



half past forever
a. morell

Table of Contents

Love’s Landscapes.....	3
Half Past Forever – Information	5
Half Past Forever	6
Prologue	7
Chapter 1.....	9
Chapter 2.....	12
Chapter 3.....	15
Chapter 4.....	21
Chapter 5.....	28
Chapter 6.....	36
Chapter 7.....	38
Chapter 8.....	42
Author Bio	46

Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

HALF PAST FOREVER

By A. Morell

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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HALF PAST FOREVER

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Photo Description

Two men huddle naked in shadows, one perched on the edge of a seat and the other kneeling between his spread knees. The seated man is faceless in the dark, but his hands lie tenderly on the back of the kneeling man's neck and shoulder.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

This man I'm kneeling before isn't someone I know well, matter of a fact we only met three days ago. Yet he tells me something that's hard for me to believe, he tells me he is immortal. That's not all though he seems to believe I'm the man he has dreamed about for thousands of years, that I'm his mate. The more I think about it the more I believe, well I believe that he isn't exactly human I'm not so sure about the mate part. Still I can't imagine what's supposed to happen now.

Requests: please; have story taken place in current time period 2014, Tell how they met, characters in late twenties early thirties, No instant love but should be a happy ever after.

Sincerely,

Shepley

Story Info

Genre: contemporary supernatural

Tags: immortal, folklore, stripper, soulmates/bonded

Word Count: 15,090

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Prologue

Passing Into Legend

In the time of fallen empires and embattled kings, a son was born of a demon and a mortal woman. Though she loved her beautiful and unholy child, she could not hide the stain of sorcery that had brought him into this world. Cast out by all who laid their eyes upon them, she met her end while he was still a boy.

Alone, discovered and taken by traders, the boy soon revealed that he possessed unnatural strength and was unsusceptible to harm. His training as an invincible warrior began, and soon the boy became a man who bathed in blood.

The wars raged on across the known world for generations, each with its own tales of one great and terrible soldier who could fell entire legions and walk away unscathed like an unstoppable human plague. He held no loyalty, for all men were of no consequence to he who had been made so by their own hands. With nothing of his own left to fight for, he turned his back on mankind and retreated to the great forests of his homeland, and all who dared pass through emerged with nightmares and warnings of the Madman of the Wood.

He knew no longer the measure of days, nor years. Time passed, until one moonless night another of his kind entered the woods, one who would see himself woven into the myths and legends of man. The all-powerful seer and sage, the keeper of knowledge and secrets of the arcane, the son of a devil and a servant of God.

“I have seen your plight, my brother,” he said. “I come to end your madness.”

The half-man half-demon saw the stranger was one of his own. Touched by the last Druid, he learned the truth of his birth and was foretold of a life of solitude and observance until he found that which he sought above all else. But, he was warned, in finding it he would also bring about his own doom.

That night in his dreams he beheld a vision, a man almost bare and bathed in blue light. Every night the silent man came to him, always in the same light and always with the same eyes piercing into him, never reaching for him and never allowing him close, until at last the moon waned and vanished once more.

Every new moon it came—the vision of his destined mate. Through centuries and dynasties and darkness and rebirth it came, as steady as the rise of the sun. A thousand years passed, and the world began to expand. Still he endured, and still he waited for the one that would seek to claim his heart and destroy him.

It's not an impulse that pulls him inside. Still he thinks nothing of it—why should he, when he comes to these kinds of places on his own so often? Man, woman, or more, he takes wherever he knows he can.

But the instant he's through the door he feels it. It's the pulse of the universe aligning every star just so to center around this one moment, around him. It's all, everything he's seen and heard and smelled and tasted before, but never felt.

He feels it now.

The floor circles and sprawls around him, wide and deep and drenched in the blue that haunts his dreams. He understands now what it was, what it's been all this time. A stage rises in front of him. He feels the music beating in his bones and rooting his feet to the ground.

He's lived forever, and only now does he feel the clock begin to tick.

Chapter 1

First Sight

The paltry smattering of people gathered at the tables in front of the stage was just as small as Callum had feared. Just another hazard of working in one of the older clubs on the last edge of Soho. He sighed.

“Let’s go, Diego, you’re on in two.”

His eyes rolled heavenward. He hated his stage name. The closest he came to Spain was having a grandmother born in Catalonia and raised in Ireland, whom he hadn’t spoken to in over a decade. Aside from that there was nothing Spanish about him, and yet the man in charge seemed to think dark hair and darker eyeliner was enough to pass him off into his loathsome stereotype.

He came away from the curtain and started after the stage manager. “Malcolm, I’ve been doing these pissant weeknight shifts for a month now, when will you put me on Saturdays?”

The wiry ginger guffawed and shook his head in disbelief, adjusting his glasses. “When you have a chance of pulling in as much as Hawk or Christian. You might want to settle in, love. Face it—you’re past your prime.”

Callum seethed but didn’t have time to get into it with his boss now, only just managing to hold back the string of invectives he wanted to hurl after Malcolm. Right now he had to make do with what he had, and looking enraged onstage never helped anyone get better tips.

“Fucking twenty-nine is not past my prime,” he muttered. He huffed and quietly asked the universe for patience as the maracas at the start of his cue music sounded, and he did his best to tune out his ridiculous introduction.

“...so get your maracas rocking for our own local Latin loverboy, Diego!”

The curtain flew back to the rowdy catcalls of the daytime drinkers who had time to waste away weeknights in strip clubs, and for those three and a half heart pumping minutes Callum was gone.

Blue eyes lined in black pierced through the stage lights to gauge the slow-growing crowd, searching for those who might shell out for a private dance once he got down to the floor. Most were balancing bills and beers in their hands, some more precariously than others as they followed his gyrating and

flexing as the light played along the sheen of oil on his muscles. Honestly they all looked the same to him at this point. It was the size of the note he was concerned about.

Every motion of his routine was just muscle memory by now, and as it neared the end he caught sight of a dark figure at the back of the room and right in the middle of the floor. Callum couldn't make out his features from here but he could tell he was staring, and he thought it odd the way he didn't move at all.

It wouldn't be Monday without a creep hanging around, he supposed, and he finished his dance by tossing his tearaway shorts into the crowd. God, those things were awful. He had never expected to be back in them four nights a week, but then he'd never expected that the budget crisis for social workers would result in him losing his job, either. Life was just full of surprises.

A few more groups of people had wandered inside by the time Callum made it down to the floor and his mood improved marginally. Pasting on a flirtatious smile, he headed for the tables to go make some new friends, scouting for the bigger spenders—and then stopped short.

The man doing his best statue impression was right in front of him. He was tall, with light eyes and fair hair that glowed in the blue phosphorescence of the club lights, and a dark coat that hung at a perfectly tailored endpoint at the thigh. He was still here, still staring, still as a ghost. Callum half expected him to disappear if he blinked—he almost wished he would, then maybe those eyes wouldn't be lancing right through him.

He couldn't tell if it was a small eternity or the skip of a heartbeat before the silent man turned on his heel and walked away, vanishing through the doors as another small crowd of people came in.

“Creepy,” a voice said in Callum's ear, making him jolt. It was Jordan, one of the drink servers, a waifish man who looked bored even when he was happy.

“Don't do that,” Callum said, grabbing a drink from Jordan's tray.

“You'll owe me for that one,” Jordan drawled, but he was looking at the doors the strange man had disappeared through. “You know him?”

“No.” Callum paused with the drink at his lips. Did he know him from somewhere? The man hadn't looked familiar, but he had almost looked upset. Callum hoped to God he wasn't some old teacher of his—or worse, someone he'd met in the field.

He drained the glass in one go, setting down the empty and taking up a fresh one. "Put it on my tab," he said before Jordan could complain, leaving him to pout and get back to work.

Aside from one patron getting too handsy and being tossed out by security, the rest of the night passed uneventfully. The cash wasn't bad for a Monday. A few more nights like this and he might be able to wrangle that Saturday shift after all.

He bid his coworkers goodnight and let one of the bouncers walk him to his car, sending him off with a pat on the shoulder. It was a nice touch and quite the upgrade compared to how it had been when he had been stripping his way through school, and that was less than ten years ago.

