

Family Tea Party  
A Pack of Dawn and Destiny Short Story  
By K. M. Shea

“This is bad. This is a level of bad I’ve never reached before in my life, which is saying something,” I said through clenched teeth.

“Considering your hobbies of climbing trees and breaking and entering into second floors of buildings, I’d have to agree,” Wyatt said.

“You two are exaggerating,” Aeric said. “We’re greeting Greyson’s family. You’re his *mate*—the other half of his heart. They can’t possibly hate you, which means this is an easy win!”

Together, the three of us watched a mud-spattered Jeep roll down the paved road that zig-zagged through a portion of the meadow as it wound over to the area the Pack used as a parking lot for the lodge.

I knew the Jeep contained Greyson’s family—his parents, his older sister, and his older brother—because I’d gotten the call from Hector confirming their entrance into Pack lands about ten minutes ago.

Unfortunately, *fifteen* minutes ago Greyson was called away by the Low Marsh Pack’s new—and anxiety-proned—Alpha. To rally the sagging Pack relations Greyson had gone, because we hadn’t expected his family for at least another two hours based on when they’d left their home in Colorado.

*Someone has a lead foot. Better not let East find out.*

“I hope you’re right, Aeric, but I don’t share your optimism.” My throat squeezed uncomfortably as the Jeep rolled to a stop.

“No matter what, the situation will be salvageable,” Wyatt said. “Worst case scenario, I’ll shove you at whatever one seems to dislike you the most. Your puppy pheromones will take it from there.”

I swung around to brandish a finger at him. “No—no. No! No Pomeranian Puppy Powerups, understood?”

Wyatt adjusted his glasses. “It’s a wonderful defense mechanism.”

“I don’t care,” I said. “No.”

“You’re no fun,” Aeric grumbled.

I turned around with a smile when I heard car doors thud shut. Greyson’s family moved around the car.

My hunter senses kicked in with their arrival, showing four bright spots in my mind that signaled his family were werewolves.

An all-werewolf family was rare...but it wasn’t without its losses.

Greyson’s oldest brother—whom he barely remembered because of the large age gap between them—had died attempting to become a werewolf.

*But that’s a topic we’re staying far away from—Greyson only recently told me about it, and I can’t imagine his family wants to rehash the topic.*

I smiled and walked closer to the family with Wyatt and Aeric on my heels.

“Welcome to the Northern Lakes Pack,” I said with my best welcome center smile. “I’m Pip. Greyson wanted to be here to greet you, but he was pulled away shortly before we found out you were here, and unfortunately he broke his cell phone earlier this morning and we didn’t get him a replacement yet.”

Greyson's father had gold eyes just like his, though they were markedly sharper and not nearly as mischievous as Greyson's. He narrowed his eyes slightly—underlining the difference—as he studied me from head to toe. “Pip as in Phillipa Sabre—the hunter and Wolf's Kiss?”

I blinked in surprise at the identifier—I'd assumed they would latch onto my relationship with Greyson, given that Greyson had told them back at Christmas about us, and now it was April “And Greyson's mate, yes,” I said. “These are my friends and fellow packmates, Aeric and Wyatt.”

Aeric smiled and waved his hand. “Hey-o.”

Wyatt merely nodded as his eyes flicked back and forth between the members of Greyson's family. “Hello,” he said in an unusually reserved tone.

Greyson's mother glanced at her family before she met my gaze. “I'm Sedona, this is my husband Cliff, and our children, Mill and Lakelen.”

Lakelen—Greyson's sister—nodded to me, but Mill only gave me a cursory gaze, then looked around the meadow.

“It's great to meet you,” I said with the forcible enthusiasm I'd learned from working in a customer service position. “I can certainly see the family resemblance.”

Greyson's family, who looked like a posse of models since they were all tall, all possessed athletic builds, and all had ridiculously good hair—I guess genetics did play a big role in Greyson's good looks—stared at me.

