**CHAPTER 1**

**K**eegan’s call echoed in Rourk’s mind as he was finishing his set. She always came to him when he least expected her, after which he was unable to focus on little else but her. His hands gripped the bar tightly and he tried to ignore the pull of her thoughts. He tried to focus on training, on the cold steel and the smell of sweat in the room—anything that could take his mind off of the one girl who owned it.

Taking a deep breath, he shook his head and unclenched his jaw, quickly finishing up the set. He had to force his hands to uncurl from the bar; it was almost painful. He wiped his face and tossed the towel in the bin—the rest of the workout would have to wait for tonight.

Using one of his secondary gifts, he closed his eyes and visualized her face. It was nothing for him to picture her, to bring her into focus like a high-powered lens. Rourk smiled. She was at her favorite spot; a private corner of paradise on her parents' land.

Her beautiful auburn hair blended in with the fall leaves that surrounded her. The dress she wore was pale green and ankle-length, flowing ethereally around her body. He watched a smile spread across her face as she inspected a rock from the creek, and laughed when she slipped it into her camera bag.

The first time it had taken him hours to navigate to her location. When the pull came, it was now just a twenty-minute hike through some woods.

Grabbing his bag, he jumped in his old beat up truck and headed towards her, probably driving a little faster than necessary. It was an urgent need to be near her when he heard her call, so he could never get there fast enough.

When he reached her location, he climbed the rugged terrain hastily. The dirt had the loose feel of earth unpacked by human feet; with every step, he sank a little, hindering his progress. The sun sparkled through the canopy above him, illuminating the path he forged through the trees, though it didn’t offer any warmth in the cool afternoon. A branch scraped him across the face and he impatiently pushed it to the side, hardly caring whether it had left a mark. Finally, he reached the top, bursting through the tree line and into pure daylight.

Rourk stood rigid, his lean body tensed as he looked over the edge of the rugged cliff. *Why do I do this to myself? I shouldn’t even be here. She’s killing me. I have no self-control.*

In the elfin society, life mates were predetermined using complicated methods to ensure ideal matches. The secret of this formula had a need- to-know basis; meaning he would never know how Keegan was chosen for him. There were many creatures in this world, but his kind held their secrets close to their chest.

There were certain rules his kind had to follow. One’s lifemate may have been chosen at birth, but the first and most important rule was that they could not meet until they both turned 18. Growing up knowing that one’s other half was out there waiting brought a sense of comfort to Rourk. Ordinarily, neither knew their other half until they became of age. Their society believed it was better this way so they could enjoy their childhood.

*So how did he find her?*

Someone had told her his name. She pulled him closer to her each time she thought of him. It was as involuntary as breathing. When he was younger he could resist with ease. As he got closer to being of age, curiosity got the better of him. Sometimes he wished he’d resisted so he didn’t have to endure the agony of waiting now. Although, he knew he loved seeing her even if it caused him pain.

Keegan was standing on the rocks, the water rushing around her feet, with camera in hand as usual. One minute, she skipped across the rocks

like a child and the next she would stop, a look of total concentration taking over her face. That was when she started snapping photos.

Staring at her, Rourk squatted and rested his hands on his knees, wondering what she saw through her lens. He watched as she jumped from a rock and slipped, her arms flailing as she almost fell into the water. His heart lurched. A strong need to protect her filled his body, and if her laugh hadn’t echoed up to him like music, he was poised to jump in after her. But instead, her face broke into a huge grin as she steadied herself and continued to take photos. He relaxed, content to stand and watch her for hours.

Rourk didn’t even know her name, but he knew he’d never seen anything so magnificent in his life. Her wavy hair glistened in the sunlight. She had a delicate face that was round, with large blue-green eyes and full lips. With her cheeks flushed from the cold fall air, she reminded him of a porcelain doll. He knew all too well, though, that looks could be deceiving. She looked sweet and innocent, but it was her eyes that gave her away. They were bold and daring, constantly observing her surroundings. Rourk smiled to himself; she would soon belong to him.

It took a lot of self-control not to approach her, but Rourk knew that would be breaking the rules. He accepted that they were in place for a reason. He had to be patient. Their time would come. Unfortunately, she was over a year younger than he, which meant he would have to wait longer than he would like. He pondered this as he watched her pack up, lovingly storing her camera away in its bag with her hair falling over her face. It wasn’t until she had disappeared down the path to her house that Rourk finally turned and left.

\*\*\* Keegan sat at her small black desk looking through the photos she’d

taken that morning. Her hair had been driving her crazy for the last hour, falling over her face with nearly every movement, so she pulled it into a bun. Securing it with a pencil, she continued to study the shots. She noticed there were a few decent ones she could add to her Tumblr page; she had a small circle of followers there who seemed to enjoy her pictures as much as she loved taking them. She loved photography. Life

was nothing more than a series of moments and a picture could capture that moment.

Her moments often felt empty. Sighing, she turned her head to gaze out the window, her chin resting in her hand as she let her mind wander. If she had Rourk, maybe she would feel...more fulfilled. All she knew about her partner was his name. Thaddeus, her brother, was a seer and he had told her when she was younger. He said if she ever felt that she was in danger to think of Rourk’s name.

Of course, she thought his name often, even when she was not in danger. She loved the sound of it: *Rourk.* She believed he would be a powerful warrior like her father, but she wouldn’t know for sure until they met. It was possible he could turn out to be a seer like her brother or a healer like her mother. There were many powers passed down through their elfin bloodlines.

Keegan smiled, leaning back in her seat to prop one barefoot on the edge of her chair. Most humans automatically imagined elves as Santa Claus’ little helpers with enormous ears and fuzzy green tights. This could not be further from the truth. Seriously, she had never met an elf that worked for Santa.

Evolution had allowed them to blend in with the humans. The females tended to be smaller than average. Most were only between 4’9"-5’2" tall. The part about pointed ears was true. However, their ears were pointed in a cute way, and not overly large like those in most mythology projects. Due to the fact that their ancestors were from Ireland, the elves tended to have reddish hair.

Her room didn’t look like an elf’s room that was for sure. Two of her walls were pale lavender, a color complimentary to the vivid emerald green of the other two. She had posters of her favorite bands and several of her favorite snapshots framed all around the room. The bed was large with a fluffy purple comforter and four fat pillows upon which a few of her childhood stuffed animals were propped.

And there was the light, lots of daylight from her windows. Her room was her safe haven, almost as much as her spot in the woods... Keegan was startled out of her thoughts by the sound of the door

opening downstairs. It was too early for her parents to be home and her pesky brother was at Sam’s house. Quickly she closed her eyes and