

One Evening

Selah was putting away dishes while the twins were asleep and hardly registered Belor's presence in the kitchen until he spoke. "Mama, Papa has told me about how he came to be a Finder, but he has remained pretty mum on your own experience, though he says that both of you had the help of each other when it happened. You've been a Finder for so much longer. I don't know how that happened."

She laughed, trilling naturally now, after her transformation. "He did indeed have a great part in this, though he likely would be rather embarrassed to talk about exactly how it happened. You see, I was not as happy and competent as I am now. I was a seventeen year old girl, just past my birthday, and barely away from my aunt's and uncle's house, the house I'd been abused in for so long. I wouldn't have survived to become a Finder, and I think that things would have gone much differently for your father as well, if Lady Night hadn't nudged him in my direction that night. It was about ten years before your birth, and I had the herbs in front of me to end my life, when he came in. What happened, well, it changed my life then and there."

Selah settled herself onto one of the benches in the inn, stuffing herself into a corner where she would attract less attention. At least, if she drew no attention to herself, she'd find a quiet place to die, someplace that didn't ache or make this any harder than it was. She had a mug of hot water before her, and shakily took out the pouch of herbs she'd gathered on her way up here. She'd learned enough from the herb-wife in her home village to have an idea what might allow her to simply fall asleep and drift off into the realm of the Dead. It would be comfortable, and she'd not have to worry about discomfiting her aunt and uncle. She was nowhere near Ayshan, or the lands that they could call their own now. What meager belongings she had would likely be shared out by the inn's help, or sold. There would soon be nothing to hint that Selah LightBlossom ever existed, for she mattered to no one.

She looked up at the sound of a slight commotion toward the center of the inn. It looked only to be a regular patron here, but it was one that she couldn't help but take a moment to admire. He was tall, built more sturdily than most of the farmers that she'd seen, with hair that was almost the color of flame, tied back loosely. A part of her wanted to take a long moment to study him. He'd never be one to pay attention to her, but it might give her something pleasant to dream on as she sent herself into oblivion. She let her eyes rest on his clean jaw-line and almost delicately fine features. There certainly was no one like him in Ayshan, and as the only one from there with elvari blood, she was a poor example of the blending of the races. She suspected he was a mixed-breed too, but one who had had much better luck in life.

He seemed to see her, even hidden as she was deep within the cloak that was about the only thing she had of decent quality. She quickly averted her eyes, not wanting to attract any attention. He would doubtless be uncomfortable to be gazed at like that by someone whose form was so withered and cursed. There was no reason that he'd want to be anywhere near her, she knew, and she pulled her cloak tighter around her.

Off in that direction, she heard a rich full voice call out, "Barkeep, I know you keep bottles of Ehvenglen for when I pass through. I'll have one of those, and two mugs." Someone was ordering powerful stuff. Selah had heard of Ehvenglen exactly once before, on a caravan passing through. It was not an inexpensive drink; she was fairly certain it had something to do with the elvari of Alfaren.

A hand gently nudged at hers where she was still picking through the pouch of herbs before her. "It's too fine a night for tea, miss. Perhaps you would be willing to join me in partaking of this fine vintage?" The voice was the same as the one who'd ordered the wine. Almost unwillingly she looked up, finding her gaze matched with the red-headed man's warm green eyes. She was dumbfounded for a moment, not knowing what to say. As she tried to find her voice to say anything, he spoke again, "Do you mind if I sit here, miss?"

That at least gave her a possible response. She quickly scooted further down along the bench. "You can sit here, if you wish, goodsir."

He set his hand on hers after he settled onto the bench, "My name is Telin, miss. And there's no reason to be afraid of me. I saw you sitting here and thought how nice it would be to see you smile."

He carefully moved her mug out from in front of her, then uncorked the bottle of wine and started pouring. "As I said, it is far too fine a night for mere tea. I would be pleased to share a drink with you, though not too much. This is rather strong, and you don't look like you've got much experience with it."

She looked at him almost in fear, but his expression seemed honest. There was no overt cruelty in his face. Taking the mug he passed her in shaking hands, she sipped at the draught, finding herself almost instantly overcome with subtle and invigorating flavors. It was something she couldn't compare with anything, and she was surprised to find his hand on the one she was holding the mug with. "Take it easy. If you're not familiar with these wines, they can hit you pretty hard."