His parents' expressions were...*neutral*. Maybe.

But Lakelen lips slanted down, while Mill openly scoffed at me.

*We're off to such a great start.*

I made myself meet their gazes—I wasn't backing down from this fight—and forged on. “Would you like to see the lodge first? We've got guest rooms ready for you.”

The four werewolves exchanged glances before the dad, Cliff, shouldered the two duffle bags he was carrying. “Very well,” he said.

“This way, please.” I motioned for them to follow me and led the way up to the lodge as I tried to sort through their reactions.

*They don't know me at all, so I was prepared for caution...but this is closer to dislike. Are they that upset I'm a hunter? I'd understand that if Greyson was stuck with an incomplete bond, but we cemented it months ago and it doesn't adversely effect either of us.*

I prodded the bond, reassured when I felt Greyson's solid presence at the other end of it. He was focused on whatever he was doing, but I could feel a touch of impatience through our magical connection.

*Whatever. This is the first time they're coming up here, ever. Maybe they're just nervous. Their body language is pretty closed off, and they don't seem overly invested in Aeric or Wyatt either.*

That conclusion was enough to make me frown—Aeric and Wyatt were awesome. Only idiots would write them off.

*And I doubt Greyson's family are idiots. So maybe they are just worried and it's coming off as rude.*

I led them inside, pausing when we walked past the open-concept kitchen area. “Would you like anything to eat or drink, first?”

Mill and Lakelen bumped into each other and seemed to be wordlessly communicating as they glanced from me to the lodge.

Cliff steadily gazed at his wife, holding the two duffle bags with ease.

Greyson's mom, Sedona, tilted her head back and forth. "A pot of tea and snacks would be nice," she finally said.

"Tea?" I blinked, surprised by the beverage choice—tea was usually a fae-thing, not a wolf thing. "Okay, I think we have some."

"I can make a pot," Aeric volunteered.

"Then I'll grab the snacks." I scurried into the kitchen, heading for the fridge as Aeric wandered toward a cabinet.

Wyatt frowned slightly. "Do you even know how to make tea?"

"Yep," Aeric said. "Shania taught me—she used to drink tea all the time in the winter because it helped when she had asthma as a human."

"I think we have some tea bags for individual cups," I said.

"Sedona asked for a pot," Aeric stubbornly said. "So she's getting a pot." His eyebrows briefly lowered, revealing his mixed emotions about their conduct as well. He brightened when he opened the cabinet and pulled down some mugs and the giant, porcelain teapot River brought a few months ago at the Timber Ridge thrift store because it had a white wolf on it.

I scrounged up a bag of pretzels and crackers, then I hit jackpot when I found Rio's secret stash of beef and venison jerky and dug out a huge variety of Wisconsin cheese from the fridge—I had to make all the local dairy farmers proud, after all!

I didn't really pay attention to what Aeric was doing, except to note that the tea smelled unusually floral. (I knew the Pack had peppermint tea on hand for stomach aches, and other teas that were supposed to have health benefits, but none of the wolves particularly liked floral teas.)

Greyson's family sat down at the giant island counter, where I spread out the bounty of cheese—which they were not impressed with, their loss—and jerky—which they proceeded to eat all of.

"Here's the tea—enough for all of us!" Aeric set a variety of mugs down—all of them were wolf/outdoors themed. He poured tea from the giant pot, getting enough for himself, Wyatt, and me in addition to Greyson's family.

I wasn't a tea person, but since Greyson's family were actually relaxing in their chairs I figured it was better to go with the flow, so I picked a mug.

I chose one of my favorites—it had a cartoon wolf puppy on it and '*Howl you doing?*' on the handle. "I hope the drive went well?" I asked.

"It was fine," Sedona said in a tone that shut down any follow up questions.