Callum paused, lips pressed thin as he had to shove Malcolm's earlier words back out of his brain. He was not *old*. He bet half those younger gits Malcolm favoured would kill to have his core strength and flexibility. Little brats.

"Do you make it a habit to hang around dimly lit parking lots by yourself at one in the morning?"

Callum whirled around and felt his heart stop, his hand flying to the can of pepper spray attached to his key ring when he froze. It was him.

"You're the only one who's lain in wait for me so far," he said after forcing his heart back down his throat and yanking his guard back up. He pulled out his phone, ready to dial inside the club for Big Mike.

"You don't need to call your friend back," the man said, drawing Callum's accusatory gaze back up.

"I'll do worse than that if you don't get going." His hand tightened on the pepper spray.

The man's eyes gleamed oddly in the sharp light from the neon signs. "I am going. You ought to do the same."

Callum stared right back, determined not to be taken lightly. The stalemate seemed likely to last forever when the man shifted and turned abruptly, just as he had in the club.

"You have no idea how long I've lain in wait for you," the stranger spoke to the darkness, letting the words carry behind him. Callum felt them trickle down his spine, but the man never turned back and soon disappeared into the shadows. Callum couldn't get into the car fast enough.

Chapter 2

Challenge

Callum stared into his cereal and wondered why he felt vaguely hungover. Two drinks over the span of one night was hardly enough to do him in, but he had spent most of the night struggling to stay asleep and not think of the strange man's parting words to him.

He looked at the clock. He had errands to run before heading out for work—or he could go back to bed.

Bed, he decided without even finishing the question. He dumped the last of his soggy breakfast and went to fall joyously back between the sheets.

He felt better when he awoke and decided to keep this luxurious feeling going with a long hot shower and eggs with toast, and by treating himself to a coffee from the bean house down the street from the club.

“What're you so happy about?” Jordan said when he walked in.

Callum gave him an odd look. “Who says I'm happy?”

“The first time you walk in here with a smile on your face I'm gonna notice,” Jordan said, giving Callum a once-over and a knowing smile. “You finally get laid?”

Callum scowled. “Like I'd tell you if I did. And what d'you mean, 'finally'?”

“Darling, we all know those pastures have seen greener days. We're all pulling for you.”

“Go pull yourself, you wanker.” Callum gave him the two-fingered salute and hurried to the dressing area backstage, brow still furrowed. So much for his good mood. And of course Jordan just had to bring that up.

He set his coffee and bag down in front of the long mirrored counter with a sigh. It wasn't Jordan's fault that he didn't know it was a sore subject with him—well, he probably knew that now. But he definitely didn't need to know it wasn't the sex Callum was missing so much as the roof over his head when his supposed-boyfriend but really roommate-with-benefits had kicked him out, probably for one of those “greener pastures.” Social work was barely enough to

cover the rent on a place of his own in this part of London, and then that had been taken away from him too.

Callum caught his reflection in the mirror, back to his now typical surly self. Coming back to dancing had enabled him to get his own small space in nearby Battersea, but this was all getting very old, very fast. Was there even a point anymore when he was supposed to be working to help other people, not just to survive?

Disgusted at where his thoughts were heading, he grabbed his coffee and downed nearly all of it before tossing it into the rubbish bin. One day he might stop fighting, give up clawing his way through life. But not today. Maybe things were shit right now, but they had been shittier, too.

Resolved not to give in to self-pity, he threw himself into work and hit his stride right around midnight, after his second performance of the evening. The crowd seemed more eager than usual, and he took that energy and made it his own.

It was then, as he sauntered around the floor looking for his next special patron, that he spotted the familiar figure in black by the bar, drink in hand and close enough for Callum to see his gaze locked on his every move.

Callum narrowed his eyes. Perhaps it was the electric vibe in the air or his determination not to be conquered tonight, but rather than fear or anger, he felt rebellion burning brightly in his chest as he stared back.

If the stranger was someone he couldn't remember from his past, he would rub the man's face in the truth. And if he was just some creepy stalker, Callum would show him exactly what it was he wouldn't be having.

He followed the fistful of twenty-pound notes waving him over, sending a look of challenge to the man by the bar as he slid amiably into the patron's lap. He didn't like getting too touchy with any customer, but he had a point to make and felt a bit drunk from the heady power he knew he could hold over these people. He was grinding into the man's lap while his group of whooping friends egged him on, smirking when he felt the telltale hardness beneath his ass and turning to look back over at the bar.

The man's eyes blazed with heat so intense Callum felt himself flushing, and for that brief second he couldn't look away, thrown by the pure passion and lust burning there. It wasn't the grotesque lechery or disgust he was expecting, and it made him feel as though he was the only other person in the room.

His customer's hands quickly brought him crashing to reality, and he gave him a coy look as he brushed sweaty palms from his hips.

"Don't be a naughty boy, or you won't get to see me anymore," he admonished, affecting a throaty tone that he despised but that worked on everyone.

"Sorry," the man said with a grin, resting his hands on his thighs to frame the obvious bulge in his pants. "I'll give you double if you help me with this though."

"Sorry, love." Callum offered no excuses as he pulled away, smiling as he wrapped his fingers around the last bill in the man's hands. "But come see me again soon."

He walked away to the sounds of groans and protests and fought the urge to roll his eyes. He looked back at the bar—the man was gone, as was the high he'd been riding all night.

He couldn't explain it, not even to himself. He had no reason to feel annoyed, or like the customer he had consciously decided to work into a frenzy had taken something away from him. But why the hell did that freak keep vanishing like that? And why couldn't he get those eyes out of his head?

The end of the night took an eternity to come. He had made a lot of good money, so much that on his way out Malcolm stopped him to tell him to take Thursday off so he could work his first Friday night. It was all good news, but all Callum could think of was what might be waiting for him out in the parking lot.

He had Big Mike walk him out uneventfully and sent him on his way as he had the previous night, lingering outside his car and wondering what the hell was wrong with him. He couldn't seem to help waiting, even turning subtly to peer into the darkness for signs of movement. But he was alone.

Eventually he saw Big Mike heading back out with another dancer, and he huffed as he got into the car. Was it a death wish, or was he just stupid?

Neither, he decided, starting the engine and gripping the wheel. He had questions, dammit, and he had every right to the answers.

Chapter 3

Brush With Fate

The obnoxious buzzing of his alarm dragged Callum rudely from a heavy and exhausted slumber. He gave the clock a slap to shut it up and glared at the red analog digits. No skipping out on errands today.

Spurred on by the thought of what would be his sixth egg-and-toast meal in a row, he sat up with a groan and tossed the warm covers away before they could trap him for another hour like they had yesterday. Maybe he'd go out for breakfast.

A quick shower and twenty minutes later he was out the door.

The fresh sun of mid-spring had deigned to make an appearance today, and Callum felt himself enjoying it through his sunglasses. He took a coffee and a bacon sandwich to go, indulging as he opted for a walk to the grocery store. Even his cynical heart could be warmed by the sight of a blue sky and window boxes full of tiny flowers that stretched open for the light.

He grabbed a small trolley when he got to the store, hooking his sunglasses into the front of his shirt as he blinked quickly to adjust to the change of light. Not the type to concern himself with shopping lists, he headed down to one end of the store to start making his way up and down every aisle. Produce seemed as good a place as any to begin.

He rounded the corner and stood to one side to take in his options. Bananas were on sale, as always, but he was sick of bananas. Maybe he ought to have gone to the back end of this aisle first, with all the lettuces...

He blinked. What had he just seen over there, heading for the breads? He had to start going to bed earlier, because he was clearly imagining things—

No, no. He wasn't imagining that. It was definitely *him*.

Questions raged in his mind, but he hurried to push his trolley behind the tall display of bananas and peered out from behind it. What the hell was Mr. Tall, Fair and Creepy doing here? Though he supposed it was a good sign that he could appear out in daylight without turning to ashes.

He waited until the familiar form in the black jacket—did he own only one?—vanished round the bread display and into the next aisle before he slowly emerged from his hiding spot. Did the man actually know he was here, or was

this just an insane coincidence? He did live less than four miles from work, so it wasn't entirely impossible for the man to be shopping like a normal person might if he happened to live nearby.