She looked down, "I don't know why you're doing this."

He carefully lifted her chin and brushed her coppery hair from her face, "Because I like to make women smile. And you looked like you needed the chance to smile." His gaze lifted to her forehead and then he brought up a smile of his own. "So you are Beauty, if only for tonight. It's written on you clearly, in my mother's tongue."

She felt incredulous at this, but so far, not a single word he'd spoken had any bitterness, nor sounded abusive. "I'm not a beauty, I know that, goo...Telin. I don't know why you're doing this for me."

He smiled and sipped at his own drink, "I told you that already, Beauty. I wanted to see you smile, honest enjoyment. I have a night in which I choose to put myself at your disposal. As for Beauty, or in the tongue, Si'hi'qal, it is written across your forehead. I'd be blind not to recognize that as belonging to you when your own body manifests it so clearly. May I?" He reached up as if waiting for permission to pull her hood from her. Burning with embarrassment at being so heavily focused on, she nodded, saying nothing.

He brushed back the cloak hood, running his fingers through the thick coppery hair. "You have no need to fear me, Beauty. Though I may have a reputation for seeking pleasure, a good part of that pleasure lies in bringing it to others. I won't do anything you don't want me to; all you have to do is to ask me to stop, if things get too uncomfortable."

A large part of her wanted to stand up and walk away, telling him that she didn't want his attention. But if she were honest with herself, she had to admit that she wanted his attention. He was so gentle, so attentive. He surprised her, not only with how he treated her, but with how much she wanted it to continue. The thoughts of the herbs she could use to sleep eternally were almost gone from her mind, and, in fact, she felt somewhat ashamed that the herb pouch was still on the table. Hurriedly, she closed it and tucked it away. She felt embarrassed by his attention, but was afraid that if she spoke up, he really would go away, taking her at her word.

When her hand reached the table again, after tucking away the pouch, he carefully picked it up, eyes glittering with amusement. "May I?" he asked again, and she didn't know what he meant. He must have taken her silence as agreement, because he half-rose, bringing the fingertips to his mouth,

kissing each one, ragged nails and all. Moments later, she pulled her hand back, wiping helplessly at the dampness at her eyes, dampness that she couldn't understand.

"There is no need for tears, Beauty. What harm have I caused you? What have I done that would be viewed ill?" his voice was soft, and both gentle and coaxing.

"N...nothing," she stammered, hurriedly taking a sip of the drink in front of her. "I am just not used to such attentions."

He chuckled, reaching into a cloak pocket to produce a clean, and surprisingly soft, handkerchief, which he then offered her.

"If I have caused you pain, you merely have to tell me to stop, though I find your caution endearing, Beauty. Take this to dry that dampness."

"Why are you doing this, really? Is it to mock me for my form? Like everyone else has, all my life?"

"The body is merely as a set of clothes, something that we wear for a short while before returning to our true nature. And as a noble can dress up in beggars rags, so too can Beauty be hidden in a form that others would disdain. I do not mock you. I would never mock a lady."

She dabbed at her eyes, feeling as if everyone in the taproom were paying attention to her. "I'm nothing, no one. I don't deserve this, and I don't understand."

"Call it fate, if you want. I was looking for someone to spend time with, and chanced to rest my eyes upon someone who clearly wanted something that she was too timid to ask for. While my tastes are often more toward those who are considered by all to be fair of face, I find it intriguing, and pleasant, to spend my time tonight with someone who seems afraid to live, but perhaps not to die. Am I that much of a risk to you? I assure you, I do not intend any harm to you."

He was blunt, almost too blunt. And yet, his honesty about how she had looked at him when he walked in was almost comforting. It meant that she herself could be honest.

"Yes, I, well, I considered when I saw you what it might be like to have some dashing knight rescue me, but it's nothing more than a dream, and not one that I'm happy to admit to. I certainly would never expect it to come true."

"I am not a knight like my father, or my sister, but I would rescue you from your fears for a night, if you'll let me. I would like to bring you a feeling that you wouldn't likely get from a knight. It pleases me to be able to see someone light up at my approach. Which is why I chose you, tonight."

He reached out for the handkerchief wadded up in her hand. "Let me, please. I would enjoy seeing you smile, truly, Beauty."