I grabbed a square of aged cheddar, then reluctantly took a sip of my tea. It was surprisingly good. Like, *amazingly* good. It didn't taste floral at all, it had a subtle sweet flavor, and tasted more like fresh raspberries right off the plant, warm from the afternoon sun.

*Maybe I need to take up tea drinking if there are more flavors like this out there!*

"The pack is excited for this chance to meet you," Wyatt said. "Since Greyson has been our Alpha for quite a while, and you haven't visited before."

"I've recently been made Alpha of my Pack," Mill said. "I was unable to come earlier."

"I left our parents' pack and joined Mill's," Lakelen said. "Taking a vacation so soon after making such a huge shift isn't advisable."

*Yeah, so how do you think Greyson felt up in northern Wisconsin without any show of support from his family when he was taking on a larger Pack in a more complicated situation?*

Cliff glanced at Wyatt and frowned. “Given that I’m the beta of my Pack, it is difficult for me to find the time to leave.” He took a swig of tea from his mug, and the furrow in his brow cleared.

“We’re just happy your son’s engagement is reason enough.” Aeric beamed at Cliff with the brightness of the sun.

Cliff opened his mouth—probably to say something rude about me since he glared in my direction—but under Aeric’s constant, sunny smile, he wilted and instead took another sip of his tea.

Mill, however, took up the cause with a sneer. “We’re here because it’s shady that *she’s* his mate.” Mill thrust a finger at me, his nose wrinkling with distaste.

Wyatt, having just taken a sip from his mug, grabbed the last piece of venison jerky. “Pip? Yeah, I guess I was pretty surprised at first. But after a lifetime of a near total lack of dates and never getting an actual boyfriend because no one wanted to go on a second date with her, I figured the world owed her something to even out the experience.”

“Thanks for your support, Wyatt.” I rolled my eyes before I took another swig of my tea.

“That you’re trying to play this whole thing off like a joke says who your true loyalties are with,” Mill said.

“Of course we back up Greyson,” Aeric said. “He’s our Alpha. That’s the way things are. Unless...are they different in Colorado?”

Mill looked angry enough to spit out the mouthful of tea he’d taken. “No. You’re obviously siding with *her*,” he pointed angrily at me again.

I looked up from my mug, which I’d been looking at and wondering how I’d drunken half of it without noticing. “I’m confused. I thought you were older than Greyson?”

“I am,” Mill said.

“Then why do you act like a high schooler with an attitude problem?” I asked.

“Because you ruined his life!” Lakelen said. “He had to leave Colorado because of you, and now you just ‘happen’ to be his mate instead of giving him a chance to have a normal bond relationship with another werewolf? Not a chance.”

*Wow, am I glad I didn’t meet these people until now, when I’m finally secure in our bond. They would have made me sick with guilt if I met them before we took care of Rafe.*

“Well?” Lakelen said.

“Well what?” I asked.

“Don’t you have anything to say?”

I leaned against the countertop and grabbed more cheese. “Uh...I’m sorry you feel that way?”

“That’s all you can say? After everything you’ve done to him?” Lakelen demanded.

I had my cheeks stuffed with aged cheddar, so I wasn’t about to say anything, but at that moment a butterfly with blue wings that sparkled like gems popped into existence in front of my face.

I watched it flutter past, leaving a trail of pink sparkles in its wake.

*What the...*

“Hey, guys?” Aeric leaned in, smashing his shoulder against mine as he whispered. “Are you seeing the bright pink lady bugs everywhere?”

“Nope, but there are flowers growing from my mug.” Wyatt showed us his mug—which was empty.

I tilted my head as I prodded my hunter senses. “Magic,” I whispered. “There’s magic.”

“Do you think Rio did something to his jerky so we wouldn’t eat it?” Aeric asked.

“There’s no way he’d ever risk ruining good jerky,” Wyatt said.

I tried to ignore the blue butterfly—which was hovering over Mill, shedding purple dust all over him—and stared at Greyson’s family, trying to judge if they were also experiencing hallucinations.”

