go after all this time and everything, but he's smiling and laughing so it feels right to have come.

We go through a bunch of pleasantries, "You look great." I say eagerly. "You look great too Ag, California must be agreeing with you." He says, just as eager. "Yeah it is." I say. And we're smiling and nodding and then we run out of things to say so Simon steps back and says "Baz, Agatha's here."

I look past Simon to where Basil is leaning against the door, his arms and ankles crossed. He's tall and lithe and just as elegant as I remember. "Wellbelove." He says coolly.

"Basil." I say, equally unruffled.

"Well, Baz and I have to pop out, to get some stuff for dinner, right Baz?" Penny cuts in, grabbing her coat and scarf. Baz hasn't even taken his coat off so she just grabs his arm like he's not an evil vampire and pulls him away from the door. "You and Simon catch up for a bit while we're gone
yeah?" She goes on, eyeing Simon meaningfully as she drags Baz out the door. Baz all the while looking at Simon with a look I can't quite place.

I look at Simon and he looks at me. Let's catch up I suppose.

**Simon**

I refill her glass of wine and get myself one before I sit down. I don't drink normally - my psychologist said it probably not a good idea while I'm a recovering trauma victim to make it a habit, but she also acknowledges that I'm a uni student so she just said "Moderation."

We talk a lot about what's been happening during the past year. We talk about my classes, Penny, the flat and my job. She talks about her classes in America and some friend she's made. Then we stop.

"So you're honestly okay Simon?" She asks, looking at me carefully.

"Yeah, I'm getting there." I tell her truthfully. "I wasn't, for a long time after." And I tell her about after, how I stayed at Penny's house, and that I didn't talk to anyone but Penny and Baz for a while, and about the magickal psychologist who's been helping me. "Penny and Baz and Pen's family and even your parents, they've all helped, a lot. Especially Penny, and Baz." I finish.

Agatha's frowning now "So you're really friends with Baz?" She asks, hesitantly.

I look at Agatha. I've never kept my relationship with Baz a secret from anyone, well after the first few days anyway but there was a lot going on then. And after I danced with Baz and then kissed him at the leaver's ball at Watford I just assume everyone in the magickal world knew. And we certainly don't hide from the Normal world either.

"Agatha," I say. "Baz and I, we're not just friends," I take in a deep breath and let it out slowly, looking straight at her, "He's my boyfriend."

She stares at me. "Boyfriend?" She says, frowning even harder.

"Yes."

"Since when?" She asks dubiously.

"Since a year ago." I shrug.

She's still staring at me. And frowning. I want to rub my thumb across the crease between her eyes to smooth it out. "Simon, are you gay?" She asks eventually, and I smile at a memory of the last time I saw her, in her car on Christmas Eve.

I shrug again. "I suppose." I'm kind of smiling now, just a bit.

"Since when?"

I shrug again automatically. I think I'm shrugging too much tonight. Baz and Penny say I do it too much. "Probably since I kissed Baz."

"You kissed Baz?" She asks, and she's stopped frowning now because her eyebrows are raised halfway up her forehead instead. "When?"

"Last year. The night before Christmas Eve" I say. I've decided to just keep answering her questions honestly. It will probably be easier this way, and quicker.
She thinks about this for a bit. "Wait - the night before we were all at Baz's house last year?" She asks, her eyebrows arching even higher now if that's even possible.

"Yes"

"Wait-" she says again. "Is Baz gay?"

I kind of roll my eyes, but I'm smiling. "What do you think?"

"How long has he been gay?"

"I think you have to ask him that Agatha-" I start but she cuts me off.

"Simon!" She's frowning again.

"Like forever, I don't know, a long time." I say finally. "I really think you should defer to Baz on this."

Her eyes widen temporarily as something dawns on her. "So all that time, at school," she says slowly, "he wasn't interested in me?"

"C'mon Agatha, this is kind of awkward . . ." But she staring at me so I sigh. "No, he liked me for a long time."

"How long?"

"Really long."

We're quite for a bit. I can see she's thinking about this now. "Agatha, I'm sorry. I know you had a crush on him and-" I start to apologise but she lets out a small laugh so I stop.

"No Simon, don't be silly. I didn't have a crush on him. I thought I did - for about a week maybe, but I honestly didn't."

"You sure?"

"Quite sure." She says, nodding vigorously. Then she gets straight back to questioning me. "And you two are dating?" She asks again, more like confirming it to herself now.

"Yes."

"Since when did you start dating?" She asks, and I hope we're getting to the end of this soon.

"Since Christmas Eve last year."

"The next day?"

I'm nodding. "Yes." And then we're quiet for a bit. She sips her wine. I sip mine.

Then she frowns again, "You're dating Baz?"

"Yes."

She's quiet for a bit so I take another sip of wine. She does too.

"You do realise he's a vampire Simon?"
I roll my eyes. "Yes Agatha, I told you, remember?"

She stares at me and takes another sip of her wine. We're going to need another bottle if this conversation goes much longer.

Then she has another thought. I can tell because her eyes go wide. "Does my mother know?" she blurts out loudly.

I shrug. "Everybody knows."

She watches me for a while before she eventually nods. We're quiet for a bit and I think we're finally done. And I'm glad, it was kind of exhausting.

Then we're quiet for a bit longer.

And then I've had enough of the quiet and I don't want things to be awkward between us, I just want things to go back to normal. So I take her hand and tell her how I didn't know that I liked Baz until that night, but once I realised it, it made so much sense, that it felt right, and good, and it's still good, great even. And I tell her that I definitely didn't know while I was with her. And then she says that she always thought we hated each other and that it's going to take her a bit to get used to the idea that we're friends, let alone boyfriends. And then she tells me that she has sort of met someone and that although it's very early days, she likes him. And then I tell her how happy I am for her. And then I tell her how brave and selfless she was to go to the Mage that night and nearly get herself killed and how I thought about how wrong things could have gone for all of us – well more wrong than things actually did and she stops me then and squeezes my arm.

"I'm just glad that you're okay, and not dead!" She's crying now.

"I'm glad you're not dead too Agatha." I say, and I think I'm crying too.

We stay like that, holding each other until my pocket buzzes. I let go of Agatha and pull my mobile out.

**Baz:** All done Snow?

**Me:** Yes, you can come back now

I'm smiling as I answer and Agatha is watching me with a questioning look. "Baz." I tell her. "Wants to know if I've told you yet, if they can come back."

"Did you plan this?" She asks.

I shrug. "Penny did."

This time Agatha rolls her eyes.

**Baz**

Bunce plans for us to stay out for an hour even though we bought the bread and wine in ten. We stop at the pub where it's warm and she orders a Vodka Cruiser to pass the time. (What is she, fifteen?) She suggests I order a glass of wine. I don't. I don't drink much and I definitely do not order wine by the glass. I'm looking at my mobile, impatient to get back.

"Relax Baz, Agatha's not going to jump Simon." Bunce smirks. She can be quite irritating when she
wants to be. "Anyway I think she might be seeing someone." She gives me that one, to make peace.

It's been forty five minutes and I've had enough of waiting so I text Simon, relieved when he responds immediately and says we can go back.

"Come on Bunce, I'll pour you a decent drink when we get back." I'm already walking to the door.

Agatha

Simon stands up and moves into the kitchen and I realise we've been sitting for a long time. I follow him and lean on the counter with my wine. He starts talking about his job at the café as he slides the lasagne out of the oven and covers it while finds a salad bowl and starts putting together a green salad. We hear Baz and Penny come in then, they're quiet as they take off their coats and scarves. Then I watch Baz as he stride right past me and head straight for Simon. I'm still watching as Baz wraps his arms around Simon's waist from behind and gives him a kiss on the cheek and Simon leans into it and smiles.

It all so bizarre - last time I saw them they were sworn enemies. No that's not right, they were sworn enemies at school, until they were working together to solve Natasha Grimm-Pitch's murder. And they had already kissed for the first time the night before. I shake my head, this is going to take some getting used to.

I glance at Simon again before I move back to the couch. (The kitchen is getting a little crowded.) He looks so happy. He said he is, and it's obvious really.

Penny sets the table and Baz finally lets go of Simon and opens one of the bottle of wine they carried in with them. Then he leans against the wall, watching Simon work until Penny shoos him out. He strolls over to the chair opposite me and sits down, cool as ever and he gives me that bored look I became so used to at Watford.

"Good flight Wellbelove?" He asks, he even sounds bored.

"Great. So you and Simon are dating?"

He stares straight at me then, doesn't blink or anything "Yes we are." He answers calm as ever. He even looks a little proud.

"And you always wanted him?" I ask, still staring at him. I might as well get straight to the point.

Baz continues to stare at me as he crosses his arms. He lifts his chin a little but his expression doesn't change at all "Yes that's right Wellbelove. Always." Baz finally answers, unblinking, daring me to say anything else.

I think about this a bit longer and then smile and nod.

"Well played Basil."

He smirks at that and nods to himself. Simon and Penny bring dinner to the table then and Baz's look softens as he watches Simon bring in the lasagne. And then it hits me, that look that Baz had for Simon when he left the flat with Penny before, it was protective.

Dinner goes well and Simon can cook! The evening is lovely and the conversation flows easily. And while we eat and talk and drink wine I watch Penny and Simon, how they finish each other's stories and joke and laugh and their easy banter, even Baz was relaxed. It was obvious that the three of them spend a lot of time together and that they enjoy each other's company. Simon and Baz look at each
other and smile all every now and again and I think they're holding hands under the table.

Maybe what Penny said is true, that Baz really is a sweet vampire. I catch myself. A sweet vampire? A sweet Pitch Vampire? Morgana, things really have changed!

I say I want to make a toast. I'm not sure how this will go and I must look a bit worried or hesitant because Penny asks if I'm okay? So I ask if it's all right to make a toast to Ebb. She saved my life on that dreadful night and it's important to me to acknowledge this. Everyone looks to Simon, waiting. He looks surprised at first but then he smiles at me and quietly says of course it is.

Dinner and dessert are done and we're just finishing our drinks and then I remember the photo I have in my bag. The one I took (stole) from Penny's mum last Christmas, the picture of the Mage and Lucy. I was going to give it to Simon tonight but seeing him now, all happy and content, I'm not sure if that's the right thing to do. It may just push him back to where he was right after everything happened. I decide that I need to think about this a bit more and tonight is definitely not the time to give it to him. I'm in London for a week so I have plenty of time to decide what to do.

We start to get up and I notice that so far Penny and Baz haven't used magic at all tonight. I wonder if they don't use it in front of Simon. But then as soon as I think this, Penny points her big purple ring at the table and cleans up the entire mess, dirty dishes, cutlery, empty wine bottles and everything, and I'm starting to remember that magic definitely has its advantages.

**Baz**

It's gotten late so we call it a night, finally. I must admit the dinner was not as dismal as I had assumed it would be in the week leading up. Still, I'm relieved it's over. Wellbelove's gaze moved from Simon to Penny to me during the course of the evening. She watched Simon and Penny especially, smiling. And she watched me, frowning occasionally. I'm not bothered, whatever she thinks of our relationship is her business and as long as she doesn't interfere I couldn't care less what she thinks.

I'm staying over. I could drive home – it's not that late and I hardly drank (or ate) tonight. (I've gotten used to eating in front of Simon and even Penny sometimes, but I don't need to shock Wellbelove with my fangs and drive home that I am, in fact, a vampire.) I'm staying over because there is no way in this realm or the next that I'm leaving my boyfriend alone while his ex-girlfriend sleeps in the next room, no matter how unlikely it is that anything would eventuate.

Simon announces as we leave the table that I'm making pancakes for breakfast tomorrow. I raise my eyebrows at that. "I don't even live here Snow." I scowl. He grins and grabs my hand and pokes my mouth with the other hand as he pulls me to his room.

"You're pouting." He says. "And we have a guest Baz. It would be bad manners not to make Agatha a decent breakfast before she leaves." He finishes as he kicks the bedroom door shut with his foot, kicking his shoes off at the same time. I scowl again, (I was definitely scowling not pouting.) at the kicking or the flicking or the pancakes I'm not entirely sure. Then he pulls off his jumper, (and drops it on the floor) and steps out of his jeans and climbs into bed. I remove my jumper and jeans and hang them neatly over his chair and climb in after him, ready to argue the point. But his tail winds its way around my thigh and he kisses me, more than once.

So of course I'll be making pancakes. I'm stupidly in love with my boyfriend and I'd do anything to make him happy. It really is that simple.

**Agatha**
I'm staying in Penny's room tonight and as I walk to her room I watch Baz and Simon walk hand in hand to Simon's room, still discussing pancakes. Penny sees me watching them so when we get inside Penny's room I ask her.

"Penny is Baz staying over?" I question. I can't help myself, I still see them as enemies let alone friends or boyfriends.

"Uh huh." Penny says distractedly, pulling out her pyjamas.

"How often does that happen?" I ask, getting my pyjamas out of my overnight bag.

"A lot." Penny says, taking off her glasses and rubbing her eyes. "Or Simon stays over at Baz's."

"And are they always like that?" I tip my head towards the door.

"Like what?" She asks, taking off her shoes.

"Like that." I tip my head towards the door again. "You know, so close."

"Yes, they can be quite maddening sometimes." She snorts.

"It still seems weird."

"Only to you, everyone here is used to them." She shrugs, pulling off her cardigan and hanging it over her chair.

I sit on Penny's bed and ponder this for a while. And then another thought strikes me. "Penny, are they doing it?"

"Doing what?" she asks, getting into her pyjamas.

"You know, having sex." I whisper now, putting on my pyjamas as well. I'm more curious than ever now.

"Not tonight I hope!" Penny whispers forcefully, climbing into bed. I stop putting on my pyjamas and frown at her. She sighs as she answers. "What do you think Agatha, they've been together for a year now."

"But he's a vampire! Isn't that dangerous?"

"Obviously not, Simon's still here isn't he?" She says, and I think she's laughing now. For Morgana's sake, doesn't she take this seriously at all I wonder to myself as I climb into bed?
Chapter 4

Simon

I'm lying in bed next to Baz facing him. He's not awake yet, so I'm still deciding whether it's worth waking him for those pancakes or just watch him sleep. He looks different when he sleeps – he looks peaceful, younger. When he's awake he usually has this bored look on his face or he's smirking (at something I've said) or smiling (at me). I'd never even seen him smile until last year. He was usually grimacing (at me) or sneering (also at me). He doesn't sneer much anymore – he still does but not as often, and usually at Penny.

Today is Christmas Eve and our one year anniversary. Funny to think that a year has passed since we became boyfriends. It feels like we've been together forever. Being roommates for seven and a half years definitely doesn't count given that we hated each other for nearly all of it. Or thought we did.

A year since we became boyfriends. And a year since everything happened; the Humdrum gone, my magic gone, the Mage dead, Ebb dead. The fact that the Mage was behind every bad thing that happened; letting the vampires into Watford, Natasha Grimm-Pitch's murder, Baz's kidnapping, the wars, everything.

I'm still not over all of it all but I am in a good place now. I have Baz and Penny and the Bunce and the Wellbeloves. They're all nice to me and even Baz's family don't want to kill me anymore. No reason to I suppose. I'm not the Mage's Heir anymore and I was used by the Mage just like everyone else, well, maybe a bit more than everyone else.

I have my flat and I have my classes, even though I still don't know what I want to do. But who does when you're nineteen? (Or twenty, I'm not really sure.) Unless you're Penny or Baz of course, they've had their careers planned for ever.

I have a job that pays the rent and I can cook two dishes now. Not bad for an ex mage supervillain. (Or superhero, it depends on who you talk to.) And I have dragon wings and a tail, which would have been really annoying if it wasn't for the fact that I learned how to fly in the summer.

It was Mordelia who made me try in the first place. She may be only eight, but she's really clever and a little bit sneaky because she definitely tricked me into it. And she may not be a Pitch but the Grimm's are just as smart in my eyes. It will be good for Baz to have some intellectual competition – to stop him from being such a know-it-all. It's already bad enough that he's such a posh git.

I was at Oxford with Baz one day in the summer after he moved to London. As soon as he finished at Watford we were spending all our time together, which was good for Penelope, because before that I was spending nearly all of my time with her, except when Baz came over and took me off her hands for a while. Baz was inside discussing his courses with his parents and I was outside kicking the football around with Mordelia. We had some makeshift goals set up and for a little kid she was whipping me. She was kicking goals and I was running back and forth letting as many through as I was stopping.

She put her hands on her hips and yelled across the lawn at me. "Why don't you just fly Simon?"

"I can't fly." I said, stating the obvious. "I need magic for that Mordy." It came out a bit stuttered because I was panting hard.
She rolled her eyes at that. "No you don't, you have wings." she said, just a bit exasperated. Honestly she and her brother are more alike than they realise. "Try!" she demanded.

I tried to stare her down but she's eight so she was unfazed.

So I tried. It's not like I had anything else to do, and I needed a rest from tending goal. I'm in better shape now from all the running but I'd worked up a sweat chasing the ball. So I spread my wings and flapped them a bit and concentrated a lot and tried to fly and nothing happened. This went on for a while. Mordelia stood still, passing the ball between her hands, watching me and getting impatient.

"You look like you're trying to do a poo." she said, shaking her head.

"Mordy!" I said, trying to sound serious but failing. "It's not working."

She glared at me and shook her head again, more like an adult than a kid. And then she kicked the ball up high and it was heading straight for one of the house windows. I jumped up and caught it and then she was yelling and I was ten feet off the ground, wings flapping, ball in hand. As soon as I realised where I was I came straight down, kind of crashed really, then I was rolling on the grass. "Fuck me!" I gasped. Then I looked around to make sure Mordy didn't hear.

She ran up to me, clapping and jumping up and down and yelling "Do it again! Do it again!"

"No way Mordy!" I said puffing, "I nearly killed myself." But she insisted and I've got to admit I really wanted to try again, to figure it all out.

I have no idea how I got up the first time, I wasn't thinking about anything when I went for the ball, I just wanted to stop it from smashing into the window. I decided not to over think it. So the next time I just aimed for the top of trees at the edge of the big lawn and flapped. I was a bit shaky at first, sort of hovering a bit, and then I was moving – just stuttering along really – but I was definitely off the ground.

I was pretty chuffed.

I kept going forward and soon I was using my wings properly and swooping and turning and flying in wide circles around the big lawn, because I could, and because I wasn't sure how to land. Mordy was yelling and clapping and she was so loud that Baz's step-mum came outside and saw me and had this look of wonder on her face, and then Baz came outside and saw me and had a look of awe on his face.

Then I thought I had better try to land and started to panic a bit, but I aimed for the middle of the lawn and sort of, pulled up – a bit like that dragon back in eighth year, and it worked. I slowed right down and then just sort of stepped, sort of stumbled on the ground near Baz and his step mum and Mordy. It was very cool, actually it was brilliant. Mordelida ran up to me still clapping and yelling "I want a ride, I want a ride!"

"No!" Her mum screamed. We all turned to look at her because she's normally more collected. "No Mordelia." She said, more composed this time, smoothing down her skirt.

"Aleister Crowley Simon!" Baz said, still looking at me, wide eyed and grinning from ear to ear.

Since then I flew over the big lawns every time we went to Oxford, practising over and over until I got it down. I even took Mordy for a little ride, only once, when her mum wasn't around, otherwise she really would have killed me.

Once I learned to fly well enough I started flying to Baz's flat in the dead of night every now and
then, if I had a nightmare or if I just want to see him. It was summer so it's warm enough to fly without any warming spells, which was good because I would have to explain to Penny in the middle of the night why she needs to cast warming spells on me in the middle of the night. Flying's better at night, there's less risk of being seen so I don't need to be spelled invisible and it's wickedly fast and saves on bus fare.

Maybe I just got used to sound of Baz's breathing all those years we were roommates at Watford but I sleep better when I'm with him. I think he does too.

That night when we arrived back in London after the first time I flew, I don't know if it was the rush of adrenaline from flying or the fact that I had been thinking about what my psychologist said for a while now but as soon as we got inside his flat I pinned Baz to the back of the door and pushed myself against him and kissed him like mad, like I couldn't get enough of him, because I couldn't get enough of him. I think I took him by surprise which doesn't happen very often, so I was smiling a bit at that, and then I stopped thinking about that and just thought about kissing him again. And then I was dragging him to his bedroom, pulling his tee shirt over his head and pushing him onto his bed. He's way stronger than me but he just went with it and I swear the look on his face was priceless, surprised and horny.

I pulled off my tee shirt and kicked off my shoes and pulled down my jeans without stopping to think about it. Then I climbed on top of Baz and he undid his jeans and peeled them off himself and dropped them on the floor. I climbed back on top of him, my wings spread wide, my tail in the air. He was staring at me and I couldn't do anything but stare back, first at his incredible grey eyes, and then his smooth chest and hard stomach and that thin line of hair that trails from his stomach down past the waistband of his shorts. I dragged my eyes back to his and touched his heart then, to let him know that I know it beats, that he's alive. He smiled his beautiful smile at me and then he reached up and pulled me down to him and kissed me.

I slid his shorts off with one hand (I'm not sure how I managed that) and then he took off mine and then there was nothing between us, finally.

Neither of us knew what we were doing, it was both our first time so it was a little awkward. But it was tender and sweet, and then it was incredibly hot and fucking amazing.

We did it again the next morning.

And that afternoon.

Penny and I had only been living together for a little over a month so she kept texting me, wondering what time I'd be home. When we finally made it back to my flat we must have been so obvious because she worked it out almost straight away. She's so smart she doesn't miss a trick. And she's not subtle at all.

We were sitting at the kitchen table. Penny found the biscuits and put them on a plate in the middle of the table and poured the tea and then looked at me, then at Baz and then at me again.

"Wait." She said, putting down the tea pot. "Did you two have sex last night?"

"Penny!" I said, blushing immediately. She's also incredibly blunt.

"What's it to you Bunce?" Baz said, trying to be all cool but you could see he was glowing.

"I knew it!" She squealed and smirked at the same time. Then she sat and stared right at both of us. "So, it was a good night then?" She's relentless.
"And morning." I mumbled, my eyes flicking over to Baz as I blushed again.

"And afternoon." Baz countered, never to be outdone. But he was looking straight at me with that soft look on his face.

I blushed even more. I didn't think that was even possible because I was already blushing so hard. I think Baz makes me blush on purpose, which is kind of masochistic for a vampire when you think about it.

And I think my psychologist was right.

And then we told Penny about the flying.

I'm still watching Baz sleep. Once we sorted out Christmas, Baz wanted to talk about our anniversary. I wasn't going to do anything but Baz said of course we have to celebrate it. Then he said that traditionally the first year is paper so I decided I would give him one of the sketches I did of him. I'm going to have to tell him about the art classes eventually, it's been killing me to keep this a secret so I may as well do it now.

I reach my hand up to his face and carefully tuck a lose wave of hair behind his ear. His eyes flutter open and he looks straight at me.

"Happy anniversary." I say, moving my hand down his arm and resting it at his waist.

"Happy anniversary." He murmurs back. He smiles a little and then brings his hand to my face, lightly touching my cheek. (I have a couple of moles there, he's always touching them.) And we stay like this for a while, just looking at each other. It's nice in the early morning light, all warm under the blankets with the sun peeking through the closed curtains. Then my stomach grumbles loudly and I kiss him gently on the lips, (with my mouth closed) (he says I have morning breath) and then I move my mouth to his ear and say, very quietly, "Pancakes Baz."

He just rolls his eyes.
Chapter 5

Penny

When mum called today I thought she was just calling to wish me a Happy New Year, which she did, but then she asked if we could come over tomorrow. The three of us, Simon, me and Baz. I'm glad she said tomorrow and not today because Micah is leaving tonight and we are both sporting rather large hangovers, which I blame entirely on Baz.

The week with Micah flew by so fast and now it's almost over. He flew in on Christmas Eve and I met him at the airport and caught the tube back to my flat. Baz and Simon dropped Agatha back to her house and I think they were spending the rest of the afternoon together to celebrate their first anniversary as boyfriends or whatever. All I know is that it meant I got to have Micah and the flat to myself for a few hours before heading to mum and dad's for dinner.

I missed Micah so much. I was supposed to visit him last summer but after everything that happened I couldn't leave Simon. And anyway, we were moving into our new flat and I'd just started working so it really wasn't a good time to leave. I'll probably visit Micah next summer, things are going well with Simon and I've been working a lot so I have some money saved, and mum and dad will probably help me with the rest.

Agatha asked if she could see us all again before she leaves and I was surprised but also really glad. Last year Agatha wanted to get as far away from magic and us as possible, and I sort of get it because she just didn't seem to care that much about the wars and the Humdrum and the whole threat to our world. She just wanted to be a normal teenager. (normal, not Normal, or maybe she did want to be Normal, I'm not really sure) Looking back I'm starting to think that she just couldn't deal with all the dangerous crap we went through all those years. It was overwhelming really, and we did drag her along to every adventure we set out on and she always came, albeit reluctantly.

We both had busy weeks with her being home and Micah coming, but we scheduled a day together and New Year's Eve dinner.

Christmas Eve was bedlam at home as usual, mum fussed over Micah for ages and asked endless questions about Yale and his family and she almost forgot about the turkey. Prem is back from Uni and although he's not as obnoxious as he was last year now that he's not part of the Mages personal army, he and my other brothers and sisters were still annoyingly loud, and argued more than they talked. I don't think they're used to sitting around the table and eating at the same time because it took ages to get everyone to sit, just sit together, without one getting up and wondering away. It was like rounding chickens. Then Simon and Baz were late (as usual) and the turkey was almost overdone but Simon gave mum and me Christmas hugs and kisses and shook dad's hand and almost knocked over the Christmas tree with his tail and he handed mum some flowers that I'm sure Baz bought and some mince pies from the café he works at, and Baz handed dad a bottle of something that looked expensive and they were forgiven just like that. If I was late on Christmas Eve mum would have flipped her lid but Simon can pretty much get away with anything, talk about favourite child. And he's not even hers.

She still brings him sour cherry scones every week from Watford.

Christmas day was a little more subdued after the craziness of the night before. My family spent it together with Micah. It was still noisy but it was relaxing and enjoyable and after a full day with my entire family Micah and I couldn't wait to get back to the flat.
I had lunch with Agatha while Simon, Baz and Micah hung out, and it was more fun than I expected. I thought Agatha would want to go shopping or get a manicure or something like that but she was happy to go out to eat some proper fish and chips. (She said she misses them.) We spent the rest of the afternoon in a tea shop and drank tea and ate scones and talked.

She told me more about her friend Emma, how she's a Normal and little bit crazy and very down to earth and very smart and very nice. She said I'd like her. She told me she has a dog that she and Emma both love. Then Agatha talked about how she's interested in studying Veterinary Science and that her grades are good so she has a reasonably good chance of getting in, and then she said that she's bringing her wand back to America with her this time after leaving it behind last year.

"Merlin and Morgana Agatha!" I cried, a little too loud for the small tea shop. "How could you leave it behind?"

"Shhhh!" she hissed, looking around the tea shop. "Don't judge me Penny please." She said in a more normal voice. "I was just sick of the whole magickal world by then. I just wanted to get as far away from it all as possible. I hardly used it here anyway, remember?" I do remember, I think she used her wand even less than Simon, and Simon's wand had a tendency to backfire or set things on fire.

I think Agatha suffered her own traumas last year and she's only just coming through them. I spent so much time worrying about Simon this year that sometimes I forget that Baz and Agatha and I went through a lot of crap as well. Talking with Agatha puts things into perspective.

Apart from lunch with Agatha the rest of the week was all mine and Micah's. Simon stayed at Baz's most of the time. "You and Micah deserve some time alone Pen." Simon said, and even though I know he was just as keen to have an excuse to spend the week alone with Baz I still couldn't help but love him just a little bit more for being the thoughtful best friend that he is. A week with Micah alone, it was perfect.

It was Micah's second to last night when we went out dancing. It was New Year's Eve and both Agatha and Micah were flying out on the same day so we decided to go out for dinner.

It was going to be a quiet night, just the five of us and dinner, but then we started talking. And maybe it was because we were all together again or maybe it was because this was our last chance to talk before Agatha and Micah left, but we ended up talking quite candidly about what happened last Christmas. Simon said he still has nightmares about it, and I said I still do too and then Agatha also said she sometimes does. Baz wouldn't admit anything even though Simon's already told me that he does. Then Simon mentioned his running and the meditation and yoga that his psychologist suggested he do to keep his mind off them. (He didn't mention how flying helps more than anything, Agatha doesn't know about the wings and the tail so there's no point dropping that one on her when she's just about to leave.) And he blushed ridiculously when I mentioned that the psychologist said sex was a great distraction. (He should have known when he told me that I wouldn't be able to keep that to myself.) We were still giggling about that and our meditation and yoga when Simon accidentally let it slip that dancing was the only thing his psychologist suggested that he hasn't tried.

Baz immediately seized on that and suggested we all head over to this new club that's supposed to be the latest thing and Simon and I groaned and Agatha and Micah said yeah! We finally left the restaurant and headed over to the club, after Baz and Micah argued over the bill that is. Baz paid of course, he might be a complete snob most of the time but he always has impeccable manners and would never let a guest foot the bill. And that's how we ended up drinking shots and dancing New Year's Eve away to thumping electronic dance music until three am.

I make a pot of tea for Micah and me, we're having a quiet day in my flat today, just the two of us.
He's leaving tonight and I want to get my fill of him before he leaves. I'm still wondering why mum was so insistent on seeing us as I pour the tea.

Agatha

I'm on my way to the airport. I've had a good week at home but I'm looking forward to getting back to California, it's so cold here! Mum and dad cried a bit at the departure lounge but they finally let me get on the plane after I promised I wouldn't leave it so long between visits, and after lots of hugs.

I had a lovely time catching up with Penny and Simon and even Baz. I never thought I'd ever say that but it's true. And Simon is happy, happy and alive, and that's such a relief. Seeing them again was better than I expected, and a lot of fun. I can't remember a time when we just went out and had fun, well Simon and Penny and me anyway, we were always off trying to save the realm or some rubbish.

And I'd never been dancing at that type of club before. I must say it was refreshing not to have boys hitting on me all the time. (A few of the girls did but I politely said no thanks and kept dancing with Penny.) I don't even think Simon realised where we were. Although how he didn't notice all the boys looking at him and Baz is beyond me – everyone was looking at them, both so good-looking and Baz in that suit. I think Baz knew how good they looked and that everyone was watching them, actually I'm sure of it, but they only had eyes for each other and it was rather sweet. (A sweet vampire! Morgana, now I sound like Penny!)

I even caught up with some of my Normal friends as well, although most of them have moved away for uni so there's not as many left as I thought. But Minty was home for Christmas and we had a chance to catch up which was lovely.

I still have that photo of the Mage and Lucy with me because it didn't seem like the right time to give it to Simon. I thought about giving it back to Mrs Bunce but then I'd have to tell her that I took it and I was afraid she would think less of me, or tell my mother, so I'm bringing it back to California with me for now.

And I'm bringing my wand back to California too. This is a big step for me but I think it's time.

Simon

Christmas turned out pretty good. Christmas Eve at Penny's was crazy noisy as usual which was fun and rather entertaining. Penny's mum fusssed over me and Micah and even Baz, but not as much, because Baz isn't the sort of person who you fuss over I guess. Christmas Day at the Grimm-Pitch estate was much the same, only without the mayhem, or the fussing, or the racket, and more posh, and grand, and civilised, and composed, and way more food. Actually they weren't alike at all.

And the gifts at Baz's were a little over the top. I got a load of gifts from everyone, even his parents and Fiona which was a bit weird. (Clothes from his parents, although I think some of them were from Baz, drawings from his siblings and some fancy headphones from Fiona.)

Baz and I exchanged gifts when we were alone. I made him promise not to go over the top when I agreed to go to his fancy family lunch. In fact, I set a thirty quid limit on gifts because we just had our anniversary and I'm a little short on funds. He bought me a nice wool beanie, probably so I wouldn't keep stealing his. He also bought me a matching scarf. I bought him some new leather gloves so I could steal his.

Baz's dad still looks at me funny most of the time. I don't think it's the wings because he's gotten used to them. It may be the tail, but then he doesn't really look at that so I don't think it's that either. It
creeps me out a bit but not as much as it used to and Baz says that's just the way he is, and Fiona keeps him in check when he gets too serious or scary looking, usually by saying something completely inappropriate. I think she does it to move his attention from me so I'm not complaining, it's just weird. Fiona's and my relationship is strange like that, one minute I think she still wants to kill me and then the next minute she's bringing me cherry scones from wherever she's been off vampire hunting.

Baz and I dragged Micah out one day while Penny and Agatha caught up. Micah wanted to do a tour of the haunted pubs of London, (I didn't want to go, I'm still haunted by Natasha Grimm-Pitch's ghost back at Watford but wasn't going to tell them that.) and Baz wanted to check out some Museum that had some really old fancy furniture. (Which neither of us wanted to go, I mean who wants to look at room set up with four hundred year old furniture, really Baz.) I wanted to try ice skating so we compromised and tried to do all three. It was a busy day and I think Penny was relieved she didn't have to join us. She loves spending time with Micah of course, because they get so little time together, but haunted pubs and ice skating is definitely not on her to do list. And that furniture thing, that's not on anyone's list except Baz's.

Turns out I can't ice skate for shit. It also turns out that ice skating after a tour of haunted pubs is not the best idea. We'd only had a few pints but once I got on the ice I realised that no pints was probably a better idea. Micah can ice skate surprisingly well and of course Baz can. Baz was as agile and graceful as usual while I flayed my arms and tail around and I worked up a decent sweat trying to stay upright. In the end I flapped my wings a little to keep myself from falling so I didn't learn to skate at all.

New Year's Eve was a proper end to the year. I've never actually been out anywhere to celebrate New Year's Eve. Usually Agatha and I would spend the night at her place while her parents went out back when I was with her, and last year no one acknowledged it at all. This was our last chance to all be together so I was looking forward to the dinner. Everything was going well until I let slip about the dancing and then Baz jumped on that idea. In a way I was relieved, it was the last thing I'd been keeping from Baz and even though it wasn't a big secret or anything, I still found it hard to not let it slip ever since my psychologist first mentioned it.

I think Baz still thinks I didn't know what kind of club it was. I mean I didn't realise it was a gay club at first but once Baz dragged me on the dance floor I noticed there were lots of blokes – fit blokes, dancing with other blokes so it made sense. They were all watching Baz of course, he looked so handsome in that suit, better than handsome, he looked beautiful. He knew they were all watching him of course so I held his hand and I wrapped my tail around his waist and didn't let go because I swear all those blokes were going to pounce on him if I left his side for a second.

"Everybody's staring at us." I said.

"That's because we're cool and mysterious and better looking than any couple has a right to be." He said smugly as he held me close.

"I thought it was because I'm crap at dancing." I said.

He shook his head, trying not to crack a smile. It didn't work and I heard him laugh softly, his hair falling in waves around his face as he shook.

"And I thought that you thought dancing is well gay?" Baz said while we danced.

"I do. It is." I shrugged, smiling. "Especially if it's between two blokes." And then my tail wrapped around his waist even tighter.
When the countdown to midnight started Baz pulled me closer, snaking his strong arms around my waist. He pressed his body into mine and his lips to my ear.

"I love you Simon Snow." He whispered, his lips brushing against my ear.

"I love you Baz Pitch" I whispered back, wrapping my arms around his neck.

And then he kissed me and he didn't stop. We didn't wait until the countdown reached zero. He kissed me until I couldn't hear the music or the cheering anymore, all I could hear was the sound of my heartbeat and the sound of our breath between kisses. I pushed my hands into his hair as he pulled me even closer until there was nothing between us. All I could think about was Baz, my boyfriend, and his lips on mine and his arms around me, and in that moment I knew there was no place I'd rather be.

Penny pushed us apart eventually. "Merlin Baz, let me say Happy New Year to my best friend before the year's over!" And then Penny dragged me in for a hug and I kissed her cheek and wished her a Happy New Year.

"You too Simon, let's make this one even better than last year." She said happily. I think she was a little drunk.

I kissed Agatha on the cheek and wished her a happy new year too and then Micah gave everyone a hug and kiss. He's really strong for a small bloke.

Penny grabbed Baz and gave him a kiss on the cheek and a quick hug and Baz let her, but then his nose twitched and he pushed her away gently. Then Baz shook Micah's hand and then awkwardly went to shake Agatha's hand but she must have been a bit tipsy because she gave him a quick squeeze and wished him a Happy New Year as well.

It was a brilliant night.

I've made a pot of tea and scrambled eggs for breakfast. Penny is finally out of the bathroom and she takes her seat at the table. (Since I've been living with her I found out that she's not a morning person at all!)

"Here you go Pen." I say, sliding the eggs onto the toast and passing her plate over to her. I slide some onto my plate and sit across from her. "Feeling better today?" She and Micah were a bit quiet yesterday after New Year's so Baz and I left them alone. And it was their last day together so I spent the day at Baz's.

"Thanks Simon." She grabs the plate and drags it towards her. "Loads better actually." She huffs.

"So, when are you planning on going to America?" I ask her, already starting my eggs.

"What for?" she asks, pouring the tea.

"To see Micah again." I say between mouthfuls. She's not usually this thick. She must still be half asleep.

She sighs and starts eating her eggs slowly, chewing thoughtfully as she chooses her words. "I don't know Simon. I have to study, he has to study, and we can't honestly afford to be flying around all the time."

"But you miss him already?"
"Yeah, I do." She says gloomily.

I put my hand on hers and squeeze and she gives me a small smile.

I go back to my breakfast, shovelling a forkful of scrambled eggs into my mouth. "So you enjoyed yourself at the club?" I tease.

"Ugh, don't remind me." She groans. "Why I let Micah talk me into all those shots I'll never know."

I take a sip of my tea and fork some more eggs onto my toast. "You and Agatha handled them pretty well I thought."

"Yeah, until I woke up." she groans again. "I keep forgetting that Micah is used to it. Must be an American thing. I'd rather a Vodka Cruiser any day."

I shake my head at her. Her taste in alcohol is terrible. "How old are you, fifteen?" I snort, shoving some more eggs into my mouth.

She snorts back. "Anyway," she says, changing the subject away from her. "You and Baz looked like you were having a good time too?"

"Yeah, it was pretty good." I shrug, trying to downplay the night. I had a brilliant time, not that I'm letting on – she'd never let me live it down.

She snorts again and raises her eyebrow at me. "Just pretty good eh? That's why I almost had to spell you two apart." She says, smirking at me. I can't put anything past her.

I shrug again even though I know I'm blushing. "I saw you and Micah making a decent go if it too you know." I retort, mainly to stop her from looking so smug. It works because then she stops smirking and goes back to finishing her breakfast in silence.

When we finish breakfast I clear up and sit on the couch waiting for Baz. We're going over to Penny's mum's house, she wants to see us.
Baz

Simon face is unreadable.

We're sitting in Professor Bunce's office and the other Professor Bunce (Headmistress Bunce) has just finished telling us about the Will, the Mage's Will. Apparently a law firm contacted her as the current Headmistress of Watford and advised that the Mage left a Will, to be forwarded to the current Headmaster of Watford after his death. No one knows why it took twelve months for it to reach her, and I suspect no one actually cares.

Professor Bunce has been talking for about fifteen minutes. When we walked in Simon was relaxed, chatting with the other Professor Bunce about his latest visits to assess the holes in the magickal atmosphere. Then Professor Bunce started talking, first about how the Will was sent to her as the current Headmistress, and then about the cottage up north and the bank account with a small but reasonable sum that was all bequeathed to Simon. All the while Simon face has become increasingly blank and inscrutable. His eyes are fixed on Professor Bunce and he hasn't said a word.

"So Simon, I've had my lawyers look it over and it is all legitimate." Professor Bunce finishes. She's noticed the change in Simon – we all have – and she's trying to get through it as quickly and succinctly as possible so this can be over for him. "The cottage up north and the money is all yours." She finishes a little nervously.

He had no idea why we were called here today, and while Bunce and I both exchanged worried looks on the way upstairs Simon didn't have a clue. And Crowley why would he? He's been doing so well this year after everything that happened with the Mage. At first he spent weeks hardly saying anything to anyone. We would spend hours sitting in silence – him staring at nothing and me holding his hand. He started talking more eventually and even smiling some. Then he started meeting with his psychologist and that helped him noticeably, every day was an improvement.

When I went back to Watford I called him every day when I was alone back in our room. And he would text me ridiculous things that would make me laugh during lessons.

Then summer came and things improved even more. When he found his job and moved into the flat with Bunce and started organising his classes he really came into his own. It gave him something to focus on after all those months of nothing.

We spent more and more time together and it was good, very good. And Simon seemed happy. The running helped clear his mind to some extent but I think it was the flying that helped him the most. I never told Simon or Bunce but when he flew with wind blowing those ridiculous bronze curls flat against his head and his clothes billowing and his blue eyes half closed he looked euphoric, more than that, he looked like a Greek God.

We would talk for hours sometimes. We would spend all day on that ludicrous blue couch in his flat or on my rather more comfortable Chesterfield, shoulder to shoulder, our hands linked, talking about everything and nothing at the same time. We became even closer. He finally told me about his childhood in the orphanages and I told him about my mother and my family, my cousins, aunts and uncles. He talked about his summers away from Watford and I talked about mine. We learned and then made fun of each other's taste in music and movies. We spoke seriously and at length about Simon's favourite desserts and where in London you can get the best ice cream and pizza, curry and fish and chips. And then he dragged me to most of them and wanted my opinion on all of them, not
resting until he'd shown me every single one. He even convinced me to play violin for him and I
don't normally play for anyone, not even my family.

We spoke about all the things we did to each other at Watford, sometimes laughing at the
ridiculousness of it all and sometimes quite in our remorse.

It was one of those lazy afternoons in my flat when I finally told Simon I love him. I had wanted to
tell him for a long time but I hadn't worked up the courage. Simon and I were sitting on the
Chesterfield, his fingers laced through mine, our shoulders touching, enjoying our solitude, when I
asked him what he wanted to do that day. He shrugged and said 'just this Baz'. I was thinking about
how effortless it was for Simon to be happy after all that had happened to him and then it came out
before I could stop myself, I didn't want to stop myself.

It felt like a release in a way, it felt right to finally let him know how much he means to me. I simply
held his gaze and said "I love you Simon Snow." Then I told him all the things I love about him, all
the things I've always loved about him – how he's honest and brave and selfless and clever and kind.
(And adorable and beautiful and funny and sweet and so alive.) He looked at me with his warm blue
eyes and said without hesitation that he loves me too, and I had never felt as happy as I did in that
moment.

We gave each other our anniversary presents on Christmas Eve after we dropped Wellbelove at her
parents' home. We spent the day at my flat as we had planned, partly to give Bunce and Micah some
much needed privacy on their first day together but also because it was our anniversary. He still had
no clue that I knew about the art classes so he was taken aback when he unwrapped the new leather
bound sketch pad with his name embossed in small gold letters on the front.

"How did you find out Baz?" He asked, smiling but curious.

"You're a terrible liar Simon." I said. "And very untidy, you left your charcoal on your kitchen
bench on more than one occasion and most of your books are usually spilled across your bedroom
floor, including your sketch pad, which says 'Sketch Pad' across the front."

"Oh, right" He said, looking a little sheepish. "Thank you Baz, it's beautiful." And then he kissed
me.

"So are you." I murmured, as I kissed him back.

He gave me the drawing then. It was a drawing of me, and I was astounded at how good it was, it
truly was remarkable. And then he showed me some more of his drawings. It's all exceptionally
good, I don't think he realises how talented he is. I knew he was doing the art classes but I had never
seen any of his work so I had no idea of his abilities. (I'm not about to start prying in my boyfriend's
belongings, he has Bunce for that.) I thought he was doing it as a release or a distraction but it's
undeniably more than that.

And then we were kissing again. Our kisses were gentle at first – light brushes of lips and tongue.
And then they became more needy and urgent. When I finally pulled away I heard Simon let out a
quiet moan, (or it could have been me) and then either he was pushing me or I was dragging him to
my bedroom and we tumbled onto my bed, our legs entangled, my arms around his waist drawing
him closer, his hands pulling at my shirt.

Our gifts ended up forgotten on the floor for the rest of the afternoon and we were late to Christmas
Eve dinner.

We went out dancing on New Year's Eve. Dancing with Simon Snow. That was definitely on my
long list of things I'd always dreamed of doing with Simon back at Watford, when I thought that fantasising about Simon was the closest I would ever get to him. He let it slip that his psychologist had suggested it and I made sure I didn't let that opportunity pass. Simon looked stunning on the dance floor even though he cannot dance at all, it was so fucking adorable. We held each other and moved slowly to the fast music and kissed in the New Year.

The year kept getting better, our relationship kept getting better and Simon kept getting better.

And then this happens, and the fucking Mage has hurt him all over again.

"I don't want any of it." Simon says, his face is empty as he stands up. Then he turns and walks out of the room, down the stairs and out the front door.
Baz

I follow Simon outside.

He's vehemently pacing the footpath in front of my car, raking his fingers through his curls over and over until they're standing in matted chunks. "What the fuck?" He growls at me as I walk up to him.

"I know Simon." I agree. I want to say more but I'm not exactly sure what to say, what do you say to someone who's just been bequeathed something from the very person who tried to kill him?

"That bastard. That fucking bastard!" He yells, his voice rising above the noise of the street. "Can't he leave me alone? He's dead! Why won't he leave me alone?"

"Simon-" I say a little louder now, and I'm trying to catch his hand but he keeps pacing faster.

"He tried to kill me Baz. And you and Agatha and probably Penny if he had half a chance." He rants louder again, still pacing fervently. His fingers tear through his hair angrily and his tail is probably thrashing around but it's been spelled invisible along with his wings. I can see his hands are shaking as he grabs his hair again. "He killed Ebb." He says quietly and his voice breaks a little, he's just seconds from losing it completely. "He killed your mum." He whispers, barely able to contain himself.

"I know Simon--" And I want to say more but he cuts me off. I try reaching for his hand again but he's pacing relentlessly.

"Fucking hell." He whispers, shaking his head as he paces back and forth, his hands ripping through his hair. His eyes are wild and I want to stop him. I want to pull him into me and place my hands on his warm cheeks and calm him. "Deep breaths now, Snow. Let it go."

"What does he keep doing this to me?" He growls, his voice louder this time, his jaw clenched. "I don't want it. I don't want any of it."

I step closer.

"I have to go." He says as he abruptly stops pacing. He's looking around now for something. I don't think he's actually talking to me but I answer anyway.

"Where?" I ask, more to try to get his attention than anything.

"I . . . don't know." He says distractedly, still looking around.

"I'll drive you, Simon. Where do you need to go?" I say, trying to catch his hand again.

"No!" He says, shaking his head from side to side. "Run. No. Fly. I need to fly." He looks at me now, pleading. The desperation in his eyes is saturating every word. "Spell me warm Baz, please? I have to go. Now!"

"Where--" I start to ask but he cuts me off again.

"Please Baz!"

So I do. I spell him warm and then cast There's nothing to see here! so no one can see him. He
starts running. And I watch him, my heart heavy, until he turns the corner and disappears.

Simon

I have to go. I'm so angry, I'm so fucking livid that I have to go right now. I remember coming downstairs and then talking to Baz and asking, no begging him to cast a warming spell. Then I legged it around the corner and now I'm flying and I have no idea where I'm going but I know if I don't go right now I'm going to lose my shit completely.

The Mage. The fucking Mage, who fucked up my life completely and fucked up everyone else's as well, wants to leave me some stuff that I don't even want. I don't want his fucking house. I don't want his fucking money. I don't want anything from him. I just want to forget he ever existed and live a normal life. Is that too much to ask?

Apparently it is.

How could he? How could he? I fly faster than I've ever flown before.

He's a fucking murdering bastard, that's how.

I fly even faster.

Baz

I head back inside to catch Bunce as she races down the stairs.

"Where's Simon?" She's demands. "I can't believe mum just sprung that on him. What was she thinking?" She shrieks, anger coating her words. I catch her up with what happened as we head outside, and then tell her I'm going to my flat and that I'll drop her off at hers in case Simon turns up at either one. I don't actually have any idea what I'm doing and I don't think Simon would simply fly home. He was much too distraught. I don't know where he's gone and I am sick with worry.

"Come on Bunce!" I yell impatiently as I get in my car.

I dropped her off without a word, both of us deep in our own thoughts. When I get to my flat I call for him as I race in. He's not there of course and Bunce text that Simon's not at their flat either. I phone Simon and the call goes straight to voicemail. I didn't expect him to answer but I'm frantic. Bunce calls the Wellbeloves and he's not there either. I'm pacing now and raking my hands through my hair. Where is he?

The Mage. The fucking Mage. I could kill him all over again for this.

I start going through my contacts, wondering who to call but we don't actually have that many friends. I sit looking at my mobile, despairing.

Simon

I've been flying for a long time and I realise that at some point that I stopped thinking. That was a relief actually, to just fly and not think. I also realise after a while that I'm heading north, sort of. I swoop down to check out the road signs because it's raining heavily and the sky is a dark grey and I have no idea where I am.

I have a vague idea of where I'm heading now so I follow the signs. I vaguely wonder how long the warming spell will last. It's a pity I didn't get a weatherization spell as well because I'm well and truly soaked, and I can't tell for sure but it has to be somewhere below zero. I try to stay low so I can read
the signs but high enough to avoid telegraph wires, and birds. I hope the warming spell keeps working.

I start to feel a slight chill just as I read the sign that says Oxford, Five Miles. I wonder if the warming spell will last that long or if I'm going to freeze to death mid-air. I'll land and walk the rest of the way if I have to, or hitch even. My mobile has been buzzing in my pocket but I don't reach for it – I'd probably just drop it anyway even if my hands weren't numb.

I'm really cold now. I have no idea how long I've been flying and the spell must be wearing off. I finally recognise the house and with a sigh of relief I swoop down to land, pulling up clumsily in the driveway. I stumble a bit as I land because my legs have gone numb from the cold and I sort of stumble to the door and knock, harder than I planned because my hands are like blocks of ice. Water is dripping off me.

Vera answers the door and I must look a fright because she shrieks "Master Snow!" as she opens the door. I stumble in. She calls Baz's step-mum and then Baz's step-mum cries "Simon! What happened? Are you all right? Where's Basil? Is he all right?" She's shooting a bunch of questions at me and I'm having trouble opening my mouth because that's numb too.

"He – He's okay." I manage to say once I get inside the door. "London." is all I can get out. They help me to the sitting room and guide me to a chair by the fire. They take off my coat and get me a blanket. I'm shivering and Vera says she'll make some tea. Daphne starts casting drying and warming spells on me as soon as Vera leaves, which work better than any fire or blanket.

Baz's step-mum is on the phone to Baz right away, her face tight with worry. "He's fine, cold but all right." She pauses, listening for a long time. "All right, see you soon. Drive carefully Basil, it's turning into a real tempest out there." She hangs up her mobile and sits next to me. She turns to face me. "Are you all right Simon?" She asks gently. I can see the concern on her face.

I nod but don't say anything, and she doesn't push. She just pours the tea that Vera brought in and hands it to me. I drink it.

Eventually I can't stand the silence so I look at her. "Did Baz tell you?"

"He mentioned the Will, yes." She says, looking at me carefully. Baz must have filled her in and I'm relieved because now I don't have to. I don't have to talk at all. We drink our tea in silence. Eventually she turns to me. "Would you like to have a shower and rest in Basil's room perhaps, or stay down here Simon?" she asks.

I realise I'm dead tired, flying must have taken a lot out of me. "I think I'll take a shower and rest if that's okay." I say slowly. "Thanks." I mumble as I get up and go upstairs.

I do feel a little better after a shower. I put on one of Baz's tracksuits, it's soft and has some logo that I don't recognise, and then I climb into his bed and fall asleep immediately.

**Baz**

After the longest hour and of my life I get a call from my step mother. I debate not answering because I really can't think about anything but Simon right now, but she text me as well and it says Simon's here, and I'm so relieved and so fucking rattled that I answer her call and don't even say hello.

"Is he all right?" I demand.

I text Bunce as I'm heading out the door.
I reach Oxford in record time and without magic. I used up a lot of magic casting the warming spell on Simon so I don't have much left. I had no idea where Simon was heading so I wanted to make sure the spell would cover him. I'm glad it held out, the storm is coming in fast now but I make it before it hits.

My stepmother opens the door before I reach it.

"Where is he?"

"In your room, resting." Is all she has time to say before I race up the stairs, taking two at a time. I hesitate at the door for a moment and then I open it quietly.

Simon is in my bed sleeping and I'm so thankful that I actually have to stop myself from leaping on the bed and wrapping my arms around him. I stare silently from the door instead, too anxious to move. My vision blurs and I realise I'm crying so I wipe the tears away with my sleeve, a very Simon thing to do. I realise this and then let out a small laugh, in relief more than anything else.

I step quietly into my room and close the door. I kick off my shoes and drop my coat and gloves on the floor (also very Simonesque) and climb into bed, carefully so as not to wake him. I stare at him for a long time. I stare at him until I fall asleep.

Simon

I don't know what time it is, it's darker outside but still daytime. Baz is asleep next to me. I shift slightly and it must wake him because he opens his eyes and looks at me. He doesn't speak and I know he's waiting for me, until I'm ready.

"Hi." I say.

"Hi." He says back. He brings his hand up and touches my cheek softly. I give him a small smile and he gives me one back. I lift my fingers to his face and brush a lock of his hair out of his eyes and tuck it behind his ear before sliding my hand down to his waist. And we stay like this, staring into each other's eyes until I fall back to sleep.

The next time I wake it's darker and Baz is gone. I decide not to worry about that, he's probably just gone to hunt, so I close my eyes again and try to sleep. It must work because next thing I know there's a knock at the door and Baz is getting up to open it. He's talking to his step-mum in the hallway for a minute and then comes back in and looks at me. I sit up against the bedhead.

"Daphne wants to know if you want dinner." He says quietly.

My stomach growls at the word dinner and I realise that I'm ravenous.

"I take that as a yes." He smiles and I give him a half smile back and the next minute there's another knock at the door. This time it's his step-mum and she brings in a tray full of food and puts it down on his desk. She gives me a warm smile and leaves, closing the door gently behind her.

Baz must have started a fire in the grate because it's burning nicely and heating the entire room. I get up awkwardly and stretch my arms and legs– I'm a bit stiff from the long flight, and then I sit down sluggishly in front of the warm fire. He hands me a plate and takes one for himself.

I start to eat, slowly at first but then I realise its roast beef. Roast beef with peas and carrots and potatoes and Brussels sprouts and lashings of gravy and there's even Yorkshire pudding and it tastes like the best roast beef I've ever had so I start shovelling into my mouth as fast as I can. I don't even think Baz has half of his so when I finish mine he hands me his plate and I make a decent go of that
as well.

I groan when I put the plate down because I'm so full I can't even finish the glass of milk.

Baz gets up and places the empty plates on the tray and leaves them outside his door. I get up too. He faces me, questioningly.

"I suppose I should go, to the guest room." I say as I start to walk to the door.

"Don't be ridiculous Simon, you're staying in here tonight." Baz says resolutely.

"But..." I start. It goes without saying that whenever I stay here, I stay in the guest room.

"Daphne suggested it actually. You shouldn't be alone tonight." He says quietly. And I'm relieved to be honest, I don't want to be alone. Not tonight. I start to relax a little.

I look around, dragging my fingers through my hair. I know I have to say something, about losing it at Penny's mum's house but I don't know how to start so my eyes are searching around the room until I meet Baz's eyes.

"I'm sorry..." I say, "for losing it before... and for taking off like that... and.

Baz is across the room in an instant. When he reaches me he wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me in close, resting his forehead against mine.

"It's all right. There's nothing to apologise for." He murmurs. His arms are still around my waist and he's stroking my back with one of them. It's gentle and soothing and I start to cry, I can't hold it back any more. "It's all right." He says quietly. "It's all right love." He whispers it over and over, like a mantra and I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him closer as I sag into him.

I don't know when I finally stop crying but Baz is still holding me so I pull back a little. He wipes the last of my tears away with his thumb and I notice his shoulder is all wet. I'm just about to apologise for that but Baz speaks first.

"You should probably call Penelope." He says quietly. I sigh and nod as I let go of him reluctantly.

"Yeah, okay." I sit on Baz's bed, resting back against the headboard, ready to make the call. Baz sits next to me and takes my hand as I call.

Penny grills me for ages, making sure I'm okay. Then she tells me what she and Baz did. She says she went off at her mum once she realised I was gone, which I feel pretty bad about that so I tell her it wasn't her mum's fault – Professor Bunce was only doing what she had to and it would have been worse if she'd kept it from me. It takes some convincing but Penny finally agrees with me so when I insist she makes peace with her mum she promises to call her as soon as we hang up.

Then I ring Alex at work and ask for a few days off, telling her I'm sick. I've never skived off work before, I've never even missed a shift so Alex is okay with it.

I decide I've had enough of this day. I just want it to be over so I tell Baz exactly that and then I climb into bed with him. I lie with my head on his chest and my arm around his waist and he runs his fingers through my messy hair as we talk quietly in the dark.

We talk about the storm and his family and what we might do tomorrow but we don't talk about the Mage or the Will. And when I finally tell him where I flew and how I got here, I can't see him but I can tell by his voice that he's worried about me flying that far, but he also sounds grudgingly
impressed.

And the next day, when I tell Mordelia about the flight, she hounds me until I tell her exactly what route I took and then demands that her mum tell her what time I arrived and then rounds on Baz to find out what time I left London and she works out how fast I flew.

"Fifty miles per hour Simon!" She declares excitedly. "That's as fast as a falcon!"

Then she goes on to discuss average horizontal speeds versus maximum horizontal speeds. I don't know half of what she's on about.

"Maybe we should test your diving speed next. But you should probably practice pulling up first." she goes on. And then she starts quoting different bird species speeds until Baz makes her leave his room. "I'll check on dragon speeds and get back to you!" she yells through the closed door.

We spent the day at Baz's house, watching movies in the lounge room with Mordy and then we drive back to London the following day. I ring Penny's mum to apologise when we arrive back at the flat but I don't want to talk about the Will so I keep it short. She's relieved to know that I'm okay so she doesn't bring it up again.
Simon

I'm sick of sitting around the flat.

A week has passed since we found out about the Will and Penny keeps watching me, waiting for me to lose it again. I manage to get a few extra shifts at work to make up for calling in sick but I still have too much free time. I'm so antsy one afternoon and I've finally had enough of her watching me that I tell her to grab her coat and then I text Baz and drag them both to see another movie. I don't think Penny wants to – it's freezing outside and I've already dragged her out to the cinema twice before. But for once I don't care because I think I'll go mad if I have to sit around doing nothing for another minute.

I'm so relieved when the semester finally starts because I finally have something to do. I get into my subjects, staying on top of assignments as they come in, getting them right. I study hard for all my tests. I pick up extra shifts because I can't run or fly in this much snow. I join the uni gym so I can run indoors. I start lifting weights, I go every day after classes. I keep drawing.

I take up some offers from my classmates to go to the pub for a few pints on Friday night after class. I might as well start making some new friends, Normal friends, now that's what I am.

My nightmares have changed. Instead of the Mage standing three metres tall, slaughtering everyone like he usually does, he's his normal size, wearing his normal green outfit that he was always kitted out in, complete with sword and scabbard. He's sitting in front of me now, speaking to me, saying words I can't hear – like a telly turned way down. I wake up in a sweat every time.

I avoid talking to Penny about it. She keeps trying to get me to talk – I know she hears me wake in the night. I wear headphones and listen to Baz's playlist when I study so she can't talk to me about it. I stay over Baz's flat or he stays over our flat more often and I sleep a little better when he's around. I think Baz is waiting for me to bring it up but I don't want to talk to him about it either. I'm done talking about the Mage, I just want to forget about him.

Penny

Simon is definitely avoiding things. I understand that he doesn't want to talk about it, but that doesn't mean he's not thinking about it. He can fool himself easily enough but he can't fool me, I know him too well. All this running around keeping busy and studying and socialising, it's not cutting it.

I try to talk with him but he keeps avoiding me. Between his extra shifts at work and the gym and his new social agenda he's hardly at the flat. And when he is he's either studying or drawing. And he's listening to Baz's music for Merlin's sake.

I try to talk to Baz about it but he's as reluctant as Simon and I don't know why. He's definitely noticed and he's obviously as worried as I am but he won't engage.

"Not everyone needs to discuss everything endlessly like you Bunce." He said exasperatedly one afternoon. "Simon is fine." Simon was at work (again) and I was finishing up an assignment at the kitchen table. Baz was sitting on the couch playing with his mobile, waiting to meet Simon at the café. I'd been pushing him to admit that something was wrong and he kept avoiding it until he'd had enough. (Of me or the situation, I'm not entirely sure.) He stood up and left after that.
Baz

Simon is late, again. I've been waiting for him at his flat for the last hour and he's yet to arrive. Mid-term break starts today after classes and the weather's finally improved so I suggested we head to Oxford for a few days. Simon jumped at the chance because he's been itching to fly and the weather is still far too cold to fly in the city at night. At least at Oxford he can fly during the day, and we could both use a break.

But he's still not here.

Simon's been working far too much lately and he's been sailing through all of his assignments this term so his grades have improved noticeably. He's also in better shape than he's ever been thanks to all the time he spends at the gym. I'll never admit it to Bunce but I am worried, it's so unlike him.

Between his classes, work, art and gym and my classes and football practice we hardly have any time together. And now he's started going to the pub with his classmates. I suppose he's trying to make some new Normal friends, which is admirable, but all of this is cutting into our already limited time together.

My mobile buzzes and it's Simon. Can I meet him at the pub? He's obviously forgotten about our weekend.

I sigh as I pack his bag and drive to meet him.

Simon

I've only had a few pints with my classmates a couple of times and they've normally been quiet, relaxed session. Tonight's not so quiet, probably because it's mid-term break and everyone's letting off a bit of steam. I wasn't going to stay but then I got talking with a few of the fellas and then we had a few pints and then we had a few more. I had Penny spell my wings invisible again this afternoon after her final class, to make sure I could go out without them showing up some time through the night. Sometimes it can be a pain having to rely on either Penny or Baz all the time.

There's a girl yelling in my ear "So what are you doing over the break Si?" It's one of the girls from my class, Amelia or Olivia or something. I pull away from her a bit. Her voice is a little screechy because she's yelling over all the music and noise and it's hurting my ear. My classmates have started calling me "Si" tonight, I don't like it.


"Maybe we can catch a movie during the break?" she goes on. At least I think that's what she said. I can't be too sure because it's so loud in here.

I shrug again. I don't want to catch a movie with her or anyone but Baz or Penny, I just want to come to the pub for a few quiet drinks and talk about football. That's when I remember that I should probably call Baz because he'll likely be waiting. But before I can get my mobile out, her friend (Emily, Mary?) hands me another pint and a couple of the fellas from my class come over and we get talking about the game. It's another half hour and a few more rounds before I realise I really should call Baz and let him know where I am. I send him a text because it's too loud in here to call.

The girls are talking to me now and I'm starting to feel a little uncomfortable because they have me backed into a corner and my wings are pressing on the bar.

"So do you want to? See a movie?" She's back on that topic and I finally remember her name is
Olivia and her friend's name is Emily. One of the blokes from our class has joined us now, Tom? Thomas? I can't remember, and I don't really care. And he's standing too close.

"Um, no, I'm okay thanks."

"Why not, do you have a girlfriend Si?" This time Emily is asking.

"No." I say. "Yes."

All three of them round on me now. "Which is it then?"

"Boyfriend." I say.

They all look at me and Tom or Thomas raises his eyebrows. I don't like it. "Kept that to yourself haven't you Si?" He smirks.

"Not really." I say back, levelling my eyes at him. I don't like it when he calls me "Si", and I wish he would just piss off. I push past him and the girls along the bar a bit to make some space between me and them. I turn to the entrance and see Baz standing there, looking over at me. "Baz!" I call him over. He has this look on his face and I can't for the life of me work out what it means, or maybe all the beers I had are making me think that so I decide to forget about it and grab his hand. "Want a pint?" I ask when he's facing me.

"Simon, I think you've forgotten we need to be somewhere this evening." He says looking at me and ignoring everyone else, as pompous as ever.

"Yeah?" I really don't remember. Then not waiting for an answer I go on. "Do you want to meet everyone?" I really want him to meet everyone.

"Fine" He sighs. So I introduce Baz to my class mates and I try to avoid Tom-Thomas but he's right there. Baz is as polite as ever when I introduce him to everyone and the girls ask him a bunch of questions and I think they might be flirting but I'm not too sure. And the blokes stand a bit taller when they find out he's doing a double degree at the London school of Economics and stand even taller when they find out that he pays football for their A grade side. I'm standing next to him smiling because I'm really glad he's here, and maybe because of all the pints. I don't let go of his hand.

Then he's saying we need to be going to Oxford because we'll be late for dinner and I realise that's where we were supposed to be going tonight. I hastily say my goodbyes and we head out the door.

"I need to pack some stuff Baz." I say, trying to get into the car but fumbling with the door handle.

"I packed your things already." He says, opening my door for me. He waits for me to get in, and then closes the door and walks to his side of the car and climbs in.

"Oh, thanks." I say. He's such a thoughtful boyfriend.

**Baz**

I can't stand the quiet. Simon usually talks the entire way to Oxford and he hasn't said a word. I don't know whether to wait him out or start talking. It seems so wrong, this quiet but I don't know what to do. We sit in silence.

This is ridiculous, I think to myself. I'm the smartest person I know so surely I can figure this out. I decide to talk.
"So, they seem nice?" I ask. That was rather pathetic but I want to talk about those people at the pub, especially that boy and those girls leering at Simon. I couldn't think of any other way to start the conversation.

"Yeah." He says. His head is leaning back against the head rest and his eyes are closed. He doesn't say anything else.

That didn't work as well as I expected.

I debate whether to cancel the trip and take him home to my flat. That way we can hide under the covers all weekend and talk like we used to and I can kiss him until nothing else matters. I sigh because we're already halfway to Oxford and my family is expecting us and we're already late. Maybe we can do that when we get back.

The quiet is making me more uncomfortable by the minute because I know this isn't right. Simon is never quiet. He doesn't forget trips to Oxford. He loves going there now, to fly, to see Mordy and my step-mother, to get away from London. He never goes out drinking either, although he's started doing exactly that recently. And he doesn't get cornered by leering boys and eager girls but apparently that's also happening.

I know this isn't right – that something is very wrong – but I don't know how to deal with this new development. Then I hear a quiet snore escape his mouth and chance a quick look at him. I realise he's fallen asleep and honestly, I'm relieved. At least I can blame the alcohol rather than anything else for the disquiet I'm feeling.

After a quiet dinner I head upstairs with a plate for Simon. (I put Simon to bed in the spare room and alluded to tiredness so my parents wouldn't notice the alcohol.) He woke not long after and ate everything, clearly ravenous. Then he apologised for forgetting about our weekend and kissed me, a lot. I could have taken the opportunity to discuss the recent changes in his behaviour, or started a fight about it, but I didn't want to disrupt the peace we'd created, or the kissing, so I let it go and I silently wished it not to happen again.

The rest of the weekend passes without incident, and we did have a wonderful time and things were almost back to normal. Almost, but not quite.

And then the rest of the term continues much the same as the first half. Nothing discussed, nothing resolved.
Chapter 9

Penny

Simon rushes in from work and heads straight to his room, Baz is trailing behind him.

"We're going for a run." Simon says over his shoulder. After a while they wander back out wearing their running gear but instead of leaving they sit on the couch. Simon takes his phone out of his pocket and stares at the screen. He doesn't move again.

An hour passes.

"That's it, I've had enough." I say as I bang my book closed on the kitchen table. I've been watching Simon on his mobile now for an hour, and watching Baz watch Simon. They're supposed to be swotting for term finals not running or playing games. I stand in front of him and put my hands on my hips. "You're supposed to be swotting for term finals."

"I am." Simon says, not lifting his eyes.

"How?" I scoff. "You were at work, and now you're playing on your mobile."

"I'm having a break."

"You've been having a break all day." I remind him. "And I thought you were going for a run? Although you should be swotting, both of you." I add, giving both Baz and Simon a stern look.

"After."

I'm not getting anywhere with Simon so I turn on Baz. "Baz--"

"Don't look at me Bunce, I've completed my assignments and I'm well prepared for my exams."

Simon cuts in, probably to stop me rounding on Baz. "Give it a rest Penny. I'm done studying for now, I've done enough." He gets up and starts rummaging around for his trainers. The weather's improved so they've gone back to running outdoors again. "C'mon Baz."

Baz gets up and follows him out.

I sit back down at the table, twisting my ring on my finger in agitation. I want to pull them both aside and shake them. I want to shake them until they realise this can't go on. Can't they see the changes in Simon since that damnable Will surfaced? It's blatantly obvious that Simon is not handling things, he's just burying himself in work and study and socialising and running and drawing and Merlin knows what else to avoid thinking about it.

Simon

Baz and I run and it feels good to be moving. He's still much faster and stronger than me – I'll never catch up to his vampire stealth and strength, but I put in a fairly decent effort. Whenever he gets too far in front I whip my tail around his waist and pull him back. He says that's cheating. "Said the vampire with super speed." I say back.

We run five miles and decide to finish up at his place rather than go home and face Penny. I'm hot and sweaty so I race him to the shower and then get a better idea and drag him in with me and the
rest of the afternoon is history. So much for studying.

Baz drops me home late that night. Penny is asleep and I study into the early hours of the morning. Then I do a quick sketch of Baz, the way he was this afternoon sitting up in bed with his back against the headboard, the sheet pooling around his middle, his long lean muscles on display. The afternoon sun was lighting his pale skin in a really pretty way, it was sort of glowing. I need to do it before it disappears from my mind.

I finally go to bed exhausted and try to sleep.
Simon

I get home from work to find Penny and Baz sitting at the kitchen table. They're talking quietly but they stop when they see me. Baz gets up and walks over to me before I even make it in the door and he kisses me. Usually he waits until I've shut the door at least but I'm not complaining, I never complain about being kissed by Baz. I kiss him back and go to put my arms around his neck but he pulls away.

"How was your final exam?" He asks. He's always asking about my subjects.

"Good."

"And work?"

"Normal" I say. "What are you doing?"

"We need to talk." Penny says, getting up from the table and moving to the couch. "Sit down Simon." She says, pointing to the seat opposite her "Please?" she adds.

I look at Baz and he gives me a small nod. I frown at the request but I let him lead me to the couch, keeping his hand in mine as we sit. I look at Penny and then Baz and it's clear they have something to say and that they planned this. "What?" I ask.

Penny takes a breath and is about to start talking but Baz cuts her off. "Simon," he says quietly, rubbing his thumb across the back of my hand. "We're worried about you."

"Worried about what Baz? There's nothing--" I start but he cuts me off.

"Simon." He says quietly as ever, "Since you found out about the Mage's Will, you've been a little . . . distracted."

"No I haven't--" I say, louder this time. I look between the two of them. "What is this?"

He keeps talking quietly, his eyes never leaving mine. "Simon you have. You've been pushing yourself too hard, running, studying, working . . . socialising." He winces as he says the last one but he goes on. "Bunce and I think you're avoiding thinking about the Will."

"What?" I yell. I don't mean to yell but I truly wasn't expecting that. "That's not true!" I stand up and Baz stands with me, still holding my hand. Penny stands too. I shake my head and begin to deny it again but he cuts me off again.

"Simon, it's okay. We've all avoided dealing with this--"

"Well you two have." Penny cuts in. "I've tried to talk to both of you."

"Really Bunce, I hardly think this is the time." He sighs, then he looks back to me "But--"

"But what Baz?" I growl through clenched teeth. I'm trying not to get mad now but I can feel my tail slashing around behind me. I don't want to talk about this. "What is this? Is this a fucking intervention?"

"It's not an intervention Simon." Baz says calmly.
"But . . ." Penny continues softly, "We think we have a solution to help . . . deal with it."

"There's nothing to deal with Penny! Christ!" I let go of Baz's hand and throw my arms in the air and step back from both of them. I'm really yelling now.

"Simon." It's Baz again and he reaches for my hand again but I don't let him. He drops his hand when he realises I'm not going to take it and I can see that I've hurt him. I think about reaching for his hand again but then he starts talking again. "We think we should visit the cottage, to take a look around." He says quickly.

I'm so fucking stunned that I just stand there, staring back at Baz. He's still watching me, and he has a look of concern on his face. I turn to look at Penny and she has the exact same look on her face but I don't back down. I don't like feeling cornered. I start shaking my head from side to side and my tail is thrashing around.

"No!" I yell at them. "What's wrong with you two? Are you mad?" I'm still shaking my head and I start raking my fingers through my hair frantically.

"Simon." It's Penny now. "We think it's the only way to resolve this for you. If we could just go there and take a look and see what's there, if there's anything at all. Maybe it will help—" she's talking fast but I stop her.

"No. That's never going to happen."

"But Simon—".

"No!" I say louder. Then I walk to the door and out of the apartment.

**Penny**

Baz is already heading towards the door. His hand is hovering over the handle when he turns back to look at me. I start shaking my head from side to side, and I keep shaking my head until he drops his hand.

"Just give him some time Baz." I sigh.

"We've already done that and look where that's got him." He snaps. And I'm about to argue the point; that I've tried to talk to both of them and that they have both been stubbornly ignoring me, but by the look on his face I think he'll might bite me or set something on fire. So I just sigh again. Baz moves back to the couch and drops himself onto it. He's quietly rubs his forehead with his long fingers. We sit together in silence.

Eventually Baz pulls out his wand and lights a fire in the palm of his hand. Not in it, above it, but it still scares the shit out of me. "Please stop Baz." I say. "You are flammable." I mean, he's brilliant with fire, all of the Pitches are, but he's a vampire for snake's sake, and vampires are extremely flammable!

He's twisting the fire expertly through his fingers, and it looks like a ribbon, or a snake. I'm getting more and more nervous, bouncing my knee while I watch the fire. It would only take one wrong move, one slip . . . I get up and fill a glass of water, just in case.

Then Baz waves the fire away abruptly and get up and leaves without saying a word.

**Simon**
I have a pint in my hand but I don't feel like drinking it. I came straight to the pub where everyone is celebrating the end of term. I wasn't planning to come here at all but Baz and Penny pushed and pushed until I had to leave and this was the only place I could think of.

It's rowdy in here. My classmates have been here a while so they're properly plastered. They're laughing and yelling and some are dancing even though there's no dance floor to speak of. I try to catch up – so I can be as plastered as them, but I can't stand the taste of the beer. Merlin, I don't even think I like beer, I can't even get through one.

I lean on the bar and stare, not really seeing anything.

The music changes and they must be sick of dancing because a few of them round on me when they spot me alone, they start asking me where I've been all afternoon.

"Work."

They're talking about where they're going during the summer. I hear the continent, visiting family, staying here, but I'm not really interested.

Olivia rounds on me next. "What are you doing over the summer Si?" I think she's pissed. My teeth grate at my name.

"Nothing." I don't feel like talking.

"Not going away?"

"No."

"Do you want to come to a do tonight?"

"No."

"Oh come on, it'll be fun. It's Finn's birthday" She goes on, oblivious to my indifference. Tom or Thomas and Emily join us now, standing closer than I feel comfortable with.

"I don't know who that is." I say, not interested.

"So?" It's Emily this time. She's swaying a little, just as gone.

"No."

"Where's that hot boyfriend of yours?" Tom-Thomas says loudly. He sounds like a prat and I try to ignore him but he's in my face, insistent.

"None of your business."

"Aw, c'mon, don't be like that Si." He smirks, leaning in close. "Is he coming to spoil our fun again?"

"Are you all right?" Olivia asks then. She's frowning a little, but it could just be the piss.

"I'm fine." I growl.

"Did you break up?" Emily asks, eyes wide, like she's all eager that I'm about to spill some gossip with her.
"What? No." I say, but she's not listening, she's just grinning at me. And swaying. I'm feeling right pissed off now.

Tom Thomas grabs my hand. "No great loss Si." He whispers loudly into my ear. "We'll have more fun without him."

"Fuck off!" I growl, and I'm so disgusted that I push him away from me and then I have to grab my tail before it wraps itself around his neck and strangles him. I look around the pub and I have no idea why I'm even here with these people that I don't know all that well and I'm not sure I even like. Apart from doing the same subjects I can't think of one thing I have in common with any of them. Instead I think of Baz and Penny, who are the closest thing I have to family, who I treated like rubbish and walked out on when all they were trying to do was help me. I'm such an idiot.

"My name's Simon." I say to no one in particular as I put the pint down hard on the bar. I walk out of the bar without saying goodbye, and as soon as I'm outside I start running. I turn the nearest corner and break out into a sprint, then I take off and I'm flying.

I fly straight home and look for Baz's car but it's gone. I race in but Penny's not there either and then I remember that she was going to have dinner with her parents so I leave and fly to Baz's flat. I land in the ally next to his block with a bit of a thud, because I'm in a bit of a hurry, and I race up the stairs breathing hard. I'm just about to unlock the door when I stop. I think I should knock instead, it doesn't feel right to barge in when I was such a shit to them, to him. So I knock and wait. No one answers. I pace a bit in front of his door.

I knock again and again but I know he's not there. I stop knocking and lean forward until my head is on the door, my fist still raised. I close my eyes. "Baz." I whisper.

I know he's not home but I stay anyway. I turn around and lean on the door and slide down to the ground, pulling my knees up into me. I drop my head in my hands and think about everything they said and everything I said back. And I think about all the things I've avoided thinking about over the last six months. I started making a list in my head back when this all started, of what not to think about. I thought I could keep myself so busy I wouldn't have time to think about the Mage and the Will and the cottage and the money. I realise now that's all I have been thinking about.

And I haven't fooled either one of them.

I must have been sitting here by the door for a long time because my legs have gone stiff. I stretch them out one at a time, shaking out the stiffness and then pull them back in. I'm not angry anymore. Now all I feel is guilt. Guilt for yelling at them and for how I treated them over the last few months.

I don't know how long I've been sitting here.

There's a shadow in front of me and I look up. It's Baz, and I've never been so happy to see him. He has something in his hands— I think it's a pie. He kneels down in front of me and puts the pie down next to him. I take a look. It looks like a cottage pie.

"Hi." I say.

"Hi." He answers.

"I'm an idiot." I tell him.

"No you're not." Baz says straight back. He's staring at me fixedly, piercing me with his steely grey eyes.
"Yes I am. I'm sorry Baz."

"Simon, it's all right."

"No it isn't. I'm sorry I yelled at you, and Penny." I look at him and shake my head. "I'm sorry I've been avoiding both of you these last few months."

"Simon--"

"I've been horrible to you both."

"No you haven't." Baz says and he sounds like he means it. Christ, I don't deserve him, he's so patient and I'm such a shit.

"I haven't even asked about your exams." I go on. It's as if I need to prove exactly what a shit I've been to them.

"They were fine." He answers offhandedly.

"Or Penny's."

"I'm sure they were fine too."

"That's not the point."

"Simon--" He stops me again.

"I went to the pub again." I tell him. He starts to say something again but this time I cut him off. I need to say this. I need to tell him what's going through my head. "I don't know why I've wasted so much time with those tossers. I don't know them and they don't know me, they don't know anything about me. And that bloke, Tom or Thomas or whatever, I think he tried to hit on me--"

"I knew I should have ripped his throat out that night I met him." Baz says through his teeth, his shoulders tense.

"You knew?"

"It was obvious." He says. His tone is guarded.

"It was?"

"I'm dead, not blind Snow."

I chose to ignore that last comment, for now. "I didn't realise." I tell him truthfully. I'm such a twit sometimes. How could I not realise?

"I know." He sighs. "You're remarkably unobservant sometimes."

I ignore that last comment too. "I told him to fuck off."

Baz raises his eyebrow. "Your standard response?"

"When I don't know what else to do." I say quietly, smiling a little. I feel my shoulders starting to relax. "Are you mad at me?"

"Why would I be mad at you?" He demands.
"Because I'm such a terrible boyfriend!"

"You're not a terrible boyfriend."

I start nodding. "Yes I am." I tell him. "I'm the worst."

"You're the best." He says unflinching.

He's staring straight at me, pinning me with his eyes again. I search his eyes for any doubt but I can't see anything but truth.

"Why aren't you even mad at me Baz?" I ask again.

"Because I love you Simon." He says matter of fact, as if it's the most obvious thing in the world.

I really look at Baz this time, and he's staring back at me with nothing but honesty and his face is so open that I have to believe him. "I love you too Baz. I love you so fucking much."

He smiles. "Eloquent as always." He murmurs. I give a little shrug.

"And you're not dead Baz." I add.

"That's a matter of opinion." He shrugs as he stands and offers me his hand. I take it and he pulls me up and laces his fingers through mine as he pulls me in close to him. He steps closer and presses his forehead to mine. He brushes his thumb across my cheek. It feels good.

"You're right." I say. "About everything. I have been avoiding it." He knows I'm talking about the Will now. "And I've done a shit job at it because it's been on my mind the whole time." I sigh and shake my head. "I don't want to, but I think we need to go there. Sometime. If you want . . ."

"All right." He says. "We can talk to Bunce tomorrow." Then he leads me inside, stooping to pick up the pie on the way in.

Baz

"I'm going to have a shower." Simon says as he leaves the table. "Thanks Baz." He says, acknowledging dinner.

We end up driving back to Simon's flat. He wants to be home to see Bunce when she returns. I clear up with magic and then sit heavily on the couch. I'm tired and I need to clean off.

When Simon walked out I wanted to follow him, I nearly did follow him, but Bunce insisted we give him time. It's a concept I struggle with because all of my instincts tell me to grab him and hold him tight and protect him from every damn bastard thing that could hurt him.

As I sat with Bunce watching the minutes tick off, I brought fire with my wand, winding it between my fingers. Bunce was nervous but there's no need to be, I come from a long line of fire magicians and I'm brilliant with fire, as long as I don't get too close.

I counted off the beats of my heart until they reached one hundred, it takes a while because my heart hardly beats at all. And then I left.

I drove straight to Oxford where I hunted mindlessly, excessively, trying to clear my head. I didn't tell Simon that. I don't know how he would react to the devastation I left in the forest.