She froze at his gentle words. It was clear that he wanted something from her. There was a part of her that wanted to storm off, even now. But that would be even more embarrassing than enduring his attentions. And, even with his clear invitations, he hadn't shown more than the slightest hint that she could possibly displease him.

It's not like you aren't soiled goods already, a part of her reminded almost nastily. What he is asking is nothing that you could cherish for a future mate, for who in their right mind would want you for more than perhaps a night's enjoyment. At least he's not treating you with the disdain the brothers did.

He prized the handkerchief from her fingers and dabbed at her face, his expression one not quite seeming like he pitied her. Perhaps she should go with him. It's not like she couldn't take her herbs on the morrow, leaving the world after a perhaps uniquely pleasant experience.

"Perhaps you would feel better at not being on display to all here? I can get a plate of bread and cheese to bring up with us, and we can continue our 'discussion' in private. I promise you that I will do nothing to you without your permission, Beauty. I'm completely at your disposal, with no risks for you from any contact you might wish from me."

Selah sniffled, ducking under her own coppery hair. She certainly wanted to get out from public view, especially if she was going to devolve into a weeping fit. Her cousins had tormented her endlessly

over how easily she cried, though they were often the cause of it, always striking her when she wasn't on guard, or ruining any of the very few things she could call her own. A private room, even with him, would keep her from drawing stares that left her far too uncomfortable. She didn't want to stay where others could see her right now. Taking a deep breath, she murmured, "Please," mostly because she could think of nothing else to say.

He picked up the bottle of wine and both mugs, offering his arm to her. "We'll take a moment to order the food, and you should have food, especially since you look like you've never had wine before. But then we'll be safe in my room. You look like you need some actual peace. Don't be frightened, Beauty. You're perfectly safe with me, though you might not know it. If I did anything to hurt a woman, or against her will, my father would have my head, rather literally..." He seemed to look abashed at the mention of his father, though he did not elaborate.

Moments later, he handed her the mugs while he fiddled with a key, unlocking the door to one of the nicer rooms that the inn had. "Come in here, and sit down. Ferin will be up with the bread and cheese in a moment. It's not uncommon an order for them."

He took the cups and set them, with the bottle, on a small table near the bed, then motioned her to sit on the bed. "You still seem frightened, Beauty. I wish I knew how to stop that. I won't ask anything of you except to try to bring you some honest pleasure and enjoyment. Calasti honor is something I dare not risk, especially not this close to home."

Calasti? He was related to the well known Sacred Sword? Suddenly things began to make some sort of sense, though she still had no idea why he would be focusing on her. His name held a touch of reverence to it. No one would dare accuse the Sacred Sword of wrong-doing, and his sons would likewise be held to the same reputation. There was a priestess of Railah back in Ayshan, and she was always fair, even with those she was close to. She refused to favor even those related to her.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, she looked down, "I'm not the beauty you name me, Telin. I'm only Selah, a farm-girl on her way to Ryvan."

He took off his cloak and pulled hers away from her, with the ever so polite, "May I?" that seemed to be his habit, to hang on a peg by the door. "Tonight, you're Beauty. I don't think I can easily explain that, only that it is writ clearly on your forehead. Let's get some food in you, before the wine goes to your head too much. I suspect you haven't gotten a good meal in a long time."

She could barely meet his gaze, "My body has always been like this, no matter how much I eat. I was always told that I was cursed."

He took the plate that was brought up by one of the waitresses and closed the door. "Well, at least let's get enough bread and cheese in you to help you handle the wine a bit better. I wouldn't like to leave you with the headache you're likely to have without something to eat." He settled onto the edge of the bed next to her and picked up a crust of bread, pulling off a good chunk of it and grinning, "May I?" Her eyes widened when she realized that he intended to feed her by hand. But luckily, so did her mouth.

A few minutes later, she couldn't help but giggle. Much of the tension from preceding moments was falling away. He had done nothing but tried to please her, and she got a feeling that his words were completely correct. He wouldn't touch her without her permission. A warm feeling had settled throughout her body, and she felt a little dizzy. But this wasn't her usual sort of dizziness. It didn't have the pain of having been hit over the head, or the aches in her arms from being spun around by her cousins. It was pleasant and pain-free, and she couldn't help but smile as Telin fed her the last piece of cheese on the plate. "Thank you," she managed.