A shudder went up Callum's spine. He didn't want to think about how close the man might live to him, unknowingly or otherwise.

But he felt a small spike of panic now that he couldn't see the man at all. It was like knowing there was a giant wasp in the room but not being able to see where it had gone. Without a second thought he was powering through the produce, tossing a few things into his trolley as he passed to avoid rousing suspicion as he followed after the mystery man.

He stopped short in the next aisle, already spotting him. He fumbled for his sunglasses, grateful for their wide frames that might hopefully work to help conceal his face. Taking a breath to calm his pounding heart, he kept his distance and watched.

The man was browsing jams and jellies. Callum couldn't say he saw a sinister affectation to his movements, but that didn't mean it wasn't there. He watched through narrowed eyes as the man picked out a jam and added it to his basket, and followed him around the next bend.

Three more aisles and several hasty additions to his trolley basket later, Callum was forced to admit to himself that the man was doing nothing except apparently restocking his kitchen like everyone else. He didn't even seem aware Callum was there. It should have been a relief—it was, really—but it still bothered him seeing the man here, so close to home. He wondered what might happen if he took his turn to confront the man with the piercing eyes. He could still see them even now...

By the time he shook himself out of his thoughts, the man was gone again. Just as well, Callum supposed. Out of sight, out of mind. And he really needed him out of his mind.

"Pardon me," someone said beside him, and he realized he was blocking the toilet paper.

"Sorry," he said, turning quickly to get out of the way and freezing when he saw who it was. And yet it was hard to feel entirely surprised.

"Quite all right." The man half-smiled at him in a way that set him to frowning. No more skulking and skirting, Callum decided. He took off his sunglasses.

“You and I need to talk.”

The man didn't seem moved by the reveal. He looked evenly at Callum. Green, he noted. His eyes were green.

“Do we?”

“Yes,” Callum said, feeling his ire flare back up. “You've been following me.”

The man raised an eyebrow. “That's interesting. I could've sworn you were the one following me around here.”

Callum glowered to hide his embarrassment. “So you did know I was here.”

“Not especially,” the man said with a shrug. “I just saw you looking surly over here. Can I get at the toilet paper, please?”

Callum huffed but stepped very slightly aside to let the man at his paper products. “You can stop playing innocent. You've been hanging around the club the last two nights, you expect me to believe this is just a happy coincidence?”

The man set his toilet paper neatly in his basket. “No.” He smiled wryly. “Maybe fate?”

“Don't make me vomit.” Callum wondered if this man was for real, or if maybe this was all part of one of those hidden camera shows. He prayed for the latter. “Why do you keep showing up wherever I am? Do I even know you?”

The man looked at him, and it was there again—that distant, penetrating, unfathomable expression that seemed to see past everything. Every shield, every pretence, every outward display was shaken before those eyes.

“Do you feel like you should?” the man said.

For a split second, Callum felt the truth ready to fall from his lips, and he barely caught it in time. He was not spilling one word about the way this man gripped his psyche even when he was gone, not when that was probably just what he wanted to hear.

“Do you need some help?”

The man gestured to Callum's near empty trolley. The abrupt change of subject threw him, and he had the distinct impression that the man had gotten the answer he'd wanted anyway. It pissed him off.

“All I need is for you to stop following me around,” Callum snapped, bumping his trolley against the man’s leg. It would be the only warning he’d get.

The man’s free hand rested gently on the front of the trolley. Suddenly it wouldn’t move.

“I can’t do that,” he said softly.

Callum tried not to focus on the stuttering of his heartbeat as he fought back panic. How strong was this guy? “It’s easy,” he said, pushing past the tremor in his voice. “If you see me, just turn around and go the other way.”

The man’s gaze never wavered. It was disarming from this close up. “I’ve been doing that.”

Callum refused to admit the man had a point. “Stop coming round the club.”

Something in the man’s eyes changed then, like he was battling something within himself. Callum wasn’t sure he wanted to know what that was. “I will,” the man said, his voice still gentle. “If that’s truly what you wish.”

It is. The words lodged in Callum’s throat and refused to emerge. He tried to force them out, but remained steadfastly silent even as anger made him run hot.

He wanted to know who this man was. No, he needed to know. He was already losing sleep over this; if he went the rest of his life not knowing he might truly go mad. More worrying, though, was the fact that despite his brain doing all it could to warn him away, despite the very real sense of danger clinging to the man and even despite his own fears, Callum’s fight or flight instinct was utterly shut down around him. Was it a mental block? Some kind of trick? Brazen stupidity?

The man’s hand slipped away from the trolley. There wasn’t triumph in his eyes as Callum expected, only something like understanding.

“I’m glad,” he said, taking a step backward. “It’s taken me a long time to find you.”

The kindness left Callum rubbing at the goosebumps on his arms. “I wasn’t lost,” he said tersely.

“To me you were.” The man’s gaze was soft and lonely for a moment and he made to leave.

“Wait,” Callum heard himself saying. He cursed mentally when the man stopped and half turned to look at him. “What’s your name?” Why was it such an embarrassing question?

The corner of the man’s lips curved upwards. “Levin,” he said, and he turned to go on his way.

“Hey!” Callum hurried indignantly after the man—Levin. “Don’t you want to know my name?”

Levin had his hand in his pocket and an amused smile on his face. “I already do. Diego, right?”

Callum felt what was becoming his customary angry flush around this man return. “Of course that’s not my name,” he said through gritted teeth. “Who would perform with their real name? And do you think a real Diego could bring himself to dress up like that?”

Levin shrugged, seeming awfully comfortable to be walking with Callum already. “People do all sorts of things.”

“Well I don’t do that,” Callum said. “And my name’s Callum. Don’t bloody call me Diego, my idiot of a stage manager came up with that.”

“Callum,” Levin repeated. He paused and glanced into Callum’s trolley. “Well, Callum, are you actually going to do any shopping while you’re here?”

With a start Callum realized he’d lost track of how long he had spent tailing the other man, but a quick check for the time had him breathing a sigh of relief.

“Yeah,” he said, aiming himself back toward the produce section and latching onto Levin’s hand basket. “And if you’re going to be a stalker, you might as well be a useful one. Come reach things for me.”

It was disturbingly easy to drag the taller man around as he sped through the aisles again, and Levin was bizarrely complacent in allowing it. Callum wondered if this was what it felt like to keep a beast on a leash.

As he was comparing costs between two brands of biscuits, he suddenly became aware of a lot of eyes aimed his way. He raised his gaze cautiously and found a good half dozen people staring—not at him, but at the man behind him. He looked up at Levin, who didn’t look any different than he had before, and unconsciously sidled a bit closer.

“Why is everyone gawping at you?” he whispered, a bit freaked out.

Levin rolled his shoulders a bit and cleared his throat, seeming to shake something off. "Are they?"

Callum frowned up at the other man, but when he looked again only two of the shoppers still had their gazes trained his way. He definitely hadn't imagined that. "Do you just bring weirdness and oddity wherever you go?"

Levin smiled. "I like to think I attract it. You're still here, after all."

Unamused, Callum tossed the winning biscuits in amongst his other groceries. "I think you're done helping now."

"If you insist." Levin's smile widened just enough to irritate Callum, and he bowed his head faintly and headed for the registers.

No promises or other words of parting were made, but Callum knew they were unnecessary. He would be seeing Levin again.

He grabbed some gum as he checked out and realized only after swiping his card that he still had to walk back home. With a jug of milk, a dozen containers of cheap yogurt, and about ten pounds of fresh meat and produce among everything else.

"Fuck," he said under his breath when he reached the halfway point, wincing at the bite of the shopping bags in his palms. Maybe he should have made Levin stick around a bit longer after all.

Chapter 4

Circumventing

He had to give himself a quick rinse at the kitchen sink after putting the groceries away, but still managed to toss in two loads of laundry and have a quick bite to eat before heading back out for work.

He got to the club early, unable to ease the subtle urgency that kept him wound up just below the surface. None of the other dancers were around yet. He stared at himself in the mirror and pulled out his makeup and tools.

If he was extra meticulous with the lines and shadows around his eyes, he didn't question it. Nor did he question his sudden compulsion to fuss over the pattern of his five o'clock shadow, to dab on just a touch of his favourite scent, or to make sure his lips were softened to irresistible perfection. But as he slipped into his best fitting cobalt blue briefs, even he didn't believe it was just to encourage extra tips.

