

Chapter One

LEE

She is running, and I let her. Somehow giving chase as a man is more thrilling than as an ogre. I can see her through the trees a good thirty yards in front of me. The morning sun reflects off her hair at times, and I can't wait to have her in my arms as they tingle with anticipation.

We are still on the edge of the border between the earth and water realms. For three days now, I have been keeping her in a nearby cave, hidden and resting for the journey ahead. Although she fought it initially, staring at me in stubborn silence, she eventually slipped into sleep, giving me the chance to further calm and relax her into an even more profound slumber.

I have planned every detail for the past year. I have known her elements would follow. Her Earth element would shift and take to the skies looking for her. I suspected he would take the form of some kind of bird, but when I saw the dragon, I knew it was him.

Dragons don't exist in this world anymore. Still, they are a part of earth's past, and it is the form his element chose to take. He is Tate, the one I can see that fills most of her dreams. My power of mind control is stronger after being an ogre for so long. His and her mental connection disturbs me, making me feel their pain just as they do. I can't control it. Her mind is an open book to me until I can find a way to block her thoughts.

I feel what she feels for him. Their bond isn't complete or else he would be on us now. Still, I hear him at times, calling to her. I have kept her well-hidden and in slumber so she cannot call to him. When he is close, I fill her head with dreams of the other two men. Lindon, her Wind element, she is more acceptable to. She believes the fantasy more real when he takes her into his arms. Brier, the broken Water element, only frustrates her and causes pain. I don't like putting him in her head after a while. It is for the best anyway, as he could never be hers. Brier is more harm than good, and I am going to have to show her this.

Tate is now moving away from the area, and I know it is time to go. I left her this morning looking for food since she would be hungry when she woke. I suspected she might run before I got back, and that is what she did.

She knows I am on her now as she dashes to the left, not giving up. Celine is not that kind of person. Despite having been running for the past half hour, Celine's pace increases, and she begins to duck and weave around the area's trees. My lips curve in a smile. Even trapped in the convent, she found a way out. It's one of the things I like best about her. Because I didn't give up, either. I will never give up on her. Not when she is my destiny.

She is fast, but I am faster. Slowly I get closer to her, and she knows I will catch her soon. She calls to Tate in her mind for help, but he is too far away now to hear. No one is here in this area but me and her.

Reaching out, I pull her to me by the waist, lifting her off the ground. Her struggles make me lose my balance, and we go crashing down to the earth, me taking the blow as her weight lands on top.

She elbows me in the ribs, and I let her go. As she scrambles away, I am right behind her, flipping her to her back and pressing myself down against her softness. She is still fighting me; I bring her hands over her head and hold them. I don't want to hurt her, only to make her realize she cannot escape.

"I see you're ready for travel now." Not being able to stop the tease, I add, "But you're heading in the wrong direction, Chaos."

She looks at me in question at calling her that, but that is what she is to me. For the longest, I have seen her chaos, and it has driven me crazy with a desire to tame. She did nothing in order like the other nuns. She worked in the gardens any given day or she ran around the compound any given hour. To live in a life of structure yet she seemed good at breaking those rules. Just as she kept to her own faith as she was accepting of theirs.

“I did what you asked.” She looks at me with pure scorn in her eyes. “You have changed. Now let me go.”

“I have changed, and I thank you for that. Could have done so years ago if you would have come with me.”

“I thought you were going to eat me!” she shouts as she struggles again.

I press harder into her, holding her down. I can't help being turned on this close to her. I have watched and admired her, the longing to touch her once more had become consuming. For too long, I have felt no one. All I had was her at a distance as a reminder of what I was and why I couldn't love her as I wanted. I should have kissed her all those years ago as we had hidden in that small closet. Maybe she would have let me then, but she wasn't about to now.

“Tempting as my craving to taste you was, if I had, I would never have become free of that curse.”

She stops struggling and looks up at me. “Well, you're human now, so let me go.”