Sedona was staring off at nothing, her head tilted to the side—she was *definitely* affected by whatever magic was in the area.

Cliff’s seemingly permanent frown had shifted to something closer to confusion as he stared up at the timber rafters of the kitchen. “You allow birds to make nests in the lodge?”

I swatted the butterfly away from my face as I peered up at the empty rafters.

“Birds?” Mill was staring at the floor. “I’m more concerned about the ducks.”

Lakelen set her mug down on the island counter. “What’s wrong with you all?” She yelped and slapped her hand over her mug. “Where did all these gold-colored crickets come from?”

“This feels like a fae glamour,” I said. “Since we’re all seeing things.”

“I bet they brought something,” Aeric said. “To try and get to Pip. We should call for backup!”

“If we did this to get to the hunter, why would we dose ourselves?” Lakelen demanded.

“I don’t know,” Aeric said. “You’re stupid enough to think Pip is bad for Greyson. There’s no telling how low your intelligence is.”

“*What?*” Lakelen stood up, then abruptly sat down again. “The crickets are playing instruments like an orchestra now.”

“Maybe the spell is in the tea,” Wyatt suggested. “Because besides us, they’ve barely touched the cheese.”

“How? We don’t have spelled...” My heart chugged to life, beating so hard in my chest that I could feel it in my throat. “Aeric what tea did you use?”

“Hmm? Some kind of berry stuff,” Aeric said. “Oh, and a random white sachet since it smelled good.”

I bolted for the counter where Aeric had set the empty pot, and sure enough. Left inside the pot were a few bags of raspberry tea, and a white, silk tea sachet, one that I’d reluctantly thrown in the tea cabinet after receiving it from a visiting fae at the welcome center.

I could see some small embroidery in the corner of the sachet—someone had taken the time to sew actual letters onto it. It read “*A Breath of Spring*”.

“I knew I should have just thrown it out,” I moaned. “He talked about charming tea before he gave this to me! That’s practically stranger danger 101!”

“What’s wrong?” Wyatt peered over my shoulder.

“The tea Aeric used—I got the sachet from a fae,” I said. “He must have charmed it.”

“Oh, well, in that case I’m sure it’s okay,” Wyatt said.

“*Okay?*” I batted the magic-induced butterfly out of my face—it had somehow created a butterfly friend with vivid red wings that settled on Aeric’s shoulder. “This is the opposite of okay! I’ve *drugged* my mate’s family!”

My heartbeat hitched to a faster pace and I shoved my hands through my white hair. “This is like a worst-case scenario!”

“Nah, no one has shed any blood, yet,” Aeric said. “We can work with this.”

Mill tilted his head back and forth. “Why am I not more worried about these ducks?” he asked.

“A good question,” Wyatt said. “Because of magic.”

“Okay,” Mill said.

“At least the tea seems to have some kind of calming charm attached to it,” Aeric said. “I know I feel quite calm. Don’t you two?”

“No, in fact, I *don’t*,” I hissed.

“Did you drink your whole mug?” Wyatt asked. “I bet that would help.”

“I don’t *want* to be calm, I want to maintain the use of my brains, thanks.”

“Harsh,” Aeric said.

“There’s got to be a potion we can use to get rid of this.” I started rummaging through the enormous fridge, nudging aside bottles of BBQ sauce and opening up the cheese drawer in my search for the miscellaneous potions the Pack kept on hand.

“I gotta say, this place is gorgeous.” Lakelen leaned against the counter as she peered around the kitchen with open admiration. “It suits Greyson.”

“Yeah, he deserves this kind of place.” Mill clutched the edge of the island as he seemed to have a hard time balancing on his chair. “Especially with all the extra work he puts in.” A frown twitched on his lips while a new butterfly—this one yellow—fluttered past him. “It seems unfair that he’s going to get stuck being the Midwest Pre-Dominant when he didn’t want the role.”