The urgency mellowed to a low burn of anticipation, as night fell and ushered in those eager to take whatever it would offer. He didn't think of Levin, only saw him in his mind. The music started. Callum couldn't decide if it had come too soon or too late.

He stepped out onto the stage, one of three dancers for the opening performance. He could imagine Levin's eyes on him—could practically feel them—but refused to look for him. All the same, the other people in the room became an afterthought, and he danced knowing Levin was watching.

As soon as he was on the floor, the familiar dark figure emerged from a shadowy corner of the club. Callum lifted his chin defiantly.

"You're going to have to pay for my time here," he said. He watched as Levin slipped his hand out of his pocket and offered up a hundred-pound note between two fingers.

"What'll this get me?" Levin said smoothly.

"The same as everyone else," Callum said, snatching the note before the other man could take it back. "A private dance."

Levin didn't seem perturbed. "How private?" He was grinning again.

Callum's brow furrowed but he was determined to get the better of the other man this time. He gestured to one of the open tables arcing around the stage. "Take your pick."

If Levin had a comeback, he kept it to himself as he led the way to a free table near the back, away from the rowdier guests. All of a sudden, Callum's stomach clenched into knots. He had the freedom to deny any customer he wanted; why had he just agreed to this, exactly?

Levin sat down and smiled softly up at him. The knowing look in his eyes should have bothered Callum, but the hints of desire behind it gave him power and settled his nerves. This was why, he remembered.

Slowly, he let the beat of the music drive his body into motion, sliding sensuously closer to the other man. His hands slid over his own bare skin to tease himself and to guide Levin's gaze, showing him everything he had to admire.

Levin seemed willing to follow his lead, and Callum grew bolder. Leaning in too close, he rested his hands on Levin's thighs for balance. They were strong and warm to the touch, and it was all too easy to roll his body forward to straddle them.

A few inches of body heat were all that separated them. Callum could see fire in Levin's eyes and he felt the faint kiss of the other man's breath on his face. He had to go that one step too far. He made sure Levin was looking at him as he gave another roll of his hips and pressed their groins together.

The soft exhale of shock was enough to know that Levin was the one at his mercy now. The hardness growing against Callum was just icing on the cake. A reckless notion crossed his mind then, that he wouldn't mind if it stayed this way. Rationality returned quickly to chase the fleeting thought away, and he let his fingertips brush Levin's rough stubbly cheek as he slid off his lap.

Victory was his—then Levin broke the rules, his strong fingers catching hold of Callum's hand before it was out of reach. Callum could only think of the way those very fingers had so effortlessly drawn him to a halt in the store earlier today, though Levin's grip was gentle. He turned to admonish the man, but the need to ask the question that had been burning in his mind all day finally overtook him.

"What are you?" he murmured.

If anything in the world could shake Levin, this apparently wasn't it. On the contrary, he looked to have been expecting it. "You really want to know?"

Callum nodded.

Levin dug into his pocket and slipped another hundred into Callum's captive hand. "Just come sit with me then."

Callum hesitated, but knew he was willing to listen even without the money. Taking it just meant he wouldn't get in trouble with the boss. He joined Levin at the table and sat quietly while the man ordered himself a drink.

Once the server was gone, Levin leaned in slightly to keep his voice for Callum's ears only. "Are you familiar with the stories of people—husbands, housewives, the occasional priest—who, rather than take responsibility for their infidelities, opt to blame a supernatural force they claim led them astray?"

Callum blinked hard. This didn't bode well. "You mean like... 'the devil made me do it' kind of people? Or witches?"

"Kind of," Levin said. "You're on the right track. 'Demon' might be a better word, specifically the kind dealing in carnal desires and temptation."

Callum couldn't help the way his gaze flicked up to Levin's forehead at the mention of demons. Of course there were no horns that he could see, and he frowned as he processed Levin's words. "What, like a succubus? And why has this suddenly turned into twenty questions?"

A faint smile curved Levin's lips. "Those are the females."

Callum stared hard at the man beside him, trying to gauge how likely it was he was pulling his leg. "You're an incubus."

"Half, actually."

"Right. Half sex demon." It was official. This guy was definitely insane.

Levin's smile never faltered. "You don't believe me?"

"Oh, I believe you're something all right." Nothing good for him, that was for sure. Maybe Levin was just a really strong madman—one who happened to like following him around. Great.

"I can offer you proof if you'd like," Levin said.

"What are you going to do, have sex in front of me? I hate to tell you this, but we, er, *humans* do that plenty."

"Indeed you do," Levin said with that flicker of amusement and heat in his eyes. "I've always enjoyed that aspect of humanity. But I did have something else in mind."

“Like?”

At that moment Jordan came over with a tray full of drinks. He winked at Callum and then sidled up to Levin. “Hey there, gorgeous, I’ve got a whisky on the rocks with your name all over it.”

“Watch,” Levin whispered. He didn’t move as Jordan leaned over to set down his drink. In fact nothing changed at all about him, but all of a sudden Jordan turned to look at Levin with wide eyes and parted lips. Everything about his body language screamed instantaneous interest in Levin, which was all wrong. Callum knew Jordan was happily devoted to the man he’d been with for seven years and never let his flirting at work go too far. As Jordan’s tray of drinks began to slip from his hand and he looked about to climb into Levin’s lap, Levin reached out to keep it balanced before it could fall.

“I think that table behind you is waiting for you,” he said kindly.

Jordan’s eyes were still wide, but whatever spell he’d been under was clearly broken and he fumbled a bit as he straightened and took several steps backward. “Er, yes... just—just flag me down if you need anything else.” He sent Callum one last look of discomfort and hurried off. Callum whirled on Levin.

“What the hell was that? Did you make him do that? You bastard, he’s got a bloody boyfriend—”

“You believe me now then?”

Callum’s protests died on his lips. It was absurd, but what choice did he have but to believe at least some of what Levin had told him? If it had been anyone but Jordan he could have maintained his doubts, but Jordan was the most monogamous serial flirter he’d ever met.

“You still didn’t have to do that to him,” he seethed.

“I’m sorry if he’s your friend,” Levin said. “But I did stop him before he did anything.”

“What was it, then? You just look at people and they want to jump on your dick?”

“It’s seduction,” Levin said as though he were commenting on the weather. “There are a few things dear old dad passed down to me, and that would be one of them. I can’t participate in sex dreams the way he could, but I can give them to people if I want.” He smiled again, and maybe it was because of what Callum had just seen him do, but it was more disarming than usual.

It was hard to process. He barely understood what an incubus was, let alone how one could be half. Mostly though Callum was stuck trying to imagine what had made Levin, whatever he was, come from out of nowhere and threaten to turn his world upside down. “Why are you here?” he said after a lengthy pause.

“Is this really the place to start getting existential?”

Callum tried for a scowl but was still too shaken. “What do you want with me? Why are you suddenly here all the time—why are you everywhere I go?”

For the first time Callum actually saw what looked like a flash of uncertainty on Levin’s face as he turned away. He was almost afraid of what the other man might have to say, and it took some time in coming.

“...If you saw the same man in your dreams every new moon for the past thirteen-some-odd-centuries, and then finally saw him in the flesh, wouldn’t you chase after him just a little bit?” Levin still wasn’t looking at him. He knocked back his drink and let out a quiet breath, contemplating his empty glass. “Wouldn’t you want to find out anything you could about the one you were supposedly fated to be with?”

There was a sudden ringing in Callum’s ears, but he had no chance to even begin trying to comprehend Levin’s words, as the DJ’s voice boomed through the club and announced him as the next dancer. He had two minutes to get back into his costume and stage ready.

Levin looked at him again, nodding faintly for him to go. Callum wanted and intended to, but remained frozen because he could at last read that unfathomable depth in Levin’s eyes. It wasn’t danger or mystery or even lust—it was an endless and unimaginable desolation.

Callum had no choice but to go, and by the time he made it onstage Levin was gone, his table taken over by a group of unruly college boys.