“I need something else from you,” I say, not expanding. She's not ready for the whole truth yet. “I need you to come with me.”

“I need to go back to them!” She refuses, pleading, “Please, just let me go back.”

“It has been three days now, and they have not found us,” I tell her. “They are not going to. But I can promise you this. I want them to find us. And I have left them clues as to where we are going. If you want to be with them again, you have to come with me.”

“How can I trust you? You could just be saying that so I will go with you.”

“I am saying that so you will go with me,” I tell her, knowing that being on top of her frightened her but just a little. In general, she isn't scared of me. She lost that fear after the wolves attacked us. She had even wanted to help me right up until my change. “I have never lied to you. They will come.”

She looks at me, uncertain, before asking, “Why do you want them to come? Are you going to hurt them?”

“No. I'm not going to hurt them,” I say softly to her, trying to be considerate of her feelings. I heard her fears in her head for them more so than for herself. I want to assure her that everything will be fine. “I know you need them, but there is something else you need that you don't see yet. Let me take you to it. They will meet you there, I swear.”

Finally, she nods at me, and I get up, pulling her with me. I regret the loss of her pressed against me, but we need to move. I feel an almost dizzying euphoria at the contact of her skin. The feel of her heat seeping into my own makes my blood flow faster. My fires are reaching out for that heat, wanting it to burn hotter and brighter than before. It sends a lick of pure lust straight to my core, making me hungry for her touch once more.

“Are you hungry?” I ask the question, but I already know the answer. I can feel it in the connection between our minds. She hungers, but not physically and not for me as I do. I can understand why. I have taken her from the other elements, and she is hurting for them. I hate causing that pain, but I must do this. I hope that one day she will understand why. If not, then she is going to hate me even more.

We start back to the small cave I have been keeping her in. “I went hunting for food and snagged us a small fox.”

“Yay,” she says, rolling her eyes at me. I am more pleased that she doesn't refuse the idea of food. I need her to keep her strength up for the next few days. We will be leaving as soon as we eat.

We walk in silence, but her thoughts are far from silent. Being trapped in the ogre's form for so long means communicating telepathically is second nature to me now. I couldn't turn it off if I wanted to...and I don't want to. It puts me at least a single step ahead of Chaos and her other elements.

This is doubly important now that my other powers are hindered from being an ogre. I can't make a fire well or a shield at all but know they will come back to me. I just need to work with them. Just like I

need to learn to cut the connection into her mind at some point. I don't like hearing everything she was thinking, and it was going to get to me in time.

She is planning to escape but has to figure out how. She thinks of Tate, and how he must be hurting as she is. Is Brier okay? She is still concerned over how we left him. Even Lindon and the last time she spoke with him. How she had hurt him at that moment with her refusal.

Her thoughts overlap, moving from Tate to Brier to Lindon. She thinks about me now and again in brief, unimpressed spurts. She refers to me as Brown or Damon, and I don't like that. I am neither of them any longer.

Damon had been weak and easily manipulated, and I refused to be that person again. Brown was a monster, but being him, I found my strength to survive on my own. From this time on, I will take my middle name, Lee. I was not Damon the Weak any longer as I have commanded herds of ogres. I have led them away from Chaos, curbing their hunger for her smell and blood. It was the heat of it that drove them, and I could give them the warmth to curb their appetites.

Even though I found my strength in being Brown, I still hated the things I had to do to survive as him. I might feed the other ogres my heat, but as for myself, I had needed the warmth of the blood. The animals I killed from local farmers. It had been required, and they all hated me for it, trying to kill me several times. The few men I have had to kill to survive. It was just more demons I had to live with.

But that life made me who I was now, and soon, I will take my kingdom from my father and will find a way to overturn so much of the bad he has done. I will find a way to win over Chaos, as she is my destiny told to me by a mage long ago. A mage that desires to lead kings into their rule over the realms. She who tells no lies and is faithful to the king she so serves.