He wiped at her mouth to remove the crumbs and set aside the plate. "That's what I was hoping to see. Even if we go no further than that, it was something that I like seeing. It's a much better look than the one that was on your face in the taproom."

Even with how gently dizzy she felt, she got the feeling that she should pay for this attention, this gentleness in some way. "You want more, though," she began, hesitantly. While she had a suspicion that what he would want was no different than what the farm-boys had wanted, just over a moon ago, this time she wouldn't feel so bad about it. She knew that this was probably the most she could ever look forward to, for she wasn't foolish enough to think that any man would want more than a night's pleasure from her. Telin had been nice to her, offered her wonder and enjoyment without asking anything up front. It certainly behooved her to give him the pleasure he doubtless was after.

He wrapped an arm around her shoulders, "Only if that's what you want, Beauty. I would certainly enjoy sharing my bed with you, but that is your choice completely. I spoke truly when I said that I was at your disposal for tonight. Whatever you want, I'll try to do for you." He tilted his head to study her face, and she noticed his instinctive flinch. So, no matter that he called her Beauty, her appearance did have an uncomfortable effect on him. But he raised a hand to her chin and lifted it. "Perhaps we should start here, may I kiss you?"

She felt that she couldn't refuse, though he'd offered her the opportunity more than once. Perhaps it was that she didn't want to refuse. She wanted to feel this, if only because it was a spot of light where there had always been darkness before. With only the most faint of nods, she closed her eyes and let him guide her mouth to his. It started with just a faint brushing of her lips by his, but she could feel his tongue probing slightly at her lips. Guessing that this was what was supposed to happen, she let her lips part, and felt almost giddy as he deepened the kiss. His breath held that faint honey taste from the Ehvenglen, and she found her arms reaching out to wrap around him, almost instinctively. *Gods and Goddesses, this felt so good.*

When he broke away, there was amusement in his expression, "For as inexperienced as you seem, you learn quickly, Beauty. Do you feel any better now?"

"Yes, thank you. It wasn't like this..." she hesitated to mention what she'd been through before.

He placed a finger on her lips. "This is not a time to dredge up past pain. It is a time to enjoy the present, and what is being offered to you. It is enough to know that you might have some experience, but not of the most comfortable type. I can work with that; hopefully, if you'll let me continue, I'll show you what this should feel like. But it's your decision, Beauty."

She pressed herself up against his side, and he dropped his hand from her lips to rest on her legs. She wasn't sure what to do next, or what she could expect from him, but she found that she enjoyed his touch. It made her tingle, and made her heart jump and pound with something other than fear. "I think I want to learn," she began hesitantly.

He kissed her forehead, "That's something I'm glad to hear, Beauty. I'm glad I'm not losing my touch." She found this amusing, as if he likely had ever been turned down. She had little doubt that he could convince just about any woman he wanted to share a bed with him. He ran his hands up along her sides, probing gently at her frame. She knew she didn't have proper womanly curves, but it felt like he was finding whatever it was he was feeling for. It also caused her to squirm after a moment, for he found a ticklish spot.

At that point, they both laughed. He ran his hands through her hair and looked at her with what seemed to be his usual grin. "I'm getting a touch hot in this tunic. Do you mind if I take it off?"

She blushed, guessing that she was probably part of the reason for his heat, even if she couldn't figure out what it was that he saw in her. "If you wish, Telin."

He disentangled himself from her arms and stood up, then started pulling off the tunic. Under the dark linen was a well muscled torso. She was surprised to see how little of his bulk was actually from overeating or a comfortable life. His skin was fair, with the faintest tinge of gold to it, and there were dots and lines of perspiration running down it. He carefully set the tunic over the back of the chair and sat down next to Selah again, intentionally moving her hands to where they would touch his skin.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Beauty. I'm not quite as sturdily built as my older brother Jalak, but hopefully I'm nothing to look away from."

She couldn't help but smell the earthy musk that he exuded, and it didn't smell wrong. If anything, it made her want more of his attention. She wobbled a bit in his arms, then found herself leaning back on the bed. He moved almost instantly to lift her legs and get her lying across the bed properly, though she still had all of her clothes on. "I don't know what's coming over me," she murmured helplessly.

"You're enjoying yourself. And, as I can promise that there will be no unpleasant surprises a moon or so along, I would hope that you'll allow me to teach you a bit more about pleasure."