“He decided to take that role on,” Wyatt said. “Because he wants more for werewolves than what we have now.”

Sedona sighed. “That’s Greyson. My baby is altruistic to his core.”

I’d popped the cork cap off a fae potion and was sniffing it—trying to judge if it had expired since it seemed like it had separated into two layers, one rose petal pink and the other a sickly green that didn’t make me very keen to serve it lest I add “potion-poisoning” to my growing list of sins against my future in-laws. But when Sedona spoke, I rested the bottle on my knee and stared at her. “Altruistic?” I repeated. “Greyson is a lot of things—roughish, self-sacrificing, an incredible leader, deviously smart...but altruistic?”

“He’s benevolent,” Cliff said. “He withholds his true power for the sake of others.”

“Yeah, because it’d be annoying to try to deal with everyone when they’re flat on the ground because his Alpha powers are too strong for anyone to handle,” I said.

Sedona was starting to lose the dreamy look to her eyes. “How could you say something like that about your mate?”

“Because it’s true?” I said. “Greyson would sacrifice himself for his Pack, and he’s the best Alpha the Northern Lakes Pack could ever hope for. But he didn’t agree to become the next Pre-Dominant because he’s got some airy dream. He took it on because he knows he can *force* change, and that the werewolves need it. He’s ruthless—he *has* to be in order to be as strong as he is and to see what’s good for the Pack and for werewolves in general.”

Cliff and Sedona stared at me. Lakelen’s gaze kept drifting to a corner of the island—probably where her cricket orchestra was—but Mill just swayed on his chair.

*Yeah, I gotta find a potion now, or they’re going to be upset about this later.*

I set the expired potion on the counter, but before I could renew my search, Wyatt stooped down to pat my shoulder. “This is why you’re such a good match for him. Because you appreciate that ruthlessness in him.”

Sedona slightly narrowed her eyes—but not in anger, more like she was concentrating really hard. “Greyson is...he isn’t tyrannical...is he?”

“Gosh, no.” Aeris casually swiped his hand through the air. “He’s *commanding*, and he’s not afraid to shake us when we need it. But Timer Ridge thrives because he encourages us, and our ideas, and new things. He’s also the reason why used cellphones cost almost as much as a brand new one. Everyone knows he goes through a few a week,” Aeris grumbled.

“He’s also why we have more hunters living with us,” Wyatt said. “Although they originally stayed here for Pip.”

“Yeah,” I said. “Hey, Wyatt. I swear we had more fae potions, but I can’t find any besides this expired one.”

“We were going through them so fast, Hector bought a minifridge for them a few days ago and put it in the laundry room by the back door,” Wyatt said. “That way we wouldn’t track blood through the lodge after practice.”

“Oh good.” I shut the fridge and started to pivot away from it, but paused when I felt Greyson’s rapidly approaching presence. “Greyson’s coming,” I said. “I think he’s just about reached the meadow.” I started to relax—he could deal with his less-than-lovely family—until I realized he probably wouldn’t be thrilled I’d drugged them, so my adrenaline spiked again. I started to shuffle off to the laundry room to get those fae potions, but was more than a little confused when I felt Greyson speed up.

*Huh. I wonder why he’s coming on so fast—did he figure out his family is here?*

Greyson almost threw the door off its hinges with his entrance, and as I turned around to face him, I felt the inescapable, heavy pressure of his Alpha powers slam into the lodge.

Mill, Lakelen, and Sedona toppled off their stools, hitting the ground as they tried to move their jaws.

Cliff managed to slide off his chair, and sit so he had one knee on the ground and wasn’t face flat like the rest of the family.

Both Aeris and Wyatt bent to ninety-degree angles in bows, the muscles of their necks twitching as they fought to survive in the face of Greyson’s overwhelming powers.

“*What* did you say to her?” Greyson growled. He stood in the doorway, his arms braced on the wood.

