

Luminary

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Chapter 1: Between Reality and the Tangible

"This couldn't be happening, NOT AGAIN!" Wicus all but roared with agitation as he raced down the corridor between reality and the tangible. "*THE SAFEGUARDS...*" his voice rose sharply before breaking off, as he tried to control his tone, only to nearly scream seconds later with frustration, "They're supposed to PREVENT THIS! Oh the council is not... NOT going to happy, NOT HAPPY AT ALL," he wailed.

Waxine glided effortlessly in midair beside him. Her 3-foot-long power cord whipping along in front of them, its enchanted three-pronged plug pointing the way as the corridor ahead of them responded to her unspoken commands, shimmering and shifting, turning form into nothingness and back into form again, sending the scurrying pair right, left, even diagonally without revealing any obvious corners, leading them where they needed to go: the Council of Nine.

Over the centuries she had grown accustomed to Wicus and his occasional outbursts. He was normally very quiet, insightful, often charming and always consistent unless he was agitated and angry like he was now. Then her powerfully built friend seemed to lose track of himself in his ire, he was like a bull in a china shop. He could be very passionate when it came to protecting the rights of a soul, any soul, even the ones she thought wouldn't amount to much with or without a designated mate. She had been listening silently to his latest tirade for about an hour, while she guided them through the secret passages which provided security around the chamber housing the Paragons' ruling body. Wicus had yet to run out of steam.

Finally she spoke, "They will intercede."

"They have to!" He exclaimed, "without it the alternative is too bleak."

Wicus eyed her with a hint of dubious incredulity, he was surprised that she was at his side. He had been so absorbed in this pressing dilemma, he'd forgotten she was there. For a fraction of a moment he ceased to recall why he was in such an agitated state, such was the calming effect of Waxine's voice as it echoed in the chambers of the metal shafts which made up her body. Like the tinkling of chimes. What had she said? He remembered and his distress quickly returned. He needed to get to the council quickly. They needed to know that strange and violent things were afoot. Something was amiss in the human realm, something that should not be happening, he thought.

Little did Wicus know that the council was already alarmingly aware of the mysterious events that were unfolding. Aware and gathering more information than even he had access to, and that was saying something. He increased his pace as a growing sense of dread urged him forward, it couldn't be much farther.

"This is unprecedented in the history of time, no one... never has anyone lost both... this simply has to..." He stopped mid-sentence as the true ramifications hit him. He consciously understood where the dread, which laid like a brick in his stomach, was coming from now. And he felt a shot of terror hit his gut. They would have to change an existing soul, already in human form. That was the only option.

A human who had lost his designated mate.

"It is a nasty business, a nasty, painful business indeed... retrofitting a soul... but maybe, yes maybe...."

Wicus fell silent, but maintained his frenzied stride, a distracted look filled his yellow flamed eyes. He did not trust his judgment about what the council would do. He was weighing his options. There were millions of humans under his protection. For many he had already fulfilled his pledge and introduced them to their soul mates. That was his job, making sure that the assigned souls met, to ensure that their union could bring magic into the world. What happened after they met was out of his control, such was the limit of the Paragons' power and duty.

Tragedy had hit some-- as often happens in the human world. Through sickness, accident, fickle behavior, or completely, utterly, bad luck -- they had lost their soul mates. Their names and faces began to flow through Wicus' mind like a flash flood, he reviewed the torrent of painful images with patience, he knew the intimate details of each life.

A Paragon could only retrofit a soul that had been introduced to his or her mate, prior to that moment there were locks in place, locks which protected the person's dreams and his or her soul from magical interference.

Waxine shifted closer to him. Despite an epoch in this world between reality and the tangible, watching the Paragons as they fulfilled their responsibilities... guaranteeing that each human met the one person they should spend their life with, she had yet to observe what Wicus now seemed to clearly dread.

She herself had been retrofitted once and it hadn't been painful at all. Responding to her thoughts, Plug abandoned its duty as guide and turned toward Waxine, its three-prongs transforming into a face, grinning at her before nodding in agreement. *No*, their union had not been painful at all.

Without the attachment's magical direction, the corridor began to settle into a cohesive form and Wicus slammed into a wall, face first, his flawless features flattened, taking on the one-dimensional look of the surface. His shiny, black, close-cropped curls tumbled forward by the impact. The elegant, charcoal gray cloak that covered his 6-foot-3-inch frame swayed noiselessly around his strong legs, which were clad in black boots that clung to his muscular calves. He wore the cloak on formal occasions and when he was visiting the council. It matched his tunic and trousers perfectly. The garment was snug across his muscular arms and torso, secured in place both at mid-chest and at the waist by black leather straps and buckles. The same non-embellished attire was favored by most soul minders.

Wicus stepped back and true to Paragon fashion, his features and hair snapped back into place like a rubber doll, the crease smoothed on his high intelligent forehead, while his square jaw jutted forward in a surprised grimace.

The race of super immortals were aptly named, they were simply perfection. Perhaps Wicus more than others, Waxine thought. While his body reacted to solid objects like rubber, he appeared for all intents and purposes like a human man, albeit, a beautiful one.

Although the accident was an unintentional slight, Waxine now had his full attention. Noting the pesky Plug's misplaced gaze before Waxine flicked the power cord and the corridor once again shimmered, Wicus raised an eyebrow, seeming to read her thoughts, as he rushed onward.

"Its not the same, Waxine. You were never... human. At least... you have never mentioned that you were... am I missing something?" He glanced at her with evident curiosity.

"Humph", his companion huffed disdainfully.

