

Chapter 3-6 – Christmas

The bones of his bunker house became fleshed out as things marched on toward Christmas. Callum did spend some time walking through the work site, using his perceptions to check that there wasn't anything untoward going on. He did have to point out a few places where they needed to redo some work, but that was actually fairly common.

Some projects he'd worked on had involved so much speculation and graft that they'd taken twice as much money as budgeted and still delivered a substandard product. Thankfully, the village head who'd taken charge had found a company that wasn't prone to that — or at least, not when it came to his house. There was a reason that Callum preferred to work with smaller, more local companies.

The only thing that worried him was the toughs that hung around now and again, shifty looking characters with guns. Miguel assured him it was just for security, but Callum wasn't sure he entirely believed it. The only reason he didn't push harder is that none of them seemed to take an interest in him, specifically, and the building site probably *did* need some security. Once it was finished he intended to cover it with a glamour but for the moment it was hardly secret.

Since the house was still under construction, he and Lucy were forced to do all their work in the little trailer house and its back yard. He finished up the telepads for Alpha Chester, and while it was a little disheartening to know that he wouldn't get actual cash for them, being paid in enchanting material was absolutely worth it. His worry over money was probably a little premature anyway, since with the vast majority of the investment for his bunker finished, there weren't many ongoing expenses.

At least, at the moment. The days of eating cheap food and living in a hovel were coming to an end pretty quickly, and he well knew how fast things added up when two people lived together. Upon reflection, he was probably going to need to think about income sooner rather than later.

Lucy wanted to try and access her accounts from some random city somewhere, and Callum had very reluctantly talked her out of it. He knew exactly why she wanted it, because she didn't want to rely on him, become beholden to his whims, but there was no way that money was still there. If it hadn't been simply frozen, all the accounts would be flagged to throw an alarm and there was no telling how much trouble that would cause. Lucy didn't like it, but she saw his point.

Which wasn't to say she resigned herself to relying on him financially. She fully intended to earn her own money, and for that to happen she needed a brand new identity. Something which took a while considering she had to start from scratch.

Callum didn't understand the ins and outs of what she was doing, since he'd just bought his IDs at a shady black market store, but it meant at some point in the future they could actually use bank accounts. Maybe.

The delivery of the telepads was remarkably lacking in drama. Lucy's idea of using a drone made things far easier, even though the current version was basically just taping a portal anchor to a kid's toy they'd gotten from the local big box store. Actually designing and constructing a dedicated, drone-integrated portal anchor was going to take more time and experimentation.

Being able to use his insane spatial dragging technique at a distance freed him to use it more liberally, and with less worry of accidentally shooting himself into space. Experimenting with the portal anchor demonstrated something he had worried about, and one reason why he really didn't like using the technique for long periods of time: angle mattered. If he tilted it forward or backward, swiveled left or right, the trajectory of his motion followed. After all, space was relative, not absolute.

If he just tried to float up an anchor by itself, even with the best of intentions it'd end up tumbling and spinning, which resulted in completely unpredictable movement. The only reason his flying chair didn't do that was that *he* wasn't actually floating. It was more like he was in the basket of a hot air balloon, so it was fairly stable. Not completely, but good enough for the short distances he was going.

That was why the drone was so important. The thing was *very* stable, and if he ended up lofting it a few thousand feet up into the air, that was fine. The mana was far thinner that high, but most of the mana keeping the portal anchor open came from the cave-cache side anyway. The only potential issue was losing the actual control signal, if he had to close the portal for example, but Lucy set it to hover when it didn't have connection. Under most circumstances she piloted it through a high-powered emitter placed right next to the portal anchor. He wouldn't have thought that a signal would go through the metal, but it wasn't thick and it was nonferrous so apparently it worked.

Alpha Chester's people nearly shot it out of the sky when it approached the pack compound, but that was fair enough. That would have been his reaction, too. At least he had the presence of mind to approach from outside the property rather than invade the pack's airspace, else he and Lucy would definitely have lost the drone and probably the portal anchor in the bargain.

What made the handoff short was the simple fact that Alpha Chester wasn't there. That threw him, for some reason, but it only made sense. Chester was in charge of an awful lot of people, so he couldn't stay holed up on his compound all the time. Callum just deposited the telepads with the gate guards and recalled the portal-drone.