All of this is entirely my fault. I've sat back and watched Simon drive himself to distraction (and near
exhaustion) over the last few months and I did nothing to stop him or help him. I've been reluctant to confront him in case he retreated even further from me. I've even been a part of that distraction I'm ashamed to say. I did nothing.

I picked up a cottage pie that our cook left for me. She actually leaves them for Simon, the pies. I sometimes think the staff like Simon more than they like my family.

I can't say how relieved I was to find him at my door. I was so afraid that I'd lost him, that I pushed him too far tonight. I've been living a charmed life since Simon Snow kissed me in the forest that night and I know that every moment with Simon is a gift. That's why, with everything that Simon has been through lately, I thought that it's only a matter of time before he's had enough. But that hasn't happened tonight and I'm so relieved I can hardly think straight.

Simon is out of the shower now and dressed, waiting on the couch next to me when Bunce comes in. I managed to get some blood on my shirt when I was hunting, which is unusual. I spelled it away before I drove back but I still need to shower. I get up and go into the bathroom to clean off and to give them some time alone.

**Penny**

"Penny?" Simon says quietly as I enter our flat.

"Yes Simon?" I put my handbag on the table.

He stands from the couch and walks over to me, reaching out with one hand. "I'm sorry Pen." He says. I smile and walk over to him and take his hand. He seems to have calmed down. He pulls me down onto the couch next to him. "You and Baz were right." He goes on. "I said to Baz that I think we should go there... one day."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. I have been avoiding it. But the Will, and the stuff, it's all I've been thinking about really." He says, and then he lets out a sigh. "I'm sorry I've been such a prat."

"You haven't."

"I have Pen and you know it. I haven't even asked how your exams went."

"They went okay thanks." But he frowns at me then, not believing. "Okay, better than okay, I aced them." I smile.

"And I haven't asked you how Micah is for ages." He goes on.

"He's good."

"And whether you want me to take you to the airport next week?"

"I'm not sure if I should still go." I say, thinking aloud. "I mean, if we're going to the cottage--"

"No way Penny!" He interrupts. "You're going to America. We'll go when you get back." He insists, shaking my arm with his hand.

"But-" I start to argue.

"But nothing. You didn't go last summer, probably because of me so you're not missing this trip."
That's not entirely true. "I wasn't up to going last summer." I tell him. "And I'd just started working and we'd just moved into the flat, remember? It wasn't all because of you Simon."

"Good." He says, and he's clearly relieved. "You know, you don't need to worry about me all the time Penny. I can take care of myself."

"I like worrying about you Simon." I say and I'm smiling now. "But you're crap at taking care of yourself. Baz will be here I suppose . . ."

He looks at me indignantly. "Penny, I can take care of myself." He huffs.

I snort out a laugh and shake my head. "Okay Simon, whatever you say." I can't help sounding just a little incredulous. It's Simon after all.

Baz comes out of the bathroom then, fully dressed and looking impeccable as always. He sits on the couch next to Simon. Simon immediately takes his hand and I'm glad to see everything is okay with them. That's the good thing about Simon, he never holds a grudge and they're so in love that it would be impossible for either of them to stay mad at the other anyway.

"Anyway, Baz is going to teach me how to drive while you're away." Simon says cheekily.

I raise my eyebrows and I try not to sound alarmed. "I'm glad it's you and not me." I say to Baz. I think Simon can hear the worry in my voice but he ignores it and grins instead.
Chapter 11

Baz

We saw Penny off at the airport yesterday. It was agreed that her family would take her, but Simon insisted we go as well so we were all witness to the tears (Simon's) and long farewells and hugs, (Simon and Professor Bunce's) until I'd had enough of the spectacle and practically pushed Bunce onto the plane so Simon and I could leave.

We finally leave the airport and drive straight to Oxford for the weekend. My family are heading to the south of France for the summer, so we're spending time with them before they leave. I was asked to join as usual, but after years of enduring the stinging sun on our holidays abroad I opted to stay behind. I skipped last summer as well so I don't think my family was expecting me to say yes.

And I couldn't go without Simon of course. He could have come with us – my step-mother invited him, but I don't think he has a passport. We're currently working on his driver's licence.

"Press the clutch. Slowly"

"Got it."

"Now press on the accelerator, slowly. Slowly Snow!" I remind him, unconsciously mimicking the move. "Move into the next gear and slowly release the clutch. That's it."

I have my wand in my hand (just in case) and I'm a little anxious as Simon is driving Fiona's MG. It's one of the only cars we own with manual transmission and she's not in London so it seemed like a good idea. And I wasn't about to offer up any of my father's cars.

After a few false starts Simon is doing surprisingly well. We're on the open road near Oxford and there's little traffic so I have him speeding up and slowing down in an attempt to familiarise himself with the gears. And after another twenty minutes of nervousness (on my part) we've made it to the house and we're heading straight for the garage.

"To stop, remember brake and clutch." I remind him again. He is slowing down somewhat, but I don't think he's stopping quite fast enough. "Crowley Snow, you might want to hit the brakes sometime soon!" I ram my foot into the floor instinctively.

"Okay, okay I've got it Baz." He says calmly as he pulls up to the closed garage – albeit a little closer than I feel comfortable with. He turns off the engine and turns to face me, giving me a wide grin. "How was that?"

"Fine Snow." I drawl.

I think I'm sweating.

"You look a little nervous." He says.

"No I'm not."

"And you've got your wand out."

"Merely a precaution."
He climbs out of the car and heads to the boot to collect our bags. "I think I've got this." He says confidently as he pulls the bags out of the ridiculously impractical boot. This car is a travesty.

"That was your first drive Snow." I remind him, taking my bag from him.

"What else is there to learn?" He shrugs.

"Stopping, starting, not hitting other cars."

He shrugs again. "Piece of cake."

"Yes well I think you need a little more practice before we let you loose on the streets of London." In truth, he drives well for a novice, but I'm not about to tell him that.

"Sure, sure." He says as we head to the door. As we enter we're almost knocked down by Mordelia and the twins who run to greet Simon (first) and then me.

"Ride Simun! Ride Simun!" The twins are jumping up and down at his feet excitedly. Simon looks to me for guidance.

"You know you're not allowed." I remind both of them, and then I look between Mordelia and Simon because I'm fairly certain he's been taking her for short flights over the lawns. They both shrug innocently.

The twins round on me next. "Bazoow! Bazzoow!" They scream and wrap their arms around my legs. (I'm still trying to teach them the correct pronunciation of my name.) Thankfully, my stepmother follows the noise and the twins run to her.

"Hi Mordy!" Simon grins.

"Hi Simon, want to go out for a kick?" Mordy raises her eyebrow and I think she's asking for a ride instead but I can't be too sure. I wouldn't put it past either of them.

"Mother." I say, kissing her cheek. She likes when I call her that.

"Basil, Simon." She greets us both with a smile. "How was the trip?"

"Fine thank you."

"Great thanks." Echoes Simon.

Then Simon turns to Mordelia, "Yeah okay Mordy, I'll drop off my bag first."

"Perhaps after lunch?" Daphne suggests, and I can see that Simon is thankful for the small reprieve. Driving may have taken its toll after all, or he's probably just hungry.

-oOo-

The weekend passes easily, with lazy days outside playing with my siblings and quiet evenings with my parents or alone in my room. Simon spends most of his time outside on the lawns, either playing football with Mordelia or flying or chasing the twins or chasing the twins while flying (much to their delight). Simon's like a child himself sometimes so it's no wonder he enjoys himself so much here.

I spend some time with Father, discussing what needs to be dealt with on this estate and the Hampshire estate while they are away. There's not much to manage; the staff will be on leave and only the gardens will still need to be tended to. The Hampshire gardens are also maintained monthly
and there's a cleaner once a month – not that any of us ever go there anymore, we leave that to the Normals who looks after it on our behalf.

My step-mother spends a great deal of her time outside as well. She and Simon are talking while the children play on the lawn. She has quite a soft spot for Simon these days – ever since he nearly froze to death flying here last winter. I think she was thrilled that he thought to come here at all. I certainly wasn't expecting it, but I was undeniably pleased that he trusted my family enough to come.

We return to London in my car, refreshed and relaxed. We left Fiona's car at Oxford. Her car is fine in small doses but it's older than me, actually it's older than her, not very comfortable and she's magicked the sound system so it only plays her CDs (British punk, pre 1983). Simon drives for a while but we swap as we get closer to London. He's doing well but I'm not ready for him to take on the busy roads and other cars just yet. When I take over driving he's content to hold my hand the rest of the way home.

We arrive at my flat and race each other up the stairs. After three days at my family's home, sleeping in separate rooms, we're desperate for each other. We barely make it in the door and drop our bags before he kicks it closed and starts taking off my clothes.

"In a hurry Snow?" I smirk between kisses, my tee shirt falling to the floor.

"Yes" He says, completely unabashed. He tugs off his own tee shirt and discards it carelessly, and then his hands are on the button of my jeans. "And it's Simon."

"All right, Simon." I echo, my mouth grazing his neck. I work quickly to pull off his shorts.

We don't make it to the bedroom, the couch works just fine.

-oOo-

Simon sighs quietly and twists to his side so his wings and tail are hanging off the couch. His curls are matted and his tawny skin shiny with sweat. I love his skin, it's the most perfect shade of light gold and it's so warm. He has freckles on his shoulders and moles across his chest and back and arms and legs. I'm tracing my fingers across some of them now, connecting them together in slow, soft lines.

I'm taking my time, there are a lot to connect. I've made my way from his face, to his shoulders and arms and chest, and when I get to the ones on his stomach he lets out a small, quiet moan. I pull him in closer and wrap my arms around his warm torso, and he lifts his chin to kiss me, lightly brushing his lips across mine until I can't stand it any longer and I kiss back him hungrily. I feel his tongue slide against mine, and I taste the heavenly taste of him all over again and as he pushes his body against me and I can't think of anything but Simon Snow.

-oOo-

"Mmmm." He hums quietly.

We've been lying together for a long time. The light is changing and its turning Simon's skin into an even warmer shade of gold. We're both spent so neither of us is in a hurry to move. I brush my hand across his cheek and I'm rewarded with a glowing smile. He opens his eyes briefly and stares into mine as he pushes my hair behind my ear. Then he closes his eyes again.

"You know Baz." He whispers. His eyes are still closed but he's smiling like a Cheshire cat. "With Penny away we have my flat all to ourselves for the next six weeks."
I feel myself flush. "I like the way you think Snow." And I can't help but smile back.

Penny

Micah meets me at the airport with a big hug and even bigger kiss.

"I've missed you Pen." He says between kisses. He wraps his arms firmly around me and squeezes me tight.

"I've missed you too." I manage, reluctantly pulling away from him. I trace my eyes over him and smile – Skyping every day is okay but nothing beats the real thing. He smiles back and kisses the tip of my nose, which makes me laugh, and kiss him one more time before he slides his arm around my waist. We stay close as we walk to collect my luggage.

"So what do you want to do while you're here?" He asks. "But first, my family are dying to see you."

"I think we'll see your family then." I say, grinning.

I'm so glad I came here to America. Great Snakes it's so good to see him, I've missed him so much. Since Micah left London after New Year's we've been Skyping almost every day – even during our finals, and when Simon was avoiding me last term I found even more solace in Micah than usual. But being here with him is so much better. I don't know how we're ever going to get through a few more years of this.

I was thinking on the way over that maybe we need to talk about how we can close this distance between us somehow. We're both still studying so I know it's not going to be an easy conversation but it's a conversation we need to have nevertheless.

When we arrive at his house it looks like his entire family is there to greet us. He has a big family – lots of brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins, and they're all huggers so it takes a long time to say hello to everyone. We finally sit down outside under the porch and his mother brings refreshments as the rest of his family ask about the flight, the weather back in London and my family. By the time we've finished I'm quite exhausted so Micah has the good grace to show me to my room so I can take a quick shower and rest.

He comes to get me when dinner is almost ready and we sit and eat with his family. The aunts and uncles and cousins have left but I am warned that I'll see them again very soon. Dinner is a relaxed affair, nothing like the bedlam of my family dinners so I take the time to enjoy it, answering more questions about London, my family, Simon, and Prince Harry.
Chapter 12

Simon

I'm so grateful to Baz and Penny. Ever since they pulled me up on my behaviour I feel like a weight has been lifted off me. I realise now that I was carrying around the burden of the Will by myself every waking minute, and every minute I was asleep too. The nightmares haven't stopped but I don't have them as often and they're not as intense. The Mage is still talking to me, and I still can't hear what he's saying, but sometimes Penny and sometimes Baz is there with me and sometimes both of them. And when they're there, in the dream, the Mage feels smaller somehow and not so formidable.

And Baz is with me every night either at his flat or mine so he's always there to wake me if I need.

I tell Baz about the nightmares now and I talk about them with my psychologist. We also talk about the impending visit to the cottage. I think they're trying to prepare me for anything, even though we don't have any idea what we might find.

Baz still has nightmares too, but nowhere near as often as he used to and I'm always there with him if he needs. He doesn't talk about them much but he says they're not as bad as before. I know they are mostly about his mother and about being kidnapped by the numpties, and I think it was us finally unravelling his mother's murder that helped him the most, that finally gave him some peace.

The summer holidays are flying past.

I've been working more these holidays, taking on as many shifts as I have time for. I need to save up as much money as I can so I have some back up funds during term. I still have that big bag of leprechaun's gold stuffed at the bottom of my wardrobe, but I haven't touched any of it. After everything that happened I'm not so sure where it came from, and if it has anything to do with the Mage I don't know if I want it.

I've taken another life drawing class at the uni over the break, mainly because I really like it but I also find it relaxing. I love the how lost I get into the work. Sometimes I lose hours drawing and I'm usually so exhausted by the end of a session that I fall asleep easier than ever. Baz is taking some summer violin classes again and he's also taking some language classes because they're not part of his double or triple degree or whatever he's doing. It's demanding and difficult work, but if anyone can handle the load it's Baz. Maybe that's another vampire thing – a super big brain. Or maybe it's just a Baz thing.

I sneak into his violin lessons a few times after work, just to hear him play. I'm not supposed to but he spells it so that no one notices. Sometimes I take my sketch book and sit quietly drawing him. I've got Baz down pat, but the violin is still a bit of a task. The music and the drawing calm me and I don't think he minds. I also like going to his violin lessons because I like to watch him play, and because I can't get to his football practices anymore now that we're at different universities. I still watch him play football every weekend just like I used to at Watford and its better now that he's my boyfriend, because now at least I have a good reason to watch him. He's just as strong and fast and graceful on the pitch as ever, and just as ruthless.

I usually wear his team's hat and scarf to his games and sometimes I sit with his family if they come. Mordy is always decked out in a scarf and beanie as well and she cheers from the side so much that her mum usually has to tell her to quiet down a bit. Sometimes Penny even comes if she's not working or tutoring and the weather's fine enough, so it's usually a nice afternoon.
When his uni played against mine recently some of the fellas in my class were there watching their A side. I still wore the LSE hat and scarf and the fellas from my uni may have noticed but I didn't care. Even that bloke Tom or whatever the fuck his name is was there, but I ignored him and he didn't bother me.

We're at my flat today, four weeks into the break and for once neither of us has work or art or violin or any other classes today. We've been running enough these holidays and there's a summer storm brewing outside with the smell of rain heavy in the air so instead of getting up, I declare we're having a duvet day.

"What's a duvet day Snow?" Baz says, trying to hold back a smile. He's looking at me like he still can't work me out, even after all this time.

The first sound of thunder rumbles in the distance.

"It's a day off, were we stay under the duvet. Obviously Baz." I tell him, smiling and rolling my eyes at the same time. I think I've gotten quite good at the eye roll thing, thanks to Baz.

"All day?"

"Yep, that's why it's called a duvet day."

He arches his perfect eyebrow at me. "What about your job, and my lessons?" he queries.

"Not working today and you don't have any so it's not an issue." I say, with just a little smugness. I also learned that from him.

"Does this have anything to do with the lightning forecast this morning?"

He's so fucking smart so of course he's worked it out. "Yes." I shrug. "You're flammable and there's no sense taking any chances."

And now he's looking at me like I'm an extra special idiot, but he shakes his head eventually. "All right." He says, his lip curling up into the hint of a smile. "Why not."

So we make breakfast and then bring it back to bed where we lay out a table cloth (Baz insists) under the tray of French toast and tea. Baz frowns when I said we should make the entire loaf into French toast but I reckon I know what I'm doing because we have all day after all. Once we knock off half at breakfast, we set the tray aside and nestled back under the covers where we talk and we kiss as the storm picks up outside. And as the thunder rumbles and lightning flashes against the windows, Baz presses up against me and pulls me even closer and I kiss him and trace my hands across his cold skin until he's almost as warm as me and the only thing he can say is my name, my first name, over and over.

-oOo-

We wake to the sound of silence. The rain has stopped and the skies are a clear blue. I stretch slowly and sit up against the headboard. leaning over the side of the bed to pick up the tray with the now cold French toast and tea pot. Baz reaches for his wand on the bedside table and casts Some like it hot! on the teapot and You're getting warmer! on the toast and I think magic is so useful on duvet days because we don't even have to get out of bed.

"See I told you we needed all this." I say between mouthfuls.

"You mean you need all this Snow." Baz quips, pouring the tea carefully and handing me a cup.
"Yeah, same thing." I shrug as I offer him some of my French toast. He takes a bite and then he grabs a plate and takes a couple of slices for himself, ignoring my smugness.

"Some music would be nice." he says as he picks up his mobile and chooses a playlist. Music starts playing softly from the blue tooth speaker he bought me recently. When he came over with it, I told him to stop buying me things because I can buy stuff I need myself. He said he didn't buy it for me, but it's never actually left my flat.

"Okay Snow, what do you suggest we do now?" Baz asks, raising his eyebrow. He's finished his toast and tea and he takes my empty plate from me and puts everything back on the tray next to my bed.

"Hmm," I think. I have no clue but this was my idea so I have to see this through. "What about a movie? My laptop's here somewhere." I say, looking around the floor.

"It's in your bag, and I don't feel like watching a movie."

"FIFA?"

He looks at me sideways. "Do you really want to lose? Again?"

"Not really." I shrug. "I know, I'm going to draw you."

"I think you've done that enough Snow." He says, smiling as he's shaking his head.

"Simon, and no, I don't think I have."

"Yes you have, Simon." He says, reaching over to kiss my neck. He slides down the bed until he's lying on his side and he's pulling me down with him, sliding close to me.

"Okay." I breathe. "Maybe I have." I say between kisses, pulling him towards me with my hands in his hair.

I don't know how long we kiss this time, but I'm nowhere near ready to stop, and I'm fairly sure this is going down as one of my all-time favourite days with Baz.

"How's the day going for you so far?" I ask while he busies himself with my neck. I know my voice is shaky and I hope he doesn't notice, it'll just make him extra smug. I probably should be worried that a vampire is sucking at my neck right now, but it feels really good so I can't bring myself to care. If he was ever going to bite me he would have done it already – he's had plenty of opportunities. But Baz never would, he may be a vampire but he'll never hurt a human, and I don't think he'd ever hurt me.

"Mmmm." He says, still nuzzling. I think I might have a mark there after.

I don't worry about asking again.

And I think we're going to need some more food.

**Baz**

I'm watching Simon sleep. That's something I still do, although now I don't have to do it in secret. I move my nose to his hair and I breathe in the scent of him. I can't help it, he smells so good, like bacon and homemade cinnamon buns, like something I'd gladly eat. But he also smells sweet and brown and like boy and sunshine and sweat and sex. I think about pinning him down by his hands
and running my tongue all over him again.

I woke in the night wanting Simon. I kissed him awake.

"Simon." I whispered.

"Mmmm?" he hummed sleepily. I laced my fingers through his, pressing him down on his back. He went willingly. I pressed myself against him as I kissed every mole on his face, his neck, his chest and he moaned then, fully awake. I let go of his hands and moved mine to his waist as I worked my way down, kissing each mole on his chest and then his stomach. And when I kissed him low on his hips he let out a long low moan and clenched his fists in my hair. We made love into the early hours of the morning and then we fell asleep, sweaty and spent in each other's arms. It was fucking incredible.

"Simon." I'm touching his cheek, trying to wake him.

"Baz." He mumbles into the pillow.

"We have to get up, I have classes, you have to work."

He groans and turns to look at me, blinking. "Okay, okay I'm getting up." But he doesn't move. I carefully push his curls away from his forehead and he reaches up to brush my cheek with his warm fingers.

"You need to shave." He says, running his fingers across the stubble there. It feels good.

"So do you." I say, rubbing my thumb back and forth across his chin. I can't stop staring at him. It's entirely possible that I'm even more in love with him today than I was yesterday.

I kiss him quickly and pull off the covers before we don't end up going anywhere at all. "Go." I say. He groans again as he finally gets out of bed and drags himself towards the bathroom. His wings are spread wide and his tail is dragging along behind him and he looks glorious in all his nakedness. I know I'm smiling as I watch him go.

He wanders out a while later, towel wrapped low around his middle, hair in a mass of wet curls and I contemplate dragging him back to bed again. Yesterday was definitely one of my favourite days since we've been boyfriends. I have a list of favourite days with Simon in my mind, I think yesterday made the top three.

I decide to have a quick shower – mostly to curtail my growing desire for more of him, and when I finish I find Simon making breakfast. (Fried eggs, bacon, tomatoes, mushrooms, toast and tea.) He's dressed casually in a tee shirt (mine), jeans and trainers. He looks good. He always looks good. And I recall something I've wanted to do for a while. I think now is the time to ask.

"Simon?" I say as I pour the tea.

"Mmmm?" He's sliding the eggs onto the plates and handing one to me. We sit and he immediately starts eating, shovelling an entire egg in his mouth in one go.

I hold back a smile. Simon still eats like a wild dog and I still find it enthralling. "I was wondering." I start.

"What?"

"I was wondering if you would like to go on a date with me?" I finish quickly. I feel my face turning
slightly pink.

He stops eating and looks at me, grinning. "A date?" He asks. "As in a real date?"

"No a make believe date, of course a real date." I answer automatically.

He scoffs and ignores me as he shovels some mushrooms into his mouth. "Baz, we've been boyfriend's for a year and a half."

"Yes I know that, but we've never been on an actual date." I sip my tea.

I'm still watching him – he's finished his eggs already and is working on the bacon and toast. He'll grab mine soon so I make a start.

"No I suppose we haven't. Our first date . . ." He says, chewing his breakfast carefully. "Where?"

"Dinner I suppose." I take a bite of my breakfast.

He shoves some bacon into his mouth. "Dinner. Yeah, okay, dinner sounds good." He shrugs, chewing happily. "I'll go on a date with you Baz." He grins.

That was easy. I sigh quietly in relief. "Good, tonight, seven o'clock?" I propose. I take another small mouthful of egg and bacon, awaiting his reply.

"Okay." He says, still grinning easily. He finishes off his breakfast in a few more enormous mouthfuls and reaches for mine, dragging the leftover eggs and toast onto his empty plate. I let him.

I know I'm smiling ridiculously as we walk out of the flat and go our separate ways.

Simon

I've never been on a date before. I mean, when I was with Agatha we just hung out at school and went to the school dance together and Penny was always there with us so it never really felt like a date. I didn't even meet her and walk in with her or anything, I always met them together.

It's just like Baz and me to do everything back to front. We were boyfriends pretty much as soon as we started kissing, and we hated each other and were sworn enemies before that so we've never actually done normal. I think we're normal boyfriends now though, as much as a mage vampire and an ex mage Normal with dragon parts can be I suppose. That's why I agreed to go on this date.

Who am I kidding, I'd agree to just about anything when it comes to Baz.

I'm looking in my wardrobe trying to decide what to wear. I have a few pairs of jeans and shirts and more tee shirts and shorts and hoodies and jumpers, and there's a fair amount of Baz's clothes in there as well. We spend so much time at each other's flats that half our wardrobes are mixed in with each other's, and half the time I'm wearing his tee shirts or jumpers if I forget to pack my stuff. I'm broader than him and he's taller, but his stuff fits well enough.

Most of my clothes were Christmas gifts or just gifts, either from Baz's family or Penny's. Even the Wellbeloves still give me clothes at Christmastime. I've hardly had to buy anything since Watford, which suits me because I don't really like shopping.

Baz loves shopping of course, and there have been plenty of times he's dragged me out on the pretence of buying something for him only to end up with a whole bunch of new stuff for me. He just can't help himself.
Then I spot the grey suit of Baz's that I've worn a few times. (His family likes to dress up for dinner on Sundays and holidays.) Maybe I should wear that. Baz will probably wear a suit, he loves any chance to dress up. I decide to give him a quick call.

"Snow." He answers. "You're not phoning to cancel on me are you?" I roll my eyes even though he can't see me.

"I'm not sure what to wear Baz, it's my first date you know." I tell him truthfully. "Are you wearing a suit?"

"Of course." He says as if it's basic knowledge what you're supposed to wear on a date. (It probably is basic knowledge.) Of course he's going to wear a suit. He's such a posh git sometimes, he'll probably wear a tie even. I don't even know why I called. Yes I do, I'm a little nervous and I wanted to hear his voice, not that I'm telling him that.

"Okay." I say. "I think I'll wear one too. Thanks." And I hang up before he can say anything else.

Then I quickly put on the grey suit with a black shirt that Baz bought for me (no tie), then I pace around the lounge room a bit until I grab my sketch pad and sit and finish off a sketch I started yesterday.

Baz knocks on the door at precisely seven o'clock and I get up and let him in. He may be a posh git but he's always punctual. He's wearing that black suit he wore on New Year's Eve, black with a hint of purple or violet when it catches the light. He has a violet shirt and a dark tie. He looks beautiful.

Baz Simon looks as stunning as always in that grey suit. And paired with the black shirt against his golden skin, the effect is striking. I know I'm staring and I need to stop.

"Ready?" I ask.

"Yes, let's go." He says, his eyes haven't left mine and I'm contemplating not for the first time today whether to cancel our plans and keep him for myself. I take his hand instead and lead him to my car.

"Where are we going?" He asks when we get in the car. I'm driving, Simon has driven quite a few times to Oxford and back but I'm still not comfortable with him driving in the city just yet.

"A restaurant that Fiona suggested. She dated the owner." I tell him. "They have good steaks."

I picked a small private restaurant that's not very well lit and I asked for a table at the back. I'm sitting facing the wall and Simon is facing the restaurant. At least I can eat on our date without anyone seeing my fangs.

Dinner is extremely good. Simon orders the Beef Wellington while I order the fillet steak (rare) and we order a side of steamed vegetables to share. We talk about driving to Oxford tomorrow for the weekend. My family is still away but he says he wants to fly and I know he wants to drive again.

We talk about going for a swim now that the weather's warmed up and he tells me he doesn't know how and I realise there's so much that Simon has missed out on growing up in an orphanage. Christmas was fairly dismal for him as a child until he started spending them with the Wellbeloves, he's never been on a family holiday or any other holiday. He doesn't even know his own birthday so he's never celebrated it. What a tragedy – who doesn't know their own birthday for Crowley's sake? It will never stop breaking my heart.

Then he reminds me of all the good things that happened once he started at Watford, like magic and
meeting Penny and Agatha and even me. I tell him that I don't think he should think of me as one of the good things at Watford, we were enemies after all and spent more time trying to hurt each other than anything else. He doesn't agree. That's just like Simon though, life has dealt him some harsh blows but he will always remember the good things over the bad.

Simon finishes his meal and then half of mine and we are contemplating the dessert menu when the owner joins us briefly. I stand to greet him.

"You must be Fiona's nephew." He says, shaking my hand. "I'm Louis. Please don't get up." I remain standing.

"I'm Baz, and this is Simon." I say, shaking his hand.

"Pleased to meet you Baz", He says warmly, and then he turns to nod and smiles at Simon, "Hello Simon."

"Hi." Simon says still contemplating the dessert menu.

Louis turns back to me. "Your aunt is a dear friend of mine. Fiona is charming woman, quite lovely."

I've never heard anyone call Fiona charming or lovely, and judging by Simon's face he's just as surprised as me. I hope Simon will catch himself because I can't kick him under the table. "I see you ordered the Beef Wellington?" He nods at Simon.

"Yeah." Simon answers. "It was great."

"Thank you, it's our speciality." He smiles. "Anyway, enjoy the rest of your dinner, dessert is on me."

"Thank you, that's very kind." I say, sitting down when he leaves.

"Fiona, charming?" Simon snorts, eyebrows raised. "He obviously doesn't know her that well."

"Wonders will never cease."

We order dessert, dark mint chocolate mousse for Simon and Lemon Soufflé for me, and enjoy a dessert wine (compliments of the Louis) while we wait.

"That was brilliant." Simon says as he eyes my dessert wistfully. He's knocked off the chocolate mousse and I hand him my half eaten dessert. I've had enough.

"So what do we do next?" He asks as he finishes my dessert.

"I don't know, why don't we walk for a little? It's a pleasant evening." I suggest. I'm actually not sure what to do on a date. It's not like I've ever been on one either.

We leave the restaurant after thanking the owner for the lovely meal. I take Simon's hand and his tail wraps around our wrists as we stroll languidly towards the car.

I can hear the music before Simon, and I look around to see where it's coming from. There's a nightclub up on our right.

"How about a dance?" I suggest. I try not to sound too hopeful – Simon and dancing are probably mutually exclusive.

"What, out here?" Simon asks, stopping.
"Yes, in the middle of the street Snow." I say, rolling my eyes at him and pulling him forwards. "There's a nightclub over there." I point to a dark blue door where the music is reverberating.

"Baz really?" He asks, somewhat warily.

"We don't have to if you don't want to." I tell him. I don't want to force him into anything he's not comfortable with.

"No its fine, you're organising this date." He says smiling now. "I'm organising the next one."

I roll my eyes (again), and pull him into the nightclub.

Simon

It's fairly dark in here but not as dark as that vampire bar we went to so I can still see where I'm going, just. The dance floor is full of people dancing to the beat and the bar is lined with more people. Baz pulls me to the dance floor and before you know it we're dancing like we were dancing on New Year's Eve. He puts his hands on my waist and brings me in close so I don't have to dance on my own and we slow dance to the fast music. It's nice enough.

My tail has wrapped itself around his waist and pulls him closer. It does that sometimes. I can usually control it, unless I'm upset where it slashes around or if I'm concentrating where it stands on end, and it seems to have a built in magnet for Baz because whenever he's around it either wraps itself around his wrist if we're walking or his thigh in bed or his waist like now. And I swear I'm not doing any of it. Baz gives me a smug look whenever it happens. I think he likes it, actually I think he loves it.

"You're dancing Snow." He murmurs into my ear.

"Well, sort of." I shrug. We're not really dancing, just moving side to side to the music, looking at each other. Before Baz, I'd only ever slow danced at the school balls with Agatha and I was always crap at it. "I'll never be able to dance like you." I add.

He tips his head to one side. "True." He says, trying not to smile.

Of course Baz is an exceptional dancer, and I know people are looking at him, I'm looking at him. We've been boyfriends for a year and a half and I still can't stop looking at him. Merlin he looks so good.

Still, he can be a right arrogant git sometimes.

The music's changed and there's a slow song playing so Baz pulls me in closer and I automatically wrap my arms tighter around his neck and rest my head on his shoulder. He puts his chin on my head and we move to the music. I don't know how long we've been dancing or just swaying to the music but it feels like a while. I'm lost in the music and enjoying being close to Baz so I don't worry about how much time passes.

Eventually he brings his mouth close to my ear. "Time to go?" He murmurs. I look up at him, remembering where we are, then I nod and I take his hand as we head out the door.

When we reach my flat Baz stops the car but he doesn't get out.

"What are you doing?" I ask. I'm half way out the door and Baz hasn't moved.

"I'm dropping you off."
"Why? Aren't you coming in?" I know I'm frowning because we've spent every night together since Penny left for America. I'm starting to worry.

"I didn't want to presume."

"Presume what?" I'm not sure what he's on about.

"It's our first date, I didn't want to presume you would invite me in." He's so sincere when he says it that I have to hold back a laugh.

"Of course you're coming in Baz." I say rolling my eyes. "Merlin, after what we did yesterday you must know that I'm up for it." I walk around to his side of the car and pull him out.

When we make it inside my flat he pulls me close and murmurs in my ear. "Up for it, hmmn?"

"Absolutely." I say, pulling him to my room.

Penny

I think Micah has an ulterior motive to dragging me around New York. He's been relentless. He's showing me all the sites he can; we've been to a Yankees game, climbed the Statue of Liberty, taken a fancy elevator to the top of the Empire State Building and right now he's showing me around Columbia University. He goes to Yale so I'm not sure what this is in aid of.

"I just want you to see what it's like here." he says solemnly, pushing his glasses up his nose. "New York's awesome in the summer."

"It's lovely Micah." I say. I'm a little exhausted after a week of sightseeing and I don't think we've even scratched the surface. We're currently having a late lunch in a bakery of some sort. It's full of excellent pastries and pastrami sandwiches and pizza and coke and genuinely bad coffee.

We spent the first week at his home with his family. There were so many of them to visit and that visited us it took the entire week. He's usually away at Yale so they were just as excited to see Micah as they were to see me. And it's the first time they've seen me since all that mess with Simon and the Humdrum and I knew they were keen to find out all the details. We may live in different countries but the realm of Mages is quite small and news travels very fast.

So I spent some time telling them what I could, what I wanted to tell them and what I know Simon would be comfortable with me telling them. I didn't tell them how we ended the Mage, only that he was behind every bad thing that happened and now he's dead. I didn't tell them how Simon had created the Humdrum (accidentally) when he first went off when he was eleven. And I didn't tell them about the latest development, how the Mage has bequeathed his estate to Simon. And I most certainly didn't tell them about Simon's wings and tail. Only my family, Baz's family and the Wellbeloves know about those. It's not generally accepted in the magickal world that you can give yourself wings and a tail. We're not genies for Merlin's sake!

Micah knows everything of course, even about Baz. There was no way I could keep any of this from him. He's been my rock throughout all of this. While Simon was not talking much to anyone after what happened and Baz was there for Simon to lean on, Micah was the one I turned to. I Skyped him a lot in the early days and he helped me through.

We spent the second week visiting Connecticut, staying in New Haven so Micah could show me around Yale. It was rather impressive I must say. I think he's trying to sway me to move although he swears he's not. Either way, it's a beautiful area and I'm happy to be here.
We're spending the next few weeks in Manhattan before we head back to stay with his family. I'm in half a mind to call Agatha to see if we can catch up. I know she's on the other side of the country but it's not like she's on the other side of the world. It makes sense to catch up with her while I'm here. I'll see if Micah wants to come too, he may enjoy a trip to California, we can be together and it will give us some time away from his family. (I've answered just about enough questions about the Royal Family that I care to.)
Chapter 13

Baz

Father has been on my case for months to make another appearance at the club. He thinks it will be advantageous to my magickal future. He also thinks that I need to build some of my own connections after he worked so hard to maintain his own during the Mage's tyrannical reign. I'm not all that sure – I don't know what sort of magickal future there is for a vampire in this realm or any other.

I've only been to the club a few times since everything happened and only when Simon is at work, but since our date I've felt more confident in asking him to join me. I never thought he'd agree to the date and he did, so anything's possible.

It's midweek and mid-morning and we're lazing in bed. Neither of us has any commitments today and Simon doesn't have work until later so I suggest a game of tennis at the club.

"Tennis? At your posh club?" Simon scoffs, his face incredulous.

"Yes." I say, sitting up against the bedhead.

Simon sits up next to me and turns to face me. He pulls his chin in – a move he's picked up from Bunce no doubt. "But I'm a Normal, and Normals aren't allowed at your club."

"You're not a Normal, you're the Chosen One. You were the most powerful mage ever." I remind him. "They'll let you in, Crowley they should make you an honorary member." I tell him truthfully. I can't believe he still finds it so hard to believe – no one else has trouble believing it.

He's shaking his head from side to side resolutely. I decide to leave that discussion for another time, right now I want to focus on getting him on the courts.

"But I can't play tennis." He says instead.

"It's not that hard."

"And there's plenty of old families that still want to kill me," He adds.

"No they don't, they all know what happened. Anyway you'll be a guest. I can even cast Be our guest if you want."

"Isn't there somewhere else we can play?" he pleads.

"No."

He stares at me with his chin up. I know that stance.

"Come on Simon, it'll be fine." I say quietly. I smile as I push his curls off his forehead and his eyes close involuntarily. It won't be long now.

His shoulders drop slightly. "I don't know . . ." And I can see he's relenting.

"There's lunch." I offer. If this doesn't do it, nothing will.

It works. His eyes light up so this definitely sparks his interest. "There is?" He asks. Crowley, we haven't even had breakfast and he's already thinking about lunch.
"Yes."

"You really want to me to go to your posh club?" He asks again. Great snakes, how can he not know that I always want him with me. I'd have him permanently glued to my side if I could somehow manage it.

I nod determinedly. "Yes, come on." I say, getting out of bed. "I've got some tennis whites here that should fit you."

"I have to wear white, to play tennis?" He looks incredulous again.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It's required."

"Why?"

"Because it's tradition."

"It's a stupid tradition." He says, finally throwing the covers off and getting out of bed. Victory.

-oOo-

We arrive at the club a little before eleven and to my relief it's very quiet. Most members arrive in the afternoon or evenings and weekends are particularly busy. Simon relaxes a little when he sees how empty it is.

We're greeted at the door by the concierge and I sign Simon in and then I wave my wand to gain entrance. Some people stare at Simon as we make our way through the club and head outside to the courts but Simon takes my hand and keeps his eyes straight ahead as we walk. I can see he's nervous.

He relaxes a little once we make it outside and select a court. There are a few other games on but more than half are empty, I picked a good day. We drop our bags at the end of the court and work through a series of stretches.

"So, do you know how to play?" I ask, picking up my racquet.

"Yeah of course, I just never got to play much. Sometimes we had a hit at the local courts." He says as he swings his racquet around.

"All right." I say, walking over to the other side of the net. "Warm up rallies first. I'll serve."

"No magic?" he asks me.

"Of course not." I scoff. I don't need magic to play tennis. "And no wings, or tail." I spelled them invisible as usual but I'll know if he uses them.

"Bugger." I hear him mumble.

We get through the warm up easily and then start playing for the next hour or so. By the time I beat him he's worked up a decent sweat and most probably an appetite.

"Not bad Snow." I say as we head inside for some lunch.
"I was rubbish, wasn't I Baz?" He says glumly, shaking his head from side to side.

"Certainly not. That was a good effort. I have been playing since I was three you know."

"Since you were three?" he asks incredulously. "What did you do, spend all your baby years in violin and tennis lessons? What happened to playing with trucks and in the sand pit?"

"Is that what you did?" I ask as we head to the carvery. I nod hello to a few people I know – friends of my father's and some distant relatives. They nod back and then turn to stare at Simon. They all know who he is but to my intense relief, no one says anything.

"Yeah, and whatever other crap toys the orphanage had around. I thought that's what all kids did, just with, you know, better toys." He says, starting to fill his plate. He stops momentarily and looks over to me. "All this is free?" he asks, pointing to the spread.

"Yes. It's part of the membership."

"Oh." He says, and he fills his entire plate with roast meats and vegetables. I can see he wants to add some more but he's wary of being watched, or judged, so I add more to my plate instead. We grab some drinks and find a table in a quiet corner.

"Well I had quite the different upbringing I suppose." I say as we sit down.

"Obviously." He says smiling as he starts to make his way through his lunch. And I smile, because I think I've managed to distract him enough so that he's momentarily forgotten where we are. Either that or he's so ravenous that he doesn't care.

I cover my mouth and eat some before handing the rest over to Simon.

After lunch we head back to the courts for another game. Mrs Wellbelove spots us on our way out and waves us over to her table. She's a regular here and today it looks like she's lunching with the other regulars.

"Simon, how lovely to see you here." She calls cheerily. Then she turns to me and nods. "Basil."

Most of the magickal world knows about us by now, and most have accepted us. But some, like my father, still struggle with the idea so I'm not quite sure how these ladies will react. It was a challenge to get Simon to agree to come in the first place so I don't want his first visit to be his last. I greet the ladies by name, nodding to them in turn.

"It's been a while since I've seen you here Master Pitch." One of the ladies says to me.

"I've been busy, studying." I answer. "And playing football." That usually works around here.

Mrs Wellbelove introduces Simon to each of them. He nods at each of them as he's introduced.

He's introduced last to an older woman at the head of the table – Lady Salisbury.

"Ah we finally get to meet the Chosen One?" Lady Salisbury declares loudly. She's tall and sturdy and has a commanding voice - and she's known to be quite the rowdy one. She grabs Simon's hand and shakes it vigorously. "Good to finally meet you. You're quite the enigma."

Simon shakes her hand just as eagerly. "Er thanks?" Simon says, a little bemused at her enthusiasm.

"Well, it looks like you're ready for a game, we won't hold you up any further." Mrs Wellbelove says, sitting down. "Cheerio then." She waves as we head out to the courts. I'm pleased that no one
made a fuss about the Chosen One or us.

I go through another series of stretches while Simon waves his racquet around and we're just about to start when Dev and Niall wander up. Fuck. Of all the people to bump into today when Simon is with me. I haven't spoken with them much since Watford, they're both at different universities now and I haven't bothered to maintain our friendship. And I don't know what they think of my relationship with Simon – we've never had a chance to talk about it. They were annoyed enough at me for befriending him after we spent our entire youth plotting against him so I have no idea what they think about us being boyfriends.

Dev looks at me and nods. "Baz."

"Dev, Niall." I nod at both of them. Niall nods back.

We stand around awkwardly for a while and I can see Simon watching from across the court. His arms are crossed and his chin is raised, as if he's ready to jump in at a moment's notice. I hope he stays calm.

"Haven't seen you round in a while." Dev says casually.

"I've been busy." I shrug, trying to appear indifferent.

They look over the court at Simon and smirk. I can't help rolling my eyes at the imbeciles.

"How was the continent?" I ask. Both of them usually spend some time abroad during the summer and it seems like a safe topic.

"Good." Dev says. "Brilliant. We just got back from Ibiza." They grin at each other.

"Wonderful."

"It was." Niall says, smirking.

"Well... we were just about to play..." I say, hoping they pick up on my polite way to tell them to get off my court.

"How about a game of doubles then?" Dev asks. And I can see it's unexpected because Niall gives him an incredulous look. Dev shrugs at him.

I look at Niall. "Niall?"

He looks from me to Simon and then back to me again. "Yeah okay, why the fuck not." He shrugs, feigning indifference.

I nod and make my way to Simon's side of the court. "We're playing doubles." I tell him when I get there.

"What?" he asks. "With those two wankers?" He's pointing his racquet at Dev and Niall and his is tone is somewhere between shock and incredulity and it would be entertaining under any other circumstances.

"Yes, who else?"

"Are you serious?" His voice has risen an octave.

"Relax Simon, I could beat these two on my own, with my eyes closed." I tell him. "And they've just
spent the last four weeks drinking themselves stupid in Ibiza." I finish, hoping this convinces him.

"So I can sit it out then?"

I sigh. Of course it didn't convince him – he's the most stubborn person I know. (After me of course.) "In the spirit of, past friendships, can we please do this?"

"Not my past friendships, those bastards wanted to kill me." He growls, still waiving his racquet around at Dev and Niall.

"And?" I challenge. "So did I."

"No you didn't. You said you didn't!" He argues, standing with his hands on his hips.

I roll my eyes at his dramatics. "I didn't, but you thought I did. Same thing really."

"No it's not, that's completely different!" he argues, waving his arms around for good measure.

"You two ready to play yet?" Dev calls over the court.

"Simon." I give him a meaningful look. I'm trying to look persuasive, not like I'm pleading. (But I am pleading, really.)

He stares back at me, still incredulous. But when he see's that I'm not going to give in he finally huffs as he relents. "Yeah okay." he growls. "But you owe me."

No doubt.

"Ready when you are." I call back, smiling. "No magic."

"Doesn't mean no tail." I hear Simon mutter as we start the game. This is going to be interesting.

There's a lot of swearing on Niall and Simon's part, and some rather impressive rallies between Dev and myself. And I'm not sure if Niall is actually trying to hit Simon in the head rather than win any points but Simon manages to deflect all of the more aggressive balls with his wings and then he gives as good as he gets, clocking Niall in the head more than once so the game is entertaining enough. We're up 6-3, 6-1 and on the last set 4-0. Everyone's worked up quite a sweat and the three of them look like they are getting tired so when Simon hits a particularly high volley I hope Dev and Niall don't notice that his racquet was nowhere near high enough to reach it.

I turn to Simon and narrow my eyes. "No tail." I hiss.

"Why the fuck not? It's not magic." He growls back.

"We don't need your tail to win." I say quietly as I get ready to serve.

"You've got vampire speed, I'll use my tail if I want."

I let it go. He's here at the club, playing tennis with Dev and Niall. I don't think I should push him any further. I serve an ace instead. Game over.

We win the final set easily, thanks to my superior tennis skills and Simon's tail that could reach even the most difficult shot. And Simon looks a little more at ease now that the game is over and no one tried to spell him. We walk up to the net to shake hands.

"Good game." Dev says as I shake his hand and Niall grumbles 'good game' reluctantly. He's never
been a particularly good loser. You'd think he'd be used to it by now – he's never won a game against me. They both nod at Simon, Simon nods back. I roll my eyes exaggeratedly.

We head back inside and grab a drink of water at the bar. Dev and Niall follow us and order a round of pints.

"Pint Baz?" Dev asks as Niall orders theirs.

"No thanks, we'll be leaving soon." I answer as I sip my water. I didn't think they would follow us back and I can see Simon is getting agitated. His tail has wound its way around my waist which is a sure sign that he's uneasy. It makes me smile nonetheless. He swallows down his water in large thirsty mouthfuls and I order him another one.

Niall grabs two pints from the bar and hands one pint to Dev.

"Cheers." Dev says, to all of us, taking a big guzzle of his pint. Niall takes an equally big drink, downing half all at once.

"Good game." I say, either because decorum dictates some discussion of our match, or more simply to pass the time.

"Yeah." Dev says. "Still can't beat you though."

"Not yet."

"You two play doubles often?" he asks, looking between us.

"First time."

'Yeah?' he says. He looks impressed.

We stand for a while drinking our drinks in silence.

"So." Niall says, nodding at me and Simon. "You two?"

"Yes?" I challenge. My head is tilted slightly to one side and my chin is raised slightly. I dare him to say something about us. From the corner of my eye I can Simon squaring his shoulders.

"Why didn't you tell us?" Dev says now. He doesn't sound annoyed exactly, he almost sounds curious.

That was unexpected but I shrug indifference. (I've learned well from Snow.) "It wasn't any of your business."

"And snogging at the leaver's ball is your way of letting everyone know?" Niall challenges, he's still smirking slightly. I find it irritating.

I feel a slight breeze to my right and Niall stumbles. I glance at Simon and raise my eyebrow but he doesn't acknowledge me. He continues staring straight ahead, his face impassive.

"Believe me, that wasn't for anyone's benefit but ours." I reply coolly and Simon snorts.

They change topic thankfully, enlightening me with details about their summer abroad which involved more pubs and pints than any sights, and when there's finally a lull in the conversation Simon leans in close to my ear. "Can we go home now?"
He's finished his second glass of water and stands motionless with his arms crossed. I can see he's had enough.

"Of course." I say. "Gentlemen." I nod to Dev and Niall and I take Simon's hand as we walk away from them and out of the club. I rub my thumb across the back of his hand as we head out to my car and I see Simon visibly relax. When I throw Simon the keys and walk to the passenger side, he smiles at me.

"Did you have to knock Niall over with your wing?" I ask as I settle into the passenger seat.

"He was being a dick." Simon says, shrugging as he starts the car.

Then he guns it out of the car park and I can't help but snort in a very juvenile sort of way.
Simon

Penny's due back next week so we really ought to clean up the flat. Baz and I have been a little distracted over the last few weeks, okay quite a lot distracted (especially since our duvet day) so I haven't even noticed the mess build up until this morning at breakfast. (Poached eggs, baked beans, toast and a pot of tea.)

I look around the room surveying the damage. I decide it's not that bad. I mean, there are a few clothes and shoes here and there, (we were in a hurry last night) (and the night before) and my art stuff and Baz's notes from his summer language classes are strewn around the coffee table and floor, and the dishes have sort of piled up in the kitchen a bit, and I think the bathroom could do with a bit of a scrub.

And then there's my room – half of the bedding is on the floor and there are more clothes strewn across the room and the lamp is on its side. When did it get in such a state? Then I remember last night.

I look over at Baz again, he's got a tee shirt on but there are faint bruises on his neck that I can just see above his collar and there's a small set of scratches on his arm where it looks like I dug my nails into him. When did I do that? I bring my hand to my neck and feel a tender bruise there as well and then I remember Baz's mouth on that spot last night.

I'm lost in thought when Baz touches my cheek gently. "All right Snow?" he asks quietly.

"Hmmm?"

"What's wrong?" He asks, concerned.

"I was just thinking about last night." I've started to blush.

"Mmmm yes, last night." He says smiling. "You know, you can do that again any time you like."

I blush harder.

"I'm sorry, about that." I say, pointing to his arm and neck.

He touches his arm then and looks at the scratches and smiles. "You don't have to worry about that." He says dismissively. He grabs his wand and casts a healing spell on the scratches and bruises on his neck and I wonder to myself how often he does that.

"Penny's back next week." I say after we finish breakfast.

"Hmmm, I think we need to tidy up a little before she returns Snow." Baz says, echoing my thoughts.

"And we probably need to shop before she comes back too." I suggest. We've still been shopping but mainly for breakfast supplies. So we've been living on sausages and eggs and take out and some pies from my work for dinner since we ate all of the meals that Baz's cook made before they took their holidays. We've also cleared out my fridge and pantry.

"Well, we have a week so we can sort out our respective places this week and then shop before she
returns." He proposes.

"And you've got magic so you can sort out each place even quicker." I suggest hopefully.

"This job is too big for even my magic Snow" he scoffs. I think he might be right but he waves his wand and tidies the coffee table and floor in the lounge room as we sit. "We need to make some time," he says, and pulls up his calendar on his mobile and blocks out some time between his lessons, my work and a trip to Oxford so he can hunt and I can fly. He shares it with me so I look over the plan and I block out one night because Alex invited us over for dinner. (She worked out that I was running out of food at home because I was eating at the café more.) Our week is getting really full so I decide to block out another few hours here and there.

"What are they for?" he asks.

"Recreation." I smile.

He snorts as he sits back and crosses his arms. "Your appetite for sex knows no bounds Snow, much like your appetite for food."

"Maybe." I shrug. "But it's entirely your fault."

**Penny**

Micah and I decide to fit in a trip to California to visit Agatha. He says he'd like to see the west coast again but I suspect he might need a break from his family questioning when I'm going to move to America and when we're going to get married.

We have talked about it, while we were in New York. He would like me to move to America immediately and I'd love for him to move to England, but I've only finished my first year at uni and Micah still has two years to go. It would be unfair to expect either one of us upend and move in the middle of things. While we're still okay with this long distance relationship we can't see any other way forward so we're not changing anything for the time being. I said we should reassess at Christmas, to see how we're both feeling.

We agreed to keep talking about it so that if anything changes or any of our feelings change we let each other know immediately.

"My feelings aren't going to change Penny." He said one night in bed. The hotel was lovely and the bed was very comfortable so after a week of sightseeing I suggested a rest day. We did most of our talking that day (and other things).

"I know that Micah, I just want to make sure that if they do, I'm the first to know." I said.

"I love you Penny. I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you and if we have to wait a little longer then so be it." He said resolutely.

I can't help thinking how lucky I am to have found him. "I love you too Micah."

We flew to California after I confirmed everything with Agatha. She has a part time job and is working through the summer, which I think may be more of an excuse not to go back to London again. She did enjoy her visit but I don't think she's ready to make it a regular thing, and there's this boy she's met.

"This is Joshua." Agatha introduces the tall blond boy to us. We've met up at a coffee shop near her place. Micah stands up and shakes his hand.
"Hello Joshua." he says immediately, grinning widely.

"Josh please." He says back.

"Hello, I'm Penny."

"Hi Penny, Ag's told me a lot about you, both of you." He says, smiling easily at both of us and I like him already.

He has an accent I can't quite place, it sounds a little American but also sounds a little English, maybe Australian?

We get talking and it turns out he's not only English (born in London but moved to California when he was ten years old), but he's also a mage!

"What!" I shout. I didn't mean to shout, but great snakes this is a surprise.

"Shhhhh Penny!" Agatha hisses. "I probably should have told you but I wasn't quite sure how, and then you phoned last week and said you were coming and well, I thought I'd deal with it when you arrived."

"Well I have to say I'm a little surprised Agatha." I go on. "No offence Joshua, but Agatha was a little anti-magic for a while there, weren't you Agatha?"

"That's cool, Agatha told me what happened." he says.

"Well most of it." Agatha looks to me before I can demand exactly what she has told him. And honestly, what she chooses to tell him is her business anyway. Instead I ask for the whole how-they-met story.

"You may as well tell us everything now, Penny's relentless and it will be less painful this way." Micah suggests. Bless him. Agatha sighs.

As it turns out, Josh is the boy that Agatha told me about at Christmas. They met one day while she was rollerblading. Talk about dangerous, rollerblading without a helmet or magic, what was she thinking! Agatha says she turned to see who her flatmate Emma was waving to and she fell, or she started to fall when all of a sudden she wasn't. She said it was like slow motion.

So she was suspicious of Joshua from that moment, she definitely felt his magic when he stopped her from falling and he carried these drumsticks around everywhere and didn't once profess to play the instrument. When she confirmed that she was from London, he mentioned that he was born there and then casually threw in that if he had stayed, he would have gone to a school called Watford. He was fishing, definitely. Agatha said she feigned ignorance for a long time, in fact she only told him that she had attended Watford after she returned from Christmas in London (with her wand).

He says he's heard all about the Humdrum and Simon Snow from his parents but his information seems a bit limited so maybe his family is not that connected in the magickal realm here in California. And I'm not sure if she knows that Agatha dated Simon for almost three years, I'll get to the bottom of that when I have Agatha alone.

They seem happy together and he seems nice enough so I'm happy for her. And I giggle to myself as I think how pleased her mother will be, Josh being English and a mage.

The next day Agatha and Micah and I decide to have lunch and visit the beach. It's lovely here and the weather is beautiful. I get straight into the questioning of course.
"So Agatha, a mage, and an Englishman." I giggle.

"I know Penny, I didn't plan any of it you know." She says rolling her eyes. "I didn't know he was a mage, or English until quite a while after I met him."

"Well I like him." Micah says, ever the charmer. "He's smart, he's a mage and he can surf. What's not to like?"

"Everybody here can surf." Agatha mutters.

Micah nods in agreement. "Maybe I should have a lesson?" he considers for a moment, then shakes his head and pushes his glasses up his nose. "Nah, who am I kidding."

Agatha did eventually tell Josh that she dated Simon for a while. He was quite surprised by that piece of information and a little bit impressed too. Agatha says she played it down quite a lot, saying how young they were and how they only dated at school and spent the summers apart, so it wasn't really like dating. And it wasn't, like dating when you think about it.

And Joshua's not a half bad mage apparently, he's probably around Agatha's level, but she has the Watford training so her spells are a lot more polished. She says his magic feels like honey, warm inside your bones. That's how it felt when he saved her from certain death rollerblading, or from a nasty bruise at the very least. She says she likes how it feels.

I'm really happy for Agatha and when we spend the next evening with her and Joshua and see them together I can see that they really like each other and are good together. He's relaxed and calm and she doesn't seem to dislike magic so much anymore.

I tell Agatha about the Mage and the Will now and how angry and upset Simon was and how he was a little lost for a while. But I also tell her he's back in a good place and not to worry about him. That's all I mention about the Mage though, I don't want to keep dredging up the past and I know Agatha doesn't want to either.

We fly back to New York after a week of sunshine and Agatha and I'm so glad we made the trip out west. I can't wait to tell Simon about it.

I'm heading back to London in a few days so I make the most of the time I have left with Micah.

**Agatha**

I had a lovely time with Penny and Micah and it was good to finally tell them about Joshua being a mage. I thought Penny would poke more fun at that but she let it go and I'm glad, I'm sick and tired of defending my choices to everyone in the magickal realm. I'm an adult for Morgana's sake, I can do whatever I like.

I still have that photo of the Mage and Lucy and it's bothering me a little because it doesn't belong to me. But I think I'll hold onto it for a bit longer. It doesn't seem like it will do any good dredging up all that terrible history now that everyone has moved on. It even makes sense that that Mage left everything to Simon, he was his heir after all, even if it was only to have him entered into the book of magic so he could attend Watford. Being a Normal that was the only way Simon could attend, no other Normal has ever attended Watford before Simon.

No sense dwelling on the past. I'm well and truly tired of thinking about it. I'd much rather think of my life here in California with my studies and work and Emma and Joshua. I do love it here.
Simon

We get through the cleaning in no time with a bit of help from Baz's magic and with only a few minor interruptions. (Baz will blame me but I swear he's just as bloody easily distracted as I am.) We even manage a trip to the supermarket, so by the time Penny returns the flats look pretty reasonable and there's a decent supply of food again.

Baz and I go shopping a few times a week while Penny's been away – usually for breakfast supplies. I like shopping with Baz. When I shop with Penny, she makes a list during the week of all the stuff we need, and then we have to stick to the list when we shop, she's fanatical, but when I shop with Baz we tend to just wing it. He usually carries the basket while I load it with whatever I want, then he takes things out when he thinks I'm not looking. He isn't too fussed with what food I buy because he doesn't need to eat as much as us, although he prefers sourdough to plain bread and we have to get free range eggs because they taste better and the hens are treated better.

"Said the vampire." I say, rolling my eyes. But I'm smiling a little.

"I don't torture the animals I hunt Snow." He answers quietly. "They can still be treated humanely."

And I'm reminded that he truly is the world's most reluctant vampire so I squeezed his hand until he smiles back.

He rolls his eyes when I grab the cheapest bath soap, taking it out of my hand and putting it back and picking something fancier – something with shea butter and vanilla in it. I don't know what shea butter is but it says butter so it must be okay.

Today we have a lot more to buy so he's pushing the trolley while I load it up with fruit and vegetables and bread and rice and pasta and a bunch of other things we need. I'm talking and he's smiling as he listens to me ramble on about uni. I enrolled in my new classes yesterday and I'm filling Baz in on what I've decided.

"I think I'm going to study Environmental Science." I tell him as I grab some Earl Grey tea. I used to drink builders tea but I got used to Baz's tea at his flat and now I prefer it. "I have to pick something and it looks interesting enough. It's a start I guess."

"It's a good start." Baz agrees, leaning over the trolley as he strolls down the aisles. "And you can always change course if you change your mind."

"Yeah I know." I shrug. That's what everyone keeps telling me, but I need to get my shit sorted sometime. May as well be now.

"And you don't have to try and fix the holes in the magickal atmosphere Snow. The dead spots are not your fault."

"They kind of are my fault." I say, shrugging again. "What about you anyway?" I ask, changing the subject. I don't like talking about the dead spots.

"You already know what I'm studying."

I roll my eyes. "I know you're studying Law, and Economics or Finance or whatever, but what about your music?" I don't really know what he's studying apart from law, it could be economics or is it
business finance? Accounting maybe? I'm not too sure of the difference. He tried to explain it to me once but I got lost and Baz got frustrated so I kissed him until he forgot what we were talking about.

"What about it?" Playing dumb doesn't really work for Baz. He's so fucking smart he knows exactly what I'm talking about.

"Come on Baz, I know you love playing the violin." I say. "And you're bloody good. Have you ever thought about doing it professionally?"

"Not really." He says, shaking his head slightly. He's taking the bag of mixed lollies out of the trolley. "That isn't very that practical is it? I can hardly make a living out of it."

"Yeah you could, you could join one of those posh orchestras, like the London Symphony or something like that." I suggest, shrugging. "Or just do it for yourself even." I sneak a bag of Liquorice Allsorts into the trolley while he's not looking. Baz has a wicked sweet tooth – he'll knock these off before Penny even gets back.

"Yes." he muses. "I'll play the violin and you'll draw and we'll live in a villa in Tuscany and make love in the afternoons and dance under the stars . . ."

I stop abruptly and stare at Baz, unblinking. He's never talked about the future – our future, ever. Not even joking. I don't know if he's joking or not right now but I hope he's not, even though he probably is. I mean, it's way too early to be thinking about that. I won't think about that yet. (I won't get my hopes up.)

But Merlin, that sounds bloody brilliant.

He stops and stares back at me, wide eyed, realising what he said. He doesn't say anything so I quickly walk off to the next aisle where I grab five sticks of butter and three packets of bacon. I put them hastily in the trolley when Baz catches up and then I keep walking, neither of us speaking. Baz follows me quietly through a few more aisles. I don't know who's more embarrassed.

I add two dozen eggs and he raises his eyebrow at the haul. "Why so much food Snow?" I'm glad he's changed the subject. This is much easier to talk about.

"You know I like butter Baz, and bacon, that's a staple." I grab some tins of baked beans and tuna (more staples) some mince and some lasagne sheets and spaghetti, I have to make a Bolognese sauce for when Penny returns. She'll want to get back to our dinner schedule and she'll be way too tired to cook for a while.

"It's not a staple Snow, and anyway the shop will still be here tomorrow. I don't think they'll run out." He says as he pushes the trolley next to me.

"Can't be too sure. And you know I don't like to shop. It cuts into my time too much."

"Time for what?"

"Time for us." I shrug, and I think Baz blushing just a little.

Baz adds a few mint Aero bars and salt and vinegar crisps and I smile back at him.

"Anyway, we can make French toast tomorrow." I suggest hopefully as we line up at the checkout.

We leave the supermarket and walk quietly back to the car. I'm thinking about what Baz said, about our future, our possible future. And even though he probably was joking, my stomach feels a little
fluttery at the thought of it. I try to push it to the back of my mind.

We're on our way to Alex's place for dinner. She's been trying to get Baz and me over for ages but we couldn't get a night where we were all free. She finally cornered me one day at the café after I finished work when I was buying some mini cottage pies and insisted that we come over because she knew we weren't cooking as much without Penny around.

Alex loves to cook. She makes all the meals at the café and the pastries and cakes as well. I've been trying to get her to add sour cherry scones on the menu for a while but she says she's got enough to deal with. Maybe next year she said. I live in hope.

We arrived at Alex's flat for dinner (on time for once) to a house full of people. There's her boyfriend Marco, who's a chef at a top Italian restaurant, and he greets us by kissing us on both cheeks and immediately hands us drinks. Then there's her flatmate Zoe and Alex's sister Victoria (Vicki) and her husband Kiaan. Baz hands Alex a bottle of wine and I give her a bunch of flowers we bought on the way. I know she likes the flowers, she always has some in the café, and she thanks us as she puts them in a vase and then gets busy offering us some nibbles.

The dinner is amazing. I had no idea but it turns out she studied a whole bunch of pastry classes and cooking classes at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. No wonder her pies and pastries at the café are so good and in such demand.

The conversation at dinner flows non-stop and it's pretty loud too because Alex and her sister Victoria speak over each other all the time, and Marco has a booming voice and he waves his hands wildly whenever he speaks, standing occasionally to make his point. And he laughs loudly and often too. I look over to Baz at one point and see he's smiling as he's deep in conversation with Marco about football so it looks like he's having a good time.

After dinner, we move into the lounge room and that's when Baz spots Alex's violin on a stand in the corner.

"Do you play?" he asks immediately.

"Yeah, when I have time." She says. "Before I got into cooking, I studied at the London College of Music."

"Impressive." Baz says, and I can see that he means it. "Have you ever played professionally?"

"No," she says. "I wasn't that good. I've played all my life. When I was younger, I thought I wanted to be a musician but like I said, I wasn't that great. And I love my café more."

Her sister Victoria cuts in then, smiling. "She's better than she says."

"No, I'm not." Alex insists. She shakes her head from side to side but she's smiling at her sister.

"Baz plays." I blurt out. "He's really good." I can't help it, I want her to know. I want everyone to know.

"Do you?" Alex says smiling. "I thought you were studying law or business."

"Yes that's right." Baz says. "But I've played the violin since I was a child."

"Can you play something for us Alex?" I ask. This is a side of her I never get to see. At the café
we're usually so busy keeping up with customer orders we hardly get time to talk about anything else.

She initially says no but then we all talk her into playing something. And after she plays, she gets Baz to play as well. He doesn't want to, he never plays in front of anyone but since he brought it up he can hardly say no.

He's really good. Everyone sits still, listening to him play and even though I've seen him play dozens of times, he's still mesmerising to watch. He closes his eyes when he plays, and he looks completely engrossed in the moment, entirely immersed by the music. His long graceful fingers pull the bow across the strings elegantly, creating the sweetest sounds from the instrument.

When he finishes he opens his eyes and looks at me before looking down, blushing slightly. I think he loves to play much more than he makes out.

"That was amazing Baz." Alex says, and everyone else agrees.

The next day when I go back to work, Alex can't stop raving about Baz's playing. And when Baz comes into the café at the end of my shift, Alex and Baz get into a long conversation about their favourite string pieces and the merits of Mozart over Bach. I have no idea what they're talking about.

-Penny arrives without announcement. She wouldn't let me come to the airport to pick her up. "After that display by my family and you Simon, I thought it would be quicker if I caught the tube home." She says. "That way I can unpack without the pandemonium."

She looks happy but she's obviously knackered, so I make a pot of tea while she showers and magicks her laundry and luggage away. Then we flop on the couch and drink our tea. I switch on the telly for her so she doesn't have to talk straight away. When Baz finally arrives with some scones we've got a nice afternoon tea happening by the time she's ready to tell us about her trip.

"I got you this Simon." She says, handing me a snow dome of the New York skyline. I love it, I've never owned a snow dome before. I turn it around in my hands, studying the cityscape and then shake it around for a bit, watching the white snow fall over the little night time city. Penny points out some of the buildings that she knows the names.

She digs around her bag some more and hands both Baz and me some Yale tee shirts and New York Yankees baseball caps.

"Thanks Penny." I say and I'm grinning because I'm chuffed that she stopped to buy us gifts. "These are well cool."

Baz thanks her as well. "Nice Bunce." He says.

-Penny

I fill the boys in on the trip and Micah and his family. I tell them all about our trip to New York and Yale and then California. Simon asks a never ending stream of questions, he's never travelled outside of England so I answer all of them patiently.

I decide to tell Simon about Agatha straight away. They both listen while I tell them about the talk about Joshua and how they met and how he's a mage and English. They're both fairly relaxed as I talk and neither is too fussed when I bring up Agatha. In fact, they look pleased to hear about her
new life.

I notice that they don't let go of each other's hand the entire time I talk. It's ridiculous to think they're even more in love than before I left but it really does look like it. And I'm so glad, after everything that happened last semester I was a little worried to leave Simon, but he looks fine and happy. He looks extremely happy actually, too happy come to think of it.

When I finish telling them about my trip they're hands are still entwined. "So, what have you two been up to while I was away?" I question. "I was expecting to hear from you more than the odd text Simon."

"Hmmm, not much. The usual." he stammers. "Working, drawing . . . um . . . we went to Oxford a few times. We played tennis at the club, against Dev and Niall. Oh and I learned to drive. I'm pretty good actually." He shrugs, then looks at Baz and blushes.

"Your driving is adequate Snow, but you'll need a lot more practice before you can claim to be good." Baz says, and he's smiling at Simon so lovingly I think I'm going to be sick.

And then it hits me. "You played tennis at the club?" I ask, pulling my chin in. "With Dev and Niall?"

"Yes. I didn't want to, but they asked." He says, shrugging.

"How was that?" I ask in disbelief.

He shrugs. "Not too bad. We won." He says.

I turn to Baz and give him a withering look. How could he put Simon through that ordeal. "Really Baz?" I challenge.

He rolls his eyes at me, completely unfazed. "It wasn't that bad Bunce."

"Really?" I say again, unconvinced. Simon went to the club – Baz's snooty club, and played tennis with those two imbeciles. I can hardly believe it. I glance at Simon again and he looks relaxed as he holds Baz's hand. I realise Simon is not about to do anything he doesn't want to do so I decide to let it go, for now. I narrow my eyes at the two of them. "And that's all you've done?" I probe.

"Um . . . Yes. That's it really." Simon stammers again. "More tea Penny?" He pours the tea and strike me purple if he isn't blushing even more. "Do you want to sleep for a bit Pen? We can go out if you need some quiet." Simon goes on, clearly changing the subject.

"Yeah maybe." I agree with a yawn. "Mum and dad are going to pop in for a bit later so I think I'll have a bit of a nap first."

"Do you want me to make you something to eat first?" Simon asks. "We could make you some French Toast?" And Baz looks at Simon so lovingly that I might gag. Merlin those two!

I'm suspicious. They've obviously been snogging and shagging the entire time I've been away. That's probably why the flat is so clean and tidy – they probably didn't even leave Simon's room. I hope they didn't do anything on the couch. I shift slightly at the thought, but I'm knackered so I don't have the energy to think about it. They must have left some time for work and Baz's studies and music and they look reasonably well fed – they even bought groceries. I decide to let it go.

I'm too tired to worry about them right now. I need to get over my jet lag, so I head back to my room for a quick kip before mum and dad turn up.
I wake up from my sleep and walk to the kitchen to get a glass of water. I only slept for an hour so I'm heading straight back to bed. I see Simon and Baz on the lounge, sitting close, shoulders touching, heads angled towards each other, sharing a headphone. They don't hear me enter. They must be listening to songs on Baz's mobile, he has an enormous playlist.

"This one." Simon says. And they are quiet for a bit, listening and moving their heads up and down in unison.

"It's good Snow, but what about this one." Baz says, and they're quiet again, leaning their heads together.

"Yeah, that's lovely Baz." Simon agrees, "Really nice, but a bit over the top isn't it?

"I don't think so. I think it's perfect."

"What about this one?"

"What are you doing?" I ask, still tired but more curious than ever.

Simon startles when he hears me, and I can see his ears turning pink. "Picking our song." Simon says over his shoulder, grinning sheepishly. "I've got one for me and you too Penny."

I roll my eyes and go back to bed.

I wake when Mum and dad come around and I tell them about my trip and Micah and his family. I give them some presents from Micah's family and some things that I bought for my brothers and sisters. And after a few cups of tea and lots of questions they finally leave, which I'm more pleased about than I should be but I still need to catch up on a lot of sleep.
Simon

Penny's only been back for one day before she brings up the cottage.

"Have you and Baz talked about it?" She asks over her Weetabix.

"Yes we have. I'm not avoiding it anymore Pen."

"So when do you want to go?" she pushes.

I want Baz here for this discussion – he's going to come with us of course. His classes are over now and football hasn't started yet, and my sketch class has finished as well so I only need to make sure I'm off work and we can go. I say as much to Penny and although she seems impatient to go, she backs down a bit. (It's been way too long between adventures for her.)

"Let's decide later, when Baz comes round." I finally say. I'm still a bit hesitant about the whole thing.

Penny

Simon is reluctant to go but he knows he needs to do this. I've been back a couple of days when I decide we need to work up a plan. It only took this long because I had to go to uni to sort out my classes. I tried to drag Simon with me, he couldn't possibly have sorted out his classes already but he said he had, (which I confirmed with Baz) so I let it go. When did he become so organised?

I tell the boys to join me at the kitchen table and I magic up some tea and biscuits and then I raise my ring again.

"See what I mean!" I say, and I raise my finger ready to write in the air. Baz rolls his eyes but Simon drags him over.

Baz pours the tea and Simon takes a couple of biscuits, dropping crumbs on his tee shirt and the kitchen table as he wolfs them down.

"We need to think about what we might find there." I start. "And we'll probably need supplies." I start writing Supplies with my fingertip.

"What supplies? The cottage is only a day trip from London." Baz scoffs. He's lounging back on his chair, sipping his tea. He's clearly not interested.

"And we might need a place to stay overnight." I say, ignoring him. I write Accommodation next to Supplies.

"Again, we can drive back the following day, or any other day if needed Bunce." Baz says exasperatedly.

"Well what about what we might find there?" I challenge as I write Possible discoveries next to the other headings. "We need to know what to expect so we know what we're dealing with."

"Crowley Bunce we have no idea. There could be nothing there at all." He looks over at Simon.
Simon is quite. He's sitting at the table staring into his tea.

"But we need to plan." I argue. Surely we do. We can't just wing it for Merlin's sake.

"I don't see what there is to plan." Baz argues confidently. "We go, and then deal with whatever we find once we're there. Simon?" He turns to Simon again, and this time he takes his hand and I can't help but roll my eyes.

"Huh?" Simon asks, clearly distracted. I don't think he's been paying attention at all.

"When would you like to leave?" Baz asks quietly. I stifle the urge to roll my eyes again.

"Uh . . . tomorrow morning?"

"Done." Baz says, getting up from the table. Simon gets up with him. "We leave at eight."

"Okay." I agree reluctantly. "But what about--"

"I'll just get my stuff." Simon says to Baz, cutting me off. Then he looks apologetically at me. "I'm staying at Baz's tonight."

He races off to his room and starts banging around. He emerges shortly after with his backpack and both he and Baz head towards the door, Simon snaffling a few more biscuits on the way.

I sigh and wave my ring, "Clear the Air!" I say dejectedly. That was a complete waste of time, but at least we have a commitment to leave tomorrow morning.

"Don't be late!" I yell as they close the door to the flat.
Chapter 17

Baz

I need to hunt if we're going to be on the road tomorrow so we're on our way to Oxford. We dine with my family, where we listen to their accounts of their trip abroad. It's pleasant enough and it provides the necessary distraction we both need before our excursion.

We don't tell them what we were doing tomorrow, and the Bunces don't know either. This is just an investigative undertaking at this stage and we agreed to keep this and anything we find there strictly between the three of us. It's what Simon wants.

When we return to my flat we climb into bed and talk into the night. We talk about Simon's subject choices for his second year as well as my own, and we discuss my semester load. (He thinks I'm taking on too much.) When we get to the topic of the cottage it's late and Simon is sleepy so his words are slurred.

We're lying on our sides, face to face. My nose is pressed into his cheek.

"I just want to get this over with Baz." he mumbles sleepily. His eyes are closed as he nestles in closer, throwing his arm around my waist and his leg over mine. He still sleeps mostly in a knot, but these days he twists and knots himself around me.

"I know love, it will be soon." I say quietly, stroking his back.

He runs his fingers through my hair and his thumb across my cheek. The movement slow and soothing. "I dunno what we're going to find there, but I'm glad you're coming with me."

"Neither do I. But I'll be with you, no matter what Simon." I feel like I need to tell him this, like he needs to know he's not alone anymore.

"I know. I love you Baz." he mumbles sleepily.

"I love you Simon." I whisper. "Always."

I hold him until we both fall asleep.

-oOo-

We head off for Bunces sometime after eight. We were going to be on time for a change, but then Simon got an idea into his head and we lost another hour, albeit it was an extremely *creative* hour. He was full of nervous energy this morning and needed to get it out. He woke me rather early.

I realise once we're in the car that we could have just gone for a run.

"About time!" Bunce complains as we pull up closer to eight forty-five. "You're late." she adds, stating the obvious. It's an irritating habit of hers.

"Button it Bunce." I sneer. I'm not in the mood for her patronising superiority this morning. We're all a little nervous and she knows it. She climbs into the back seat and doesn't say anything more until I pull away from the curb.

"All right Simon?" she asks, ignoring me. Her voice is soft as she addresses him and I roll my eyes to
"Yeah, Morning Pen." He says.

We drive in silence for about five minutes until Simon turns to me. "When are we stopping for breakfast?"

I give him a quick glance then return my focus to the road. "We just had breakfast Snow." I remind him. I try to hold back a smile.

"Yeah but this is a road trip." He says confidently. "We need snacks."

"We've been driving for five minutes." I remind him. I don't even think it's been five minutes, more like three. "And it's only a little over an hour drive, I don't think you're going to starve."

Penny hums in agreement. "Mmm, I could do with a coffee. Oh, and maybe one of those lovely croissants."

"I worked up an appetite." Simon mumbles. I glance at him again and my lip quirks up into a smile, which makes him blush. It's fucking adorable. I sigh and make a beeline to the nearest café.

Once we stock up on breakfast supplies, (Coffee and croissant for Bunce, coffee, three scones and a sandwich for Simon, tea for me.) we're back on the road.

"Can we play something a little less thumping this early in the morning Baz?" Bunce whines at my music choice.

I sneer at her through the rear view mirror. "What do you suggest Bunce, some of that childish pop that you listen to?" I snap at her.

Simon looks at me sharply so I hold my tongue and switch the music through the channels until we hit on something quieter.

"Better." She says, once I hit on something more appropriate for this time of morning. She settles back in her seat and finishes her coffee.

Simon goes quiet as the drive progresses – he hasn't said anything since we stopped for breakfast. Bunce must have noticed as well, because she alternates between glancing at him anxiously and glaring at me pointedly in the rear view mirror. I take his hand and continue to drive. He hasn't even asked me if he could drive so I know he must be nervous.

We arrive after a little over an hour, following the car's GPS until we reach a small dilapidated cottage. It looks quite run down – like no one has been here for a very long time. The garden is overgrown and wild, and the gate is hanging lose by a rusted hinge. I give Bunce an uneasy look as I slowly pull to a stop. I stop the car and turn to Simon, waiting for him to make a move. He's staring at the cottage, not saying anything. He sits for another minute in silence, staring at the cottage in front of us until he finally opens the door and climbs out of the car.

Simon

Baz walks around to my side of the car and takes my hand. Penny walks to my other side and puts her hand on my shoulder. I'm glad they're here.

I take a look around. The cottage looks a bit run down, like it hasn't had any one look after it in a long time, a very long time. There's a yard in front, which is a decent size, but there's nothing in it but
overgrown shrubs and a few trees. The fence is a bit crooked and the paint is also peeling. The
cottage is fairly small and has two windows that are crusty with dirt and a door in the front has paint
peeling off. There's a little shed, out the back and a little to the side.

I walk through the gate and up to the door. We may as well go inside I think to myself, so I pull the
key that Penny's mum gave me that day from my pocket. The key gets stuck for a bit so I juggle it
around and then it clicks into place and I unlock the door. I look at Baz and then at Penny. Baz has
his wand out and Penny has her ring raised. I look at Baz again and he nods to me so I push open the
door and we go inside.

It's dark and it smells a little musty. Penny tries the light switch but nothing happens so she uses
magic to cast some light. It's not much but it's better than nothing. Then she goes to the windows and
pries them open, they're a bit stiff but they give eventually and let in a slight breeze.

We walk around the room for a bit, looking around. It must be a sitting room or a TV room or
something, but there's no TV – instead there's a small couch and some chairs and a little table in the
middle. Everything is covered in a thick layer of dust. The walls look like they are covered in some
sort of weird wallpaper but then I realise that it's writing. Penny walked up to one wall to get a closer
look.

I'm more interested in taking a look around so Baz and I walk from the sitting room to get a look at
the rest of the cottage. There's a little kitchen to the left, it has a few cupboards, a sink and an old
fashioned stove. And there's a small table pushed up against the wall. Everything there is covered in
dust too. We walk past the kitchen to couple of rooms but they are both locked. I check the key but
Penny's mum only gave me one key and it doesn't fit either room. Baz raises his wand but I shake
my head, I want to keep looking around right now. We walk through the rest of the cottage and get
to small laundry and bathroom at the back, I poke my head in as we pass, they're both empty so we
head out the back door. We're out the back now and I can see the little shed, we go inside but there's
nothing there. I turn around and face the cottage again and let out a breath I didn't realise I was
holding.

"All right Simon?" Baz asks, still holding my hand.

"Yeah." I say a bit unevenly. I think the hardest part is over. We're here, we've been inside and there
aren't any monsters or dark creatures lurking. I'm not sure what I was expecting but I'm relieved, it's
just a house and nothing more.

"Penny?" I call. I think we should stay together in any case. It's just like her to go off on her own,
she's stupidly brave and very impatient.

"In here." She calls from the cottage.

We go back inside where we find Penny still staring at the walls. Baz turns to follows her gaze,
looking at the walls as well. Penny turns quickly to face me.

"So." I say, nervously. "Nothing here?" I don't know why I feel so jittery.

She doesn't say anything. She just stands there, frowning at me.

"What?"

"I'm not sure . . ." Penny says.

"What is it Penny?" I demand this time.
She's frowning harder. "There's some writing on the walls." She goes on. "I can't really make it out."

Baz and I walk to where she is standing and she moves aside to let us see. I can see it a little better now in the bit of light she's cast with her ring. When I look around the room I can make out more writing on each wall, with lines and arrows pointing all over the place. Sometimes they are just single words and sometimes whole paragraphs but it's still too dark to read.

"Can you make any of it out?" I ask either one of them.

"No, I need more light. Baz can you cast some more light here please." she says.

Baz casts "Shine a light!" and the room lights up with a bright glow, like someone flicked a switch. Penny frowns in annoyance.

"I don't know that one." She says to Baz. She doesn't like to be out of the loop with new spells.

"Rolling Stones." Baz shrugs. "One of Fiona's, I'll teach it to you later." He says distractedly.

He's looking at the walls now, we all are. We can make out the words quite clearly so we start reading. There are phrases and versus and odd words, arrows linking some versus to others, then questions written below some of them. Some if it is quite neat and orderly, then some of the writing is scrawled and messy, I can hardly make out the letters.

It looks like a bunch of nonsense to me.

"Looks like a load of tosh to me." I say, and I can hear the relief in my voice. I wait for them to agree with me so we can move on and get through this place as quick as possible.

But Penny and Baz are not agreeing with me. They are not saying anything at all. They are walking around the room, staring at the writing on the walls, reading.

After a few minutes I can't stand it anymore. "What?" I ask.

They exchange a look I can't quite fathom.

"What?" I ask again. I'm beginning to feel uneasy but I don't know why. I just wish they would say something.

They turn to look at me.

"It looks..." Penny starts.

"Looks?" I ask.

"It looks like the prophecies Simon." Baz finishes.