“Greyson.” I swatted his powers away when they tried to press in on me, and my hunter powers brushed them off. “What the heck are you doing? Lighten up.”

“Your emotions have ranged from hurt to full on panic. *What did they say to you?*” Greyson’s gold eyes were sharp as he stalked into the lodge, power seeping from him.

“It’s okay,” I strolled up to him, having no trouble despite his active alpha powers. “We’re just getting to know each other. And I was panicked because I *may* have accidentally drugged them—hahah, funny, right?”

Greyson turned his gaze to his family. “I warned you,” he said, his voice barely above a growl. “Pip was *never* at fault in any of this. I told you not to come if you were going to say anything rude to her.”

Normally I found it charming when Greyson defended me—and I was quite touched that he’d been so firm on his boundaries with his family for my sake.

But they were his family, and they were *shaking*. Lakelen’s breath was ragged, and his parents couldn’t even *look* at him, that’s how strongly his powers were permeating the air.

*There’s a time for boundaries, but there’s also a point in recognizing you have all the power, which calls for being the better person.*

“*Greyson!*” I slapped my hands on his chest, getting his attention. “I’m thankful, and I’m all for us being a united front, but this is enough. Take it down a notch, or I will *shoot* you!”

Greyson stared at me for several long moments. When I saw a cocky smile play at the corners of his mouth, I knew everything was fine. “Lady Hunter, I’m surprised to discover I enjoy your threats of *rough* flirting.”

*Wow, wow, wow, maybe having his stifling powers out isn’t so bad after all. This is worse.*

“No. Nah-uh. You’re not allowed to say things like that in front of your parents, much less in front of Wyatt and Aeric,” I said.

“Why not?” Greyson set his hands on my shoulders and traced them down my sides so he could rest them on my hips. “Aeric and Wyatt don’t care. They’ve seen us flirt before.”

“Never willingly!” I said.

“That’s true,” Wyatt said. “But we *are* used to it. Kinda like how as a teenager you get used to your parents flirting in front of you.”

“I find it reassuring when it’s not overly gross,” Aeric said. “If you are in a good mood, you’re less likely to break a phone.”

Greyson had wound his powers back in enough that the duo could stand upright again.

“Plus, the whole Pack likes knowing Dad takes good care of Mom,” Wyatt added.

“That’s true,” Aeric added.

“Can’t you two be on my side just *once*?” I asked.

“Nope,” Wyatt said. “We’ve known you too long for that.”

“I take it back. You are a true mate bond.” Sedona grimaced as she boosted herself to a standing position. Greyson’s powers left her slightly knock-kneed, and she had to grip the counter for support.

“Of course we’re true mates. There is no other kind of mate.” Greyson shifted so he could eye his family again. His stance wasn’t *tense*, exactly, but it certainly wasn’t welcoming, which was enough to make me slap a hand over his stomach.

Not that I thought I could stop him or anything, but because I figured it would be a distraction—which worked based on the way he gave me the side eye and grinned.

*Ugh. Wolves.*

“No, I see what Mom means.” Mill looked from me to Greyson—the magic-induced signs of listlessness gone as he rubbed his strong jaw. “You knocked us flat—all of us, probably every wolf in the building. But that hunter of yours walked right up to you like it was nothing.”

“I did tell you my name was Pip,” I reminded him.

Cliff rubbed his knee, which was probably sore from kneeling. “You can be yourself with her and cut loose without worrying.” He glanced at the ground, then peered at his son—his eyes possessing the same piercing intelligence Greyson inherited from him. “There’s never been anyone else you could do that with...has there?”

“No,” Greyson said.

“Not even us,” Sedona said.

Greyson paused. “Correct.”

Sedona eyes were glassy for a moment, but she nodded, and forced herself to look at me. “Hunter Sabre—Pip—it is my pleasure to meet you, my son’s mate.”