An hour later, we are sitting back at the cave in front of a small fire where I have cooked us the fox. It is a secure little area I found months ago when I was planning this. I had us double back to it, knowing I would need a place to hide her from sight above. It has worked out well for its purpose. The forest around is dense here also, and the spring is only about half a mile away.

"Damon, why were you cursed as an ogre?" she asks me as we eat. Her mind has been playing on that subject for some time, and I was wondering if she was ever going to ask. With her still thinking of me as Damon, that rattles me.

"Don't call me that. I told you to call me Lee."

"Your name is Damon, not Lee." Her eyes meet mine as she tosses a bone into the fire.

"I am not Damon anymore, nor Brown." I know I need to make this point and now. "You will call me Lee if you expect me to answer."

She sighs loudly and rolls her eyes, then looks at me again. "Why was Damon turned into Brown?"

She is stubborn, but at least she doesn't call me by their names. "Isn't it obvious that your sister did the curse?"

"But why?"

"A few days after Damon left, a Mage appears to him on his way home. She tells him that your sister has done something horrible to you and that he needs to return." I want her to see Damon and me as entirely separate beings. "Damon returned only to find the whole kingdom grieving the loss of their princess. But he knew she wasn't dead, and he confronted the queen, demanding to know the truth."

"How did she curse him?" she asks, and I am happy she refers to him in the third person.

"She told him you were being held at the convent, so he went there but you were nowhere to be found." I remember she somehow kept me from reading her mind. My powers had not been as strong as they are now, but I had tried then I couldn't. "As he is leaving the earth realm, a different mage appears to him. This one promises Damon a spell with which to find you. The spell turns him into Brown."

I had been desperate to find her at that point, and though I couldn't read a Mage mind like others, I had believed her. I didn't think the queen would tell me the truth and felt it was my only way. So, I allowed the casting, and it did lead me to Celine. It led Damon ultimately back to the convent, where she was finally brought. It also turned him into an ogre that craved her blood just like the other ogres that were congregating outside the walls.

"And you believed her?"

“Damon believed her. Mages are not known to be evil but are instead supposed to be pure of heart. You should know that.” I defend myself even though I cursed myself a thousand times for doing so.

“Yes, they are,” she agrees with me. “Alice, back at the convent, was a Mage. She was amazing.”

“Yeah, amazing at throwing rocks at Brown.” She smiles, and it catches me off guard. It is the first smile I have seen from her in so long. I shake my head, needing to clear any thoughts of enjoying it at this time. “Come on, we need to move.”

I get up and stomp the fire out with my bare foot and then reach down for the bag I took off Brier. His clothes I found in it fit me well. In the bag are also ropes and hooks, a trap for small game, a few small knives, some salt, and water canteen. We even have one blanket roll. Not much for a trip overland for two weeks, but it will have to do.

“Where are we going?” she asks as she stands up.

“To the ocean’s shore. There is a village there that Brier will come to,” I tell her, hoping that would make her more willing to believe me.

“The ocean?” she asks, her voice hitching a little. “I haven’t seen the ocean since I was a little girl.”

“Then you should like it.” I motion for her to come with me. “Water elements love the seas and oceans. It is their home.”

“But it isn’t for fire,” she says with a wicked smile. “Don’t you all hate the water?”

“It doesn’t scare me like it does most of my kind,” I say, which is true. Since I inherited my powers, touching another Fire element left a void in my life. Mine was so strong compared to theirs that it had left a longing for something more than just the heat of the fire. I needed Chaos to be that something more for me. That balance I have been seeking for so long and I had felt when I first met her.

The destruction fire has caused in this world has become too much under my father’s rule. It is why I want to help Chaos fix that and stop my father. She can’t do it without me; no one can. Because my father’s power was the closest match to mine. But I am nothing like him. I don’t want to live in the fires. I want to live with all the elements.