There were loads of prophecies written about the Chosen One, about me. I know one or two, the main ones that magickal parents taught their kids, like a nursery rhymes. But I don't know many – growing up in a Normal orphanage meant I missed out on a lot of the stuff kids from magickal families just knew.

"So?" I say. "The Mage was obsessed with me in the end, probably trying to work out how to steal my magic and defeat the Humdrum like he said." I reason.

"I don't think so Simon." Penny says. She keeps reading, frowning deeply. "No one's been here in a long time. This was written a long time ago."
"So?" I challenge.

"So there's nothing here about stealing magic, or the Humdrum. It's all about the prophecy." She says impatiently. "And anyway, he was raiding all of those the magickal houses towards the end. That's where he was probably trying to find out how to steal your magic. That's what mum said."

"You're right Bunce." Baz agrees. "This is not about stealing someone's magic or the Humdrum. This is all about the Chosen one."

"But isn't that kind of the same thing?" I ask. "I was the Chosen One and he wanted to steal my magic."

"No. I don't think so." says Penny slowly, drawing out the words. "And he had that spell – that one he was using to steal Ebb's magic, remember? There's nothing here about that."

"Maybe we haven't found it yet." I offer.

"I need to study this more, to understand what it means." she goes on. Baz is next to her now, also reading.

I wait a bit longer. "Baz?" I ask.

He turns to face me. "Yes Simon?"

"What do you think?"

He hesitates for a while before he says anything. "I don't think this is about taking your magic either Simon." Then he turns back and continues to read.

They take their time reading each passage, starting at the top and working their way first down and then across, trying to follow the arrows and lines.

I look around the room for nothing in particular, but there's a newspaper on the coffee table so I pick it up. The newspaper is dusty and yellowed and it crackles and tears a bit where I hold it. I check the date. 1997. Looks like no one has been here for a long time. I start to feel uneasy.

I throw the newspaper on the couch and join them, just to have something to do. I start reading the verses now. I read verse after verse about the chosen one as I follow behind Penny and Baz. They wait for me to catch up.

All of the verses are different but they're all saying the same thing. How it was prophesied that the chosen one would come right when the world of mages needed him. About how one would come to end us, and one would bring his fall, how the greatest power of powers would reign and that it would save us.

And then I start to read the questions and notes below the verses. Most of it doesn't make any sense, there's lots of "When" and "How" questions along the way, as in when and how will the Chosen one come I guess. I'm next to Penny and Baz now reading the same wall, it looks like the last wall written on, the writing has got messier and more chaotic and there is no more after it.

And what I read sends a chill down my spine.

There, at the bottom of the farthest wall, scrawled in messy writing was the question. "What if I bring the greatest mage?" and underneath that "Who better than us, to raise our saviour?"
And then there's nothing else.

Baz

Fuck. It can't be. It can't be fucking true. Surely not. Not the Mage?

I glance at Simon. He has a strange look on his face.

"What does that mean?" he finally says.

I turn to Bunce and her face is unreadable. Guarded.

"Baz?" Simon pleads.

"I-" I start.

"What did he do to me?" he asks, his face flicking between both me and Penny.

"Simon," I say. "It may not mean anything."

"He said he got me wrong Baz." He goes on. "Did he do something? Did he do something to me, when I was a kid?"

"I don't know." I say, but a feeling of unease washes through me.

"Did he give me my powers? Did he bring me power somehow? How?" His eyes go back to the wall. He looks worried now. "And what does that next bit mean? Penny?" He looks to Penelope now, his eyes imploring.

Penny

What does it mean, how do you bring the greatest mage? Does this mean Simon? Did the Mage bring Simon?

I turn to face both of them. Neither is moving so I look back to the words and think it through. Mages aren't created, they're born. They are born to magickal families. Except for Simon, Simon came from the Normals otherwise how did he end up in an orphanage? Mages don't give up their children, everybody knows that.

And you can't just go around and create a chosen one for snake's sake. Mages certainly don't go around creating super mages to take over the world. There aren't any spells for that. (Are there?) And who would do something like that? It would take a great mage to be able to come up with magic powerful enough to be able to do that. (And do what exactly?)

But the Mage was not just any mage, he was very powerful, possibly the most powerful mage in the realm besides Simon and Ebb. And he was evil, he let the vampires into Watford that killed Baz's mum and turned Baz into a vampire and started the wars, he killed Ebb. He wanted to take over the entire realm.

I look at Simon again, he looks pale.

"Penny?" He says again. I look at between the two of them, Simon's eyes are questioning and Baz is guarded.

"Simon," I say. "I don't know for sure, I mean there's no evidence or anything, but it looks--"
Baz cuts me off then and takes Simon's hand. "We don't know what this means yet." he says harshly. Nobody speaks for a while.

I think back to what my dad told me about the holes in the magickal atmosphere. They first started documenting them back in 1997, around when Simon was born. I try a different tact.

"The holes in the magickal atmosphere." I say. "They started around the time when you were born Simon."

"Yeah, so?" he asks.

"So that would suggest that you had your power when you were born." 

"When I was born?"

Baz nods. "Yes, so that means he didn't give you your power as a child Simon, you were born with it."

We all stare at the words again. I take a step closer to Simon.

"So if he gave you your magic, it would have happened before you were born."

"But how?" He asks. He's frowning and he looks confused. "How do you give someone powers before their born? You'd have to know who you're going to give it to for starters."

"The next line." Baz says quietly. "'Who better than us, to raise our saviour.'"

"'Raise our saviour?'" Simon repeats. "How do you raise a saviour?"

Baz looks at Simon then. "Raise Simon." He says carefully. "As in--" 

"As in parent." I finish, just as careful. "As in raise an unborn child."

"Who's?" Simon asks.

"His own." Baz says quietly.

"But--" Simon whispers.

"But . . ." I say, shaking my head. "Why would he do that and then stick Simon in some orphanage? Mages don't give up their children, everyone knows that."

"The Mage wasn't an ordinary mage wasn't he?" Baz says bitterly. "I think he proved that when he started all the wars and sent dark creatures to kill mages. For all we know he did abandon his own son to an orphanage--"

"No!" Simon yells. He takes a step back and then stops. His eyes are wild. Baz and I stare at Simon.

Simon looks between Baz and me, his eyes pleading. No one says a word. Then he turns and walks out of the room.

**Baz**

For a moment I think he’s had enough and is going to leave, but instead he walks quickly to one of the locked rooms. I follow close behind. He tries the door again but it doesn't open so he bangs his
shoulder against it. Nothing happens so he does it again, and then again. I place my hand on his shoulder and he turns to look up at me, confusion in his eyes. I raise my want and he nods his head.

"Open Sesame!" I cast at the door. It swings open.

Simon walks into the room, Penny and I follow. I cast the light again and the room is lit up in a bright white glow. It's a small bedroom with a double bed in the centre and a small wardrobe against one wall and a chest of draws against another. We walk around the entire room in a few steps. There's nothing out of the ordinary in here, it's neat and tidy and it has a thick layer of dust over everything like the other rooms. Simon walks to the wardrobe and opens it carefully. There are a few clothes hanging on hangers, very old and shabby, but nothing else. He stares at the clothes for a minute, touching them carefully with his fingers. There are some jeans and a few printed shirts, women's clothes. He shuts the wardrobe and walks over to the chest of draws. He opens the first drawer, it's empty, then he opens the second and third, they're all empty.

He walks out and heads for the other locked room and tries the door handle again before he bangs his shoulder on that door. I Open Sesame that door as well and it swings open. Simon steps inside and I follow, casting more light so we can see. Penelope steps in behind us. Simon stands in the middle of the room and doesn't move at all.

It's a child's room, a nursery. It's similar to the one in the other bedroom but smaller and painted white. There's a bassinet in the middle of the room near the window and a chest of draws against one wall and there's a wardrobe against the other, all painted white. There's a faded blue stuffed elephant in the corner of the room, nothing else. A thick layer of dust covers everything.

I move next to Simon and that's when I see what he's staring at. There, on the chest of drawers is a set of small, brightly coloured wooden blocks. They have painted letters bonded on one side and they're set up in a row across the chest. Nine of them. They spell out a name, his name. Simon Snow.

I take his hand in my own. He lets me but he doesn't move. He just stares at his name. Penelope walks up to Simon's other side and when she sees what we're looking at, she lets out a small gasp. Simon's face pales as realisation dawns on him. He lets go of my hand and takes a step backwards and then another, until his back hits the wall. He slides down against the wall and pulls his knees up in front of him, still staring at the blocks. He doesn't move again.

Penny

We're standing in Simon's nursery. The Mage really was Simon's father. I can't believe it.

Oh Merlin, if the Mage was Simon's father, he gave him up and let him live in the orphanage all his life and then took him to Watford and mentored him and made him his heir, all the while knowing he was his son and never letting on.

And then he tried to kill him.

I turn to look at Simon, he's sitting with his back against the wall, staring at his name. He looks even paler than before – he looks as pale as a Visitor. Before I think to even move, Baz kneels in front of him and takes his hands in his own.

Who is his mother then? And where is she? Why didn't she look after him? Could then both be so evil as to stick him in an orphanage and forget about him? It can't be true.

"Simon." I say. "We don't know what this means yet." I sound more like I'm trying to convince
myself but I don't know what else to say.

I turn to Baz and Simon again. They already know what it means, without any doubt.

**Baz**

Simon is as white as me and he hasn't said a word. He's still staring at his name spelled out in those wooden blocks. I'm holding his hand, rubbing my thumb across the back of it. He lets me but he doesn't look at anything but his name.

"Simon." I whisper. "This may not mean . . . what you think . . . It may not mean anything." Although I think it does. I think it means *everything*. But there's no proof, so I tell him that. "There's no proof of anything yet."

No reaction.

"Simon–" I start, but I don't go on. What can I say? What could I possibly say to Simon right now?

The Mage is Simon's father. *The fucking Mage*. Of all the terrible fucked up things that the Mage has done to Simon this is by far the worst possible. It's not enough that he tried to kill Simon, that he tried to take his power, that he almost ended our entire Realm. But this, to have a child, create the Chosen One and then abandon him, this is evil.

I wish Simon would say something, anything but he doesn't, he just stares straight ahead. And the look on his face, his face is crumbling like his world is crashing down around him, and I suppose it is.
Chapter 18

Penny

I don't know how long we've been here in this cottage, in this room, but Simon hasn't moved from the floor since he sat there. And he hasn't said a word. And Merlin, his face – he looks shocked to the core. When he read the words on the wall he was frowning at first, like he didn't believe. He looked suspicious. I thought maybe he would want to talk all of this through like he normally does, to work it all out.

But once he saw the nursery – his nursery, I saw everything change. There was still some doubt on his face before, some hope even. But there's nothing there now. Now he looks positively gutted.

I wish he would look like he did that day when we first learned about the Will. That time his face went blank at first as well, but then he went off his head. I hope he blows up like he did then, at least it would be something. And right now anything would be better than this, this nothing.

Or even when we worked out that he was the Humdrum, that he was causing the holes in the magickal atmosphere. He was upset then but he was angry too. And he argued with us, not believing, until he decided to go to the Mage. But again, he did something.

Right now he's not doing anything, and it's scaring me. He's been sitting, staring blankly for maybe an hour or more. Baz has move from kneeling in front of him to sitting beside him, still holding his hand, watching him. Neither have said a word.

I join them on the floor, sitting against the wall next to Simon. He doesn't acknowledge me when I sit next to him or when I put my hand on his shoulder. I take it off again after a while. He doesn't acknowledge that either.

I glance at Baz but his eyes haven't moved from Simon the entire time. He looks worried, more than that, he looks positively frightened. I've never seen Baz look like this and this scares me just as much as Simon does.

I don't know what to do so I just sit next to Simon, watching the pair of them.

Baz

Simon has never looked like this before and I'm beyond worried, I'm terrified.

He's still staring at his name spelled out in blocks. Sometimes he turns and looks at the bassinet and then he looks at the blocks again. I'm still holding his hand. He doesn't acknowledge me but he doesn't let go of my hand at least.

Another half hour passes before Bunce gets up and walks around the cottage. I hear her wander from room to room until she heads outside. I keep my eyes trained on Simon – watching for a movement, a change, anything that will tell me he's still here. After a time she comes back inside and heads back to sit on the floor next to Simon but something must catch her eye because she stops abruptly and moves to the chest of drawers.

She stoops to pick up something off the floor, half hidden under the chest of drawers. She stares at it, unmoving. She has a small piece of paper in her hand – not paper I realise, a photograph. She walks silently towards us and stretches out the hand with the photo to Simon. He doesn't move or even acknowledge her so I raise my hand to take it.
It's a photograph of a young man and woman. They look like they are standing in front of the cottage. The man has wavy brown hair and is smiling broadly. It could be the Mage, in fact I'm certain of it. He's younger and his hair is longer and he's not wearing that ridiculous green costume but he has the Mage's face, his eyes, his chin. I turn my eyes to the woman next – she's leaning her head towards the Mage. I don't recognise her. She has a smile on her face and shoulder length and curly yellow-blond hair, and she's quite beautiful. One of her hands is holding his hand, the other is laying protectively across her belly.

She's pregnant.

I turn to Simon. I don't want to but I hand Simon the photo. He's still staring at the blocks so he doesn't acknowledge it at first. I bump his hand gently and he looks down at the picture in front of him.

He stares at it for a long time before he takes it from me. He doesn't do anything but stare. It's awful to watch. The pain in his eyes is endless.

Penny

Simon's eyes haven't moved from the photo since Baz handed it to him. He just stares at it. I've been wringing my hand together, wondering how I am going to get him to speak, to look at me even.

"Simon." I say, as gently as I can.

I wait for a minute. He doesn't move or even acknowledge that he can hear me. He just stares at the photo. I sigh to myself.

I don't know how to help him or what to do. I've never seen him like this. Whenever he's upset or angry or flustered or whatever, he's usually banging on about whatever it is that's annoying him, or he's banging into things himself. He's never quiet, Simon doesn't do quiet.

"Simon." I try again. This time I put my hand on his shoulder. He still doesn't acknowledge me.

"What Bunce?" Baz snaps. His voice is tense.

I turn to Baz instead. "Maybe we should just leave?" I say slowly, "There doesn't seem to be anything more here. Maybe we should just go home."

Baz

I drag my eyes away from Simon to glare at Bunce. I'm just about to tell her (in no uncertain terms) that she can leave, but I realise she looks as lost as I feel, and I feel my shoulders sag in defeat. Maybe she's right; we're not helping Simon by staying here and we've been through the entire property and there doesn't seem to be anything else here, any other shocking revelations. It's probably best to get him home with the state he's in.

I let out a resigned sigh. "All right." I say eventually.

She gets up slowly then, and reaches for Simon's arm. I do the same.

"Simon." I say. "We're going home." Then I add, "If you like."

I expect some resistance on his part, or for him to ignore me so I'm surprised when slowly he gets up. He walks up to the blocks and tries to pick them up in his arms, but there are too many of them and he still has the photo in his hand, so Bunce raises her ring and casts them into the air. He turns and
walks out the door without a word, the blocks following close behind. Bunce shuts the windows and
grabs the key from the coffee table and locks up as I follow Simon to the car. He climbs silently into
the car. The blocks fall gently into his lap and he places his hand on top of them. He stares silently
straight ahead.

I exchange a worried look with Bunce as she climbs into the car, saying nothing. I glance at Simon
again but he's still staring straight ahead. I start the car and back out of the drive.

The drive home is excruciating. No one says a word and when we arrive back at their flat Simon
simply climbs out of the car, photo still in hand, and walks up the stairs and into his room. He waits
for the blocks to follow him and then he closes the door. Bunce and I watch him go, wordlessly.

We stare at the closed door for a moment before Bunce abruptly spins on her heels and heads to the
kitchen. She puts on a pot of tea – I suspect to busy herself more than anything, and we sit at the
kitchen table and watch the tea steep. We pour ourselves a cup and drink in silence.

I take a cup of tea to Simon. He's lying on his bed with his eyes closed but I don't think he's asleep.
The blocks are stacked on his bedside table and the photograph is leaning against them. I put the tea
on the bedside table, careful not to disturb anything and then I sit on the bed next to him.

"Simon, there's tea here," I say quietly. He doesn't answer or even acknowledge me. I sit with him
instead, holding his hand and rubbing my thumb across the back in a soothing gesture. He doesn't
respond.

The tea goes cold.

"Simon," I try again. "I know this is . . . devastating. Please know that we're here for you if you want
to talk." He doesn't answer. I don't blame him – even I know that was lame. It's so much more than
that. (Crushing, tragic, gut-wrenching come to mind.) Eventually I get up and go back to the kitchen
and sit with Bunce.

We sit in silence until it's too dark for Bunce, and she stands and turns on the light. She sits again and
starts wringing her hands together – it starts to irritate me. I sit with my head in my hands.

"Do you think it's true?" Bunce whispers eventually.

"What? I say, my voice is flat. "That the Mage is Simon's father?" It comes out a bit harsh and I'm
immediately contrite.

"Yes."

I look up and see my fear reflected in her eyes. I decide to cut her a break, she's just as worried as I
am. I sigh unevenly. "It certainly looks that way doesn't it Bunce." My voice softer this time.
"Everything seems to point to that."

"I know." she goes on. "But, the orphanage–"

"I know."

"And that woman in the photo." she whispers again. "Is that Simon's mother?"

"Maybe, who knows?" I shrug. "It's highly likely."

"Who is she?" she probes.
"I don't know."

"And where is she?"

"I don't know."

"This is devastating." she says, stating the obvious again and I restrain myself from rolling my eyes. "How is he going to handle this?" she pushes.

"I don't know." I snap now.

She flinches at my tone and I feel like an idiot but I don't say anything. We sit in silence, each lost in our own thoughts while we drink our tea. I make another pot, which we drink in the same strained silence. It's fully dark outside by the time we run out of tea again. We've been sitting here for a long time.

I glance at Bunce, her eyes are half closed. "Go to sleep Bunce." I sign.

She nods and is about to get up but before she rises, she puts her hand on my shoulder and looks at me. "Go to him Baz." She says, giving me a weak smile. I nod as she leaves, and I feel the loss when her hand leaves my shoulder.

She closes her door of her room, I get up and walk slowly to Simon's room. I knock quietly, but enter without waiting for a response. I close the door behind me.

Simon is still lying on his bed with his eyes closed. He hasn't touched his tea. I climb onto the bed and lie next to him and wait for a response – nothing. I pull the covers over us and wrap my arm around his waist gingerly.

"I'm so sorry Simon." I whisper in the dark. He doesn't respond to my words or my touch. He doesn't move at all.

I whisper the words again and again into the night.

Eventually I fall asleep.
Baz

I wake early, in the same position I fell asleep. My eyes fall immediately on Simon. He's in the same position as yesterday and I stare at him, willing him to move. He doesn't.

"Simon, love" I say hopefully, brushing his arm lightly with my fingers. He doesn't answer, he doesn't move at all. I lay silently next to him with my hand on his waist, not sure what to do. I get up when I hear Bunce in the kitchen.

She looks at me questioningly when I enter the kitchen, and she's about to say something but I shake my head from side to side. She lets out a resigned sigh and then starts busying herself with the tea. I sink into the closest chair.

Eventually I decide to make some breakfast, none of us ate anything yesterday after our second breakfast on the road, and while I'm not hungry I'm hoping Simon will be. I put together a plate of poached eggs and toast, a cup of tea and a bottle of water and take it into his room. I cast my eyes over him as I slide the tray onto his bedside table, careful not to disturb anything. His eyes are closed.

"Simon." I say, carefully brushing his curls off his face. "We've made you some breakfast." I offer hopefully. "You should eat something."

He doesn't move, or react at all, so I sit on the bed next to him and take his hand. He lets me but doesn't say anything. He doesn't acknowledge me at all. After an hour of silence, I can't stand it any longer so I get up and walk out of the room.

Penny gives me a questioning look and I shake my head as I sag into the couch.

"I don't know what to do." Penny says as she sits beside me.

"Neither do I." I hate to admit it but it's true. I feel at a complete loss. I feel defeated.

Penny sits with Simon for a while and I take over. I remove the untouched breakfast tray, leaving the water, and I bring some sandwiches for lunch. Maybe he'll eat those. I sit with Simon, rubbing my thumb across the back of his hand silently. I lie with him, touching his waist lightly. Occasionally I whisper words of encouragement. It feels like I'm talking to myself.

"We're here for you Simon, Penny and I are. You can talk to us." I whisper to him.

When it gets dark I leave Simon's room and find Bunce sitting at the kitchen table. She looks up at me hopefully and I shake my head as I slide into the chair opposite her.

"What are we going to do Baz?" she asks, her hands wringing together nervously.

"I don't know." I say, my head is in my hands.

"Maybe we should call Dr Wellbelove." She suggests.

I lift my head and stare at her. Simon didn't want anyone to know about the visit to the cottage so I don't think that's an option – yet. But then again, that was before we unearthed this bombshell.

"Not yet." I say, trying to sound more sure of myself than I feel. "Give him some time."
"But he hasn't spoken, or eaten or anything all day." she counters. As if I didn't know that. "Maybe he's in shock." she suggest now.

Shit, he's probably in shock. Why didn't I think of that? "Maybe" I concede eventually. I hate it when she's more attune to Simon than I am. "Tomorrow perhaps, if things aren't better."

"Okay" she says resigned. At least she doesn't argue.

-0O0-

The next day is much the same as the one before. We take turns sitting with Simon, talking to him. I hold his hand. We bring him food and tea only to take it back out again hours later, cold and untouched.

I have to go hunt, it's been too long and I'm thirsty. I don't want to leave Simon but I'll be useless if I don't go before too long. I grab my keys and tell Bunce I'll be back soon.

Penny

Baz has gone to hunt I assume. I wait a few minutes until I can't stand it any longer, then I knock on Simon's door. He doesn't answer but I go in anyway. He's lying on his bed, still in the same clothes as yesterday and the day before. His eyes are open now but he's staring into space. He doesn't acknowledge me.

He hasn't touched his food. I think he may have had some water. Or maybe I'm hoping.

I sit nervously on the edge of his bed and take his hand. He lets me but he still doesn't look at me. I hold it anyway.

"I'm so sorry Simon." I say eventually. "But please, you're scaring me. You need to eat something. Baz is beside himself with worry--" I stop myself before I go any further. No need to guilt him into snapping out of this, even if I am desperate. Maybe I'll try that later.

Eventually I hear Baz return and I get up to leave. Then I remember the key to the cottage in my pocket, I've got the same jeans on that I wore the other day so I fish it out and put it on his bedside table next to the blocks. I shake my head at Baz as I walk out of Simon's room, brushing my hand lightly on his arm as I pass.

I phone Simon's manager and tell her Simon is sick and needs a few days off work. She sends him her best wishes for a speedy recovery. She likes Simon a lot, she says he knows all of the customer's orders and their names so I know she's fine with him having some time off.

Then I sit on the couch and wait. Baz sits with me for a while, until he can't anymore and he gets up and walks back into Simon's room. Eventually I go to bed.

Baz

I wake up and immediately sense something is different. I reach for Simon automatically, but he's not there. I sit up quickly and look around the room. I must have been tired last night because I fell asleep almost as soon as I came back from hunting.

I tried talking with Simon again last night again. I told him how sorry I was. I told him we were here for him. I told him we'll work through this with him. I told him I love him. I whispered the words into the night, until I fell asleep.
I get up and walk into the lounge room expecting to see Simon on the couch or in the kitchen but he's not there. I walk to the bathroom and he's not there either. I knock on Bunces door.

"Bunce?" I call.

"Yes?" she sounds half asleep. I must have woken her.

"Is Simon in there with you?"

"No." she says quickly, and I hear her stumble before she opens the door. She's rubbing her eyes and her hair is sticking up in all different directions. "Isn't he with you?"

"No." I tell her urgently. "I woke and he was gone."

"Well where could he be Baz? He's in no state to be wandering around outside, he hasn't eaten a thing in two days."

"I know that." I snap irritably. (Always stating the obvious.) I've got my mobile out and I'm already calling Simon. I walk into the kitchen, then the bathroom – checking each room again, Penelope following behind. The call goes straight to voicemail so I shove my phone angrily into my pyjama pocket. I race down the stairs and look around outside, not at all certain what I am looking for. (For Simon heading back with coffee maybe?) I don't see him so I head back upstairs and race into Simon's room. Penelope follows me in.

That's when I notice the blocks are gone. I look around, maybe he threw them in a fit of rage somewhere (anywhere). I check under the bed and around the room but they're nowhere. I look around again and this time I notice some things are missing. His satchel is missing, the one that he carries his books and laptop and his backpack is also gone, the one he brings to my flat with his spare clothes. (When he remembers to pack.) I check his wardrobe. I'm not sure but some of his clothes may be missing, although half of his clothes are in my wardrobe and his wardrobe is a mess so it's hard to tell.

I grab my mobile again and call Simon but it goes to voicemail again. I leave another message to call me please. I call my step mother and ask if Simon is there. He isn't. I ask her to call me if he turns up, the second he turns up. I don't answer any of her questions. Penelope calls her parents and then the Wellbeloves, he's not at either one. She tries the café where he works, there's no answer, it's probably not open yet.

I pull on my jeans and jumper from last night race down the stairs to look around again, and when I don't find him I get into my car and drive around trying to think of his favourite places. I drive passed the café and it's open now, but he's not there. I try some other cafés that make reasonable sour cherry scones but he's not at those either. I drive to his art class, I know he enjoys it and he may have gone there for some alone time, some solace perhaps. He's not there, it's not even open at this time of the morning. I try his gym but he's not their either. I try to think of any other place he might go. I can't think of any except for my flat. (My flat. Of course!) I drive much too fast and leap up the stairs, taking two at a time.

"Simon!" I call as I unlock the door. There's no answer. I run from room to room, looking for him but he's not here. No one's been here for days.

My mobile rings and I'm so unnerved I fumble with it before I can answer the call. It's Bunce.

"Have you found him?" I demand.

"No, have you?"
"No" I sigh, deflated. I rub my temple in agitation. "I'm on my way back."

I'm so full of nervous energy that I drive back to Simon's flat much too fast and when I get there I race up the stairs, taking two at a time. He can't have gone far I reason, I know he can fly for about an hour without stopping but he hasn't eaten a thing in over two days so he couldn't possibly have the energy to go anywhere. (And where would he go?) Maybe he just went to get something to eat. (But why take all of his things?)

Bunce is in the lounge room pacing back and forth. She stops when she sees me. There’s fear in her eyes.

"Anything?" she asks.

I shake my head, closing the door. I look around the lounge room as if Simon will be there and I just didn't see him before. He's not. (Obviously).

I head back to his bedroom and stand at the door, scanning the room. I look to where his bag and satchel were. Penny walks past me and stops in front of the bedside table.

"The key." she says with a start.

"What?"

"The key." She says again, nervously. "To the cottage."

"What about it?" I snap.

"It's missing. I put it there, on his bedside table, next to the blocks. Last night." She's pointing to the empty bedside table.

The cottage. Of course. He probably flew back to poke around a bit more – to get some answers perhaps. We race down the stairs wordlessly and climb into my car. I drive fast and we make it to the cottage in forty five minutes once we're out of London.

I pull up much too fast, spraying gravel and dust into the air behind us. We get out quickly and race to the door. It's locked. Penelope bangs on the door.

"Simon!" she yells, knocking harder.

"Move Bunce!" I say impatiently, shoving her with my elbow. I raise my wand to the door. "Open Sesame!" I yell and the door flies open. I walk in quickly and Bunce follows. "Simon!" I call.

"Simon!" Bunce echoes.

There's no answer.

We hurry from room to room, stopping for a minute in the nursery. Nothing has changed since we left a few days before, the newspaper is still on the couch exactly where Simon dropped and nothing else is disturbed. We walk through the cottage and out through the back door, around the shed and the gardens. There's no Simon.

Bunce tries a finding spell, just in case. He doesn't appear – I didn't think he would.

"He's not here." she says.

Obviously, I think. "No." I say.
"Maybe he's on his way, or he's already been?" she suggests hopefully.

I sigh. It's possible I suppose. "Yes, maybe." I agree, and we sit and wait. I check my mobile for any message and Penelope checks hers, but there aren't any. I call my step-mother again to see if Simon is there. He isn't, and she wants to know what's going on but I don't tell her anything, I don't know what to say.

We wait for hours but Simon doesn't turn up. Eventually Penelope says we should leave and reluctantly I follow her to the car.

"We can always come back." She says. "And we can check on the way back, in case he's . . . hurt . . . or something."

"He's not hurt!" I say much too loud.

"I know Baz." she says quietly. "I mean, in case he's stopped, somewhere." All I can do is nod.

We drive back to London, slower this time. Bunce casts finding spells on the way but we make it back to their flat without finding Simon. When we get inside, Bunce calls for Simon again. There's no answer.

We stay at the flat. Bunce paces, she wrings her hand, she calls Simon, she checks her mobile. I do the same. The day passes in silence. Eventually she goes to bed and I leave, driving past the café (now closed), the university, they gym and even the pub. I drive endlessly, street after street scanning the crowds, looking for his face. When I've had enough of driving, I stop the car and get out and walk the streets, and then I run, casting finding spell after spell, hour after hour until the first rays of light appear in the early morning sky. He's nowhere.

I go back to Simon's flat and try to sleep. I climb into his bed and lay my head on his pillow, pulling the covers up high. His bed smells like him and I breathe him in deeply. Sleep eludes me for a long time.

When I wake I immediately check my mobile. Nothing. I get in my car and drive around again, checking the same streets over and over. I drive past the café again, I go to the university gym, the library, the art room. I scan the footpaths.

Bunce is up when I return, she makes some tea. We sit at the kitchen table.

She stares at me before she speaks. "Did you sleep at all Baz?"

"A little." I shrug.

"We should go to the cottage aga–" She starts, but she's interrupted by her mobile. She answers it immediately.

"Hello?" I watch her expectantly, hoping that it's Simon.

Bunce's shoulders sag. "Oh hi Alex." She sighs. It's Simon's manager. Why would she be calling Bunce? "Simon's still not well–" Bunce starts to say, but she's cut short. She listens intently.

She moves the couch, listening to Alex. "What?" she brings her and to her mouth.

"When?" she whispers. She's quite for a while, listening. Then "Shit, I don't know Alex. He's going through some stuff." I'm starting to worry. I need to know what's going on so I stand in front of her. She says 'I don't know' a few more times and it's starting to irritate me. Then she sighs. "Okay".
"Let me know if you hear anything." Then "Thank you Alex. Goodbye." She hangs up and looks at me.

"What?" I demand.

"Simon." She whispers, looking at me. "He text Alex sometime early this morning. He's . . . resigned."

"What? Why?" I demand again. I'm still standing in front of her, towering over her so I move to sit down.

"I don't know Baz . . . He loves that job." She's staring at me with wide eyes. "What's going on?"

"I don't know." I say, an unsettling feeling is starting to wash over me. It sends a cold chill down my spine and my body shivers involuntarily.

"Why would he do that? He needs that job." She says, looking down at her hands.

I don't answer. Instead I sit, unmoving. I feel like I'm paralysed. My unease is threatening to engulf me completely.

Bunce jumps up then and runs and grabs her computer from the kitchen table and drags it back to the couch. She's typing away frantically.

"Come on. Come on." she says impatiently. "Thankfully he hasn't changed his password yet." she mumbles to herself. After a few minutes of cursing and typing, she stops, and sits back.

"What are you doing?" I look over to the screen now. She's logged into her university timetable for some unfathomable reason. It's really not the time to worry about coursework. No wait – not hers. Simon's.

His status has been changed to 'Deferred’. I stare at the word, transfixed.

"When did he do that?" she asks, confusion washing over her face. "Why would he do that?"

And I know. I've known for a while really but I wouldn't let myself think it. I wouldn't let myself believe it. But it's true and I know it now. "Because he's gone." I whisper and then my world falls apart.
Chapter 20

Penny

I'm feeling jittery so I put the kettle on again and make some tea. I pour the tea for Baz but he doesn't take it. Neither of us has had breakfast but I don't feel like making anything (and Simon and Baz are the breakfast makers) so I just grab some Weetabix. It tastes like cardboard as I try to force it down.

Simon. He's quit his job and he's deferred his degree. When did he do all this? I know that he text Alex this morning. Did he log in and defer his degree at the same time? That means he stopped somewhere to do all of that. Where? Where is he?

And why? Why resign? He loves his job and he needs it. And why defer his degree? He's only just worked out what he wants to do, after a year of studying a whole range of subjects, looking for something that sparked his interest. (Only to select a course that dad suggested in the first place.) The only reason he'd do something like that is if... Oh Merlin. What if Baz is right. What if he really is gone? What if he's not coming back?

I drink some tea, more to try to calm myself than anything.

I decide to shower and get dressed, more just to have something to do. I take my time in the shower, letting the hot water run over me while I think about Simon. Where could he go? Where would he go? Where can he go with those wings and that tail?

When I'm done I pour myself another tea and sit back on the couch, next to Baz. I don't think Baz has moved the entire time I was in the bathroom.

"At least we know he's okay." I say, placing my empty tea cup on the coffee table.

Baz doesn't say anything, he just ignores me.

"I mean, we know he's not dead in a ditch somewhere." I go on.

He still doesn't say anything.

"It's only been one day." I say, trying to sound calm. "He may come back."

Baz doesn't move.

Mum calls my mobile. She probably wants to know what's going on, but I don't know what to tell her so I let it go to voicemail. It's too early to tell them whatever it is that's going on yet, and Simon may come home soon, after he has some time to think.

Baz's mobile rings next. He doesn't move so I pick it up off the coffee table to see who's calling. His father's name pops up on the screen so I put the phone back on the coffee table unanswered. I'll let that go to voicemail too. I'm not about to try to explain any of this to Baz's father, and Simon's right – he is scary.

Baz doesn't say anything. He hasn't moved from the couch, he hasn't moved since we found out that Simon resigned and deferred his studies. First Simon was in shock for days and catatonic, and now Baz looks like he's going into freefall. I don't know if I can handle any more.

I get up and make some sandwiches and a pot of tea for lunch. Baz doesn't eat anything. We stay
sitting on the couch until it gets dark. I turn on the lights and nibble on the left over sandwiches but I'm not very hungry, it's more for something to do.

"Maybe he's back at your place Baz." I suggest hopefully. Baz jolts upright at my suggestion and gets up and leaves without saying a word. At least that got his attention.

"Call me if you find anything." I call out to him as he heads down the stairs.

**Baz**

Simon's not at my flat. I wasn't expecting him to be – I know he's gone. I knew it the moment I woke up that fateful morning when he wasn't next to me. I raced around looking for him, searching his favourite places, calling him, but I already knew.

He's been pulling away from me and Penelope from the moment he discovered the devastating truth. Pulling away from us and retreating into himself from the moment he saw his nursery. It was obvious. Simon doesn't go quiet, he bangs about and argues and gets himself worked up into a lather, but he doesn't go quiet. Unless he's defeated. And this has obviously defeated him.

I walk around my flat, checking each room. I don't know why, I'm not expecting to find him but I do it anyway. I've done a full circuit and I'm back at the door, staring at the empty room. My knees feel weak so I slide down the wall next to the door and bring my knees up. I pull out my wand and bring fire, letting it weave through my fingers.

**Penny**

I wake and immediately check my mobile. There are no new messages. I haven't heard from Baz or Simon so I call Baz, but there's no answer. I text him next but he doesn't respond. I let it go for now, knowing Baz he's moping around his flat and blaming himself for not seeing any of this coming. (But how anyone could see any of this coming is beyond me).

I call and then text Simon again. I don't expect an answer but at least I can let him know I miss him and want him to come home.

I'm worried about Baz. He looked positively devastated when he realised Simon was gone. I decide to head over to his flat but before I do I scrawl a quick note and stick it to Simon's door: *If you come home while I'm out call me immediately Simon, and then WAIT HERE!* I figure it can't hurt.

I knock on Baz's door and call out. "Baz open the door!" There's no answer. "Come on Baz I haven't got all day." I yell again. (Actually I have got all day, but I'm starting to get a little annoyed.) I bang on the door harder this time "Baz, Open the door now!"

He must use magic because the door opens slightly, but when I look inside there's no one there. I walk in hesitantly, looking around, and then I see Baz on the floor next to the door, wand in hand, fire weaving through his fingers.

He looks more dishevelled than yesterday and I notice he's still dressed in the same clothes he had on when he left my flat. He probably came home, found Simon wasn't here and then sulked in the corner. In fact, I bet that's exactly what he did.

He hasn't done this in a long time, a very long time. Simon told me all about that night when Baz lit the forest up and practically killed them both, saying his mother would have killed him if he knew that he'd become a vampire. Simon talked him down that night. (Actually he kissed him, but I'm not doing *that.*) Who's going to talk him down this time?
I walk to the kitchen and grab a glass of water and put it on the coffee table. Just in case.

I crouch down in front of him, a little distance away. "Basil." I say, as quietly and firmly as I can. "Put that out please. I need you to focus, not burn to death." He doesn't answer, just continues weaving the fire between his fingers. The stream of fire winding between his fingers continuously like a white hot coil of rope. It is kind of mesmerising but I can't get distracted now. I wait a little longer for him to respond.

When he doesn't respond I start again. "Basil." I say again, more gently this time. "I need your help. I can't find Simon on my own." He doesn't respond. He just sits there, weaving his fire through his fingers.

"Basil!" I demand this time. My patients is running thin.

"Go home Bunce. He doesn't want to be found." He says, finally. His voice flat.

Merlin this boy looks absolutely devastated. Haven't I got enough to deal with – with Simon gone? Do I really have to deal with Baz falling apart as well?

"So you're not even going to try?" I challenge, my voice firm. "Merlin Baz, he's only been gone two days. We have to try!"

He's still not looking at me, he just sits weaving fire between his fingers, staring at nothing. "He doesn't want to be found Bunce."

"Of course he does! He just doesn't know it yet." I snap.

He shrugs noncommittally.

"And for all we know he could be lying in a ditch somewhere, half-starved and out of his mind!" I go on, getting more agitated as I think through all the possible scenarios. Each one more devastating than the last. "No one's heard from him since yesterday morning. Anything could have happened in that time! We're wasting time here. We should go back to the cottage."

"Why?" he asks indifferently.

Oh Merlin and Morgana, he looks like he's given up completely already. This is not like Baz at all. Well, actually this is entirely like Baz but not when it comes to Simon. Baz is the most protective, devoted, loving boyfriend I've ever seen. Why is he giving up so soon, so easily?

"In case he's there!" I cry. I get up now and stand in front of him. I'd grab his arm and pull him up but he has fire weaving through his fingers, and he's extremely flammable so I don't want to chance it. (And he has vampire strength, so it would be a waste of time.) I put my hands on my hips and glare at him. "Get up Basil!" I yell.

That seems to pull him from whatever hole he was sinking into. He gives me a blank look, then he puts the fire out with a flick of his wrist and lifts himself to his feet.

He's standing in front of me now, staring at me. "Do you want to, um, have a shower or anything?" I suggest. He looks like he needs it. I don't know the last time he showered or changed his clothes.

He shrugs so I push him to the bathroom and close the door behind him. "Hurry up!" I yell at the closed door. I move to the lounge and sit down. (It's a very nice Chesterfield, very comfortable.) I check my mobile while I wait for Baz to get ready. Mum's called me a number of times, and I realise that I'm going to have to tell her what's going on if Simon doesn't turn up soon.
**Baz**

I let Bunce coerce me into driving back to the cottage even though I know it's a waste of time. Bunce hasn't seemed to work it out yet, that Simon isn't coming back. Either that or she has but she won't acknowledge it. I don't know which and I don't actually care either way. I'm in my own private hell here and I don't have any space to think about anyone else.

I don't speed this time – there's no point, and when we arrive Bunce is agitated and impatient. She cast a few finding spells on the way but finds nothing. She races out of the car now and opens the door with her ring. She's going to run out of magic if she doesn't slow down. I don't bother getting out, I wait for her in the car. I can hear her racing around the rooms and out the back door. Eventually she returns to my car, walking slowly.

"Nothing." she says, like she was expecting to find Simon sitting on the couch waiting for her. She wanders around the cottage again for a final check but it's clear that Simon hasn't returned. Why would he? This place unearthed nothing but the appalling tragedy that is his life. Nothing good emanated from coming here. I don't expect he'll return to this god forsaken cottage at all.

Simon's not coming back.

It's as clear to me as the day is long. He's cut his ties with us, with our magickal world. And why not? The magickal realm hasn't treated Simon very well. Life hasn't treated him well. I'm surprised it took him this long to leave us. It was only a matter of time before he realised that this world has nothing to offer him, that he's better off without us; the magickal world that abandoned him, lied to him, used him.

Left our realm. Left us.

Left me.

And why shouldn't he? What could I possibly offer him? Me, a vampire. I'm dead for Crowley's sake. What could I possibly have to offer to Simon that he can't get somewhere else – anywhere else in the Normal world. Far less complicated and far more alive. He's finally realised what I always expected him to work out eventually; that he doesn't need me, that he's better off without me. He's finally done what I expected him to do all along. Leave.

We drive back in silence. I drop Bunce at her flat without saying anything and then I head back to my flat. Once inside I shut the door and then slide back down the wall. I bring out my wand and bring fire again. There's nothing else now.

**Penny**

Seven days have passed since Simon left. Every day I call Simon and leave a message or three. Then I walk around the neighbourhood. I go to our uni, into his art class, to his work, looking for him. I cast finding spells and I ask around. I even stopped at the pub one night and talked with some of his class mates. They haven't seen him since summer break started, since that night we confronted him.

Every night I skype Micah.

Uni starts next week. How am I going to look for Simon and study and work? I don't know how I'll manage. And what about Simon's classes? I know he's deferred but that must have been in a moment of anger or frustration or something? Surely he'll want to continue with his studies, he was doing so well. And then there's Baz, how on earth is he going to cope?
I skype Micah. He wants to come to London immediately but I tell him not to. What can he do?

"We can't keep flying around the world Micah. And uni is just about to start. You need to study. Merlin, I need to study." I'm sitting on my bed in my pyjamas, Micah looks like he's just finished baseball practice.

"Are you sure Penny?" He asks again. I can see how worried he is about me.

"Yes Micah. Baz and I will sort this out ourselves." I tell him.

"Poor Simon, this is a big blow for him." he says.

"I know." I sigh over my laptop. "He's been through so much, and now this." I take off my glasses and rub my eyes tiredly. I don't think I've had a full night's sleep since all this started. It's beginning to hit me.

"No wonder he left." He says. "He probably just needs some time Penny, maybe that's all this is."

"I don't know Micah, he's never left before." I say, more to convince myself than anything. "I'm just so worried about him."

"I know Pen. Call me if anything happens. Anything." He stresses the last word and I love him a little bit more for that. "I love you Penny."

"I love you too. And don't worry. I don't want you to worry." But I know he will. Still, I'm glad I told him. I can't handle this all on my own.

I've gone to Baz's flat every day and every day he's in a worse state. He doesn't get up, he doesn't help me look, he doesn't do anything but stare at his mobile. I think he's doing nothing but scroll through photos of Simon – which is not helping at all. Occasionally he calls Simon to leave a message, each one is more desperate than the last. He looks terrible, greyer than I've ever seen him, even after that time he was kidnapped. And he's thin and drawn as well. I don't think he's showered since I forced him when we last visited the cottage. I don't know if he's eaten anything. I don't even think he's been hunting in over a week. Can vampires even last that long?

I don't know what to do.

Simon is nowhere. I've tried every finding spell I know, including the one Fiona used to find Baz. And I've been to every place that's important to him and we've found nothing. How can Simon just disappear, he's got wings and a tail for snake's sake. He's hardly inconspicuous.

I think it's time to call my mum, or call Baz's family, or both. I've left this as long as I can and I can't handle this on my own anymore. I pace my flat, trying to decide who to call first. Mum will probably go into hysterics, demanding to know everything right away. And then there's Baz's dad; he scares me more than mum. She's always Fiona I suppose. She's scary as hell but at least she's better than the alternative. I actually have no idea where she is, whether she's in London or Prague, but I do have her number. (Simon gave it to me as a joke once, he knew I was missing Agatha after she left and said to call Fiona if I wanted some girl time, hah!) I start with her.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" she asks curtly. Even over the phone she's intimidating.

"Hello Fiona, Penelope Bunce here."

"I know that." she snaps. "What do you want?" I hear her breathe, she sounds like she's taking a drag of a cigarette.
"It's Baz--"

"What about Basil?" She demands, cutting me off. Her voice is severe and commanding.

"And Simon." I go on.

"What have those two lovebirds gotten themselves into this time?" She says. She sounds impatient so I need to get the point.

I take a deep breath. "Simon's gone missing and Baz is a mess, he hasn't hunted in over a week." I say quickly, wanting to get this over with.

"I'm on my way." She says, and then hangs up.

I don't know where she is or where she's on her way from but I decide to head straight over Baz's place to meet her – to fill her in, just in case he's not in a cooperative mood. I decided to deal with Baz first as he's the one in danger of starving to death. (Is that even possible for a vampire, isn't he already dead?) I'll talk with mum about Simon after I deal with Baz.

Fiona arrives later that day. I've been at Baz's flat for a while now. I've been sitting on his couch watching him and his bloody fire for hours. I gave up talking to him hours ago and I'm a nervous wreck. She bangs on the door so loudly it startles me after hours of sitting in silence. I get up and let her in.

"What's going on?" she demands as she charges in.

Fiona is just as intimidating as Simon says she is. She strides in purposefully – all commanding and determined, so tall and lithe. Even her black hair looks intimidating with that white streak down the middle. She has the same heavy lidded eyes and pouting lips as Baz and his mother but they're not quite as arresting, like they've been watered down slightly, even with that bright red lipstick. She's wearing black shiny skinny jeans, black Doc Martens and a white tee shirt with a Union Jack on the front (in shades of black) and she's carrying a black leather jacket. (Doesn't she know that it's summer?)

Baz glances up at her and then glares at me accusingly. I didn't warn him that she was coming – I'm not that stupid. He doesn't say anything, he just keeps playing with that incessant fire.

She stands in front of him with her hands on her hips, assessing him. "Christ, Basil. You're a mess." Then she turns to me. "What the fuck is going on Bunce?"

I tell her everything, about the will and our visit to the cottage, the nursery, the photo of the pregnant woman, about the Mage being Simon's father. It all pours out, and I'm relieved in a way, not to have to carry this burden all on my own any more.

"What the actual fuck?" she says incredulously. "The Mage? His fucking father?"

"We think so."

"And the woman?" she demands.

"We don't know." I say finally.

Then I tell her Simon disappeared a week ago and point to Baz.

"What a fucking mess." She says, pacing in front of Baz. She stops to light a cigarette and takes a
deep pull from it. Really? She's going to smoke, in front of Baz? She must remember herself because all of a sudden she drops the full cigarette into the glass of water I left on the coffee table. She moves to stand in front of Baz again, assessing him.

"He needs to hunt." I say.

"I can see that." She snaps. "Come on Basil, get up." She demands. He doesn't move so she raises her wand and threatens him. "Get up Basil or I will make you."

He glares at her this time, narrowing his eyes at her, clearly aware that she'll follow through. He finally waves away the fire, (Thank Merlin) and reluctantly gets up. She grabs his arm and pulls him to the door.

'Where are you taking him?' I ask.

"Oxford, he's better off there with his family than here alone." She says as she drags him out of the apartment. I follow them out and close the door behind me. "Jesus Christ Baz, how long has it been since you had a shower?" she mutters, and then she looks over her shoulder to me "And he can hunt there."

I stand at the door, unsure what to do next. I think I need go to mum's and tell her what's going on. I follow them down the stairs and watch as Baz and Fiona climb into her MG and drive away.

I've never felt more alone.
Chapter 21

Fiona

He's a mess this one. One week without the love of his life and he falls apart. Jesus! I drive fast because I'm more worried that I made out to that Bunceling. (She's not a Magling anymore, not since they all worked out what a murdering bastard he was.) I don't really care much for the Bunces, they're not one of ours after all, and there's a whole bunch of them, bred like rabbits as soon as they left Watford they did. But she did help Baz find who murdered Natasha and she did help bring an end to the Mage. And she's a smart one (like her mother no doubt, her father's a wet rag) so she's good to have on your side when the shit hits the fan, and right now, it looks like the shit has really hit the fan.

We get to Oxford and I drop Baz off by the forest before we get to the house. "Don't come back until you've knocked off a deer or two!" I yell out the window. "Then come to the kitchen for something to eat!" I yell again. "I'll be waiting!" I close the window and drove up to the house.

I used to be quite uneasy discussing Basil's vampirism, but that was before the Coven appointed me head vampire slayer. (Quite ironic when there's an actual vampire in the family.) Since I've had the pleasure of chasing those blood suckers across the continent and back I've gotten quite used to the whole deal. And Basil is nothing like those vampires in any case, he doesn't touch humans of course, he's a Pitch and we've brought him up right. He keeps to legal game and pests and he has a human boyfriend for Christ's sake. He's the most unwilling vampire around, and that's something.

No one's home so I wait in the kitchen. Vera says they've all gone to London for the day to organise the children's school or something or other, I don't really care. I get lunch sorted for Basil and myself, then I wait, smoking and pacing, until he returns.

What a fucking mess. I'm still shaken by just how bad he looks. And only after a week of sulking and pining for his absent boyfriend. What's he going to be like if the Chosen One doesn't come back? A fucking mess that's what.

I might take the piss about his chosen one whenever I have the chance, but there's no denying that Basil is the happiest he's ever been since they've been together. And he deserves some happiness after all the shit he's been through – that the Mage put him through. If Snow doesn't return it's going to tear him apart, and Christ knows I don't need a depressed vampire moping around for all eternity. I've got to sort this out now.

Basil comes in a little later. His cheeks have a bit more colour and he's definitely less grey so I think he must have fed well. Lunch arrives and we sit and eat some leftover roast beef sandwiches and egg salad. There's a pot of tea that we demolish and I magic up another one. Basil knocks off some of the sandwiches and half the salad, and lots of tea. His skin looks a little better again but he still looks defeated.

"What the fuck Basil?"

"Leave it Fiona. This is none of your business." His voice is flat.

"You're my business, so this is my business."

He doesn't say anything, he just stares out the window across the great lawn, lost in thought.
"You have to eat Basil, and hunt. Can you at least remember to do that? Christ, your father and Daphne will be beside themselves if you croak because you've lost your will to live."

"I can't die if I'm already dead Fiona." He says like the cheeky brat that he is. He's always had a smart mouth on him. I guess I taught him well after all.

"Don't be a smart arse Basil. Or I swear I'll spell you dead myself." I huff and he ignores me. "We need to talk to your father." I say eventually.

"Why?"

"Just trust me, we do." So I make him have a shower and get changed. "Really Basil, you look like you haven't washed in a week." He heads upstairs to his room and I listen until I hear the shower start. After a time I hear the shower stop, and then I finally relax a little. He doesn't come down again.

His family returns later that evening and after I hand out some gifts to Mordelia, the twins and the baby, I shoo them out to Vera and I round up Malcolm and Daphne into the library. Vera brings some tea and then calls for Basil. We drink the tea while we wait. This should come from him, not me.

He comes in a short while later. He's showered and dressed and his face is no longer that awful grey like a London winter, he looks a hell of a lot better than when I picked him up. He sits facing his parents. They look at me expectantly.

"What's going on Fiona." Malcolm asks, bored and looking slightly amused.

I decide to get straight to the point. "The Chosen One's gone AWOL." I tell them. Basil glares at me and I shrug back at him. "Tell them Basil."

They both turn to Basil now, curious.

"He's gone." Basil says, looking out the window. He doesn't look at anyone.

"Why?" Daphne cries, obviously concerned. Not her too. Christ!

We're all looking at Basil now. He finally stops staring at the garden and turns to look at his parents, first his father, and then Daphne. He smooths down his trousers before he speaks.

"We're fairly certain that the Mage is Simon's father. His biological father." Basil says finally. I think I saw him wince at the word 'father.'

"Oh no!" Daphne gasps. She brings her hands to her mouth. Malcolm takes her other hand in his.

Basil proceeds to fill them in about the Will and the cottage. When he mentions the nursery and the photograph Daphne weeps.

"Poor Simon!" She cries. Malcolm lets go of her hand and places it on her shoulder. He gives it a gentle squeeze. Daphne looks up at Basil. "Who is she Basil? The woman in the photo?"

"They don't know." I say when Basil doesn't answer.

No one speaks for a time. We watch Basil as he stares out the window.

"Why are you here Fiona." Malcolm says, looking at me.
I knew this was coming eventually. I tell them how Bunce called me, worried about Basil. I don't tell them exactly how bad Basil was when I picked him up, or that he hadn't hunted for over a week. They don't need to know that – it would just worry Daphne.

Basil sits quietly while the rest of us talk. He doesn't look at anyone. Daphne looks sick with worry. She's quite taken by the Chosen One for some inexplicable reason. Malcolm looks wary. He has his hands clasped in front of his mouth.

"Anyway, this lovesick puppy was a bit of a mess when Bunce called me so I picked him up and brought him here." I finish.

"Oh Basil!" Daphne cries. "We need to find Simon. What can we do?" And it's so bloody heartfelt that even I'm starting to feel a bit emotional. No fuck that, I'm a rock. I don't do emotions. I mentally shake myself to stay focused.

Basil doesn't say anything. He just stares out the window into the gardens.

I look at Malcolm. He still has his hands clasped in front of his mouth. I catch his eye and look at him expectantly. He clears his throat.

"Basilton." He says. "I need to tell you something."

**Penny**

I call mum and tell her I need to talk to her and dad. She's been going into Watford every day even though term hasn't started yet, but she comes home early when I ask her to. By the time I finish my third cup of tea with dad, she's walking in the door. My brothers and sisters are around the house somewhere, but I don't bother to talk with them today, I need to focus.

Dad makes mum a cup of tea and then head upstairs to dad's study. When we're all seated, they both stare at me expectantly.

"Simon's missing." I say, twisting my ring around my finger.

Mum pulls her chin in and her eyes go as wide as an owl's. "*Missing!*" she shrieks. "What do you mean missing?"

"He's not missing exactly . . . well, yes he is." I stammer. "He left."

"What are you talking about Penny?" Mum cries again, and dad puts his hand on her arm to calm her.

"Let Penny speak Mitali." he says, patting her arm calmly. "Penny, what's going on?" He asks, turning to me.

I take a deep breath and then I tell them everything, starting with our visit to the cottage and what we found there; the nursery, the blocks spelling his name, the photo of the Mage and the pregnant woman. For some reason I leave out the bit about the prophecy – it doesn't feel right to mention it without Simon.

"We think she's Simon's mum . . ." I trail off.

They're both staring back at me silently. We're all silent for a long time.

"The Mage? Simon's father. I don't believe it." Mum says, shaking her head from side to side. She's
fairly quiet about the news. I thought she'd be shrieking – she's usually more dramatic. She sits staring at the wall for a long time.

"Who was the woman in the photo?" Dad asks when it's clear that mum isn't going to say anything.

"I don't know, I didn't get a good look, and it was taken a long time ago." I sigh. The photo was so old that even if I did get a better look it wouldn't have made any difference.

"And Simon's gone?" Dad asks. He's obviously just as worried as I am.

"Yes. We've looked everywhere for him." I tell them, looking between each of them as I speak. "He quit his job and deferred his studies, (mum gasps at that) and Baz is a mess and I don't know what to do." I finish, finally bursting into tears. My dad comes straight over to me and hugs me and it feels good. Then he moves to let mum hug me. She holds me tight for a long time. I let the tears fall.

I stay for dinner but mum and dad and I are so tense that it's a quiet, awkward night. After we finish clearing up, dad takes me home and sees me into my flat.

"We'll sort something out Pen." He says reassuringly. "He can't have gone very far." He adds, and I nod and he hugs me again before he leaves.

I pace the flat as I check my mobile for messages, there aren't any. I go to bed.

Baz

My father is talking to me about my mother. Why in Crowley's name he's brought this up now is beyond me – Mother has nothing to do with Simon leaving. Maybe he's trying to make me feel better.

I'd rather he get to the point.

"Basil, I don't know how relevant this is to the matter at hand . . ." He starts.

"Father?"

"Your Mother . . ."

"What about my mother?"

He stops talking and stares down at his hands – they're clasped together in front of him now. He looks hesitant, like he's picking his words carefully.

His eyes flicker to me for a moment and then drop back to his hands. He lets out a heavy sigh. "That night, when your mother came to Simon through the Veil . . ." He goes on.

We're all staring at him unabashedly now. I don't have any idea why he's bringing this up. All of this came out at the trials, how she came to Simon and told him to find Nicodemus to uncover the truth of her murder. Is he still upset that she came to me and not him? And what has this got to do with Simon?

"The second visiting . . ." he says after a time.

"What about it?" I challenge. I must be upset because I never speak to my father in such a tone.

His eyes flicker back up to me for a moment. "Where she called you her 'Rosebud boy' . . ."
I know instantly what he's talking about. "Yes?" I haven't thought about that in a long time.

Father is still looking at his hands. "I don't think that was your mother . . ." He says quietly, finally looking up at me. "She never called you that."

I think about that for a moment. I had forgotten all about the second part of her visit. When she called me her 'rosebud boy' and said 'he said we'd be stars'. Simon and I couldn't find any relevance to solving my mother's murder so we just forgot about it, focusing instead on finding Nicodemus. I hadn't even thought about it since that night, when Simon gave me his magic, when I took Simon to the stars.

I've thought about that many times. When Simon held my hands on my bed and pushed his magic into me. So much power, I felt like I could do anything. And his hands in mine, I did take him to the stars and when he pulled away it felt like the tide pulling back, if the tide was made of heroin and fire.

And my father is right, my mother called me her 'little puff' all the time. I remember her saying it every day. I liked it, it made me feel special, loved. She either called me that or Basil and occasionally Basilton but never anything else. She never called me her 'rosebud boy'.

"I think that may have been Simon's mother." Father says finally, breaking into my thoughts.

My head snaps up at his words.

"Malcolm!" Daphne gasps, throwing her hand over her mouth.

I think about what Simon repeated back to me – what he said she'd said to him. What was it? 'Simon, Simon, my rosebud boy'. That's what she'd said; 'Simon, Simon, my rosebud boy'. 'Simon' not 'Basilton'.

Of course. Of course! It's so obvious now that I can't see how we could have missed it. She had even said his name for Crowley's sake! It couldn't be any more obvious. How could I have been so blind?

But I know how. I was so incensed that I'd missed my mother's visit, that Simon got to see my mother instead of me. I was blinded by my anger, and then I was so intent on finding my mother's murderer that I didn't even think for a moment what the rest could mean.

And Simon, so selfless, so hell bent on helping me, so determined to help me find my mother's murderer that he didn't even think for a second that it could have anything to do with him. Why would he? He always thinks of others before himself, even his sworn enemy.

I didn't think it was possible to feel any worse but I was wrong. This is all my fault. I shouldn't have missed something so obvious. How could I have been so selfish?

"Of course." I mumble, shaking my head.

"Okay Basil." Fiona pipes up. "I can see that look on your face."

I turn to Fiona. She's giving me a knowing look.

"Don't you dare go blaming yourself for this. This is not your fault." She says determinedly.

"Of course it's my fault." I snap back. "I should have realised."

"Christ Basil, snap out of it!" Fiona says firmly. "You're not helping Simon with this ridiculous guilt
"Basil, you had a lot on your mind. You were trying to solve your mother's murder, you'd just been kidnapped." Daphne says quietly.

I look between Fiona and Daphne, they're nodding at me and it irritates me. I turn to my father instead. "Why didn't you tell me—us, before?"

He stares down at his hands again, and then looks back at me. He hesitates once again before he speaks. "Basil, there was a lot going on... After everything that happened, we nearly lost you... You and Simon were... content... I didn't want to dredge up the past..." he trails off.

"It wasn't the time." Fiona snaps, shaking her head impatiently. "Anyway, you're all missing the point."

We all turn to look at her. I raise my eyebrow in question.

"She came through the Veil." She says looking at each of us pointedly. No one moves and she rolls her eyes mightily. "That means she was a mage."

Shit.

"Oh, and she's dead."

Fuck.

A mage, his mother was a mage. Both of Simon's' parents were mages, he didn't come from the Normal world after all. But he is still an orphan, his mother died and he was left in the orphanage alone. And he doesn't know, he doesn't know that it was his mother that came to him that night through the Veil.

I stand up quickly, almost knocking over my chair in my haste. I need to think. I need to go for a walk. I need to understand exactly what the fuck this all means. I leave the room without a word and wander back into the woods where it's quiet.

I wander aimlessly for hours, thinking about everything that's happened recently. The Mage was Simon's father. The Mage somehow brought him here. Simon's mother was a mage. She came back for him. How will he be able to handle this latest piece of information? Just when we think there couldn't possibly be any more devastating news, the revelations just keep coming. And how can I tell him anyway? He's gone. He left.

I stay at my parent's house for the night. I have dinner together with my family and Fiona – it's a subdued evening. The next morning I insist that Fiona take me back to my flat, I can't stand the scrutiny of my family for another minute, and whenever I look over at the lawns here all I can see is Simon flying, Simon playing with my siblings, Simon sitting quietly in the shade, drawing.

Fiona doesn't want to take me back to London but I promise to come back in a couple of days and I promise to eat and to hunt.

"All right." she says reluctantly. "But I'll be checking on you every day boyo so don't go starving yourself or go off wallowing in self-pity again. Got it?"

"Fine." I say as she drives me back to London.

Penny
I wake up and walk into the kitchen to make a cup of tea. Baz is sitting on the couch looking at his mobile.

He looks a hell of a lot better than he did yesterday morning, even though he still looks like crap. His cheeks have a bit of colour and he looks like he's had a shower. He's definitely changed his clothes. Thank Fiona for coming through when she did. The Pitches may be malevolent and dark but Baz was right – they're fiercely loyal to their own.

I bring two cups of tea to the coffee table and put them down. "I told my parents." I blurt out as soon as I sit.

"Simon's mother was a mage." He says in a flat voice.

"What?"

He doesn't say anything more so I get up and stand in front of him. His eyes are vacant.

"Baz what the hell is going on now?" I demand.

"She's dead."

"What?"

"Sit." He says. And then he fills me in on the discussion with his family yesterday, and I can see he's blaming himself for not seeing it, for not realising it when Simon first told him what his mother had said from beyond the Veil.

I level my eyes at him. "Baz this is not your fault."

"Yes it is Bunce." His voice is empty. "It was obvious. I should have realised."

I shake my head and I'm about to disagree but I don't want to argue with him right now. He's in one of his dark moods and I know that no matter what I say, he's going to blame himself. He blames himself for Simon leaving and now he blames himself for this. He's being completely ridiculous and pathetic but there's no point in telling him now, he won't listen to me.

"Well, we need to find him now more than ever." I say instead. "To tell him!"

Baz doesn't say anything. He doesn't touch his tea.

I'm still in my pyjamas so I get up to have a shower. When I come out Baz is gone.

Baz

I go home. There's no point in staying at Simon's flat, I don't want to hear Bunce prattle on about looking for Simon. There's nowhere to look. He's gone.

I look around my flat. There are reminders of Simon everywhere – his charcoals on the coffee table (leaving black smudges on its surface), his shoes thrown haphazardly on the floor. And when I walk into my room it smells like him. Damn my vampire heightened sense of smell, I can smell him everywhere. He is everywhere; discarded clothes thrown across my chair, shoes on the floor, drawings on the desk. Crowley, half his clothes are in my wardrobe. I can even see the dent in the pillow from when he last stayed over and the memory of our last morning together washes over me. I crumble to the floor against my bedroom wall and let the tears fall.
Another week passes and uni starts. Baz has all but given up looking for Simon. Well he refuses to help me look for him and he refuses to talk about looking for Simon anymore. He refuses to talk at all. But I think he still goes out at night looking for him on his own. I call around his flat sometimes late at night and he's never there.

I go to my classes and I look around the uni even though I know he's not there. I Skype Micah and tell him I still haven't found Simon. He tells me about his classes but I know his heart isn't in it, he just wants to know that I'm okay.

I start going around to Baz's place early in the evening before he heads out for the night, to make sure he's okay. I bring him food because I don't think he's shopped since Simon left and he definitely hasn't cooked anything. I make sure he eats something before I leave. He eats so I will leave, so then he can.

Fiona calls him every day to make sure he hunts and I text Fiona to tell her how he's doing. He is obviously hunting because he doesn't look as bad as he did that week. He still looks terrible – gutted even, just not gutted and dying.

Baz won't tell me where he goes every night but I'm certain he's out looking for Simon. Alex at the café tells me she's seen Baz a few times. He goes in, looks around and then leaves. And I've seen him hanging around outside the pub where Simon went a few times. He doesn't go inside. He stands out the front, waiting, scanning the crowd. I go in and ask his friends but no one's seen him.

I know Baz drives around the city at night looking for Simon too. I've seen him leave when I leave. And when he drives to Oxford, I know he checks the route, casting finding spells and looking for signs. He doesn't find anything.

Baz looks like he hasn't slept in weeks. He still goes to classes and his parents and his coach insist he continue playing football. I don't think he wants to – his heart's just not in it judging by the way he played last Saturday. I went to his game, more to see how he is than watch the match. I sat with his family, which was unusual to say the least, but right now I don't actually care. His step mother seems nice enough though and his siblings were nice and well behaved. (Not at all like my siblings)

Baz was completely different to his normal professional self on the field. He was aggressive and angry – merciless even. He got yellow carded more than once. I could see his father getting more and more agitated as the game went on.

And to top it off his uni was playing against my uni so and there was an incident after the game when that idiot Tom, (that boy Simon said had tried to crack onto him) said something about Simon to Baz. Baz pushed him against the wall of the change room so hard that I heard it when his head hit the wall and then Baz was saying something back to him – I don't know what, but his voice was low and dangerous, he looked absolutely menacing. Luckily I was right there and I silently spelled them apart with my ring. I swear Baz was going to kill him, actually kill him. And that boy, Tom, had such a terrified look on his face I almost felt sorry for him.

Baz's coach told him off after that, and said he needs a few weeks off to 'calm down' and to 'sort himself out'. So now Baz isn't playing football anymore. He's not running either or practising violin. (I saw it at his flat, the case was covered in dust.) He's not doing anything but going to classes and
looking for Simon.

At least he's still going to his classes, for now.

Mum calls me every second day to see if we've heard anything. I tell her no. Dad calls me other days and I tell him the same.

Five weeks pass, six, seven, eight. And still nothing.
Simon

I don't know how long I've been here. I wasn't planning on staying this long at first, but the days were a bit of a blur back then so I've lost all track of time. And the place is comfortable enough – it's very comfortable actually, it's a fucking palace.

I could check my mobile or my computer I suppose, but I let them power down a while ago after I text Alex to resign. That was hard to do. I didn't want to leave the café, I like working there. But since I'm not going back I had to let her know so she could get someone to replace me. After that I deferred my uni course. That took a bit more effort because you can't just decide to defer for any old reason, so I wrote them a short but true account of why I couldn't return and the head of faculty accepted it without question.

I didn't tell them that my murdering mage of a father lied to me my entire life and then tried to steal my magickal power to take over the magickal world and kill me for good measure. I said I'm an orphan (which they already know) and I just found out who my father was so I need some time to find myself (whatever that means). They accepted it straight away so I don't really give a shit.

Then I turned my mobile and computer off because I couldn't stand to see the messages from Penny and Baz anymore. If I read any of them I know my resolve will weaken and I'd turned around and go straight home.

I can't though, go home. I can't go back. I can't be part of that world anymore. Ever.

Penny and Baz probably think I left because the magickal realm and the Mage treated me so bad. And he did do that. I've been abandoned and lied to and used and almost killed. When I first left that's exactly why I thought I had to leave. I thought exactly that for weeks after.

But I'm not the only one who's been used and abused by the realm. Look at Baz, he lost his mum and he was turned into a vampire. And Ebb, she lost her life for no reason other than because she was so powerful. And look at Agatha, so scared that she took off half way across the world to get away from everything. I've been treated like shit but that's not why I can't go back.

I've had time to think about it, really think about every shit thing that's happened to me, to Baz, to Baz's mum, to the realm, to everyone, and how the Mage was responsible for all of it. And I know that I can't go back because the Mage was the most deadly, most dangerous thing that ever happened to the realm, and I'm his son. So if there's any chance, any chance at all that I'm even the tiniest bit like him, I have to keep the realm safe by staying as far away from it as I possibly can.

I've had a lot of time to think about it. That's all I have thought about since I got here.

I wander downstairs and head to the kitchen. This house (manor, mansion?) is so big that it takes me a while. When I finally get to the kitchen I put the kettle on. Thank Merlin Baz reminded me about this place, I don't know where I'd be without it. When his parents left for their summer holidays and left him to manage the Oxford property, they also handed over the management of the Hampshire estate.

Baz will never come here of course. No one with magic comes here. Since I created the biggest hole in the magickal atmosphere here nearly two years ago, no one with magic has stepped foot anywhere near here. And if they do come here they won't have their magic so they won't be able to cast finding
spells or any other spell to find me. They'll be as useless as me.

The Normal cleaner still comes once a month, and the Normal gardener still comes around the same time to keep the place ready for when the magic returns, (if it ever returns) so there's power and water. That's all I need really, and as long as I stay out of their way they're none the wiser. I just wait out in the forest while they go about their business and then I come back through the same attic window I flew to and entered the first time. After I jimmied it open the first day I can slip in and out without anyone knowing it's ever been opened.

I thought about going to the cottage at first but I honestly didn't want to go anywhere near that place. And I knew that Penny and Baz would go there if they were to look for me, so I stayed away.

Those first few days were a blur here. I slept a lot and cried a lot more – I was such a mess. Then I raided the pantry and ate some tins of food I found there, and drank black tea. I even had a shower eventually. I don't know how long it had been but I must have smelled pretty bad. Thank Merlin no one was around. Eventually I got my head together a bit and I turned on the fridge and worked out how to go out to get food.

Then one night I heard some strange noises and that's when I remembered that this fucking mansion is haunted. That scared the shit out of me at first. But I haven't seen anything and I only heard noises that one time so I decided not to worry about it unless something actually comes for me. Then I suppose I'll run, or fly away.

The kettle whistles and I get the tea ready. I grab some milk from the fridge and an apple. I check the pantry and it's looking a bit sparse so I'll have to duck out for supplies when it gets darker. I can go during the day if I need to but I don't want to be seen by too many people, just in case. I've cut up my backpack so I can fit my wings and tail inside so I just look like a student or a backpacker or something, but I don't like to go out very often. I only go out at night and I only go out to buy food.

Before I left London I flew to a cash machine and withdrew nearly all of my savings so I'm trying to make it last. I usually fly to the outskirts of Hampshire once it's dark then walk the rest of the way into town. I pick a different supermarket each time. Sometimes I grab a coffee but I don't like to waste my money on luxuries like that. I don't know how long it will hold out. I need to make it last.

I've been sleeping in Baz's room since I got here. I probably shouldn't because that's not helping me forget about him, but when I first arrived here I wasn't in any state to plan very much. I was so tired when I finally made it inside that I just went to the only room I knew. I climbed onto his bed and fell asleep straight away. I slept for ages that first night, probably for the first time since we went to that fucking cottage.

And whatever the fuck is haunting this house still doesn't come into Baz's room. That's something.

I'm careful not to make too much mess, I keep Baz's room and the kitchen tidy and I stash my food at the back of the pantry and I take the rest of my shit with me when the cleaners comes and wait them out. The house is so big that I don't think they'd notice me if I stayed inside but I don't want to chance it. I need this place.

When I first arrived I landed in the forest right near where the Humdrum attacked Baz that Christmas Eve. It's still charred and blackened from when I accidentally set it on fire, but I guess that's expected. I landed on the ground and then I screamed and cried and didn't stop until my voice was hoarse. I don't know how long I was in that forest but the sun was setting when I finally flew out, hoarse, cried out, drained.

I must have held it all in since we went to the cottage, when I finally found out that the Mage was my
father. My father who abandoned me while he set about his plan to take over the fucking world.

I held it in for days, until I knew I couldn't hold it in anymore. Until I left. I didn't want to lose my shit completely in front of Penny and Baz, I didn't want them to be responsible for me anymore. They've done enough.

I know they were talking to me, saying things to make me feel better, but I didn't hear any of it the first day. That first day, I felt like I was under water and I couldn't breathe and their voices were really far away. I felt like I was drowning.

And on the second day I could breathe a bit better and I could hear what they were saying, but I didn't want to hear any of it, I was already planning to leave.

I put it off a bit because I knew it would be the last time I would see them, and when Baz was with me I could have easily changed my mind, I nearly did. But my resolve held somehow and when he was asleep I grabbed the key to the cottage off my bedside table, then I grabbed the first things I saw (my backpack and satchel) and shoved the blocks and photo into them and then grabbed some shoes and left. I just walked out of the flat. Baz must have been exhausted because he didn't wake at all. And I was relieved really, if he'd woken up I may not had the courage to leave him.

Baz. I try not to think about him, but that's really difficult because I've never not thought about him. Through all the years of us living together, first hating and then loving each other, he's the one thing I can never ignore. He's always been on my mind, first because I thought he was plotting to kill me, and then because I was so mad for him. Still, I have to be strong, for him, for Penny for their world. I can't go back.

I can't imagine how much I've hurt them both, just taking off like that. I wonder when they worked it out, that I wasn't coming back. They must be so sick of all the crap by now so they're probably relieved to be rid of me. I turned off my mobile and computer ages ago so I can't check their messages. I can't see when their concern turned to anger, then to disgust. They must be there by now. They've probably already moved on. Good for them.

Penny can move to America without worrying about me anymore. She deserves a good life with Micah. They deserve to be happy.

And Baz, he deserves happiness, and a boyfriend who's not so messed up. He's the best person I know and I want him to have the best. I'm not smart enough or good enough to be with him. He's so fucking smart and talented, he could do anything, be anything. He doesn't need a Normal holding him back, a Normal with a fucked up life as well as wings and a tail for Merlin's sake.

Baz and Penny. They worked it all out before me of course. I think they already knew as soon as they read the prophecies written all over the walls. They knew the Mage was my dad. I hate saying that, 'my dad', he was never a dad to me. He was my biological father, nothing more. Penny's mum and dad and the Wellbeloves and even Baz's step mum and dad have been more like parents to me than the Mage ever was.

I think they were trying to protect me at the start, saying they weren't sure what it meant and all that. I know Baz would have done anything to protect me. (Back then, he probably hates me now.) But I know how smart they are, of course they worked it out way before me.

I worked it out eventually though, when I saw that room. My room. I had my own room in that cottage, left empty all those years while I had to live in an orphanage. Live there, eat there, sleep there, in a room with seven other discards.
I didn't want to believe it at first. I mean, who would? I thought it must be a mistake or something.

And then the photo, that really sent me over the edge. If I had any doubt at all before, it completely disappeared once I saw the photo. A woman, pregnant, and the Mage. My parents. My mother.

I've thought about it a lot. Why they dumped me in an orphanage instead of raising me as their own. Why would anyone stick a baby in an orphanage after they went about creating something so powerful? And I was definitely powerful, I had so much power I sucked the magic right out of the magickal atmosphere whenever I went off and used too much of it. Sucked it right out of all of Hampshire I was so powerful. All I can think of is that I must have been damaged, broken, like the Mage said.

They didn't want a broken, damaged mage. They wanted a super mage.

I took the blocks. I don't know why I took them – maybe because they were mine, or maybe because they were proof. The only proof I have that I belonged somewhere, even if it was only for a little while.

I took the photo as well. I look at it every day. I still don't know what happened to the woman in the photo, my mother. Why she abandoned me. I don't know how the Mage gave me all the power. I don't know what made him think he could play Merlin like that. I suppose I'll never know everything, but I know enough now, enough to keep myself away from the world I love. I can keep that world safe, I can at least do that.

It's dark enough outside now that I head out. I fly to the outskirts of town and hide as I pack my wings and tail into the backpack. They're pretty cramped but it won't be for long. I don't have any other choice. I find a supermarket and grab a basket, filling it with things I need.

No one looks twice at me, so that's good. I'm still plenty nervous when I come into town. I don't have Penny and Baz anymore to spell my wings and tail invisible, and that's probably the biggest change I've had to get used to, apart from not having Penny and Baz that is. I got so used to them spelling them invisible that I kind of forgot I had wings and a tail half the time. So they are a bit of a problem now that I have to keep them hidden. I don't think the Normal world is ready for a bloke with dragon parts wandering around Hampshire.

I don't mind hiding my wings and tail in the backpack. I like my wings a lot, and I love flying so I would never change that unless I have to. I'm not that fussed with my tail though. It seems to get in the way more often than not. I wonder if I need my tail to fly, like a rudder or something. Baz loves my tail but he's not around anymore so I'll have to stop thinking about him. (Which is hard to do.)

Maybe Dr Wellbelove can remove my tail. Maybe he can remove my wings and tail. Even though I don't want to lose the wings, I'll probably have to someday if I want to get a job or something. I'm going to have to do something eventually. I could go see Dr Wellbelove and he wouldn't be able to tell anyone. Aren't doctors bound by that doctor patient confidentiality thing? I'd better check before I do anything drastic.

I grab bread, butter, eggs, bacon and tea. Then I pick some tins of baked beans and tuna. I grab some fresh fruit as well, and some milk. I can probably get by with this for weeks. That's another thing that's changed, my appetite. I'm just not that hungry anymore. I'm not running at all and I'm not flying very much so I think I'm just not using very much energy. I sleep a lot too, that's probably why. I take it to the checkout and fill some shopping bags. I need to make sure I can carry all of it on my way out of town and while I fly.

I fly back to the house. I dump the grocery bags just inside the attic window before I climb in. Then I
take everything downstairs and sort them into the fridge and pantry. I'm not even hungry so I go back upstairs to Baz's room, kick off my shoes and climb into bed. I can't even be bothered taking off my jeans.

It's probably another few weeks before the cleaners come again. I've gotten slack and lost track of days so they caught me by surprise. The days have been merging together lately. I can't seem to focus on anything while I'm awake and when I sleep I dream a jumble of dreams that don't make sense and wake me all through the night. I see the Mage, and Penny, I see Baz as well but it's like there's a thick wall of glass between them and me and I can't hear what any of them are saying to me. Sometimes the woman in the photo is there too, she smiles and talks but I can't hear her either, I can't hear any of them. I wake up feeling muddled and confused.

I quickly tidy Baz's room and grab my bags. I can't do anything about the kitchen because she's downstairs now but I think I kept it pretty neat yesterday. I head to the attic and climb out the window and fly to the woods where I park myself for the rest of the day. I wish I had a bottle of water or something.

After they leave I drag myself back inside and head straight to the kitchen for a drink and something to eat. That was close. I really must be losing track of the days because I thought I had another few weeks before they returned. I've been sleeping way too much and sometimes during the day as well as at night. I haven't even been doing anything to get this tired but I'm still always tired.

Then I realise I left the fridge running. I wonder if they noticed?
Chapter 24

Penny

My mobile is ringing.

It's late so I automatically think its Micah calling – to make sure I'm all right, but Agatha's photo comes up on the screen instead. Shit Agatha. I promised to call her sooner than this after I came back from America, but with everything that's happened lately I completely forgot. She's probably pissed with me. I answer the call.

"Hi Agatha."

"Penny? What's going on?" She sounds pissed.

"I'm so sorry I didn't call you. I've been . . ." I rack my brain for a plausible excuse but I can't think of one. I don't know what to tell her about Simon. Should I tell her? Does she want to know? What can she do in California anyway? There's probably no point worrying her as well.

"I just got off the phone with Mum. She said that Simon's missing!" She cries.

Okay, not pissed. She knows. I sigh as I debate how much to tell her. I mentally decide I may as well tell her everything, she's bound to find out anyway if she hasn't already. I've already spoken with Dr Wellbelove and filled him in on the whole sorry mess when Simon left. I was so worried that Simon might do something rash, so I asked him if Simon had spoken with him in the last few days, and specifically if he asked to have his wings and tail removed. (How else could he live in the Normal world?) Dr Wellbelove promised that he hasn't, but he also told me that if Simon wants to do that, then the decision would be Simon's and Simon's alone.

"But he's not in his right mind!" I said, throwing my arms in the air.

"Nonetheless, it would still be his decision." Dr Wellbelove said patiently. "And it would be confidential between the patient and doctor." He added, even though I'd already figured that as well. *Fuck that* I thought to myself. But I didn't say it, I would never say that to Dr Wellbelove.

"At least promise me you'll make him discuss it with his psychologist first. Or Baz or me or someone. This isn't a decision he should make while he's not thinking straight!" I pleaded, hoping he could see how worried I was.

"I understand your concern Penny. Any decision will not be made without relevant consultation with his psychologist." He allowed. He got up then and patted my shoulder. "Now if you'll excuse me I have a house call to make . . ."

"Penny, what's going on?" Agatha demands again, dragging my mind back to the present.

I sigh. I'm going to have to tell her eventually so it may as well be now. I'm not sure how much her parents have said so I decide to start from the beginning.

"You remember when I told you that the Mage bequeathed all of his stuff to Simon?" I start.

"Yes, something about a cottage and some money?"

"Uh huh. Well, we went to the cottage after I got back from America, and we found something."
"What Penny?" Agatha asks, concerned now. It's obvious her parents haven't told her the full story. As usual they've left that to me. They obviously didn't want to worry her but they should have realised that she would call me straight away.

"The Mage. He's . . . well." Merlin this is difficult to say, no matter how many times I've been through it in my mind or said it out loud. "We're quite sure the Mage is Simon's father." I finish quickly.

"What!" I hear Agatha gasp through my mobile. "How?" she demands.

I take a breath so I can get it all out at once. I tell her about the cottage, and how we found a baby's room and the bassinet and baby stuff. And then I tell her about the blocks that spelled Simon's name. She's silent for a while. I leave out the part about the prophecies again – it just feels like too much to take in. I focus on the Mage being Simon's father – that's more than enough.

"The Mage?" she asks, and she sounds just as disbelieving as we were. "But . . . the orphanages Penny?"