He passed the rest of the night in a quiet daze, and despite doing rather well in his takings, his mind was consumed by Levin. He didn’t know what to feel about the things he had seen and heard tonight. They were obviously crazy—*he* was obviously crazy to even consider believing them, but there were some things he just couldn’t deny. Now it became a question of which was crazier, believing a fantastical truth or ignoring its undeniable proof?

It was impossible to avoid catching his own gaze in the mirror as he slowly took off his makeup, and the distress on his face gave him pause. It wasn’t a

new sensation where Levin was concerned, but what disturbed him this time was that it wasn't worry for himself he felt but rather a sort of grief for the other man.

He couldn't let himself believe that Levin had really been alive for more than a thousand years. It was just incomprehensible. And yet the mere glimpse of the isolation and sorrow in Levin's eyes was enough for a hundred lifetimes, and Callum couldn't get the image out of his head. What had they seen to reflect such anguish?

He was usually the first one out at the end of a shift, but tonight he was so distracted one of the doormen actually had to come tell him to get a move on. He hurried to finish getting dressed and dumped everything back into his bag before trotting to the entrance, waving off the offers to see him to his car this time.

He watched as the club doors were locked and the last of his co-workers scattered, and he waited even after they were gone. Five minutes passed, then ten, and he finally leaned back against the wall.

"Are you waiting to get robbed?" The clipped question came from the dark.

"Depends," Callum said, trying to spot him. "Are you planning on robbing me?"

Levin emerged from the recessed entryway of the dry cleaners next to the club, his arms folded across his chest. "Why do you insist on tempting fate?"

"It's not my fault this is the only way I can actually reach you." Levin's casual mention of fate had Callum's stomach clenching, but he ignored it valiantly. "You could carry a phone like a normal person."

"I do," Levin said, pulling one out of his pocket.

"Well obviously I don't have your number," Callum said shortly. "I just learned your name today."

"Does that mean you want to talk?"

Callum faltered. It was hard letting his guard down enough to be so honest, but at the same time he couldn't just brush Levin off as he had before. His instincts had tried to warn him away from his last lover and he hadn't listened. He wanted to trust them again, even if what they were telling him to do right now was stupid.

"Yeah," he said at last, "but not here. Take me to your place."

It was Levin's turn to be taken aback, one heavy eyebrow arching slowly. "Self-preservation really isn't your strong suit."

"You've had plenty of opportunity to kill me or worse and you haven't yet," Callum said, only grasping the truth of this fact as he spoke. It did make him feel more confident in his decision though. "Do you want to get to know me better or not?"

Levin seemed at a loss for words, grasping until he managed to settle on one. "Yes."

"Then let's get going, it's late and I'm hungry. How close are you to here?"

"I... not too far," Levin said, still looking a bit dumbstruck. "I usually walk though."

"I'll drive then," Callum said. "Come on."

Without looking back or waiting to see if Levin would follow, Callum pushed away from the wall and began striding to his car. A few seconds later he heard the other set of footsteps behind him and felt pleasantly vindicated.

Chapter 5

Unbound

Callum was no stranger to awkward car rides. Even so, he thought he would have taken the one post-coming-out to his very Catholic parents again over this one right now. At least he had been able to run away from the former.

The man beside him was quiet aside from giving him directions, and it was barely ten minutes in when Levin told him to pull up. They were in the heart of Kensington, and Levin's building took up half a block on its own. Callum only realized he was staring when he felt Levin touch his arm.

"Come on, it's cold and we've got to go up to the top."

Of course he had the penthouse. "You've been walking all this way from the club each night?"

"It's not that far."

Callum certainly wouldn't go traipsing around at two in the morning for three and a half miles each night, but he said nothing more to argue as they entered the quiet building.

The lobby's inoffensive shades of cream and grey were bathed in criminally tasteful lighting provided by seamless wall sconces, and even the silent stature of the bamboo plants in their nondescript corners were in perfect symmetry. Callum was glad to escape into the elevator, which was just as modern but so much less oppressive for its size. Sterile places like this made him itchy.

They reached the top level in silence, Callum too preoccupied with clearing his mind of such cultivated perfection to bother talking. He couldn't imagine what to expect when Levin opened the door to his penthouse for him, and he couldn't stop his eyes from widening as he stepped numbly inside.

He had seen luxury before—in magazines and movies. As someone constantly scraping and clawing to keep his head above water, he refused to be impressed by money. And if Levin's penthouse had looked like it had sprung right from the pages of a real estate listing, that would have been easy. But while the interior was spacious and had all the trappings of modernity, it was filled with the opulence of plush furniture, fine rugs, and rich woods. The television wasn't even bigger than what anyone else might have at home if they invested a few hundred pounds. It felt real, lived in, and strangely inviting. At

that point Callum became aware that he had been moving along on his own to take in more, and he was already at the sparkling Parisian-styled kitchen.

“Want something to drink?” Levin offered, moving past Callum and pulling open the fridge. There were bar stools along one side of the marble-topped island and Callum slid onto one, unable to keep his head from swivelling and craning. It seemed like the more he looked the more there was to see, from the proudly displayed and obviously well-used copper-bottomed pots hanging on the wall, to the recessed shelves showcasing what looked like treasures from around the world.

He heard Levin clear his throat softly and returned his unblinking gaze to the other man. He had quite forgotten the question in the wake of his own. “What on earth do you do for a living?”

Levin stared at him and then snorted, cracking open a sparkling water and pouring himself a glass. “Technically, I’m an investment manager. Does that mean you’re not thirsty?”

Callum waved a hand at the bottle in Levin’s hand. “That stuff’s fine. What’s technical about it? ‘Technically’ incubuses don’t really have jobs?”

Levin poured some of the fizzy water into a second glass and slid it over to Callum. “Technically, I just manage my own investments. I can’t speak for them all, but we half-incubuses still need to put food on the table.”

“You’ve a lot more than just food on this table,” Callum muttered into his glass before taking a sip.

“I’ve got more rainy days to save up for than most.”

It was a fair point and Callum had no retort, so he continued to sip his water as he eyed Levin over the rim of his glass. There was that thousand-or-more-years-old thing again. The longer he stared at Levin, the more questions came rushing into his mind.

“Levin—is that your real name?”

Levin blinked. “As far as I know, though the spelling’s changed a bit. Keeping with the times and all.”

That was something, at least. Callum straightened on his stool. “Well if you’re really an incubus—”

“Half-incubus.”

“Whichever.” Callum waved his hand. “You have all these weird powers, right? Why haven’t you used them on me the way you did on Jordan then, especially if…”

“If you’re supposed to be my mate forever?” Levin provided the words Callum couldn’t bring himself to say. He nodded.

Levin let out a breath and went to put the water back in the fridge. “First of all, I’d like to make one thing clear, and that’s that I don’t typically use my ‘powers’ on unwilling participants. I made an exception tonight to show you I’m not full of shit, and I never intended to let it go further than it did.”

The relief hit Callum harder than he expected, and he ran a hand through his hair to try and redirect attention from the feelings that were probably written all over his face.

“They don’t work on you anyway.”

Callum stilled and looked up. “What?”

“I said they don’t work on you.”

“I bloody heard you. I meant, what do you mean? How do you even know that?”

Levin came hesitantly back from the fridge looking a shade guilty. “I, um, I was just curious. I tried them out on you in the store.”

Callum was about to demand more clarification when he bristled, suddenly remembering the glazed faces of the shoppers at the end of their little interlude at the grocery store. His mouth fell open. “You—that was—what the fuck!”

“Hang on, hear me out!” Levin leaned back from the counter that separated them, hands up in surrender. “Please. I’d just been trying to give you those dreams ever since that first night, but you never seemed affected. I just did it to see if that was true for everything. I’m sorry.”

Callum glowered across the span of cold marble, arms folded as he thought of the best way to verbally mince the other man.

“Truthfully, I didn’t want to use them on you at all,” Levin went on, perhaps spurred by the stony silence. He sighed. “I don’t want to take the reins for Fate, Callum. If we are somehow destined for one another, she shouldn’t need my help.”

If Callum had had the proper time to really think about all this, he knew he would feel the same way. He detested being forced or coerced into anything.

He just wasn't sure if he liked or loathed that he and Levin were agreed on that count.

“Why did you try giving me weird dreams, then?” he said.