"Elusive as ever I see." Wicus had never delved much into his enchanted companion's past. She wouldn't let him. But he accepted her for who she was and he didn't try to change her.

It was believed that Waxine was crafted by the finest chandler in Denmark into a beautiful eight-socketed candelabra in the tenth century, during the time when immortals hid among the Vikings, causing mischief utterly for sport. But it wasn't until a wizard was grievously injured in a battle with one of them, and some of his power was accidentally deposited onto Waxine, that she actually came into 'being status'. Her past prior to that is murky. If she had any memories of her non-enchanted self, she never spoke of them.

"Still unwilling to share how you came to be in the hands of that immortal oaf, Marsden in Iceland?"

Waxine ignored his question. That was her stubborn nature when she didn't want to reveal something about herself. She continued whipping around her appendage. Plug maintained its focus on the magical passageway so that there were no more unfortunate delays, or corridor crashes.

It was known that she had passed from the possession of one immortal to another until she was placed on a spot on the edge of reality. She was there but for an instant. Then faster than a spring breeze can blow away a falling eyelash, Wicus had reached through the veil into the visible world and taken possession. Her hulking owner, recognized only as 'Marsden', never saw what happened.

Wicus wasn't jealous by nature, none of the Paragons were, but something about her had captivated him completely, he felt an instant, deep, connection with her, and knew she belonged here in his world with him. After all, the super immortals used magic in their daily duties, it was fitting that Wicus had an enchanted being at his side. He wasn't the only Paragon with a luminary companion. Waxine had helped him with his more difficult cases. He wasn't surprised by her refusal to answer his question, over the centuries he had learned to ignore her stubborn ways.

"I thought you were worried about more pressing matters at the moment." She interjected, effectively turning the conversation away from her past.

Wicus' thoughts immediately returned to Emily Wren, the 23-year-old college student in Georgia, who had no soul mate. Talk about difficult, this case was going to be a doozy. Yet he was determined that she would get her chance at happiness.

She deserved a soul mate, as every human did. The *Yoke Accords of Tusome* guaranteed it. And he wasn't going to be sidetracked by anything, especially another human war.

"I should have been watching them both like a hawk... maybe I could have prevented all of this," Wicus groaned.

"Do you really think you could do that? With all the souls under your care....there aren't enough hours in the day. You have millions of souls in your region alone. How can you keep track of two of them when they go off to war on the other side of the world?" asked Waxine logically.

"I feel like I should have been more prepared or something."

"You cannot interfere with the lives of humans."

"Interfering in the lives of people is what I do...all of the time...ITS MY JOB." He added emphatically, with his eyebrows pulled upward.

"You know that's not what I mean... You cannot change their fates... if someone is destined to die on a battlefield, you cannot stop it. You're a Paragon... not God."

The wars of man, and there had been many, had caused every alteration that existed in the Paragons' laws. The original pairing of soul mates had always culminated in a wedding, resulting in the perfect kind of love...releasing magic into the world, but that edict ended centuries ago. Nowadays soul minders were only responsible for bringing souls, in their human forms, together.

The chance meeting, the unexpected turn of events, the remarkable concurrence of circumstances--- all of which were actually carefully planned to set two souls on the path to lasting happiness. But Paragons were no longer allowed to hang around for the courtship.

To advance mankind, magic was constantly needed, as a result souls were mated on a regular basis. But the global population had grown exponentially and the great wars had changed so much, killed so many, that time and time again amendments to the Accords were made.

Now there existed a very intricate plan, every soul mate had a backup, who in turn had two soul mates as well. But not Emily Wren, at least not anymore.

"It doesn't make sense that both of her soul mates were killed... at the same time... in the same battle. It shouldn't be possible. It shouldn't be allowed."

"Quite a coincidence, don't you think...that both died today."

Waxine knew how Wicus would answer. *Coincidences*, he would say with a charismatic air, 'are the province of the Paragons, they don't merely happen.' But her words stopped him short.

"It can't be a coincidence." He breathed, as an alarmed look crossed his beautiful face. "Was there something else going on? Something I have not seen?"

Wicus searched his memory... He was very dedicated to his duty. It had taken him 500 years to get into the soul minder brotherhood and it was a job he took seriously.

Waxine stopped, "We're here."

The amorphous blackness in front of them quickly retreated, easing into a cohesive shape that towered overhead and down to the newly formed floor, revealing a pair of intricately carved, eternal redwood, doors that stretched 15-feet-high.

Images of the Paragons' ancestors, the Beings of Light, as they were called--- with their red, yellow and blue eyes of flame, gazed back at the pair. Etched panels illustrating other images were interlaced through the carvings; one depicting a hand holding an archer's bow, while a second hand drew across it with an arrow; another showing a hand reaching up from the earth pointing to a glowing orb that was shining bright like the sun, a golden circular mark surrounded the wrist; while a third image showed a glowing triangle that seemed to melt into the earth.

Some Paragons theorized that the symbol of the archer and his bow could be the basis of the Cupid myth in the human world. While the hand reaching for the sun symbolized Paragons reaching through the veil into the human realm to perform their duty. Each of the super immortals bore a mark, a golden scar around at least one wrist. The image of the glowing triangle sinking into the earth was believed to symbolize the release of magic.

Plug, its duty over, wrapped its cord quietly and snugly around Waxine's base as Wicus glanced at the Latin inscription above the doors:

"Deferens animam, et concepit, venenatis in mundo", he spoke the words aloud.

"Bringing soul mates together and magic into the world," she translated.

From where he was standing, he thought less than a second, reached out with his mind and watched as an invisible hand materialized in the space in front of the massive double doors, made a fist, and magically knocked.