"I know Agatha."

"That's dreadful Penny. Poor Simon." she says quietly, "But . . . are you sure?"

"We're fairly certain, because that's not the worst of it."

"There's more?"

"Yes." And I still struggle to say the words. "In the nursery, we found a photo–"

"A photo? A photo of what?" she interrupts, whispering now.

"Of the Mage, and a woman. She was pregnant."

Agatha is quiet for a time. She's probably processing it all. I give her some time before I speak again.

"We don't know who she is, but you have to admit it all points towards them being his parents." I say.

"Yes. I suppose it does." She says quietly. "And Simon's gone?"

"Yes. He took it badly, more than badly, he didn't say a word after he went into that baby's room. He didn't say anything for two days. It's like he went into shock or something, and then he just left. We woke up and he was gone. That was two months ago. And he resigned from his job and deferred his course. " I take a big breath then. "Merlin Agatha! I'm just so worried about him. Baz is beside himself with grief and we've been looking for him everywhere but we can't find him anywhere. He's really gone."

"Oh Penny. Is there anything I can do? I feel so helpless here." she says and I'm grateful that she called all of a sudden.

"We feel just as helpless here believe me." I sigh. "Baz believes he doesn't want to be found, that he's gone for good, but I can't believe that. I won't!"

"I was planning to come back at Christmas Penny, but I can come back a bit earlier. I could help, you know, look for him." Agatha says.

"I don't know if that would make any difference Agatha." I tell her truthfully. "We have absolutely
no clue where he is. Baz and I haven't stopped looking but it's like trying to find a worseger in a woodland. It's hopeless."

"But I want to help somehow." She pleads. "I don't know how to from here but I want to do something."

"I know Agatha, and thanks. All we can do is keep looking and hope he calls one day." I rub my eyes tiredly.

"I'll get my flights organised. At least if I'm there I can help. I feel utterly useless here." She says determinedly. "And Penny, please call me if you hear anything. Promise me?"

"Yes Agatha all right." I agree. I'm starting to feel weary.

"And call me if you need to talk. I'm always here Penny, don't forget." she finishes.

"Thanks Agatha." I tell her, and after we hang up I feel like a little of the weight has been lifted from me. I'm so grateful to her for calling me today.

I'm absolutely drained by the time I finally go to bed. I lie in bed for a long time, thinking about everything we talked about. I still feel hopeless but I'm glad one more person knows that he's missing and is worried about him. Everyone should be worried about him! He saved our entire realm. And by saving our realm then he saved the entire Normal world too, otherwise Merlin knows what dark creatures would have taken over. He's a real life superhero, and no one's looking for him except me and Baz, and now maybe Agatha.

Agatha

Poor Simon! I feel so sorry for him. He's been through too much already and now this. I can't believe the Mage could be his father. The Mage! I'm fairly certain he didn't even like children. He came to my parent's house a number of times and he didn't even know my name. Even when he tried to kill me he still couldn't remember my name. You literally couldn't find a worse person to be a parent.

And Simon, so sweet and honest and caring – he obviously didn't get his father's genes, he's nothing like him. And thank goodness for that! He must have inherited all of his goodness from his mother. His mother – I wonder who she was, that woman in the photo.

I jump up with a start. The photo! I run to my room to fetch it. When I find the photograph I stare at it for a while – at Penny's mum, so young and wild looking and the Mage, handsome and not at all evil looking and then Lucy, young, beautiful, innocent. No it couldn't be her, Penny's mum said she left for America, well before all of this nonsense started, and Penny said she didn't know who the woman in the photo was. I'm sure his mother was a Normal or something like that, some poor woman the Mage got his hooks into. I wonder what ever happened to her?

Maybe I should try to find Lucy while I'm here. See if she knows anything about the Mage and the mysterious pregnant woman in the photo. I turn on my laptop and start searching for Lucy Salisbury, California. I figure it can't hurt.
Chapter 25

Penny

I'm having dinner with my parents tonight. Mum and dad have been inviting me over for dinner every week since I told them about Simon, but I kept saying no. I couldn't deal with mum and her incessant questions about Simon and Baz so I have been avoiding them ever since I first told them. But it's mid-term break and I've run out of excuses and mum's home from Watford every day so she'll be over at my flat if I don't make an appearance at home every now and again.

We've finished dinner and my siblings have wandered away, (always when it's time to clear up) so I help mum and dad in the kitchen. I know they want to talk anyway so I may as well get it over with.

Mum stands up and magicks away the dirty dishes to the dishwasher and I clear the rest of the table with my ring.

"So any word about Simon?" Dad asks.

I knew this is what they wanted to talk about. "No, nothing." I tell them.

"Penny, maybe we need to accept the fact that he doesn't want to be found." Mum says, carefully. I know she means well but I really don't want to hear this.

"Mum!"

Dad pats my shoulder in an effort to calm me down. "That may well be the case Mitali, but that doesn't mean we should stop looking for him." Dad says quietly.

"I know that Martin, but if he really wanted to be found, surely Penny and Baz would have found him by now. We have magic for Merlin's sake!" Mum says as she puts the kettle on.

"I know that Mit, but it's not that easy – he could be anywhere." Dad says as he prepares some mugs for the tea.

"Yes I suppose. He could be anywhere, he can fly after all. He's probably flown half way across England to get away." She concedes.

"You're not helping mum." I sigh. But I know it's true. We've looked all around London, the cottage, and even Oxford. I don't know anywhere else he would go.

"What about the orphanages he spent his summers in?" Mum suggests. "Would he have gone back to any of those cities Penny?"

"I don't know. He never liked being in any of those places and he always said he'd never go back, too many bad memories." I reason. "But I suppose it's worth a try."

"It's like he's just disappeared into a dead spot." Dad muses. He's always going on about the dead spots, he spends so much time studying them and measuring them, seeing if they've shrunk at all so it's just like him to bring it up. Usually I ignore him when he starts banging on about them but I stop to think about it.

"Dead spot?" I question. It is possible that he could be in one of them, I suppose.
"Hmm?" Dad says, distractedly, pouring some milk into his tea.

"Shit." I mutter as I head upstairs to dad's study. Dad follows me and mum isn't far behind.

"What is it Pen?" Dad asks once we're in his study.

It's still the same as when he was hunting the Humdrum. An entire wall is covered in a map of the UK and there are strings mapping each dead spot with dates written on little flags in the centre. There are so many that I don't know where to start.

"Simon!" I say. "He could be hiding in one of these!"

"I suppose it's possible." Dad says carefully.

"Yes..." Is all mum says, and she drags the word out slowly, like she doesn't really believe it.

I turn to dad. "Have you got a list Dad?"

"Of what?"

"Of all the dead spots!" I say exasperatedly. They really need to learn how to keep up. Dad is frowning at me but he nods and then starts rummaging around his desk for a bit. He pulls out a piece of paper and looks at it.

"This is from The Magickal Record." Dad says, handing it to me.

I don't wait to hear anymore. I race down the stairs and immediately head to Baz's flat.

I arrive in record time and bang hard on the door. "Baz let me in we need to talk. Now." I decide to go heavy straight away to save some time.

The door flicks open and I wander in. Baz must have magicked it open again because he's sitting against the wall, staring at his mobile. I peek at the screen – it's a photo of Simon. Merlin is this all he does when he's here alone? But at least he's not playing with fire today, although how often he does that is a question I don't want to think about right now.

I can hear some Music playing softly in the background and I listen for a bit. "Is that The Cure?"

Baz shrugs, not lifting his eyes from his mobile.

"Are you listening to 'Pictures of You', while looking at photos of Simon?"

Baz ignores me.

"Really Baz, could you be any more pathetic?" I accuse, rolling my eyes. "When did you last hunt?"

He ignores me.

"Baz I will call Fiona again."

His eyes flick over to me. "A few days ago." he says, his voice empty.

"Well you need to go now," I demand. "And then we need to talk. I need you with a clear head."

He's still staring at me, unmoving.

"Now! I have Fiona on speed dial." I threaten, waving my mobile in his face.
"All right." He says. He gets up slowly and heads out the door without another word.

I pace around his flat nervously. Could Simon be living or hiding in a dead spot? If he is that would explain why we can't find him. But there are so many! And it still doesn't explain how he can live in plain sight of the Normals with his wings and tail.

I turn off the music in the middle of Nick Cave's *The Boatman's Call*. I can't stand it any longer, it has to be the most depressing album in the history of music. Baz needs to get a new playlist or stop listening to Fiona's CDs at the very least.

Baz returns after an hour or so and looks a little better. He obviously didn't go all the way to Oxford but as long as he's fed he'll be coherent enough to help.

**Baz**

"Dead spot." she says. She sounds irritatingly smug.

"What about them Bunce?" I'm not in the mood for her games.

"Simon! He could be in one. And we won't be able to use any finding spells. It's the perfect hiding place don't you think?" She looks extremely pleased with herself, despite the fact that we haven't done anything yet.

I'm sitting on my Chesterfield next to Bunce. She's magicked up a pot of tea for us but I don't drink any. I think this through instead. He could be in a dead spot I suppose, if he wanted to hide from us. But does he want to hide from us? Or did he want to get away and start a new life?

I decide it doesn't matter either way, he still left.

"So?"

"What do you mean 'so' Baz? This is the first lead we've had in weeks, months even! We could go to some of them and take a look, see if he's there."

"And what if he is Bunce? Have you thought about that?" I snap, rubbing my temple with my fingers. "He left us. He doesn't want to be found. And if he is in a dead spot then he most definitely doesn't want to be found, at least by anyone in the magickal world."

Bunce has the good grace to stay silent now, finally. But not for long.

"Baz." She says tentatively. "Have you thought that perhaps Simon is in shock, or grieving, or both? He was devastated with the news. It probably overwhelmed him. He took off so soon after finding out everything and now he could be somewhere spiralling into despair, all alone."

I'm still sitting next to Bunce staring straight ahead but I turn my eyes towards her now. Could she be right? (She usually is.) (Annoyingly) Have I been wallowing in my own misery all this time while Simon is spiralling into some black hole of depression all alone? Have I been so self-centred yet again that I could only see his leaving as act of him turning his back on our world, on me, rather than what it most likely was, as an act of desperation by someone entirely at the end of their rope?

Now I know I actually am the worst person alive. If I even am alive that is.

"And you know he doesn't think before he acts." She goes on.

True, Simon never thinks before acting. I don't think we would have ever been boyfriends if he'd
thought it through before he kissed me. And I was so paralysed by fear of him hating me even more than I thought he already did that I probably wasn't ever going to act on my feelings for him.

Aleister Crowley, I've wasted the last two months doing nothing but sulking around all day and driving around London night after night, wasting time and being utterly useless. I sit up and pour some tea for us both. I drink it down quickly and then pour another. It's been a while since I've had a cup.

"All right Bunce. What do we do now?"

"Now, we go to the dead spots." She says smiling at me.

I nod. "Can we get a list? From your father?"

"Already thought of that." She says, handing me an extract from the Magickal Record. It lists all of the dead spots around the UK as of December 2015, when the last dead spots were recorded.

I snatch the list from her hand and eye it greedily.

"I must say it's good to have you back Baz." She says, rather smug.
Chapter 26

Penny

The list of dead spots is extremely long.

I didn't realise just how many spots there were when they were mapped out on dad's study wall. But here, on paper, the list is endless. They date back from 1997, right up to December 2015 when Simon finally finished off the Humdrum. They are hundreds of them all over the UK— as far up north as the Isle of Skye in Scotland and as far south as Hampshire. I don't know where to start.

Baz is scanning the list as well. His long fingers are running down the list of locations and every now and again he stops to consider something.

"We can discard holes over the seas. And we can probably forget about the forests as well." Baz says decisively. "He'll probably be in or near a town."

I pick up a pencil and hand it to him. He starts crossing off a bunch of locations.

"He can't have flown that far. At least not without stopping." I suggest. "So that probably cuts out those too far north."

"But it's been weeks Bunce. He could have stopped a dozen times over since he left." Baz counters. "So he could still be anywhere."

"Well he needs to eat, and to sleep." I offer. "So he needs to be near shops and some sort of shelter. And he didn't have that much money on him so he can't afford to waste money on hotels."

Baz stops scanning the list and turns to me. "How do you know that?" Baz asks suspiciously.

"I checked his bank withdrawals. He took out five hundred pounds on that first day, here in London. And he hasn't touched his account since." I tell him. Five hundred quid, that's a lot of money but not all of it. He was saving that for rent. He was being so careful with his funds, knowing he needed to have some money put aside for when term starts, and now he's withdrawn nearly all of it and resigned from his job. I wonder (not for the first time) if looking for him is the right thing to do, everything points to him not wanting to come back.

"Bunce?" Baz is watching me, his head is cocked to the side and eyebrows are raised, breaking into my thoughts.

"What? He gave me all of his passwords when we moved in together. Came in handy so don't complain about my snooping." I assert, more than a little indignantly.

"All right." Baz sighs as he concedes. "So he has some money, but not enough to pay for accommodation and food for as long as he's been away."

"And he can't stay in a hotel with other people with his wings and tail."

"No he wouldn't be in a hotel." Baz says slowly. He's looking up at me now.

"What about a hostel?"

He frowns. "That'd be more affordable I suppose. But he would still have the problem of his wings
and tail." Baz reminds me.

"So not a hostel either."

"A house then?" Baz says, more to himself than to me.

"A house? There's got to be hundreds of houses in the dead spots. Most would be Normal houses though, and occupied."

"An unoccupied house then." Baz offers.

"A magickal house perhaps?" I suggest now. I remember dad telling me some mages had to move when a dead spot happened at their house. I remember thinking how devastating it would be to have to move away from your home forever. "Although I don't think Simon knows about any of those . . ."

"Hampshire!" Baz says, banging his hand on the paper loudly. He's underlining one of the last names on the list – almost the last dead spot before Simon ended the humdrum. Baz's house.

"But." I say. "Your house?"

"Why not?" Baz snaps. "The estate is empty, it's isolated and it has power and water. He knows all this too. It's perfect." Baz is nodding now, admiringly.

I think Baz is convincing himself that this is where Simon would go, like when he flew to Oxford after first finding out about the Will. I think Baz is getting his hopes up that he's gone to his house again, and I'm worried that when we don't find Simon there he'll head straight back down the rabbit hole he's been in the last two months.

"Baz." I say quietly, putting my hand on his shoulder. "I don't think Simon would go to your house if he's trying to get away from us."

This seems to break Baz out of his reverie. He gives me a long cool look. "Do you have a better idea Bunce?" He snaps.

I stare back at Baz. It's infuriating because he's right, I don't have a better idea. The list of towns and streets and magickal houses lost to dead spots is so long and I have no other idea where to start. And Simon doesn't have the same list we have so if he is in a dead spot he can only be in one of the very few that he actually knows about. And he definitely knows about Hampshire.

"No." I say finally, letting out a long sigh. "Let's go there then."

**Baz**

I don't want to waste any more time so we head to Hampshire straight away. The drive takes a few hours.

I don't tell Bunce but I can't imagine Simon actually flying to Hampshire and staying in my house. Why would he if he's trying to get away from us. I am secretly hoping though, hoping that he's done exactly that.

And what do I do if we find him? What then? Will he want to see us? Will he turn around and leave again? I'm so anxious that I can hardly focus on the road.
Chapter 27

Baz

We arrive at Hampshire in record time. Both Penny and I feel the dead spot as soon as we cross into it – one moment we have our magic and the next it's gone. And in its place is a dry parched feeling. That scratch in the back of our throat. It's woeful.

"Let's just get this over with." Bunce says. I can see the loss of magic is getting to her. It's getting to me too, dragging me down.

I remember the last time I was here with Simon, that night when he saved me from the Humdrum by filling me with his magic. He had so much magic. He created this hole in the magickal atmosphere that night, right over my family's home. He didn't mean to of course, he was saving me at the time. What a price to pay, my family's home for me. I don't know if my family ever realised that, I didn't tell them.

I pull up in front of the garage and we go into the house through the kitchen door. We move quietly, so we don't disturb anyone. (Simon) In case anyone's here. (In case Simon's here.)

I'm about to head straight through the kitchen into the main part of the house but Bunce stops me.

"Someone's been here." She says.

I stop and take a quick look around – there's a cup in the sink and a plate draining next to it. I quickly scan the room, nothing else is out of place so it may have been the cleaner, or it may not have been. Then I notice the fridge, it's switched on. That's odd. I open the door and I see butter, bacon, eggs and some fruit. Bunce comes over and looks in as well.

I walk to the pantry and see tea (Earl Grey), and some tins of baked beans and tuna. It could be mine and Simon's shopping from the last few weeks before Bunce came back, all the same items, the very same.

"Simon." I whisper.

I turn and race up the stairs now, taking two at a time. Bunce is somewhere behind me, trying to keep up. We get to my room and hesitate at the door. I'm too frightened to open it and too scared not to. Bunce pushes past me and shoves the door open.

Nothing. I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding.

But someone has been here, the bedspread is twisted like someone has been lying on it and my wardrobe is ajar. I race to it and hesitate at the door. I'm too frightened to open it and too scared not to. Bunce pushes past me and shoves the door open.

But someone has been here, the bedspread is twisted like someone has been lying on it and my wardrobe is ajar. I race to it and open it. A few items of clothing that my stepmother didn't bother packing are still in there. It looks like someone has been through it. It could be Simon, looking for some clothes perhaps, or it could just be my imagination.

But I can smell him now. Thanks to my vampire heightened sense of smell I can smell him! He's definitely been in here recently. His smell is all over my room, my bed. He's definitely been sleeping here. I touch my bedspread and breathe in the scent of him, the magnificent scent of Simon.

Bunce heads out now, looking through the rest of the house. I don't want to leave my room but I want to find Simon. I catch up to her and lead her through the rooms otherwise she's sure to get lost. Each room is empty, untouched. Only my room and the kitchen and a bathroom look like they've
been used.

We cover the house from bottom to top methodically now, looking in each room, calling for Simon. Not loudly, we don't want to scare him, but quietly, soothingly. He's nowhere. My hope diminishes a little more with each empty room.

We make it all the way to the attic without finding anything. I lean heavily against the attic wall and let out a sigh. "He's not here."

"But he was here Baz." Bunce says quietly. "So he might come back?"

"Or he was here, and left when he heard us." I challenge.

"He might still be here." She suggests.

"Where? We've searched the entire house." I snap, then I instantly regret it. The lack of magic and not finding Simon is messing with my mind.

Bunce and I stare at each other, each lost in our own thoughts. I wonder where he could be. Where he could hide from us. And then I think of the forest, it's a good place to hide. So good in fact, I don't think we'd ever be able to find him without magic. Still, I can take a look.

"I'll check the forest." I tell Bunce. "Stay inside." I add, just in case I decide to hunt. The forest is still teeming with deer so I may not be able to help myself. I only caught a few rodents in London before we left and I'm starting to feel edgy.

I head outside and run straight into the forest. I call for Simon more loudly now, desperate. I didn't want Bunce to see how desperate I was in the house so I restrained myself, calling his name quietly, calmly. But not here, here in the forest I call for him loud and urgent. And when I cover the entire forest, running from end to end and find nothing, I take the nearest deer and sink my fangs into it and drain it completely, and then I take another.

I sink to the forest floor now, crying. I let the tears roll down my cheeks and onto my shirt. Simon was in this house, he was here and he left. Did he leave when he heard us? Or did he leave when he saw us arrive? Either way, he left as soon as he knew we'd found him. He really doesn't want to be found, by us. By me.

I wait for the tears to stop before I wipe them away, and then I get up and head back to the house slowly. I know Bunce will want to leave as soon as possible, the parched feeling is awful but I don't care right now, the feeling of losing Simon all over again is a thousand times worse than any loss of magic. I enter the house and find Bunce in the kitchen, sitting at the table. I shake my head.

She looks as dejected as I feel. "Well it was worth a try Baz." she says quietly, her tone resigned.

"He was here." I say, slumping into a chair.

"I know." She says, putting her hand on my shoulder. "That's something."

"But he's gone."

"Maybe, maybe not."

"He's gone Bunce." I say as I stand up. "Let's go."

She follows me to the car and we get in silently. I drive away slowly.
We feel our magic return as we head away from the estate. It's a relief in a way, but the relief is full of aching and pain. I feel the tears falling down my cheeks again as I drive away from Hampshire, I don't stop them.

**Simon**

I really don't want to leave Hampshire but I left that bloody fridge on and now someone is here and they are moving around downstairs. It must have been the cleaners, they must have called the police or someone and now they are here, looking for the intruder. Looking for me.

I grab my bags and quickly make my way up to the attic. Thank Merlin the house is so big. There's no way they hear me move quietly up the stairs. I've gotten fairly good at moving quietly. I climb out the window and fly straight up as high as I can and as fast as I can, away from the house in case anyone is looking.

I don't have any other place to go. In all the time I've been here I haven't thought about what to do next. I got so comfortable here that I didn't plan anything. That's my problem, I never think.

I need to find somewhere because I can't keep flying around indefinitely. I'm used to flying now but it still takes it out of me. It's a bit like running so I reckon I can fly for about an hour or a bit longer without stopping.

I need a plan and I'll need to shop again, I had to leave everything in the kitchen. What a waste. I can't afford to waste money like that, I need to make it last.

I fly north for about half an hour but I'm getting tired and it's broad daylight so I need to stop and wait for nightfall. I've been keeping away from the main roads and towns and when I find a big empty looking forest or park I land there. I pack my wings and tail into my backpack and find a place to rest.

Nightfall comes finally. I've been sitting here waiting for the dark before I take off, sitting and thinking about where I can go next. I can't believe I messed up Hampshire so bad. That was the best place I could think of, the only place I had in my head when I left. I knew no one could find me there and I knew no one from the magickal world would go there. Now I've lost it. There's only one other place I know that I can go, a place that's mine.

I fly north for about an hour and then I stop for a rest. I'm really tired and I need a break. Luckily the houses are few and far between out here so I can stop without being seen, and it's still dark anyway. I find a secluded spot, pack my wings and tail and lay down for a short nap.

When I wake it's still dark but there's a small sliver of light on the eastern sky. It must be early morning. I have to get going before it gets light so I take off again.

It's with a heavy heart that I finally land at the cottage. I open the door with the key that I picked up from my bedside table all those months ago. It seems so long ago now, and my old bedroom, that seems like another world entirely.

I didn't want to come here. I didn't want to come here at all.

This is all so fucked.
Penny

Well, that didn't work out quite as planned. We went to Hampshire to see if Simon was hiding out in a dead spot and it looks like he was, or someone was, and Baz is convinced it was Simon so I'm inclined to believe him, he does have those vampire heightened senses. All I know is that someone who eats the same food as Simon was there, so it's highly likely.

And he's gone anyway, Simon left.

Maybe Baz has been right all along, maybe Simon doesn't want to be found. Maybe we're wasting our time looking for someone who doesn't want anything to do with our world anymore, who doesn't want anything to do with us. I can't stand thinking like this but maybe I need to face the awful truth of the situation; that Simon may not want to come back, ever.

Baz was even more a wreck when we got back than he was before we came up with this plan. When he dropped me at my flat I was worried that he would go straight back to the morose state he's been in all along and go home to listen to more Nick Cave. Merlin!

"I'll come by tomorrow." I tell him as I get out of the car. Baz doesn't say anything.

I left the list of dead spots at Baz's house. I want to take another look at it but I can't go back to Baz's now, I'm too tired, so I decide to ring dad and ask for another copy.

"I'll email it to you now." Dad says after we've talked for a bit. I fill him in on the Hampshire dead spot we just visited. He's interested to know how it felt, if it still felt the same, if it was still as big as before. It did and it is I told him. "Oh and your mother wants to speak to you." He puts mum on the phone.

"Hi Mum" I say. I hope this is going to be quick. I'm really tired from being in the dead spot all day. I didn't realise how draining it would be.

"Penny, I've been thinking . . ." She starts.

"About what?" I ask, not really interested. I don't have the energy for a conversation with mum right now.

"About the woman in the photo--" She says. And that reminds me, I haven't told her about Baz's conversation with his dad. I didn't tell Agatha either, but I'll save that for another day. Honestly I feel like I'm relaying information all over the place at the moment, it's exhausting.

I cut her off. "She's dead mum." I tell her. "Not the woman in the photo, Simon's mum. And I suppose the woman in the photo, if they are the same person. And we think they are . . ." I'm rambling on, I must be tired.

"What!"

"We think she's dead. And that she was a mage." I say.

"How do you know all that?" she demands. I'm tired but I tell her about what Baz's dad said. How he thinks that it was Simon's mum and not Baz's mum who came through the Veil that second time. Mum already heard all this at the trial, but ignored it like everyone else, focusing instead on
"She called him her Rosebud boy, and called him Simon. It's seems so obvious now. Baz can't believe he didn't realise it at the time." I say.

"Oh Merlin." Is all mum says for a while. "That does make sense. I can't believe we all missed it."

"I know mum. Look, I'm actually really tired. I need to have a bit of rest."

"Okay Penny . . ." mum says. But she sounds like she still has something to say.

"What is it now mum?" I snap. I don't mean to, I'm just tired.

She hesitates for a moment before she speaks. "Nothing Pen." She says slowly. "I'll talk to you later, when you're more rested."

Dad emails the list of dead spots but I'm too tired to look at it. I Skype Micah instead, filling him in on our visit to Hampshire and how we may or may not have found where Simon's been living.

Micah's quite impressed with Simon's ingenuity.

"That's rather resourceful of Simon to think to go there." He says approvingly.

"I know but don't go saying that to Baz, he's quite distraught about it all." I say. "Honestly Micah, I'm beginning to think he doesn't want to be found."

"Well I think the opposite." Micah says. "If he didn't want anything to do with all of you then he wouldn't have gone to his boyfriend's family's house. There are plenty of other places to hide in England Penny."

I think about this. And then I think Micah is right, of course Simon still wants to be found, he went to Baz's house for Morgana's sake.

"You know, I think you're right Micah." And I'm so fired up that I start looking through the list of dead spots as soon as we finish our call. Looking for all the possible places he could be.

**Baz**

Bunce turns up the next day, as promised.

"We need to keep looking through the dead spots." She insists. She's relentless when she sets her mind to something.

We go through the list again, this time looking at the magickal houses. Penny's father gave her a list of all the magickal houses that have remained empty, that the mages haven't sold off to Normals. He has access to a lot of information because he's been researching the dead spots for so long. All of the mages were happy to hand over the details (and sometimes the keys) to their properties in the hope that he would find a solution and bring the magic back to their homes.

It is possible that Simon could know about some of these so we focus on the ones that have remained empty, like Hampshire. And he visited a few spots with Professor Bunce so we focus on those first.

We start with London, making our way through each and every one. Then we widen the search, ever widening the net. We don't find any sign of Simon but this time I don't give up. He was in Hampshire, I'm sure of it, so he has to be somewhere.

And he's alone, and hurting. We have to find him.
I hunt, I go to classes, I eat. I stay focused

**Simon**

I hate this place, I hate everything about it but I don't have anywhere else to go. I messed up in Hampshire and my money won't last forever so I'm stuck here. I close off the two bedrooms and pretend they're not there. I don't go outside. I don't do anything.

When I first arrived I lay on the couch and went straight to sleep. I slept all day and woke when it was nearly dark. I headed to a supermarket before they closed, to get some food. Not much, just the basics. There's no power here, or water so I don't know how long I can stay. I bought only food I could eat without heating and I had to buy water and no tea. Then I came back and crashed on the couch again. I closed my eyes and turn my back against the writing on the walls. I don't move for days.

It feels like it's been raining for ever so I'm surprised when I wake up and the sun is shining into the small room. I walk outside and the ground is dry. Maybe the rain has been in my head. It feels like it's been raining for weeks, pulling me down. My head feels full of cotton wool, everything feels fuzzy and I can't stand the brightness so I go back inside. I lay on the small couch with my back to the walls day and night. I don't want to see the writing on the walls any more.

My nightmares are back. Now it's only the Mage and he's talking to me, at me. I hear all the words he said to me over the years, all the lies and this time I hear what he's really saying. *You're not good enough, you're broken, I got you wrong, we didn't want you.*

I don't look at the photo or the blocks anymore, I hate them too. They are just a reminder of a life I never had, a life that I wasn't good enough for, that I didn't deserve. I don't take them out of my bag. I don't even bother to change my clothes. I can't remember when I last had a shower. What's the point?
Chapter 29

Agatha

It's been an entire fortnight since I spoke with Penny and I can't think of anything else but helping to find Simon, so I decide to fly into London a few weeks earlier than I originally planned. Thank Morgana I finish all of my assignments early. I hand everything in weeks ahead of plan and then hop straight on a plane home. When I tell Joshua what I'm doing he wants to come, I think he wants to help, or to meet my family or both perhaps, but this isn't the time. I have to help Penny and Baz, I have to help Simon.

There I was thinking I could hot tail it to California and escape the whole magickal world, but I realise now there is no escaping. I think I've finally figured that out. I can't walk away from my old life. My family is part of that world, my friends are part of it. I'm part of it.

Mother and father pick me up from the airport and take me home. I spend the day with them, partly because I'm exhausted, but also because I can see that they want me to. I call Penny when I get home and tell her I have to see her and her mum.

It's time I finally hand back the photo.

Penny says she's going to bring Baz along with her. She says if there's anything to know about Simon he should be there, she's right and he is his boyfriend after all.

Mother doesn't want me to go off looking for Simon, she's worried that I'm going to get myself nearly killed again like two years ago. She and I have been arguing since I got here.

"But why Agatha?" she cries. "What good will it do if you trapes off looking for him right now? Penelope and Basil have been doing that for months. And he many not even want to be found, don't you think Welby?"

"I think Agatha is old enough to make up her own mind." My father says, giving me a warm smile.

"But you've only just arrived Agatha." Mother goes on. "We want to spend some time with you. And I've arranged a marvellous dinner for all our friends, to welcome you home dear." My mother again.

"Really mother? A dinner?" I sound incredulous. I am incredulous. "Can't that wait?" How can she think of a dinner when Simon's missing?

"And you nearly got yourself killed last time Agatha." she reminds me. As if I need reminding.

"I have to help them," I say, "And besides, the Mage is dead, no one is out to kill us anymore. We're just looking for Simon, that's all. Nobody's wrapping up curses and dropping us in the Hell of the Wood anymore."

"What's that dear?"

"Nothing Mother" I sigh. No point completely freaking her out now. She doesn't know the half of what we got up to back at Watford.

So after arguing with my mother for most of last night I'm finally heading to the Bunces, photo in hand, to tell them what I know. I don't know much but at least it's something. I'm also going to
apologise for taking the photo two years ago, I shouldn't have done that.

Penny

We're at mum's house again. Agatha, mum, dad, Baz and I are sitting around the dining room table drinking tea. Agatha wanted to meet here, which I thought it was a bit odd but then I thought I would just go with it. I'm currently catching her up on the conversation Baz had with his father so we're all on the same page. I must say, it's good to have everyone here, knowing everything that Baz and I know. I don't feel so alone. I feel like maybe we could find Simon if we all work together rather than working in a haphazard fashion like we have been doing.

Baz was quiet when he picked me up. We've visited as many magickal houses in dead spots as we could over the last fortnight but we haven't found any sign of Simon, yet. I'm not giving up though, we were so close in Hampshire.

And at least Baz is eating and hunting now, although not quite enough by the look of him. I thought when we didn't find Simon at Hampshire he would fall back into his miserable state but he's been able to stay focused. It's a relief that I don't have to worry about him on top of everything else.

I didn't think for a second that Simon would be in Hampshire and then leave because of us, but I tell everyone what happened there anyway, as painful as it is to relive it. I don't want to leave anything out, everything may be relevant no matter how small a detail.

Then I tell them what Micah said. That he probably does still want to be part of our world given that he went to Hampshire and didn't disappear completely. Baz glances at me when I finish, and I give his arm a small squeeze. And everyone else agrees with me, that Simon may actually want to be found given that he hasn't wandered too far from our world.

Everyone except for Baz of course. He just refuses to see it, he refuses to believe that Simon may still want to be part of our world, may still want him. He still wants to find Simon, he just doesn't believe Simon wants to be found.

That's what all of his wallowing has been about of course, Baz has been so hurt by Simon leaving that he refuses to believe Simon could still want to be with him. He's taken all of this as a personal affront on their relationship, even though he knows deep in his heart that Simon is hurting. No matter what I say he still refuses to believe that Simon will still want him after all of this is over, if it will ever be over. He's just so stubbornly stupid sometimes.

I've finally caught everyone up and we sit quietly for a while, drinking our tea. Agatha paces her cup gently down onto the saucer and coughs slightly, and then she fishes something out of her bag and slides it across the table.

"I'm sorry Professor Bunce." She says contritely. "I took this two years ago from here and I've been meaning to return it ever since. I don't know if it's at all relevant to Simon. But . . ."

"Lucy!" Mum says as she picks up the photo.

"Who?" I ask, straining to look at the picture.

"You remember, I showed you this photograph a couple of years ago." Mum says. "The Mage – Davy, and Lucy and me." She says his name like he's something unclean, evil even and I love her a little bit more for that.

I take the photo from mum a look at it a little closer. It looks old, like it was taken years ago. There are three Watford students sitting on the grass. Their uniforms are a little different to the ones we
wore. I don't recognise anyone. "I've never seen this mum."

"No? Oh, maybe it was Agatha I showed it to." she says distractedly.

"Who is it?" I ask, still staring at the photo.

"That's me," Mum says pointing to a young woman with wild curly brown hair. "And that's the Mage and that's Lucy– his girlfriend, my best friend at school." Mum says, pointing at each person in turn.

"I remember taking that." Dad says, smiling at the memory.

"That was his girlfriend?" I ask, incredulous. I remember now, mum telling me that he had a girlfriend, but I completely forgot she was mum's friend. And I never expected her to be so normal looking and pretty, we're talking about the Mage after all.

"Yes." Mum and Dad say in unison.

Baz looks over now, and I slide the photo over to him. We're both staring at it intently. The Mage looks like he did in that photo we found at the cottage, and mum looks so young and wild and completely different to how she looks now, and Lucy is lovely, she has shoulder length yellow blond hair that's curly and thick and lovely blue eyes.

"I don't know how this is relevant Agatha, Lucy left for America not long after they broke up." Dad say, cutting into my thoughts.

"Do you still keep in contact with her?" I ask mum. "Maybe we could talk to her."

"No, I haven't heard from her in years, since before she broke up with Davy. Her mother told me that she moved away, to America." Mum says quietly.

"But you don't know for sure?" Agatha asks.

"No, but her mother, Lady Salisbury was quite adamant . . ."Mum says frowning. Then she turns to me. "Although since you told me about the photo you found at the cottage, I did start to wonder . . ."

Is that what mum wanted to talk to me about the other night? I remember cutting her off. Shit.

"I tried to find her." Agatha blurts out. "I can't find any record of anyone named Lucy Salisbury in America. No one by that name immigrated there the last twenty years."

"How do you know that?" I ask.

"I googled around for a while, then I went to the British Embassy and asked how to locate someone who emigrated from England. They gave me a lot of help. But I couldn't find any record of her anywhere." Agatha explains.

"Agatha, you have been busy." I say impressed.

"That doesn't mean she's not there of course." Agatha continues. "Just that I couldn't find anything, no record, no name change, nothing. And she could have changed her name her before she left, or she could have moved somewhere else I suppose . . ."

"It's her." Baz says quietly.

"What?" Agatha and I say at the same time.
"The woman in the photo, the pregnant woman. Simon's mother. It's her." He says, still staring at the photo. He hasn't stopped staring at it since I slid it over to him.

"Baz, how can you be sure?" I ask carefully. "We only saw that photo for a minute."

"It's her." He says again, looking up at me. "Lucy. She's Simon's mother."

"Baz—" I start.

He looks straight at me now, levelling me with his eyes. "It's the same person Penelope. Trust me." he says authoritatively. "I stared at that photo in Simon's room for two days before he left. It's definitely her."

Mum gasps then and brings her hands to her mouth. "Lucy!" she whispers. I turn to look at mum. Her best friend was Simon's mum, and she's not living in America, she never left the UK. She stayed here, she had a baby, Simon, and then she died. Dad puts her arm around her, pulling her towards him.

No one says anything for a while. No one knows what to say. I think we're all in shock.

Baz

It's her. It's definitely her. Lucy Salisbury is Simon's mother. She was a mage, she dated the Mage, she had a baby– Simon, and then she died.

And she came back through the Veil to see Simon, to see her son, to tell him he was her rosebud boy.

It feels wrong, to know all this when he doesn't.

I have to find him.
Chapter 30

Simon

This place is messing with my head. I can't think straight since I got here, I can't do anything, I can't focus on anything. I've lost track of days. I can't remember the last time I ate anything. I don't even really sleep anymore, I get by on catnaps, day and night.

It actually is raining today outside, it's not just in my head, and I can't sleep at all. Instead I do something I've put off since I got here, something I've been trying not to think about since all of this started.

I open the door to the main bedroom. I stand there for a long time, staring at the room. There's nothing special about this room, it's just a bedroom, but still I feel jumpy and frightened at the same time. I take a step inside.

I walk around the entire room in a few steps. Then I make my way to the bedside table and open the first drawer. I look through it. There's nothing there. I look through the rest of the drawers. They're empty. I pull all the drawers out completely now, placing them on the bed and search the empty void the drawers left behind. Still nothing. I turn to the wardrobe next and open that. The clothes are still there, hanging where they have been for years probably. Nothing has changed. Why would it? No one but me has been here in twenty years.

I touch the clothes again, running my fingers slowly across the old fabric. My mother's clothes. I let them go and crouch down and feel around the bottom of the wardrobe. Nothing. I drag a chair from the kitchen and put it in front of the wardrobe and climb up. I run my hand along the top of the wardrobe. I don't know what I'm looking for but I don't find anything anyway. I look under the bed. There's nothing here, no evidence at all of a life except for a few discarded clothes.

I let out a breath I didn't realise I was holding. There's nothing here. For the first time I wonder what happened. What actually happened to her?

I move across the small hallway to the nursery. My room. I stand unmoving at the closed door for long time. Then I quickly open the door and push it so hard it swings all the way open and bangs against the wall. I stand in the doorway not moving, working up the courage to enter my room.

My room. It still sounds wrong. I never had my own room as a kid. I spent my entire childhood sharing rooms with other orphans. Those rooms never felt like my own, they weren't mine, I always felt like a visitor. It wasn't until I got to Watford that my room finally felt like my own room. (Even sharing it with Baz.) And my room in my and Penny's flat, that feels like my room.

Baz and Penny. I haven't thought about them in weeks, longer even. I stop thinking about them immediately. I can't let myself think about them, it hurts too much. I walk into the room instead.

The room is slightly smaller than the other bedroom but it's still a decent size. It faces what I assume was once the back garden. The view was probably nice once when there was a garden out back. I imagine flowers and washing on the line and chickens running around. I don't know why, I don't know shit about this place. I shake my head to clear the thoughts and then take a step inside.

I open the wardrobe first and I'm shocked to see there are some baby clothes hanging up. They're old, like the woman's clothes in the other room, and they're so small, little soft onesies in blue and white. Not many, but a few. I touch them carefully, as if they might break. Then I see there's a big
pile of cloth nappies on a shelf, I touch those too.

I search around the bottom of the wardrobe for anything else but there's nothing. I drag the chair in from the other bedroom and step on the seat and feel around the top of the wardrobe, like I did in the other bedroom. There's nothing there either. I move to the chest of drawers.

I can still see nine squares marked out in the thick dust where I took the blocks. I run my fingers across it absently. Then I take another deep breath and open the top drawer.

Little white socks and a beanie and some white cotton singlets. Nothing else. I touch them carefully. I feel around the drawer, reaching to the back corners for anything. There's nothing else there. I go through the next two drawers and don't find anything apart from more baby clothes and a blanket.

Why did they have all this stuff if they weren't going to keep me? If they didn't want me? I don't get it.

I'm not expecting anything when I open the bottom drawer. So I go completely still when I see the tarnished silver box.

Baz

"We should speak with Lady Salisbury." Wellbelove says.

No one has moved since I told them all that the woman in the photograph, Lucy Salisbury, is Simon's mother. I wonder what the etiquette is for waiting to speak when people go into shock. Professor Bunce is definitely in shock. This was her best friend after all and she's been under the delusion that Lucy's been living a wonderful life on the west coast of America for the last twenty years, not dead and buried somewhere in England.

And the other Professor Bunce, Bunce's father, he may be in shock too, he knew her as well. But I can't tell how he's feeling, he's holding his wife's shoulders while she stares straight ahead, her hands held silently over her mouth.

I don't think Bunce is in shock. She's staring at her parents, frowning. She's probably wondering why she didn't know any of this while Agatha did. It's so unlike Bunce to miss something this important.

And Wellbelove, she's looking from Bunce to Bunce's parents, to me, not sure how to proceed.

"We should speak with Lady Salisbury." Wellbelove says again.

"Why?" Bunce asks.

"Because Lucy is her daughter." Wellbelove says nervously, "Shouldn't she know what happened to her?"

"But we don't know anything yet. Not for sure." Bunce says again. No one else is speaking.

Lady Salisbury, I remember now that Simon met her at the club that time when we played tennis. Lady Salisbury is his grandmother.

"We don't have any other leads do we Bunce?" I say. "At least this is a plan."

"But she doesn't know anything." Bunce goes on. "She thinks her daughter is in America."

"Well do you have any better ideas?" I snap.
"No. But I don't think we need to bring her into this just yet." Bunce is determined as she speaks.

I'm about to argue the point but Professor Bunce clears her throat.

"I think Penny's right." She says quietly. "Lady Salisbury hasn't heard from her daughter in twenty years or more."

Agatha is nodding, all too ready to concede. My eyes narrow as they flick over to her. Is she going to back down that easily?

"This would devastate her." Bunce's father agrees. "We should wait until we have evidence before we tell her anything. Right now we should focus on finding Simon."

Finally someone is making sense, and it's the other Professor Bunce no less. He's right though, we do need to focus on finding Simon not telling Lady Salisbury that her daughter is dead. Simon's been gone for months and we finally have some information that will help him through this. We know who his mother is for Crowley's sake. He needs to know what we know, he needs to know that she came back for him, that she loved him.

"How do you propose we do that?" I sigh. "We've already searched all of London. We've visited as many dead spots as we can that he would have known about, and many that he didn't."

"Let's think about this logically." Professor Bunce says slowly as he takes off his glasses and wipes the lens with a napkin. "He went to Hampshire first . . . so perhaps we should look at all the places that hold some importance to him . . . that have been important in his life . . ." and I don't think I can stand the snail's pace of his thoughts. He's going to lull us all into unconsciousness if he doesn't make a point very soon.

"Dad, we've already done that." Bunce says gently. I can see she's trying to be patient with him. "We've gone through the list of dead spots that he knows about, we've been to Hampshire, and we even went to the cottage when he first disappeared--"

I'm a bloody idiot. "The cottage!" I say standing up. "Of course!"

"We've already been there Baz." Bunce sighs.

"That was an age ago Bunce." I snap. "And he was at Hampshire the whole time. Where else could he go after we chased him out of Hampshire? Where else could he stay for a long period of time?"

Everyone turns to stare up at me. I'm still standing but no one else is getting up. Why isn't anyone moving?

"Well?" I sneer. "Does anyone have a better idea?"
**Chapter 31**

**Simon**

I've been staring at this silver metal box for a while, minutes or hours I'm not really sure. I want to know what's inside, but I'm afraid. I'm not afraid that it will hold the answers to all the secrets of my life; who I am, why I was abandoned, who my mother is. I'm afraid that it won't. And that fear of not finding anything is what's stopping me from opening it.

I'm sitting on the floor in front of the chest of drawers with the box in my lap. It's not locked I don't think, it's just shut over. All I have to do is lift the lid. I run my fingers across the top and sides. I stare at it.

That line of thought hasn't got me anywhere all day, so I change tact. Now I think what can be the worst thing that could happen? That I open the box and there's nothing in it, nothing in it about my life, my family, my mother, my fate. And what will I do then? That's what I'm thinking about now. What will it matter if there's nothing in it? Will my life change that much? Was my life actually that bad before all this shit started? I'm so tired of all this running and hiding. I don't think I want to be here anymore. I think I want to go home.

I've just about talked myself out of finding anything in this box when I finally open it.

There's something in it. Two somethings actually.

There's an envelope. And a wand.

I pick up the envelope and turn it over. It's addressed to me. It actually is addressed to me. 'Simon Snow' is written on the front. My hands are shaking as I take the letter from the envelope and read it. I read it three times before any of it makes sense.

*My dearest Simon,*

*You're due any day now and I can't wait to meet you. I can't wait to hold you and cuddle you, to spend time with you, and watch you grow. My beautiful boy. My beautiful Simon. Simon, my rosebud boy.*

*Your mother,*

*Lucy xxx*

I've been staring at the letter for a long time. I read it over and over and my eyes lock onto those words; 'Simon, my rosebud boy'.

I know what this means. My mother. It was my mother that came through the Veil, not Baz's mum. I mean it was Baz's mum the first time, when she demanded that I tell Baz to find Nicodemus, to find her murderer. But the second time, her voice quieter, higher, and more gentle – that was my mother. I know it now, I know it for certain.

My mother. She came to me and she wanted me, she loved me. (I was wanted. I was loved.)

I pick up the wand and turn it in my hand, looking closely at it. I'd almost forgotten about it while I read the letter, but I look at it now, marvelling at how it feels in my hand. It must be her wand–Lucy's, my mother's. And I don't know if it's the tears welling up inside me or something else as I
hold my mother's wand but I feel something rise up from deep inside me as I start to cry for the first time since I landed at this awful cottage. I let the tears fall and I cry for my mother who died, who was a mage, who loved me and wanted me. I cry and cry until I can't cry anymore, until the tears run dry and I heave out a final shaky breath.

And I want to go home, I'm so tired and lonely and sick of all of this and I just want to go home. So I get up and pick up the silver box and the letter and keep the wand in my hand. It feels good to hold it, I don't want to put it down. I walk back into the family room and find my bags and I read the letter one more time before I put it safely in my pocket and put the silver box in my bag. Then I pick up my things and walk outside into the front yard. I drop my bags outside and walk back inside and look around one last time. I still don't like this room with the prophecies on the wall and the Mage's evil plan to create his very own Chosen One, I want to get rid of this, so no one ever has to bear witness to his madness ever again, so no one else ever gets this kind of idea ever again. This is one way I can keep the world of mages safe, to get rid of any remaining evidence of the Mage and of what he did.

I don't know how much of a stone cottage can burn but I'm going to give it a go anyway. That's the only way I can think of to end this place, to get rid of all of the evidence. Will the paint on the walls burn? I don't know. I think the roof will burn at least, and all of the furniture and curtains. I don't care what happens to the rest of the place, I don't care for it at all, it was never mine, I've never even lived here.

I wander into the kitchen and find a book of matches. I don't know how long they have been here but I never even noticed them before, I could have made a cup of tea all along. I wonder if they will still work after all these years? I go outside and find some wood lying around the garden. There's not much and some of it is wet so that probably won't burn but I grab some of the dryer pieces anyway and bring them in. Then I grab the newspapers and any other papers I can find in the kitchen. This will have to do. I pile everything up in that god forsaken sitting room floor next to the coffee table and strike the entire book of matches. It lights on the third go, so I drop the matches onto the paper and watch it burn. Then I get an idea to speed things up a bit so I grab a cushion off the couch and watch that light up, then I throw it back on the couch, watching the couch light up as I walk out and lock the door.

I pick up my bags and fly away.

**Penny**

We're almost at the cottage again, Agatha Baz and I. Baz insisted we leave immediately so we said goodbye to my parents and left them holding on to each other as we jumped into the car and headed straight here. I don't know why Baz is so insistent this time, it's not like we found anything the last time and mum could have done with me staying for a bit. She was so upset, and why wouldn't she be, she just found out her best friend that she thought was alive and well living in America had actually died right here in England.

Her best friend was Simon's mother. It's weird to think that mum's best friend was my best friend's mum.

I'm glad Agatha is here too, she really did come through with that photo – who would have thought? She's sitting in the back seat asking us about the cottage.

"It's not much." I tell her. I'm nervous and I'm glad for the distraction. I keep rambling on. "Just a small cottage with a bit of land. It probably would have been nice under different circumstances but I don't think Simon wants anything to do with it."
We're not far away when we notice the smoke. I turn to Baz and he glances worriedly back at me. A sense of foreboding edges its way between us. He steps on the accelerator.

Simon

I'm trying to fly across the highway and I'm really struggling which is strange because I can usually fly for ages. I think about turning back because there's no way I can make it all the way back to London or even part way with how I'm feeling at the moment when I notice a car that looks like Baz's. I must be so eager to get home that I'm seeing things. It's the first time I've allowed myself to really think about Baz and Penny and home in a very long time.

I'm really tired and I realise even if I can make it all the way, which I can't, I can't very well land in the middle of London during the day. Maybe I should wait until night and rest up before I leave. Maybe I should go back and watch that place burn. I think I will.

I turn around and head back, ready to stop a safe distance away and watch it burn to the ground.

Baz

The cottage is on fire. I'm still at least half a mile away but it's clear that it's burning. I plant my foot on the accelerator and drive even faster. I see Penelope's knuckles white on the dash. I don't know if that's from the speed or the fire.

Wellbelove is asking what's going on but we ignore her.

Simon. He must be there. Did he do this or was there some accident? Either way, I can't imagine that we're not too late. I can't imagine after everything we've uncovered about Simon and his mother that it could have all been for nothing.

I slam on the brakes near the front of the cottage, far enough away from the fire but still close enough to feel the heat on my face as I open the door.

"No Baz!" Bunce shrieks as I race towards the cottage.

'Make a wish!' I yell as I point my wand at the burning building. Some of the fire fizzles out but quickly relights.

'Make a wish!' Bunce screams, pointing her ring and grabbing my arm as she attempts to drag me back away from the fire. I don't budge. Some of the fire goes out and then restarts again.

"Simon!" I shout as she tries to pull me back.

'Make a wish!' Wellbelove yells, pointing her wand at the fire. Again some of the fire dies but quickly restarts.

Wellbelove has caught up to us now so we point our wands and Bunce's ring together this time and scream in unison. 'Make a wish!' More of the fire dies, including the front door, so I race up to the now charred door.

"Baz! No! You're flammable!" Bunce screams as she tries to push past me but I'm much too strong. I hold her back.

'Open Sesame!' I yell and the charred door swings open wide. The centre of the room is ablaze and the fire is licking up the walls.
"Simon!" I shout from the door. I don't wait for an answer. I edge my way in. I can hear Bunce and Wellbelove behind me casting 'Make a wish!'. I can feel their magic on me. I wonder for a second if they are casting that spell on the fire or on me. "Simon!" I shout again.

Agatha

I don't know what's going on but I follow Penny's lead. I cast spell after spell to put out the fire. Baz has gone inside. I hope Simon's not inside. I try to put out the fire around Baz but it keeps starting up again. I try again but I'm not powerful enough. I don't know what to do.

Penny

"The roof Agatha!" I yell. "It's going to cave!" The roof is alight and I'm sure it will cave at any moment, and Baz is inside and Simon could be inside so I step back and aim my ring and Agatha aims her wand at the roof and we cast 'Up and Away!' in unison and pull the small section of burning roof straight up and over the now empty garden. It's not much, but it's something.

I race to the door again and call for Baz. I can't see anything for all the smoke. I cast Make a Wish! again around the door and around Baz but the door quickly catches fire again. He's trapped.

Simon

It is Baz's car I'm sure of it and I'm still a way back in the air as I watch them race out of the car and head straight for the fire.

I watch Penny, Baz and Agatha (Agatha is here?) casting spells I think to put out the fire and then I watch as Baz heads inside, straight into the fire! And he's flammable!

I don't know what I'm doing but I throw my bags to the ground from the air and I raise my arm. As I'm flying towards the fire I watch as a small part of the roof lifts straight off the cottage and lands in the dead garden. I see Penny and Agatha try to put the fire out, pointing towards the cottage, but the fire's not going out. And I can see a bit inside now through the hole in the roof, the family room is on fire and the fire is licking its way up the walls. I can see Baz now, he's standing inside pointing his wand, casting spell after spell. The fire is all around him, slithering closer. The roof is starting to collapse.

I always knew I'd die in a ball of fire, but I didn't think it would be like this, with one that I started and while I was trying to save the bloke that I'm madly in love with. Life's funny like that. I stop thinking as I fly straight down through the burning roof into the burning cottage, and I can feel the scalding heat of the fire on my wings as I spread them to stop parts of the roof from falling onto Baz. I point my (mother's) wand and with all the force I can gather I scream 'Make a wish!' as I fly straight down and wrap my wings protectively around Baz.

And then everything goes black.

Penny

I see Simon! He's flying straight down into the burning fire and initially all I feel is relief because we've finally found him, but now he is inside the burning cottage with Baz. He's gone in to save Baz while Baz is inside looking for him and I'm really panicking now and wondering what to do next but then the entire fire literally goes out like it's sucked back within itself. Smoke rises in giant plumes from the cottage.

I race to the door and Agatha meets me there. I Open Sesame! the door and as it swings open I hear
Baz let out a heart wrenching howl.

"Simon!" I shout. "Baz!" I edge my way in, trying to find my way through all the smoke. I finally find Baz in the middle of the family room with Simon cradled in his arms. Simon's not moving.

I drop to my knees next to him. Baz is holding him tight, casting healing spells through the tears. 'Get well soon!', he says and 'Early to bed early to rise!' over and over.

"Come on Simon." He whispers between spells. "Wake up, please love, wake up."

I check for a pulse. "He has a pulse!" I shout to Baz. "It's faint, but it's there!" And then I see his wings, there are burns across the back of them. I start casting healing spells on them.

"I'll call my father." Agatha says.

"Yes." I say. Then I turn to Baz, "We have to get him to Dr Wellbelove."

He doesn't say anything at first and I realise he hasn't even registered our presence. He just keeps casting healing spells on Simon. I touch his arm gently. "Baz," I say and Baz finally looks up to me, his eyes wild with panic. "We have to get him to Dr Wellbelove."

He nods silently and picks Simon up like he's not a fully grown man and he carries him quickly to the car. He slides carefully into the back seat with Simon in his arms and then fishes out his keys, throwing them to Agatha. I slide in next to him.

We cast healing spells all the way back to London. Baz all the while whispering to Simon "Wake up Simon, please wake up love." He brushes Simon's matted hair off his face as he whispers.
Chapter 32

Simon

I feel groggy. I don't know where I am but I don't think I'm at the cottage anymore. It doesn't feel like I'm surrounded by fire. Wherever I am is more comfortable that that.

"Baz?" I try to whisper but what comes out of my mouth sounds more like a croak. Where is he? Was I too late? Did he burn to death because of me? My mind fills with awful images of Baz dying in the fire that I started. I struggle to open my eyes.

"I'm right here." I hear him say. It's Baz. He's all right, and he's right here. Relief floods through me.

I open my eyes for a second and see his face in front of me before I black out again.

I wake up again, this time it's dark but there's a sliver of light coming from the half closed doorway. It looks like the light is coming from a lamp in the lounge room, my lounge room. I'm in my room back at my flat. I'm back at my flat! I look around and see Baz on a chair by my bed. He's asleep. I wonder briefly why he's on a chair before I fall back to sleep.

I don't know how long I've been out but I feel like I'm waking properly now. I can hear voices talking but I can't quite make out what they're saying. They sound muffled, or far way. I try to open my eyes. It takes a while because they feel so heavy but eventually I get them open. I blink a few times as I look around the room, my room. I am back at my flat, at least I wasn't dreaming that.

I see Penny and Baz and Dr Wellbelove too, they're all looking at me. I look around to see if anyone else is here but I don't think I could squeeze many more people in my room. Nope, no one else. I open my mouth to say something but nothing comes out.

"Ah, Simon. You're awake, good." It's Dr Wellbelove. He's smiling at me.

I try to say hi again but I make a croaky sound instead. I cough to clear my throat and try again.

"Hi." It comes out as a whisper and it sounds weird. But I haven't talked to anyone in a long time so I figure that's probably why.

Baz and Penny are right there then and I've never been so happy to see them. I'm so glad they didn't die in that fire. I try to say that, that I'm glad they didn't die in that fire but nothing comes out.

"Simon!" Penny says, and she's grinning at me. I try to grin back. I'm not sure if I am but I don't care. She's here and she doesn't sound mad at me or anything. I thought she'd be pissed. Maybe she still is but she takes my hand and gives it a squeeze so that's good. I try to squeeze back but I feel weak.

I look over at Baz now and he's standing back a little, looking at me and I can't stop looking at him. Merlin he looks so good and I've missed him so much and I want to tell him that, but I can't because it's still hard to talk and everyone is here and he's looking at me. Instead I drink him in with my eyes, all of him. I look at him properly now and I notice that he looks thinner and a little pale. Maybe it's just my imagination, maybe the fire hurt him, maybe I hurt him. I don't know what to think so I just stare at him.

"Simon, can you hear me?" Dr Wellbelove asks, looking at me now. Penny moves back next to Baz to give him room. I drag my eyes off Baz and look at Dr Wellbelove.
"Yes." It comes out as a whisper.

"Good, good." He says. "You've been unconscious for a few days now. We're glad to have you back."

A few days? Merlin I feel like I've been unconscious for a few months but I don't tell him that. I don't think I could right now. I don't have the words, or the voice yet. I nod instead.

"Do you remember anything?" he asks me.

I do remember some things, I remember falling into a black hole that I couldn't get out of, for months maybe. I remember it raining inside my head for weeks. I remember thinking I could be as bad or evil as the Mage. Then I remember the letter and the wand my mother Lucy and me flying. That's all.


They're all smiling at me. That's good I think.

I see Baz and Penny exchange glances. "What?" I whisper again.

Dr Wellbelove ignores the question and goes on in his practiced medical voice. "You suffered some burns to your wings but we managed to heal them quite well. There are only a few small scars where we couldn't spell the burns away entirely, but it shouldn't affect your flying at all."

My wings, I feel them now, and my tail, they both feel fine. Burns? I wonder what happened to them. Then I remember the fire again. I remember flying into the fire. Why did I do that? Why would anyone do that? But it sounds like something stupid that I would do so I don't question it.

"Baz and Penny here acted very quickly so the scarring is minimal, hardly anything at all. Now to business." He goes on. "Can you tell me your name?"

My name? Why is he asking me my name? "Simon," I whisper. "You know my name's Simon Doc."

He chuckles at that and I can see Penny and Baz relax their shoulders.

"Just making sure there isn't any memory loss." He says. "Last name?"

I try to roll my eyes but it hurts so I answer instead. "Snow."

"Good. Now, how many fingers am I holding up?"

Really, he's going to ask me these sorts of questions? "Two." I say, although I don't tell him they're a bit fuzzy.

"Good." he says again. "And the names of these two?"

I look at Penny. "Penny." I say, and she smiles at me. Then I turn to look at Baz. He's staring back at me and I feel a lump rise up to my throat but I push it down. I've missed him so much. "Baz." I whisper, staring at him. His mouth twitches a little – you would hardly notice it if you weren't looking for it, then he looks down at the ground.

"That's very good Simon." Dr Wellbelove says. "Now for the difficult question, if you're not too tired that is." I turn back to him. "What's the last thing you remember?"

"I'm okay." I say. Then I try to remember what happened. "The fire . . . I remember flying into it . . ."
Baz was there." I look up at Baz. I can't remember anymore and I must be frowning because Dr Wellbelove says that's good and that's enough now and I need to rest.

"I'll see you again tomorrow Simon." He says, patting my shoulder lightly as he leaves. Penny walks with him and they talk out in the lounge room for a while. Baz still hasn't moved so I look at him, he's watching me silently.

"Baz?" I whisper. I still can't talk much so I raise my hand instead.

He's crosses the room in a second and takes my hand, kneeling next to my bed. I try to sit up but I'm still weak so I stay lying down looking up at him. He looks at me and I stare at him but my eyes want to close, I'm so tired. I fight it but they close anyway and I drift off to sleep.

-oOo-

I wake up as Dr Wellbelove walks into my room.

"Good morning Simon, how are you feeling today?" he asks.

"Yeah good Doc." I say. My voice is a little better. I'm still whispering but it doesn't hurt so much. I try to sit up but I still feel weak so I don't bother.

"I'm taking you off the drip today so you need to eat and drink on your own. All right Simon?"

"Yeah okay."

"I'm also arranging a session for you with your psychologist for the day after tomorrow. Think you'll be ready for that?" he asks while checking my pulse, my blood pressure, my eyes and my wings."

"Yeah I'm good." I sort of whisper. "Are my wings okay Doc?"

He checks my wings again and casts some more healing spells on them, muttering 'very good' as he goes.

"They're fine Simon, they've healed quite nicely. You should be up and away in no time." He chuckles to himself. Then he asks me another series of questions, about work, uni and Watford. Probably to make sure my memory is okay. It must be because I answer all of them and he says everything’s fine and he'll see me again tomorrow.

He stops at my bedroom door and looks back at me. "Are you up for a few visitors soon Simon, there's a bit of a queue of people wanting to see you?"

I wonder who wants to see me. Penny and Baz have already seen me so there isn't anyone else I'm that close to. "Um, yeah okay." I tell him.

"Well done. I'll let them know. Bye Simon, Bye Penny, Basil." He says on his way out.

Penny sees him out and brings in a tray of breakfast for me. (Fried eggs, bacon, toast, tomatoes, sausage, mushrooms and a pot of tea and a glass of juice.) It's huge.

"Dr Wellbelove took you off the drip this morning so you have to eat and drink now." Penny says all serious like. I nod and try to sit up but it's harder than it looks and then Baz is there helping me. Merlin he's strong, he just pulls me up to a sitting position like I'm some little kid. Maybe I am, I feel like I've got no strength.

"Thanks." I say to Baz. My voice is a little better now. He doesn't say anything though, he just steps
back, which is a bit weird. I'm just about to say something but Penny is handing me a cup of tea so I take it and have a sip. It tastes fantastic. Then she's handing me the plate and I am so ravenous that I have to eat straight away, albeit a bit slower than normal. I finish the entire plate then finish the tea and another cup before I sit back full and content. She hands me a glass of water.

"Dr Wellbelove says you have to drink a lot too. You were quite dehydrated." I take the glass and drink it down. She refills it and I drink that one too. Then she refills the empty glass and puts it on the bedside table. She turns back to me. "Great Snakes, Simon, I'm so happy you're back." She whispers, reaching for my hand.

"Me too." I whisper, taking her hand. She squeezes it and then lets it go to pick up the tray. She glances at Baz as she walks out of the room.

"Baz?" I say, looking over at him now. My voice is still hoarse but it doesn't hurt as much. He already looking at me but he doesn't say anything. I want to ask him what's wrong but I think I know what's wrong. Does he hate me now? For leaving. I want to ask him so badly but I'm afraid of the answer so I ask something else instead.

"Are you okay?" I ask. "The fire, did it--"

"I'm all right Simon." He says, cutting me off. He doesn't say anymore, he just stands against the wall. I drag my eyes over him again, just in case. He looks okay except for his thinness and paleness.

"Can you tell me what happened? I – I don't remember." I say, my eyes searching his for answers. His eyes are on mine for a long time before he says anything. "Now's not the time Simon." He says softly. "You need to rest."

"Please?" I ask. I really want to know but it's more than that, I want him to talk to me. I think he might know this because he relents and sits in the chair opposite me. He still won't sit on my bed.

"You saved my life Snow." He says simply.

I did? When did I do that? "What?" I say. "How?"

He watches me again without speaking. "You flew into the fire and wrapped your wings around me. You protected me from the fire." He says, looking straight at me. "That's how your wings were burned."

I remember now, flying into the fire to Baz. But then how did we get out? I don't remember that at all.

"How did we get out?" I ask.

He gives me a long look. "Bunce and Agatha must have spelled the fire out." He says.

So Penny and Agatha must have pooled their magic and put the fire out. Thank Merlin they did–who knows what would have happened to Baz, to me, if they didn't.

I want to talk to him some more but I'm so tired. I'm fighting to keep my eyes open.

"You need to rest." He says quietly. And my eyes close completely at that.
Simon

I wake as Penny brings me lunch, or dinner, I don't actually know. All I know is that I'm still really hungry so I eat everything and Penny brings more.

"Did you make all of this?" I ask her, finishing off a plate of sandwiches. "And breakfast too?"

"Baz made breakfast. You know I'm crap at mornings." She says, smiling. "But I made these sandwiches." She says, piling a second lot onto my plate.

"Thanks" I say. These are easily the best sandwiches I've ever had. Or maybe I'm just really hungry.

"Where's Baz?" I ask when I've finished eating the second plate of sandwiches. She clears my dishes away with magic.

She's sitting down at the end of my bed with her legs crossed and looks at me for a long time before she answers.

"He left." She finally says.

"Why?" I ask, and I know I sound hurt. I don't want to but I can't help it.

"He needs to hunt Simon. He hasn't hunted since we found you." She says quietly. "He left as soon as you went back to sleep so he should be back soon."

"Oh" I say, relieved. And we sit for a while in silence. But then I can see the worry on her face and I don't like it so I talk instead.

"I'm sorry I left you." I tell her. I scratch at the back of my neck nervously.

"Simon." She says determinedly. "Don't you dare apologise for that."

I'm just about to go on about how stupid I was for leaving but I don't think I'll be able to get it all out without losing my voice, or crying, or both, so I just sit and stare at her. She finds my ankle through the blanket and gives it a squeeze. I give her a small smile.

Baz steps inside the door then and leans against the wall. "You have a visitor." He says from across the room. I want him to come closer but I don't say anything, I'm just relieved that he's back.

Agatha walks in behind him. "Hi Simon." she says, smiling tentatively at me. "Feeling better?" She asks as she seats herself on the other side of my bed, at the end next to Penny.

"Yeah, loads better thanks." I say. I smile back.

"I like your wings, and your tail." she adds, rather bluntly.

So she can see them now. I realise they haven't been spelled invisible and I wonder when Baz and Penny told her.

"Thanks." I say. And I remember seeing her at the cottage now. "You were there?"

"Yes." she nods.
"Why aren't you in America?" I ask her and everyone laughs a little at that.

"Because I came here. I wanted to help." she says, giving a little shrug as if it's no big deal.

"Help what?" I ask. I'm a little confused. I think I'm frowning.

"Help find you of course." She says, like it should be obvious.

"Why?"

"Because you were missing." She says, frowning slightly.

"You do know we were all looking for you?" Penny asks, watching me seriously.

"No?"

"Really Simon, what do you think we were doing while you were gone?" she sighs. She sounds exasperated and I think I'm missing something.

"I don't know, getting on with your lives?" I offer. I don't know. I assumed they'd moved on and forgot all about me.

Penny shakes her head and lets out a small huff. "Anyway, Agatha came and helped us work things out."

"What things?" I ask.

I look around at all three of them. No one says anything so I decide to talk instead. I want to tell them what I found out, about my mother.

"I worked some things out too." I say, looking at all of them. "I found out who my mother is, the woman in the photo. And it was her, she came to me through the Veil." And then I go to pat my pocket to find the letter but it's gone. That's when I realise I'm not wearing the clothes I had on when I left the cottage.

"The letter?" I ask looking around, panicking.

"It's okay Simon, here it is." Penny reaches to my bedside table and picks up the letter. It's next to a wand, my mother's wand and I remember that too now. Penny hands me the letter. "We had to clean you up, you were a bit of a mess when we found you."

"Oh, thanks." I say, a little embarrassed at the thought of exactly how much of a mess I was. "Did you read it?" I ask instead.

"Yeah we did Simon. I hope you don't mind."

"Of course I don't mind." I say, rolling my eyes. As if I'd keep anything from them. I can see she's relieved.

"But we also found out that Lucy was your mother." Penny goes on.

"You did? How?"

Agatha hands me a photo then. I stare at it for a while, looking at the three people in the photo and then I back up at Agatha. I must look confused because she explains who they are and how she took the photo from Penny's mum, not knowing at the time how important it was. I stare at it for a long
time. The Mage, Penny's mum and Lucy, my mum – the pregnant woman from my photo.

My photo is on the bedside table so I pick it up and compare the two. There's no doubt, it's definitely
the same person. Lucy.

"Her name is Lucy Salisbury." Penny says. "They were at Watford together."

I look up at her. Lucy Salisbury. My mum's name. I say it a few times over in my head.

"Our mum's were friends?" I ask Penny.

"They were best friends." she says grinning. "Cool huh?" I grin back. It is cool.

"And Baz's dad also worked out that it was your mum who came through the Veil to you the second
time that night." Penny says, nodding at me enthusiastically.

I look over at Baz. He's been standing against the wall quietly this whole time. I wish he'd come
closer. "Your dad?" I ask. I know I sound surprised but I can't help it, how did his dad work that out.

He nods, giving me a small smile. I can't believe it, how could Mr Grimm know that?

"How?" I ask.

He speaks slowly, looking directly at me. "My mother never called me her rosebud boy, she called
me something else. Father suspected as soon as he heard our testimonies during the trial." He
hesitates then. "I didn't realise it at the time, I should have, it was obvious. I'm sorry Simon—" He
drops his eyes.

"No Baz, none of that." I say determinedly, shaking my head as I look at him. "This is not your fault.
I didn't realise it either and she came to me that night." I wait until he looks up at me again, and then I
go on. I'm determined to get this out even though my throat is starting to hurt. "No more apologies,
ever. This isn't yours or anyone's fault." I want to make absolutely sure he knows that I don't blame
him for this, for any of this.

"That's what I keep telling him." Penny says, shaking her head.

"If this is anyone's fault it's mine." I say.

"No it isn't!" They all yell at once.

"Yes it is." I say, dropping my eyes and my voice. "I shouldn't have left. I know that now."

"Simon, you weren't in your right mind!" Penny says.

"It could be my fault." Agatha says. "I took the photo in the first place, I've had it for two years in
California. It should have been here, then perhaps you could have found it earlier…"

I don't know if she's trying to be funny or if she means it. "No." I say. "That's ridiculous Agatha."

"It's as ridiculous as you blaming yourself, Simon." Penny says. "Or Baz, blaming himself over a
visiting that happened right after he was kidnapped and not in his right mind . . ."

She's staring pointedly at Baz. He stares back at her, his face is unreadable.

"All right then." Agatha says. "Can we please all agree that none of this is anyone's fault?"
We all stare at each other silently.

"Agreed." Penny says, smiling a little.

"Agreed." Agatha says smiling too.

I smile at each of them, giving them a decisive nod. Finally I look over to Baz. "Agreed." I say, staring at him. He doesn't say anything at first, he just stares back at me from his spot against the wall. Penny and Agatha turn to look at him and now we're all staring at Baz, waiting.

"All right, agreed then." He snaps finally, throwing in an eye roll for good measure. I try to hold back a smile.

I don't believe that he really means it, but it's a start.

We talk a little more, until my eyes start to get heavy and I feel tired. I fall asleep quickly and wake a few times to hear Penny and Agatha talking in the lounge room, but I don't hear Baz. I look around, panicked, but then he's right here on the chair next to my bed. I take his hand and hold it as I fall asleep again.

-oOo-

I wake up early in the morning and I'm sick of being in bed. I think I need a shower so I get up, careful not to wake Baz in the chair and walk woozily to the shower and strip down. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I haven't seen myself in a really long time and Merlin I'm so thin and drawn looking that I hardly recognise myself. I try not to look too much because I know I look like shit, so I step in to the shower and then I fall over because I'm still weak. *Fuck* I mumble to myself. The water's still raining down on me as I try to get up and then give up and if it wasn't for Baz I would have stayed there until the water ran out. But he came in and turned the water off and helped me up and dried me off and helped me back to my room.

"Not yet Snow." he chuckles as he helps me into my trackies and tee shirt.

"Maybe the couch for a bit?" I suggest, because I'm kind of sick of being in bed.

"All right." he says, and he helps me to the couch. I don't let go of him so he has to sit down with me.

I turn to face him. "Baz? I say once we're both seated.

"Yes?"

"Can we talk yet?" And he knows what I'm asking. Can we talk about us? About how bad I fucked everything up between us. Because since I woke up that's all I want to know. Will he ever forgive me for leaving him? And I'm afraid of the answer.

**Baz**

Simon wants to talk and I'm not ready yet, because he's not well enough yet and when we talk we'll probably fight. As much as I know it's wrong and terrible of me I can't help but feel angry with him. I'm so angry with him for leaving, angry with him for not letting me help him like he helped me, angry with him for leaving *me*. I know it's wrong, I know it makes me the worst person ever but I can't change how I feel about this, I've tried.

When I finally found him I was so fucking relieved that he was alive and back in my arms I would
have done anything for him. He saved my life from that fire by wrapping those miraculous wings around me and I was so grateful. I was so relieved that we'd finally found him. But then he passed out and didn't wake up for days and I've been frantic. I would have given anything for him to wake up, to be all right. And now he has and he's unharmed and I don't have any right to be angry at anything, but I am.

"What about some breakfast first, you're still very weak Simon." I suggest, getting up and moving to the kitchen. I know I'm deflecting but I need more time. More time to work through my own feelings so that when we finally do talk about this, I don't go and do something idiotic like blame him for leaving or beg him never to leave me again, or both.

I busy myself making breakfast and he eventually moves slowly to the table and waits quietly. The quiet feels like a weight between us but I can't bring myself to start talking. I bring him his breakfast instead and when Bunce walks in I bring her a plate as well.

We eat in silence.

Once he's finished eating, Simon stands carefully. "Thanks Baz, for breakfast." He says, his mouth breaking into a small sad smile. Then he walks slowly back to bed, Bunce holding his arm as he walks. It's heartbreaking and I hate myself all the more for being the cause of his sadness.

Bunce comes back to the kitchen and glares at me. "How long are you going to do this?" she whispers forcefully.

"I don't know what you're talking about." I say as I get up to clear the dishes without magic, mostly for something to do.

She glares at me again. "You know exactly what I'm talking about." She says in a low voice. "And if you don't fix this I'll tell him exactly what a pathetic mess you've been while he was gone."

That Bunce knows exactly how to get to me and I don't like it, I don't like it at all. But I don't say anything, I sneer at her instead.
Simon

Penny's parents come to visit in the afternoon. They bring a few curry dinners that Penny puts in the fridge and freezer and a box of sour cherry scones from Watford that we have straight away with tea. The scones are brilliant. They taste even better than I remember, or maybe it's just that I'm still really hungry and everything tastes brilliant.

Mrs. Bunce tells me all about when she and Lucy were friends back at Watford. Penny and Baz sit on either side of me and I take Baz's hand and Penny squeezes my knee when her mum starts talking about her. Penny's mum says she was a brilliant student, strong and powerful and a little wild. I like that about her. It's really good to hear all about her.

Mr. Bunce nods and agrees with Penny's mum because he knew her as well and he liked her too.

And then Penny's mum says that I'm a lot like her, that she can see the similarities now and that I'm nothing like the Mage. That makes me feel good, that I could be like her and that Penny's mum knew her and says I'm like her. I know I'm smiling as she talks about Lucy, and Baz squeezes my hand every now and then and Penny squeezes my leg, then Mrs. Bunce stops talking and looks at me.

"We had no idea Simon." She says. "We thought she had moved away to America."

Her voice is san and I can see the tears starting to well up in her eyes then, for a lost best friend, for my mother and I don't want her to feel bad about this so I give her a small smile.

"I know, it's all right." I tell her.

We've been talking for a while now and I try to stifle a yawn but they both see it so they stand up and start saying their goodbyes. As they leave they both bend down to give me a hug. I don't get up because I still feel weak.

"It's so good to have you back Simon. Don't you ever do that again." Mrs. Bunce whispers into my ear as she hugs me. I nod and hug her back. Then Mr. Bunce pats my shoulder.

"Good to have you back Simon." He says to me.

I'm starting to feel a bit choked up but I swallow it down. "Thanks." Is all I can say.

Penny sees them to the door and then turns to me. "Do you want to have a rest Simon, or have the curry for tea?"

"I think I need to rest for a bit." I say as I get up and head back to my room. Baz gets up and helps me to my bed, then he says he needs to hunt and leaves before I can talk to him again. I fall asleep almost straight away.

I wake later and try to get up. Baz helps me up and I go to the bathroom and then sit at the kitchen table. Penny gets the curry out and casts You're getting warmer and we eat dinner quietly.

"Up for a movie Simon?" Penny asks after she clears away the dinner mess.

I shrug and nod as I move to the couch, I'm not sure if I am up for a movie but I'll give it a go. Baz sits next to me and when Penny sits they argue over which movie to watch. I'm too tired to care so I
let them pick and I fall asleep within the first half hour. I have no idea what it was.

-oOo-

I wake and Baz is bringing me breakfast so I figure it must be morning. I look at the tray of food – this breakfast is just as big as all the other breakfasts they've made me eat since I got back, and I swear I'm going to be the size of a house if this keeps up.

"You don't need to keep bringing me breakfast." I say as I struggle to sit up. "I can walk to the kitchen you know."

"You're still weak." He says dismissively. "You need to get your strength up."

"And you need to eat too." I say looking him over. "You've lost weight Baz, and you're as pale as ever."

"I'm fine." He says offhandedly. He waits for me to sit up before placing the tray on my lap. "Eat." He instructs. Then he steps back and leans against the wall, arms crossed as he waits for me to start eating.

I don't argue. It tastes good so I eat it all and drink the tea and the juice and the water. After I finish he picks up the tray and starts walking to the kitchen but I stop him.

"Baz I really need a shower." I say. I'm a little embarrassed because last time I tried I fell. "I don't want to ask Penny to help."

"All right." He says. And he takes the tray to the kitchen and then comes back and follows me to the bathroom. I can walk by myself all right this time, I don't feel as woozy anymore.

"I think I can do it on my own." I say as I step into the bathroom but Baz is right behind me, ready to catch me if I fall again. I still feel a little light headed but it's not too bad.

I take a look at myself in the mirror properly this time. I really do look like shit; my hair is long and matted, I need a shave and I'm thin and pale.

"I look like shit." I mumble. Baz doesn't say anything.

Then I turn to look at my wings and tail as I lean on the basin and brush my teeth. I spread the wings out as wide as I can in the small bathroom and it feels good to stretch them. They feel fine, they're not sore at all so I'm not sure what Dr Wellbelove is on about, but I look them over and then I can see some faint scars that must be from the fire. There aren't many but they're there, long silvery lines snaking up the deep red webbing of each wing. I touch them lightly, running my fingers up and down the scars.

I can see Baz watching me through the mirror so I shrug it off. "I need a shave." I say instead.

"Think you can manage that yourself Snow?" he asks, raising an eyebrow.

"Yep." I say, getting my razor out.

After I shave (leaning on the basin again) I slowly get into the shower. I know Baz is watching so I feel a little self-conscious because I look so bad, but it's not like he hasn't seen me shower before so I let it go.

"The Wellbeloves want to visit today, if that's all right." Baz says.
"Yeah okay." I say. It feels good to finally wash my hair. I'm not as dirty as I should be and then I remember that Penny said they had to clean me up while I was unconscious. I wonder for a second how bad I was but I don't want to think about that now so I think about not falling over instead. The water feels heavenly so I drag out the shower as long as I can before I finally turn off the tap. Baz hands me a towel and I dry off and wrap the towel around my middle. He walks with me back to my room and when I sit on my bed he rummages around in my drawers and hands me my shorts and socks and a trackie and tee shirt and hoodie. I manage to get everything on myself this time.

-oOo-

Agatha comes over with her parents. Dr Wellbelove checks me over while Agatha and her mum talk to Penny and me. Mrs. Wellbelove is polite to Baz but I think she's still a bit dark on him because he and I are boyfriends. (Were boyfriends?) She probably thinks Agatha would stay in England if she and I were still together.

Agatha's mum brought over a big container of cold roast beef. "Helen made this for you, for sandwiches." she says, handing the containers to Penny. "And a Battenberg cake." Penny and I thank them. I love Helen's roast beef and the cake is to die for.

Dr Wellbelove says I'm doing very well, and then he reminds me that I have my session with my psychologist today. I don't mind, I think it will be good for me actually, to talk about everything.

Penny and Baz and I have been talking a little every day too. Well Penny and I do, Baz sits and listens, occasionally disagreeing with Penny and sometimes holding my hand but he doesn't talk to me. It's weird and I hate it but I don't know what to do about it so I don't do anything. At least he's here I think to myself.

I told them everything that happened once I left and I couldn't believe it when they told me it was them at Hampshire and not the police coming to lock me up for breaking into the estate.

"That was Baz's idea. That you might be in Hampshire." Penny said.

"Only after you worked out that he could be in a dead spot Bunce." Baz said.

"I can't believe it was you two." I said when they told me they went there looking for me. "I thought it was the coppers coming to lock me up."

"Is that why you left?" Penny asked, looking pointedly at Baz for some reason.

"Yeah of course. I never would have taken off if I knew it was you." I rolled my eyes. Surely they know that?

"And where did you go then?" Penny asked. She's relentless when she wants to know what's going on.

"I flew to the cottage." I said, my voice getting quieter. "I didn't want to, I didn't like being there. But I didn't know where else to go."

I told them how I thought I wanted to get away from magic, when I first found out that the Mage was my father. I told them that it was all I could think about when I left. And then I told them how I was scared that I could become as evil as the Mage because he's my biological father. I told them that I thought I had to stay away from the magickal world, to protect it.

Penny squeezed my leg and Baz took my hand.
"Like I said, I was in a dark place."

I told them how I hid my wings in my backpack to buy food and they were pretty impressed. Penny was equally impressed that I thought about going to Hampshire in the first place. She said that Micah said that I didn't want to get away from all of magic and going to Hampshire proved that. I think he was right that I didn't actually want to get away. I thought I had to get away, but I didn't want to. That Micah is a smart one.

And then I told them that while I was at the cottage I was convinced that both my parents didn't want me because I was broken, or no good. That part was hard to tell them and Baz held my hand the whole time. Then I told them that when I found my mother's letter I finally realised that I'm not like the Mage, just because he was my father. My mother was good and she wanted me, she came back to me through the Veil.

I looked at Baz as I told them that I wanted to come home then.