We are walking now, and she asks, “What does scare you?”

I let that hang without an answer as I wasn’t about to tell her what scared me. I am afraid that she won’t find a way to accept me, that she could be too stubborn to see the truth.

That the only way to fight fire... was with fire.

Chapter Two

CELINE

My life has taken a sharp turn, and I am not at all happy about it. All because of the man who walks beside me. Lee is a Fire element, which I hate with a passion.

The Fire elements are destroying the world in which we live, and I am trying to save it. The earth and wind realms are already half-burned, and only the water realm still stands without harm. The fire and water realms both have a kingdom as they are the largest in population and are the dominant elements over Earth and Wind.

I've done everything I possibly can, giving myself up in the process to the elements of Water, Earth, and Wind. But no way in hell am I giving myself to Fire. My sister, Elizabeth — a Fire element herself — could have loved me when I was little, but she changed into someone abusive and awful to me. Her own blood. Years of her abuse had left me with a sour taste for all Fire elements, including the one I walked beside now.

It doesn't endear me to Lee that he took me from the others and is leading me away to someplace by the ocean. He is not telling me why; instead he is being secretive with his reasons.

I look over to him, to his sure stride on bare feet. He isn't going to get anywhere with me...

I cry out as I stumble in a gopher hole. Lee grabs for my arm and catches me before I fall to the ground. I glance up at him and jerk away. He lets me go easily enough, and we continue walking.

It's hard to comprehend that he was once Brown, the giant, terrifying ogre who plagued me for the last five years. I was trapped in the walls of that convent because of the beast, and he wreaked havoc in his efforts to get me out.

Brown had not been like other ogres from the beginning, and now I can see why. He had been cursed as one—trying to help me, he claims. I am not sure if I believe that. I don't want to consider that there may be truth in his words, because he's taken me from the men I love.

I had thought I had escaped him, and the realm filled with ogres, but apparently, that hadn't been true. Brown had shown up and taken me away. We ended up crossing the border together, and in doing so, he changed into a man.

My only hope is that my elements will come for me and rescue me from his hold. They are okay. I know this, as he had told me he had not killed them. He even told me they would come for me soon. I have no idea how he knows this, but I must believe it. Even if they don't know exactly where I am, I must have faith they will find me again.

All I want is to get back to them. Tate is my Earth and my childhood sweetheart. We shared one blissful moment together before everything turned upside down. I yearn to feel his arms around me again. He is calming to me, and I love him so much. The tears sting my eyes, and I swipe at them, frustrated and angry to have just gotten him back in my life and now be torn away from him again.

Lindon is my Wind. He is full of passion and stokes my desires, but I haven't been able to claim him yet. I miss the way he makes me laugh and feel. He makes me feel beautiful in every way, and I long to be with him.

Brier is Water and my protector. I'm certain he feels such despair in losing me to Brown. I wish I could comfort him and tell him I am okay. That I know, he will come for me, and I wait for him. He hasn't accepted me as his yet, but the last words he spoke gave me some understanding as to why. He feels he's broken, and I deserve better.

I had wanted to show him how much I did care for him and that he wasn't broken. That I needed him no matter what and to show him that I was never going to leave.

Instead of being able to do that, I am stuck here, the Fire's captive, an element I despise and want to destroy. I don't understand why he was cursed as an ogre because of me, but I don't care. His kind is killing the world, and they must end so I could rebuild it with the others.

For two days now, we have been walking. The land was changing from thick forest to rolling plains, and soon we were coming to the hills. My feet hurt but not as much as my heart because I felt like I was losing Tate.

I don't feel the distance between Tate and me any longer. I still long for him, my mind traveling to him with every other thought. The way he made me feel when he touched me. How good it felt with his naked skin pressed against mine. The climax of our lovemaking. Even the connection of our bond when it was forming plays in my mind on repeat.