I licked my lips. “Thank you.” When Greyson gave no sign of moving I removed my hand from his stomach so I could slip my fingers through his. “I look forward to getting to know your family more.”

“As do we,” Sedona said.

Her actions seemed to break the tenseness that had wrapped around the family.

Relaxed, and with his face showing more good humor, I could see the family resemblance between Mill and Greyson as Mill grinned at his younger brother. “Congrats, Lill’ Grey—on getting married, and getting the Pre-Dominant position.”

Greyson stepped forward to give Mill one of those, bro-back-slap things the wolves typically liked to exchange—though he kept holding my hand. “It’s not officially announced yet, but thanks.”

Lakelen was next to hug Greyson. “Congratulations. I can’t say I’m surprised you’re breaking more traditions with who your mate is, but I’m glad you’re happy.” Lakelen tightened the ponytail her blond-brown hair was pulled back into, then flashed me a smile that made her downright gorgeous. “Maybe it’s good Pip is a hunter and avoided you for so long. I bet it did him some good to have a mate that wasn’t that impressed with him.”

“Pip was impressed with me,” Greyson said. “She just didn’t *like* me. At all.”

“He means she hated him,” Aeric said.

“There was a lot going on that I didn’t know about,” I said.

“Yes,” Greyson agreed. “And now you know it all, so you’ve got no choice but to get dragged into the Pre-Dominant stuff with me.”

I opened my mouth to complain but Cliff’s warm smile stopped me.

“That would be nice,” Cliff said. “As a Wolf’s Kiss, it’d be a great thing if you could help the Midwest like you have changed the Northern Lakes Pack. Greyson told us all about your powers—and how they can improve the survival rate of those who attempt the change.”

Sedona’s smile looked fragile. “It’d be nice,” she said. “If others didn’t have to experience what we...” She trailed off and glanced at her husband while Lakelen and Mill shifted behind her.

*They’re thinking of their oldest...who died trying to become a werewolf.*

My complaints died in my throat. I squared my shoulders and lifted my chin. “Yes,” I said. “Which is why we’ll try, and we won’t give up.”

The room felt warmer, and I knew we were going to be okay.

“Oh, hey,” Lakelen said. “The cricket orchestra is gone! I guess the tea wore off.”

“The cricket orchestra?” Greyson repeated.

Aeric sheepishly ran a hand through his red hair. “I may have accidentally used some charmed tea Pip got from some strange fae she met at the welcome center.”

Greyson rotated so all of his attention was pinned on me. “Do you frequently keep things from strange fae you meet at the welcome center?”

“I should show you all to your rooms. This way to the staircase!” I yanked my fingers from Greyson and made my escape, hurrying away.

“Pip!” Greyson called.

“Oh yeah,” Mill said. “She’s great for you. No wonder you’ve liked her forever.”

“It hasn’t been forever,” Greyson said.

“Sure it has,” Lakelen said. “You’ve liked her for ages. She was one of your chief complaints when you arrived, and you wouldn’t stop talking about her whenever you called home.”

“You fell hard, Lill Grey,” Mill said.

“Don’t call me that. I’m taller than you are.”

“But you’re still younger!”

Greyson growled—this time in irritation. “When are you all leaving again?”

“Not soon enough for you!” Mill said in a sing-song voice. “And I’m very eager to get to know more about my future sister-in-law.”

“Me too,” Lakelen said.

I stopped when I reached the safety of the staircase. “Is anyone coming?”

“Yep!” Mill and Lakelen trotted after me, while Sedona and Cliff stopped by Greyson.

“Congratulations.” Sedona kissed Greyson’s cheek, then hugged him. “I’m happy that *you* are happy.”

“Thanks, mom.”

I smiled at the sight, then started climbing up the stairs with Lakelen and Mill on my heels.

*I’m glad it worked out. Maybe the charmed tea wasn’t such a bad thing after all—we got all the tension done with in one shot. HOWEVER. I’m never taking tea from a fae again!*

The End