"Why did you set the cottage on fire then?" Penny asked.

"I didn't want anyone else to ever find what the Mage had done, in case anyone ever got the same idea." I shrugged. "I wanted all the evidence of what he'd done gone for good."

"It was Baz's idea to go back to the cottage too." Penny said. "After we worked out who Lucy was, thanks to Agatha."

I looked at Baz then. "If I'd have thought for a second that you would have gone there I never would have set the place on fire Baz. I don't know what I would have done if you'd got hurt…"

"I know." Is all Baz said to me the whole time.

-oOo-

Baz's family come to visit – which is really, really weird. Daphne brings a bunch of different pies including a couple of Shepherd's pies, Cottage pies and I think a Steak and Kidney pie as well. The freezer is so full that Penny has to jam them in.

Mordy made a cake with 'Get Well Simon' on it and she stuck some dragon wings and tail on it somehow. (I think her mum used magic.) It looks cool.

"It's chocolate and mint." Mordy says as we sit on the couch. "Yours and Baz's favourite." She's jammed herself between Baz and me and she's holding my tail and is swinging it around as she talks, almost hitting Baz in the head more than once. She made the football team at school which she was pretty chuffed about. And she's also doing brilliantly at a bunch of different languages, just like Baz.

"Please put that down Mordelia." Baz's dad says, looking really uncomfortable sitting in the old stuffed chair that we inherited from Penny's parents. Penny had to grab some kitchen chairs so we had enough seats for everyone.

"The twins drew some pictures for you Simon." Mordy says as she hands me some drawings. She picks up my tail again and alternates between swatting my and Baz's knees with it as she talks about the drawings. "This is you flying." she points out, "And that's me and that's the twins running on the lawn. Oh and this is Baz over here, reading and looking all serious and pretending he's not watching." Baz rolls his eyes and snatches my tail out of her hand and wraps it around his wrist. She rolls her eyes and pokes her tongue out at him.

Daphne talks about the twins and Baz's brother. She tells me what they've all been doing since I last
saw them, which is mainly art classes for Baz's little brother and tennis lessons and music classes for the twins. I didn't even know they had that sort of stuff for kids who don't even go to school yet. She says they all wanted to come today but she decided to leave them home with the nanny in case I wasn't up for the noise. I thought that was kind of funny— they're the quietest and most well behaved kids I've ever met. It was probably for the best that they didn't come though, there isn't enough room in the flat for so many people. We've already filled our small lounge room with just us. She says I have to come and visit them soon and she looks pointedly at Baz.

"We're so relieved you're all right." Daphne says when there's a lull in the conversation. She's smiling at me warmly and I smile back.

"Thanks." I say. And then I turn to face Baz's dad. "And thank you, you know, for working it out . . . about my mum coming through the Veil. And telling Baz . . ." I trail off.

It's awkward to say, and he's still as scary looking as ever but I'm glad I get it out. He nods at me and almost smiles.

When they get up to leave, Baz stands to see them out. I'm a bit worn out so I stay sitting on the couch. Mordy hugs me and whispers rather loudly "Next time you come can we go for a ride?" I chance a glance at her mum but she pretends not to notice so I mumble yeah sure. Daphne hugs me and says I have to come back to Oxford soon.

"The children have missed you so much Simon. And so have we." she says, hugging me.

Baz's dad pats me on my shoulder and nods, which is weird because I always thought he hated me. Maybe he still does and he just has decent manners.

When they leave Penny and I look at each other, "I think you've got yourself a bit of a fan club there Simon." she says, grinning at me cheekily.

I snort back a laugh. "Yeah right, Baz's dad is my number one fan."

She rolls her eyes at me. "I meant Daphne and Mordelia . . . But maybe his dad too." And then she giggles and so do I.

-oOo-

My ex-boss Alex arrives with coffees and cakes and a bunch of different pastries from the café.

"Alex!" I yell. I can't believe she's come to visit me. I was planning to call her to apologies for resigning anyway. (And for resigning by text especially) Now I can tell her in person.

"I'm really sorry Alex, for resigning by text." I tell her. "That was rubbish of me."

"Yeah Simon it was." She says. "But Penny here told me you were going through some family shite so I forgive you. When can you come back?"

"What?" I ask. How can she want me back? I resigned and left her in the lurch all those months ago. Surely she's replaced me by now.

"When can you start?" she says again. "I need you back, all my female customers miss you and so do most of the blokes as well."

Baz narrows his eyes and Penny says, "Hah!"
"It's true." Alex says, smiling now. "And a lot of the older ladies have been asking after you as well Simon. You seem to have a bit of a following."

Baz snorts from his seat next to me.

"Um," I say, "If you really mean it Alex, I'd love to come back. If you're sure, that is."

I do need my job back, or a job. I wasted a lot of money while I was away and I owe Penny a shit load of back rent. I can't believe my luck.

"Sure I'm sure." She says adamantly. "You're the best barista I've ever had. You can start as soon as you want, just let me know before so I can get rid of that dolt I had to get to replace you. He's hopeless, doesn't know the difference between a macchiato and a piccolo for heaven's sake."

"Thanks Alex." I say again, grinning like an idiot at her.

Then she turns to Baz. "And when are you going to come over again with your violin? It's been a long time."

He looks at her and smiles. "Whenever you like."

I smile at that. I can see he wants to, he doesn't hang out with anyone from music school given that he only goes during the summer. I know he loves practicing with Alex. They get along really well for a vampire and a Normal.

She says goodbye to Penny and Baz, giving them both quick hugs. This time I go to see her out and when we're in the hallway she turns to me.

"You have good friends there Simon." She says quietly. "Look after them."

"Yeah okay, I will Alex." I say, a little embarrassed. She hugs me goodbye and I have to bend a little because she's really short.

"Ring me next week okay?" She says bouncing down the stairs. "Or better still come into the café, we can work out a timetable for you." she adds. "And tell Baz to come too. I want to talk music with him, it's been too long!" she calls back over her shoulder.

"Okay I will." I say as she disappears down the stairs. I'm still smiling when I go inside my flat.
Simon

"How did you find out about them?" I ask Agatha. We're on our way to the café where I work. I haven't actually started back at work yet, but I've sorted out a start date now with Alex. I'm feeling a lot better so Dr Wellbelove said I could try a few short shifts next week to get back into it.

I've been stuck inside for the last week so it feels good to finally be outside. Baz and Penny are at uni today– I didn't even realise they still had classes, but I was sleeping so I didn't notice when they were gone. I think they skived off quite a few when we came back.

Agatha has been coming over every day since they went back to uni so I wouldn't be left alone. Dr Wellbelove said I shouldn't be left alone yet, and I think Baz and Penny wouldn't have let me anyway. She came with me to get a haircut one day and the rest of the time we're either at the flat or going for short walks. We talk while we walk and she tells me all about San Diego where she lives.

"When we were at Penny's mother's house." She says. "They kept talking about you leaving Hampshire and going here and there. I assumed you were driving – I thought you had your licence by now. Anyway, it wasn't until we arrived at the cottage and I saw you fly down . . ." she trails off.

"Oh."

"Yes." She says. "It was quite a sight."

"I bet." I can't imagine what was going through her head when she saw me flying.

"And you've had them all this time?" she probes. She doesn't sound fussed about them, she actually sounds curious.

"Yeah, I gave them to myself when I still had my magic Agatha. Then I couldn't get rid of them." I shrug.

"Well you hide them very well, I can't see them at all now." she says, looking around where my wings should be. She frowns a little, like she's straining to see them.

"Penny and Baz do it." I say.

It's been good talking with Agatha. I like hearing about her new life in America, her almost Normal life. She doesn't seem to miss the world of magic at all. She's really curious about my wings, and especially the tail. She finds the wing and touches the soft leathery skin, rubbing it between her fingers. She doesn't know what to think about the tail. It's kind of funny.

We get to the café and after I talk with Alex for a bit, I order some coffees and cake. I introduce Agatha to Alex. I pick a table near the window and once we're seated, Agatha stares silently at me for a bit, then she cocks her head to the side curiously. "What's it like to fly Simon?" she asks.

I wasn't expecting her to ask that. But I grin. "It's really cool actually. It's like, I dunno, flying."

She looks at me and laughs at that. "Yeah, that makes sense I suppose." She says, shaking her head. "Silly question."

We drink our coffees and I eat both our cakes.
"And how are things, with Baz?" she asks when she finishes her coffee. She's playing with some grains of sugar on the table next to her cup. "I don't know Agatha." I admit reluctantly. "He hardly talks to me anymore. Christ, he hardly looks at me. I think he might hate me. I don't know what to do . . ."

She puts her hand on my arm and gives it a squeeze. "Penny said he was very upset when you were gone. More than that, she said he was frantic."

"Did she?" That's news to me. Penny hasn't said anything to me about when I was gone, and neither has Baz.

She nods vigorously at me. "And when I spoke with Penny, she was very upset too, quite distraught." she goes on.

"Of course she was, they both were." she says. "Anyway, they're probably both trying to protect you by not telling you. And I don't want you to go blaming yourself Simon, that's not why I'm telling you this."

"I know." I nod, dropping my head to stare at the table. I still feel guilty though. I'm only now starting to realise how my leaving had affected them.

"But I think you should know Simon, Baz doesn't hate you." Agatha says, breaking into my thoughts.

I look up at her. "How do you know?"

"It's obvious." she says dismissively. "I saw him when he found you. Anyway, I think this is just his way of protecting himself."

"From what?" I ask.

"From you Simon." She says. "From being hurt again."

Shit. I stare at her, raking my hands through my hair. "I didn't mean to hurt him Agatha." I try to explain. "I wasn't thinking straight."

"I know that." she says, and she's nodding at me again. "And I'm sure he knows that too, but he was so hurt."

"Christ." I mutter, shaking my head. "No wonder he doesn't want anything to do with me."

"Of course he does." She says, a little forcefully. "He hasn't left your side since we found you. And Penny said the first few days, before you woke up, he didn't leave your side at all, not to hunt, not to eat, anything. He was quite fixated on you."

"Then what should I do Agatha?" I huff. I've got no fucking clue how to fix this.

She sighs then. "Just give him some time I suppose."
Time. Brilliant. That's all I'm supposed to do is give him time? I feel so helpless, so – I don't know so stupid. Baz and I were together for a year and a half and now I don't know where I stand with him and it's all my fault. And I'm just supposed to wait it out now. I sigh and let it go. I don't want to talk about it anymore so I change the subject. We talk about my mother and the photograph that she took and she tells me that Lucy was her inspiration for moving to California.

"Really?"

"Yes, and it turns out she never even left England." She shrugs. "I wanted to get away from magic after everything that happened, and well, I kind of liked the idea that she got away too. So I thought anyway."

"Yeah." I say. So everyone thought.

We head back to the flat. "Tell me more about your life Agatha." I say as we walk. "What else do you do in California?"

And her face lights up as she finally tells me about her boyfriend while we walk back to the flat.

"A mage." I say, elbowing her. "And an Englishman, your mother will be pleased."

"Yes." she says, rolling her eyes. "I can't wait for that meeting."

"Bring him over for Events season, so she can drag him through all those galas and regattas. Just tell him he'd better have a few nice suits."

"Oh Morgana!" she laughs. "I don't know how he'll ever cope."

**Penny**

Tonight Simon and I are having dinner alone. Baz has gone to Oxford to hunt and visit his family. He didn't invite Simon and I know Simon is hurt by it, but he's trying not to show it. I pick his favourite curry that mum made and he picks a movie and we're going to eat in front of the telly for a change.

We went into uni on my last day so he could re-enrol for next term. It all got sorted quite easily, which was a relief for both of us. Simon was able to pick up most of the subjects he deferred last semester so it will be like he never left. I think it was a load off his mind to get that all sorted. And he's gone back to work now as well. Alex was so pleased to have him back that she didn't even mind when he had to sit down a few times at the start. And since then he's managed to make it through a full shift.

I also want to talk to Simon about Christmas tonight. I don't even think he realises how close it is. I remember last year, how I was worried about talking to Simon about his Christmas plans. This year I don't worry so much.

I hand him his dinner and sit next to him on the couch. "Simon." I say while we wait for the movie to start "Christmas is coming."

"Is it?" he sounds surprised. "I didn't realise."

"Well it is, you need to work out what you're doing." I tell him.

"I don't know Penny. I haven't thought about it at all."
"You and Baz need to talk about it." I say. And then I sigh, I didn't want to talk about their relationship but it's been weeks and nothing has improved. "You and Baz need to talk, period."

He looks at me and he looks so lost and sad that I wish I didn't bring it up. I don't want him to feel like this anymore. Damn Baz for being so stubborn, I don't know what his problem is.

"I know Penny, I will. But I don't want you to worry about me anymore, I'm not your problem." He says determinedly. "Let's talk about Micah instead, when's he coming?"

"Nice try, he's coming next week, end of discussion. Talk to Baz all right?"

He huffs and shoves a forkful of curry into his mouth. "All right Penny I will." he grumbles around a mouthful of food. "Can we watch the movie now?"

And we do, and while Simon eats and watches the movie, I send a quick text to Fiona. I don't want to interfere but Baz is being completely pathetic and needs a bit of a push.

*I'm on it.* Fiona texts back. I watch the rest of the movie with Simon, feeling hopeful.

**Baz**

I've had to endure two hours of my family berating me for not bringing Simon to dinner and for not bringing him to Oxford at all over the last few weeks. Mordelia rounded on me as well and Fiona even made an appearance at dinner and gave her opinion on the matter (which for the record she sided with my family, not me) so it became quite an unbearable evening.

"Christ Basil, I thought you'd be over the moon that your boyfriend's back, what the hell are you doing?" she had to curb her language at the table, my siblings were present.

"This is none of your business Fiona."

"You're forgetting that I had the pleasure of seeing you at your finest while your Chosen One was MIA. I'm more than happy to fill him in on the details." She threatened.

I glared at her across the table. "You will not." I said, even though I know Fiona will do exactly as she pleases.

"That's entirely up to you Basil." She said, raising her eyebrow. "I think it will make an entertaining story, don't you?"

Eventually I made an excuse of early classes and left. They don't know that my classes have finished for the year.

So far I've managed to avoid talking with Simon about us, but since my classes have actually finished I don't have any other excuses to keep me away. I know we're going to have to talk soon. I know that he's been patiently waiting for me to be ready, and I've been waiting for him to get better. And he is much better now, he's almost back to his normal self. I know I can't put this off any longer.

I know I'm being ridiculous. I've hardly spoken with him even though I'm always at his flat. I don't know what he's making of all this, I don't know what to make of it, I'm behaving like an idiot.

**Simon**

Our next visitor is the most surprising one yet. Fiona rocks up unannounced, carrying a big box tied with fancy ribbons in one hand and a bottle of gin in the other.
"I thought you might need something a little stronger than all that tea." She says as she hands the gin to me, then she hands the box to Baz. "Compliments of Louis, said your boyfriend here liked the Beef Wellington. Oh and there's a couple of dark choc mint mousse as well, should feed the lot of you tonight."

Then she flops on the couch and puts her boots up on the coffee table, crossing her ankles. We all stare at her, except for Baz who takes the box of food and places it on the kitchen table and then comes back and takes the bottle of gin from me.

"Perhaps we'll hold off on this a little while longer." He says with a small smile. I smile back, I can't help it, that's the most he's said to me for a while.

And I remember back to that night at the restaurant and later at the nightclub and then much later at home. That was our first date. It was a good date and I hope it won't be our last. It probably will be though, our last, the way things are going.

"Hey, Chosen One. Why the long face?" Fiona asks as she picks up a magazine from the coffee table and flicks through it. I wake from my reverie and stare at her but she ignores me and turns to Penny. "What do I have to do to get a cup of tea and a bikkie around here Bunce?"

I look at Penny then and she raises her eyebrows at me and then Baz. I try not to smile as I sit on the couch.

"Fiona!" Baz says, clearly annoyed. "There's no need to order everyone around."

"Calm down Basil." She says waving her hand dismissively. "I just want a cup of tea, unless you feel like cracking the gin?"

"It's a little early for that." Baz says, rolling his eyes.

"Tea's coming right up." Penny says. She magicks up the tea and cup and saucers and a packet of chocolate Digestive biscuits and stands to catch the tray. She places it carefully on the coffee table before sitting down.

Penny pours the tea and we all grab a few biscuits, all except Baz, and we drink quietly for a while.

"Why are you here Fiona?" Baz asks, bored.

"No reason, just wanted to visit my favourite nephew." She says, waving her hand airily. "And make sure the Chosen One here is all right seeing as you didn't bring him round for dinner last night."

Then she turns to me. "Got a right bollocksing from the family for not inviting you, he did." And then she turns to Penny and winks. What the fuck?

"Fiona!" Baz says, clearly irritated. "I hardly think this is the time."

"Of course it's the time!" She says, dunking her biscuit into her tea. "You might think it's all right, dragging this out for everyone to endure, but nobody else does. Get on with making up already will you?"

I cough then and spill a bit of my tea on my jeans. Penny spells them clean with her ring.

"Fiona!" Baz says again, exasperated this time. I think I see a faint tinge of pink on his cheeks, but it's hard to tell. "Don't you have anywhere else you need to be?"
"Nope." she says, grabbing another biscuit and dunking that in her tea.

Penny is smirking now. "Actually I agree with Fiona, Baz." She says. "So can you please get on with sorting this out?"

"Since when do you agree with Fiona, Bunce?" Baz sneers.

"Since she saved your arse." She fires right back. "Want me to refresh your memory?"

"You had a hand in that too Bunce." Fiona says shrugging.

I'm sitting here completely confused by this exchange. It's so weird seeing Penny side with Fiona and Fiona complements Penny. And Baz is sneering at both of them now. I'm obviously missing something they're all in on, but I have no idea what so I don't say anything, it seems safer that way.

"Oh and your father and Daphne want you to confirm Christmas very soon Basil." She adds, licking some chocolate off her fingers.

"Good idea." Penny says, nodding.

This is all so weird.

We finish our tea and the entire packet of biscuits while Fiona talks about some place near Bucharest where she just sorted out a major vampire problem. "It was a bloody mess, I can tell you." She says shaking her head. "Normals disappearing left, right and centre. I had to shut those blood sucking bastards right down, no offence Basil, otherwise Christ know what would have happened. A complete shambles, that's what it was." I glance at Penny and I think she's trying to stifle another giggle. We finish our second cup of tea in awkward silence and then Fiona abruptly gets up and says she needs to be off– something about a suspected vampire infestation over in Dorset that needs her attention.

"That was weird." I say to Penny as Baz sees her out. "You two new BFF's or something?"

"Hah!" Penny says, shaking her head as she clears up the afternoon tea dishes.

We stop talking when Baz comes back in. He stops at the doorway and looks around uncomfortably. "I need to hunt." He mumbles as he turns and heads out the door.

I stare at the empty doorway for a minute. I want to follow but Penny comes up to me and puts her hand on my shoulder. "Let him go Simon." she says.

I turn and head to my room. "I'm going to rest for a bit." I mumble.

I can hear Penny sigh as I shut my bedroom door behind me.
Chapter 36

Baz

I don't really have to hunt, I hunted at Oxford last night, I just need to get away so I can work through my thoughts without interruption. I quickly drain a few rodents in an abandoned warehouse in Southwark and then head back to my flat. I debate whether to go back to Simon's flat, they'll be expecting me for dinner but I can't face him right now, not after what Fiona said.

Damn Fiona to hell. She may be a fierce magician and an utter badass when it comes to protecting the Pitches, but she's a complete pain in the arse when she sticks her nose in where it's not wanted.

I'm at my flat now, pacing the lounge room, not sure what to do. I'm thinking about Simon. He's all I have been thinking about since he left so this isn't new. What is new is that I'm thinking about Simon and me, together. I want to be with him, I love him. Crowley, I love him so much. It's actually quite ridiculous how much I love him. I would do anything for Simon, to make him happy, yet here I am hurting him by my inaction.

I've hardly spoken with him since we found him. I was so worried that he wouldn't wake up at first. He was unconscious when I carried him to my car, and Bunce and I cast healing spells on him as Wellbelove drove us back to London. I carried him into his flat as Wellbelove called her father, and Bunce and I cleaned him up as best we could while we waited for Dr Wellbelove to arrive. He looked so weak, so thin and drawn. I've never seen him look so bad, even after all those years when he returned from the orphanage after the long summers, thinner and paler than when he'd left Watford only a few months before. I held his hand as Dr Wellbelove checked him over and added more healing spells to his wings and his body. I held his hand all through the night and the next day and the day after that, willing him to wake, to be all right.

I wasn't sure if he even wanted to see me after all this time – he'd left after all. And at the time I still believed that he left Hampshire to get away from us, I still believed that he didn't want to see any of us. (see me) But he called my name during the night and he called my name again the following day and he reached for me. So after all the time I'd spent convincing myself that he was gone, that he didn't want to be part of our world, that he didn't want me, there was some semblance of hope.

I've held onto that hope for the last few weeks.

When he finally woke fully and I stepped back to let Bunce and Dr Wellbelove take over, I didn't know what to say or how to act. I was paralysed by my own fear.

Crowley I'm still so paralysed by my own fear that I don't know what to do. But fear of what exactly? I keep asking myself. Of being hurt again, yes definitely, of being left again, absolutely. But my greatest fear of all, the one that's been eating away at my insides ever since Simon left, is that Simon Snow doesn't want me anymore.

I've been pacing for hours now, with these thoughts running through my head. I finally stop pacing when there's a knock at the door.

Simon

I wait for Baz to come back for dinner but he doesn't come. Penny opens the box that Fiona brought over and pulls out two of the three Beef Wellingtons and carries them over to the table.
"Come on Simon, let's eat." She says.

"I'm not hungry."

"Just give him some time Simon." She pleads. "He'll come round."

"Penny, it's been a fortnight and he's hardly spoken to me. I know I messed everything up."

"You haven't messed anything up Simon." She says determinedly. "Come on, you need to eat, you're still as skinny as ever."

"I don't know how that is. All I've done is eat and sleep since I got back." I mumble. But she's right, I am hungry so I follow her to the table and watch as she casts You're getting warmer with her ring. She squeezes my arm as we sit to eat. We eat in silence.

After we finish the pies, (That were really good, but reminded me of Baz and my date all those months ago, so I couldn't even enjoy it.) I get up to go to my room.

"Thanks Penny, I think I'll just go to bed." I say as I get to my room. I shut the door quietly and then sit on my bed, leaning back against the headboard.

I don't know what to do. I haven't known what to do since I got back.

When I discovered who my mother was, back at the cottage, all I wanted to do was come home. And now I am home but it doesn't feel like I thought it would, like it should feel, like it used to feel before I left. When I first woke up after the fire I was so relieved to see Baz there in front of me and I was so glad to be home, I stupidly thought everything could go back to how it was. But he ignored me and wouldn't talk to me, or touch me, and I realise now that things might never go back to how they were.

I notice the wand on my bedside table, still there from when I first came back. My mother's wand. I haven't thought about it since before I left the cottage, which is a bit weird because I remember now how good it felt to hold it when I first found it. I pick it up now and it feels good in my hand and a memory is tugging at my mind but I can't grasp it.

I've thought about my mother a lot since I found out who she was. It feels good to think about her and it makes me smile. I like thinking about what she wrote to me and what she said when she came through the Veil. She came to see me and that was pretty incredible. I think about what Penny's mum told us about her. They were good friends and she told us lots of stories about their time at Watford.

I start thinking about Baz and I stop smiling, I feel like I might cry instead. I knew when I left that he would hate me eventually and move on. And while I was away from here I almost talked myself into believing that I could get used to that. But now that I'm home it's different, my head is clear for one thing and I know I could never get used to that.

I never expected that coming back would feel like this– like I'm home but I'm not. It feels terrible and wrong. And I know why it feels so wrong now, it's because Baz is my home. Baz, the person I love most in the world, not some flat or room. I never thought I could miss him even though I see him every day but I do, I miss him like mad. I miss how we used to be and how we used to be together.

Have we broken up or are we breaking up? I don't know. I've only ever broken up with Agatha and I never saw that coming either.

I twist the wand absently in my hand like I'm casting a spell. It's been so long since I've cast any spell with a wand that the action doesn't feel that familiar anymore. I still remember some of the spells I
learned at Watford and I run through some of them in my mind absently while I think of Baz. I'd do anything to fix this, fix us, but how can I fix us when he won't even talk to me? I don't know if I can fix us.

It takes a while for me to notice that the lights are coming on and off as I think about how to fix things with Baz.

I stop then and look at the lights. Am I doing this? I flick my wrist again, casting the spell in my mind and the lights go off. I do it again and the lights come on. Merlin, am I actually doing this? I do it again and the lights go off.

"Shit." I mumble as I drop the wand on my bed. I stare at it for a while, and then I look at the lights and will them to come on with nothing but my mind. Nothing happens and I let out a breath of relief. I don't want to be able to do things just with my mind ever again. There's no way that that would ever be a good thing. I pick up the wand again and flick my wrist and cast the spell and the lights come on again.

I can feel something inside me this time as I spell the lights on. It feels like it could be magic but I'm not exactly sure. It doesn't feel like my old magic, like a jet engine about to take flight or a bomb about to go off, and there's no smell of smoke. This feels different, a lot more subtle and safer, restrained. I try to spell my shoe laces undone and it works, then I spell some of my clothes from the floor away and they go. "Blimey!" I whisper.

Now I'm starting to remember the fire, and Baz in the fire and me flying into the fire pointing my mother's wand. What I'm doing right now, with the lights and my clothes, feels kind of the same but a lot less and a lot more controlled. I have an image in my head now, like a daydream but clearer, of me flying into the fire, pointing my mother's wand and screaming something. The fire was all around Baz and there was no way out for him and I was screaming something. And I remember now, I screamed Make a wish at the fire as I flew down and wrapped my wings around Baz.

I remember that I put the fire out with my mother's wand as I wrapped myself around Baz. I know it was me now, and not Agatha and Penny. I know it was me because I can feel the magic in me now like I did then. It was magic that I felt come out of me as I flew down into the fire, right before I passed out.

That's probably why I did pass out. I must have used a shit load of magic to put out that fire.

And now all I can think of is I have to tell Baz. I have to tell Baz. I get up and move to my door and then I stop. I try out Penny's spell on my wings and tail to see if I can make them invisible. It works. Wicked! Then I race out of my room, yelling over my shoulder to Penny that I'm going over to Baz's as I race out of the apartment. And then I come back in and grab the last Beef Wellington and dessert in case he's hungry and race out the door, and then I come back in again and grab my coat and gloves, (I forgot that it's bloody cold outside.) and then I race out again.
I open the door to a very cold and exhausted looking Simon.

"Simon?"

"Baz." he says. He's shaking from the cold and he looks like he's been in a wind tunnel. He looks like he's been flying.

"Did you fly here?" I demand.

"Um yes." He says. "Can I come in? I need to talk to you?"

I realise I'm blocking the door so I move aside to let him in. "What in Crowley's name do you think you're doing Simon? You shouldn't be flying in this weather. You shouldn't be flying at all, you're not strong enough yet." I say as I help him to the couch.

"I brought you dinner. I thought you might be hungry." He says, putting the box down on the coffee table.

He's still shaking as he removes his coat and gloves, and then puts the coat back on because he's so cold.

"Here let me." I say as I grab my wand and cast a warming spell on him until he looks comfortable.

"Thanks." He says, and he's a little calmer. He sits down on the couch and rubs his hands together, like he's trying to work out what to say next. After a time he turns to face me. "I need to talk to you." he says.

I stare at Simon for a long time. He looks agitated. I don't want him to feel like this, I never want him to feel like this, but he looks like this whenever he looks at me since he returned and I know I'm the cause. I feel even worse. "I need to talk with you too." I finally say.

"Me first." Simon says. "Please?"

"All right." I say slowly.

He stands up then and walks around the room, raking his fingers through his messy hair as he paces. Then he comes back to the couch and sits next to me, turning to face me again. I have no idea what he's going to say.

"I know you're mad at me Baz." He says holding my gaze.

I wasn't expecting that.

"I'm not mad at you Simon." I tell him.

"Yes you are."

"No I'm not."

"Why won't you just admit that you're mad?" He demands now. "I mean, I think I know why. I think
it's because I left, I left you. And I know you probably hate me now because of that, and you've probably had enough of me and want to move on with your life and everything."

"That's not--"

"And I came here to say that if that's what you want, just tell me, even though I don't want that, because I love you, I do, I love you so much. And I know I was a burden on everyone last year with everything that happened. Especially you, and Penny. And you've got every right to be sick of me, Christ I don't know why you stayed with me for so long in the first place. So if you want to leave me, then you don't have to wait anymore. I won't stop you, if that's what you want . . ."

He looks so sad and lost and I can't stand it.

"Just tell me what the fuck is going on Baz." he says, frustrated now. He's shaking his head from side to side.

"All right I will." I finally snap. It comes out angrier than I meant it to but it has the desired effect. He stops talking and stares up at me, his eyes searching mine. I stand up and start pacing in front of the couch, willing the right words to come.

I stop pacing and turn to face him. "I am angry with you Simon." I finally say, throwing my arms in the air. "I'm so angry that I can't think straight! You left me, and it's not the first time, you take off every time something happens!"

"I know Baz, I know I do that. I don't know why I do it, I don't know what the fuck I'm doing half the time." He mutters, shaking his head again and dropping his head in his hands.

Why is he agreeing with me? He should be arguing the point, that he had good reason to leave. It makes me feel even worse and I try to rein in my anger but I can't, I keep going instead.

"You've got that right." I spit back. "I'm so fucking angry with you for leaving me Simon. All I've ever wanted is to be with you, be there for you, and you won't let me."

"I'm sorry Baz, I'm sorry. I'm such an idiot." He mumbles, and he looks crushed. I wish he would stop.

"No you're not, and will you please stop apologising? It's infuriating!"

"But, it's my fault?" He frowns.

"No it isn't."

"But, you're mad at me?"

"Just let me finish, please." I say exasperatedly, and I stop to take a breath to try to calm myself down. "I am angry with you Simon, I am, but do you know what the worst part is? The worst part is that I know, I know, I've no right to be angry at you, no right at all. You were in shock and you were grieving and you had every right to do what you did and I know that. Crowley, you've been through so much, so much more than anyone, and you've had to deal with these terrible things your whole life. And I'm so fucking angry at the Mage, for putting you through all of that . . ." I stop pacing and look at him now. "But I'm still angry with you for leaving me, which is inexcusable under the circumstances. So I believe that makes me the most selfish person there is."

"You're not selfish Baz." Simon says quietly.
"Yes, I am."

"No, you're not." He says. And I can feel his eyes on me as I collapse down next to him and rest my head on the back of the couch. I feel defeated.

I turn my head to face him. "Yes I am. I'm completely selfish when it comes to you."

He doesn't say anything now, he just watches me as I watch him, neither of us daring to speak first.

I let out a small sigh. "I know why you do it Simon. Leave that is. I've had plenty of time to think about it."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Well are you going to tell me, because I don't have a bloody clue?" He growls.

I sit up and sigh as I face him. "You've never had a family, to come home to, to be there for you." I shrug. "You've never known what it's like to have people who'll always be there for you, always, no matter what. I have my family, and if they weren't there after I was Turned, or kidnapped, who knows what I would have done, where I would have ended up."

"Bunce has her family." I go on. "Her parents would do anything for her and her siblings. And even when that dolt Prem was acting like a complete moron, charging around with the Mages men, ordering everyone around including his own parents, they were still there for him."

"You've never had anyone Simon. So it makes sense that you have this fight or flight mindset, to deal with things on your own whenever something goes wrong, whenever you feel threatened or upset."

"Oh." He says, looking thoughtful.

Finally Simon shakes his head and looks at me, piercing me with his blue eyes. He looks so sad. "I don't want to do this anymore." He says quietly. And I think this is it, he's finally leaving me. I knew it would happen one day. Why on earth it took this long for me to work it out is beyond me. Me, a vampire, a dead vampire. How could I have possibly thought that someone as good and brave and honest and selfless, as alive as Simon Snow would want to be with someone like me? What was I thinking?

"I mean, I don't want to do that anymore," He says this time. "I want to have a normal life. Not Normal, you know, normal, like uneventful, or boring even. I want to go to uni and work and go out with our mates and fly and go on dates and dance even and learn to drive a car and I don't know, go on holidays, you know, like everyone else."

"I get it Simon. I can't give you a normal life, I'm a vampire."

"No Baz, you're not getting it." He says, holding my gaze. "I know you're mad at me for leaving you, but I have to say this, I have to let you know. When I was at the cottage and I found out about my mother, that she wanted me, all I wanted to do was come home, to you. But I don't know if I have you anymore." He takes a big breath and lets it out. "So what I meant was, I want to do all of that stuff that I said, all of it, with you. It's the other rubbish I don't want. And I don't want to leave you again, ever. That's what I don't want to do anymore. I don't want to feel like I need to take off every time something bad happens. But I want to do all of that other stuff with you... And I want to be your boyfriend again, if you'll let me."
Simon

I sit here rubbing my hands together nervously as Baz looks at me like he really can't work me out. That's the most I've said to him in months and I'm worried because he's probably going to tell me to fuck off or something before he leaves me. But I had to get it out, it's been killing me this last fortnight, not talking, not touching, not being together. Not being anything.

He doesn't say anything for such a long time and I'm thinking that I should maybe get up and leave when he finally smiles a small smile. This could be good, or not. I have no idea.

"All right" He says finally, and my heart leaps out of my chest. I feel my eyes go wide and I'm just about to grab him but then he says, "But you're a flight risk, so I'll do that on one condition."

And I think he's going to ask me to get rid of my wings, and tail too I suppose, because I'm a flight risk. I like my wings a lot, actually I love my wings and I love flying, I really love flying. When I fly I can push all the bad stuff to the back of my mind and all I think about is the wind on my face and the freedom of it all. But I love Baz more so I'd do it for him if he asked me to. I'd do anything for him, to be with him again.

But he doesn't ask me to get rid of my wings. Instead he asks something else, something that I never thought he'd ever ask me, not ever.

"Marry me? Simon?"

Baz

Simon doesn't say anything, he just stares at me. I wish I knew what he was thinking.

Simon

I don't think I heard right. I thought Baz just asked me to marry him. Why would he ask me that if he hates me? Obviously my head still isn't right. Maybe I haven't recovered as much as I thought I have. Maybe the flight here took it out of me. I can't stop staring at him.

"What?" I finally say.

"I just asked you to marry me Simon." He's staring at me, pining me with his eyes, and I can't do anything but stare back.

"I thought you were going to ask me to get rid of my wings, and tail." I say.

"Why would I do that?" He demands. "You love your wings. I love your tail."

"Because I'm a flight risk?" I ask, a little confused. I think I'm frowning.

"I meant that metaphorically, not literally." He's says shaking his head. "Although with you I suppose it could be taken either way . . . "

"Oh." And I'm still staring at him, because I can't stop.

"So?"

"So what?"

"Do I have to ask you a third time?" he asks, exasperated this time.
And I remember my magic now. That's what I came here to tell him when I raced out of my flat in such a hurry earlier, that and to tell him I wanted to be his boyfriend again. It feels like a lifetime ago now.

"I should probably tell you something first." I say.

"What?" he asks suspiciously.

I'm smiling a little now as I look at him.

"What?" he asks again, eyes narrowing.

I think I'm grinning now. "I'm fairly sure that I got my magic back, that day, at the cottage . . ."

His eyes grow wide and his mouth falls open. "How?"

"And I'm fairly certain that it was me who put out the fire. I remember casting Make a wish as I flew down to you, with my mother's wand."

"Show me." He demands.

I get out my mother's wand and think of what spell to cast. I can't think about anything but him at the moment so I try to spell the top button on his shirt undone. I only meant to do one but they all come undone at once and his shirt falls open. I'm sure he sees my eyes drop to his chest for a second. I swallow hard.

He raises one eyebrow a me.

"Er, sorry." I say as I spell them closed again. "I think my mother's wand is letting me get the magic out, my magic. It feels a lot better than that other wand I had, the one that the Mage gave me. And I think that's why I fell unconscious, I must have used a ton of magic to put out the fire. It must have taken a lot out of me." I shrug.

We stare at each other. We've done that a lot tonight.

"Snow?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you going to marry me or not?" He demands, impatient this time.

"Oh." I say, still staring at him. And now I think I might be grinning like a bit of an idiot because I want this, I really want this, more than anything. I've wanted this ever since I first worked out that I was in love with him. "Yes Baz, I'm completely mad for you. Of course I'll marry you."

Baz

"About fucking time." I tell him as I pull him to me and press my mouth against his and kiss him again and again, for each and every time we haven't over the last few months. I've missed Simon so much and I've missed this so much that I can hardly think straight. I hear him gasp when our lips touch, and feel him shudder when his mouth opens to mine, and when his tongue brushes against mine I feel a jolt of pleasure rip though me. And then he pushes his fingers into my hair and clenches his fists in it and pulls me even closer.

"Crowley Simon." I gasp into his mouth between kisses. "I've missed you so much."
"I missed you too Baz." he breathes, and he kisses me again. And he keeps kissing me until he has to pull back a little for air.

"I don't ever want to be apart from you again." I say against his lips. I want him to know this.

"Me neither Baz." He whispers back and my heart soars. I can't believe he wants this, he really wants this as much as I do. Crowley, to think how much time I've wasted. I've been a complete idiot.

I press my forehead against his until our mouths are a breath apart. "These past few month Simon, they were the worst months of my life." I whisper against his lips. I can't stop talking, this is quite unusual for me.

"Mine too." He says, moving his hands to my cheeks. He presses his warm lips back to mine and kisses me so tenderly that I feel my knees go weak. I pull him closer and kiss him again and again.

His hands are still on my cheeks as I trace my mouth down his chin, and along his jaw to his neck, his heart stuttering under my lips. I kiss his neck again and I smile again against his skin when I hear him moan. Crowley I've missed him. I drag my mouth back to his and kiss him hungrily, I don't think I ever want to stop kissing Simon Snow ever again.

I pull back a little so I can take a breath and I look into Simon's eyes, those beautiful extraordinary blue eyes. He moves forward to kiss me again and I capture his lips hungrily. He moans again and I love it.

"We might need to slow down a little Snow." I say eventually, breathing hard.

"I don't want to." He pants, he's out of breath. I smile at that.

"Neither do I, but Dr Wellbelove will not be pleased if you relapse." I loosen my hands from his waist and bring them to his face.

"I suppose it would be a little embarrassing to explain. . ." He says, but he kisses me again, running his fingers through my hair and down my back, it makes me shiver.

I have something else I need to tell him, so I reluctantly pull back. I need to make some space between us to keep my thoughts clear. "I need to tell you something else." I say against his lips.

He stops running his fingers down my back so he can pull back a little, he looks at me warily.
"What?"

I take his hands in mine and I squeeze his hand lightly, he presses his thumb against the back of my hand.

I struggle to start. This is difficult for me to say but I need to get it out now, I need him to understand. I try to smile. "When I said that you've never had anyone, and that's why you leave." I say, looking into his eyes. "I meant that you never had anyone, until now. Because you have family Simon, I'm your family."

He smiles at me then and it's breathtaking.

"I am your family. All right?" I say and he nods slowly, his eyes are brimming with tears. "And Penelope and my family and the Bunces and the Wellbeloves, they're all your family too you know. But I'm your family now Simon. You have family. Don't ever think that you don't."

He continues to stare at me and he's smiling. His tears are running freely down his cheeks now and I
bring my hand to his face and gently brush them away. I brush my fingers across his beautiful red
lips and I want to kiss those lips again as they part but I sit back and take his hand again instead. I
want to talk about what we'd just finished talking about before. We're engaged for Crowley's sake!
And I'm so ridiculously happy that I start grinning like an idiot.

But Simon beats me to it. "So when can we get married Baz?" he asks quietly.

"Whenever you want." I say, grinning wider now. "You know, the average age for Normals to
marry is twenty seven or something outrageous, but the average age for a mage is a lot lower, around
twenty two. We could meet somewhere in the middle if you like. I'm prepared to wait for you, until
you're ready . . ."

"I'm not a Normal anymore." He says quietly.

"I know." I say, smiling. I'm rubbing my thumb across the back of his hands in small circles. "I was
just outlining the possibilities." In truth I'd marry him right now if he'd let me.

"I don't want to wait that long." He says, piercing me with his stunningly ordinary blue eyes. "I love
you Baz, I want to be with you."

My heart stutters again and I can't help but kiss him again. "I love you too Simon. Crowley it's
ridiculous how much I love you." I whisper, brushing my lips across his.

"And I want to live with you, like right now, and I want to sleep next to you, all the time, and I want
to talk to you about everything, and I want to look at you and hold your hand and kiss you whenever
I like." he says in that ridiculously honest Simon way. Crowley I love this boy.

"I want all of that too." I nod, grinning stupidly at him.

"But I don't think I can move out of my flat yet." He says, frowning now. "I've only just come back
and it wouldn't be fair to Penny." I want to smooth out the crease with my thumb.

"All right Simon." I whisper, rubbing my thumb gently across the crease in his forehead.

"And where would we live anyway?" he asks.

"Here of course. If you like that is." Is that the right answer? Does he want me to move in with him?
Do we get another place entirely? Crowley. I'd follow him to the North Pole if that's what he wanted.

He grins at that. "Yeah, I'd like that a lot."

"All right." I say, secretly relieved that I don't have to move to the North Pole. My heat challenged
body wouldn't last a week. And I'd need an entirely new wardrobe. And where would I hunt? What
would I hunt?

"But I'm only twenty, or maybe twenty one." Simon says, bringing me back to the present.

"Yes." I nod. He is.

"And I still have uni, I've only finished my first year. I don't even have a proper job."

"Same here Simon." I agree. Also true.

"And I don't have any money, so I'll probably need a better job, to save up for it." he adds, frowning
again.
"That's one thing you don't have to worry about." I assure him. Being a Pitch has some advantages. I've never worked a day in my life. Crowley, even Fiona only hunts vampires when she feels like it.

"But I will worry about it." he says doggedly.

"It's all right Simon, believe me." I say as soothingly as I can. I don't want him to worry about that. Financial security is the one thing I can give him easily, and forever.

"Maybe we could get married next year, like at the end? That way I could give Penny plenty of notice." He goes on. "And I'll be finished another year of uni and have saved up some more."

I'm grinning again. "All right Simon, if you like." I nod again. I'd agree to anything right now.

"Or even the year after? I mean, there's no hurry if we're going to be together forever?"

"Yes all right." I keep nodding.

"Or maybe we should do it straight away." He says frowning again. "I don't know if I can wait that long."

"All right." I'm still nodding.

"And it's not like we can't be together all the time anyway?" He questions. "Right Baz?"

"Absolutely." I agree. There's nothing I want more in this realm than to be with Simon. Always.

He looks down at his lap and takes both my hands in his. I think he's finished talking but I wait for him, just in case. We haven't actually resolved anything and I don't care. Simon has just agreed to marry me which means he wants to be with me forever, and nothing else is as important as that. He looks back up at me, smiling that adorable smile of his.

"So we're really engaged?" he asks hopeful.

"Yes." I say reassuringly.

"And we're fiancés now? Not boyfriends?"

"We are." I say smiling.

"And we're going to be married?"

"Absolutely." I'm grinning now.

"And we'll be together forever?"

"Definitely." I beam.

He smiles broadly now, a big wide smile that's so free and easy – it's magnificent. It's been so long since I've seen Simon smile so willingly like that, he's beautiful. I plan to spend the rest of my life making Simon smile like that.

Simon puts his hands on my cheeks and pulls me towards him and kisses me again and it's tender and I love it, I love him. I've missed him so much, missed this so much. I kiss him back eagerly.

Eventually he pulls back a little and looks at me. I know I'm grinning stupidly and I don't care. I just stare back at him. He takes my hands in his.
"Baz?"

"Yes love?"

"Are you hungry?"

"I could eat." I shrug.

He stands up then, facing me as he pulls me off the couch.

"Come on then Fiancé." He says, picking up the boxed Beef Wellington and pulling me to my room. I go willingly.

We eat sitting up in bed and then we hold each other and talk and kiss for most of the night, and then sleep for a time before waking to talk and kiss some more. And in the morning, when I'm sure that Simon is rested enough and after he's had a good breakfast, I drag him back to bed where I show him exactly how much I've missed him.

-oOo-

"Baz?"

"Yes love?"

I have no idea what time it is and I don't care, I'm back to tracing his moles with my fingers. I've missed this, just lying together, kissing, touching.

He feels so warm now, warmer than before his magic came back but not as hot as he used to feel when he was full of magic. And he still smells the same, like something sweet and brown, not like before when he smelled like green fire and brimstone. We talked more about his magic this morning and he cast a few spells and he said it felt like it is his this time. He seems to have control of it and he's definitely more comfortable with it.

"I think it's your turn."

It takes me a few seconds to backtrack from my thoughts to work out what he talking about. But then his soft lips are on mine and he kisses me, slowly at first and then more urgent as he presses himself against me, pulling me close with his arms around my waist. I stop tracing his moles then and bring him closer to me, I can't get enough of him.

He pushes me on my back this time and for a brief moment I worry that this is too much for him, that he's going to overexert himself, but then his lips are grazing down my throat, down my chest, stopping for a time around my stomach and I forget what I was thinking about, and when his mouth reaches its mark, I don't think of anything at all.

-oOo-

"Baz?"

"Mmmm?"

I'm expecting Simon to tell me that he's hungry. It must be well after lunch time now and I'm thinking about what I have left in the fridge. I'm wondering if there might be a forgotten pie lurking in the back of the freezer, or perhaps some French toast will do.

"Why did it take you two weeks to tell me that you were mad at me?"
I wasn't expecting that. I run my fingers through his messy curls while I think of how to answer.

"I was working out what I wanted to say." I say eventually.

He pushes himself up on his elbow and looks down at me. "It took you a whole fortnight? To work out what you wanted to say?" He looks incredulous.

"Yes."

"'I'm mad at you.' That's all you had to say you know." He says, he's raking his fingers through my hair across my pillow, it feels so good.

His blue eyes are pinning me down into my bed and I stare into them, trying not to lose my train of thought as I think of what I want to say next.

"Not all of us are blessed with an ability to articulate every thought immediately Snow." I finally say.

"What?"

"Not everyone can say out loud everything that's going on in their head." I clarify.

"Why not?" He looks confused.

"Some of us like to think things through." I tell him.

He's silent for a while and he looks like he's lost in thought. Then he turns back at me. "Too much thinking isn't good for you Baz. You could have just told me you know."

"I know."

"So will you? Next time?" He asks, looking at me intensely as he twists a lock of my hair between his fingers.

"Will I next time what?"

"Will you tell me next time I make you mad?" he says. "Straight away?"

"All right." I say, and I'm smiling now. There's nothing much Simon could ever do to make me angry, I'm so stupidly in love with him.

"Promise?" he asks, penetrating me with his gaze again.

I let myself get lost in the blue of his eyes. "I promise."
Chapter 38

Penny

Simon didn't come home last night. I was in the middle of an all out panic attack, and I was on my way out to look for him when he finally answered my text, telling me he was staying at Baz's flat. I was still a little worried about him, (and mad for not letting me know sooner) so after I sent him another text telling him he was a bloody idiot, I text Baz as well, just to make sure. After I called Baz a few more choice names he confirmed Simon was staying with him, which means they must have sorted everything out. And it's about time!

And now that I don't have to worry about Simon, I have some free time so I decide to give Agatha a call. We spend the morning Christmas shopping and then have lunch at Simon's café. I say hi to Alex as we walk in.

"So I think they're back together." I tell Agatha when we order lunch at the counter.

"About time." Agatha says, echoing my thoughts exactly.

We find a table near the window and check out our Christmas shopping while we wait for lunch. I bought Simon some more art supplies and some running clothes; most of his running stuff is worn out and he was wearing Baz's back before he left. He hasn't started running or done any drawing since he came back yet, but I'm hoping he gets back to all that when he's strong enough. I bought some books and clothes for Micah as well but I'm thinking about something more than just a Christmas present this year. I'm thinking it might be time to propose.

"So, are we making gingerbread this Christmas?" Agatha asks me, pulling me from my thoughts. She picks up a sandwich triangle daintily and takes a small bite.

I take a sip of my cappuccino and place it back on the saucer carefully. "Do you still want to do that?" I ask, genuinely surprised that she would want to.

She puts her sandwich down and smiles at me, "Yes why not, seems a shame to drop such an important tradition." She says seriously. I don't know if she's joking or not but she seems willing enough.

"Good, my place then, Christmas eve eve." I say, taking a bite of my sandwich. "Micah arrives the day after." I may as well lock in the date now before she changes her mind.

"So does Joshua." She says.

"He's coming here?" I ask. This is news to me, I thought they were spending Christmas apart.

"Yes, he phoned the other day and asked if he could come." She shrugs. "I suppose I'll have to introduce him to Mother eventually so it may as well be now. That way if she scares him off I won't have wasted too much time." She laughs. She takes a sip of her latte.

I snort back a laugh at that – Agatha's mother can be a bit much sometimes, but she means well. "You two serious then?" I ask, taking another bite of my lunch.

She shrugs. "I like him, a lot. I wasn't looking for anything serious before I met him but it's been good so . . ."
I can see she's trying to play it down so I don't push. I'm happy for her. I take another sip of my my cappuccino. "Maybe we could have another dinner, you know, the six of us." I suggest, but then I think to myself that I'd better run it by Simon first – see if he's up to it yet.

"That would be lovely," Agatha says. "And it will get us out of my mother's house for a while."

We both laugh at that, and we're still laughing when Alex comes over to ask how Simon's doing.

"Hey Alex, can you tell me what we should cook on Christmas Eve?" I ask after we've talked enough about Simon. She really does seem concerned about him, and I decide I like Alex a lot.

'Hmmm," she says thoughtfully. "Who's cooking?"

Shit, I hadn't thought about that. "Probably Simon, he's loads better than me." I tell her sullenly. (It's true, I'm crap at cooking.) (Not that I'd ever tell him that.) "But he doesn't know yet! I've only just thought of it."

"All right, how about Beef Wellington, I know he likes that," she says decisively. "With some honey glazed carrots and parsnips perhaps. And you have to have mince pies of course. Oh, and it wouldn't be Christmas Eve without a trifle." She adds, just as sure of herself. She really knows her food.

"Oh." My face falls. "I don't think any of us can cook all that."

"Don't worry about it." She says dismissively, waving her hand in the air between us. "I'm making the mince pies for the café so I'll put some aside for you. And the trifle is easy as . . . even you can make that Penny."

I scoff at that. "I'm not that useless Alex. What did Simon say about my cooking?"

"Nothing." She says quickly, picking up our empty dishes and balancing them expertly between her hands. "And I'll help Simon with the Beef Wellington. I'm making one for me anyway so he can start early that day and we'll make two. Don't worry, it'll be a piece of cake."

"Are you sure that's not too much trouble?" I ask. It's extremely generous of Alex. Simon always said she was a good sort and I guess it's true, she really is lovely.

"It's no bother at all. Like I said, I'm making one for me anyway and this way I can get Simon here helping me." She says, shrugging as she picks up our empty cups as well. "Oh, and you have to make some mulled wine Bellini's to drink, they're to die for." She says, giving us a cheeky grin over her shoulder as she walks off with our empty dishes. I watch Alex leave, still smiling at what just transpired. Christmas eve eve at our flat. It sounds like a lot of fun, and we could all use a bit of fun for a change.

"I'll help with the trifle Penny, and the Bellini's." Agatha says immediately. "They don't sound that hard. Surely even we can't mess those up."

I turn back to Agatha and smile. "That would be great Agatha." With the two of us on the job surely it won't be that difficult. Then I have another thought. "Though I'd better let Simon know before he finds out from Alex." I mutter as we get up to leave.

Simon

We're on our way back to my flat. I'm driving Baz's car and I must admit, it feels a little weird. It's been a long time since I've driven and I'm a little out of practice, and this is only the second time I've driven in the city so I'm a little nervous. But there's not much traffic around today, and Baz seems
relaxed so I start to relax as well. And he doesn't even get his wand out this time, which is also weird. When I pull up out the front I stop the car but I don't get out.

"Snow?"

"Baz." I say, turning to look at him. I hesitate for a moment and he takes my hand and gives it a squeeze. I love the feeling of his hand in mine again – it still feels new. (Right.) I stare into his eyes. "I don't want to tell Penny yet, about us." I say.

He narrows his eyes at me suspiciously. "Why not?" He demands. "Are you going to change your mind?" His shoulders go tense.

"No of course not Baz." I say rolling my eyes. "I just don't want everyone making a fuss. It's nearly Christmas and Micah is coming and I know she's so looking forward to seeing him and I just want her to have some time with him and have Christmas with him and not worry about me . . ."

I can see his shoulders relax the more I talk. "All right." he says, smiling a little now.

"And I want this to be ours for a while." I go on. "I kinda like that we're the only ones that know that we're engaged . . . Is that all right?" I ask.

"It's all right Snow, I get it. We can share the news whenever you want." he says, a little more confidently. "But we do need to talk about Christmas." he adds, getting out of the car. "My family is expecting you to be there."

"Oh yeah, okay Baz." I say, getting out of the car. "That's fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure." I tell him. "I already thought I was spending it with you since we're engaged now." I shrug.

Baz flashes me a big grin at the word and drapes his arm around my shoulder as we head up the stairs. I wrap my arm around his waist. It feels good.

"What about your magic?" he questions. His voice is low as we head up the stairs – it's not really something to talk about in front of our Normal neighbours. "Are you going to tell her about that?"

"What? Yes of course." I say. I never keep anything from Penny so keeping the fact that we're engaged is going to be hard enough – I don't have room for any more secrets. And I wouldn't want to keep that from her anyway, I can't wait tell her about my magic.

Baz stops me and presses his lips against mine before we go inside. It's slow and tender and I lean into him as he presses his body against me. He's done this so often in the past that I shouldn't be caught off guard anymore, but I always am. And it's been such a long time since he's done it. I've missed it so much.

Baz kissed me last night until my mouth was sore. He kissed me so much my head swam and I felt dizzy. And when his mouth finally left mine and he trailed his lips across my jaw and neck, and then down across my collarbone to my chest and stomach, I thought my heart was going to burst. I almost forgot how to breathe then, and I realised what I guess I'd always known deep down– that he was mine and I was his. Forever. I would have done anything for him, given everything for him in that moment, because I love him.

I'm still blushing as we go inside.
Bunce is sitting at the kitchen table with Agatha when we get inside– both staring at us expectantly. She looks down at our joined hands and gives us a satisfied smile that is downright irritating. "Sorted?" she says, looking both smug and worried at the same time. (I wonder how she does that?) She's looking Simon over, letting her eyes roam over him, our joined hands and me, until she finally gives a satisfied nod.

"Yes Penny." Simon answers, grinning broadly at her. He releases of my hand to give her a peck on the cheek, and then gives one to Wellbelove as well. (Much to my annoyance.) "Hi Agatha." he beams at her.

"Hi Simon, Basil." Agatha smiles our way.

Simon takes my hand again and leads me to the couch, dragging me down with him. He kicks off his shoes and flops back comfortably on the couch, putting his feet on the coffee table, crossing his ankles and wriggling his stockinged feet. Simon getting comfortable on the couch is an entire show and I know I'm smiling as I watch him, but I can't seem to stop. It's a show I'd gladly watch repeatedly. Thankfully Bunce and Wellbelove can't see me past Simon otherwise I'd never live it down.

"Simon I was thinking." Penny starts. Thankfully she's already moved on from the topic of us. I let out a quiet breath in relief – she can grill Simon for details when I'm not around.

'Yeah?' he asks. He's rubbing his thumb across the back of my hand. I watch the movement, mesmerized. It's still feels so new –this, us.

"Christmas Eve. Do you want to have dinner here? The six of us."

"Who's the six of us?" he asks, turning to face her now.

"You two, Micah, me, Agatha and Joshua." She answers carefully. "Joshua's coming for Christmas."

"Yeah okay." he shrugs easily, leaning his head back on the couch. "I'm good with that."

"Good, you're making the main course with Alex at the café." She says, and I can see she's a little more nervous this time.

I turn and sneer at Bunce. She can be quite cheeky sometimes. "You can hardly expect Simon to do that, he's still recovering." I reminder her angrily.

"Doc says I'm fine Baz." Simon says looking over at me. He squeezes my hand and I stop sneering.

"Yeah Baz, Alex says Simon will be working anyway so he'll just do it while he's there. Sounds like a win-win don't you think?" she says in that smug tone.

I don't say anything. I sneer at her again instead.

"It's all good." Simon says, rubbing the back of my hand with his thumb again. It feels good. "What are we having?" he asks.

"You're making Beef Wellington and some vegetables." she goes on, more confidently this time. "Alex is providing the mince pies. Oh, Agatha and I are making dessert."

"You're making dessert?" I scoff. This I've got to see. I've never seen her cook anything other than
that biryani and a few burnt sausages.

"Watch it Baz, or I'll get you to cook something." She retorts, cocking her head cheekily at me.

"Not bloody likely." I throw back over my shoulder. "This is your grand plan, you sort it out." I tell her.

Simon lets go of my hand and gets up. He moves to the kitchen and starts poking around the fridge. "What's for dinner?" he asks. He's always hungry lately, which is a good sign. He must be getting back to his normal self.

"I'll sort it." Bunce says, getting up and waving Simon away. "Agatha, are you staying for dinner?" she asks as she gets one of the pies out of the fridge. She sets about setting the table and making a salad. Simon makes his way back to the couch and once he sits back down I take his hand again.

"Oh yes please. If it's not too much trouble." Agatha says happily.

"No trouble Agatha." Simon and Bunce both say at the same time. They stop and stare at each other before chuckling and smiling goofily. It's so good to have Simon back to his normal self. I know I'm still smiling like an idiot but I don't care.

I wonder if Simon is going to tell Bunce about his magic tonight. I nudge Simon and this seems to remind him. He nods at me and turns to Bunce.

"Penny, I have to tell you something." He says, grinning.

"What Simon?" she questions, as she potters around the kitchen.

Simon pulls his mother's wand, or his wand now, from his sleeve and turns to the kitchen.

"I got my magic back." He says.

Bunce stops what she was doing and turns to face him. Her eyes go wide – it's quite the spectacle. "What?" she shrieks.

"What?" Wellbelove shrieks.

I snort at their reaction, I know it's juvenile but I can't help it.

"How? When?" Bunce demands as she walks up to him. She stands in front of him with her hands on her hips, fixing him with a worried look.

"At the cottage, when I put out the fire." He shrugs.

"I thought you did that Baz?" Bunce asks, turning to face me.

"Wasn't me, I was busy not burning to death." I remind her. "I tried, but it kept relighting. I thought it was you and Wellbelove."

"It wasn't me." Wellbelove says from the kitchen table, "I tried but all I could do was put out small sections, it flared up again almost straight away."

"It was me." Simon says.

"Well it wasn't me." Bunce says to Agatha and me, ignoring Simon for the moment. "I was in the same boat as Agatha. Every time I put some of it out it started up again. I couldn't get a hold of it."
"It was me." Simon says again.

She turns to face Simon again – they're both looking at Simon now, still completely unconvinced. "Are you sure Simon?" Bunce says in a soft voice. She's standing in front of him, frowning deeply. "I mean, you haven't had magic for nearly two years. It can't just suddenly reappear. That's not how it works."

"Yes, I'm sure." He nods, smiling. He's obviously having fun with this, and so am I. I'm not stopping him.

"Simon, I know it was a shock when you lost your magic. And I know it's been difficult for you without it, but surely we put out the fire. Maybe it was all three of us, pooling our magic..." she goes on.

"It was me Penny." He's smiling at her as he lifts his wand and proceeds to undo all of the buttons on my shirt, again.

I raise my eyebrow at him. "Really Snow, can we save that party trick for later?"

"Er yeah, sorry Baz. I'm a bit rusty." He blushes as he buttons them again with his wand. Then he magicks up some biscuits from the pantry and opens the packet. He takes one out and manages to shove the entire biscuit in his mouth at once, dropping crumbs on his lap as he eats. (It's brilliant.) He offers me one but I decline.

"Nicks and Slick Simon!" Bunce cries in disbelief. I can see the shock register on her face, and then I can see when it changes to wonder as she rushes to him and hugs him fiercely, pushing me aside and crushing the packet of biscuits as she does. "This is amazing! This is unprecedented!" she cries, hugging him tighter. When she finally lets him go, she's still holding onto his shoulders. "We have to tell mum." she says determinedly.

"Not yet Penny." Simon says, brushing biscuit crumbs from his jumper.

"Why not?" she demands. She's let him go finally and she straightens and places her hands back on her hips.

Simon looks up at her and shrugs. "I dunno. I just got it back. I want to test it out a bit first. See if it's here to stay."

"But Simon!" Bunce pleads. "This is extraordinary!" she throws her arms into the air to make her point. I can see she's not going to give in easily.

"It's Simon's decision, Bunce." I snap at her. "He'll decide who to tell and when."

She looks between us now – her eyes darting quickly between me and Simon. I can see she's bursting to plead with him again, or coerce him but I stare her down. Eventually she lets out a loud huff and concedes.

"All right." She relents sulkily. "But you at least should tell Dr Wellbelove so he can check you out."

Simon shrugs easily. "I think he's checked me out enough." But Bunce holds his gaze until he sighs, "Yeah, okay Penny."

"Congratulations Simon." Wellbelove says quietly from the table, smiling at Simon. I forgot she was still here.
"Thanks Agatha." Simon says. And then he puts his wand away and grabs my hand and turns to Bunce. "When's dinner Penny? I'm starving."

**Simon**

I've had enough of answering Penny's questions about my magic but at least it distracts her from asking about Baz and me getting back together. I didn't mind answering her questions at first, but I don't know exactly how or why it came back and Penny is relentless in trying to work it out. I'm getting tired.

"Perhaps it was always still inside you?" she asks at dinner.

"Perhaps." I shrug between mouthfuls.

"And perhaps, your mother's wand is the only way you could get it out." She goes on, dropping her fork with a clang.

I shrug, taking another big mouthful. We're having Shepherd's Pie tonight, it's one of my favourites.

"Or perhaps, it actually was gone all that time." She says frowning slightly. She has he thinking face on.

I nod but don't say anything as I chew another mouthful.

"Or perhaps, it was gone, but the shock of everything somehow let you regain your power." She says, nodding excitedly.

I keep eating.

"Or perhaps," she sits up higher now, "Your old power was gone – the one the Mage gave you. But your actual power– the one you would have been born with, finally found a way out through your mother's wand once you lost your old power . . ."

I shrug again and shovel more shepherd's pie into my mouth. It's really good.

"Or perhaps–"

"Perhaps you could leave it Bunce, so we could eat in peace." Baz snaps, clearly over the whole discussion.

-ooO-

We're going back to Baz's place tonight. I want to spend more time with him alone – it's like I can't get enough of him now that we're back together and engaged and all, (Merlin, we're engaged!) and it would be too awkward to sneak off to my room with both Penny and Agatha there. Penny gives me a knowing look as we get up to leave, which I try to ignore but she corners me in my room as I'm packing my bag.

She must have fixed my backpack with magic because it looks good as new, which is brilliant because I can't afford a new one right now – I'm flat broke. I suppose I could fix it myself now if I knew the spell. I'm going to have to brush up on my spells again, I can remember some of them but it's been a while. I trashed my laptop too when I dropped my bags at the cottage so I'll need to get a new one before uni starts. There's no magic to fix that.

"Everything all right with you and Baz, Simon?" she asks one more time, looking me over carefully.
"Yeah Penny, Baz and I are good." I tell her. "Really good." I give her a reassuring smile.

She looks me over once more before she lets me go back to my packing. Then she leaves my room and I see her having a word to Baz near the door. She's standing with her hands on her hips, glaring up at him and pointing her finger at his face, so I think I'd better hurry before she gives him a good bollocksing.

I drag him out of our flat while Penny is mid-sentence, saying something about The Cure.

-oOo-

We're in bed but I'm not that tired, not like I have been lately. Instead I'm thinking about Christmas. It's nearly Christmas, which means that it's nearly our anniversary. Do we still have an anniversary since we were apart for all those months? I'm not sure anymore.

"Baz?" I say into is neck.

"Yes love?"

He's lying on his back with one hand behind his head, the other hand is raking through my hair with his long fingers. I'm nestled against him with my head on his shoulder and my hand on his chest. He feels deliciously cold when I touch his skin and where I've been lying, his skin is almost warm.

"Are we still celebrating our anniversary this year?

"Of course." He says immediately, and I smile at that. I'm pleased about that, but now I have to get him something and I haven't thought about that yet, or Christmas, and I don't have much money.

"That's good." I say. "But I haven't bought you anything yet, for our anniversary or Christmas, and I'm a bit skint."

"You don't need to get me anything." He says, which is nice but wrong.

"Of course I do." I scoff as I sit up. "It won't be much of an anniversary or Christmas if I don't give you anything."

He pulls me back down and I nestle into him again. "All right. What do you want?" he says as he pulls me close.

I think about it for a while. I was thinking about what to get him, not what he could get me so I don't know really know. And I already have him so I don't need anything else. But then I do think of something and I can't help grinning.

"There is one thing I do want . . ." I start.

"What Snow?"

I grin wider now. "You have to call me Simon."

"All right Simon, what?"

"No, I mean, you have to call me Simon. That's what I want." I can't help grinning.

"For our anniversary? Or for Christmas?" he asks. He's frowning now.

"Forever." I say as I push myself up on one elbow. I'm smiling and trying to raise my eyebrow at the
same time. It's kind of hard to do but I don't care because I know I've got him, because how can he refuse? He asked me what I want and I told him, and I'm thinking how fucking clever I am right now for thinking of this.

He's stares up at me for a moment, unblinking, and then he frowns slightly and looks like he decides something. I know that look.

"But I want to give you something traditional for our anniversary." He pouts and my heart instantly melts. "The second one is traditionally cotton."

"Cotton?" I say, poking his mouth gently. "What in Merlin's name can you get made of cotton?"

"I don't know, a nice cotton dressing gown or something." He suggests, his eyes twinkling mischievously. He pulls me back down to him and wraps his arms tight around my waist.

I roll my eyes. "Who are you, Penny's mother? We don't even wear dressing gowns, Baz."

"That's just a suggestion." He murmurs. He pulls me even closer to him and brushes his mouth against my jaw. It feels so good. "The choices are endless, Simon."

"Like what?" I can hear my voice getting shaky. Merlin I love it when he calls me Simon.

"Hmmm Simon, there are tea towels, tablecloths, towels, sheets . . ." He whispers, peppering my jaw with kisses as he speaks.

"Oh--" I breathe. I think he's trying to be funny but I'm not really listening. He's still kissing my jaw all the way up to my ear and back. It feels incredible.

"Oh?"

"Oh– kay." I get out this time.

"Good." He whispers, kissing my neck over and over.

"Wh– what about Christmas then?" I manage to stutter. It's getting kind of hard to talk.

"I've already bought you something for Christmas." He says quietly, running his nose up and down my neck and along my collar bone, adding a few kisses here and there. "I wanted to get you something that you can unwrap on Christmas day." He whispers and I can feel his breath tickling me.

"S– something to unwrap?" I breathe again. What he's doing right now feels amazing.

"Yes Simon." He whispers against my collar bone, lips touching my skin lightly with each word. And that feels even better than what he was just doing. Merlin it feels good.

I'm having trouble making a coherent thought right now so I agree with him. Whatever he said must make sense, I think. And agreeing with him seems easier than arguing the point right now. "Oh– kay." I finally get out.

"All right it's settled then." He says, placing tiny kisses along my collar bone as he speaks, "Anniversary is cotton. (kiss) And something to unwrap for Christmas."

"Uh huh." I manage to sigh.

He brings his mouth back to mine slowly, dragging his cool lips against my neck and jaw as he does.
When he reaches my mouth he licks my bottom lip until I moan and then takes my lip in his mouth and kisses me softly. He kisses my top lip then, and then his mouth is on mine and he's kissing me over and over, pressing me down further into the bed as he climbs on top of me.

It's not until I wake up the next morning that I work out what happened.

"I know you tricked me Baz."

"No I didn't." he says, his face is impassive.

"Yes you did." I say, but I'm smiling. I thought I had him there for a while but he's so fucking smart and so fucking beautiful, I didn't really have a chance.

"I did not trick you. You agreed to everything. I can't help it if you're so easily distracted Snow." He says, smiling now. He brushes my hair off my face with his fingers. "Don't you have to work today?"

"Oh shit." I say, and I race out of bed and get into the shower. He follows leisurely behind me. 
"Relax, you still have an hour, I'll make you breakfast."

"Okay thanks." I smile. I'm still thinking about how my great plan went to pot. And now I have to get him two presents and I'm flat broke and one of them has to be cotton because it's tradition. (Baz and his traditions.) What the fuck can I get him made of cotton? I think I'll ask Penny, or Agatha.
Simon

I went Christmas and anniversary shopping on my own, even though I don't really like shopping. Penny wanted to come with me – probably because she still thinks I can't be left alone, but I promised to be back within an hour and let her know where I was going. She still worries a lot, which I get, but she couldn't very well come with me if I was going to buy her something.

I bought Baz a cotton slouch beanie in black, thanks to Agatha. It was her idea (All the boys in San Diego wear them.) and a bloody brilliant one. And it was only ten quid so when I arrived back at the flat I told Baz that we had a ten quid limit for our anniversary. I couldn't help laughing at the look on his face

"What in Crowley's name can I get you with ten pounds Snow?" he asked petulantly.

"You're very smart Baz, I'm sure you can work something out." I said.

Christmas was a lot harder, but Penny suggests I talk with Alex about something for Baz's violin. Alex says it sounds like he has everything, which is probably right. So I rack my brain every moment over the next few days to think of something to get him. He's so bloody hard to buy for because he's got everything he needs and a whole lot of stuff he doesn't, and what he hasn't got he just goes and buys anyway. I'm at work making my hundredth coffee that day when I finally think of something so I hop online during my break and finally find something. I hope he likes it. It costs me a bit more than I want but I think it's going to be worth it.

I find Penny the perfect Christmas gift too. She's always falling asleep on the couch and dragging her dressing gown over her, or her ratty duvet off her bed, so I buy her a fleecy blanket for the couch that looks nice and very warm too and it says sleepy head all over it which I thought was kind of funny, and relevant, for Penny. I don't know whether I had to get Agatha or Micah anything but when I talk with Penny, she tells me that they're making gingerbread biscuits again this year so that covers all of Agatha, and that she's ordered some merchandise from our uni from me for Micah. I'm relieved at that, I've spent enough.

-oOo-

Today is our second anniversary. I work in the morning, helping Alex make the Beef Wellingtons first and then make coffees until we close after lunch. Being Christmas Eve, most people were done shopping by lunchtime so things quiet down very fast. I race home to drop off the food for dinner and meet Baz there. Agatha and Penny are just about to start on the dessert so we leave them to it. Micah and Joshua are out shopping or at the pub so I still haven't met Agatha's boyfriend.

We drive straight to Baz's flat in a ridiculous hurry. We race up the stairs and when we get inside I drag Baz straight to his bedroom.

"What about presents?" Baz asks as I push him onto his big fancy bed.

"Later." I say, climbing on top of him and kissing him stupid. "We're on a tight schedule."

He gives me a wicked grin. I decide I'm going to kiss that grin right off his face.

-oOo-
We're sitting up in bed after very pleasant hour. I've just grabbed Baz's present from my bag – his ten quid present.

"Happy anniversary fiancé." I say, handing him the very nicely wrapped extremely cheap present.

He looks at it for a minute, smiling broadly at the word fiancé before he opens it. And then he laughs out loud when he sees the cotton slouch beanie.

"Why are you laughing?" I ask. "It's a perfectly good present – practical and cheap. And made of cotton."

"Yes it is a very good present, and very practical Snow." He agrees, kissing my cheek. "Thank you. Happy anniversary fiancé." He says as he hands me a package.

I open it and find a pair of black socks.

"Socks?" I ask, glancing up at him. Okay well I did get him a beanie.

"Cotton socks. And not just any cotton socks, look." He says as he turns them over. "Personalised socks, very useful."

I look at the underside of the socks. One says Simon in white stitching across the bottom and the other says Snow. Now it's my turn to laugh, I've never had personalised anything before so I'm chuffed. I love them.

"They're bloody brilliant Baz!" I say, putting them on immediately and then I kiss him stupid again. When we finally pull away a little breathless, I put Baz's beanie on his head and we stay like that, wearing nothing but our anniversary presents for the rest of the afternoon.

**Penny**

Agatha is here helping me put the final touches to our Christmas eve dinner. Simon quickly dropped off the Beef Wellington and vegetables and mince pies before he and Baz took off to celebrate their anniversary together – which means they've probably spent the entire afternoon snogging and shagging. They're due here any minute and I really hope they arrive soon and are not late today. Agatha and I have made the Christmas trifle and now we're making the mulled wine Bellini's and we're getting a bit sozzled because we keep testing it to make sure it tastes right, although the more we test the less we're sure so we have to test more.

Micah and Joshua finally arrive after spending the day Christmas shopping. Although judging by their appearance I think they spent half of the afternoon at the pub.

"Penny!" Micah yells as they walk in. "That's a hell of a lot of stairs out there." He pants as he kisses me sloppily on the mouth. They've definitely been to the pub.

"Agatha!" Joshua says, also panting. "This country's freezing. And it never stops raining. How did you ever survive?" Joshua says as he follows Micah's lead and kisses Agatha sloppily full on the mouth. She laughs at him but doesn't push him away.

We get them to try a Bellini each and they love it, or they're already half cut and would drink anything, I'm not entirely sure.

We settle into easy conversation as we wait for Simon and Baz. We're on our second Bellini and they're still not here so I pick up my mobile and text Simon.
Are you on your way?

And:

We're all here, waiting for you.

And then:

It's Christmas Eve. Beef Wellington. You're the host. Hurry up.

And then:

Are you and Baz shagging again? Honestly Simon.

My mobile beeps then and it's Simon.

On our way now!

They were definitely shagging.

It not even ten minutes later when I can hear them bounding up the stairs and they burst in raucously, bunches of flowers and a pile of presents in hand.

"Sorry we're late." Simon blusters as he hands me and Agatha each a bunch of flowers, He kisses our cheeks before unloading the small pile of presents under our pathetic tree.

Simon didn't think we needed a tree but I found this one going cheap. It already looks like its dying and it's less than a metre tall and only has a few decorations on it. (Simon and I made some out of coloured paper one afternoon to pass the time.) But it's still a Christmas tree and there are quite a few gifts under it now.

Agatha introduces Joshua to Baz and Simon and they shake hands and greet each other warmly, and I can see Joshua is slightly awed to be finally meeting the Chosen One, even though he knows he's Agatha's ex-boyfriend.

I glare at Simon. "Right, cooking." Simon mumbles and races to the kitchen, averting his gaze. I turn on Baz instead.

"Terrible traffic." Baz declares as he busies himself pouring Bellini's for him and Simon. "Anyone for a top up?" He refills Micah and Joshua's drinks, and then mine and Agatha's for good measure. Then he wanders into the kitchen to see if Simon needs any help.

"Nope, all done. Alex is a genius." He says as he moves back to the couch, dragging Baz with him.

We finally sit for dinner, a little later than expected and a lot more plastered than any of us were intending. But the Beef is wonderful and the vegetables are perfectly cooked. That Alex really is a genius.

Josh is particularly interested in talking about Watford. He spent his schooling at a Normal school and says he's missed out on valuable magickal learning. But none of us actually want to talk about it given everything we'd been through, so Agatha gently changes the subject. And Josh doesn't know about Simon's magic yet so Baz and I steer any conversation away from that.

"So what are you both planning to do while you're here Agatha?" Simon asks.

"After Christmas I'm not too sure, show Joshua London in the winter I suppose. It's quite beautiful
Josh." Agatha starts. "But I know Mother wants to show Josh off at the club."

"Maybe you and Baz can join them for a game of tennis." I snort as I turn to Simon, recalling what he did last summer.

"Not much chance of that." Simon mumbles. "It's a bit cold for tennis anyway."

"You went to the club?" Agatha asks Simon, her tone incredulous.

"It was Baz's idea." Simon mumbles again.

"They spell the courts clear and warm during the winter, so members can play all year." Baz tells Simon, topping up everyone's drinks again.

"And they played doubles against Dev and Niall." I say, nodding at Agatha's unbelieving face.

"But Normals aren't allowed at the club." Agatha says.

"Did you win?" Micah asks, drinking down his Bellini quickly – I think he has a taste for them.

"Of course." Baz says nonchalantly. And then turns to Agatha. "Simon saved our realm, he can go wherever he likes." He snaps.

"I wasn't planning on playing against them." Simon mutters.

"Why?" Joshua asks, clearly not following.

"Dev and Niall weren't exactly friends of the Chosen One." Baz says, nodding in Simon's direction.

"Neither were you." I say pointedly. Baz shrugs.

Joshua still looks confused. "They were part of the old families, who were at war against the Mage." I try to explain. "And as Simon here was the Mage's Heir . . ."

"So was Baz though, to be fair." Micah adds. He's taken it upon himself to top up his Bellini and he's smiling adorably.

"The Mages Heir?" Josh asks. He's frowning now and he looks even more confused.

"No, part of the old families who were at war with the Mage." I explain slowly. "Which means at war with the Chosen One."

"They were out to get you?" Joshua asks, turning to Simon now.

"They weren't out to get me, they were out to kill me." Simon mumbles.

"Dev and Niall were not going to kill you, they wouldn't have done anything unless I told them to." Baz sighs exasperatedly.

"Wait." Josh says, looking between Simon and Baz. "You guys were enemies?" He looks dubious.

"Mortal enemies." Simon shrugs.

"You only thought you were." I add, rolling my eyes at him.

"Wow." Josh says, shaking his head in disbelief. "Your high school years at Watford were way more exciting than mine. I spent mine skateboarding and learning how to surf."
"I wish." Simon mumbles and Baz bumps his shoulder gently with his own. They give each other a soft look and I roll my eyes again. Merlin those two!

"So can I get a look at Watford while I'm here?" Josh asks, looking around at all of us now.

"You'll need to go with someone else. I'm not going back." Agatha says adamantly. "I'm never going back."

"I'm not going back either." I say. I'm still not ready, after everything that happened. I don't know if I'll ever be ready to go back.

"Not me. I've only been once and I'm in no hurry to go back again." Simon says.

"That will have to be a no from me too." Baz says quietly. "I've spent enough time at the place where my mother was murdered. I have no desire to go back."

"Sorry guys, I didn't mean to dredge up everything. I didn't know--" Joshua starts, his face is contrite as he glances between everyone.

"It's okay Josh." Simon shrugs. "Of course you didn't know."

"Well I'm happy to take you." Micah says. "I spent a year there and I wouldn't mind taking another look around."

"That's a great idea Micah." I say, relieved at his quick thinking. Maybe mum can take them on a tour.

We let that conversation end and move on to happier topics. Baz gets up and tops up our drinks again while we talk about things to do in London in the winter, and Simon scoffs loudly when someone suggests ice skating. The Bellini's are flowing freely all night and by the time we finished dinner our small group is quite rowdy.

Agatha and I serve the trifle and mince pies together and nobody minds when Simon eats half of the mince pies while waiting for me and Agatha to finish serving. Baz continues topping up everyone's Bellini's so we completely lose track of how many we have.

It's late and things are winding down when Micah finally asks Baz why he's wearing that beanie. He's just about to answer when Simon excitedly takes off his shoes and shows everyone his anniversary present.

"We haven't taken them off since we gave them to each other." He shrugs. "Oh, except to have a shower." He mumbles, and then he blushes and Micah bursts out laughing and Joshua doesn't quite know what to make of him, even Agatha laughs a little and Baz looked at Simon so lovingly it's ridiculous.

I use magic to clear away the mess and Simon goes into his room to pack a few things for Christmas day and the following few days. He's staying at Baz's because Micah is staying here. He wanders out of his room, bag in hand and says his goodbyes, shaking Joshua's hand and hugging Agatha and Micah and me.

"Merry Christmas, try to get some sleep tonight huh?" he says to me, teasing.

"That's the pot calling the kettle black." I say back, shaking my head in disbelief.

We nearly forget to unwrap presents thanks to all the Bellini's, but Baz remembers just in time. Then
Simon and Baz offer to drop Agatha and Joshua at her parents' house before heading back to Baz's. Baz nearly always drives, he hardly drinks anything – preferring to keep everyone else's drinks topped up instead. He plays the perfect host as usual and he doesn't even live here. Simon told me that Baz once said he did all the drinking he needed when he went through a rebellious phase at fifteen. (He also told me Baz still smokes sometimes!) (And he's flammable!)
Simon

I wake early on Christmas morning. This will be our second Christmas together, (third actually but we don't count the first) and I'm excited to finally give Baz his present. But he stops me and says we have to bring them to Oxford to open them with his family.

"Why can't we do it here?" I ask, a little petulantly.

"Because it's Christmas and we need to put our gifts under a tree. It's tradition." He says resolutely.

I roll my eyes. "You and your traditions." I mumble, and he flashes me a cheeky grin. But I really don't mind – I've never had any Christmas traditions, except making gingerbread with Penny and Agatha, so I don't mind going along with his. And if we're going to be together forever now we might even start some new ones of our own.

We head off to Oxford early because they open presents before lunch. (Another tradition.) I'm driving this time, and I'm getting pretty comfortable behind the wheel these days – Baz doesn't bring out his wand at all anymore.

He's wearing his new beanie and I wanted to wear my new socks, but Baz said I couldn't just Clean as a Whistle them because that only removes the dirt you can see. He says they need a wash after wearing them all day yesterday. I suppose he's right.

"Maybe you should have bought me a whole set." I suggest hopefully.

"But that would have exceeded the ten pound limit." He reminds me, eyebrow raised. "That you set."

I keep driving. He's too smart for his own good sometimes.

I remember how useful that spell was. I used it a lot, particularly back in third year. I've been practising a few spells since my magic came back. I was pretty rusty at first and I'd forgotten a lot of them, but Penny says she's going to lend me a couple of spell books from her parent's library. I might borrow some from the Oxford library as well.