"What do you mean?"

"I have a token, acquired with the help of my brother's wife, that will keep me from siring any children. I can't imagine that you want to be saddled with a child yourself, not at this point. The token is as much for your protection as for mine. I would not wish you any harm or discomfort, Beauty."

He ran his hands along her sides again, then bent down over her, nuzzling at her ear. Even as she giggled in response he lipped lightly at her neck down to where the collar of her shirt concealed everything, then moved up to kiss her again.

For a moment, she froze with fear. She remembered the last time she was in a similar position, when two of the neighbors had her pinned behind their barn. That hadn't been pleasant; they'd talked her into going back there for some fresh fruits, then used her for their pleasure. Telin was easily as big as either of the farm-boys, but she could tell that he wasn't fumbling at her skirt just yet. And he'd promised that he wouldn't touch her without her permission. He smelled good, not of rotten vegetables and manure. She forced herself to remember where she was and let loose the breath she'd held.

As he nudged her mouth open for that kiss, she could hear his words breathed faintly, "I'm not going to hurt you, Beauty." Then he pulled her to him, his hands under her back, arching her toward him as he leaned over her. Something in his touch brought her a sense of peace. *It doesn't matter if he just wants pleasure; he's given me far more than that so far*, she decided. As he let her go, she fumbled awkwardly with her belt, to try to loosen her tunic.

He let her up, then pulled at the laces of his boots. "It seems that you've made a decision, Beauty. But let's take it nice and slow. Get your boots off, and let me help you with the rest. I've always liked being able to undress the woman whose company I'm going to share." That was direct, but at this point, she hardly cared. She only knew that she wanted this, to be held in his arms, if only for tonight.

With both of their boots knocked across the floor, she stood, letting him loosen her tunic and ease it up off of her. She felt abashed, especially knowing how much more her almost skeletal gauntness would show when he could see her bare. But if he was willing to see that, she wouldn't hide it from him. He pulled her against him, skin against skin, for another kiss before drawing her skirt off of her. She saw his gaze flinch as he studied her, though she wasn't sure if that was more because of her curse or the bruises that lined much of her form.

He pulled back the covers and let her sit on the bed while he tugged at the laces for his trousers. What surprised her was that he looked a little bashful himself as he pulled the cloth off. His physique was just as good, if not better, than his torso had hinted at. Her eyes caught on the part of him that moved with a hint of eagerness as he was kicking the pants off. "Beauty, it doesn't matter how you look; the way you've responded to me leads to this instinct. I can't help but want a woman who's so clearly ready for me."

He sat down on the bed and took her hand, "You shouldn't be afraid to touch me, even here. In fact, I couldn't think of anything that I want more at this moment than your hands on me, exploring, finding out that I'm just as eager for this as you are. And your body is telling me that you want this." He carefully placed her hand on the part of him that moved so eagerly. Under her hand, she could feel his

pulse through this. He wanted her, and was willing to show her more consideration than she'd ever experienced, for anything in her life. She picked up her feet and turned, scooting into the bed, letting her hand trail up around his torso and side.

He turned and followed her, bending over her, but he did not move to take the place he would need to fully complete this. Instead, he let his hand wander. At her look of surprise he only chuckled, "In my experience, women need more to fully enjoy themselves than men do. I want to make sure that you're ready before I take my own pleasure here, Beauty." He let his hands explore her body, and she found herself squirming and gasping in what felt like pleasure, though she'd had little enough of that in her past.

When he did move to kneel between her legs, she was caught between laughter and tears. The experience was as much different from what she'd experienced before as night and day. His body seemed to shiver with anticipation, but he did not move quickly. He took his time, kissing her repeatedly as he fulfilled both of their needs, finally rolling to lay next to her.

Selah was exhausted. Between the wine and the thrill of her lover's touch, she had lost track of time, of where she was even. She leaned against his chest, letting him enfold her in his arms, and finally fell asleep. Her dreams were different from before, with a soft misty grayness surrounding her. It wasn't an unpleasant sensation, and she felt welcomed, like she was part of something. There was the vague sense of someone talking to her, cajoling her past her fears and sorrows. She wasn't even aware entirely of when she woke, only coming to her senses as she tried to move to touch him, and finding only empty bed.