Levin fumbled for words. “I... it was the moment I saw you. After waiting so long to stumble upon you by accident, all I could think was that I wanted to try giving you even the smallest taste of the torment I've been through—always seeing you in my dreams and never being able to get any closer.” Pale green eyes locked onto his, and Callum felt his heart thud in his chest. “I would still like to get into your dreams—just the old fashioned way for once.”

Levin downed the rest of his water and slid the glass out of the way before making his way slowly around to where Callum sat, pinned in place by those eyes. He couldn't possibly tell Levin about his sleepless nights, especially not now when he knew no incubus sorcery was to blame for them. But he couldn't deny that he was sorely tempted by Levin to test those old fashioned powers of seduction, and he didn't move away when Levin stopped in front of him and brushed warm fingertips over his arm.

“I thought you brought me here to get to know me,” Callum said, his voice involuntarily hushed.

Apparently encouraged by his lack of resistance, Levin let his hand move to graze Callum's cheek, never looking away. “That's not what you want right now though, is it.” It wasn't even a question, and he was right, damn him. “I'm happy with that too.”

Callum didn't know where his voice had gone, but it wasn't anywhere near him now. His pulse quickened as Levin leaned in, and he let his eyes shut softly as he felt the faintest brush of the other man's lips on his cheek.

“Will you let me have a bit of you?” He felt Levin's words against his skin more than he heard them, and he had to force his head back a little to clear it enough to think.

He wanted Levin. He wanted to ride his dick into next week right now if he were perfectly honest, and it was about time he was. But Levin had a lot more trust to earn.

“I'll try you on,” he said at last. “But the moment I don't like something, I'm out the door.”

If he'd expected Levin to be at all put off by that, he was dead wrong. A grin broke out across the other man's face and he reached out to cup Callum's

cheek. "I'd better do my best to please you, then." Without another word he guided Callum's lips to his, and Callum allowed it.

Something about the contrast between supple lips and the scrape of stubble dragged Callum under quickly, and he clung to Levin like his mouth was air. It annoyed him to no end that for whatever reason Levin didn't need his stupid powers to get his motor running, and the thought prompted him to kiss him a bit harder as though it were somehow a punishment. He felt Levin's warm hands smoothing over his sides and sneaking up under his shirt to press against bare skin, and retaliated by fisting both hands in the other man's hair. One of Levin's hands slid back out and further down until it cupped him through his pants, and it was fine until Levin began to work his hot palm over him, squeezing and teasing until Callum had to pull back gasping.

Without warning, his feet were off the ground, and Levin's arm was tight around his waist until he felt the soft cushions of the couch beneath him as he was laid down gently. It shouldn't have made his belly tighten with want, but it did, and it was all he could do to nip at Levin's lips until they moved to trail down his neck and chest. He felt deft hands at his belt and zipper, and then the cool air of the apartment hit his straining cock as his pants were tugged down his hips. Before he could utter a sound, Levin had him in his mouth.

It was a struggle to hold back, and Callum had to throw his arms up behind him to grip the armrest of the couch until his fingers cramped. Maybe it had been too long of a dry spell for him, but Levin's mouth seemed made for pleasure—it could have been, for all Callum knew. It worked him into a hot, damp, sticky mess, swallowing around him gloriously as one hand teased his balls while the other pinned his hip down. Callum couldn't remember ever falling apart so completely so quickly, and it was lucky Levin seemed to be able to sense his impending orgasm, because he was so beyond words he couldn't warn him off. Even so, Levin didn't shy away. He stroked Callum hard and fast, sucking mercilessly at the soft, wet head until Callum's back arched off the couch and he came in Levin's waiting mouth.

His aim must have been impeccable, because by the time Callum had come down enough to use his brain again, Levin was neatly licking his lips, not a spare drop of anything anywhere.

"You've had a lot of practice with this," Callum said, still panting softly.

Levin's eyes caught his and the look of unapologetic pleasure in them made Callum's dick throb. "Well I have been around awhile."

If this was what over a millennium of experience could be like, Callum had to wonder what else Levin might be impeccable at. But then Levin's hand was on him again, only to tuck him back into his pants. Callum frowned. "Is that all you're going to do?"

He saw Levin smile as the other man rested a cheek against his thigh. "Do you want more?"

Yes I fucking do. Callum had to bite back the words and the urge to demand it. "Yes."

Levin's smile grew too knowing, but Callum was horny enough to let it slide this time. He let Levin take him by the hand to help him onto his feet, leading him to the master bedroom. Callum was sure it was lovely and breathtaking but didn't give a damn about the details now.

Levin was gratingly calm and collected despite Callum already having come undone. He was struck suddenly with the need to see Levin lose that tight control he had on himself, to see if he couldn't draw out the so-called sex demon in him. He turned to face Levin, letting go of his hand and grabbing the front of the man's shirt to steal the breath from his lungs in a searing kiss. Maybe he didn't have lifetimes of experience to draw from, but he knew how to get a man's attention. He gave Levin no room to breathe as he sucked and bit at his lips, pressing flush against him and rolling their hips together to feel the hardness encased by Levin's trousers.

Finally Levin yanked himself back, mouth bruised red and panting. "What was that for?"

Callum didn't know if that meant Levin had been intending to be slow and gentle, but if he had he was definitely changing his mind now. Callum smirked. "Just some insurance that you'll come at me hard."

Light flashed in Levin's eyes. "If you want me that hard I can leave you simpering."

It was just what Callum wanted, and he took hard hold of Levin's jaw to get into his face. "Prove it."

He couldn't say who moved first, but it didn't matter. He was kissing Levin when he could reach the other man's lips in between rough passes of hands over flesh that moved frantically to get under hindering clothes. He got Levin's shirt off first and drank in the sight of him, wanting to grab fistfuls of him and sink his teeth into his muscular body. In his distraction he heard his shirt

ripping along the collar but couldn't spare it the slightest thought, instead pulling away to rid himself of every last scrap of fabric. He felt like a man possessed as he pushed Levin's pants down and shoved him to sit on the edge of the bed, sinking to his knees on the floor.

He didn't understand it. He'd meant to drive Levin into a fever of need, and now here he was running his hands and mouth down Levin's intoxicating body and kneeling before him, needing to taste more. His blood was pounding and making his head spin and his cock ache again. He rested his head on Levin's powerful thigh and resisted the urge to squeeze himself when he felt tender hands on his shoulder. They began running through his hair, and he lifted his gaze to meet green eyes that seared.

"I could return the favour," Callum said, not sure why he felt the need to explain himself to the other man.

Levin's smile brought to mind a wolf about to take down a mighty meal, but he leaned down to kiss Callum with such slow passion it left him trembling with arousal. He pulled Callum to his feet. "I want you on your hands *and* your knees."

The low growl beneath those words echoed in Callum's head as he let Levin pull him close for more, stumbling into the other man's lap. He held on for dear life, but now he could feel the hard strength of Levin's dick against his own, and he moaned quietly as he imagined how it would feel inside him.

The sound seemed to be the last straw for Levin's control, and he wound his arms around Callum's waist to lift him as he got to his feet. He spun quickly and tossed Callum onto the bedspread, which felt softer than silk against his naked body. Levin was gone for a moment, and when he returned he was wearing a condom and coating his fingers with clear lube and making sure Callum was watching.

Callum didn't have a chance to so much as prop himself up on his elbows before Levin was bending his knees and spreading them, his fingers smearing lube all over Callum's hole and pressing inside to stretch the tight ring of heat. They worked him quickly, maybe even too quickly, but Callum was already tossing his head back and biting his lip in anticipation of more and he didn't care. He made no protests as Levin flipped him over onto his stomach and clamped his hands on Callum's hips, pushing his way inside him in one thick and jarring slide.

It felt like too much and yet not enough when it was all Callum could do to keep his head down and his hands digging desperately at the sheets, pushing

back against every thrust. Every slap of flesh against flesh made him need it more, faster and harder and deeper. His back arched until it was almost painful to take Levin's dick as deep as he could, but he felt more alive than he had in months, maybe years. Panted moans and hissed curses escaped him as he felt the coil of tension building again, and then Levin slowed his pace.