I'm definitely more in control now, like my wand works for me now rather than before. That wand seemed to work against me most of the time, if it even worked at all. I haven't touched that other wand in years and I don't think I ever want to. It never felt like mine, not like my mother's wand does. This wand feels like it belongs in my hand. I never knew that it was supposed to feel like that until I picked up my mother's wand. It's all starting to make sense now.

And I'd forgotten how much fun magic can be. I've mastered that buttoning spell so well now that I can really annoy Baz by undoing his buttons every time he tries to get dressed. I did it that so many times this morning that he ended up putting on a nice jumper over his tee shirt and carried his shirt on a hanger to the car.

We arrive to a busy house this year. Although it's still just Baz's family at the moment, they're expecting a lot more people for lunch than last year, and Baz explains that there are various Grimm's and Pitches coming for lunch. But for now it's just his family and me so Daphne offers us eggnog and we sit around the Christmas tree handing out our gifts.
The kids get a load of toys and clothes and Mordy gets clothes and books and loads of new football gear. Baz's parents give him a pile of clothes and books, as well as a new tablet that he can use to help with his violin practice or something.

Baz's family gives me a load of gifts too, although I'm fairly sure that some of them are from Baz. There are some clothes and a new suit and new tennis gear as well. They know I went to their club with Baz that time and I think they're expecting me to go again. Mordy gives me a book about dragons which is really cool and the twins and the their brother made me cards and drew pictures. I kept the last lot on the fridge all year and I think they came over. She looks downright chuffed when I tell her I'll put these on the fridge as well. Then I give Daphne a drawing of the kids that I did ages ago, one of the last times I was here last summer right before they went on holidays. She smiles and kisses my cheek. It's kind of sweet.

Then Baz gives me his present and I'm lost for words when I open it. It's a new laptop.

"Snakes alive, Baz!" I can't believe it. I've been fretting about forking out for a new one ever since I came back. I was waiting until after Christmas, hoping to pick one up on sale or something.

"What's wrong?" he asks. He looks a little confused by my reaction.

"This is too much." I say, shaking my head in disbelief. "Thank you." And I want to kiss him then, but I can't, in front of his family so I just look at him and smile.

He smiles back.

And then I give him his present, and when I hand him the small flat gift he had no idea what it is, and when he opens it he stares quietly at it and doesn't say anything.

"Simon, this is wonderful." He finally whispers, and I can hear the astonishment in his voice.

"What is it Basil?" Daphne asks.

"Tickets to the London Symphony Orchestra." Baz says, staring at me with a look of surprise on his face.

I bought him concert tickets for some symphony with something called the largest possible contingent of strings. I don't know what that means but Alex helped pick it and she said trust me, he'll love it. I think he does.

And then the gifts are done and we break away for a while before the guests start arriving. I take my gifts to my room and as I sit on the bed looking at everything, and I'm still feeling a little overwhelmed by their generosity when there's a knock on the door.

It's Baz, looking gorgeous as ever in his fancy suit, so I pull him in and close the door quickly. And then I snog him senseless.

"Thank you." I say breathily between kisses.

"Thank you." He whispers back. And we don't say anything else because we can't stop kissing.

There are a lot more people than last year, and I don't know most of them but I sit next to Baz and Mordy and enjoy the lunch anyway. And it's amazing. There's so much food that I have at least two serves of everything and I'm feeling really full by the time pudding arrives but I still manage to eat two serves of that. Mordy can't stop giggling at me. After lunch people move off to various rooms, with most of the adults in the library and little kids downstairs playing in their enormous play room.
Fiona rocks up in the afternoon and hands out gifts to Baz's immediate family. The kids squeal with delight at the pile of toys she hands them. Baz gets some vintage long sleeve tee shirts of some 70's and 80's punk bands that Fiona likes and he rolls his eyes when he opens them. She gives me a similar pile but different bands and I like them even though I haven't heard of half of them. When I give her a blank look she hands me a pile of CDs as well. 'Get yourself an education Snow.' she says, smirking and rolling her eyes affectionately.

"What am I supposed to do with these?" I ask Baz, holding the CDs up in front of me. I don't have a CD player. I don't know anyone who does anymore.

"Fiona's old school, you're lucky they're not vinyl." he quips dismissively.

Then Baz grabs my hand and we sneak off to his room for a while. He's already talked with everyone so he says they won't notice if he's missing, and I don't think anyone will notice me gone.

We're lying on his bed on our backs now, side by side with our hands linked.

"That was an amazing gift. When did you think of that?" Baz asks. The concert tickets are on his bedside table.

"Alex helped me." I shrug. "Once I told her what I wanted to get you she suggested that concert." I smile at him and he smiles back. I'm just glad he likes the present.

I sit up and lean on my elbow so I can look at him directly. "And thank you, for the laptop." I whisper. "That's way too grand by the way." I tell him. I'm shaking my head from side to side because I still can't believe he bought me a laptop. He's such a thoughtful boyfriend – no scratch that, fiancé. Merlin I love that word.

"No it isn't." He says quietly.

"Yes it is." I say, tracing my fingers across his cheek until I reach his hair. I push his hair gently away from his face, tucking some lose strands behind his ear. His eyes close automatically when I do that.

He stares back up at me again. "No it isn't." He whispers. "You're my fiancé. I can give you whatever I like." He pulls me to him now, pressing our mouths together for a long, slow kiss. And we spend the rest of Christmas day on Baz's bed, snogging like teenagers, until we realise we probably need to make an appearance downstairs. We need to say goodbye to their guests at the very least.

It's a big day so I'm happy when I finally get to my room to sleep. We managed to knock off a pile of leftovers for dinner, and I don't think I've ever eaten so much in my life. I groan as I climb into my bed, full and content.

I lie in bed and think about the day, and about how normal it all is that I spent Christmas at the Grimm-Pitch estate with a bunch of Grimm's and Pitches. Who would have thought? Eventually I drift off to sleep thinking that you never really know what the future holds, no matter how much it looks like it's set in stone.

Last night, before I left my flat, I grabbed my sketch pad and charcoals and pencils. I haven't drawn anything for months – since I found out about the Mage actually. And up until yesterday I haven't had the urge to draw. But last night, thanks to Penny's gift, I felt like maybe I might draw something while we're here. Tomorrow I plan to find a quiet spot and start.

Baz
We stay at Oxford for another day before heading back to London. Simon spends some time with my siblings playing with their new toys – I'm not sure who's enjoying themselves more. Then he and Mordelia study the Dragon book, comparing his wings to those in the book, trying to identify the breed of dragon. As they hunch over the book, I stare at the shiny silver scars on his wings. He doesn't notice them and they don't seem to bother him, but I see them all the time. I know what they mean – that he saved me from that fire, and the fire burned him instead of me. I'll never stop being grateful.

He ventures outside eventually and spends some time flying now that the staff have gone, casting his own warming spell with his mother's wand. He's getting quite good at casting spells again. We found some books in the library that might help him and I left him sitting in the library reading them through.

And his energy levels are back up to near normal now. He still hasn't started running yet – Dr Wellbelove suggested he wait another few weeks. It makes sense given how exhausted and dehydrated he was when we found him. I shudder when I think what may have happened if we didn't find him when we did.

Christmas lunch was interesting. All of the Grimm's and Pitches know who Simon is, and that we're together. But as most of them still harbour some ill will to the Mage, and some of them still have difficulty separating those feelings from the former Mages Heir, regardless of the fact that he brought an end to the Mage and the Humdrum. My father did inform them that Simon would be here so they could decline the invitation if they felt so inclined. But everyone came, whether for Christmas or to get another look at the Chosen One I'm not entirely sure. The day went without incident though, and Simon didn't seem to notice their occasional stares over lunch, thanks to Mordelia and the twins keeping him entertained.

I spend some time with my family, and when I return to the library I'm surprised to see Simon with his sketch pad on his lap and charcoals in hand, his fingers are blackened and there's a smudge on his cheek. I stand by the door for a while and watch him and I can't help marvelling that this beautiful boy is my fiancé. He's concentrating hard but he looks relaxed so I don't disturb him – he can go for hours when he's focused like this. Instead I go downstairs and organise some food and drinks for lunch.

He looks up a while later.

"When did you get here Baz?" he asks, stretching his arms and back, and taking a long drink from his bottle of water.

"Not long ago, do you want some lunch?" I ask, putting down my book.

"Yeah okay." He says.

I point to the table. There's a sliver tray laden with left over roast turkey sandwiches, Christmas cakes, fruit and a pot of tea.

He gets up and stretches a long slow stretch, his new tee shirt riding up above the waist band of his jeans showing a small, golden piece of flesh. I stare at it for a moment. Then he gets out his wand and Clean as a Whistle's the charcoal from his hand, he smiles at me.

"Nice tee shirt." I say, pouring the tea.

He looks down briefly at the ridiculous gift from Fiona. "Yeah, cool isn't it." He says, piling a number of sandwiches onto his plate – it's stacked so high with sandwiches that it looks like it's
going to topple over. He starts eating vigorously.

"You know who they are?" I ask, pointing to his tee shirt with my sandwich.

"Everyone knows The Clash Baz. I didn't grow up under a rock you know." He says through a mouthful of food, rolling his eyes. "I like yours too." He says, looking at my ridiculous tee shirt. "And yes, I know who they are too."

I'm smiling as we finish our lunch.

"Daphne wants to know if we're staying for dinner." I ask after he demolishes the entire tray of food.

"Yeah, sure." he says, rubbing his stomach contentedly. "But can we go back to London after? I have to work in the morning." he adds with another long stretch.

I know Simon's work schedule better than he does but I simply nod. "All right, I'll let her know."

We head back to London after dinner. Simon wants to drive so I relax in the passenger seat. He talks the whole way, about Christmas, my extended family, Mordy's book and Fiona's taste in music – which he doesn't mind. (We're listening to one of her CDs now.) When we arrive back at my flat we head upstairs and crash into bed and fall asleep almost immediately.
I've had plenty of time to prepare for this, and now I only need to organise this motley crew of friends together for New Year's Eve to bring it all to fruition. I start with Simon and Baz.

"What are we doing New Year's Eve?" I ask innocently.

"Dunno." Simon says, shrugging.

"Well, shall we go out to dinner again like last year?" I ask. "We can ask Agatha and Joshua too?" I add for good measure.

"Yeah okay." He says distractedly.

He and Baz are sitting on the couch looking quite silly in their 70's punk tee shirts, listening to music from that genre. Today Simon's wearing a yellow Sex Pistols (Never mind the bollocks.) and Baz is wearing The Jam in black and white. Yesterday Simon was wearing The Stranglers and Baz had a rather nice Joy Division one on. Their working their way through the pile of tee shirts that Fiona gave them for Christmas.

Micah joins them, balancing on the end of the stuffed chair, and starts talking about The Ramones and Green Day and now they're shuffling though their playlists, taking turns to play their favourite songs. It's getting loud in here.

"Might want to keep the noise down a little, the neighbours won't like it." I remind them.

"Mr Thompson next door is three quarters deaf so he won't hear anything." Simon says over his shoulder.

Baz waves his wand and spells the room soundproof. "Fiona." He says when he sees me question the spell.

"Where should we book for dinner Baz?" I ask, ignoring the spell for now, although I wouldn't mind learning that one– it could come in handy while Micah is here. Then I start to wonder if Baz has used it when he stays over. He probably has –they probably both have now that Simon has his magic back – I wouldn't put it past either of them. I shake my head to clear my thoughts, I have to get back to organising New Year's Eve and he's the only one of us likely to know a good restaurant.

"I'll arrange it." He says over his shoulder.

Good. I don't have to worry about the restaurant now, Baz will be true to his word. Next I text Agatha. We already spoke about going out to dinner so she quickly responds yes from them. Good, almost sorted.

I flop down on the couch with a sigh and listen to the music. Then I remember Simon and Baz sitting on the couch all those months ago, picking their song or something equally as stupid. I roll my eyes but my curiosity gets the better of me as I wonder what they chose.

"What's your song Simon, you and Baz?" I ask.

He looks at me frowning and then his eyes widen and he blushes, finally remembering what I'm
talking about. "Um, we didn't finish picking it." He mumbles as he looks away, red faced.

"I think you did." I push, smiling at him. He's a terrible liar. It's obvious he's trying to avoid telling me. "Come on Simon." I plead.

"I picked one for us too Penny." He says quickly, and I know he's deflecting but now I'm curious. He shuffles through his playlist until he finds it. "Here it is. Best Friend, Sofi Tukker." He says, turning the music up. It's quite loud now and he sits back, smiling as the song plays.

"Who's she?" I ask as I listen and I can't help smiling because it's pretty good.

"They not she." He says rolling his eyes. Then he stands up and pulls me off the couch and we're holding hands, jumping and dancing around the lounge room, bobbing our heads like idiots.

-oOo-

I manage another day with Agatha as the four boys head out for a day sightseeing and ice skating (much to Simon's dismay). Micah told Joshua about the haunted pub tour and Josh says he'll try to talk Agatha into it. I don't like his chances though, maybe Micah will go with him, I know Simon won't.

Agatha and I spend the day together and we manage to get in a quick bit of shopping in for a few things she needs before she heads back and I get some gifts for Micah's family as well and then we stop for lunch at Simon's café again. We tell Alex what a success Christmas Eve was and thank her for the Bellini tip, they definitely made the night.

By the time New Year's Eve arrives, everything is organised but a little nervous. I pull Baz aside when he's not latched onto Simon and tell him I want him to suggest another night of dancing after dinner. I know Micah and Agatha will agree, so we only have to convince Simon this time, and he'll most likely agree if everyone else wants to go.

Dinner is a huge success – Baz absolutely knows how to pick a restaurant, he's never let us down. Our meals are lovely and the desserts are spectacular. Baz is still as guarded as ever when he eats but we've got this routine sorted now, with Simon sitting on his side and Micah and I sitting opposite him so that Agatha and Josh can't see his fangs when he eats. And we're all pretty good at distracting them so they don't look Baz's way very often.

Simon makes it through all of his and half of Baz's dinner and both desserts, and then he stares longingly at Agatha's half eaten dessert, but she passes over to Josh instead. The drinks are flowing freely by now, so when Baz suggests a nightclub everyone is fairly easy to talk around.

"What about a dance then?" Baz suggests. "There's a place just around the corner I think you'll all enjoy."

"Is that why we're so dressed up?" Josh asks innocently.

"Nah, Baz likes to dress like this all the time." Simon jokes, looking at Baz. I have to admit it, Baz is looking quite handsome in a new black suit and he's wearing a lovely blue shirt, I think it's silk with some sort of pattern on it – maybe paisley but I'm not sure, it all goes together rather smashingly. Simon looks just as good in a similar suit but in a light bronze, with a black shirt. Those two are quite the pair.

"Dancing again?" Micah laughs. "Why not. Last year's was a blast!"

"Yes!" Agatha's eyes light up. "I'm in."
"Um . . ." Josh says, a little hesitant. "Dancing Agatha? Are you sure?"

"You don't have to dance." I offer, as convincingly as I can. I want him to come along so Simon will say yes. "But I warn you, stay away from Micah at the bar. You'll actually be safer dancing."

"Dancing Baz, really?" Simon scoffs. He's sitting back, rubbing his stomach. I don't know where he puts all that food – he's still skinny as ever.

"Why not?" Baz demands, raising his eyebrow suggestively at Simon. "It's been a while since we had a dance."

"And there's good reason for that." Simon says, still rubbing his stomach.

Baz scoffs and raises his eyebrow even higher, and Simon smiles back. Merlin those two! I shake my head dismissively – I need to keep things moving.

"Come on Simon, we don't do this very often and everyone's going back to America soon." I say. I'm trying not to plead but I need him to come.

"And it is New Year's Eve." Agatha chimes in.

Baz raises his eyebrow again at Simon, challenging him.

He looks between Agatha and me and Baz, unconvinced at first, but we're all staring unrelentingly back at him so he finally gives in. "Yeah, okay." He shrugs.

We head over to the club after Baz settles the bill (again), and it literally is right around the corner. Baz speaks to the door person and they let us in immediately, even though there's a long line of people waiting to get in. Everyone looks at Baz.

"The owner is a friend of Fiona." he says as he leads us into the coolest club I've ever seen. It's obviously new, the décor can attest to that, and it's big and loud and full of people and we're immediately swallowed up by the expansiveness of it.

Baz leads us to a private booth off on the side and then orders champagne for everyone. The bottle arrives almost immediately and we all toast each other. No one toasts to the end of this year, I think we'll all be glad to see it over. I know Simon will. And no one mentions next year either, I did that last year and things didn't work out so well. Baz notices that Simon is deep in thought so he pulls Simon up by his hands.

"Time to dance" Baz says, and Simon rolls his eyes as Baz drags him to the dance floor, and then we're all on the dance floor, even Josh, dancing away what's left of the year.

When there's only one minute left of this year I take a step back from Micah. People are dancing all around us and I know the countdown will start soon so I have to get this done. I take a deep breath to steady myself as I raise my hand and point my ring

"Time Stand Still!" I shout as I push all my magic into the spell, I shout as loud as I can to be heard above the music. I feel my magic start to rise up from deep inside me, somewhere deep below my stomach, rising slowly at first and then with such a force I've never felt before. I've been preparing for this for a long time.

There's a shimmer in the air and then everything stops exactly in place – the music stops, people freeze mid-dance or in mid-conversation with drinks half raised to mouths, the lights stop flashing and everything is dead quiet. Simon, Baz, Agatha and Joshua are completely frozen in time. It's an
astonishing site. Only Micah and I are moving. He stares at me, eyes wide, a smile growing on his face.

"Penny?" he asks quietly. "What are you doing?"

"Micah." I say, smiling as I step towards him. I swallow and take a big breath to stop my voice from shaking. "Will you marry me?"

His smile grows wide across his face until he's beaming. "Penny, Pen, Pen, Penelope." he says grinning wide. "You becha! Of course I'll marry you!"

I tip my head back and laugh now – it comes out like a howl, and then he grabs me and hugs me tight spins me around and around before he finally kisses me.

"Micah!" I laugh, relieved and ecstatic. "I love you so much."

He kisses me again. "Penny." He whispers into my ear. "I love you. I've been waiting for this you know."

"I know!" I say, and I laugh again and kiss him again and again, as time slowly starts up again.

Simon

There's only a minute to go before this year is over. It's been a rubbish year, but I can't say it's been completely shit because even though all the bad stuff happened, there was a lot of good stuff as well. Baz and I are going to be married, and I know who my mother is and I know that she loved me and wanted me, and I got my magic back. I can't feel bad about any of that. I tell Baz all of this as we slow dance to the fast music.

"You're an amazing person Simon Snow. I've never met anyone quite like you." Baz murmurs in my ear and I can't help laughing as I hold him closer.

"What?" he asks, pulling back a little.

"Well I've got dragon wings and a funny tail, so of course you haven't met anyone like me Baz."

"That's not what I mean and you know it." He says, pulling me back in close. "You're the bravest, strongest and kindest person I know." He whispers. And I can't stop staring at him – that's what he is, not me. I hold him closer.

The music stops and the countdown is about to start so we stop dancing and I look into his beautiful grey eyes. He's staring at me so intensely in that moment that I feel like I'm drowning.

"I love you Baz." I tell him seriously. "Even if you insist on taking me dancing every year." I add, because I'm a bit of an idiot.

"I love you Simon." He says back, smiling and shaking his head. "And I don't think we dance anywhere near often enough."

My tail is wrapped around his waist and he brings his hand to my face and touches my cheek gently. I keep my hands around his neck and when the countdown reaches zero he brushes his lips gently against mine, lightly, tenderly.

"Happy New Year, fiancé." He whispers, his mouth against my lips.

"Happy New Year, fiancé." I smile as I whisper back.
When we kiss, we kiss deeply and we don't stop until the music starts up again and the cheering stops and Penny is pushing us apart.

Baz smiles against my mouth. "Bunce has something to tell you." he whispers. "I believe congratulations are in order."

I pull away frowning, and then turn to Penny.

"I did it!" She yells over the music. "I asked Micah to marry me! We're engaged!"


"I stopped time Simon, just before midnight!" She beams.

I hug her this time. "Congratulations Penny!" I say again, and tears are welling in my eyes but I can't help it because I'm so fucking happy for her. "Where's Micah?"

Baz is shaking his hand and I bound over and shake his hand too. "Congratulations Micah!" I say.

"Thanks Simon." He says, grinning wildly. Then he looks straight at me and Baz and says. "I hope you'll be next." And I can't look at him because I'm a terrible liar so I hug him again and then find Penny and congratulate her again.

"You did it then? You stopped time?" I ask as I pull back, holding both her hands.

"Yes!" She's nodding excitedly, shaking my hands up and down as she starts jumping. I start jumping with her, I can't help it – her happiness is contagious. "You were all frozen for a minute or so. It was remarkable!"

"I bet it was!"

"But what I want to know..." We stop jumping finally and she looks thoughtful. "Is how Baz worked it out."

"He did?" I ask. And then I remember what he said to me. How did he work it out?

"Yes." She says preoccupied. She's got one of her' trying to resolve a mystery' faces on again. Even when she's just got engaged she still can't help her inquisitive mind.

Agatha pulls Penny from me then and I remember it's new year's, so I shake Joshua's hand and wish him a happy new year, and then Agatha and then Micah again and Penny again. And then I find Baz and pull him in close to me.

"How did you know Baz?" I ask. He's kissing my cheek and jaw and neck and there's a whole bunch of butterflies causing a riot in my stomach until he finally brings his mouth back to mine for another kiss. Then he pulls back slightly and looks at me.

He gives me a little shrug. "I felt the interruption." He says.

"You did?" I breathe. My stomach is still fluttery and my heart's beating wildly after all that kissing. "How could you feel anything in here with all this music and the drinks we had and the dancing?"

"It felt like a glitch, or a hiccup. And when Bunce asked me earlier tonight to make sure we went dancing I knew something was up." He shrugs again.
I don't say anything, I just stare at him shaking my head and letting my heart and my stomach calm down a little. He really is so fucking smart. (And incredibly sexy.)

We're all too excited to sit in the booth so we head to the bar and Baz orders another bottle of champagne and we all toast to Penny and Micah. And then we get another bottle and toast them again. By the time we drop Agatha and Joshua at Agatha's parents' house and Penny and Micah back at our flat and then drive back to Baz's flat, it's very late or very early. I peel off my new suit and drop it to the floor and climb into bed and we don't wake up until nearly lunchtime.

We drive to Oxford running a little late for New Year's Day lunch, which another tradition in the Grimm-Pitch household. Honestly I'm going to have trouble keeping up with all these traditions.

Daphne is excited to hear about Penny and Micah's engagement and she mentions a number of wedding planners and friends that she offers up to help. I tell her I'll let Penny know. I don't know what Penny's planning yet but I realise now that things are going to change at some point, and I'm going to have to get my head around it.

Baz drags me away eventually, after I spend a few hours with his siblings playing in their enormous play room. They have every toy imaginable and we spent hours building an enormous Lego fort, until the twins decide it would be more fun to knock it down. Well, it might have been my idea.
Chapter 42

Penny

Micah and I have New Year's lunch with my family so we can tell them the news. Mum is ecstatic and practically starts planning our wedding straight away. Dad's just as pleased and can't stop smiling. I think he's quietly shedding a tear or two over lunch, but it's hard to tell behind his glasses – he's just smiling stupidly at Micah and me.

Even my brothers and sisters are happy and Priya starts jumping up and down and announces that she's going to be the best bridesmaid ever and that she wants Simon as her partner "Because I want a Pokémon partner." she screams, even though I haven't asked her yet.

Fortunately Micah and I discussed our plans earlier so we wouldn't be swayed by either of our families, and mum eventually has to relent once she realises we've already thought everything through.

-oOo-

It's late afternoon by the time Baz and Simon finally return to the flat. They've been at Baz's for the last two nights and I've been waiting for him to return so I can talk with him about what we've decided. I'm worried that he might feel like I'm going to abandon him – especially since he's just come home after so long away, so I'm relieved when they walk in, smiling and talking easily. Simon looks like he's blushing a little. He always looks like that when he comes home with Baz, I have no idea why.

"Hiya Penny, Micah." Simon says casually as he drops his bags and his shoes by the door and flops onto the couch. He pulls Baz down next to him and puts his feet up on the coffee table, crossing his ankles. He's just finished work and he looks a little tired.

I put the tea on and magic up some biscuits. When it's ready I bring everything to the coffee table and sit next to him. Micah takes a seat on the stuffed chair and gives me a small nod. I turn from Micah to Simon.

"Simon." I start. "We want to tell you what we've decided, about our wedding."

"Congratulations again Pen, Micah." He says again. He's beaming at us as he takes his feet off the table. "That was smashing news you know."

"Thanks." I say, a little more at ease. He seems pretty relaxed about it – maybe he hasn't thought about it yet. That's entirely possible with Simon.

"And extraordinary magic." Baz adds and he looks impressed. "That will make an impressive addition to the marriage rites records."

"Thank you Baz." I say, and I turn back to Simon. "Simon, I just want to let you know that nothing will change here for a while."

"What do you mean Penny?" he asks, furrowing his brow. "I thought you'd be going to America now."

I stare at him for a bit. He looks genuinely surprised that I'm not going to pack my bag and head off to America immediately. I thought he might be concerned about that, or maybe it just hasn't hit him
"I will – one day, most likely." I tell him truthfully. "But for now I'm staying here. I want to finish my degree here, so I can't see myself moving for the next few years."

"And I still have a year and a half to go on my degree. I plan to finish that at Yale." Micah adds.

"So you're not moving to America?" he asks, he looks confused.

"Not yet Simon. Probably one day." I say slowly. "But we want to get married as soon as Micah finishes studying."

"Yes we do." Micah says smiling back at me and I flash him a quick smile.

"And then Micah's going to move here for a while." I tell him. I watch Simon carefully– I want to make sure he understands.

"Until Penny finishes her studies." Micah adds. "Then who knows where we'll end up."

"Probably America." I say to Micah.

"Maybe." He shrugs.

I turn back to Simon again. "So that's what we're planning to do." I tell him. "I wanted to let you know so you don't have to worry." I finish.

"Thanks Penny." He says, and he's still smiling easily at me. "But you don't have to worry about me anymore. You two need to get on with your lives and stop worrying about me all the time."

"I do need to worry about you Simon." I say, raising my eyebrows. I can't believe how easily he's taking all of this and it's got me a little concerned, but I look over at Baz and he's smiling as well. Maybe Simon actually will be all right. I really hope so. I decide to push on. "There's more." I say.

"What?" he asks, a little warily this time.

But I'm smiling now, this is the easy part. "Micah has a huge family, enormous actually. So we want to get married in their church, in America."

"Yeah?"

"Yes." I say. "So you'd better get your passport organised. I want you to be my Man of Honour."

"What's that?" he asks, frowning now.

"The person standing beside me when I get married, Simon." I try not to roll my eyes at him.

"You do?"

"Of course I do." I say a little exasperated. "You're my best friend, who else would I have by my side?"

And then he's hugging me, squeezing the air out of my lungs. "Thanks Penny. I'm honoured!" He says. "This is brilliant!"

"And Baz, you're coming too of course." I cough over Simon's shoulder.
"I suppose someone has to make sure Simon arrives on time." Baz says indifferently.

"Oh don't be ridiculous, if Micah is having all of his brothers and cousins as groomsmen I'll want you next to Simon on my side." I snap at him. He can play all cool and mysterious with everyone else but not me– I know him too well.

Simon grabs Baz's hand, beaming at him.

"Surely you have a litter of Bunces for that?" Baz says with disdain.

"What? Don't you want to be in my wedding?" I challenge.

"It appears to have slipped your mind that I can't enter a church without bursting into flames, Bunce." He says casually. "We've had enough near-death-by-fire experiences for a while don't you think?"

"Great snakes, how could I have forgotten about that?" I wonder out loud, and Simon's face falls at the realisation. How could I have overlooked that rather important little fact?

"It's all right Bunce." Baz says, apparently unconcerned. "I'll come to America, just not the ceremony."

"We don't have to get married in a church?" Micah suggests.

"Your family will disown us if we don't." I tell him. "And anyway, if you're moving here after the wedding it's the least we can do."

"True." Micah agrees. But I can see he's almost as disappointed as me.

"Right, that's settled then." Baz says. "Time for dinner, Simon's got to be hungry by now."

"How did--?" Simon says, and then his stomach growls loudly. He smiles sheepishly. "Yeah I am."

There's a knock at the door then which reminds me about Agatha. "Agatha and Josh are coming for dinner. They're leaving tomorrow so we thought we'd have one final catch up." I say as I get up to open the door before we can do. As we eat dinner together I ask Agatha to be my bridesmaid and surprisingly, she says yes. I smiling happily all through dinner because I can't think of anyone I'd rather have in my wedding than the very people sitting around our table right now. It bothers me that Baz can't be in our wedding party, or join us in the church, but I can't think of anything that will let that happen. He doesn't look overly concerned about it, judging by the way he's gazing at Simon like the love sick boy that he is, but I can see that it bothers Simon.

Maybe this is the way it will have to be though, I may just have to be pleased that Simon will be there and Baz will be at the before and after celebrations, maybe that will have to be enough. It looks as if Priya will get to be bridesmaid after all, at least I know she'll be pleased.

**Baz**

"Baz?"

"Mmmmm?"

"This marriage rites thing?" Simon asks as he pushes himself up on his elbow. He brushes my hair off my face and runs his fingers through it a few times before he tucks it behind my ear. I hum in
response.

It's late and we're in bed and I thought he was asleep already. The last few days have been hectic and tonight's dinner ended up an unofficial celebration of Bunce's engagement, as well as a goodbye for Wellbelove and Joshua, so it was another late night.

"Yes love?" I smile. I love it when he does that with my hair. I don't think I'll ever cut it.

"Do all mages do that?" He asks.

"It's traditional, some do it to varying degrees, but not all."

"What do you mean?"

"Not all mage's do it, and not all proposals are as elaborate as Bunce's." I say, looking up at him. "Why?"

"Nothing . . . It's just, I know how you like your traditions . . ." He starts. "So should we do something like that?" He sounds unsure.

I prop myself up on my elbow now so I can look at him directly. "Would you like me to?" I ask, brushing his cheek with my thumb.

"No, that's not what I meant." he says. "I mean should I do something like that. Do you want me to?"

I shake my head. "You've already saved my life Snow, more than once. And you took me to the stars, remember? I don't know how you could top all that."

"You took me to the stars Baz."

"It was your magic that got us there."

He shrugs, unsure.

"And I proposed to you." I remind him. "So traditionally I'm the one that's supposed to perform the magickal marriage rite."

"Oh."

"Would you like me to?" I ask again, lying back down and pulling him down to me.

"I dunno." He says, putting his head on my shoulder and sliding his arm around my waist. "It sounds a bit showy, I don't really see the point."

"It's traditional."

"But it doesn't actually achieve anything." He muses, closing his eyes. "I already know how powerful you are."

"So it would have to be useful?" I ask.

"Makes sense." He murmurs and I think he's falling asleep. "Otherwise what's the actual point?"

And I think I understand what Simon's getting at. He never used his magic to show off. He only ever used it when he needed to, and usually when either he or someone else was in mortal danger.
(Except for Christmas morning just passed but I think he may have had an ulterior motive that time.)
(But we were already running late . . .)

I wrap my arm around his waist and we fall asleep like that. And I wake thinking about marriage rites and useful magic and what I could possibly do that would be worthy of Simon Snow.
Simon

I decide to tell Dr Wellbelove first that I got my magic back so he can take a look at me, and he examines me again, even though he's coming around to check on me every week since the fire. He takes a look at me and then my wand and determines that my magic is here to stay, which is a bit of a relief because I've been enjoying it again. I like not having to do everything the Normal way, it frees up a shit load of time.

Penny had already checked discreetly with her dad that no new dead spots have been created since I got my magic back. That was one of the first things she did when I told her I got it back, and we were all relieved when she reported back that there's been no change. No change since that night back at Watford. But my relief was short lived because then she hounded me until I agreed to talk to Dr Wellbelove.

After we're sure I'm not pulling the magic from the centre of the earth this time, Penny tells her mum. She looks worried at first because there's no precedence for this, but when we explain that I have my mother's wand she and Penny immediately start discussing a bunch of different theories as to why and how. Most of them are the same as the ones Penny already came up with that first night so I zone out after a while.

I'm still a little anxious about it all. I'm not exactly sure what worries me more; that I could end up as powerful as before, or that people will think that I'm as powerful as before.

I talk to Penny and Baz about it and then I talk with my magickal psychologist. They all say that the same thing; that there's no evidence that suggests that my magic is anything like it was before, and that all the evidence points towards it being mine this time, and not the magic that the Mage gave me. Magic that was so powerful that it sucked it right out of the magickal atmosphere. And created my evil twin.

"But what about putting out the fire?" I ask Baz and Penny one night. "That took a lot of magic."

"And that knocked you unconscious for days." Penny says. "It was most likely a reaction to seeing your paramour almost dying." she says in a matter of fact tone. I shudder and squeeze Baz's hand a little tighter.

"You gave all that old magic to the Humdrum." Baz reminds me. "That magic is gone, this magic is all yours Simon." he says reassuringly.

This magic does feel like it's mine now and not like I'm pulling it from the centre of the earth. But they can see I'm still troubled, so we decide to test it out. Penny and Baz have me cast a few basic spells first, like warming and cooling spells. I don't burn or freeze anything and they work just as well as theirs so they're pretty happy. Then we move on to some more difficult spells which all work how they're supposed to and nothing blows up.

Finally they get me to cast April showers on some wilted flowers that Penny finds. I do it and they're both pretty impressed because it's a tough spell; flowers and food take life so they need a lot more magic. I get a little tired after that one but Baz said that's normal. I start to feel a lot better about my magic when everything looks like it's working normally.

Then Penny's eyes light up and she asks me if I could try to get rid of my wings and tail.
"I think we've had enough for tonight." Baz says hastily, pulling me to my room and closing the door before Penny can say anything else.

-oOo-

Baz and I finally tell his family. They're the ones that have the most to lose given that I was the all-powerful Chosen One– their enemy. And they are worried when we first tell them, actually I think his dad is scared – he's really tense when we tell him. But Baz convinces them that my magic is normal now, not explosive, blow-things-to-smithereens incredibly powerful magic. And Baz tells them that I've had it since I returned, and how I've been using it every day, and I think they finally settle into an uneasy acceptance.

They don't even know that it was me that I sucked the magic right out of their Hampshire estate. I guess we'll leave that for another time.

I go back to uni and get into all of my classes and every time I pull out my laptop– the one Baz gave me for Christmas, I still can't believe how lucky I am to have him in my life.

I work more shifts at the café and I fly to Baz's place at night sometimes using my own warming spells. And I spell my own wings and tail invisible every day, which is a relief not to have to rely on anyone.

Penny starts organising her wedding. It's a bit of a challenge for her given that she's having it in America and she's here. She's had to rely on Micah's family more than she wanted to but they seem to be doing the right thing by her, and not taking over like her mum would have if she was getting married here, so it all seems to be working okay. She's planning to go back to America in the summer to arrange some of the venues and important stuff. I think she's happy to leave the rest to Micah and his enormous family.

Baz and I start running once the weather warms up, and I slowly build my distance back up until soon we're running as far as before. Baz is still faster, but I don't think that's ever going to change. We also use Baz's Christmas present and go to the string concert. He makes us dress up in suits because he says its opening night and therefore it's tradition. I don't argue.

Alex and Baz catch up some evenings too, to play violin together when she closes the café. They really seemed to hit it off and he's always happy after a session with Alex. They also manage to go to a few string concerts and when they return they spend hours talking about the music, the musicians and a whole bunch of other stuff I don't understand. And I realise that Baz gave up most of his friends when we became boyfriends. He doesn't say anything but I think it might bother him occasionally. Penny can be a bit much for others to take sometimes.

We catch up for dinner with Alex and her flatmate and Marco a few times at her place. She loves cooking and so does Marco, and she has endless energy so it's no problem for her to work all day in the café and then have people over for dinner the same evening. I don't get it. She even invites Penny sometimes. And Marco gives me a bunch of new Italian recipes that are easy as to cook, so now I have a whole range of dinners in my collection. I've left Penny for dead in the cooking area.

-oOo-

It's not until we're a few weeks into the semester when I ask Baz why he's not at football training and he tells me after a lot of coaxing that he was kicked off the team.

"What?" I ask "How?" Baz is the best player I know, and the most composed. He never breaks a rule on field so this doesn't make sense at all. He's reluctant to tell me but I stare him down until he
finally relents.

"I got into a fight." He says, dropping his eyes. "With that moron Thomas."

"What did he do?" I snort, and then it dawns on me– his vampire strength. "Is he all right?" I whisper. "Did you hurt him?" I know Baz would never forgive himself if he hurt him, even if that Tom bloke is a dick.

"He's fine." He sighs. "Bunce spelled us apart before I could do any real damage."

I let out a sigh of relief. Thank Merlin Penny was there to save his arse. I don't know what we'd do without her sometimes.

"What happened Baz?" I finally ask. I can't think of a single scenario where Baz would let that wanker bother him. It doesn't make any sense.

He stares at me for a long time before he answers. "When you were . . . gone . . . let's just say I wasn't thinking very clearly." He averts his eyes.

"I'm sorry." I say.

"Don't be. This was entirely my fault. I lost my temper." He says quietly.

I take his hand. "But surely that was last year? Can't you play now?" He didn't hurt him after all, it sounds like it was just a scuffle after the match.

"I haven't tried out." He shrugs.

"Why not?" I cry. "You love playing!"

He doesn't say anything.

"You should." I say, staring him down.

He looks at me silently.

"You should." I say again.

The next week Baz is back on the team and I go to watch him play. Penny comes too, just to make sure he doesn't behave like he did the last time he played. He must have absolutely shocked the hell out of her that day because she says he's like a completely different person.

-oOo-

I bump into Olivia at uni. She's in a couple of my classes which is weird because I'm a semester behind. We start sitting together after a few weeks. We both don't know anyone else.

"What are you doing here?" I ask her one day as she sits next to me.

"Oh, I had a bit of a bad semester last year." She says. "Too much partying."

"Oh."

"Yeah, I failed some classes."

"Oh." I say again.
We start working together on a few assignments and it turns out she's nice enough. She's not at all like I thought she was, and she doesn't call me Si anymore. She tells me she has to find a part time job to repay her parents for her failed semester so I ask Alex and she asks Marco if he needs anyone. Turns out he does, so she gets some shifts waiting tables on Friday and Saturday nights and Sunday lunches. She really enjoys working with Marco and he says she's simpatico whatever that means. "Keeps me out of trouble." Olivia confides one day.

We're working together on a paper at my flat tonight, Penny's at her yoga class and Baz at football practice.

"So, what happened to you last semester Simon?" She asks.

I stop typing and look at her, deciding what to say. "I had some family stuff to deal with." I tell her finally.

"Is it your parents? Is everything okay?" she asks. She sounds genuinely concerned.

I watch her for a bit, she looks concerned too, rather than just nosy. Alex already knows I don't have any parents, she asked when I applied for the job and listed Penny and Baz as my emergency contacts. I told her but we don't talk about it and she doesn't pry, which is one of the reasons why I like her. I decide to tell Olivia as well.

"They're dead." I say. It's the truth and that way I don't have to talk about it.

"Oh I'm sorry." She says, embarrassed.

"That's okay." I say, and I smile at her to let her know it's true.

"Your flatmate came to the pub a few times asking for you." she says quietly, like she's unsure if she can still talk about it.

"Penny?" I didn't know that.

"Yeah, and your boyfriend was there a few times too, but he didn't come in. I saw him standing out the front a few times." She goes on.

"Baz?" I ask. I didn't know that either.

"Yeah, Tom was shit scared of him. He stopped coming to the pub ever since your Baz nearly beat him up." Olivia says, nodding.

"He didn't mean that, he wouldn't have hurt him." I say, but I think he would have hurt him plenty if Penny hadn't been there to stop him. Thank magic Penny was there.

"I mean, Tom was being a dick at the game." She says.

"What did he do?" I ask. Baz never told me what he said.

She looks at me for a second before she speaks. "Oh you know Tom, he can't keep his mouth shut sometimes. He was baiting your boyfriend all day, you know, yelling things out during the match. Then after the match he said something about you to Baz and Baz just went mental. He pushed Tom into the wall, really hard. I saw it happen and I saw the look in your boyfriend's eyes, he looked positively dangerous. I think if it wasn't for your flatmate, Penny, he might have really hurt him. But she yelled at him and he just stepped back." Olivia shrugs.
"He wouldn't have hurt him." I say again, even though I think he might have.

She doesn't look convinced but Baz comes in then and that puts an end to our conversation. I introduce them and Baz remembers her from the pub that night. He's polite and charming as ever as he smiles and says hello. He's all sweaty from football and he kisses me quickly before excusing himself to shower.

"He seems really nice." She says when he's gone. "He's completely different to that day at the game."

"Yeah, he is really nice." I say. I don't want her to think he's not.

"Does he live with you?"

"Nah." I say. "He's just here a lot, or I'm at his flat." I shrug.

She ends up staying for dinner and I make spaghetti Bolognese. She asks lots of questions about how we met and Baz explains better than I could how we all went to Watford, which Normals think is just an ultra-exclusive boarding school, and how we hated each other all through school. And then Penny tells her that I dated a girl while at school and her eyes go wide and she shakes her head a lot and Baz starts sneering at Penny until I kick her under the table and she changes the subject.

"How did you learn to cook so well Simon?" Olivia asks as she swallows her last forkful.

"Simon likes to eat, so he had to learn how to cook." Penny says, elbowing me in the ribs.

"A bloke's gotta eat." I shrug, wiping up the last of my sauce with some bread. "And Penny can't cook for shit."

"Yes I can!" Penny cries indignantly.

Baz snorts at that and she glares at him.

"No you can't. And it's about time you learned how to make another curry Penny." I tell her. I mean I like the Biryani but enough is enough already.

Penny turns and glares at me now so I change the subject and tell Olivia about Penny and Micah and how they met while he was on exchange from America.

"You guys are lucky, I can't even find one decent bloke." She says. "All the ones I've dated from uni so far are all complete idiots."

When she leaves Penny says she probably can't find a bloke because she's so intimidating. She's as tall as me and Penny says she looks like an Amazonian princess with her long dark hair and dark skin.

"She looks like Wonder Woman." She says. "Or Zena the Worrier Princess."

"You watch too much TV." I say, shaking my head. I hadn't really noticed, she's just Olivia to me.

-oOo-

I watch Baz play football every week and his family start coming to the games as well. I bump into Olivia and Emily and some of the other blokes from my old classes when his uni plays mine. Tom stays far away from me, and I sort of feel bad for him but at the same time I don't want there to be any trouble again so I steer clear of him too.
After the game, we all end up in the same pub having a few pints. Some of Baz's teammates are looking over at the girls and Olivia is eyeing one of them back. Baz notices too so he introduces them. I poke Olivia in the ribs when they go to get some more beer and she elbows me back hard.

"What?" she whispers.

"That bloke." I say, pointing with my chin at the one she's been eyeing off.

"Yeah, he's nice I suppose." She says, blushing.

So I ask Baz if he's a good sort.

"Yes he's fine." He says. "For a Normal."

And then he smoothly brings that bloke and his mate back into our conversation and before you know it Olivia and Emily and those two are chatting away nicely for a time before Olivia has to leave for work, but not before they exchange phone numbers. I smile smugly at Olivia and Baz rolls his eyes.

-oOo-

Summer finally arrives and Penny and Baz have finished their second year. I'm a semester behind them now, but I don't really care— it's not like I'm in any hurry or anything. Penny's going off to New York to see Micah soon and to start arranging their wedding. This time Agatha is flying over to New York to help her out.

"Maybe Agatha should be your Best Man, or Man of Honour?" I suggest one morning at breakfast. (Scrambled eggs, bacon, mushrooms and toast.)

"That would be Maid of Honour." Penny corrects automatically as she pours the tea.

"Well maybe she should." I say again. "She'll be helping a lot more than I will. I don't even know what I'm supposed to be doing."

"You've done plenty." She says dismissively. "You came with me to pick my dress."

"Yeah, that was fun." I shrug, hoeing into my eggs and bacon.

It was fun I guess. We went to a few shops— one each week, and then went out for lunch or to the pub when we'd had enough. Most of the dresses were crap and made her look like she was wearing a giant tea cosy, but then Baz's step mum suggested a shop and Penny found the perfect dress straight away. I can't believe she trusted my opinion at all, but she face timed Agatha as well and she agreed the dress was lovely too. (So maybe she didn't trust my opinion at all.) (But she bought the dress and we didn't have to go to any more dress shops so I wasn't complaining.)

"And you and Baz are organising your suit." She adds.

"Well, Baz is really." He's already spoken with Micah and is making sure that mine coordinates. I'm letting him run with that.

"And you need to arrange your passport." She reminds me.

I'm sitting my driving test next week, after that I'll apply for my passport.

"Don't I need my birth certificate for that?" I ask.
"Yes, it's the same for the drivers licence." She reminds me. "Mum already sorted all of that when she started at Watford. You used that when you applied for your learner's permit." She reminds me again. And she did, Professor Bunce contacted the orphanage to obtain a copy of my registered birth certificate. It has the date and place of birth as unknown, just the year I was born, 1997. But there's also the date that I was left at the orphanage noted. I know that's not my birthday so I've always ignored it but for all this documentation I've had to use something.

"Well I can organise a cracking stag night for you when the time comes." I suggest.

"I think that's a hen's night." She corrects me again. "The stag night is for the groom."

"Oh." I say. I'd better brush up on my Man of Honour duties. Right now I know squat about what I'm supposed to do. At least I've got a year to prepare.

Baz and I see Penny off for her flight, I drive us back from the airport. I'm driving because I recently passed my test. I finally have a drivers licence. While I drive, I suggest a game of tennis at Baz's club – it's been ages since we had a game and I know Baz likes beating everyone at tennis.

"You want to go to the club?" he asks, giving me an incredulous look.

"Yes why not?" I shrug. I do have an ulterior motive but hopefully he won't work it out.

"Does this have anything to do with Dev and Niall?" he asks suspiciously.

And then I remember how fucking smart he is and I really shouldn't bother trying to outsmart him, even if it is for his own good.

"Yes." I say resolutely. "You should reconnect with them."

"Why?" he scoffs, looking at me like I'm a complete idiot.

"Because they're your friends. At least they were until we got together." I remind him. "Surely they can't hold a grudge forever." I don't really know Niall and Dev all that well, maybe they can hold a grudge indefinitely.

"Snow?" He asks slowly. "Do you genuinely want to socialise with Dev, and Niall?"

"Not particularly." I shrug "But as long as Niall isn't being a complete wanker, I'm prepared to give it a go."

"All right." He says, shaking his head. "I'll arrange a game."

I smile to myself as I drive back to the flat.

We spend a few days at Oxford before his family travels abroad. We were invited to go with them but I still don't have a passport and I have to work. I've repaid Penny the three months back rent I owed her even though she said not to, but I just couldn't let it go. But that means I still don't have a lot saved so I'm working straight through the summer. Alex even talked about having some time off, she and Marco want to travel through Italy and check out some of the latest restaurants.

"I can't cook any of your dishes." I say when she brings it up again. "But I can run the café for a few weeks." I offer. I can pretty much do everything but making the pastries and pies now.

"I reckon you could Simon." She says, seriously thinking it through this time. "If I can get someone to cook the pastries and prep the meals, I could actually take some time off."
"You could do a reduced menu." I suggest.

"Yeah, then Vicki could do it. She can't cook as well as me but she's not bad. And she's in between jobs at the moment." Alex says decisively. It sounds like she's already made up her mind.

So now I'm running the café with Alex's sister, Vicki for a fortnight while Alex travels to Italy next week. I'm a little nervous but I reckon it'll be all right, and I have her on speed dial just in case.

-oOo-

We're at Oxford and I'm outside sitting on a blanket under a shady tree, drawing. Baz is lying next to me reading a magickal book. He's been reading a few lately, ever since he finished his exams. Mordelia is blocking goals while the twins run around with the ball, trying to get it passed her, and there's a constant stream of squealing and giggling while they chase the ball. Maybe I'll read some of those magickal books too, I am a mage after all. Maybe I should learn some new spells or study up on magickal history that we didn't learn at Watford I think to myself, but the weather's lovely and I'm working on a sketch of Mordy and the twins for Daphne and I'm completely lost in the drawing when Baz says. "We should tell everyone."

"Tell everyone what." I say, still focused on drawing. The kids are running around all over the place so I'm having trouble finishing it.

"That we're engaged, that we're going to be married." He says, smiling as he looks up at me.

I stop drawing then and turn to face him. And for a second I'm distracted, I think I want to draw him exactly like that, peeking up at me with those sexy as fuck grey eyes and that beautiful smile on his face. I think I'll do that next. And then I remember what he just said. I've managed to keep this secret from everyone for six months, which is some sort of record for me. It was easier than I thought with Penny because she was so distracted with her wedding plans and study and work, and with everything going so well with Baz and me she seemed to stop watching me so much.

I grin at him. "Does that mean I get to call you my fiancé now? In public?"

"Of course."

"Then yes, let's do that." I say. And I sneak a quick kiss before his siblings catch us. I'd never hear the end of it from Mordy if she caught us snogging.

So after dinner that night, after the kids go to sleep, we sit with his parents in the library and Baz tells them. I'm really nervous and I'm sweating a bit but Baz is as cool as a cucumber. I don't know how he does it. He smooths out his jeans.

"Father, Mother." He says, his calm voice belies any nervousness he might be feeling. "Simon and I are engaged, we're going to be married."

I hold my breath.

His father looks at Baz, his face hasn't changed at all and I have no idea what he's going to do. I check for my wand, just in case.

Daphne looks between Baz and me and she's beaming. She stands up and walks over to Baz and he stands up, I follow his lead.

"Congratulations Basil!" she says hugging him tight. The tears are already welling in her eyes. "Congratulations Simon!" she says next as she hugs me and gives me a kiss on the cheek. "I'm so
happy for you both." She cries, the tears falling freely now.

We smile and thank her and she hugs us both again, crying harder this time. Then she pulls back wipes her tears with a fancy looking handkerchief and looks at her husband.

"Malcolm." she says quietly.

We all turn to watch Baz's dad. I shift a little closer to Baz instinctively.

Baz's dad looks at Baz and then at me and then back to Baz. "Is this what you two want?" he asks quietly.

"Yes Father."

I nod a few times. I don't dare speak– I'm so nervous I'd probably choke on my words.

He nods once and takes a step towards Baz, facing him directly. "Then I'm happy for you Basil. Congratulations Son." He nods again and shakes Baz's hand, patting his shoulder at the same time.

"Thank you Father." Baz says. And even though he sounds just as pompous as ever, I can hear the happiness in his voice.

And then his dad turns to me and I swallow, hard. "Simon." He says raising his hand.
"Congratulations." And as I shake his hand I let out a huge sigh of relief.

"Yeah, thanks." Is all I can say. I feel like I'm going to pass out.

And then Daphne is back hugging us again, saying lots of things at once. "This is such wonderful news!" and "A wedding Malcolm!" and "Oh Basil!"

I catch Baz's eye between hugs and he's beaming at me.

And then Daphne says "Where are your rings?"

"What rings?" I say before I think.

"We don't have any yet." Baz says. "We haven't discussed it."

"What?" I ask.

"Whether to have engagement rings, or wedding rings, or both."

"Oh." I say. There's clearly a lot I need to learn about getting married. Maybe I'll ask Penny.

"Oh well, you'll sort all that out." She says dismissively. "And if you need any help organising the wedding please don't be afraid to ask."

Organising a wedding? I think to myself, shit, we haven't even told everyone that we're engaged yet.

"We haven't set a date yet." Baz says quickly.

And I'm relieved because I have enough to deal with being Man of Honour for Penny. I don't think I could organise my own wedding at the same time. And then I think Penny! We haven't told Penny. She's going to flip her shit when she finds out that we told Baz's parents before her. Hell, she's going to flip anyway because we got engaged before her and didn't tell her for all this time. Thank magic she isn't here.
"All right" Baz's dad says then. "I think a toast is in order."

And snakes alive! He's pulls out a bottle of something expensive looking and fills four glasses and passes them around to all of us.

"To Basil." He says, looking at his son with so much affection. "And Simon." He says looking at me, not with the same level of affection but at least he doesn't look like he wants to kill me. And then he says something that almost makes me cry but I hold back because I absolutely do not want to cry in front of Mr Grimm no matter how weirdly nice he's being right now. "Your mothers would be proud."

We drink the toast in silence.

Later that night Baz comes into my room. "That went well." He says, smiling as he leans against the door frame.

"I can't believe it Baz. I thought he might want to kill me all over again, or disown you at the very least." I'm shaking my head in disbelief.

"He's had plenty of time to get used to us." He shrugs.

"Yeah but still," I say. "He might be used to us being boyfriends, but it's completely different us getting married."

"Is it?" he asks, raising one eyebrow at me.

"Yes it is."

"Why?" he challenges.

"Well it's more permanent isn't it?" I shrug. "He was probably hoping this was just a phase you were going through or something."

"A phase that's lasted half my life." He snorts and rolls his eyes. "Anyway, I suspect Daphne's been preparing him."

"Yeah?"

"Yes." He nods. "And now we have to tell Bunce." He says, raising his eyebrow at me.

"Yeah, I know." I frown. "We will, as soon as she gets back."

-Baz comes with me to apply for my passport, which is not a smart thing because they have to take my photo about five times before they get one that they can use because I can't stop smiling. There's a lot of paperwork given it's my first one and with the problem of my lack of birth date but Professor Bunce and Dr Wellbelove sign off for me so it all gets done eventually.

Baz is back in music school for the summer and he's still doing his language classes, but he's dropped the Greek and Latin this year and is focusing on French now, and he decided to try Italian because he's been listening to Marco and he likes it. I'm running the café for the next fortnight with Vicki. It's exhausting, but in a good way, and Vicki is pretty organised so things run fairly smoothly. Vicki's a lot like her sister but not quite as mental. And she's pretty smart too, it turns out she studies finance or something and worked in a big accounting firm and that's where she met her husband, but she was
sick of the long hours and is looking for something a little less demanding. She helped Alex set up the business and get the finances sorted. Alex loves to cook but hates dealing with the money side of things so they make a good pair.

I start early and finish in the early evenings and when I finish Baz is usually at my flat and trying his hand at cooking dinner. And he's not bad, he's definitely been googling some recipes. He still picks up a pie or two every week from Oxford and he made sure we had a stash for the summer before his parents went away, but he's also cooking dinner himself now which is new.

I race home now from my final shift with Vicki before Alex returns. I'm absolutely knackered after working for an entire fortnight straight and I need a shower but as soon as I'm through the door I pull Baz towards me and runs his hands through my hair so I pull his face to mine and kiss him so hard I can feel his teeth against mine for a second. His body trembles at the contact so I pull him even closer and kiss him again, and then I kiss him again. I have to stop for a moment to catch my breath, and when I do I feel his lips move to my jaw, then my throat, and my collarbone, and then slowly back up to my mouth. It makes my heart pound in all different directions.

"Welcome home." he murmurs against my lips. Our foreheads are pressed together and mouths are barely apart.

"Thanks." I think I say, but I can't be too sure. His hands are tight around my waist, bringing me even closer as he kisses me again, which makes me shiver this time. I feel him tremble again which makes my stomach drop and I moan as we kiss again. I slide my hands under his tee shirt and pull it over his head and he tugs mine over my head and then his hands are all over me and it feels like I'm on fire. I drag him to the couch, undoing his button and letting his jeans slide down before we tumble together, our legs entwined and our hands on each other, my mouth on his, and his tongue cool and delicious as it slides against my own.

-oOo-

"We're having a duvet weekend." I say, quietly. I don't know what time it is but it's still light outside. We're on the couch, lying in each other's arms. Our clothes are on the floor and both of us are covered in a light sheen of sweat. Baz's hair is all over the place and he looks as sexy as fuck.

"Now?" he asks, grinning at me. His hands are tracing over my skin and I feel like I'm on fire again.

"Yes." I say, lifting my chin and pressing my lips to his. "Right now."

And my stomach grumbles right then and Baz smirks. "What about right after dinner Snow?"

"All right." I say shrugging, I am hungry after all, and I still need a shower. "And it's Simon."

So we eat (fast) and clean up (with magic) and then race to the shower (together) and take our time in there, and then climb into my bed and don't plan to leave for the entire weekend.

And he calls me Simon the entire time.

Baz

"Tennis, today, at the club?" I ask Simon. It's Monday and true to his word we spent the entire weekend under the duvet. It was fucking brilliant.

"Mmmm?" he asks sleepily. His curls are all over the place and he needs a shower and a shave. He's an absolute mess and he's so fucking beautiful. Crowley I love him like this but I can't get distracted now, we have to get moving.
"After work, after classes. Tennis Snow." I say, a little louder this time, brushing his matted curls off his forehead. Simon is due into work soon and I have violin today so we have to get up now. "And we can have dinner at the club." I add.

"Tennis, dinner, yeah okay." He says. And with that I hop out of bed and start breakfast while Simon hits the shower. We agree to meet back at his place before heading to the club. I've managed to get Dev and Niall in for another game. I don't think they know quite what to make of it.

Simon looks magnificent in his new tennis whites, and I think about cancelling but it took pains to set up this game so I'd better not. We manage to get in a quick game before Dev and Niall turn up so Simon is fairly relaxed by the time they're ready to play.

"Gentlemen." I say, nodding to each of them.

"Baz, Simon." Dev says. That's an improvement, Simon actually earned a mention.

"Boys." Is Niall's greeting.

Simon can still only bring himself to nod to each of them.

They head around to their side of the court.

"No magic." I call out as I serve. Then I turn to Simon. "No tail." I whisper. He stares straight ahead, no saying anything.

This match is even easier than the last. They've obviously been drinking their way around the continent yet again, or drinking their way through university. Nothing much changes apparently.

Simon doesn't use his tail at all this time and we still manage to win, and when we're done, both Dev and Niall are puffing and sweating generously. We make our way inside for a quick drink at the bar and dinner. When we find a table I'm surprised to find Dev and Niall following us.

"Mind if we join you?" Dev asks. They've already had a few pints at the bar and are ready to eat.

I turn to Simon. He nods imperceptibly but doesn't say anything. "Why not." I say, giving them a warm smile.

We hit the carvery and Simon fills his plate, and then looks longingly at the rest of the food. I fill mine with whatever he didn't fit on his plate and we make our way back to our table. I smile and nod to a few members and friends of my fathers.

"This is going to be interesting." I say before Dev and Niall return from filling their plates. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Sure Baz it's fine. They're your friends." He says. "You've had to put up with Penny all this time."

"True." I say, smiling. Bunce isn't that bad actually, she's decent enough company and my equal in all things academic, including all things magickal. And she pulled me out of my self-induced misery while Simon was gone. She's good to have around, not that I'm ever telling her that.

Dev and Niall join us with their heavily laden plates and immediately start telling us a long winded story of one of their many misadventures on the continent while hoeing into their dinner. It's not all bad, and Simon is content to eat quietly while I listen to them tell story after story about uni life, drinking at the uni bar, travelling, drinking at various bars in other countries and drinking in general.
When Simon finishes his plate I hand him mine and he gets stuck into that as well.

When they ask what I've been up to I can't think of a single thing to tell them. I can't tell them we're going to be married, we've only just told my parents and I don't think they'll want to hear about that anyway. I can't tell them we almost died in a fire last year, trying to save each other. I certainly can't tell them that we discovered the Mage is Simon's father and we found his mother. So instead I tell them the small things, about my music and studies and how Bunce stopped time on New Year's Eve. Everyone in the magickal realm knows that anyway, it's been entered into the marriage rites record already.

"You were there?" Dev asks us both.

"Yes of course, she's Simon's best friend." I remind them. "And Wellbelove and her new beau were there as well."

"Impressive magic." Niall says, reluctantly.

"It was." Simon says, nodding.

"Agatha has a boyfriend?" Dev asks.

"Yep." Simon says.

"And you went out with him?" he asks Simon again.

"I didn't go on a date with him." He says, rolling his eyes. "We all caught up while they were here."

I try not to laugh as both Dev and Niall look embarrassed.

"Where did she do it?" Niall asks once he composes himself. "The marriage rite?"

I tell them the name of the club. They've probably never heard of it anyway.

"That gay club?" Niall asks. "What were you all doing there?" he looks at me.

"Dancing, what do you think we were doing?" I say. I can hear Simon snorting.

Niall looks embarrassed and doesn't know where to look. He ends up looking at his empty glass. "Oh, er, another pint?" he asks Dev, more to change the subject than anything.

"Yeah sure." He answers, as if it was going to be a no.

"Baz? Er, Simon?" Niall turns to us, getting up from the table.

"No thanks." Simon says immediately. I know he doesn't want to end up in rounds with these two, and we're going for an early run tomorrow before he heads off to work.

"Not for me either, going for a run in the morning." I tell them politely.

"A run?" Niall scoffs. "We're on summer break." He shakes his head incredulously at the very thought.

By the time we leave, we've heard too many drinking stories and Simon is dubious. "You actually hung around with those twits for seven years?" he asks.

"To be fair, we were young." I say. But I have to agree with Simon, they really are complete idiots.
Simon

This summer I've been flying a few nights a week, mainly around London and every time we head to Oxford, so I've gotten quite fast. I can feel the strength in my wings as I fly now, they feel even stronger than before the fire so I decide it's time for our second date. It's only taken nearly a year but better late than never.

I arrange for Baz to come over early on Friday evening. "Dress comfortably, and bring a jacket." I tell him. "No suit."

When he arrives he has a quizzical look on his face – it's clear he has no clue what I have planned. Alex helped me organise a picnic basket full of her pies and desserts and she even made us a Beef Wellington. I add a bottle of champagne that I know Baz likes.

"I need to borrow your car." I tell him when I meet him at the door. He's dressed in dark jeans that hug him in all the right places, and a tee shirt and thin cashmere jumper in pale blue, he's carrying a light jacket. He looks perfect as usual.

"All right Snow." He says frowning at me. He has no idea what we're doing tonight.

We head out with the picnic backpack, a picnic blanket and ourselves and I drive out of London towards the south east coast. It's a bit of a drive but I make it in good time (and without magic). When we arrive at Dover I park the car at a quiet car park and grab the picnic gear.

"Right." I say when we're out of the car. "You have to hold on."

"Hold on to what?" he asks. He has a quizzical look on his face and it's obvious he has no idea what I've planned for us.

"To me. We're going up there." I point my chin to the top of the cliffs.

"I'm not going up there with you." He says, his eyes as wide as dinner plates. I looks a little worried.

I give him my most encouraging smile. "Yes you are, and the only way to get there is to fly." I shrug.

"Isn't there a path?"

"Not where we're going."

He stares at me, unblinking, like I'm a complete moron. "Snow?"

"Yes?"

"Have you thought this through?" he asks. "What if you drop me?"

"I won't drop you Baz." I say. I shake my head and roll my eyes, because he's being a bit childish at the moment. Baz likes to be in control so I know this is killing him. "I can use a sticking spell if you like. Penny did that when the Humdrum summoned us. It works." I shrug.

"This is not one of your better ideas Snow." He says, head tilted to one side, arms crossed. "Yes it is." I counter. "And I've had lots of brilliant ideas."
"Oh really?" He challenges. "Like what?"

"The duvet days." I answer smugly.

"All right, I'll give you that one." He concedes.

"And feeding our leftover bread to the pigeons on the roof." I go on, smiling. "So their nice and fat for you to feed on. Sort of like the circle of life isn't it?"

"I don't think that's quite what they had in mind when they wrote that." He says quietly.

"But it was a good idea." I nod. "And that weekend, when there was that blizzard."

"The Marvel Cinematic Universe movie marathon?" he recalls, smiling.

"Yes, that was a brilliant idea."

"Yes it was." He agrees. Then he lets out a sigh. "All right Snow. But if you drop me I won't marry you."

I shake my head, smiling. "Okay, deal." I give him the backpack to put on and I pull him towards me, wrapping his arms around my waist. I cast the sticking spell that Penny used, just to keep him happy and then I take off as fast as I ever have. I feel him squeezing me tighter and his eyes are shut tight and I can't help smiling. I've never flown with Baz before, he's always flat out refused, so I'm pretty chuffed that I even got him to agree.

"Open your eyes Baz." I say into his ear. He does then and stares straight at me. I smile at him reassuringly, and then point my eyes and tip my head to the side. He looks around and a small gasp escapes him. I feel his arms tighten around my waist and his eyes widen in wonder as he takes in the breathtaking view of the white cliffs of Dover underneath us. I fly further out now, over the water so we can see the cliffs from the water and then I fly back over the cliffs and look for a flat spot near the edge where we can land. I see the perfect spot and fly over to it, pulling back as we near the ground.

I land easily– I really have this whole flying and landing thing down pat now, and we step onto the ground smoothly. I undo the sticking spell and Baz takes another moment before he lets go of me. Before he lets go of me completely I pull him back to me for a kiss, brushing our lips together a couple of times before I pull his face to mine and kiss him properly.

"Very nice start to our date Simon." He says, a bit breathless as we finally let go of each other. His hair is all over the place.

"I thought so too." I say as I lay out the picnic blanket. We're close enough to the cliffs so the view is spectacular and uninterrupted but not so close that we feel uneasy or feel like we're going to be blown away by the wind. Baz removes the backpack and hands it to me and we sit down. I pull out the food and champagne from the backpack and place it on the centre of the blanket, and then pull out two plates and cutlery and two champagne flutes. Alex made mini Beef Wellingtons today, so I grabbed some of those and a bunch of different tarts for dessert. I pour the champagne and hand a glass to Baz. I'm about to take a drink but Baz proposes a toast.

"To us." He says, smiling at me. "And to a fucking amazing piece of flying there." He adds as an afterthought. I laugh as I take a sip.

"You're still as terrifying as ever, you know." He says shaking his head.

"Thanks. I think." I decide to take it as a compliment.
"You're welcome." He says quietly.

I cast a warming spell on the beef and then serve it up on to the plates, handing Baz a plate.

"This is very impressive Snow." He says, and I can see he means it. My heart flutters just a little bit.

"Yeah I thought so." I say. I know I sound smug but I don't care, it is rather impressive when you think about it.

We get through dinner easily. We talk about how the year's gone so far and how much he's enjoyed playing violin with Alex and how lucky I was to find Olivia at uni and how good my tennis is getting and how Penny's doing in America and how well his Father is adjusting to us being engaged. And as I pull out dessert from the backpack and my eyes light up and Baz muses that it can't be a coincidence that half of our friends work with food.

"Of course it's a coincidence Baz, just a bloody good one." I say as I look at the incredible tarts. "Alex really did come through." I add, eating all of mine and then half of his. We finish off the champagne while I try to convince Baz to come flying more often.

"You'll love it." I say to him, waving my hand lazily in the air above us. "It's brilliant fun, Mordy loves it." And then I realise what I've said so I start to backtrack. "I mean she loved it, the one time I took her. It was only one time, I swear Baz."

Baz snorts back a laugh. It makes him sound like a teenager and not at all like a pretentious posh prat. "As if I didn't already know. You two are as thick as thieves." He says. "I've already told you, you're a terrible liar."

"Yeah, true." I shrug. "Anyway, want to go again?"

"Let's save it for the trip home." He says, lying down on his back and pulling me down next to him. We stare up at the stars, holding hands.

"Do you know their names?" I ask, pointing to the stars.

"Of course." He says. And then he points to each constellation and starts naming them. I'm only half looking, not paying much attention as I listen to the deep timbre of his voice. Eventually I don't know which constellation of stars he's pointing to because I've turned to watch him. He has a small smile on his face and I watch his beautiful lips move as he speaks, naming star after star. I think to myself that I have to kiss him right now on his beautiful mouth, so I do. I lean over to him and kiss him full on the mouth and he stops talking and wraps his strong arms around my waist and kisses me back. I don't know how long we kiss but I need to catch my breath so I pull back a little.

"I think this would have to be the best second date I've ever been on." He whispers against my lips, our mouths touching.

"Me too." I breathe as I press our foreheads together. And then I kiss him again and again until he moans right in my mouth. Then I stop and pull back.

"What's wrong?" he asks.

"Nothing." I tell him. "It's just . . . I don't want you to think I brought you up here to seduce you or anything. I mean, it's only our second date you know."

He raises his eyebrows at me. "So you're not trying to seduce a vampire, Snow?" He asks as he wraps his arms tighter around my waist.

He pouts then as his lips brush mine. "Pity." He whispers.

And I can't help myself, I kiss him again as I slide my hands just under his tee shirt and touch his cool skin. My hands are on the hem of his jumper and tee shirt now, pulling both over his head and I drag my hands back down his chest and stomach until they rest on his waist. His skin is cool and it feels so good that it's driving me mad. He pulls off my tee shirt and jumper now so we're chest to chest– his cold to my warm, and I kiss him over and over as our hands roam all over each other. And we stay here, on the clifftop and I suppose I do seduce him, or he seduces me. And more than once.

I don't want to leave but it's late, or early morning. So we get dressed, pack up the picnic and I fly us back down to the car park. Baz doesn't even remember to cast the sticking spell, so he either trusts my flying or I blew him away completely, shagging him on the clifftop under the stars.

He drives home with magic this time and when we arrive back at my flat we fall into bed and fall asleep almost immediately in each other's arms.

**Penny**

I return to London after six lovely weeks in America with Micah. We managed to spend some time alone and quite a bit of time with his family and his mother and sister was particularly helpful when it came to sorting out the church and reception hotel for our wedding. All of the bookings are made and deposits paid so we're locked in. I felt a pang of guilt as we booked the church, but Micah reminded me that Baz was okay with it so I should try to let it go.

Agatha came to New York for a week where she helped me start planning some of the fiddly details. I had no idea there was so much to arrange. There's the invitations, the music for the church and the reception, the pre-wedding dinner, (she told me that's an American tradition), and separate flowers for all of those, the cars, the photographer and the gifts. And that's just the start! I tried to suggest she could pick her own dress because I couldn't be bothered arranging that as well but she told me she and Priya would coordinate their dresses with the groomsmen and she'll sort it out when she visits London for Christmas and I was thankful for that. Then I told Micah he could sort out the honeymoon because I don't think I'll have the energy. (To organise it, not participate in it.)

By the time I return to London I'm actually feeling a bit overloaded on wedding planning and I think I'll be glad to get back to uni. I let myself into the flat and I'm surprised to find it empty, and spotlessly clean. Simon left a note saying he's at work and dinner's in the fridge if I want but he'll be back in time.

I magic my clothes and luggage away and then shower and go straight to bed for a quick sleep. And I wake a few hours later to the sound of Simon and Baz talking quietly in the lounge room.

"We have to tell her today Simon." Baz says.

"I know and we will." He says. "After dinner."

"Tell me what?" I ask from my door way.

"Penny!" Simon yells. He's barrelling over to me and wraps me in his strong arms and swings me around. "Welcome back! How was New York? How's Micah? Did you see Agatha?"

"Good, great and yes I did. Now what are you going to tell me?"

"Do you want to have dinner first?" Simon asks.
"No." I say determinedly. "What is it?"

Baz magicks up some afternoon tea which is lovely and just what I need, I've missed a good cup of tea in the afternoons. We sit around the coffee table with biscuits and tea and I wait for Simon to tell me what's going on. I have no idea what he's going to say. This can't be good though, I think to myself. When is it ever good? I'm starting to worry.

"I'm starting to worry Simon." I tell him. Have they gone off and done something stupid?

Simon takes Baz's hand and Baz smiles at him encouragingly.

"Penny." He says, taking a big breath. "Baz and I are engaged."

That was unexpected. I can't think for a moment until I register the words. "You're engaged?"

"Yes," he says, smiling at me.

"Engaged! Congratulations Simon, Baz!" I cry as I pull him in for a big hug, then I reach over Simon and hug Baz and swat Baz's arm when he pushes me off him, and then I pull Simon back in for another hug. I can't believe it!

"When did you do that?" I ask while hugging Simon. They must have done this during the summer.

"Well, actually . . ." Simon starts, but stops. I let go of him and sit back, holding his hand excitedly. He looks at Baz and Baz nods to him. "Last year." He finally says.

"What?"

"Last year, that night, when we got back together . . . You know, in December, after I came back . . ." he stops talking suddenly. He's looking at me with a worried look.

I pull my chin back. "Last year?"

"Yes."

"You got engaged last year and didn't tell me?"

"Yes?"

He looks very worried now and I realise I'm twisting my ring around my finger. I stop.

"We're telling you now." Baz says in a smug tone, and I have to stop myself from spelling that self-satisfied expression right off Baz's face. I take a deep breath instead, to calm myself and then I turn to Simon.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I ask, a little calmer now.

"Because I'd just come back . . ." Simon starts, "... and you two spent enough time worrying about me and it was nearly Christmas and Micah was coming and I'd just got my magic back. There was a lot going on and I didn't want you to worry about me anymore, I just wanted you to enjoy your time with Micah . . ." Simon trails off and looks at me.

And I get it now, Simon didn't want to make a fuss.

"We only just told Baz's parents the other week . . ." He goes on.
"You told them, before you told me?" I can't help the surprise in my voice.

"Um, yeah?" He says, unsure again. "We were there, and well, we just told them."

I take another deep breath to calm down. I turn to Baz. "Merlin Baz, how did your dad take it?"

"Surprisingly well actually." He answers and he looks pleased.

"Yeah, shocked me stupid I can tell you." Simon says.

I let out an involuntary laugh.

"We're okay?" he asks solemnly.

"Yeah, of course we're okay." I say, nudging him with my elbow. Then I smile at him so he knows I mean it, and he smiles back. "I can't believe two are really engaged!" I say and I'm so happy for them that I pull them both in for another big hug, ignoring Baz when he tries to push me off him again.

"So when are you getting married? And where? Do you need me to do anything?" I say excitedly, bouncing up and down.

"No Penny, you don't have to do anything." Simon says, shaking his head. "You have enough on your plate with your wedding."

"Are you sure Simon?" I ask. They can't possibly do this all themselves.

"It's fine Bunce." Baz cuts in. "We haven't set a date yet."

I look between them, Simon is smiling and they both look completely relaxed. "Oh, okay." I agree reluctantly. "But are you sure?"

"We're sure." Simon says. "Just get your wedding sorted, okay?"

"All right." I say, my tone resigned. But I'm so excited for them that I can hardly stop bouncing.

**Simon**

Baz is playing against Niall as Dev and I sit in the shade against the glass windows of the club dining room. We're watching them play while we slowly down a pint. Baz and I had a game before lunch and then these two turned up and Niall challenged Baz to a friendly game. I don't know why he bothers, he's never going to beat Baz. And it's not that friendly– I can hear Niall swearing from here. He's already broken one racquet and it looks like he's ready to smash this one as well. Baz doesn't even look like he's worked up a sweat.

Baz just aced another serve and Niall swears again.

"Fuck Baz, how fast was that?" Niall pants.

Baz shrugs and calls out the score. "Thirty-Love." I try to stifle a laugh.

"So . . ." Dev starts.

I look sideways at Dev and then back to the game.

"How long have you two been together?" he asks, pointing his pint at Baz across the court.
I shrug, even though I know exactly how long Baz and I have been together. "A few years." I say. (Two years, eight months, eighteen days.)

We watch Baz serve another ace.

"And you live with Penelope Bunce?"

"Yep."

We look back to the game and watch as Niall runs and miss another one of Baz's rather aggressive baseliners.

"And you still keep in contact with Agatha?" He asks.

"Of course." I shrug again. "She's my friend."

"Even though you two dated?"

I shrug. "So?"

"Nothing." He says. He goes silent for a while.

We drink in silence and watch Baz lob another ball just out of Niall's reach.

"What's Baz been doing all this time?" he asks.

I look at him for a second and then back to the court. He looks genuinely interested so I shrug. "Uni, violin, football. Being first at everything." I say. Shagging, snogging, getting engaged I think to myself.

"Huh." He says, and he goes quiet again as we watch Baz make a beautiful drop shot that Niall misses.

And I think I need to say something now, all three of them are as stubborn as each other.

"He still considers you two his friends you know." I say, staring straight ahead.

"He does?" Dev asks, still watching the game.

I nod and take another sip of my pint and Dev does the same. Baz hits a high looping topspin deep into the corner and Niall runs backwards and misses it completely.

Baz

I have to admit that Simon was right, I've enjoyed being back at the club and I still enjoy beating Dev and Niall at tennis like I used to. I've just won another match against Niall, it's been years and he's still trying to beat me, and he's still a sore loser.

"Good game." I say, extending my hand as I walk up to the net.

"Yeah." He manages between pants. "Good game." He mumbles finally.

I glance over to Simon and Dev. I noticed that they were talking while I was beating Niall and I am a little curious but they're not fighting or swearing or spelling each other so I let it go.

Simon and I decide to leave. It's late afternoon now, we've been here since mid-morning and the club
is starting to fill up with the later crowd.

"Gentlemen." I say to Dev and Niall. "We're off."

"Can you fit in another game this week Baz?" Dev asks.

"Yes I think so." I say. I'm a little surprised until I see Simon smiling just a little. "Friday?"

"Friday." Dev confirms. And with that Simon and I grab up our racquets and bags and head off into the club.

"You're doing, Snow?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." he says, smiling back at me.

We make it almost to the exit when I spot Lady Salisbury walking in. Fuck. We haven't discussed any of this with Simon yet. With all that happened when Simon came back and with his recovery and then asking Simon to marry me, I completely forgot about Lady Salisbury. I turn to Simon – he's spotted her as well as she sees us and makes a bee line towards us. He takes my hand and I squeeze his, he squeezes back. He's made the connection.

"Master Pitch." She smiles as she greets me with a nod, and then she turns to Simon and studies him for a moment before she addresses him. "And Master Snow. Lovely to see you both again."

"Lady Salisbury." I say, nodding a greeting.

Simon doesn't speak for a moment, he just stares dumbly at her. And then he finally finds his voice. "Er, hello."

"How was your game?" she asks, eyeing our tennis whites and bags and our linked hands.

"Fine, thank you. It's been a pleasant afternoon." I respond calmly, and I can feel Simon's hand squeezing mine again so I say. "Well, it was lovely to see you Lady Salisbury, we must be going now."

"Of course." She nods as we move past her.

I feel Simon relax a little as we leave the club, and once we're in the car I turn to Simon and study him.

"Are you all right?" I ask.

"Yeah Baz, I'm okay."

"Do you want to talk?"

He doesn't say anything for a while. Then he looks over to me and says "Yeah, okay."

So we talk about Lady Salisbury as I drive back to his flat. I tell him that she's Lucy's mother and when we discovered who the woman in the photo was, and how Wellbelove wanted to tell her straight away but Professor Bunce suggested we wait until we have some evidence before we told her what happened to her daughter, because Lady Salisbury believes Lucy moved to America.

"I never made the connection before." he says quietly, shaking his head.

"I know, and I completely forgot about her. Once we found you, we had other things to think
Thankfully Bunce is home when we get back to his flat so we tell her about our meeting with Lady Salisbury.

"Shit Simon." She says. "I'm sorry. Once we found you we were busy looking after you and I think we just forgot about her."

"It's all right Penny." he says.

"Do you want to talk with mum?" she asks.

"Yeah okay." He says. So Bunce calls her mother and tells her what happened.

**Penny**

We're at mums now and mum and dad are talking to Simon over a cup of tea. They are telling him all about Lucy and her mother and how her mother believes that Lucy is in America.

"I don't know what else to tell you Simon, Lady Salisbury believes her daughter moved to America over twenty years ago." Mum says.

He stares at her, frowning a little. "But shouldn't we tell her?" he asks.

"That's up to you Simon." Dad says.

"Wouldn't she want to know the truth?" he asks again, looking between mum and dad.

"It's been a long time and well, the evidence . . ." Dad trails off.

"It's not that much." Simon nods, understanding immediately. The evidence is tenuous at best. Baz squeezes Simon's hand.

"It's enough for us." I remind him. "But she might not see it that way."

"And she was very distraught when Lucy left." Mum says.

"Although that was probably more for the scandal, the supposed illegitimate child, remember Mit?" Dad reminds her.

"Yes, that's right Martin." Mum says.

"Am I that illegitimate child?" Simon asks.

"I don't know Simon." Mum says, shaking her head. "It could have been more misinformation, like Lucy moving to America."

"Oh." Simon says. He stares back down at the table.

"And once you tell her – if you choose to tell her, then everyone will find out everything, about Lucy, about the Mage." Mum says.

"About the Mage, being my . . ." He can't say it, or doesn't want to say it.

Mum nods and we all sit quietly, drinking our tea. And then mum mentions Lucy's brother.
Simon looks up in surprise. "She has a brother?" he asks mum.

"Yes. He wasn't allowed into Watford. He wasn't powerful enough." Mum says. "I think that's why Lucy listened to the Mage, with all his talk about a revolution."

"Do you know where he is?" I ask.

"No one's heard from him in years I'm afraid." mum says apologetically. "He's never been part of the magickal realm since he couldn't get into Watford."

I let out a sigh. We're not actually getting anywhere and Simon is back to staring at the table.

"What do you want to do Simon?" It's Baz this time.

He looks up at Baz now and lets out a sigh. "There's nothing to do. Not yet anyway." He says, shaking his head. He turns to mum. "Thank you, Professor Bunce, for everything."

"Sorry we couldn't be of any more help." Dad says.

"No, you've helped a lot." Simon says getting up. "I think I just need to think about this more."

We get up to leave and he hugs mum and shakes dad's hand, and we're halfway to the door before Simon turns back to them.

"Oh, I should probably let you know." He starts, and he smiles as he looks at Baz. Baz smiles back at him and nods. "Baz and I, we're engaged. We're going to be married."

Mum's eyes go wide and she pulls Simon in for a big hug. "Simon!" she says, hugging him tight. "Congratulations! That's wonderful news!"

"Congratulations Simon, Baz." Dad says, grinning happily as he shakes both their hands.