I plod along after Lee; my eyes are drawn despite myself to the lines of his backside moving powerfully in front of me as he pushes up the hill. I turn my gaze away, but it reminds me too already of Tate and the power in his own beautiful body. I swallow, wanting to experience all of that once again.

I so desire the feel of his body inside me once more. One time just wasn't enough. I craved him so severely, and I think the bond has something to do with that. Something is still missing within it, something that needs to be completed.

I want to feel the rocking of our bodies against one another. I want to feel him kissing me all over...even down there between my legs. Gods, I had liked it so much. Remembering it is driving me crazy.

It makes me want to take him in my mouth, to suck his manhood, and to hear his moans of pleasure again.

"Okay, stop!" Lee stops and yells at me, startling me from my thoughts. "You talk way more than any ogre ever did in my head, and you are driving me crazy with all your thoughts."

"You are in my head?" I ask, thinking of all the thoughts I was having of Tate. All this time, he has been listening to me and said nothing? How dare he listen in on my personal feelings?

"It's what some Fire elements can do, and I have been doing it for years with the ogres. It's kind of hard to turn it off now."

"Stay out of my head!" I shout at him again and shove at his chest.

"I can't! Trust me, I am trying."

Oh, I so badly want to stab him now. He has no right to listen in on my thoughts of the others. If I had a knife, I would stab him in his...manhood!

"You're not getting that chance, Chaos." He interrupts my thoughts once more, and he is still calling me that. I am about to ask him why when he says, "if you're really that horny, I can help you out."

I gasp at his outrageous comment. "Never!"

He steps up close to me and leans down into my face. "Then stop thinking about sucking cocks and getting your pussy eaten, or I might just take care of your problem."

I push him away with all my strength, but he barely moves. I turn and walk on, not about to stand there and have a conversation with him about my sexual needs. How dare he even suggest he would...that we could...or I would let him...

I would have Brier kill him first. Then I would have Lindon...

"I don't care to hear of your thoughts on them, either," he says, walking behind me. "I'd much rather hear you talking about my murder but not plunging this knife in my dick. That would not kill me, by the way, but it sure as hell would hurt."

I keep walking again, not sure what to say. Gods, he's listening to me even now. What should I do? How could I just stop thinking?

I should just calm down. Look at some trees or something. That's a nice one. It's big and thick and different from the rest. What is it, an oak?

It reminds me of that tree Brown had to knock down, almost killing Tate and me. A moment of passion we had been lost in.

"I was not about to kill you or him." He reminds me that he's listening to my thoughts. "It was just a warning for him to back off."

Shit, this is hard. I have no idea how to keep him out of my head.

"You can't, and until I can learn to control it better, I would prefer that you not think of your beloved Tate and the things you have done together."

"I am not talking to you!" I shout as I turn and shove at him again. "Stop talking to me!"

"If you're going to keep thinking such dirty little thoughts..."

"They are not dirty," I interrupt him. "They are...beautiful and full of love."

"They may be to you, but to me...they are disturbingly arousing, and I'd rather not be hard as a rock when we are walking."

How can he think it's so easy for me not to? It just happened, not only days ago. At least, that's what it feels like. Tate and I sealed our bond, and directly after, he was taken from me. The pain at being away from him is a physical force pulling me in two. All I have are memories. Tate was the first to touch the power inside of me. He couldn't draw my powers out, but he could connect with them inside.

How he held them up and ran them along with his solid form. He had claimed them in a smooth pool; my waters pulsed in vibrations in it until they exploded into droplets all over his, running down and gathering again.

"Chaos, please," Lee groans, snapping me out of them. "Not the bonding too."

"You're impossible!" I shout at him and stop. "I can't help where my mind wanders as we walk, Lee. This is an invasion..."

"You don't think your thoughts are an invasion for me?" He takes a step closer to me now, invading my physical space. "I don't want to hear all the things I long for."