He barely got a pleading whimper out before Levin buried himself as deep as he could go, reaching around his front to press a hand to the base of Callum's throat to lift him until he was pressed flush to Levin's chest. Callum felt teeth sinking into his shoulder and cried out, trapped tormentingly on the edge.

"Do you want more?" It was a demand this time.

"Yes," Callum rasped. He needed nothing else. "Y-yes..."

Seemingly satisfied, Levin released him and pushed him head first back down to the mattress to fuck him in tight and punishing snaps of his hips. It took only a touch of Levin's hand wrapping around his cock for Callum to explode, muffling his scream in the lush bedspread. He felt Levin pull out of his constricted body, reluctant to admit he missed the feeling of fullness already.

He couldn't move and panted shallowly, feeling lightheaded and like he'd just had a full body shock when he heard Levin grunt behind him and felt his warm, sticky release shooting all over his back. For some reason he felt a bit proud—he'd gotten an incubus off.

Levin rolled him onto his back, apparently unconcerned with keeping his bedclothes clean. He hovered over Callum until their eyes met, sliding his palm absently over Callum's stomach.

"I'm going to leave you a complete mess," he said.

Callum smiled sleepily. "Can't be worse than the one I am already." He reached for Levin when the other man pressed close again. He was ready for more.

Chapter 6

Day Vision

Callum stirred with the heavy limbs of a perfect slumber. The light was too bright to be of the morning and the bed was empty but for himself. He could hear quiet movements outside the room, probably in the kitchen, and felt content.

He finally rose and made it to the window to take in the spectacular view, mulling over the fact that only a few miles and the Thames had been separating the two of them these past months. As though on cue, that was when Levin came back into the room, filling it with the scent of coffee. He had obviously already showered but didn't seem to mind Callum's debauched state as he kissed him good morning and handed him one of the cups, joining him at the window.

"You seem to have slept well," Levin said.

"Yeah..."

So many questions ran through Callum's mind he couldn't focus on the sprawl of buildings or the river with Levin beside him. The silence stretched as his mind raced with curiosity—did Levin eat normal human food? Did he sleep like normal people did? Did anything weird happen to him during the full moon? Just how immortal was he?—but there was only one big question the others were circling around. It wasn't about whether or not he could believe that Levin was what he said anymore. That was no longer an issue.

He didn't realize he'd been staring until Levin caught him. "What?"

"Nothing," he said, fiddling with his cup. "Just..."

"Hm?" Levin prodded as he sipped his coffee.

Callum huffed softly. "Just—we're not 'mated' now that we've, well... mated, are we?" He felt his cheeks warming and refused to acknowledge it.

But rather than poke fun at his embarrassment, Levin smiled and shook his head. "No. You'd have to give me your heart for that to happen."

Callum raised an eyebrow. "Not literally, I hope."

Levin frowned. "That is an old wives' tale. And a great misinterpretation of lore."

“It was a joke, don’t get all huffy on me.”

As Callum ignored the hypocrisy of his own words to taste his coffee—which was exquisite, unsurprisingly—he felt the stirrings of regret for Levin. Even after two years with his last lover he’d never quite fully come to trust him, and in the end that had been the catalyst of their messy undoing.

“It won’t come easily,” he said softly, almost to himself.

He felt Levin’s fingers playing with the hairs at the back of his neck before the other man stepped away with his empty cup. “Nothing worth having ever does.”

Chapter 7

Two Sided

It wasn't hard to decide that he wanted to see more of Levin, and it didn't take long for him to find out the answers to the questions that were nagging at him. Levin ate like anyone else might, though perhaps rather healthier; he was a light sleeper and only needed five or six hours a night; and the only weird tie he had to the moon was to dream of Callum whenever there wasn't one, and he didn't expect to have that problem anymore.

The questions about his immortality were trickier to navigate, and details of his past were slow in coming. Callum didn't mind that however, since he had his own demons to deal with, his present company excluded.

They saw each other every day. For someone addicted to having his own space, Callum wasn't used to wanting it to be this way. But Levin seemed to know just when to show up, when to pull back, when to leave him wanting more. The bastard. Some days Callum only saw him from onstage, and sometimes for just one dance. Those days drove him mad. The first time he actually dreamed about Levin was after one such night, and it made him angry enough to drive over to Levin's place at eight in the morning to slap him awake and ride him until he could barely walk. Then he made him pay for lunch.

It was after reading off Levin's credit card number to the delivery boy that his eyes lingered over the name in raised block letters. He had long since learned Levin's surname but had never seen it spelled.

"What kind of name is Thais, anyway?" he said absently after hanging up the phone, tossing Levin's card back at him and flopping against the pillows. God, he'd never tire of this heavenly bed.

"An old one. It was my mother's."

Callum grew quiet. He had asked casually about Levin's family before—obviously he'd had a family at some point if he was half human—but Levin had always brushed the subject aside. Until now.

He wet his lips a bit nervously, not wanting to say anything to discourage Levin from talking. "You're named after your mother?" His voice sounded too light even to his own ears.

But Levin shook his head as he slipped his card back into his wallet and settled back down, the sheets pooled carelessly in his lap. "I was named after a saint. My father had no surname, so they used Thaisson. They thought it would help our family settle peacefully in a village—any village—but none would have us. At best they assumed I was the bastard of the man and his mistress, at worst word seemed to follow that my father wasn't of this world. We weren't welcome anywhere."

Callum felt like he had ice in his stomach. He knew Levin's parents weren't around and hadn't been for a very long time, and he hesitated to ask his next question. His voice could barely go beyond a whisper. "What happened to them?"

The distance of lifetimes came back into Levin's eyes and he stared straight ahead, perhaps back through countless years. "I was just a boy when the men of the village came for us, I don't remember more than a flash here and there. I was told much later what happened that night. My father sacrificed himself to get us out. He didn't know that my mother's life force was tied to his. They both died that night."

Callum couldn't imagine what he might possibly say to make this better. Even if a thousand years or so had passed since then, it couldn't be an easy event to bring up, and an "I'm sorry" would never cut it.

"What do you mean, their life forces were tied together?" It wasn't much of a deflection, but it was all he had.

Levin's gaze became less inward, and he shifted a bit to look up at the high ceiling. "Apparently when an incubus becomes mated to a mortal, their life forces become one. No one's really sure what that means—there's not really anyone to ask. But the best guess is that the immortality and the mortality combine somehow, making for a very long life that can be taken just like anyone else's. They share it though. So if one dies, so will the other. That much I know for certain."

Callum gravitated naturally to rest against Levin's chest, poking absently at it as had become a habit. He wanted to ask if that was what would happen if the two of them were mated, but Levin had already made it clear he had no definitive answers about it. He frowned softly as he thought on that. "If there's no one around to ask, who told you all this, then? I mean, you said you found out later, and your parents weren't... sorry."

He felt Levin's arm come comfortably around his shoulders. "Don't worry about it. It's a valid question. In all my life I've only met one other halfie, and

he tracked me down for his own reasons. Whether it was because he had foreseen himself doing it, or if he actually did feel sorry for the state I'd fallen into, I'll never know. But he set me right somehow, and he told me my own past and then my future. He was the one who gave me that dream."

It almost felt like he was hearing a fable. For all Callum knew, he was. "Who was he?"

Levin shrugged. "He has lots of names—happens when you live for so long and can't be killed so easily. Some people think he's still alive, actually. I think you lot call him Merlin mostly."

Disbelief cut sharply like a record scratch in Callum's brain. *Merlin?! He couldn't even think past the name, and he tilted his head to look frankly at Levin.*

"...I'm just going to stop asking you about these things."

Levin's laugh was quick and earnest. "Somehow I doubt that."

He was right of course, the tosser. Callum had to know more about him, and after that initial breakthrough he couldn't go a day without asking questions. It started innocuously for the most part, pointing to or picking up a trinket or piece of decor in Levin's apartment and asking what it was. Calling the collection of things there antiques was barely scratching the surface; Callum imagined any museum curator would get a hard-on just getting a glimpse of the stuff Levin had picked up over the years.