Mum steps forward to shake Baz's hand, and then hesitates for a moment, and then pulls him in for a hug as well. "Congratulations Basil. I'm really happy for the both of you." She says. And then she pulls back but doesn't let him go. "Promise me you'll look after him Basil? He's been through enough." She says, staring at him pointedly.

"I will." He nods, meeting her gaze.

And I push them both out the door before we end up staying here all afternoon.

**Simon**

"I'm all right Baz really." I say for what seems like the tenth time.

Baz and Penny are hovering and they look worried, like I'm going to go off or run away (or fly away) or something. I'm sitting on the couch thinking about everything that Penny's mum and dad told me. Now Penny is staring at me as well.

"Penny I'm fine." I growl.

"Are you sure?" They both ask.

"Yes, I promise, okay?" I say to both of them. And I am. I mean I'm surprised that I could have a living grandmother – and an uncle as well, after all these years having no one. And I'm a little unsure too, because they don't know about me and I don't know whether to tell them, or her anyway, Lady
Salisbury. I mean, does she even want to know after all these years that her daughter is not in America but dead and possibly buried somewhere here in England, and she has a grandson to the Mage? It all might be too much for her, she's not exactly young.

"And I'm not going to take off Baz." I tell him reassuringly.

He lets out a sigh (of relief I think) and I take his hand. "All right." He says, visibly relaxing.

"I don't know what to do about it, that's all." I say to both of them.

"You don't have to decide straight away." Baz says.

"You don't have to decide at all." Penny adds.

We're still in our tennis stuff so I have a shower and then Baz has a shower while Penny starts messing around with dinner. I'm glad she's doing it, I haven't got the energy at the moment.

"I just don't want any more surprises." I groan. I lay my head back on the back of the couch and put my feet on the coffee table, wriggling my toes. I'm wearing my personalised socks and Penny still giggles whenever she sees them.

Penny comes over to me, still looking concerned. "I know Simon, I'm sorry. We should have told you."

"No, it's not that." I say, waving my hand dismissively. "There was a lot going on."

Baz comes in and sits down next to me and I automatically reach for his hand. He looks at my socks and smiles.

"Yes I suppose it was a busy time." Penny sighs.

"Yeah." I agree. "You got engaged, we got engaged first . . ." I look at her and raise my eyebrow, smiling. She narrows her eyes at me, and then snorts.

"I can't believe you were engaged before me." She mutters, shaking her head from side to side. "Are you honestly okay Simon?"

"Yes." I say, and I mean it.

She watches me for a moment longer and then goes back to getting dinner ready when she's satisfied I'm telling the truth.

Baz watches me like he's studying me. "I'm fine Baz." I say again. "I promise." I bump his shoulder with mine and he bumps mine back.

Over dinner we tell Penny about the club, how Baz thrashed Niall and how Niall smashed a few racquets and how Dev asked lots of questions about Agatha. We all agree that he still has a crush on her.

"And you're playing tennis on Friday with Dev and Niall again." I smirk. "You're on your own this time, I'm working."

"I think I can manage, Snow." Baz drawls.
Simon

Penny is driving us both mental with her wedding arrangements. It's not that we need to do very much, it's more that she is driving herself mad while trying to arrange everything for her wedding in America while she's here in London. She said that she handed over most of the small stuff to Micah's mum but she's constantly calling her and checking and then rechecking all of her arrangements. I can hear her muttering to herself about flowers and bands and table arrangements and something called a pre-wedding dinner. Honestly I have no fucking clue about all the stuff she's banging on about half the time and I'm starting to worry that I should be doing more, but whenever I ask her she says I've done enough, and I've hardly done anything.

I bring her cups of tea and then try to steer clear of her. It seems safer that way.

I'm back to doing life drawing and tonight I had a class so it's late when get home. Penny is skyping Micah.

"I know I said your mother could organise it." Penny huffs, "But I don't really like her choice of flower arrangement for the tables, she sent me three different ones and they're all grotesque."

"They're not that bad Penny, and it won't be an actual disaster if they are not exactly as you want." Micah says calmly.

"Of course it will!" she shrieks at him. It's hard to believe this is the same person who helped me track werewolves through Soho and fight off dragons. She's like a completely different person.

Micah sighs and speaks calmly. "Okay Penny, if you don't like them why don't you just tell her."

"I don't want to upset her Micah." She says taking off her glasses and rubbing her eyes. "But I think I need to do that."

I sneak into my room to drop off my bag, taking my time in there. When I come out a while later she's still at the kitchen table googling florists in New York.

"All right Pen?" I ask, putting the kettle on to make her a cup of tea.

"Yes Simon."

"Need anything?"

"No." she says. Then, "Yes."

"What?" I ask, a little nervously. I don't know what mood she's going to be in these days.

"Can you tell me how Merlin's name I'm supposed to pick flower arrangements in New York when I'm all the way over here?" She snaps.

"Um, send them a picture of one you want?" I shrug, passing her a cup.

She stares at me for a long time and I think she's going to snap at me but instead she shakes her head. "Why didn't I just do that in the first place?" she mutters, and then she starts typing furiously on her keyboard. "Yes!" she says a few minutes later, punching the air with her fist. She finds what she
wants and sends a picture to Micah's mother.

"Done." She says, snapping her laptop closed.

"Sorted?" I ask hesitantly.

"Yes Simon, thanks. You're a genius!" She smiles a tired smile at me. "Why didn't I think of that?"

I shrug and get on with preparing dinner. It's my night tonight and we're having pasta. Baz should be here any minute, he had football practice today.

We eat dinner quietly and Penny is preoccupied with more wedding arrangements, she has a book that she keeps everything in and it's next to her while we eat and she keeps flicking through it, muttering to herself all the while. Baz looks like he's going to say something cheeky but I look at Baz and shake my head. She'll probably cast **Cat got your tongue** on him the way she's going.

When we go to bed I pull Baz close to me.

"I don't want a big wedding." I tell him.

"The smaller the better." He agrees.

"I mean, Penny's a mess and I don't want to waste a year of our lives worrying over one day." I go on.

"Complete waste of time." He nods against the pillow.

"In fact, the smaller the better." I say, then I realise Baz already said exactly that and I grin at him.

"Yes." he grins back.

"And I don't want to spend a year planning it." I tell him, warming to the idea now. "When we set the date, I want it, like, three months away. Okay Baz?"

"Sounds good to me." He says. His tone is light.

I fall asleep quickly after that. Now that it's off my mind.

**Penny**

This semester is flying by and between uni, work and wedding planning I don't have a moment to spare. Simon, bless him, has been so helpful, he's been my voice of reason whenever things get too testing and I start tying myself in knots over arrangements.

Last week I spent the entire week researching the hotel's wedding menu and discussing all of the various options with Micah and his mother, only to have Simon suggest that we talk with Alex, who knows her food, or her boyfriend Marco who's a chef. So we did just that and they were extremely helpful. They helped me select the entire wedding menu and pre-wedding dinner menu over coffee at Alex's café, taking into consideration the countless dietary requirements of Micah's family.

And this week he reminded me to buy shoes, because I had a wedding dress but no shoes. That would have been an unmitigated disaster! I sorted that out the same day. I don't know where I would be without him.

Today he's managed to convince me to go back to my yoga class. I hadn't taken it back up since I returned from America, but he says that I need the distraction and it will help me focus my mind.
And I dare say he's right. I just finished my first session and I feel more relaxed than I have all semester.

Micah's also been particularly attentive ever since the flower debacle. And he reminds me constantly that he'd marry me in the registry office if it all gets too much. I'm starting to think it's not a bad idea.

Simon

I called Micah after Penny lost it over the flowers because I thought this was all getting too much for her. I told him that I'll try to help her as much as I can, but could he perhaps call her a little more often, or a lot more, because she's scaring me a little. She seemed to calm down a bit after that.

There is one upside of her being so absorbed by her wedding. At least she's stopped worrying about me for a change. And she doesn't ask Baz or me about our wedding plans, ever, which is good because we haven't made any yet.

The only thing Baz and I have talked about is moving in together once Penny and Micah are married. Penny said that Micah will move here once they're married which gives me the perfect excuse to move in with Baz. He asked me as soon as Penny told us their plans and I said yes straight away. Of course I want to move in with Baz, I'd move in straight away if it didn't leave Penny in the lurch and if she wasn't going slightly mental at the moment.

It's not like we don't spend every night together anyway, and we eat at each other's place as well, and I study there or he studies at our flat. We've done this ever since I came back and we got engaged. I prefer it and I know Baz likes it. I don't really like being away from him anymore.

-oOo-

Baz and I head to Oxford every Friday night for dinner but we haven't been staying many weekends because Baz has football and I'm usually working, but it's midterm break now so we're making the most of the rare opportunity and staying for a few nights.

We're sitting outside on the lawns after a game of Pitch football. It's a new game that Mordy and I made it up recently. There are no actual rules to the game, because I can fly and Baz can use his super vampire speed and we've both got magic so it's kind of a free for all. The twin's main job is to run around in front of Mordy or me and distract us or try to trip us over and then get the ball, and my job is to fly around so Mordy can kick the ball up to me before Baz can get to it and I kick it back to Mordy so she can kick goals. Baz and the twins beat Mordy and me as usual, but we're getting better and we've started to come up with some plays now. Baz pretty much just gets the ball from us and kicks goal after goal, and even though I fly back to defend his goals he still gets them past me.

Mordy and I argued over the name of our game in the middle of the lawn for ages. She wanted to call it Grimm-ball.

"That's a bit grim isn't it?" I said when she first came up with it.

She rolled her eyes at my lame joke. "Well it's better than Snow-ball."

"No it's not?" I came up with the game after all, well, sort of.

"Yes it is. And that will just confuse the twins." She said.

Baz got sick of waiting to play then. "We're calling it Pitch football because I'm going to win anyway. Now let's start before the day is over." And with that he kicked off so we had no choice but to play.
Lucky the staff aren't around today or any other day I fly for that matter otherwise they would have to be spelled innocent all the time because they're all Normals. And the game is quite a spectacle really.

Baz's step-mum brings lunch and refreshments outside when the game finishes. She places the tray onto a table she magicks up and hands out lunch to Baz's siblings, then she takes some for herself and settles into a chair. I grab some lunch and I'm about to hoe into it when she starts asking us about wedding arrangements.

"You've been engaged for almost a year." She says casually. "Have you made a decision on when you'll be married?"

I look at Baz, "Not yet." He says to his step-mum.

She smiles at us. "Whenever you're ready, I'm happy to help. I know it can be overwhelming."

"We're going to keep it simple." I say.

"Small." Baz adds.

"All right." She says.

We don't say anything more while we eat lunch.

Mordy starts asking questions about Watford because she going there next year. We try to answer her questions but neither of us actually like talking about it very much. Baz sticks to talking about the lessons and football, and I talk about my friends and the food and the teachers that I liked. That seems to keep her happy.

After they finish eating, Mordy and the twins run off with the football and start another game between them, each taking turns blocking goals.

"You're welcome to use the gardens here if you like." Baz's step-mum says, looking at both of us.

I turn to Baz and he stares back at me. We haven't talked about anything yet but I kind of like the idea of getting married here because I really love coming here. I smile at him.

"That would be lovely." Baz says.

"Yeah, thanks." I say.

That night Baz and I are in his room lying on our backs on his bed, talking. Our shoulders are touching and I'm holding his hand. He's rubbing his thumb across the back of my hand in that way he does. It feels nice.

"I like that idea," I tell him. "Of having our wedding here."

Baz turns to face me and smiles. "Me too."

**Baz**

I've wanted this ever since I proposed to Simon. I've wanted to be married to Simon here, at Oxford. We have so many good memories here and I know he loves being here. I can't help smiling.

He props himself up on one elbow and looks down at me.
"And I've thought of something else I want." He says.

I'm surprised at that, I thought he wasn't thinking about getting married yet. I've been thinking about it, I've been thinking a lot about how much I want to be married to Simon. "I thought you weren't thinking about our wedding yet?"

"I'm not, not really." He says, brushing a loose lock of my hair behind my ear. "But I want to go to Tuscany for our honeymoon."

I stare up at him, into the blue of his eyes. "And I'll play the violin and you'll draw and we'll make love in the afternoons and dance under the stars?" I say, raising my eyebrow in question. I can't help smiling a little.

"Yes, exactly." He says, grinning at me. And then he leans down and presses his soft warm lips against mine.

"Whatever you want." I murmur, and I pull him back down for another longer kiss.

Simon

The rest of the year flies by and Penny is in a bit better state now that things are starting to come together. Agatha is coming over in a couple of weeks for Christmas again, on her own this time because she's vowed to help Penny with any wedding things she needs help with, and because her parents would freak out if she didn't come back for Christmas. Micah is staying in New York this year because it could be his last Christmas with his family for a while, and he's missed the last two so I think they put the hard word on him.

We're having a rare, quiet Saturday night in front of the telly when Penny turn to me. "Have you thought any more about when you plan on talking with Lady Salisbury?"

I'm surprised she brought this up, I thought for sure she was going to ask me about our wedding plans, which Baz and I have been able to deflect every single time just by asking her something about her wedding.

"Not really." I say truthfully. I haven't thought about when I'll talk to her yet. Baz and Penny know I will now. They already know I've decided this after I talked it through with my psychologist.

"What's the best outcome you envisage?" My psychologist asked me.

"That she'll believe me and want to be part of my life, accept me?" I answered.

"And what's the worst outcome that could occur?" She asked.

"That she won't believe me, or that she will believe me but not want to have anything to do with me." I said. "Or that she'll keel over and die from shock." I added as an afterthought.

"And how would you feel about these outcomes." She asked.

I shrugged. "Dunno." I said. "I'm in a good place now, and I don't really need her approval."

"So any outcome would be acceptable?" She asked.

"Well, any but the last." I said. "I don't want her to keel over or anything."

"Ignoring the last outcome, are the rest acceptable?"
"Yeah I think so. The main reason I want to tell her is because it's her daughter and she should know the truth, not because I need a grandmother or whatever. I have my family, Baz is my family."

And my psychologist nodded, and I thought to myself that I know what I'm going to do.

**Penny**

Agatha has finally arrived and she's barely off the plane before I grab her and Priya and take them shopping for their dresses. I ask Simon if he wants to come too but he scoffs and says that this is one wedding thing he doesn't want to be involved in.

"Just show Baz when you get them so he can match my stuff." He says as he and Baz head off to the gym. They're back at the gym because football is finished and it's too wet and cold to run and for Simon to fly without warming and weatherization spells.

Priya is over the top excited to be shopping with us. This is her first time as bridesmaid and she hasn't stopped talking the entire way. I think Agatha is getting agitated, she's not used to children demanding her attention like that, probably because she's an only child.

We head to the shop that Baz's step mum suggests. She certainly came through with the shop I bought my wedding dress so I don't doubt her knowledge, and I'm not about to waste any more time faffing around.

We arrive and Agatha immediately is impressed. She knows the shop, in fact her mother suggested it as well.

"She has good taste." Agatha says regarding Daphne.

We enter the shop and a member of staff comes toward us instantly offering her help.

"How can I help you lovely ladies?" she says, looking kindly at the three of us.

"We're looking for bridesmaid dresses, for these two." I say.

"And you are the bride?" she enquires, looking at me.

"Yes." I beam.

She steps back then, and looks them over critically. Priya is shorter than Agatha, but apart from that they have similar builds.

"Hmmm." She says. "What style are you after?"

"Style?" I ask.

"Yes, black tie, formal, morning dress, lounge suit?"

I turn to Agatha for help. I have no idea.

"She's getting married in New York, so definitely not morning dress, I think lounge suit will do." Agatha says decisively.

"What's that?" I whisper.

"More formal than cocktail, less than formal." She shrugs.
"All right." The assistant says, "Take a seat please. Would you like something to drink? Tea or coffee, champagne perhaps?"

"Ooh, champagne please." Agatha says, giggling.

"And tea, for Priya." I add. Priya looks at me and scowls. She flops down on the lounge and crosses her arms.

"How do you know all this?" I ask Agatha once the assistant leaves us to find some dresses.

Agatha shrugs. "I've spent a lot of time shopping with Mother, I went to a lot of gala events."

"Do you miss all that?" I ask her. She left a lot behind when she left for America.

She shakes her head. "Not really. I used to think I wanted to do all of that, but I much prefer my life now." She says. "None of that is very important to me. It was more important to my mother."

And then she fills me in on her studies and her part time job and life in California.

The rest of the afternoon is spent with Agatha and Priya trying on lots of different dresses, while I sit back and appraise them and drink champagne. I must say there are worse ways to spend an afternoon than this.

By the time we find the right ones, that look lovely on both of them and are not too young for Agatha and not too mature for Priya, I hardly notice that we've finished the bottle of champagne and it's starting to get dark outside.

"It's lovely!" Agatha says.

"It's beautiful!" Priya cries.

We pick out a third dress, and arrange for it to be shipped direct to New York, since Micah informed me recently that he now has four groomsmen I needed to add Micah's sister to my ever growing wedding party. I hope the dress fits her, I'm sure they can get it altered there if they need. We catch the tube back to mum's to drop Priya home and show mum the dresses and she loves them too. And then she asks Agatha and me to stay for dinner, which we do, and mum pulls out a bottle of wine to celebrate so dad ends up driving us both home because we're both feeling a little tipsy.

It's not until I get home and into bed that I realise we didn't get shoes. Again!

Simon

It's Christmas Eve which means it's also our anniversary, and today is our third. Baz warned me weeks ago that the third is traditionally leather so I've been prepared for a while. I managed to get the whole day off because Alex decided not to open the café, she's having Christmas day at her place and needs the time to prepare.

We're having dinner again at our flat with Agatha and Penny, just the four of us this year. I'm making some new crab linguine dish that Marco suggested and said is really easy, Penny and Agatha are in charge of dessert.

I wake up facing a sleeping Baz. I don't wake him yet, I just watch him. He looks as beautiful as ever sleeping, his eyes are closed and his long eyelashes almost brush his cheeks. I resist the urge to touch them. Instead I think about last night and I feel a stirring down deep inside me so I try to think about something else, but now I can't so I lightly touch his cheek.
His eyes flutter open and he blinks a few times as he looks at me. I love watching him wake up in the morning. I stare at him for a few moments before I say anything.

"Happy anniversary fiancé." I say as quiet as I can.

"Happy anniversary fiancé." He says back, his voice thick with sleep.

I press my lips to his for a brief kiss and then pull back and watch as he slowly wakes.

"Do you want your present now?" I ask eventually, running my fingers across his cheek to his lips.

"No." He says quiet as ever as he pulls me towards him. He presses his body against mine and then stops, raising his eyebrow. He can definitely feel what I want.

"Fuck it." I mumble as I push him on his back and I kiss him. I lace my fingers through his, pressing myself against him so I can feel every part of him under me as we kiss. Merlin he feels good. After a time he pushes my hands away from his and wraps his arms around me tight, pulling me even closer and I shiver at his cold skin against mine, even though it's starting to warm up now. He breaks our kiss briefly and grins at me as he picks me up and flips me onto my back, being careful with my wings as he does, and now he's on top of me pressing his body against mine. He laces his fingers back through mine as kisses me hard and for so long that I have to take in a big breath when he finally breaks away.

He moves to my jaw now and kisses it roughly and then kisses his way down my throat and along collarbone. He's not being gentle– it's rough and needy and I'm loving it. My tail wraps around his waist and pulls him even closer as I wait until he brings his mouth back to mine. He finally lets go of my hands and takes hold of my waist so I push my hands through his hair and clench my fists in it and pull his mouth back to mine to kiss him again and again. He pulls back a little to lick my bottom lip and then his tongue is in my mouth, wet and soft as it slides against mine and I want him so much I think I might fucking die.

-oOo-

I can't stop smiling.

We're lying next to each other holding hands and I'm still a bit breathless from possibly the best sex we've ever had – this week anyway.

Eventually Baz turns to look at me, grinning wickedly and looking incredibly smug. "Presents or breakfast?" he questions. His hair is tousled and slightly matted with sweat and he looks so handsomely dishevelled that I'm thinking about doing that all over again, but I don't think my heart would take it so I think about his question again instead.

"Pbreakfast." I mumble.

He laughs at me and kisses me quickly. Then climbs off the bed and walks out of the room. I watch him go, he looks so beautiful and I think what a waste all those clothes he owns are because he really doesn't need them, he's perfect on his own. He returns in a minute with a soft gift wrapped package. I sit up.

He sits back on the bed and hands me the gift. "Happy anniversary Simon." He says.

I smile at my name and as I open the package and see a soft, black leather jacket. I forgot to set a limit this year when he told me the third anniversary is leather and it looks like he's clearly taken advantage of that. And if I think back now I clearly remember him distracting me as soon as he told
me. I look up at Baz, stunned.

"Baz." I say, "It's beautiful." I stutter, I'm completely lost for words, which is fairly normal for me anyway, so I just stare instead.

"So are you." He says matter of fact. I look at him and then shake my head in wonder, at his generosity, his thoughtfulness. Then I reach over and kiss him lightly on the lips.

"Thank you." I say, looking at Baz in disbelief. "This is too much."

"No it isn't. It's exactly enough." He says quietly.

I'm still shaking my head as I put on the jacket and I'm running my hands along the soft leather for a long time before I remember his gift.

"Your present!" I say wide eyed. I stumble out of bed and rummage around my bag until I find his present. I climb back into bed with his gift.

"Happy anniversary Baz. I love you." I say, handing him the small box.

He unwraps it and stares at the leather and steel bracelet. A small smiles breaks out on his face. He pulls it out of the box and looks up at me and then kisses me. "Thank you Simon." He says. "It's beautiful."

"So are you." I mimic his response to me exactly. He snorts then and kisses me again. Then he takes the bracelet from the box and I take it from him and clasp it around his wrist. We both look at it.

I kiss him again and he slides his hands under my jacket and around my waist. I can feel the cold steel from the bracelet against my skin and I shiver.

-oOo-

We make it back to my flat late that afternoon, and after Baz pushes me against the door and kisses me stupid we go inside and find Agatha and Penny getting drunk on mulled wine Bellini's. They were a bit of a hit last year so they must have decided to make them again. I'm not sure how they'll go with crab linguine but I don't think they'll be in a state to care. At least they don't notice me blushing.

I set about getting dinner organised while Penny and Agatha finish icing the gingerbread biscuits and start on the dessert. The icing looks a bit wonky but I don't think they really care that much. This year they decided to make bread and butter panettone pudding for dessert, another Marco suggestion and it sounds brilliant.

It's a quieter Christmas eve this year compared with last year but Penny and Agatha make up for lack of people with their shrieks of laughter as they retell stories from their time in America with Micah's Royal family obsessed aunts in the summer and how they're all planning to come over to meet Prince Harry.

Baz and I are happy to listen to them and their boisterous laughter. I hold Baz's hand and every now and again I brush my fingers across his new bracelet. It looks so good on him.

Penny's having a good time. She must need the release after such a hectic year, and she definitely looks happy now that Agatha is here and they've crossed off some more wedding items off her enormous to-do list. Penny's been filling Agatha in all day on everything that she's been up to during the year, and now that we're here she's decided to fill Agatha in on everything that Baz and I have
"And Simon's been playing tennis at the club a few times." Penny tells Agatha.

"How's your game?" she asks me.

"Pretty good." I shrug.

"When he doesn't use his tail." Baz adds, smirking at me.

"I don't always use it." I shrug again. "Only if Niall is being a dick."

Agatha and Baz snort at that.

"I haven't beaten Baz yet, though." I tip my head towards Baz.

"I don't think anyone's beaten Baz yet." Agatha says knowingly. I suppose she saw Baz play at the club back before she left for America.

"And Baz has been hanging around more with Dev and Niall." Penny continues, obviously eager to catch Agatha up on everything.

"Good for you." Agatha nods in approval. "You were friends for such a long time after all." I nod smugly at Baz. I knew I was right about that.

"And Simon finally passed his driver's licence, and he has his passport too, so he can come to my wedding." She goes on. "And he'll need it for his own honeymoon too I suppose, now that he and Baz are engaged."

"What?"

We all turn to Agatha. I completely forgot that Agatha didn't know yet.

"Yeah." I smile. "And Penny's pissed because we got engaged before her."

This time Baz snorts a laugh.

"That's not true!" Penny argues. "I was annoyed, a little, but only because you didn't tell me for six months." She says, glaring at me.

"You were annoyed a lot." I say. "Because we got engaged before you." I raise my eyebrow at her and I'm grinning.

"I can't believe you two were engaged before me." She mumbles, shaking her head. "I was planning that for ages and you two went ahead and just did it."

"You're engaged?" Agatha asks.

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Actually, you were here, last year, that night when I told you I got my magic back." I tell her.

"Simon!" she says excitedly. "That's wonderful news! Congratulations!" And then she stumbles as she gets up and gives me a hug and then she tries to hug Baz. "Congratulations Basil!" she says, and
when Baz peels her off him she hugs me again.

By the end of the night the girls have polished off most of the Bellini's and half the wine and half the pudding. I polish off the rest. I wave my wand and clean up the mess and Penny and Baz look at me, smiling. I've had my magic for an entire year and they still act like it's new whenever I use it. I don't mind, I love having my magic back and especially since it actually works like it's supposed to now and I don't blow things up anymore.

"Baz is making French Toast for breakfast." I announce as we get up to go to bed. Baz rolls his eyes but he's smiling at me.

"Yum." Agatha says, and then hiccups.

"Thass great, because I don't think I'll be able to." Penny slurs.

I watch as the two of them stumble to Penny's room. I hope their hangovers aren't too bad tomorrow, it is Christmas after all. At least neither of them has to do anything tomorrow, just turn up at their mum's by lunchtime. And Penny can always cast Hair of the Dog if she needs to. I could do it now too I suppose, although I don't think I'll ever use that spell again after what happened the last time, no matter how much better my magic is.

I pull Baz into my room and kick the door closed as I kick off my shoes. I peel off my jeans and pull off my tee shirt and drop them on the floor. My leather jacket is hanging on the back of my chair and I touch it fondly, it's so soft.

I watch Baz as he peels off his jeans, then takes off his shirt and removes his cotton slouch beanie that I gave him last anniversary and I wait for him to place them neatly over my jacket. He sees me watching him and he looks at me, questioningly.

"Baz?"

"Snow?"

"You know that spell?" I ask hesitantly. "The soundproofing one?"

"Yes?" He says, a slow grin breaking across his face.

"Reckon you could cast it now?"

And Baz is on me like a shot, backing me up so fast that I tumble backwards when the back of my legs hit my bed and he's right there on top of me. He gropes around for his wand and waves the lights out, and then casts the soundproofing spell that we've never used and I wonder briefly why, before I stop thinking of anything but him.

**Baz**

We unwrap our Christmas presents with my family around the tree before everyone else arrives. My parents bought Simon another suit, this time in a dark grey, almost charcoal and a tennis racquet and bag. They bought me another suit as well, in a very dark purple, it's almost black. I like it, I think I'll wear this one to Bunce's wedding. They also bought me a new tennis racquet and some music books that I'd asked for. We hand out our gifts to my family and my siblings unwrap their mass of gifts and squeal with delight at their haul.

I bought Simon a new leather satchel this year. His old canvas one was in pretty bad shape from the last few years use as well as being dropped from a height last year. I also made him a photo book.
While Simon was gone last year, Bunce told me that he didn't have any photos from his time at Watford or any other time. So I spent the year chasing down Wellbelove and Bunce, and even their parents, scouring through their photographs and together with mine and some from my step mother, I managed to put together a half decent assortment.

He forgot to set a limit on what we could spend this year and I've taken full advantage of that. (I may have had a hand in his forgetting, lucky he's so easily distracted.) He touches the satchel fondly and thanks me, and then he looks at the photo book for a long time before he looks back up at me and smiles a slow, wide smile, and then he thanks me again.

Simon hands me my gift last and I am so surprised that I laugh out loud. It's a magic book that I've been looking for and haven't been able to find.

"Where did you find this?" I ask him, eyeing the cover of Rarest Spells of the Millennia.

He shrugs. "Penny helped me. I knew you were looking for it." I shake my head in wonder at him and I smile. He smiles back and I can't wait until we're alone so I can thank him properly.

Fiona arrives just as we'd finished handing out our gifts, and hands out a bunch of toys and gifts to my siblings. Then she hands me an envelope.

"This is for the both of you. Enjoy."

I open it to find concert tickets to one of my favourite bands, Simon’s too. It was sold out months ago.

"How did you get these?" I ask, suspicious. Although with Fiona, I've learned not to ask too many questions.

"You don't need to know that, just thank me already." She snaps.

"Thanks Fiona" Simon says.

I can't help rolling my eyes.

Christmas lunch is much the same as last year and even though everyone is getting used to Simon being here, some of my relatives still stare across the table at him during lunch. At least he doesn't notice, or he does notice and he doesn't care.

I can't help watching him as he eats and talks with Mordelia. He's laughing at something she's saying and he looks so happy. He looks over to me at catches me staring at him and he smiles and I feel myself blush. Crowley I'm blushing at my dinner table with all of my relatives around, only Simon can do that to me. Then I think about last night, at Simon's place. His misplaced sense of loyalty to Bunce has stopped us from ever doing that while she was home before. I wonder if we get to do it again. I blush even harder.

I catch Simon's eye again and wink at him and quirk up my mouth in a small smile. This makes him blush as he smiles back at me again before he dips his head. It has the desired effect; at least I'm not blushing any more.

**Penny**

Thank magic that Agatha arrived this Christmas when she did. She's managed to help me sort out most of my wedding arrangements without sending me into a panic attack. She also organised her and Priya's shoes, which was a relief, so by the time New Year's Eve came around I felt organised
enough to be able to enjoy the evening when Baz suggested we go out to dinner again.

It was only meant to be the four of us but then Alex suggested her boyfriend’s restaurant, so Simon invited her and her flatmate Zoe, and Alex’s sister Vicki and husband Kiaan. And they all said yes.

Dinner is wonderful and it’s fairly relaxed until Simon tells everyone after dessert that I’m getting married next year and Marco brings over a bottle of champagne and we all toast to my upcoming wedding. So I tell everyone that Simon and Baz are engaged, and there are congratulations all around again and we all toast them. Even Marco and Olivia join us for the toasts once the restaurant closes.

Then as expected, Baz suggests we go dancing to celebrate and Simon groans and Alex and Agatha said yes!

"Come on Simon." Agatha says. "You know it'll be fun."

"We've done this so many years in a row now, surely you expected this?" I say.

"Judging by that suit I'd say he did." Alex chimes in.

"It was a Christmas present." Simon says defensively.

"I must say, you two look rather dashing this evening." Vicki says, looking between Baz and Simon.

"Hey, what about me?" Kiaan says to his wife.

"You always look dashing Kiaan." She soothes.

"Well I'm in." Zoe said, her eyes lighting up. "Never know who I'll get a new year's kiss from!"

Marco and Olivia join us then and Alex tells them we’re all going dancing so they need to hurry up and get changed. Then we head to the same club we went to last year and Baz gets us in just like he did last year, without waiting and in front of the entire queue that’s so long it snakes around the corner.

I grab Agatha and Zoe and we head straight for the dance floor, and Vicki and Kiaan follow. Baz and Simon join the others at the bar where Marco buys a round of drinks and starts talking passionately about something, gesticulating wildly as he speaks.

**Simon**

Baz checks his phone as we enter. I look at him questioningly.

"Dev and Niall." He says smiling as we head to the bar. They must be texting to wish him a Happy New Year. They seem to have become friends again, hanging out at the club sometimes while I work. It's good for Baz, he seems a lot happier with his old friends back.

Marco hands out some drinks and immediately starts on about football. He waves his arms around madly as he talks about the latest game. He's always either talking about football, or food or clothes. They're his favourite topics as far as I can tell. I'm happy to talk about food, although it usually makes me hungry, and Baz loves talking a about football and clothes, so he has a captive audience between us.

We finish our drink so Baz drags me to the dance floor and he wraps his arms around me and pulls me in close.
"Did I tell you how gorgeous you look tonight?" He whispers into my ear.

"Not yet." I smile.

"Well you do." He says, brushing his lips lightly across my cheek. Then he pulls back a little. "Are you happy? That they all know were engaged?" he asks.

"Yes of course," I tell him immediately. I hadn't got around to telling them but I was planning to. After we told Baz's family and Penny and then Penny's parents, I didn't get around to telling Doc and Mrs. Wellbelove until Agatha arrived, and I wanted to tell them before we told everyone. Now everyone can know for all I care.

"Are you?" I ask, looking into his beautiful grey eyes. His eyes twinkle as he smiles.

"Of course I am. I would have told everyone straight away if you'd let me."

I smile at that, and I pull him closer and don't wait for the countdown to kiss him.

By the time midnight arrives, we're all on the dance floor and we stop dancing to wish each other a Happy New Year. Penny hugs me after she pulls Baz off me and then Agatha hugs me too, I pat her back as she does.

"I'm glad you're here." I tell Agatha. "Penny was going crazy for a while there."

"She says you were doing a great job as man of honour." She says back.

"Yeah?" I ask. I'm a bit surprised. I don't think I've done anything useful. "I don't know what I'm doing half the time Agatha."

"Well whatever you're doing, don't stop." She says before turning to finish her Happy New Year wishes.

I give Alex a kiss on the cheek, "Happy New Year Alex." I say. "Have I ever told you that you're the best boss ever?"

"I'm the only boss you've ever had Simon." She laughs. "And I hope we're friends too."

"Of course we are." I say back.

"And I expect an invitation to your wedding." She says pointedly.

"Yes of course Alex." I say, rolling my eyes. "I wouldn't have it any other way. You know, this is pretty much my entire group of friends right here, so you have to come."

She laughs at me and then finds Baz and pulls him in for a hug. Baz's nose twitches a bit but he lets her, but only because he really likes her.

I shake Marco's hand, and then Marco kisses both my cheeks, and then I shake Kiaan's hand and kiss Vickie and Zoe on the cheek, then I turn to Olivia.

"Happy New Year Olivia." I say, giving her a quick peck on her cheek. "I'm glad I found you in class, uni would have been crap without you this year."

"Me too Simon. It's been a good year." She says. "You've kept me in line this year. And congratulations, on your engagement. Wow, that was a surprise."
"Yeah, thanks." I say. And then I remember that bloke from the football game that she's been seeing. "And how are things going with that bloke?" I don't like to pry so I haven't asked since the first time they went out.

"Yeah good Simon." She nods. "We've been out a few times and it's been fun, nothing too serious though. I'm not in any hurry. Not like you." She elbows me in the ribs.

"I'm not in any hurry either." I shrug. Well I am, actually. I can't wait to be married to Baz.

She laughs at me and shakes her head. I don't think she believes me. "Anyway, he's away with his family for Christmas so we're going to catch up when he gets back." She finishes.

And I'm glad for her because I really do like Olivia "That's great." I say, and then Baz finds me again and pulls me close to his side as we all head back to the bar.

"You know, Snow," he says, "This is becoming a bit of a tradition."

I roll my eyes. "Yeah, yeah."

"Crowley Simon, you're so adorable when you do that." Baz whispers into my ear.

"Do what?"

"Try to roll your eyes."

"I thought I was getting quite good at that?" I question, trying to raise my eyebrows at him. "And adorable? Really Baz, I'm not a puppy."

"If you were a puppy you wouldn't be adorable, you'd be lunch. You're definitely adorable Snow."

I let out a snort. He doesn't mean that – he'd never have a puppy for lunch. (I don't think so anyway.)

"Well you're as sexy as fuck then." I tell him.

His eyes light up as he smiles at me. "Thanks." He so loves a compliment.

When we reach the bar he glances over towards the entrance. "Looks like we have a few late comers to the party."

I turn to look where he's looking and see of all people Dev and Niall waltz up to us. Baz must have got them into the club past the long line. They nod at Baz and me and he shakes their hands and wishes them a Happy New Year and introduces them to everyone before taking my hand again and pulling me close. Dev blushes when Agatha says hello, and Niall's eyes nearly pop out of his head when Baz introduces him to Olivia.

I catch Penny's eye and she snorts at me. "Hah! This is all your doing Simon." She says. I elbow her in her side and she spills a bit of her champagne, then she waves her ring and catches the spill before any of our Normal friends even notice.

Penny drags me to the dance floor when we finish our drinks, probably figuring I need to get away from those two, and Olivia and Agatha follow, probably to get away from those two. Dev and Niall have been hovering close to them all night asking a lot of stupid questions. Eventually the music gets everyone away from the bar and onto the dance floor, except Dev and Niall, they stay at the bar drinking and watching everything. Baz pulls me into him and we dance close, and when Niall catches his eye at some point, Baz look at him like he give exactly zero fucks, which I know he does,
as he kisses me again and again.

**Baz**

Fiona phones late on New Year's Day and yells at me without saying hello. "What the fuck Basil?"

"Happy New Year Fiona." This could be about any number of things.

"Yeah whatever." She sucks in a deep breath, she sounds like she's smoking. "Considering I'm the one that helped you get back together with your chosen one, when were you going to tell me you bloody well popped the question?"

"I don't believe it was all your doing."

Simon looks over and raises an eyebrow in question.

"Pffft. You'd still be crying into your tea if it wasn't for me."

I sigh into the phone. Best get this over with. "I was getting around to it." I tell her. "You've been away."

"Well fuck Basil, haven't you ever heard of a fucking telephone?"

"Fine. You've made your point. We're getting married Fiona, all right?" It's probably better to let her get this off her chest rather than argue. Simon snorts.

"All right then." She calms down a little. "Now, if you want to stay my favourite nephew I expect a starring role when you two tie the knot."

"I'm your only nephew." I remind her.

"That's beside the point." She says dismissively. "A role Basil. And it had better be a good one."
Chapter 46

Simon

Before I know it, it's time to fly to New York for Penny's wedding. The last six months flew by, and Penny didn't lose it again thanks to Agatha organising pretty much everything before she left London, and Micah who skyped her every single day.

Penny flew out last week with her family. It was complete mayhem at the airport because her brothers and sisters fought over who got the window seat and who's sharing hotel rooms with whom before they even left.

Penny and I said our goodbyes at the flat, because I'm moving out at the same time.

"Bye flatmate." I said as she was leaving.

"Bye flatmate." She said to back to me. And then we hugged a little and cried a lot because as much as I'm happy for her to finally be marrying Micah, and for me to be moving in with Baz, I'm still a little sad that we'll no longer be living together. Penny's the best flatmate I could ever have, even if she's a terrible grump in the morning and can't cook to save her life.

-oOo-

Baz and I are on our way to the airport. We're in the back of his father's fancy-arsed Jaguar, being driven to the airport. I have no idea why his dad offered to drive us but I'm not complaining, it's more comfortable than the tube and Baz wouldn't let me fly us there.

We're taking a separate flight to Penny and her family. At first I didn't understand why Baz was so insistent – an extra week in New York would have been brilliant. But after watching Penny's family squabble at the airport, I get it. We're going to have a peaceful flight by comparison.

It's the first time flying for me – in a plane that is, so I'm a little nervous.

"Did you pack my suit?" I ask, turning to face Baz.

"You've already asked me that." he drawls. "Twice."

"All right, but did you?"

"Yes, Snow." He says, rolling his eyes at me and smiling easily at the same time.

"It's Simon." I remind him.

"Yes Simon."

"And my tie? And my new shoes?" I ask again.

"Yes Simon."

"Okay, thanks Baz." I sit back and enjoy the ride. Then I sit up with a start. "The present!"

"I have it." Baz says, smirking just a little bit.

I didn't know what to get Penny and Micah for their wedding, but Daphne suggested a new duvet
set. I thought it was a brilliant idea because Penny's was getting a bit ratty and I knew she wanted a
new one once they were married. So I checked with Penny's mum and she confirmed that neither her
nor Micah's family were buying her that, and Daphne helped me pick something out. Baz and I set
up her bed after she left London so it's all ready for when they get back. I put a card on top– I
thought of that and I was quite chuffed with how it all turned out.

We have something small to give them on the day too. It's a copy of their entry to the magickal
marriage rite book framed in a pretty silver frame, that was Baz's idea. I hope they like it.

Then I moved my stuff out of the apartment and moved it into Baz's flat ready for when we return
from America. Baz keeps reminding me that it's our flat now, not his. I'm still getting used to saying
that because it was his flat for years, and it's so fucking fancy and modern that it doesn't look like
anything I ever thought I'd live in. His parents had someone strip it and kit it out with brand new stuff
as a graduation present before he moved in, or maybe it was because he helped save the entire realm,
or most likely because Fiona trashed it while she lived there.

The flat has this modern kitchen with fancy appliances that I think would even impress Alex, and the
bathroom is a lot bigger than my old one with this big double shower which is really handy for my
wings, and for, you know, me and Baz. And the bedroom is bigger than my old one and Baz even
has a bigger bed, which is also good for my wings. At least they don't knock anything over at night
anymore. Even the spare bedroom is bigger than my old room. Daphne set it up as a study but I
don't think Baz has ever studied in there, he usually studied at my flat. I guess we'll start using it
now, or the kitchen table.

I left all my cooking stuff that I've inherited or bought over the years with Penny because she doesn't
have any, and because Baz bought a whole set of new pots and pans and these really fancy knives
from Germany that Alex said are the best. I even left my bed for when Penny has visitors because
I'm sure that Micah's family and friends are going to be regular visitors. I didn't need to pack
anything other than my clothes and books and art stuff because Baz's flat (our flat) is fully decked
out. He's got everything.

Baz's dad drops us at international departures and gets out of the car to help us with our bags. There's
not much, just two suitcases and two suit bags. Even though Baz isn't in the wedding party he still
packed a couple of suits. Actually I think he packed three. He packed a second one for me too, then
added a third.

"Why do I need that?" I asked when he started packing.

"Pre-wedding dinner." He said.

"Can't I wear the same one as the wedding?"

He didn't bother answering.

"And what about the other one?"

"Stag night– or bachelor party as they call it there."

"I thought Micah had that already?" I asked. I organised a hen's night for Penny before she left, with
Alex, Olivia, Vicki and even Zoe came along. But because I was there, Marco, Kiaan and Baz all
declined to come so it turned into a sort of hens and stag night combined, only without the stag. It was
a lot of fun but not really a normal hen's night, but then again we're not really normal, or Normal.
Either way she's having another one in New York with Agatha and a few of Micah's sisters and
cousins and other girls I don't know. I think Micah's sisters are organising a stripper for that one. She
wouldn't let me.

Micah also had a stag night last week before Penny arrived, which was probably a good idea, but since Baz and I weren't there yet and Joshua hadn't arrived yet either he's decided to have another one. Penny thinks he's had a few more in between but we're not too sure. Kiaan said he should have as many as he can before he gets married because he sure as hell won't be able to once he's married. Vicki gave him a stern look then so he said that Micah won't want to either, because he'll love being married so much the thought won't ever cross his mind. He was definitely taking the piss.

Baz's dad hands Baz a credit card just before he leaves. "Just in case you need it Basil." He says, and then he says goodbye and shakes Baz's hand and pats his other arm and then shakes my hand. "Enjoy yourselves." He says to both of us. I nod silently at him. He still looks as scary as hell to me, even though he seems to have accepted us, finally.

I'm pretty chuffed that I get to use my passport for the first time, but that wears off fairly quick because the flight is so long. And I'm a bit nervous on the flight so I hold my wand in one hand and Baz's hand in the other for the entire flight. I watch a few movies to pass the time and Baz spent most of the time reading more magic books, including the one I bought him for Christmas. He's currently reading 1001 Spells You Must Learn Before You Die, and before that he was reading something called Shakespearian Spells Throughout the Ages. I swear that's all he's been doing lately, he must know every spell ever created by now.

Baz doesn't eat anything on the plane so I eat my meal as well as his, more to pass the time than anything. (I don't know exactly what it is, but it's edible enough so I scoff it down.) He hunted right before we left, at Oxford, and he's been texting Micah over the last week so he knows exactly where to hunt while we're there, and we're only going to be there a week so it should be fine. Oh, and then we're off to Paris for another week.

That was Baz's idea, and when I said I couldn't get the time off work he said he'd already checked with Alex and she'd already said yes. Obviously those two have been planning this behind my back and not only playing the violin when they get together.

It's just getting dark by the time we arrive and we're tired from the flight so we head straight to the hotel. We're staying at the same hotel as the Bunces, and Penny and Agatha and Josh. Penny insisted, she said it will make everything easier for all of the wedding engagements. Nobody argued with her.

I walk into our room behind Baz, and after Baz tips the porter I kick the door closed. I kick off my shoes and take a look at the view from the windows as I strip off to have a shower. Baz unpacks all of our things with magic and then magicks them neatly into drawers and wardrobes. By the time I'm out of the shower he's unpacked everything and is checking the view while on the phone to Penny.

He turns to face me. "We're meeting Wellbelove and Bunce in the lobby at seven." he informs me. "We're invited for dinner at Micah's."

"Oh okay." I say as he kisses me on the way to the shower.

I lay on the bed for a minute and flick through the TV channels and then I must fall asleep because I wake to Baz calling my name.

"Simon." he whispers.

"Mmmm."
"Time to get ready for dinner." He says. "It's late."

I open my eyes and see Baz showered and fully dressed casually in jeans and a shirt and dark blue jacket. He looks so handsome and smart, as usual.

I get into my jeans and shirt and grab a jacket that Baz packed for me, and then we head down to the lobby to meet everyone.

Micah's family is big, really big, and they're all huggers. They all know about me, being Penny's best friend and the Chosen One, so they're all gawking at me and it takes ages to get through all of their questions. Eventually Micah steers the conversation into another direction and I'm grateful.

By the time dinner's finished I'm exhausted so we call it a night. Tomorrow is Micah's second (third?) bachelor party so we need to get a bit of sleep. We get dropped off at the hotel and I drag Baz into bed and kiss him senseless until I fall asleep. I wake briefly in the night to find he's gone. I assume he's gone to hunt so I go back to sleep and when I wake again he's back and I pull him closer. He feels warmer.

"Baz?"

"Mmmm?"

"You hunted?"

"Yes." He says. His lips are against my ear and his breath is tickling my skin.

"Where?"

"Central Park."

"Really?"

"Yes, it's very big and full of squirrels." He murmurs.

"Oh okay." I say. I don't say that I know the park is also full of rats and mice. I know he was sick to death of rats at Watford. He'd prefer the deer at Oxford any day, but we're only here for one week so he's probably going to make do.

"Baz?"

"Yes love?"

"Have you ever had sex in America?"

"Not yet." He whispers, lightly pressing his lips against my throat. "But I think we should, right now." And then his mouth is on mine and I pull him closer to me and we do, in the dark, forty floors above New York City.

Baz

Micah takes us and Josh sightseeing around New York and I watch how Simon is wide eyed and excited at seeing the more well-known sights. He's also shit scared of getting lost so he doesn't let go of my hand. In one morning we've managed to climb the Statue of Liberty, take the elevator to the top of the Empire State Building and take a long walk through Central Park. Now Micah's decided we need to try a classic New York style burger for lunch before more heading out to the Museum of Modern Art for the afternoon.
By the time we make it to the bachelor party I'm feeling very comfortable here. Simon isn't, he's still afraid of getting lost.

"You have magic, you can use that to get back to our hotel." I remind him. "Or your mobile."

"Oh yeah, right Baz." But he still won't let go of my hand. I don't mind.

The bachelor party is, as expected, an evening of drinking and feeble attempts at debauchery by Micah's all too pleasant college friends and cousins. We head to our first bar that's big and impressive and is crowded with after work New Yorkers. We chat and have a few drinks and I count at least three women trying to hit on my fiancé, so I'm relieved when we leave the bar. We have dinner in a pleasant restaurant before heading to the next venue— a strip club. How cliché.

Micah looks as uncomfortable as ever as his friends sit him front and centre while two scantily clad women dance around him and I think to myself how much Dev and Niall would enjoy this evening. I must remember to tell them when we return.

The boys have finally had enough of the strip club and we end the night in a nightclub where they hit the bar and knock back more drinks. Simon, Josh and one of Micah's friends are in a deep conversation about football versus American football and who owns the name football, which is ridiculous because everyone knows it's English. I think about taking Simon onto the dance floor and holding him close and kissing him like we did on New Year's Eve, but this isn't that type of club.

Micah wraps his arm sloppily around Simon's shoulder and thanks him endlessly for looking after Penny this last year.

"I don't know how she would have made it through without you Simon." He slurs as he leans into Simon, who is holding him up. "You're a good friend. The best."

"She was fine, it was no problem Micah." Simon says smiling.

"No, honestly Simon, I thought I was going to have to get on a plane myself and sort out the shoes, or the flowers, or shoes with flowers or whatever, and I don't have a fucking clue about any of that." He gushes, shaking his head.

"Neither do I." I hear Simon mumble.

Then Micah reminds Simon that he has to spend the day with the girls tomorrow for some final pre-wedding preparations, so Josh suggests that he and I head out sightseeing. I tell him I was planning to visit the Museum of Natural History, trying to deter him, but he says yeah cool so I'm stuck with him. By the time everyone decides to call it a night Simon is exhausted and Micah isn't coherent so we make our goodbyes and head off.

Josh and I head off early and take in more of the sights. We spend most of the morning wandering through the museum and then decide to have lunch in a small burger café. Josh orders a burger and fries. (Crowley, that's all everyone seems to eat around here.) I order a pumpkin mocha breve, which is surprisingly good.

"So." Josh starts between mouthfuls. "What are the job prospects like for mages in the UK?" he asks.

This is interesting. I wonder what Wellbelove makes of his enquiries. Why would he care about careers in the UK if Wellbelove is planning to stay as far away from England as she possibly can.

"Are you planning on moving?" I question, looking at him.
"No." he says quickly. "Well, not yet anyway. It depends on Agatha I guess."

"Is she planning on returning?" I enquire. "And are you two that serious?"

"Serious enough." He says. "I like her a lot. And no, she's not planning on returning, at least not yet, I don't think."

"So why the enquiry?" I push.

He thinks for a minute before he speaks. "After everything that happened with Simon last year, she's been talking about home a lot more, like, she doesn't hate it so much." He says, finishing his burger. "And I know she misses home, and Penny and Simon. And even you Baz."

I hold back a snort, she may miss Simon, and she definitely misses Bunce but I don't think Wellbelove misses me at all. Not that I care.

"And I like magic and you're all so much more organised over there, you have your own school and you even have a coven." He goes on. "So. Jobs?"

I think about his question before I answer. "There's more on offer back home than here, I suppose. At Watford for instance." I say. "Most mages tend to combine a Normal career with a magickal one if possible." I finish.

"Cool." He says, pondering this. "But I haven't discussed any of this with her yet, so please don't say anything." He says to me, looking worried.

"I won't."

"Swear?" He asks, and I wonder if he wants me to swear with magic but he doesn't say anything else.

"Yes of course." I answer, and he smiles in relief. We finish our lunch in relaxed silence after that.

After lunch we head down 5th Avenue and visit a few shops before I tell him I need to stop off somewhere and we can meet later.

"I'll come with you." He says, smiling amicably.

"I'd prefer if you didn't actually." I try to say it pleasantly, but I don't think I pull it off.

"Whatever you're up to I won't tell Simon, or anyone." He says knowingly.

And I want to deter him again but I can't think of a good enough excuse. Instead I look from side to side to make sure we're alone. "Swear it?" I say when I confirm the coast is clear. I raise my wand between us. "With magic."

He looks at my wand, unsure. I try not to roll my eyes, "It's an oath, a magical oath." I explain.

"Oh, okay." He says as he raises his hand.

"You will not tell anyone about the next purchase I make." I say. He nods. "An Englishman's word is his bond!" I say, then I tap our joined hands with my wand. Lucky he's English.

"Your magic burns." He says, rubbing his wrist.

I shrug. "Runs in the family."
So he comes with me to Tiffany & Co. where after a long time deliberating, I finally pick out a platinum wedding band for Simon.

By the time Josh and I return to the hotel he's exhausted and I'm feeling nervous and excited at the silver band in the small blue box in my pocket.

"How was your day?" Simon asks me as I enter our room, he's sitting up on the bed watching TV.

"Good, Normal." I joke, how was yours.

"Ugh." He groans, "Penny made me spend the entire day with her and Agatha and Micah's sister and Priya. They had their nails done and I had to sit and watch until they made me get a manicure, which was all right I suppose, but it took forever. And then we had lunch, which was actually really good, but then they went to get a pedicure. I said no way but they made me get one too. It kind of tickled."

"The sacrifice we make as Man of Honour." I say, trying not to laugh as I climb onto the bed next to him. I take his hand and kiss each one of his knuckles, then turn to face him directly. He leans towards me for a quick kiss. "How's your speech?"

"All done." He says confidently. "I think I've got this." he nods.

Both of our mobiles beep then and I check mine. It's Penny:

Be downstairs at 7.30pm DON'T BE LATE OR I SWEAR I WILL SPELL YOU BOTH INTO THIN AIR!

We make it on time.

The pre-wedding dinner drags along predictably, but everyone seems to be enjoying themselves and Simon looks stunning in his suit. When it's time to make the speeches, Penny and Micah thank their families and the Best Man says a few words about Micah and absent guests, and when it's Simon's turn he nervously grabs my hand and gives it a squeeze before he stands.

"Um, I'm Simon Snow, as you know, and um I've known Penny ever since she felt sorry for me on our first day at school and announced there and then that we should be friends. I agreed with her then and I've learned over the years that it's best to just agree with her about everything, because she's usually right."

"Penny's saved my arse – er sorry, my butt more times than I care to remember, and I love her like a sister, and I'd never let anyone marry her who wasn't worthy. I've known Micah now for quite a few years and I can honestly say that you are Micah– worthy that is, so now she can spend the rest of her life saving your butt instead of mine."

"To Penny and Micah." He finishes and raises his glass in a toast.

Micah lets out a big laugh, and both of their respective families smile as Simon sits down, Penny leans into him and whispers, "You still need me to save your arse Simon."

"Yeah, probably." Simon says, grinning widely at her. Then Micah shakes Simon's hand and Simon eyes are shiny and I have to fight the urge to wipe the tears from his eyes. Instead he does it himself and I drop my hand.

"Lovely speech." I whisper to him, squeezing his hand.

"Yeah? Thanks." He says as he lets out a big breath. He squeezes my hand back.
Simon

The phone rings at exactly seven o'clock in the morning and I groan as Baz hands me the receiver.

"It's for you." He says.

"Get up now Simon, we have a tight schedule today and you cannot be late!" Penny shrieks into my ear.

"I won't be late Penny." I mumble. "Why do we have to get up so early anyway, the wedding's not until three this afternoon?"

"Refer to your schedule." She snaps. "Put Baz back on please."

I hand the receiver to Baz.

"Make sure you follow the schedule to the letter Baz or so help me--" I can hear her squawking into the receiver from where I lie.

"All right Bunce, keep your shirt on." Baz says, cutting her off. "We'll be there." He says hanging up the phone.

"Where?"

"Breakfast from eight until nine, followed by hmm . . ." He says, pulling a piece of paper from the bedside table, "Shower, then meet in the lobby at nine forty five for your hair appointment." He snorts. "I'm glad it's you and not me." He says, shaking his head.

"It still doesn't make sense why we have to get up so early." I mumble as we head downstairs for breakfast.

"Refer to Bunce's schedule." He smirks, taking my hand as we walk. We meet Penny's family and Agatha and Joshua and a beaming Penny in the restaurant for our scheduled breakfast.

"All right Penny?" I ask her.

"Yeah Simon, but I'm a little nervous." She says.

"You got this Pen." I say, squeezing her hand, she squeezes back.

"Thanks."

We spend an excruciating two hours at the hairdresser – which is a complete waste of time for me because all they have to do is wash mine, while they mess around with the girls for ages.

"I could have done this myself." I mumble to whoever's listening.

"Your part of this wedding party." Agatha reminds me. "You have to participate."

"Yeah yeah. What's next Penny?"

"Refer to your schedule." She says determinedly.

"I left it with Baz." I say, and then immediately regret it.

"What! Why?" she demands.
"Um, seemed safer?"

"Honestly Simon," and she emails me another one which I make a point of reading in front of her.

"Lunch." I say smiling. "I'm good with that."

After lunch we head back to the hotel and I'm finally allowed an hour back in my room while they get their makeup or something done. All I know is I had to get up outrageously early and all I've done so far is get my hair washed.

"Be dressed and in the lobby at half past one sharp." She reminds me as she leaves me at my door. Then she turns to Baz, "Half past one exactly Baz! And don't mess up his hair!" She yells.

We make it on time, I wouldn't dare be late or Penny would probably kill me, or curse me. After a bunch of photos, Baz (who looks incredible in his new suit) and Josh leave us at the hotel and we make our way in these fancy wedding cars to the Church. I feel a pang of guilt that Baz won't be in the church with us but I know there's no way he can enter the church without being in excruciating pain at the very least, or dying in a ball of fire at the worst, so I have to let it go. He seems fine with it and it is Penny's day after all.

I've never been in a wedding before, Merlin I've never even been to a wedding so I'm not sure what to expect, but as the music starts and we walk up the aisle with all of Penny's and Micah's family and friends on either side of us, I'm overwhelmed by the joyfulness of it all. That's the only way I can describe it. All of these people have come to see my best friend marry the love of her life and I'm so proud and happy that I can't stop grinning.

Penny looks lovely in her dress. And she spelled her hair silver again, with pale almost ice blue highlights to match the bridesmaid's dresses. Baz matched my tie to the groomsmen and the pocket square perfectly with the bridesmaid's dresses, so we all look quiet smashing.

The wedding party is big, really big. There are four groomsmen and four of us and then Penny's sister Pip became upset that she wasn't in the wedding so at the last minute Pip and Micah's niece became impromptu flower girls. It takes ages for us to all to make it up the aisle and the bride and groom to finally meet at the altar.

And the ceremony is lovely, and everyone laughs when I pretend I can't find Micah's ring. (That Penny only entrusted to me outside the church.) Well, everyone except Penny that is, she narrows her eyes at me and I decide really fast that now's not the time to joke around.

I'm the first to congratulate Penny, I hug her as soon as they finish kissing and are pronounced husband and wife, and then I congratulate Micah and he gives me a big bear hug which squeezes the air out from my lungs – for a small bloke he's surprisingly strong. Then it takes ages to leave the church because Penny and Micah have to stop at practically every aisle to be congratulated by family and friend and pose for photos for them all.

When we finally make it outside I look around for Baz. I find him near the road, leaning against one of the wedding cars staring at his mobile. He comes over and congratulates the newlyweds and I take his hand.

"I'm sorry you had to miss this." I say, and I am, really sorry. He's come all this way and couldn't be in there with us.

"I didn't." he says smiling.

"What?" I ask, confused. "You couldn't come inside?"
"Nope, watched it live, thanks to Micah's glasses cam." He shows me his mobile and there's a live stream coming directly from a small camera on Micah's glasses. "Micah's idea." He says and I shake my head in wonder. That Micah thinks of everything.

We've finally made it to the reception after what felt like hours having a bunch of photos taken, first in front of the church, then at the gardens at the reception, and then inside the reception and I've had enough because I'm hungry, but no one else seems to be bothered so I try to stay quiet, only my growling stomach occasionally giving me away.

The guests are eating hors d'oeuvres and sipping champagne while they wait for us to enter, and I'm looking at the food longingly until I finally manage to snag a small something when the waiter heads past us with another full tray. Baz brings some more over to me, he must see me eyeing the food.

"Thanks," I say. "I thought I was going to starve."

"You won't starve Snow." He says, chuckling softly to himself. He looks me up and down pointedly. "Have I told you that you look rather stunning in that suit?"

"No you haven't yet." I smile at him. "And so do you." I say.

"I know." Baz says. He looks smug, and like he's trying not to smile. And he means it too – my vampire fiancé is such a smug git sometimes.

The reception goes off without a hitch, thankfully, or Penny would probably have spelled someone into the ground. The food is excellent "Thanks to Alex and Marco's advice." Penny leans over and says to me while we eat. And she doesn't complain about the table settings so they must be okay. By the time I have to make my second speech I'm fairly relaxed. I stand up and take a breath.

"Hi everyone. My name is Simon Snow and for those of you who don't know, Penny and I have been best friends since we were eleven. First I want to say how much I love Penny, she's the best friend I could possibly have because she's always had my back, like, she's always been there for me. Probably a lot more than I've been there for her actually." I think about that for a bit, because it really is true. And then realise everyone is waiting for me to keep going.

"And she's really smart too, I wouldn't have even made it through school without her. She wasted half her time tutoring me, and the other half getting me out of a few too many scrapes. And when Micah and Penny started dating I couldn't be happier for her, because Micah's perfect for Penny in every way. He has this sort of sixth sense about her, so he knows when to stay close and when to steer as far away as possible. That took me a lot longer to learn and I saw her every day, so he's obviously really smart . . . almost as smart as her."

I stop and pick up my glass. "So I'd like to make a toast, to Penny my best friend, and former flatmate, and Micah, the only bloke worthy of her."

Everyone raises their glasses and toast the happy couple, and I look at Baz then, who's staring back at me with so much love that I want to climb across the tables and pin him down and kiss him like mental. I decide to sit down instead.

Mr Bunce makes a speech and he manages to embarrass Penny a little with some stories from when she was little. Then Penny's mum joins him, probably to stop him waffling on, and she says a few words about Micah's lovely family and how they are so happy to welcome Micah into their family and by the end everyone is shedding a tear or two.

As soon as Penny and Micah finish dancing Micah's big family almost all get up at once and swarm
the dance floor. The bridal party hits the dance floor too, so I dance with Agatha, and then Priya and then Micah's sister before I finally get a dance with Penny.


"Yeah?" She says beaming. "Thanks Simon, and that was a splendid speech by the way."

"Thanks." And then Baz comes and whisks Penny away from me for a dance.

It seem like ages before I finally get to spend some time with Baz, we're leaning on the bar watching everyone on the dance floor. I'm touching his leather and steel bracelet absently, it looks so good on him. Priya is dancing with Mr Bunce, and Mrs Bunce is dancing with Micah. Penny is dancing with Micah's dad and the flower girls are sliding across the dance floor on their dresses, which aren't so white anymore.

"Good speech Snow." Baz says to me, knocking my shoulder with his.

"Yeah thanks." I say, leaning in close.

"I would love to dance with you right now." He whispers into my ear.

"Me too." I say, "Maybe later, at our hotel?"

His eyes go wide for a second, I don't normally offer to dance with him, like ever really. "It's a date." He whispers, his lips touch my ear briefly, and it sends a shiver down my spine.

Penny and Micah leave at midnight as the wedding winds down. Everyone waves them off and I manage to get in another quick hug before they jump into the car.

"Bye Penny, I'll see you soon." I say, hugging her tight "Have a good honeymoon."

"I will," she says still hugging me back. "Bye Simon, don't get into any trouble while I'm gone."

"I won't I promise."

Baz and I head back to our room and as we pass Penny and Micah's door he stops for a moment, smiling as he looks at his mobile.

"I wonder if I should tell Micah to turn off that glasses cam yet?" He muses, showing me the app. My eyes widen in shock and then I laugh out loud. "Baz you have to!"

So he phones Micah and texts Penny and Micah at once and leaves a message to turn off the cam right now and I can't help laughing when I hear Micah shout "Fuck!" from the other side of the door as Baz deletes the app. Baz drags me to our room whispering "I might need to borrow that cam from Micah sometime." His eyes are twinkling mischievously and I blush so hard I can feel my ears turning red.

-oOo-

We have five more days in New York and we spend every day out sightseeing and every night in our hotel bed together, having the most incredible sex until the early hours of the morning, and sometimes again when Baz returns from hunting. I swear I'm going to have to go home for a rest.

We go to a Yankees game with Agatha and Josh before they leave, which is brilliant even though I don't understand the rules at all. Josh tries to explain it, and then Baz tries to explain it and then they
both give up and buy me more hot dogs and beer.

I take Baz on a night flight over New York one night. I feel a lot more confident with finding my way around now and it's even easier from the air because I can see everything. He doesn't want to at first, but I went the night before and it was the most incredible sight and I couldn't stop talking about the view from the air so he finally relents. He uses the sticking spell because he's still scared shitless of my flying, and spells us invisible. We fly along the Hudson around Manhattan Island and Central Park and even under the Brooklyn Bridge and I decide right there and then that I'm going to fly over every single place I ever visit because this is the sort of sight seeing that shits on every single scenic flight in existence.

-oOo-

It's our last night tonight, and Baz says I need to dress up so we're kitted up in our best suits (Not the wedding suit he reminds me again.) and we're heading out to some fancy restaurant for dinner.

"Is this our third date?" I ask him as we enter the fanciest, biggest restaurant I've ever seen.

"Do you want it to be?" He asks.

"Yeah, why not." I shrug. "It's been a while since we had a date." He's smiling as we walk to our table.

Dinner is spectacular and I'm finishing his dessert when I notice he's staring at me.

"What?" I ask, taking my last mouthful of the best dark chocolate mousse I've ever tasted.

He hesitates for the slightest moment. "Simon." He says.

"Yes."

"I want to plan our wedding now." He says, staring unblinking at me.

I stop eating and look at him, a slow smile growing on my face. "Really?" I ask. Because now that Penny's wedding is over I want to marry Baz, like, right now if I could.

"Yes." He says, and he looks a little nervous. I wonder why because we're already fiancés so it's not as if I'm going to say no.

"So do I." I say immediately, "Let's do it."

His shoulders relax and he smiles as he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small blue box. It says 'Tiffany & Co.' on it. I watch at him as he slides it across the table towards me. My eyes flick down to the box and I take it and hold it nervously, looking at it and then up at him.

"Open it." He says quietly.

I do, and inside is a plain silver band. I stare at it, unmoving. It's the prettiest thing I've ever seen, except for Baz that is. He takes the ring from the box and slides it onto my finger. I look at my hand and then at him.

"I love you Simon, so much." He says softly, and his eyes are ablaze with so much love that they're dazzling.

"I love you Baz." I say back. "And I can't wait to marry you."
Then he grins wide as he arches one eyebrow. "Three months?" he asks.

"Can we organise it in two?" I say, and I can't take my eyes off him, he's so breathtakingly beautiful.

He laughs loudly then, and I decide it's one of my favourite sounds in the entire world. "Let's see what we can do." he says. "We'll talk with Daphne when we get back."

-oOo-

We're spending a week in Paris, which is even better than the week in New York, (except for Penny's wedding of course) and now I have another stamp in my passport. We're in the loveliest hotel that's in the most elegant building I've ever seen. It has a lobby that looks as big as a football pitch and the room is the nicest room I've ever stayed in in my life.

"What about hunting?" I asked Baz when we first arrived.

"Paris has more rats than people." He said offhandedly. "They're everywhere if you know where to look."

I looked around on the ground then but I didn't see any but I suppose Baz finds them because he comes back to our very nice hotel every night warm and slightly flushed.

We've done so much sightseeing that I feel like we've walked the entire city, my favourite is the Musee d'Orsay and the Louvre. I had no idea Paris was full of so much fucking art! We eat a lot of French food too, which is brilliant because I was a bit over all of the burgers and hot dogs. I'm really enjoying the crepes at the moment, and the ham and cheese baguettes are pretty good too, and the gallettes are to die for. And even though Baz has been here a bunch of times I manage to drag him through all the gift shops I find at the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe and I buy a bunch of souvenirs that Baz thinks are ridiculous.

"I need this snow dome." I tell him as we leave the Arc de Triomphe. "And we need these cups for tea, they're porcelain china and look, they have pretty pictures of Paris on them."

"And the throw cushion?" he queries. It has mini Eiffel Towers on it in blue grey and black.

"It will look great in our flat." I say. And with that he shuts up because I said our flat.

And then I take Baz to Rue de la Paix and take him to Tiffany & Co. and tell him to pick out a ring. He smiles at me and takes me to the counter and picks the exact same ring that he bought me. I want to put it on his finger straight away but they package it up and hand it to me all wrapped really nice so I don't take it out yet. Instead, that night, I fly us around Paris for our obligatory scenic flight and then we eat dinner in the nicest French restaurant I've ever seen and I fall in love with French food because everything is loaded with so much butter that I'm in heaven. It's not until after dinner, which was the most magnificent and buttery veal I've ever had, and a very nice wine – I think Baz said it was a Bordeaus, and the most incredible cherry pie for dessert that's creamy and custardy and had a name that I can't pronounce and is almost as good as the sour cherry scones from Watford, that I hand the box to Baz.

"I love you Baz." I say.

"I love you Simon." He says opening the box. "And I can't wait to be married to you." He mimics my words exactly.

"We could get married right here, in Paris?" I suggest as I take the ring out of the box and slide it onto Baz's finger. I could do that, I think to myself, I could marry him right now. Baz doesn't say
anything straight away, he just stares at our two identical rings and then at me. I stare back, I can’t do anything else.

"Daphne will never forgive us." He finally says. His voice is hoarse. "Nor will Mordelia."

"Oh yeah."

"And Penny."

"Oh right."

"And Fiona."

"Yeah okay." That’s one person I don’t want to piss off. Looks like I have to wait a few more months after all.
Simon

Ever since New Year's, Baz has been playing tennis with Dev and Niall a bit more, and weekly now that it's summer and they've returned from another European drink fest. From what Baz tells me, their month away was one big bender. I still go to the club with Baz sometimes but not as often and not usually when he meets Dev and Niall. I don't mind the club – or Dev and Niall, but ever since we bumped into Lady Salisbury I've tried to avoid going when she's there.

No such luck today because we bump into her on our way out. We had a decent game – I only lose to Baz by a small margin rather than the thrashing he gave me the first couple of times I played so I'm definitely getting better.

She says hello to us again and this time I decide to talk to her. I was going to do it anyway so I figure I might as well get it over with. I tell her I need to talk to her and she's surprised but agrees to meet. She suggests we come by her place later this afternoon after her lunch.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Baz asks.

"Yes I am." I tell him as I sit nervously, waiting to leave our flat.

I love saying that, our flat. We've been living together for a few weeks now since we came back from Penny's wedding. It was weird at first, because even though the flat is exactly the same as before we left, except for my stuff (which isn't very much), a new Eiffel Tower throw cushion, a couple of Paris mugs, two snow domes and a whole bunch of my drawings stuck to the walls, it feels entirely different.

Baz has been sticking up some of my drawings on the walls for a few years now. He still has the first one I ever gave him stuck up in his (our) bedroom, and since I moved in he's added a bunch more. There are some of us, his siblings and even one of Penny stuck between the fancy artworks that Daphne picked out. There are even some on the fancy fridge these days.

Baz and I barely made it in the door before we dropped our bags and decided the most important thing right there and then was to christen every single room of our place together. So we shagged ourselves senseless for two days before we even remembered to unpack and tell anyone we'd returned, only stopping to sleep, eat (hunt) and marvel at our pretty wedding rings. The wedding planning could wait a little longer.

We arrive at Lady Salisbury's apartment in a very posh part of the city, on time. Baz drives because I'm kind of nervous and I wouldn't have been able to concentrate on the road. He holds my hand as I press the buzzer on the gate and I'm so nervous that Baz has to speak into the microphone to tell them who we are. I don't let go of his hand.

Someone dressed in a black and white uniform lets us in and leads us to a posh sitting room or parlour or something. Then Lady Salisbury joins us and we exchanges pleasantries again and she requests some tea. Baz is brilliant, speaking with her and answering questions about his family while I gather my thoughts and drink the tea.

"So Simon, what is this concerning?" she asks nicely enough.

I don't really know how to start so I just go for it. "It's about your daughter, Lucy."
Lady Salisbury stiffens then and her face pales. "What about her?" she asks. She's still as polite as ever but she also sounds a little wary now and I think maybe I should have brought Penny's mum with me. I decide to push on because I need to get through this and she deserves to know.

"I don't think she ever went to America." I tell her. "I don't think she ever left England."

"And how do you know that?" She asks.

I think about just blurting it out— that she's my mum, but I pull out the letter and hand it to her instead. She reads it silently, bringing her hand to her mouth about half way though. When she finally looks up I hand her the photo of a pregnant Lucy with the Mage, and she stares at it for a long time. And when she looks at me and I pull out my wand, Lucy's wand.

"I think she's my mum." I say. Baz takes my hand and I hold it tight.

Lady Salisbury sits perfectly still and stares at me for so long that I start to run though the options that I discussed with my psychologist in my head; that she might not believe me, that she might believe me but not want anything to do with me, or that she might believe me and be okay with it. Or that she might keel over from the shock of it. Oh shit, I think, what if she does keel over? Where's that person who brought the tea? Will I have to call an ambulance? Will I have to restart her heart? Is there a spell to restart someone's heart? Does Baz know it? Does she own a defibrillator? How do you do CPR again, isn't it chest compressions to the beat of Stayin' Alive?

"I called her that." She says quietly, handing the letter back to me but keeping the photo, she looks at the photo again.

"What?" I ask before I can think.

"My rosebud." She says quietly, looking up at me again. Then she looks at the wand in my hand. "And that is her wand. Where did you get it?"

So I tell her about the Mage and the Will and the cottage. She listens quietly while I tell her what we worked out. And when I finally tell her that she came to me through the Veil, she breaks down and sobs quietly into her handkerchief.

She's been sobbing for a while and I don't know what to do or say but Baz speaks up then. "We can go if you'd like to be alone Lady Salisbury." He says quietly.

"No, please stay." She says as she stands. "I'll be back in a moment." And with that she gets up and leaves the room. I look at Baz and let out a big breath I didn't even realise I was holding.

"What do we do now?" I ask him.

"Wait I suppose." He says, still holding my hand. He's rubbing small circles around the back of my hand with his thumb and I hold on tight as I stare at him.

It's probably a full fifteen minutes later when she finally comes back. I thought she was never going to come back and that we were going to have to find our own way out for a while there, her eyes are a bit red but she's not crying any longer. She stands at the door and asks if we could follow her.

She leads us upstairs and when we get to a doorway she opens the door.

"This was Lucy's room." She says quietly and I stare at her, I don't know what to do. "You're welcome to take a look."
I'm too surprised to move or say anything but Baz says "Thank you." And he gently pulls me in. There's not much there, just a very neat teenage girls room with a few pictures on the dresser. I don't know what I'm supposed to be looking at.

She hands me a photo album then and I take it from her and sit on the bed and open it. It's full of pictures of a small girl and then teenager. My mum. I sit and look through it and I don't notice when she sits on the bed next to me. I only notice when she starts pointing to some of the pictures and starts telling me when they were taken and what occasion they were celebrating. Her voice is soft as she talks for ages, reliving all of her daughter's childhood in that photo album. I'm crying when she gets to the end.

I look up at her then and she smiles a small smile at me.

"I never would have believed this, coming from any person other than you Simon Snow." She says. "But you've quite a reputation. You're honest and forthright and very brave . . . and you look a little like her, you know."

"Thank you." I say.

"Thank you Simon." She says. And she Stares at me for a long time again before her face breaks into a warm smile. "My Grandson." She says. And then she hugs me and I'm so surprised for a moment that I don't do anything. But then I slowly hug her back, patting her back because it's a little awkward.

I look over to the door and see Baz leaning against it, smiling at me. She pulls back from me then and holds me at arm's length, looking me over.

"I'm sorry." She says. And I don't know what's coming next. I'm sorry but I never want to see you again maybe? But she doesn't say that. Instead she says "I'm sorry for what happened to you Simon. Your parents behaved quite irresponsibly."

"That's okay." I tell her. None of this is her fault so I don't know what she's apologising for. It's all a bit overwhelming so I'm glad when she finally gets up and walks to the door.

"Would you both please stay for dinner?" she asks looking to both of us. "I'd really like to get to know you a little."

"Okay." I say, looking at Baz. "Sure."

She says I can take a look around and someone will come for us in a little while, before she leaves the room.

Baz comes over and sits with me on the bed and looks at me intensely as he takes my hand. "All right Snow?"

"Yeah." I say, letting out another breath.

So we stay for dinner and when we meet her in the dining room she's more composed and a bit more relaxed than she was upstairs. She tells me stories about my mum when she was little and then she asks me a few times what my mum said when she came through the veil. She cries a little at that, but mostly she just smiles at me.

Then she asks about me and I tell her about uni and my job and my friends and Penny. Then she asks about my Watford and I tell her about Penny and Agatha and how Baz was my roommate and we hated each other. She understands that, she knows all about the wars between the Mage and the
old families and how it all ended. And then she asks about my childhood at the orphanages and I tell her a little but I don't really want to talk about those times, I don't want her to feel bad or guilty or anything.

And then she asks about me and Baz and I tell her how long we've been together. I tell her that we're engaged to be married soon and that she should come, if she wants to. I don't know how she's going to react to that, two blokes marrying is practically unheard of in the world of mages.

She says she'd love to.

**Baz**

That was probably the most nerve-wracking few hours of Simon's life and he handled it astonishingly well. I could tell how nervous he was at first, his tail wrapped itself around my wrist as he spoke and his breathing was shallow and fast, but he spoke clearly and found all of his words and managed to get everything out that he wanted to say.

And I can see how happy he is now that he's told her. And as overwhelming and shocking the revelation of her daughter's death and that Simon Snow is her grandson, Lady Salisbury handled the news with composure and grace. I don't know if she was actually in shock or if the truth hadn't hit her yet, but she seemed calm and grateful to finally know what happened.

She said not a day goes by that she doesn't think of Lucy, and that she misses her.

She said it was a relief, to finally know what had happened to her daughter.

She said she always knew the Mage was trouble and she tried to tell her daughter, but she wouldn't listen.

If only she'd listened, she said sadly.

By the time we leave Lady Salisbury and Simon are smiling she hugs him again and they're planning to catch up together for lunch the following week.

I drive us back to our flat and when we enter Simon heads straight for our bed and lies down, groaning.

"Fuck." He breathes as he closes his eyes. I lie with him and take his hand, kissing each knuckle in turn.

"You did brilliantly Simon."

"Thanks Baz." He says. His tail wraps around my waist and I smile at the familiar feeling, and we lay there for a while, each in our own thoughts. Finally Simon looks over to me.

"At least she didn't keel over." He says with a shrug.

I let out a mighty laugh and Simon hits me in the face with his pillow.

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We're heading to Oxford to meet with Daphne. It's time to start the wedding planning. Simon is driving and he's so full of energy that I have to remind him to keep his eyes on the road.

"We can have it in the gardens, like Daphne said." Simon says. "In the afternoon so the sun isn't too harsh for you."
"Good idea."

"And we have to ask Agatha and Josh. I hope they can come, they only just went to Penny's wedding." He says worriedly.

"I'm sure they'll come."

"And all our friends, Alex and Marco and Vicki and Kiaan and Zoe and Olivia." He goes on. "And I suppose Dev and Niall will have to come."

"Yes, all of them."

"And I don't want any of that huge wedding party or groomsmen crap that Penny had. What a headfuck."

"Beautifully said, Snow."

"Just Penny. We have to have Penny. Otherwise she'll probably kill me. Or curse me." he frowns.

"I wouldn't put it past Bunce."

"And Daphne can organise all the flowers and shoes she wants for all I care, I really don't give a toss."

"Neither do I."

"And food, there has to be a shit load of food all right Baz?" He looks over to me briefly before turning back at the road.

"Definitely."

"We can have French food like we had in Paris, can't we? That was brilliant." he adds.

"It shouldn't be a problem."

"And I don't want a stag night, what's the point of that anyway?"

"I think you might have some opposition to that."

"Well I don't want separate ones, we can have on together right?"

"Absolutely."

Simon stops talking as we pull into the driveway. He turns off the engine and turns to face me.

"What about you Baz, what do you want?" He asks.

"Hmm." I say. I already know what I want but I take my time answering. "A string quartet for the ceremony, a band for our wedding breakfast and you for the rest of my life."

"That's it?"

"I think that's enough don't you?"

"I mean for the wedding, just the music?" He asks as we climb out of the car.

"Yes, that should do it."
We have lunch with my family and then Daphne shoos everyone away and we sit in the library to discuss wedding plans. I tell her we want to get married at the start of midterm break so we can travel for our honeymoon without interrupting our studies. That's just over two months away so that should keep Simon happy. I give her a list of people we need to invite on Simon's side, which includes the Bunces, the Wellbeloves, our friends and Lady Salisbury. Daphne knows exactly who has to be included from my side of the family so I leave that with her. Simon tells her he would like French food, if that's okay, and Daphne laughs and says of course it is. I tell her that I will arrange the music. Lastly I tell her that Fiona requires a special role otherwise we'll never hear the end of it.

"She can officiate the entire day if you like, Master of Ceremonies." She suggests.

"Perfect." I say

"Really Baz?" Simon frowns. "Do you think that's smart?"

"She'll be fine," I tell him. "Daphne will make sure she behaves."

"Okay." Simon says, but I can see he's not convinced.

"Leave everything to me." Daphne says. "Invitations should be ready in a week. We'll reconvene next week to check them before we send them. I should have most of the wedding sorted by then."

"Most of it sorted?" Simon asks. "In a week?"

We're lying on our backs in the shade after a game of Pitch football with my siblings. Simon and Mordelia versus the twins and myself again. They're getting quiet good, Simon and Mordelia, and they seem to have worked up a few more plays which usually involve Mordelia kicking the ball high in the air towards where Simon hovers waiting and heads it into goal from high above everyone. Even my little brother took it upon himself to join their team and Simon decided it would be clever if he flies him in front of my goals just as I'm about to kick one. He thought it would deter me but I cast U can't touch this on him so the ball won't touch him as I score another goal. They almost manage to beat us until I realised Simon cast the same spell on my goals so the ball wouldn't go in. I figured it out pretty quickly though, and made him reverse the spell. He said it was Mordelia's idea.

I turn to my side and push myself up on my elbow and I look down at Simon.

"Relax Simon, she knows what she's doing." I push his curls off his forehead and run my fingers through his hair. He closes his eyes.

"I didn't mean for her to organise everything."

"She wants to." I tell him, still running my fingers through his curls. I love touching his golden curls – it's almost as good as touching his skin. "It's been a while since she's organised a party – not since Hampshire. She's getting restless."

Simon opens his eyes and stares up at me. "Are you sure Baz?"

"Yes, absolutely. "I say decisively. "We need to worry about what we have to do."

"Like what? There's nothing left is there?"
"Yes, the most important item." I tell him, trying to hold back a smile. "Our suits."