I turn away, not wanting to see that look he has been giving me all day burn even hotter. I don't want to remember all those years ago when we were so much younger. I don't want to think about how I once agreed to his court because there was an attraction between us.

"So, you do remember?" he says, almost smiling down at me as he steps closer. "You haven't thought about me, or our past, have you? Is it because you're frightened by what you felt for me?"

"Don't get too excited," I say, hating that I'm the one that remembered to begin with. "I didn't have an awful lot of suitors to think about."

"Thanks," he says with a chuckle, stepping back and holding up his hands. "I was cursed because I came back to help you. Because I thought we felt something for each other. Nice to know how little I mattered."

That hurts my heart, but it doesn't change the fact that he has kidnapped me. Sure, we had a moment all those years ago, but that is all it was...a moment.

"I'm sorry you were cursed because of me, but don't think I am going to feel sorry for you," I tell him. "You came back to save me, but you didn't. Instead, you sat outside those walls of the convent for years torturing me. And the nuns!"

"What else was I to do to break the curse? I couldn't leave. Everything about you drew me to you. If I could just have gotten you to come out, we could have left together. We could have built a life together!"

I don't like that he is referring to us as having a future together. My future is with the others, and he has taken me from them.

"I would have gone back to Tate!" I shout at him.

He just stares at me before saying, "And I would have let you."

He then starts walking again, pulling me along with him. "I still will."

I shake his hand off my arm but continue to walk with him. Thinking it could have all been so easy was too hard to believe. I didn't want him to know how much that would have meant to me. That I might have given him a chance. Instead, I try to clear my mind and just focus on walking.

"Will you really let me return to them?" I ask later. "When we go where you want, and they come for me?"

"I know you need them, and I don't want to keep you apart, but you have to see something first. Something you would not be able to see if they were here."

Knowing that they will be coming for Lee and me gives me some amount of comfort. I don't understand why I must be apart from them. They are everything to me, and I need them.

"It's because they are everything to you that you wouldn't see it with them around," he tells me, still reading my mind.

"Please stop reading my mind."

"Working on it," he says and sighs. "My powers have been locked away as well for a long time. The only one I have had is the mind thing, and I think that was only because I was an ogre. That is how they talk to one another. It has become sharper and so much more powerful than before. I don't know how to turn it off."

"You lost your powers, also?" I realize for the first time that he is going through some changes as a man now that I really haven't thought of.

"Yes, I did. I know how you feel about not having yours."

"I don't want to talk about it," I say, turning away from him. I haven't really told anyone how I felt about not having them. I didn't want him to read my mind and know.

"You know...being an ogre was not a pleasant experience. I mean, their diet really sucks."

"Really?" I get the feeling he is trying to change the subject for me. "Because of the blood?"

"That and not having shoes." He smiles, looking down at his bare feet. "My feet hurt for a month before I got used to it. Ogres are really heavy, you know."

I give a light smile and look at his feet. He doesn't seem to have too much trouble walking without boots.

"I thought about taking Brier's boots but decided not to torture him. He most likely would kill me for taking his boots."

I laugh at that, the first time I've laughed in days. "I'm sure he would have."

I look at him in Brier's clothing. Not many could have worn them because Brier was so large, but so was Lee. He was even more significant than Brier, considering how tight those pants were and how the black shirt clung to every muscle in his torso. Maybe that was why he was such a massive ogre.

"Come on. We will make camp soon." He motions me forward. "I am looking forward to finding something that I can cook and eat once more."

I say nothing but follow his lead. I guess I am just stuck with him for now. At least until the others come for me. I don't know how long that is going to be, but I hope sooner rather than later.

My mind wanders back to Tate and the pain in my chest from being away from him. We have sealed our bond, and now, I have been torn apart from him. I feel like it is being damaged. All I want is to feel him against me again.

Being with him was so...

Lee groans in front of me, and I know he is reading my thoughts. Shit, Celine, think of the damn trees.