Levin's early life was still an uncomfortable subject, and Callum had the impression he was the first person to actually hear it from Levin's mouth. The time when he had no family, his name had been written Levan, and he had been a great and feared warrior passed from master to master. It was hard to imagine the gentle and considerate man he now knew Levin to be as such a fearsome entity. The more he learned of it, all he wanted was to pull Levin back from that place in his past, to make his eyes light up as he recalled the wondrous things he had witnessed through history all over the continent instead. Some nights he drifted off to sleep with the low timbre of Levin's voice in his ear, filling his mind with images of the old world growing up around him.

It all made his own battle scars seem so faint in comparison. He knew it wasn't about who had it worse or suffered more, but Levin's unwilling endurance put his own struggles into perspective. And yet, while anyone else would have to call his life boring after hearing Levin's, somehow Levin was always interested. Callum didn't think he'd ever met anyone so engaged and

non-judgemental in hearing about his past mistakes and hopes for the future—he hadn't even shared the latter with anyone before. It was far too personal, far too close to his hurt to ever say aloud.

A home for displaced youth, like he had been. It was such a pipe dream.

"I think it's a great idea," Levin said, while Callum felt the tips of his ears burning. "Was that why you went into social work?"

Callum nodded, then sighed. Six months ago, he'd at least been vaguely on the right track toward his goal. How far he was from it now...

Levin's hand was warm on his cheek and drew his gaze back to him. "You'll get there someday."

Callum cocked an eyebrow. "If I recall, you're not the half-incubus who could see the future."

Levin smiled as he leaned in for a soft kiss. "I believe you'd call that a technicality, and I believe you like to ignore those."

"We're talking about you here."

"I'll ignore it too, then."

"Ignore this."

Chapter 8

Unstoppered

Callum had no idea what prompted him to ask Levin one day out of the blue, but the question was already falling out of his mouth and he couldn't stop it.

“Does my job bother you?”

Immediately feeling stupid, he looked down and tried not to fidget. They were in his cramped Battersea apartment and he was slowly getting ready for bed. Levin was already undressed and under the covers while he finished up in the bathroom adjacent. Somehow over the months, they had both managed to invade each other's living spaces, to the point where it didn't matter where they wound up at the end of the day. And considering he'd never cared to worry about what a man like Levin might think of his job or how he lived, the question really had come from nowhere. He quickly finished scrubbing his face and ducked his head down to rinse in the sink, maybe even hoping just a little that Levin hadn't heard him.

“No.”

Levin had answered as soon as Callum had shut off the faucet, and he let his face drip for a moment before patting it dry with the hand towel. He peeked over it at Levin. “Why not?” he said into the damp terrycloth, and held his breath.

Levin rolled his eyes a little. “Well, aside from the obvious, since I would hope you understand by now the nature of my existence...” He snorted when Callum pouted at him but then softened, turning onto his side to watch Callum from the bed. “Because you're not ashamed of it, even if it costs you some things. You don't give up, you own it and you make it work for you. And I like watching you dance when you're up there enjoying yourself, even if you have to let others touch you sometimes. You can tempt me and test me and challenge me to do something about it all at once, but it's me you still want in the end.”

There was nothing particularly remarkable about Levin's little speech, and yet they were words Callum had never heard before, not from anyone he'd been with as a dancer even during his first run of it. It usually started off well enough for a few turns in the sheets, but the jealousy always kicked in soon after. Just having Levin say he was okay with it would have been enough, but this—this

was something serious, and something very real. He felt... not just important or wanted, but cherished, and he wasn't used to that. He wasn't used to giving a damn what anyone thought of him either, but with Levin it was suddenly important, maybe even everything.

Everything. It was everything. Levin was everything.

He felt numb with shock as he stood in the doorway, afraid of what might happen if he were to move or even breathe wrong. He had no idea what his face must have looked like, but it was enough to draw Levin to his feet to retrieve him.

He took Callum by the hand and tugged him away from the door frame, guiding him into his own bed. They slipped under the covers and held each other close, nestled in the warmth of the blankets and their bodies. Levin's lips trailed all over his face and neck as his hands travelled the smooth skin along Callum's spine, no trace of hurry in his touch.

They had taken their time with each other in the past, but this was something different. It wasn't the torment of denial, nor was it drawn out from laziness. Rather than lavishing affection along every inch of Callum to drive him crazy or make him beg, Levin was appreciating every last bit of him just to enjoy him, to let Callum enjoy himself.

His body was humming by the time Levin pushed inside of him, and a sharp jolt of pleasure he'd never felt before made him reach for the other man to pull him as close as possible. The scant space between them was filled with their shared breaths until they seemed to be one and the same. Callum could feel Levin's heartbeat pounding inside him and against him until his own began to match its strong pace. The pounding swelled in his head, in his chest, in his entire being until he felt it in his bones, and then somehow deeper.

Mating, we're mating, the words reverberated in his head. A moment of panic threatened their perfect synergy, but the gentle guidance of the beat soothed him, and Levin felt too good inside him to stop. Panic gave way to the thrill of feeling all of Levin inside him, of knowing that Levin must have felt it too. He gave himself over to it completely.

When Callum awoke he felt different. Warm. Alive. And safe.

Levin's arms were around him and his nose was pressed into the crook of the other man's neck. He felt so much more aware of Levin even with his eyes still shut—he could tell he was awake.

“Morning,” Levin murmured. Maybe he could tell the same.

Callum grunted softly and opened sleepy eyes. He had to blink a few times. Was he crazy, or did Levin look different, too? He couldn't quite put his finger on it until he quite literally did, reaching up to trace the lines of Levin's handsome face.

“You've got wrinkles.”

Levin let out a short bark of surprised laughter and began poking at his cheeks. “How kind of you to point out. I guess it's a consequence of giving up immortality.”

They were really only faint crinkles around Levin's eyes and mouth. Laugh lines. They were somehow appealing. “I like them,” he said, running his fingertips along the ones by his dimple. “You look more real now.”

“I'm a real boy, just like Pinocchio.”

“Stop it.”

Neither seemed inclined to move, and that was just fine with Callum. He wondered if he looked any different now too. He wouldn't have minded losing some of the frown lines in his brow.

“Do you regret it?”

Callum couldn't actually hear Levin's thoughts, and he certainly hoped Levin couldn't hear his, but even if “it” hadn't been obvious it seemed a lot easier to read between the lines now. He wondered if Levin had been able to feel his brief panic last night, and only hoped that he would feel his sincerity too.

“No,” he said, “I don't. I guess it's true that just how we can't choose our families, we can't choose who we give our hearts to. I've just never managed to give it to someone who truly wanted it before. At least I know it's somewhere safe.” He paused, craning his neck to look up at Levin. “Just treat it better than I have.”

Levin's eyes were shining brightly as he leaned down to kiss Callum and held him tighter. “You can do as you please with mine. I'm ready for it.”

Callum couldn't tell if they could share feelings now too or if they were just both obvious in their happiness, and frankly he didn't really care to know. He had all he'd ever wanted and never allowed himself to wish for—the love of his life.

Levin was elated. He was no slave to Fate, but she had come through for him in the end.

He had no idea what was coming for them next, and that was thrilling. For a millennium and a half, no matter what happened, what he endured, he'd always known he would live to see the next day. Time was precious only to those who had limited amounts of it. He was one of them now, and he was lucky as hell. He would get to spend the rest of the time he had with the one he'd given his heart to months ago. He finally had a future, not just an endless present.

He smiled down at Callum, who was dozing in his arms again. Callum had no idea he was working toward giving him a future too, the one he really wanted. No idea of all the investments Levin had made on his behalf, not the faintest hint of all the available properties around town that he would soon be able to afford and rebuild from the ground up to be the shelters he'd dreamed of.

A couple more weeks would do it. He couldn't wait to see the look on Callum's face.

After so long on his own it was hard to believe, but they really could live happily together—not forever after, but for a good long while.

The End

Author Bio

A. Morell has been writing for fun for the past decade. She once dreamed of being a professional chef—now she knows better and is taking a stab at becoming an author. Without so much as a Creative Writing 101 class under her belt it's a bit of a stab in the dark, but she is comfortable flying by the seat of her pants.

She enjoys food, baseball, classics, word games, tattoos, shoes, handbags, escapism, and creating characters. She is averse to over-used words, spiders, zombies, tardiness, camping, and people who misquote movie lines and lyrics. She has one cat.

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