She rolled out of bed in a hurry, looking about wildly to see if her companion was just somewhere else in the room. But he was gone. Her clothes had been neatly folded and placed on the chair. It was almost as if he hadn't been there, except for the two mugs, and the remaining Ehvenglen. She felt a sense of loss, though he'd said, repeatedly, that he was offering a single night.

Taking the wine to finish it, she noticed a small scrap of paper under the edge of the plate from the night before, and a small medallion. The medallion bore a symbol of a dragon with its wings spread, and something was scribed on it that she couldn't quite read. The paper was slightly easier to read, once she lit the lamp, though she was only self-taught in reading.

Beauty, I hope you enjoyed last night as well as you seemed to. It was truly wonderful to share the bed of someone so responsive to what I had to offer. As to my calling you Beauty, this is the symbol that my mother's people use for that word, so that you know that I did not lie. Nor did you lack true beauty, for it hid there beneath all of your fears and frailties. Remember me fondly, Telin Calasti.

Below his note was a scrawled symbol, something that could be vaguely similar to the birthmark she bore across her forehead. The medallion was some trinket he must have left for her. She tucked it into her pouch as she dressed. Somehow she could sense that she'd slept long into the morning. She would have to ride hard to make it to the next stop before reaching Ryvan. Even as she tried to fight through the feeling of sudden abandonment, there was a soft and gentle presence within her mind, ~Be at peace, child.~

Selah stopped what she was doing, feeling at once that the presence was familiar and welcoming, ~Who are you?~

~I am Nocta, Lady Night. And I would have thee as one of my own. Would thou have it that any further experiences that thou might have were more like this one than the one I tried to shield thee from?~

It took Selah a moment to understand what the voice was talking of, though she recognized the name of the Goddess. ~I don't know what I want, but I don't want to face closeness again without the kindness that he showed me.~

~Very well. I can work with that. I ask thee to be my Chosen, and I will give thee skills that will protect thee through the trials that are to come. Take up what I have prepared for thee.~ Almost

immediately a pair of daggers and a weapon belt lay across the table, next to it was a chain with a small pendant on it in the shape of a mirror. Selah's breath caught in her throat, as she could imagine no one other than a goddess who could bestow things so easily. With a moment's hesitation, she picked up the belt and the pendant, wrapping the first around her waist, and attaching the second around her throat.

With a sense of loss Selah thought again of her companion from last night, ~Lady, will I see him again?~

There was a chuckle, deep and resounding, in her head, ~I have a great deal of hope that thou and he will meet again, though he has lessons of his own to gain during that time, as have thou. I will teach thee what thou needs, and place thee in a position where when next thou meets him, thou will not be weak and without courage. Thou will know thy place, and that may make a difference. ~

Selah blushed as she picked up the note and stuffed it in her cloak pocket. ~Just the chance that I'll see him again will make it worth it.~

~Of that, I am certain, Chosen.~

"The Lady had nudged him to see me, but all of the rest that happened that night was his doing. I don't know how, or why, he felt that I should share his bed that night. The next few days and tendays, and even for a few moons, I went between desiring his presence and trying to hate him. He'd abandoned me, left me alone. But the fact was, he'd told me up front that it was a single night that he would put himself at my disposal.

"The Lady helped me through that. She put me in situations where I had to be strong. I had to learn the measure of my own spirit, my courage and my skills. As time wore on, I tried to forget Telin. I tried to forget that if it weren't for him, I would not have awakened the next morning. What he'd done left me open, so that the Lady could reach me, and I wouldn't ignore the words she said as mere foolishness. That I had had worth to him also meant that I could possibly have worth to the Goddess."

Belor chuckled softly. "He regrets leaving you that night. You've got to know this."

"He regrets it now. He didn't then. But Lady Night has a way of bringing the threads she wants together. When I met him next, your mother was carrying you, and he completely agreed with my scathing remarks describing the mess he'd found himself. He wasn't afraid to admit how foolish he'd been. And that told me that there was more to him than I'd realized. And it wasn't long after that that the Lady told me that I would be working with him.

"I railed at her for a good tenday. I didn't want the pain of seeing him and not being able to touch him. I knew about his oath, and this was before Railah gave her permission. But the Lady knew what she was doing, and I have to admit, she pulled things off better than I could have. I had what I wanted, and what I needed. And now I have you and the rest of my family. It was all for the best."