Simon scoffs and rolls his eyes. Then he reaches up with two hands and pulls my face towards his until our lips meet and he kisses me quickly before letting me go.

No one is outside—my siblings left us a while ago after the game finished. So I lean back down and press my mouth to his and kiss him softly. I brush my lips against his, back and forth slowly until he can't take it anymore and he pulls me down to him so he can kiss me properly.
Baz

The wedding is all but organised thanks to Daphne, so Simon and I have had quite a lot of spare time this summer. Simon went back to work almost as soon as we returned from Paris and he told Alex the date of our wedding so they can take off work. I've told him a number of times that he no longer needs to work if he doesn't want to, it's not like we need to pay rent, or pay for food or clothes or the like, but he insists he'll be an equal contributor in our marriage and he enjoys working with Alex.

I'm fairly sure that Simon keeps working so he'll never have to rely on anyone or any of the money the Mage left him. He hasn't touched any of it, and even though he hasn't worked out what to do with it or the cottage yet, I know for certain he'll never spend one cent of it. And it's the same for that ridiculous bag of leprechaun gold he has stuffed in our wardrobe. Bunce suggested using the funds to set up a magickal scholarship one day. He seemed to like that idea.

We've been running a lot and Simon's been drawing almost every day, we play tennis at the club with Dev and Niall (we beat them, again) and I tell them we're getting married. They're a little surprised but then they congratulate us and tell us they'll be there, and then they immediately start organising the stag night.

"It's still months away." I remind them. I can't help rolling my eyes at these two idiots.

"There's quite a lot to arrange." Dev smiles wickedly.

"Can't leave it to the last minute." Niall smirks, looking a little evil.

"Nothing outrageous." I instruct.

"No strippers." Simon echoes.

"Leave it with us." Dev grins.

"You're going to have to run everything by Penny." Simon reminds them.

"Yeah all right." Niall concedes.

"Isn't that Penny's job? The stag night." Simon asks as we leave the club.

"I don't think we're going to be able to deter those two." I shrug. "And you haven't told Bunce we've set the date yet."

"She's still on her honeymoon!" He cries indignant, and then mumbles "She's going to be pissed."

"She's going to be pissed at more than the stag night. Daphne's all but arranged the entire wedding." I remind him.

"Maybe we need to give her a job."

"She's going to be our Honour Guard. There's nothing more important than that."

"What's an honour guard? I thought she was going to be our best man, er, person?"

"Same thing Simon."
"Oh."

We arrive at our flat and Simon hits the shower. When he comes out, still dripping and wrapped only in a towel wrapped low over his hips, he declares he's hungry and it's my turn to cook.

"We're not doing that dinner schedule thing of Bunces any more, Snow." I remind him.

"Oh yeah. But how are we going to eat then?" He calls from our bedroom.

I get up and stand in the doorway as he dresses. He's found his personalised socks again and I can't help smiling, they look so fucking adorable on him.

"We can both cook, we don't need a schedule to cook." I tell him. "That was Bunces ridiculous idea, I'm not doing that here."

"All right." He shrugs as he heads for the couch. "What's for dinner Baz? How about some of those crepes or gallettes like Paris?" He asks hopefully.

I've learned to make both since we returned from Paris, because Simon insisted, and I quite like them too. But I raise my eyebrow as I head for the shower and by the time I come out he's in the kitchen, cooking pasta with tuna and lemon zest and parsley (one of Marco's) and is making a salad. I wrap my arms around his waist and kiss his cheek. "I thought I was cooking?" I ask, my mouth against his ear.

"Couldn't wait. A man would starve around here waiting for you."

I can't help laughing a little. "You won't starve, Snow."

Dinner is good and I use magic to clear up and then pull Simon close to me and wrap my arms around his waist as I press my lips to his. He wraps his arms around my neck and kisses me back.

"I don't have any classes tomorrow." I whisper as I drag my lips along his jaw, down his neck and back to his lips. "And you don't have to work."

"Is it another duvet day?" He breathes, his voice is shaky.

"Yes I think so." I murmur. And with that he pushes me to our room and backs me to our bed. When I fall back onto our bed and he climbs on top of me, straddling me as he pulls his tee shirt over his head. He reaches down for mine and tugs that off as well, discarding it on the floor with the growing pile of our clothes. He smiles at me as I run my hands over his smooth chest and down to his hard stomach before I pull his face back down to me and kiss him hungrily.

He's just as hungry as I am, and he's trying to pin my hands behind my head again. I'm so much stronger than Simon with my vampire strength but I let him, I like it, and I lace my fingers through his as he kisses me again and again. Eventually I push his hands away so I can flip him over onto his back and pin him down. He smiles at me again and I know he loves it. I kiss him slowly and deeply, before I gradually make my way down. I decide to kiss every mole on his body on my way, and drive Simon insane in the process.

Penny

"What's wrong Penny?" Micah asks. "Do you want me to carry you over the threshold?"
"No thank you." I say determinedly. "I don't need to be carried like some bride-elect being dragged unwillingly to her marital bed."

"You can carry me if you like." He says with a wry smile.

Now I scoff. "What about we just go inside." I smile. But then I hesitate again before I open the door.

"What's wrong?" He asks again, gently.

I turn to look at him. "Nothing." I tell him. "It's just, well, it's all different now. Simon's gone, and we're married."

"Yeah we are." He says, eyes twinkling. He pushes the door open and pulls me inside and we drag our luggage in with us and then he kicks the door closed and pulls me to our bedroom, kissing me along the way.

We get to my room and it's not until Micah backs us onto our bed that I feel the new duvet set. I sit up and look at it and Micah hands me a card. It's a bit crumpled from where we landed on it and we look at each other and grin as I open the card. It's from Simon and Baz. I touch the new duvet lightly with my fingers while I read it, and what he's written is so sweet that it brings a tear to my eye.

Penny,

I love you and although I'm sad that were no longer roomies, and I'm going to miss you like mad, I'm so happy that you found Micah and that you can finally be together.

Micah,

I hope you enjoy living here as much as I have. And by the way Penny can't cook breakfast for shit and she is not a morning person at all so if you want this marriage to last, learn how to make a good English breakfast and steer clear until she's eaten.

Love Simon and Baz xx

Micah bursts out laughing and then tosses the note aside.

"Duly noted Simon and Baz." He says as he climbs on top of me and kisses me over and over.

We don't leave our bedroom for quite a while and when we finally do I notice how clean and tidy the flat is, it's much cleaner than when I left. I wander to the kitchen and put the kettle on and then realise we haven't been to the shops yet but Micah opens the fridge and it's full of milk and food and fresh fruit and vegetables, Simon must have gone shopping. I walk over to his room now and stand in the doorway. Everything is the same except there are no clothes on the floor and his desk is tidy. I walk over to his wardrobe and open the door. It's empty, and it hits me then, he really has moved out.

Micah comes up behind me and puts his arms around my waist and leans his chin on my shoulder. "All right there Pen?"

"Yes Micah." I say. "It's just that I was so used to Simon, and even Baz being here all the time. I think it's just going to take a bit of getting used to." I turn to him and wrap my arms around him. "But I have you here now. Great snakes Micah, I've been waiting so long for us to be married. These last few years have been so difficult."

"I know Pen." He says. "But I'm here now. And I start working next week so we have to make the
most of the rest of our honeymoon."

"We've just returned from our honeymoon."

"Well I'm not ready for it to be over yet." He says as he pulls me back to our bedroom. I must say I'm enjoying married life quite a lot so far.

Simon

Penny texts me to tell me she's back and do we want to come over, so Baz and I head off after I finish my art class and he finishes his violin lesson. Even though I haven't handed back my key yet I knock at their door, after Baz pushes me against the door and kisses me like mad that is. I'm still blushing when she opens the door.

"Simon!" she cries, pulling me in for a quick hug. "Why did you knock? Don't you have your key?"

"I'm not going to barge in Penny, this isn't my flat anymore."

"But you're still going to snog outside the door every time you come over?" She asks knowingly, and a bit too smug for my liking.

"You know about that?" I blurt out as we enter. I can feel my face reddening as I speak. I thought we'd kept that to ourselves all this time.

"Mr Thompson. I caught up with him right before I left. He had lots of interesting stuff to tell me." She's nodding as she grins, shutting the door behind her. "He's deaf not blind Simon."

"Oh. Sorry Penny." I say, my face still red. I look over to Baz, he couldn't care less of course.

"Bunce." Baz speaks up now, probably to save me more embarrassment. "Micah. Welcome back. How was South America?"

"Hi Simon, Baz." Micah wanders in and greets us with beers for everyone. "It was awesome, really great."

Penny fills us in on their honeymoon in detail while Micah prepares dinner. She talks nonstop for about an hour, about Peru, and Chile and the Incas and Conquistadors and the jungles and Tango dancing in the street and the Peruvian cuisine and Chilean pastel de choclo until Micah says it's time to eat.

We're enjoying Micah's first ever attempt at cooking and he hasn't done a bad job of it either, he's cooked some steak and made a salad and whipped up some sort of creamy potato salad with bacon—it's pretty good. The conversation hasn't stopped until halfway through dinner when Penny suddenly stands up.

"Did you two get married!" she cries, dropping her fork with a clatter.

"What? No?" And I'm not quite sure what she's on about until I realise she's pointing to our wedding rings.

"Relax Bunce. We bought these while we were away." Baz says, rolling his eyes.

"Oh." She says, sitting down grabbing my hand to look at the ring more closely. "I thought you'd gone and got married without me." Then she grabs Baz's hand and looks at his ring. "They're lovely."
"No Penny, of course we didn't. And thanks, they are lovely aren't they?" I say, looking down at my ring.

"We are though." Baz says and looks at me.

"Yeah, we've set the date Pen." And then that reminds me, the invitation.

"What? When?" She demands.

I get the invitation from my satchel and I hesitate before I hand it over. "Everything's sorted Pen, except, will you be our, er, person of honour, er, Honour Guard?"

She stares at the envelope until Micah takes it from her and opens it. They read it together and then they both look up. Micah's grinning from ear to ear.

"You guys don't waste any time." He laughs.

"Next month?" Penny says, wide eyed. "But, how can I get everything organised by next month?"

"It's all done Penny." I say. "All you need is a dress or something. Oh, and shoes probably."

"All done? How?" She demands.

"Daphne." Baz says, and he keeps eating.

"But--"

"Relax Pen." Micah says. "Looks like they're all organised."

"We are." I say nodding.

"But--"

"So will you? Penny?" I ask again.

"What?"

"Be our honour guard, Bunce." Baz says, rolling his eyes.

"Oh. Oh, yes of course I will." She says dismissively. "Who else is in the wedding?"

"No one, just you." I tell her.

She pulls her chin back in. "No one?"

"Nope, we're keeping it simple." I shrug.

"And you're fine with this Baz?" She challenges. As if he would want anything different.

"Of course." He says, waving his fork around, he hasn't stopped eating the entire time. He really does enjoy a good steak every now and again, especially when it's as rare as Micah cooked his. "Although I think Mordelia and the twins may decide to be flower girls. I'm not certain."

"You're not certain?" She asks him, shock registering on her face.

"And my brother, Daphne may decide he'll be ring bearer." He shrugs.
"Don't you know?" She asks, incredulous.

"Are you all right with that Snow?" Baz asks me.

"You didn't know?" she asks, her voice getting higher with each syllable.

"Sure." I shrug.

"You're sure?" Penny repeats, higher again.

"Yes of course. It'll all work out on the day Penny." I shrug.

She looks between us again, frowning at me as I go back to my dinner, I don't want the steak to get cold. Finally she shakes her head and lets out a small huff and eventually goes back to her dinner.

And then when we've all finished eating she's up again and is hugging me and then Baz before he manages to push her off him. "Congratulations Simon, Congratulations Baz." She beams. "It really is splendid news!"

"Thanks." I say. And then I remember the stag night. "And you're going to have to keep an eye on Dev and Niall, they think they're organising the stag night."

"What!"

"They insisted." Baz rolls his eyes.

"Can you sort it Penny? Please?" I say. "Just make it look like they're organising it, but you organise it. You've done that with me a load of times."

She glares at me briefly before she snorts. "You know me too well." She mutters, shaking her head.

It's not until after dinner that we get to tell Penny about our visit with Lady Salisbury. I fill her in on everything and then tell her we're going back to have lunch with her next week.

"Wow Simon. I can't believe you actually told her." Penny says shaking her head. "And she took it so well."

"Yeah, well she did cry a bit." I say. "But at least she didn't, like die or anything."

"So are you going to spend more time with her?" She pushes.

"That'll be up to her wont it?" I shrug. "She might change her mind now that she's had time to think about it, and tell me that she doesn't want anything to do with me."

"She's not likely to do that, Snow." Baz says.

"You never know Baz." I say.

"Well I think that took a lot of guts Simon." Micah says. "Whatever happens next week, you've done all you can."

Everyone nods in agreement, and I agree too. I'm not going to let this get to me, I've done everything I can and however she chooses to react in the future is up to her, and I'm okay with that.

Penny and Micah are yawning and cuddling on their couch so we decide it's time to call it a night. We say our good-nights at the door and then Penny's eyes widen.
"What's it like, living together now?" she asks, looking at both of us.

"Brilliant." I say. "Not that living with you wasn't Penny!"

"I know what you mean Simon."

"What's it like living with Micah finally?"

"It's wonderful Simon." She answers smiling. And I can see that she really means it so I'm happy for them both.

"I suppose you two should come over some time for dinner?" I say as we head out the door.

"That would be great!" Micah says enthusiastically. "I don't know how long I can keep up this cooking thing."

"Get Bunce to set up a schedule for you." Baz drawls. "Worked a treat for us."

I elbow Baz as we leave. I can still feel Penny glowering at us as we head down the stairs.

**Penny**

I'm not entirely convinced that everything is arranged for Simon and Baz's wedding even though they both assured me over and over at dinner. Still I insisted that Baz give me Daphne's number so I can talk to her myself. And I have to say it, she sounds very organised, and just to prove it to me they invite me next time they head out to Oxford so I can see for myself.

Daphne is a machine when it comes to arranging a party. She has everything planned. All Simon and Baz have to do is turn up, dressed. Baz has arranged the music but Daphne has arranged everything else. She even suggested what type of dress would suit the wedding.

Simon takes me shopping with him to buy my dress. Daphne suggests the shop so it's lovely of course, and I try on the first one.

"That's great Penny. I'll get it now and we can go eat." Simon says, standing up and heading to the counter.

"Don't you want to see any more?"

"Nope, I like that one."

"But I've only tried on one."

"But you like it, and I like it."

"But Simon, this is your wedding day." I say slowly, to make sure he can understand me. "You need to be sure."

"I am sure.‘ He shrugs. "And you can spell your hair silver with those purple highlights again to match."

"It's more of an iced purple, or pale purple, or light purple, or dark mauve, or maybe light lilac…” I say looking at the dress in the mirror as I touch the fabric it fondly.

"Penny it's purple. Do you like it?"
"It is lovely." I say, turning in the mirror.

"So I'll get it then." Simon says, ready to leave.

"It's not too understated?"

"What do you mean, it looks amazing. And it's very posh."

"It is very elegant." I concede. I don't think I've ever seen a more elegant dress.

"So come on, let's go."

"Are you sure Simon?"

"Yes I'm sure."

By the time I come out of the change room the sales assistant has placed the dress in a large zip up bag and Simon has already paid. He's halfway out the door.

"Good luck on your wedding day." The sales assistant says to Simon.

"Yeah, thanks." He says, grabbing my arm. "Let's eat, I'm starving."

That was way too easy.
Simon

Our wedding planning is already taking too much of my time, between shopping for dresses with Penny and suit fittings with Baz and weekly meetings with Daphne, I feel like that's all I've been doing. As well as finishing up with my psychologist and having lunch with Lady Salisbury.

I told my magickal psychologist what happened with Lady Salisbury and she asked me how I felt about it all. I told her I felt fine and I wasn't going to worry about what happens in the future with her because I'm good with whatever happens. Which is true, I really am okay with whatever happens. After all that shit with the Mage this really isn't much to deal with in the scheme of things. I'm finally in a decent place with all that other rubbish now so I'm not going to let this get to me. I like to focus on the good things that came out of that bad time, like my mother and my magic and Baz, and all the decent people in my life like Penny and Micah and her family and even Baz's family and Agatha and her parents. Even our Normal friends.

We talked some more and eventually she said that I've come a long way and healed considerably and that I'm more balanced than half her friends and nearly all of her family so there's no need to continue with my sessions unless I want to. I decided to stop for a while and catch up with her in a few months to check in.

Lunch with Lady Salisbury went better than expected. Baz and I fronted up to lunch at her place and I half expected her to tell me that she'd made a mistake and she didn't want to see me anymore. But she didn't say that, she was nice and polite and asked lots of questions about my life and my friends and Baz and our upcoming wedding and then I told her about Penny and her wedding and our trip to New York and Paris. And then when we were about to leave she said that she looked forward to our wedding and that she'd love to be part of my life, if I wanted. I said yes of course.

Baz and I have just finished dinner, Baz made roast chicken with Middle Eastern spices and a salad with a really weird name. He's getting quite good at cooking now and he's way better than Penny, not that I'll ever tell her that. I have my feet on the edge of our coffee table and my sketch pad balancing on my knees and I'm finishing a drawing from art class. My teacher has me experimenting with colour, adding highlights here and there over the charcoal. I like it. Baz is sitting next to me reading as usual, he has his shoulder against mine and my tail is wrapped around his wrist. I've nearly finished the drawing so I stop for a rest.

"I feel like this is all we do lately." I say. I don't want to sound like I'm whining but it sort of comes out that way.

"What's this?" Baz asks, lifting his eyes from his book.

"Wedding stuff."

"We've only had one suit fitting, Snow." Baz says. "And Bunce's dress shopping took all of one hour."

"Yeah but--" I put down my sketch pad and charcoal then pick up my wand and spell my hands clean. I really like that spell, it comes in very handy after drawing.

"And Daphne has arranged everything else." he reminds me.
I look sheepishly at Baz. He's right of course, we've hardly had to do anything at all.

He puts down the book he's reading, it's another magic book; Complete Magickal History of Spells or something, and takes my hand.

"We should go out." He says decisively. "You know, I've been waiting for you to take me on another date, to Dover perhaps . . ."

I smile at the memory. "You want to go again?"

"Of course." He says, nudging my shoulder. "It was a pretty good date."

"It was." I agree, leaning my head towards his. He leans his head against mine and we sit silently, reliving the memory of that wonderful night.

"Okay, let's go." I say as I grab his hand and get up.

"Now?" He asks. "It's a fair drive."

"Oh yeah, I forgot. How about tomorrow, after work?"

"All right." Baz says smiling. "It's a date."

And he looks a little snug but I let it go, I can't wait to go again. I suppose I'll need to organise another picnic but I'll sort that with Alex tomorrow at work.

When we go to bed Baz pulls me close to him and kisses me lightly. I think about the last time we went to Dover, how I flew him across the cliffs and out over the ocean and back again. That was the first time Baz had ever flown with me and it was the first time I'd ever seen the ocean. And I remember how at the time all I could think of was that Baz's eyes were the exact colour of the deep water, like dark blue and dark green mixed together. I felt like I was drowning in them. I fall asleep thinking of Baz's eyes as I look forward to our next date.

Baz

I'm a little nervous but I've been planning for this for quite a while so as long as everything goes to plan then this should work.

I've spent the last year searching through every spell book known to the magickal world and I finally found it. I stumbled on it in the most unlikely place, while I spent months scouring through spell book after magical spell book to no avail, I put them down and decided to read Much Ado About Nothing again, for a bit of respite and there it was, right in front of me. I've practised it and I know it works so now there's nothing more to do but wait for the right moment.

I drive us to Dover and Simon flies us up to the cliff tops after a short scenic flight across the water which is spectacular as always. He's staring at me as he flies and I can't look away from him until we're back on the ground. Then Simon lays out the picnic blanket and busies himself with dinner as I pour the drinks.

"What's on the menu tonight?" I ask, handing him a glass.

"Alex made mini shepherds pies today so I grabbed a few of those, oh and there's apple crumble for dessert." His eyes light up as he pulls the crumble out and lays it on the blanket.

Simon points his wand at the pies. "You're getting warmer!" he says, and then hands one to me.
"Mmmm." Simon hums through a mouthful of pie. "These pies are almost as good as your cook's."

"They're pretty good." I nod in agreement. "She definitely has a talent, a few talents actually." I recall our last get together to practice a particularly difficult piece of music, (Difficult for her, easy for me.) where she handed me some brochures on the Royal Academy of Music.

"You'll get in." She said nodding knowingly at me. "If it's what you want."

I didn't say anything, but since Simon first brought it up I have been thinking about it a lot more. I'm still enjoying my studies and I'm still first of course, but I only became interested in law in the first place because I believed I was going to be tried unfairly before the Coven under the Mage's despotic rule. I still believe the world of mages is seriously lacking quality legal representation but the need is no longer as urgent as it once was. Maybe I could do both somehow? I scoff to myself as I shake my head to clear my thoughts. That really does sound ridiculous.

"So are you going to look at getting into that posh music school?" Simon asks, bringing me out of my reverie.

I look up from my dinner. "Alex told you?" And I wonder if Alex told Simon or Simon suggested it to Alex. I wouldn't put it past either of them to scheme together on this.

"Of course she did." He smiles, waving his fork. "I think it's a brilliant idea."

"It's another few years of study, after I finish with law that is."

"So?"

"So, we're getting married, remember?"

"Like I could hardly forget." Simon says, finishing his dinner. "But what's that got to do with anything?"

"One of us needs to get a job eventually." I remind him.

"So I'll get one. I'll be finished studying soon. There's bound to be jobs going in such an important field as mine." He jokes as he fishes around until he finds the cream for the apple crumble. He points his wand at the crumble and casts "You're getting warmer!"

I shake my head at Simon, the eternal optimist. "We'll see." I say. And I leave it at that, I don't want tonight to be about me, I need to stay focused on the task at hand.

Once we finish dessert I stand and pull Simon up on his feet with me and I turn to face him. I don't say anything.

"What?" He asks. I know I'm staring at him but I can't stop. I clear my throat.

"Simon. I have something for you."

"What is it?" He asks, curious. He's looking up at me and I can see the question in his eyes.

I take a deep breath to calm my nerves. My hands are shaking slightly as I pull out my wand.

I stare into Simon's beautiful blue eyes. "I love you Simon, with all of my heart."

"I love you too Baz." he says immediately.
"And this is my official proposal, for the record." I begin.

"But you've already proposed." He says, frowning now.

"Well I have to give you something with this one." I push on.

"And I've already said yes."

"I'm aware of that."

"And we'll be married in a fortnight."

"Yes I'm aware of that too."

"So what's this all about?" He asks again, eyeing my wand.

"I just told you, I have to give you something with this one."

"You're going to give me your wand?" He asks, eyebrows raised, the hint of a smile on his lips.

I'm smiling as I shake my head. "This is important, so I would appreciate it if you would please stop interrupting me."

"Oh okay." He says. "I won't interrupt you then."

"Stop talking."

"Okay."

I point my wand to Simon's chest. "I love you Simon, and I want to marry you, and this is my gift to you." I point my wand at him as I stare into his eyes. He looks a little unsure but he doesn't stop me. "Are you ready?"

"Yes?" He says, frowning a little.

"There was a star danced, and under that I was born!" I say as I push as much magic as I can into the spell. My arm shakes and I can feel my whole body tense as I light a match inside my heart and blow on the tinder. I shudder as my magic is pulled from deep within me and the force of it pulses through me. I can feel my magic rush through me and out of my wand and then I watch it flash as it enters Simon. He stiffens slightly as a bright green aura briefly surrounds him before it shoots straight into the sky.

"What was that?" he asks, looking at me in wonder.

"Look up."

He turns his face up towards the sky then and there, written in the stars is a date. His date. His birthday.

It worked, and I let out a sigh of relief as I look back at Simon and watch as it slowly dawns on him what he's looking at.

"Is that?" He whispers.

"Yes Simon, it's your birth date. Your birthday."
He stares at it for a long time, not moving. His eyes are shining and a tear falls silently as he stares at the date. I take his hand and squeeze it and he squeezes back.

"Baz, how—" He finally manages to say. His voice is thick with emotion and he can't finish his sentence. Instead I pull him down to the blanket and lay us down on our backs so we can stare at the date in the sky, hand in hand.

I'm not sure how long it will stay there but it's been a while and it hasn't started fading yet. I feel a little tired from the amount of magic I used to cast that spell but I watch Simon. His eyes are transfixed on the date, they haven't moved from the sky the entire time. I take out my mobile and take a photo and he looks briefly at the photo before turning back to the sky. It's like he's committing it to memory, the view of the sky or the date or this actual moment, I'm not really sure. We lie in silence.

About an hour passes when the date finally starts to dissipate. It's hardly noticeable at first, Simon wouldn't even have noticed but then it fades more noticeably until it's no longer visible to a human eye. I can still see it for a short time after and then it disappears completely.

He turns to face me and I turn to him and smile. He has tears in his eyes and I wipe them away gently with my thumb.

"Thank you." He whispers as he brings his hand to my cheek and closes his eyes as his forehead meets mine.

"You're welcome." I whisper back and I love him so much in this moment. I'd do anything for him.

We drive home eventually in the early hours of the morning. Simon holds my hand the entire way and when we get to our flat he pulls me to our room and we climb into bed and hold each other as we fall asleep.

Simon

I don't know how Baz did it or found the right spell or whatever but all I know is that he found my birthday. And I'm so fucking blown away by that, that I know my birthday and that he worked out how to find it. I wake up now knowing when I was born and how old I am right now and when my next birthday will be. It's a strange feeling but it's bloody brilliant at the same time.

Baz wakes slowly, he must have used a hell of a lot of magic to pull off that spell because he fell asleep last night almost as soon as we got home. I watch him as he slowly wakes and when his eyes open I smile at him.

"I'm twenty one." I say, grinning.

"You are." He agrees.

"And I'll be twenty two soon." I think I'm grinning even wider now.

"You will." He grins too.

And then I kiss him, Baz, my fiancé, my love. And I'm so happy that I think I might burst any minute now. He kisses me back.

"We have to tell Penny!" I breathe between kisses.

"All right." He murmurs between kisses.
And then something dawns on me so I pull back. He moves forward to kiss me again but I stop him, I have to ask him something. "Baz, was that magic your marriage rite thingo?"

He laughs softly at me. "I don't think thingo is an actual word Simon." And he kisses me again.

"You know what I mean." I say between kisses.

"It was my official proposal. So yes, it is a magickal marriage rite."

"That was brilliant you know! I can't believe I have a birthday! I mean, I've always had a birthday I suppose but I never knew when it was." I'm rambling but I can't help it, I'm just so bloody happy.

"Well now you do." He murmurs, rubbing his nose against mine.

"Yes I do." I say back. And then I kiss the tip of his nose and bring his lips back to mine for another long deep kiss, sliding my hands under his tee shirt at the same time.

-oOo-

"We have to tell Penny." I say again, a bit breathless this time. Baz's hair is all over the place and he's all sweaty and breathing hard and beautiful. I don't know what time it is but I'm starting to get hungry which finally gets me out of bed and into the shower. "And I need breakfast Baz. I'm starving."

"You won't starve Snow." He says, getting out of bed and pulling on a pair of shorts as he heads to the kitchen.

-oOo-

We drive over to Penny's flat and I'm just about to knock on her door when Baz wraps his arms around me and pulls me to him and kisses me passionately. I kiss him back, wrapping my arms around his neck and bring him closer. He pulls away from my lips eventually, and drags his mouth across my jaw and neck and then brings his lips back to mine and I push my fingers through his hair and clench my fists and pull him towards me to deepen our kiss. I need to feel his mouth on mine one more time before we go inside.

"Hello Simon, I thought you moved out?" A voice across the hall says.

I pull back and see Mr Thompson standing in his doorway. "Er, Hi Mr Thompson, yeah I've moved, just visiting Penny today." I can feel my face reddening.

He rolls his eyes at me and shakes his head as he moves to go back inside. "Kids." he mutters as he shuts his door. Baz doesn't even care as usual, he just lifts his chin, probably so he can look down his nose at Mr Thompson.

When we get inside I tell Penny straight away. I'm still holding Baz's hand and we follow Penny into the kitchen as she prepares some tea and I tell her everything.

"I know my birthday Penny! Baz worked out the spell. He did it last night in Dover on the cliffs. It was written in the stars. He did it for our engagement. I'm twenty one. I'll be twenty two soon." I say quickly, and then I run out of things to say so I just stare at her, I think I'm grinning like an idiot.

"Simon slow down." She says, trying to catch up.

"I just wanted to tell you. Look, here's a picture." I hand her Baz's mobile.

Penny looks at the picture of the date written in the stars and then looks at me, beaming. "Great
snakes Simon, this is wonderful." She says, squeezing my arm.

"I know!" I say. I'm grinning from ear to ear.

"Baz, this is seriously extraordinary magic."

"Thanks." He says. And I can see he's trying not to make a big deal about the magic but everyone is very impressed right now.

"Congratulations Simon." Micah says, shaking my hand. "Well done Baz, very impressive, how'd you do it?"

"Shakespeare." He says casually.

We talk as we drink tea and eat their biscuits, and then Penny finally thinks to ask us what we were doing all the way over in Dover.

"That rhymes Pen." I say, I'm practically bouncing off the couch.

She swats my arm. "What were you doing there? In Dover Simon?"

"We were on a date." I say, like it's the most logical thing in the world.

"In Dover?"

"Yes. On the cliff top."

"How? Why?"

"Flew, because it's nice up there."

"Great view." Baz agrees, smiling at me.

"It really is." I agree, smiling back at him.

"You flew?" Penny asks, and she's doing that thing with her chin again – pulling it back in to her neck like a tortoise.

"Of course, how else would we have gotten up there?"

"Hah!" Micah laughs as he shakes his head and he clears up the tea dishes with magic. "I love it! You two sure know how to go all out."

Penny just shakes her head at us.
Simon

Our wedding is tomorrow.

Baz is staying at Oxford tonight, because his parents told him that he should, and Penny insisted that I stay at her flat.

"Why can't we stay at our flat?" I ask Baz as he packs his things.

"Because it's traditional not to see each other the night before the wedding."

"This is one tradition that is stupid, it makes no sense at all."

"You need to pack," he says, ignoring me. "Bunce is expecting you and my parents are expecting me." He's finished packing and he glances over at me. I'm sitting up on our bed with my back propped against the bed head.

"I reckon I could convince you to stay?" I say raising an eyebrow.

Baz snorts out a laugh. "Come on Snow, we need to leave soon." He starts packing my bag for me and I wait until he's finished and dropping my bag next to his at the door before I get up. I walk over to him and wrap my arms around his waist, my tail swats him on the bum.

"It's Simon, and can I convince you to stay?" I murmur in his ear as I pull him close.

"As much as I'd like to Simon, we can't." He says kissing me. His arm is waving around behind him until he finds my tail. He gives it a playful tug. "We have to arrive at our own wedding on time and this is the only way that's likely to take place."

"It's not as if they can start without us." I whisper, placing small light kisses on his neck. Merlin I love his neck, I could kiss his neck all day. Maybe I will one day.

Baz lets out a low moan and I think I've got him but he pulls away. "Simon, we have to go now."

"All right." I huff. "But don't expect to get any sleep tomorrow night. I'm just letting you know right now."

"I'm counting on it." He says, flashing me a cheeky smile as he pulls me in for one last kiss before he lets go and grabs both our bags and drags me out the door.

The last two weeks flew by—ever since Baz re-proposed on the cliffs of Dover and found my birthday. Baz and I were busy finishing assignments and running and I worked a lot and sketched and Baz played football and we picked up our suits and we even survived our stag night.

Dev and Niall and Penny arranged our stag night—which was weird in itself. And I haven't been on many but I think ours was fairly tame, at the start anyway. I think Dev and Niall wanted to go all out but Penny kept them under control. We even played tennis at the club with Dev and Niall during the day before we headed out for the night.

First stop was dinner at Marco's restaurant which Penny must have organised because she knows I would have whined all night if I didn't get to eat first. There was Dev and Niall, Penny and Micah,
Agatha and Josh, who just arrived earlier in the day, Alex and Marco who was working but said he'd join us as soon as he closed the restaurant, Vicki and Kiaan and Zoe and Olivia and Baz and me so it was a bit of a crowd. Dinner was nice and relaxing so I thought it would be as easy going night, nothing like I thought those idiots would organise.

Baz wore the most amazing suit I've ever seen him in, something so over the top flash that only he could get away with. He looked so handsome that I thought about skipping and staying home with him, but he said we couldn't. I wanted to go a little more casual– ready for whatever Dev and Niall has planned for us, but Baz insisted that I wear a suit as well so I wore the one I got last Christmas. Turns out everyone got dressed up, and all the blokes wore suits so I thought maybe we would be going somewhere posh next. That didn't exactly turn out to be the case and I think they all did it to take the piss, because Baz really loves his suits.

Once dinner wound up– a town car turned up and took us all to a very sophisticated looking gin bar where we had to listen to someone waffle on about gin throughout the ages and how to mix gin and I thought I was going to fall asleep before we finally got to taste some. We got to mix some of our own too, which was fun except when the host walked behind us yelling "Don't over tonic!" every time we mixed another one. By the time we finished we'd mixed and tasted so many that no one was very sophisticated anymore.

"I like these hic- Strawberry-Gin Cocktails." Agatha said, leaning heavily on the bar. "Morgana, I think I'm a bit sozzled!"

"Who's Morgana?" Vicki asked, looking around.

"That's what she calls everyone when she's a bit trolleyed." Penny said quickly.

"My favourite is the Gin slush!" Alex chimed in, bouncing around full of energy despite working all day.

"Alabama slammer!" Josh yelled. "I like saying it – Alabama slamma Alabama slamma Alabama slamma . . ." Until Agatha put her hand over his mouth to shut him up. I think he was a bit jet lagged because he'd only had a few and he was already legless.

"Give me a clashic Gin and Tonic any day." Micah slurred against the bar. "Nothing beats a clashic."

"Don't over tonic!" Everyone screamed at him.

"I quite like the French 75." Baz said, still perfectly composed and not out of it at all.

"Champagne and gin?" I snorted. "Of course you would." Posh git that he is.

"This Singapore Sling is lovely." Olivia said. "But I think I might have had enough, I can see two in front of me at the moment." She giggled.

"This one's pretty good." I told anyone who was listening. I think I was a bit tipsy – I'd tried a few different gins by now.

"Whass innit?" Penny asked, leaning heavily on the bar. She was on her third Lavender Lady which tasted like medicine to me.

"No idea, but James Bond drinks it so it must be cool." I shrugged, trying to look cool leaning against the bar.
"You're still not cool Simon." Penny said, shaking her head.

"That still hurts Penny."

She snorted at me and swayed a bit and then grabbed onto Micah for support.

"Who wants another gin and tonic before we move on?" Dev yelled.

"Don't over tonic!" Everyone screamed back at him.

We left the gin bar reluctantly (and a bit wobbly) and we all piled into the town car where Marco popped the champagne and poured everyone a glass. I sat next to Baz and grabbed his hand.

"All right Snow?" He asked, smiling at me.

"So far." I said, leaning on his shoulder. "Looks like nothing outrageous is going to happen?"

"The night is still young, and you don't know Dev and Niall."

The car pulled up outside the nightclub we went to on New Year's Eve.

"Now this I can handle." Baz said as we pile out of the town car and straight into the club. Baz took my hand and nodded at the doorman as we entered past the lines of waiting people.

"Yeah!" Alex said, and she grabbed Vicki and Kiaan and Zoe and hit the dance floor.

"Come on Agatha." Josh yelled as he pulls her to the dance floor. "Better to dance than drink, I think."

"Good idea." Agatha slurred. "Come on Olivia, Penny."

Olivia jumped at the chance to dance, I think she was relieved to get away from Dev and Niall who were hovering around her all night, trying to sound knowledgeable about gin.

"Dance, Snow?" Baz asked, pulling me onto the dance floor.

"Yes, if you call me Simon." I said.

"All right Simon, let's dance Simon." Baz said against my ear as he pulled me close to him.

We left Marco, Dev, Niall and Micah knocking back shots at the bar and talking about Merlin knows what. I hoped that they remembered that Marco is a Normal and they didn't start talking about magic. They were all pretty hammered by that point, so Marco probably wouldn't have remembered what they talked about anyway.

We danced a lot, which helped sober me up a bit, and Penny must have told the DJ that it was our stag night because before we knew it, he announced it over the microphone and everyone cheered. I blushed when he spotlight hit us but Baz wasn't fazed at all, he seemed to enjoy it actually. He pulled me close and kissed me and said he couldn't give a fuck what anyone thought.

By the time the car dropped us back to our flat I thought we'd managed to make it through the entire night unscathed. It wasn't until we opened the door to our flat and stood facing two male strippers that I realised they'd purposely lulled us into a thinking that, and Penny was probably behind all of it.

Her eyes were twinkling mischievously as she pushed us inside and onto the Chesterfield. She turned the music on and hit a switch and some lights started flashing, in our flat, as everyone piled inside to
watch the show. And it was definitely a show. Penny passed around some more champagne for everyone except Baz and me, we were stuck on the couch facing the strippers. Dev and Niall were sniggering a safe distance away, and Vicki and Zoe and Micah were whooping and cheering as the two very fit blokes got their gear off and gyrated in front of us to a very suggestive Nine Inch Nails song. I couldn't stop blushing and I wrapped my tail around Baz and held on tight.

Penny must have cast that soundproofing spell because there's no way the neighbours would have put up with that song blaring out of our flat at two in the morning amidst a bunch of people hooting and yelling.

When the two fit strippers finally left I let out a sigh of relief.

"I'm going to kill them." I said to Baz.

"Best not yet, I have a game with Dev tomorrow." He said laughing softly.

"All right." I said. Then I turned to face Dev and Niall, who were still sniggering over their drinks. "Just so you know, I'm getting the same two blokes for your stag nights." I said nodding to them both.

"Hah!" Micah laughed as Dev and Niall's eyes grew wide and they stopped sniggering.

The party lasted a little while longer, I think it was because everyone was so hammered or maybe it was so everyone could check out our flat. Olivia and Vicki checked out the bathroom, marvelling at the big fancy shower. They decided to see how many people they could fit inside until Dev and Niall joined them and then the girls got out really fast. Alex and Marco wandered around the kitchen and checked out the fancy appliances and then Marco stuck his head in the oven and started telling Agatha and Josh about the technology behind the state of the art heating element. Josh wasn't paying attention, he was playing with the coffee machine and Agatha nodded and swayed while she leaned on the kitchen bench, downing a couple of glasses of water. I don't think she had any idea what he was talking about, and neither did I, I just know it works when I need it to.

It was very late when the party started to wind down and Baz must have had enough because he got up and shooed them all into the town car to go home.

"Get out you lot." He said. "I want to spend some time with my future husband now."
Chapter 51

Baz

I can't believe that I get to marry the love of my life today. Aleister Crowley, I'm marrying Simon Snow!

I never believed for a moment when we were sharing a room at Watford all those years ago—sharing a room with my sworn enemy, that this could ever happen. Not even in my wildest dreams would I have entertained the thought, and my dreams were pretty wild back then. I'm definitely living a charmed life.

I dropped Simon off at Bunces last evening, and then drove to Oxford alone. He didn't want me to go, and anyone would be forgiven for thinking we were parting for a month the way we drew out our goodbye. I ended up walking him up to the flat and kissed him by the door again and again, until Bunce opened the door and dragged him inside.

I had dinner with my family and Fiona last night and then I hunted. My stepmother ran through some final details with me and then she spent some time with Fiona talking her through her role. I could have told her not to waste her time, we all know Fiona would do exactly as she pleases when the time comes.

Father and I sat in the library and talked.

"Your mother would have been proud of you Basil." My father said, brushing down the pleat on his trousers.

Even though I don't believe that would be the case I didn't object. "Thank you Father."

"I'm also very proud of you." He said. "Of everything you've achieved Basil."

I looked up at my father then—he was staring at me with an intensity I've never seen before. We've never spoken like this.

"When you decided to trust Simon and work with him to solve your mother's murder," He went on. "You solved more than your mother's murder Basil, you ended the wars, you saved our family. You saved all of us."

"That was Simon, Father." I reminded him.

"And you Basil, and Penelope Bunce. All of you saved our realm." He insisted, staring at me directly.

I nodded.

"And I am pleased for you Son. Although this is not the path I would have chosen for you, I'm pleased that you've found someone that you want to spend your life with. That's all that your mother and I have ever wanted for you." He finished.

I stared at my father again. This was a side of him I've never seen before. Crowley, does it take me marrying the boy I'm stupidly in love with to get my father to finally speak his true feelings?

"Thank you Father." I said.
I phoned Simon last night before he went to sleep.

"Baz." he breathed. He must have been in bed already. "I miss you."

I smiled at that. "I miss you too Snow."

"Penny made me sit through her entire wedding video tonight, to get me in the mood she said." I could practically hear him rolling his eyes.

"Well, we can repay her kindness with our own video when we get back." Too bad I didn't borrow that glasses cam of Micah's, we could have made a very interesting video. Crowley I really must be disturbed.

"Back from Tuscany?" He breathed.

"Yes." I said, bringing my mind back to the present.

"I can't wait to go."

"Neither can I." I agree.

We're quiet for a minute and I listened to his breathing. I thought he'd fallen asleep.

"Snow?"

"Mmmm?"

"I love you."

"I love you too Baz."

"And I can't wait to marry you."

"Me too."

"See you tomorrow Simon."

"See you tomorrow Baz." He mumbled, and with that I hung up.

**Simon**

"Wake up Penny." I whisper. I hope Micah doesn't mind me sneaking into their room this morning. It's not like I do it often, or at all, but I woke early and couldn't get back to sleep. I need to get her back for her wedding day.

"Grmngf." She mumbles. She's still just as crap in the mornings as ever, married life hasn't changed anything. Micah opens his eyes next to her and stares at me. Without his glasses his eyes look as big as an owl.

"Simon." Micah says quietly.

"Yeah?"

"What are you doing on our bed?"
"Um. Waking Penny?" I say, shaking Penny's shoulder. "Get up Penny, we have a busy schedule today." I shake her shoulder a little harder. Micah laughs at me.

"What?" Penny mumbles from her pillow. She turns to look at me. "Simon what are you doing on my bed?"

"Waking you. Get up sleepy head." I say, touching their new duvet. "This is really soft isn't it?"

"Simon."

"Yes?"

"Get out."

"Okay." I say, getting up off her bed. I know I'm grinning like an idiot. "But here's your schedule." I tell her, holding out the piece of paper towards her. "You have to follow it to the letter."

She takes the piece of paper from me and gropes around for her glasses. Micah is still laughing as he puts on his glasses and begins to read over her shoulder.

"I think you'd better do what he says Pen." Then he looks at his watch. "And you're already five minutes behind."

She throws a pillow at me as I back up towards the door.

"Pancakes will be ready in ten so get up now." I say backing out of their room.

After breakfast we each shower and then we take Penny to her hair appointment. They wash my hair as well, and Micah's for good measure. We have loads of time while they fuss around with Penny's hair, twisting it this way and that and winding flowers that match her dress into it. After that's done we have lunch at a nearby café, and then we drop Penny off to get her makeup done while Micah and I stop for a pint. I pretty much just copied her wedding schedule because I didn't really know what I was doing, and Penny helped me book everything anyway. After all that we finally go back to the flat and get dressed before a town car picks us up.

"You look really nice, Penny." I say as we drive to Oxford. I'm glad Daphne organised this car because I'm way too nervous to drive, and Micah's no help. He doesn't know where he's going yet and he still hasn't worked out how to drive on the left side of the road.

"Thanks Simon, so do you." She says eyeing my suit. "That's a lovely suit. Did Baz pick it?"

"Yeah." I say. I don't say anything else and I think she can see that I'm nervous so she takes my hand and squeezes it. I squeeze back.

Baz really outdid himself this time with our suits. They're the nicest ones I've ever seen, just black but the nicest fabric I've ever felt (Italian, he said) and he decided to go with white shirts and dark ties and pocket squares in a similar shade of Penny's dress. They really do look smart. I don't think I've ever owned a nicer suit, and since Baz and I become boyfriends I own an awful lot of suits.

Daphne meets us when we arrive and guides us into the parlour downstairs. It's been decorated with purple and white flowers that match Penny's flowers. In fact, when I look around the entire house has been decked out with the same flowers. It's a sea of purple and white.

"It's beautiful." Penny says in amazement as she looks around the room.
"Very impressive." Micah nods in agreement.

"And we haven't even been outside yet." She goes on.

Daphne informs us that the guests have started to arrive and assemble outside on the lawns. I haven't seen Baz yet and I'm starting to worry.

"Where's Baz?" I ask her before she leaves.

She smiles at me and pats my arm reassuringly. "He's with his father outside, greeting some of the guests. You'll see him soon."

"Oh okay." I say, pacing the room.

Micah returns then with Agatha and Mr and Mrs Bunce trailing behind him. "I found these guys loitering around outside," He says.

"Agatha!" I yell. It comes out louder than I meant because I'm so nervous.

"Hi Simon." She says, smiling easily at me. "My my, don't you look handsome!" She sounded an awful lot like her mother just then. I wonder if I should tell her.

"Thanks, you look great too." I say instead. Probably best not to mention it.

"Hello Simon." Mr and Mrs Bunce say in unison.

"You do look lovely, very handsome." Mrs Bunce says as she squeezes my arm.

"Thanks. So do you, look lovely I mean." I'm prattling on again because I'm so nervous.

"All set Simon?" Mr Bunce asks.

"Yeah I reckon." I say, and I can hear my voice is a little shaky.

"You got this Simon." Penny says, nudging my arm. I look up at her and she smiles at me and nods encouragingly.

The door opens and we all look up expectantly as Vera enters the room carrying a tray with a bottle of Champagne and some champagne flutes. She places it on the table and pours a glass for everyone, then she hands them around. She gives me a quick smile before she leaves the room.

"Champagne, excellent idea!" Micah says as he raises his glass. "A toast– to Simon on his wedding day."

Everyone toasts and we drink. I drink the whole glass and I'm so nervous that I can't taste anything at all. I wish she brought something a little stronger, or a lot stronger even.

We're just milling around the room and I'm getting more and more agitated until Daphne comes in a little while later and touches my arm. "We're ready for you." She says warmly.

Micah, Agatha and Mr and Mrs Bunce say their goodbyes and leave us then and Penny grabs my arm and leads me out of the room behind Daphne.

"The house looks wonderful." She whispers.

I look around as we walk through the house. The entire house is covered in the same purple and
white flowers, it looks so pretty and I remind myself to thank Daphne later. We make our way through the house and out the back door towards a big white marquee. I look around for Baz and I start to panic when I can't find him but then we turn the corner at the back of the marquee and there he is, standing with his dad and his sisters and brother.

He's watching me as I walk toward him and I can't stop staring at him, he looks beautiful as always but there's something else too, he looks kind of radiant. He's staring at me as his dad shakes his hand and as Daphne kisses his cheek and he's still staring as his dad shakes my hand and Daphne kisses my cheek. He doesn't stop staring until he's next to me and taking my hand.

"All right Snow?" he asks softly.

I can't stop staring at him. "Yeah, you?"

"Fine." He says.

"Are you ready?" he asks, his eyes are on mine and he's staring at me so intensely that I can't look away.

I take a deep breath as I hear the string quartet start playing. My tail wraps itself around our hands.

"Yes." I say, not taking my eyes off him.

And we're just about to start walking when Fiona rushes up.

"Hold on you lot, wait for me." She calls after us, straightening her dress.

We all turn to look at her. She's wearing the exact same dress as Penny, she's holding the same bouquet of flowers and she has the same flowers twisted into her hair. And she has a cigarette dangling between he lips. I step in front of Baz without thinking. Fiona and her bloody cigarettes, it would be just my rotten luck if she set my vampire fiancé alight on our wedding day.

"What are you doing here Fiona?" Baz asks, exasperated.

"If you two lovebirds think I'm going to sit around being Master of Ceremonies you can think again." She notices me in front of Baz so she pulls the cigarette from her lips and drops it to the ground, stomping it out. "I could do that in my fucking sleep. I'm making myself your unofficial honour guard Basil, you need someone standing next to you up there, trust me. And it's the least you can do seeing as you all but forgot to tell me you two were bloody betrothed." And then she looks past us and over to Penny. "Bunce, congratulations, I heard you tied the knot too. What is it with all you young ones, what's the fucking hurry?" She says rolling her eyes.

"Thanks Fiona." Penny says, bemused.

"And you, Chosen One, you scrub up all right. Wonders will never bloody cease eh?" She says, looking me up and down. "If I were twenty years younger you'd be quite a catch, if you didn't bat for the other team that is."

"Um thanks. I think."

Baz rolls his eyes at her and then looks at me. "Simon?" he asks, checking if I'm okay with this. I am. I'm not going to argue with Fiona, and I like the idea of Baz having someone next to him.

I shrug. "Yeah sure."

"Good." Fiona says. "Let's get this show on the road then, there's a G&T over with Paolo with my
"Who's Paolo?" Penny asks, she just can't help herself.

"The bloody barman of course!" she snaps. "I thought you were the smart one Bunce?"

"Fiona!" Baz says, even more exasperated as Penny tries to hold back a laugh.

"Are you going to do something about those?" Penny asks, pointing at her feet.

We all look at her feet, she's still wearing her Doc Martens.

"Oh shit, I forgot." Fiona says. She pulls out her wand and waves it airily, and her shoes change to match Penny's perfectly.

"Can we get a move on now?" Baz says, clearly irritated.

**Baz**

The string quartet plays as Mordelia heads the wedding party into the marquee throwing purple and white rose petals in her wake. My twin sisters skip down the aisle following Mordelia and throwing more petals into the air, more forcefully than necessary and occasionally hitting the guests. I think it may be intentional. My stepmother must have spelled the flower baskets never-ending because they can't possibly hold the amount of petals floating around in front of us. Some get caught in Simon's hair and they make him look even more beautiful, if that's at all possible. My little brother follows his sisters with the rings on a white satin pillow he's been entrusted to carry. He's carrying it with such care and concentration that he obviously doesn't know they've been spelled to stay put.

Bunce follows my little brother and then Fiona saunters down behind her like she owns the place, and then it's our turn. I tug on Simon's hand gently and he looks up at me. I give him a nod as we start our way up the aisle.

Daphne's outdone herself. The marquee, like the house looks absolutely stunning decked out in purple and white flowers. I think she must have used magic, there's no other way to explain the flowers hanging from the ceiling and sidling up the walls. It's a sight to behold.

When we reach the front we're greeted by Miss Possibelf.

"Miss Possibelf!" Simon says, frowning at her. "What are you doing here?"

"Hello Simon, Basil." She says, looking at each of us, her voice is tickling my ears. "I'm your celebrant." She says, answering Simon's question.

"Oh." He says. I let out a soft laugh and squeeze his hand. He was completely disinterested in all of our wedding's finer details so I didn't bother telling him. I thought it would be a nice surprise.

"Miss Possibelf." I nod in greeting.

"It's good to see you two finally worked out your differences. You took longer than I thought." She says knowingly. Simon looks at me and I shrug my shoulders.

"I wish someone had told me a bit sooner." Simon mumbles, and I can't help but let out a soft laugh.

I turn to face Simon fully and take his other hand. He turns to face me. He's piercing me with his beautiful blue eyes and I feel a blush rising in my cheeks.
Miss Possibelf clears her throat prettily as she addresses the crowd. She hardly raises her voice but everyone is silent, completely captivated by her voice.

"Welcome everyone. We have gathered here today to celebrate the coming together of Simon and Basil in marriage, to celebrate with them as they make their commitment to one another that will begin their new life together." she starts.

The crowd is completely captivated by her voice as she continues. "I had the pleasure of teaching these two at Watford and it's wonderful to see my two favourite students here today, ready to commit themselves to each other--"

Bunce huffs loudly behind Simon. Miss Possibelf turns to look at her.

"You were also one of my favourite students, Penelope." She says smiling at Bunce. And then Fiona snorts.

"And you Miss Pitch, although I seem to recall your night time shenanigans did give me and your sister more than a few headaches." She chimes as she gives Fiona a knowing look. A few people in the front rows chuckle, including my father.

"Now, if there are no more interruptions?" She looks pointedly between Bunce and Fiona and they both shake their heads. She settles her eyes back on us.

"Simon and Basil, marriage is perhaps the most challenging adventure in life. It is based on love and patience, dedication and perseverance. I know you two have had your fair share of challenges and adventures and you would not have made it through any of them without your upmost belief in each other, your trust in each other and your love for each other."

We're interrupted by Fiona honking her nose loudly into a handkerchief.

"Can you please keep it down Fiona?" I hiss, rolling my eyes.

"Sorry Basil, it's just so lovely. Go on Miss Possibelf." She waves us away with her handkerchief.

"Simon and Basil." Miss Possibelf continues, ignoring the exchange. "There are no ties in this realm or the next so sweet and tender as those you are about to assume. And there are no vows so beautiful and joyous that you are about to make. You are linking your lives into the closest possible way and your hopes and dreams are being merged into one on this magickal day."

Simon has tears in his eyes now so I squeeze his hands and smile at him. He smiles back at me.

"Still all right Snow?" I ask quietly.

"Yeah." He says in a shaky voice. His eyes never leave mine.

"It's time now to make your vows." Miss Possibelf says. She turns to me. "Basil."

I take a deep breath to steel myself as I look at Simon. He's staring back at me and I can feel the blood rush to my cheeks again.

"Simon." I start. I know I'm blushing and I know he can see it, and he gives me the most beautiful smile I've ever seen and for a moment I lose all train of thought. I take a deep breath and start again.

"Simon." I say again. "There are no words to describe the depth of my love for you. It's because of you that I laugh, I smile and I dare to dream again. I feel alive because of you. You make me a better
person and you mean the world to me, and I love you so much. In the immortal words of Paul Weller: 'You're the best thing that ever happened to me'. So, Mon amour, my love, I promise that I will love and honour and cherish and adore you, and I will never call you Snow again for all eternity."

Simon looks at me questioningly. "Never?" he asks, as if he can't quite believe his luck.

I shake my head. "Never Simon."

"Yes!" He says, grinning.

"I thought you'd be pleased."

He snorts then and shakes his head, still surprised.

"Simon?" Miss Possibelf interrupts.

"Oh, yeah." He says, and then he looks at me and smiles as he lets go of my hand and pushes my hair behind my ear before he retakes my hand in his. He takes a big breath and starts. "Er, Baz, I don't know exactly when I stopped thinking that I hated you and realised that I loved you, but when I finally worked that out everything in my life fell into place. You're the love of my life, you're my favourite person in the entire world and you're the only person I ever want to be with. I can't imagine my life without you. So I promise you that I'll always be with you, by your side and I'll never fly off in anger or in fear or for any other reason because I love you, more than anything and I know that as long as we're together, everything will be all right."

And now I'm grinning a big stupid grin. Simon's vows are the most beautiful words I've ever heard and I'll cherish them forever. Simon grins right back at me.

"Well said gentlemen." Miss Possibelf nods. "The rings please."

Mordelia grasps my brother's hand and pulls him forward towards us. He raises the pillow high above his head and I pick up Simon's ring, he picks up mine.

"Can we go for a ride now Simun?" My little brother asks solemnly as he looks up at Simon, his task complete.

The twins run up to Simon now, hearing their brother. "Yes ride Simon!" They yell. "Ride Simon!" Ride Simon!" They're jumping up and down now at our feet.

Simon looks down at the three of them and smiles. "Er, maybe later fellas, we're kind of in the middle of something here."

I look over at Daphne, she's weeping and holding my father's hand so it doesn't look like she's going to be of any help. Mordelia comes over then and pulls them all away. "Come on you lot." She says. "We'll do that later, let's throw some more petals in the air now." She's sounding more and more like Fiona every day, I must remember to tell Daphne to limit their time together.

"Yay!" They yell in unison as they shove their hands in the baskets and throw more petals into the air.

"The rings." Miss Possibelf continues as if nothing happened. Petals are raining down all around us.

"Simon," I say placing his wedding ring against his fingertip, he has petals in his hair and he looks so fucking adorable that I want to throw him down on the ground and kiss him stupid. Maybe I'll do
that later? Actually I'll definitely be doing that later. I can feel myself blushing again so I shake my head to bring myself back to the present. "I give you this ring as I give you myself, as a sign of my love and commitment to you." And I slide the ring onto his finger.

"Baz," Simon says, looking at me and smiling a little as he places my wedding ring against my finger. "I give you this ring as I give you myself, as a sign of my love and commitment to you." And with that he slides the ring onto my finger.

We're still looking at each other as Miss Possibelf says "Simon and Basil, it give me the utmost pleasure to pronounce you husbands for life."

Simon looks at me questioningly. "Can I kiss you now?" 

"Absolutely." I say. And I let go of Simon's hands and wrap my arms around his waist and pull him towards me. He's smiling widely as he wraps his arms around my neck and I feel his tail wrap around my waist and I kiss him, gently at first and then more deeply, and I don't want to stop kissing him at all so I don't stop for quite a while. It's not until I hear a polite cough from Bunce that I think we might have to stop. I pull away reluctantly.

"All right Basil, plenty of time for that later." Fiona snickers next to me. "And the bar's open."

I ignore her as we turn to face our guests now and I know I'm beaming as they applaud, politely at first and then our friends stand up and hoot and whoop and someone wolf whistles and then the Simon's entire side stands and erupts into cheering and Marco is yelling Bravo! And eventually some of my side do the same, Daphne and Mordelia leading the way.

I turn to Simon and he's grinning from ear to ear and my heart roars in my chest as I think to myself finally we're married! He squeezes my hand and looks sideways at me, one eyebrow raised.

"That was fucking brilliant." He says grinning.

"Yes it was Simon. And that was eloquent as always." I can't stop grinning too.

Simon

Merlin I've never been so relieved in all my life. I mean it was a brilliant wedding, it's me and Baz after all, but I'm glad that it's over with. My heart was pounding the whole time and I don't think I would have even made it down the aisle if I wasn't holding onto Baz's hand. But he held on and didn't let go and every time I looked up at him he was looking at me.

I lean over to Baz and he leans into me and meets me for a quick kiss again. And I want to keep kissing him but Penny gives me a little push.

"Can you two stop snogging for five minutes? The guests are waiting to congratulate you."

"Sorry Penny." I say, grinning again. I can't stop smiling.

Penny pulls me in for a hug. "Congratulations Simon!" she says and then hugs Baz "Congratulations Baz!" He rolls his eyes and gently pushes her off him but I can see he's beaming.

"Congratulations boys." Fiona says, wrapping her arms around our shoulders from behind us. "Good job."

We head down the aisle and our first stop is Baz's parents. Baz's dad shakes both our hands pats Baz on the back and Daphne hugs and kisses us both over and over until Mr Grimm has to peel her off
Baz so we can keep moving. Then Mr and Mrs Bunce are upon us, hugging us and shaking our hands and then Mr and Mrs Wellbelove come up and Baz is nearly decapitated by Mrs Wellbelove’s hat that looks like a giant wedding cake and she says "Don't you both look so handsome." Then Micah barrels over and gives us both hugs before he's pushed aside by Agatha and Joshua. Then Alex pulls us towards her and hugs us both, only to be pushed aside by Marco who kisses my cheeks three times and then Baz's cheeks as well, yelling *complimenti*! at us and shaking our hands wildly and then Olivia gives me a quick hug before she moves aside to let others have a turn. Even Dev and Niall shake my hand after they congratulate Baz.

We make it to the end of the marquee eventually, after a lot of handshakes and hugs and congratulations and we head off for photos. Everyone wanders outside and heads back to the lawns for pre-dinner drinks and hors d'oeuvres. The photos take forever and I managed to snag a few things to eat from the passing waiting staff.

"Are we done yet?" I ask Penny and Baz.

"Nearly." Penny says. "Maybe just a few more over by the house, it looks splendid with all the flowers."

We've had photos with ourselves, Penny and Fiona, Baz's siblings and his parents, the Bunces, the Wellbeloves and even Agatha and Micah so I think we've had enough.

"But it's time to eat and to party." I say. I'm trying not to whine but it sort of sounds like I am.

"Come on Simon." Baz says, "Just a few more near the house, then we can eat I promise."

"All right." I huff as we head over for our last lot of photos.

After we're done with the photos, we head back to the marquee. It's been entirely transformed to a reception setting, with lots round tables and chairs covered in white table cloths and purple and white flowers. It looks absolutely grand, I think as we wait outside to be introduced, which is another wedding tradition apparently. Eventually the soft music stops and Fiona grabs the microphone. She's changed out of her bridesmaid dress into something a lot darker and a lot racier, a lot more 'Fiona'.

"Righto you lot. Put your hands together for the newlyweds Basil and Simon!" She yells into the microphone as we enter the marquee, hand in hand to whooping and cheering and clapping. I see our table of friends making the most racket and I give them a wave.

"All right fellas?" I say, as we walk past.

"Well done Simon, Baz!" Alex yells from the table.

Baz leads us to the front where there's a table set up for the wedding party and Baz's parents. Finally I think, dinner, because I'm starving, but we have to wait until Fiona introduces Penny and Mordelia who walk in together and then the twins and Baz's brother who skip in and wave at everyone like they're in a Royal wedding.

"Righto everyone." Fiona starts again. "The order of this evening is as follows. Dinner first— that one's for Snow, and then we'll knock off those tedious speeches before these lovebirds cut their cake. And then you can get your dancing shoes on because this band is seriously good— well done Basil, oh and dessert will be served later. There will be table service for drinks, and if you want something a little fancier, pay my good friend Paolo a visit at the bar. He'll mix you a splendid gin and tonic or anything else you desire if you ask nice enough. Anyway, first a toast to the newlyweds: To my favourite nephew Tyrannus Basilton Grimm-Pitch and his chosen one, the infamous Simon Snow."
She raises her glass and everyone stands and toasts us. It's pretty cool and Fiona hasn't sworn once.

The reception really is smashing. I have to remember to thank Daphne for arranging everything because there's no way I could have ever organised anything like this. I got my French food and it's bloody brilliant, or maybe I'm just really hungry after everything that went on today. The band's been playing all through and they're very good. Baz picked them and he obviously knows his music because they've been playing a really nice mix of funk and groove that's perfect for eating and mingling.

Baz's dad makes a speech that's really moving, he talks about how Baz's mum would have been really proud of him and how he and Daphne are proud of both of us and generally how proud he is of everything and then he even welcomes me into their family, which is a huge deal in front of all their relatives.

Now it's our turn and Baz and I get up together. We agreed that he would take the lead on our speech because I'm not that great with words. And even though I'm not speaking, I'm still a little nervous, but Baz is absolutely in his element.

"Welcome to all our distinguished guests, family and friends. Thank you all for sharing our special day with us." Baz opens, confident as ever.

"I'd like to start by thanking--"

"We'd like to start." I cut in, I can't help myself.

"Yes, thank you Simon, we'd like to start first and foremost, by thanking my parents for their unconditional love, support and acceptance, throughout my life and especially over the last few years. Thank you Mother, Father, we really do appreciate everything you've done for us."

"And we'd also like to thank my annoyingly cute siblings for their rather entertaining performance today--" he goes on.

"Well done fellas." I say, raising his thumbs at them.

"Yay! That's us!" The twins jump up and down and cheer themselves while Mordy just smiles and nods. Baz's little brother is hiding behind his mum's dress.

"And Daphne." I say, "For organising the best wedding ever. It really is a corker."

"I was getting to that." Baz says, smiling at me. "So yes, thank you Mother for arranging pretty much everything. I think you'll all agree the house and marquee really look magnificent today."

"Everything's been just brilliant Daphne." I throw in.

"Yes it has."

"And then there's Penny." I remind him.

"Yes thank you Simon, We'd also like to thank our honourable honour guard Penelope Bunce, for getting Simon here on time and in tip top condition. Thank you Bunce."

Baz looks over to Fiona then and rolls his eyes. "And I suppose we'd better thank Fiona for officiating today's events, even if she did take it upon herself to join our wedding party."

"And for not cursing anyone." I add.
"Yes I suppose that's something." Baz agrees. "And finally I would like to thank my husband Simon, for making me the happiest man in the realm. You are the only person that I want to spend the rest of my life with, the only person that I cannot live without, so thank you Simon, for marrying me." Baz finishes, smiling at me.

"You're welcome." I say, smiling at him. "Thanks for marrying me Baz."

"You're welcome." Baz says, smiling at me. And then I think it takes him a second to remember we're in the middle of our speech.

"Where was I . . . Yes, I have to finish up here--"

"We have to." I correct.

"Yes, we have to finish up here, because our honour guard is impatient to say a few words against us. So without further ado, and despite my better judgement I'll hand over to Bunce. Although she's rather bias towards my husband so you should disregard anything she chooses to say about me."

Penny snorts at Baz but he ignores her. She gets up and says a few words about us, which is not nearly as embarrassing as it could have been given all the shit she's got on us. She talks about how she and I first became friends and about moving in together and then she goes on about how honest and kind and thoughtful I am and it's getting a little embarrassing, but then she talks about how good Baz and I are together and how good we are for each other and how she's come to care for Baz as well and she's just about to finish when she adds that Baz's family had better do right by me otherwise they'll have her to deal with and she's twisting her ring the entire time.

Fiona cheers loudly at the end of her speech and yells "I'm liking you more and more Bunce, nothing like a wedding speech to throw down the odd threat!" I don't think our Normal friends know quite what to make of either one of them.

We manage to talk with most people and Baz introduces me to his relatives and I don't think I'll ever remember all of their names even though I've seen some of them at Christmas. When we find Lady Salisbury she congratulates us both and tells us we look very handsome. Then she points to the bloke she's brought with her. He's not her date, he's way too young for that. But then she introduces us and I'm completely blown away because it's her son, Lucy's brother.

"That was one hell of a wedding." He says to me after he congratulates us both.

"Thanks." I say, I'm still blown away so I just stare at him. And then we talk about my mum and he tells me how his mum told him everything.

"You look like her, you know." He says. "Lucy."

"Thanks." I say again. "I think you do too, a bit." He has the same colour hair as she did in the photo and his face is similar.

"Yeah that's what everyone used to say."

Lady Salisbury tells us that she's not going to tell everyone about Lucy being my mum and the Mage being my dad. And I'm relieved to be honest, I don't really want the world of mages to know that the Mage was my dad. Maybe I'll be ready to tell everyone one day, but not right now. No one even knows I've got my magic back yet, well no one other than Baz's family, the Bunces and the Wellbeloves that is.

"That's up to you Simon." She said. "When or if you ever decide."
Fiona announces that it's time for our dance and Baz excuses us and pulls me away immediately like he's been waiting for this. He probably has— he's such a romantic git and he loves dancing.

"It's time for our dance Simon." He says so quietly and so lovingly that I just have to kiss him again.

"Lead the way, oh husband of mine." I say smugly as he pulls me to the dance floor.

Penny's been trying to find out our song ever since she overheard us picking songs all those years ago. I've never told her because it's ours, and it's been driving her mental all this time. It's an old one, it was on of Baz's mums favourites, and when he played it to me I thought it was so over the top romantic that there was no way that I'd ever let that be our song. But then we played it a few more times and Baz absolutely insisted that it was perfect and it is really.

But we're not dancing to that one tonight, that one is ours and we don't want to share it with anyone. So instead, we're dancing to that song that Baz quoted from in his vows because we both really like it and it's nice to dance to and the band can play it.

The band starts playing and I can see Penny listening like she's trying to work it out. I feel a little silly at first because everyone is watching us, but then I look at Baz and his eyes are burning with so much love that I forget about everyone else and only see him while we dance our first dance as husbands.

Penny cuts in as soon as the song ends. "Let me have a dance with Simon, Baz. You two can dance all you want later." She says as she pushes Baz off me. He rolls his eyes at her as he finds Daphne and whisks her around the dance floor, showing off their ridiculously good two-step.

"Never knew you two were the sappy romantic love song types." She smirks at me.

"We're not." I shrug. "But we couldn't really have that song that those two strippers danced to the other night."

"Simon!" She cries, turning red as she remembers. Then we both giggle.

"Anyway, that's not our song." I say, a little smug.

"It's not?"

"Nope, that's just one we wanted to dance to today."

"What is your song then?" she asks.

I smile and shake my head and I can see she really wants to know.

"Come on Simon, when are you going to tell me?" She pleads.

"Hmm, how long did it take for you to tell me how you got into Mummer's house?"

She thinks about this and narrows her eyes as she answers. "About seven and a half years." She says warily.

"So ask me again in seven and a half years." I grin.

She wacks my arm. "Simon!"

We finish that dance and we swap partners with Baz so I get to dance with Daphne. She dances on the spot for me and I see Baz whisk Penny away and Penny's crying "Slow down Baz, I can hardly
"Thank you Daphne." I say. "For everything today, and well, everything." She's done so much for us, more than I probably even know, with Baz's dad even. I know my thanks aren't nearly enough but I can't find the words at the moment.

"You're welcome Simon." She says to me smiling. "And welcome to the family, officially that is. Although you've been a part of our family for quite a while now really."

And I can't help grinning at her because that means so much to me, and then I have to look away so I don't start crying.

We're having a drink at the bar with Micah and Josh and Dev and Niall. Penny, Agatha Olivia and Alex are dancing. I think Vicki and Zoe and Kiaan are as well. Mordelia and Pip and the twins are spinning on the dance floor, laughing together and bumping into a few of Baz's relatives as they get faster and faster. I'm holding Baz's hand which I've hardly let go of all night, I don't want to either. We're watching Fiona deep in conversation with the Paolo the barman about how to mix the perfect gin and tonic and she's a little miffed when everyone yells *Don't over tonic!* at her.

My uncle comes over to get himself a drink and Fiona turns to him. "So I know everyone here and I don't know you." She says, looking my new uncle up and down.

"This is my uncle, my mum's brother." I tell her once he introduces himself to her.

"Hmmm . . . Never saw you at Watford. I think I would have remembered you." She says seductively.

"I didn't go there, or definitely would have remembered you." He says to her, smiling and not missing a beat.

"Well I think we'd better start getting to know each other seeing as you're family now." Fiona purrs. Baz rolls his eyes. "Really Fiona? He's only been family for all of five minutes."

"Never too early to get in good with the in-laws." She allures, never taking her eyes off my uncle. Baz snorts, "Why don't you chat him up somewhere else Fiona? Or better still take it to the dance floor." He says dismissively.

Fiona flicks her eyes to Baz and narrows them. "And why don't you stop being a cheeky brat Basilton?"

"That's rich, coming from someone who invited herself into our wedding party." Baz says, indifferently. He's rubbing the back of my hand with his thumb during the whole exchange.

My uncle laughs at them and I decide to pull Baz onto the dance floor, my tail wrapping itself around his waist.

"Mmmm Simon, I like this, you asking me to dance." He says against my ear as we slow dance to the band.

"I love you Baz. I'll dance with you anytime." I tell him. "And I want to get away from Fiona, you shouldn't taunt her like that when she's had a few, she's likely to spell us into the dirt. I don't ever want to go through that again."
"She won't spell you. You're one of us now Simon." He whispers, his lips tickling my ear.

"But she might still spell you."

"And I have you to protect me." He whispers as he holds me tight.

And we dance like that, and when the music picks up and our friends join us on the dance floor we keep dancing like that. And we both notice when Fiona and my uncle hit the dance floor, dancing slow and close.

"Shall we save your uncle?" Baz murmurs into my ear. "It seems a pity to lose him so soon."

"They're only dancing Baz." I chuckle softly. He can be overly dramatic sometimes.

"Fiona doesn't dance, she devours." He says pointedly.

I shake my head and try to stifle a laugh.

It's finally time to leave. We're saying our goodbyes and it takes ages to make our way through the crowds of well-wishers to the town car. Daphne hugs us as we near the car and Baz's dad shakes both our hands, then Daphne hugs us again and Mr Grimm has to peel her off of Baz again. Mr and Mrs Bunce hug us, as do the Wellbeloves. The rest of our friends catch us before we get into the car and shake our hands and wish us a happy honeymoon as we say our goodbyes.

"Hey Basil, watch out for numpties!" Fiona yells from the crowd. Baz sneers at her and rolls his eyes.

Penny and Agatha pull us up next to the car.

"Congratulations Simon, Baz. It was a wonderful wedding." Agatha says. "I'm so happy for you." And I think she might be crying a little.

"Have a wonderful trip boys." Penny says as she hugs me real tight. "Try to see some of Tuscany eh? Don't spend all your time shagging."

"Yeah thanks Penny, no I won't." I say blushing. Even though I reckon that's exactly what I'm going to do on my honeymoon.

"We'll shag as much as we like Bunce, we are married now." Baz says, rather smug but I can see he's radiant as he pulls me into the car. I wave to the sea of people and Baz ignores them all and pulls me close as we drive off.

And as I wave goodbye to Baz's family and the Bunces and the Wellbeloves and Penny and Micah and Agatha and our friends and Lady Salisbury and my uncle– who's standing suspiciously close to Fiona, and the rest of our guests all I can think of is how fucking happy I am. Because Baz was right, (and he usually is) this really is my family. And for once I don't feel alone and I don't even care what happens in the future because as long as I have Baz, my husband, by my side, I know we can face anything. And no matter what happens, we'll carry on together.

-Fin-
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Epilogue

Agatha

Josh and I flew back to California a few days after Simon's wedding. Mother and Father were sad to see us leave but I think they're used to it now, and I told them that they can come and visit any time. I promised that I won't leave it another year before I return, and this time I think I'll keep my promise. I don't feel the need to stay as far away from England as possible anymore, and given that I based my entire reason to leave on Lucy who never even made it out of England, I'm a little more open to the idea or returning someday.

Not too soon though, I do love it in California.

Penny

Micah and I left the wedding after helping mum and Daphne collect and store Simon and Baz's gifts, ready for when they return from their honeymoon. Fiona didn't help us at all, even though she made herself unofficial honour guard. I think she disappeared as soon as the boys did, and I'm pretty sure that Simon's new uncle disappeared at the same time.

Mum spent some time with Lady Salisbury, talking about Lucy and telling her everything she knew about Lucy and the Mage as a couple, I think they were trying to piece together exactly what happened to her. Mum thinks she might have died during or just after having Simon, but I suppose we'll never know for sure.

Pip was happy as anything because she and Mordelia are both at Watford and they really hit it off at the wedding. Baz scoffed when I pointed them out, playing together, and he said that given there are a lot of Bunces there was always a high chance that one of his siblings would cross paths with mine. Then I reminded him that there are just as many in his family as there are in mine so who is he to talk? He ignored me and still wouldn't admit that they're friends.

And Simon, well Simon, I still can't believe it, after everything that he's been through, everything he's survived, he's finally getting everything he's ever really wanted. And this is what he always wanted, a family, even if it is the Grimm-Pitches. He looks so happy today, both he and Baz do, and they're both so ridiculously in love with each other that I can't see that changing any time soon.

At least I won't catch them snogging on my couch anymore. I've well and truly had enough of that.

Baz

Today I got to marry the boy I've been in love with for half of my life and I'm ridiculously over the moon about it. Although he's not a boy anymore, neither of us is now. Despite everything that has happened to him or maybe because of everything, he's become an extraordinary young man. He's just as brave and honest and ridiculously handsome as ever (especially with those wings and that fucking tail) and I'm more in love with him than ever.

I wish our mothers could have been here today, to see how happy we both are. I know Simon
doesn't agree with me but a part of me still believes there's no way my mother would ever have allowed me to go on like this. But I still would have liked her to be here, for both of our mothers to be here, to witness our wedding and to know that we're both going to be all right.

Simon, my enemy, my ally, my boyfriend, my fiancé, my husband. He's my family and my home. He's the only person I've ever wanted and he's everything I ever dreamed of and so much more. My Simon. Sweet, sweet Simon.

Sometimes I still can't believe that me, a vampire and a Grimm-Pitch, could ever have ended up with someone as beautiful, and kind and sweet and honest, as alive as Simon Snow. But I have somehow and I'm so fucking thankful for every moment I have with him that I know I won't take any day I have with him for granted, because ever since Simon Snow first kissed me that night in the forest, I've never felt so alive.

I know I'm living a charmed life, and I know I'm going to die kissing Simon Snow one day, but I also know that won't be for a very, very long time, and we've got a lot of living to do in between.

Simon

As we drive off from our wedding reception I sit back and smile. I loosen my tie and undo the top button of my shirt. I loosen Baz's tie and undo his top button as well, and push a lose lock of his hair behind his ear. His eyes close automatically.

"Did I tell you how handsome you look tonight Baz?" I ask my husband.

He smiles as he leans in to me, whispering against my ear, "I think you did Simon. But you can tell me again if you like."

I nearly lose my words then, but I pull back a little. "You look devilishly handsome tonight Baz." I tell him.

"And you look extraordinarily beautiful tonight Simon." He says as he brushes my cheek with his fingers. He brings his fingers to my lips and gently strokes them until I can't help but moan quietly.

Thank Merlin Daphne booked us a hotel right here in Oxford for our wedding night, because there's no way we would have made it back to London. Baz takes us straight up to our room because he had the foresight to check us in and bring our bags earlier today. As soon as we're inside he pushes me against the door and kisses me like mad. His hands are everywhere and his mouth is on mine and I can't get enough of him. I push his jacket off him and he shrugs out of it without breaking our kiss. He pushes my jacket off as well and we're at each other's tie and buttons, letting our shirts fall to the floor. We leave a trail of clothes as we make our way to the bedroom. I undo his belt and pull it through the belt loops in one swift movement and drop it to the floor, he does the same with mine. I think this might be a really nice room but I can't for the life of me take my eyes off of Baz.

His mouth is on my neck as I undo the button of Baz's trousers but Baz stops me before we enter the bedroom.

"What?" I pant, bringing his mouth back to mine.

"We have to dance to our song Simon." He says between kisses.

"We already did that." I say impatiently.

"No, our real song." He says. He has a small smile on his lips and his eyes are bright and they're so
fucking beautiful.

So we do, Baz finds the song on his playlist (I think he had it ready to go) and we dance right there, shirtless and with our trousers low on our hips. Baz has one hand on my waist and I have one on his shoulder, he takes his other hand in his and we dance.

His grey blue eyes are like the ocean tonight and I can't take my eyes off them. He's looking at me too, his eyes are shining bright and I know the song is playing but I don't really hear it– I don't hear anything but my our breaths intermingling. He leans in towards me and kisses me, and it's soft and slow and takes my breath away.

I think the song has ended now because Baz wraps both arms around me. I wrap my arms around his neck and we stay here, standing near our bedroom door kissing softly. I don't know how long we kiss but we don't stop, neither of us are ready to stop.

Baz pulls back a little and takes my hands in his, a small smile playing on his lips. He pulls me back towards the bed without taking his eyes off mine. When he reaches the bed he stops and releases my hands so he can climb backwards onto it. I follow him, climbing onto the bed until I'm hovering over him, looking into his beautiful ocean eyes. His hair is spread around the pillow and I bury my nose in it and breathe in the beautiful scent of him. I turn slightly to kiss his cheek and then the corner of his mouth and then my mouth is on his again and his tongue is on mine and I taste him again, the sweet, delicious taste of Baz, my husband.

We're kissing again and our hands are exploring each other as if it's our first time all over again.

I remember our first time, when we were all fumbling hands and nervous glances. I'd practically torn off both our clothes in my haste until there was nothing between us. I was pressed against him and I had my hand on his heart and he was smiling at me like I was the bees knees.

"Can I touch you Baz?" I remember asking. I was so fucking nervous that day. But he smiled at me, and I knew he wanted it as much as I did – maybe more. He'd been waiting for a long time.

"Fuck yes, Simon." He hissed. "I'm going to burst into flames if you don't touch me soon!" It's always fire with Baz.

Neither of us is in any hurry tonight – we have a lifetime together after all.

My wings are spread wide as I trace my mouth across his jaw to his neck, and when he moans it causes a stampede in my blood. My heart is beating so fast it feels like it's going to burst right out of my chest tonight. I trail kisses all over his neck and jaw and collarbone and back to his neck where I suck gently on the skin, licking it with my tongue as I go, and he moans so loud that I can't help smiling to myself.

He's getting impatient now, and he flips me onto my back as fast as ever and kisses me hungrily on my mouth, my jaw and then down my neck and chest and down to my stomach, and if this is married life I wonder why we didn't do this years ago.

-oOo-

We wake and I'm ravenous.

"Breakfast Baz." I say in his ear. "I need breakfast." Even though I think it's closer to lunch time, maybe later.

"Mmmm?" He says as he slowly wakes. I don't know how many times we had sex last night but I'm
not ready to stop.

"Breakfast, and then more sex."

That wakes him up and he opens his eyes and looks at me, one eyebrow raised.

"Why did we wait so long to get married Simon?" he asks me.

"I don't know, but we're married now." I say grinning.

He grins back and kisses the tip of my nose. "That we are Simon." He says, pulling me close.

We leave for Tuscany the following day. Baz packs his violin and I pack my sketch pad and charcoals and we both pack our tennis gear because Baz made sure there's a tennis court. There's even a pool so he says he's going to teach me how to swim. After he teaches me how to swim he says he'll teach me how to dance.

"I'll let you teach me how to dance once you learn how to make those sour cherry scones like Watford." I grin at him.

"It's a deal." He says.

We land in Florence and Baz hires a nice Italian car to drive to our villa in the country. But first, Baz shows me the city and takes me to some fancy art gallery where we look at the famous sculptures and paintings by Italian artists, and then he stops at a few shops and buys a shitload of clothes that we really don't need "Because we're in Italy" and then we finally head to the villa.

The villa is fucking brilliant and the food is even better than Paris, and don't even get me started on the coffee. We play tennis every day and Baz teaches me how to swim and he plays his violin and I draw and we make love in the afternoons and dance under the stars, and it's perfect.

We do get to see a bit of Tuscany, but we'll most likely come back next year and maybe even the year after that because we don't see anywhere near as much as we should.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. Kudos to the fabulously clever Rainbow Rowell for creating these amazing characters and their wonderful world. I hope I've treated them well.

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