Lucy was particularly pleased by how well the drone worked, and attacked her own projects with renewed vigor. He had to more or less trust that she was keeping herself sufficiently anonymized as she dipped her toes back into internet security stuff, which was hard. His instincts wanted to object to that, but Lucy couldn't hole up any more than he could and she knew how to protect her location.

"Finally managed to check in on the Connors," she said, only a day or so later.

"Oh?" Callum hadn't exactly forgotten about them, but the couple had been far from his mind under the circumstances. Especially since he had no way to actually get in contact with them, especially without Lucy's ability to obfuscate phone calls and the like.

"Yeah, they were having issues— not something you need to deal with, big man!" She added after he raised his eyebrows. "Problem is, supernaturals run all the banks where they are and they're not supposed to be in contact with supernaturals. So, financial troubles."

"That is the worst kind of problem," Callum said, finding his jaw clenched on the Connors' behalf. If he were to have to deal with it, all he could do was lay down an ultimatum to Ferrochar.

"Sure, but it's the kind of problem I can fix." Lucy looked very pleased with herself. "You'd be surprised how amenable banks are to the right kind of subterfuge. I've got them closed out of their old place and supplied them with new connections. Which also means I've got some real people to supply references for my new ID! Plus, Danika's fun to talk to."

"Fantastic," he said, and meant it. He didn't believe for a minute that the difficulties the Connors were having were an unintended side effect of the deal, because fae were fae. At least, if the stories were even half true, and some of Lucy's complaints made it sound that way, he should have expected something like that.

"You know, big man, you could probably go see them about your knee." Lucy poked his cane pointedly, and Callum rubbed the knee in question. It wasn't *terrible*, but it still wasn't anywhere near normal. He was aware that he probably could have asked Gayle to fix it, too, but he really couldn't afford to trust her that much.

"I don't know," he said doubtfully.

"Hey, I know we're all hush-hush about things, but consider!" Lucy held up a couple of fingers. "They're already excluded from GAR's radar, they already know about you, they already owe you, and they have the right set of skills to help fix it up."

Callum grimaced. He couldn't actually refute any of those points. That didn't mean he was quite ready to concede that they should go visiting, but it was true that he basically had nothing to worry about from the Connors. It wasn't like he could even object to the distance because with the portal-drone it wouldn't take very long at all to get an anchor to Miami. Or wherever they'd located themselves.

"Maybe," he conceded.

"Come on, big man," Lucy said, leaning forward on the table. "You can't avoid people forever. I know you have so far," she added, holding up a hand. "I know why you want to keep from dealing with others. But if you want to start taking action you need *some* connections. If nothing else you've got to meet with Alpha Chester if you're going to keep doing business with him."

"I know he wants to, but shifters outclass me so much it's not funny." He'd seen them move, and he was pretty sure his reflexes weren't up to the task of even teleporting him in time. "In person, anyway. I'd be helpless."

"Yeah, me too, but I never worried about it!" Lucy shook her head. "It's not like I'd fare any better against you either, mister mage." Callum winced, but nodded slowly. "I'll vouch for him, big man," Lucy continued. "Look at it this way. The only way he'd ever consider moving against you would be if you're a threat to the pack. Now, do you think that's more likely if he knows you and you go to his barbeques, or if you continue to be a mysterious maverick?"

"You," he said, pointing at her. "Are making it very hard to argue against your points."

"It's part of my charm," she said, dark eyes twinkling and lips curving into a smug smile. "Plus the pack's barbeques are amazing."

"I will give it some serious thought," he promised.

"Great! I'd love to catch up with Lisa again," Lucy said happily, which essentially decided it. He'd have to chew over the options and figure out what prep work he could do, but it seemed very likely he'd have to end up ceding at least a little ground in his obscurity.

Lucy's arguments *were* valid, but so were his concerns over how any contact with others could bring him to the attention of the authorities. When he was by himself and not trying to do much more than deal with crises as they arrived, keeping to the margins had been his best option. Now that he was moving to more deliberate action, he probably didn't have any choice but to make a few connections.

Very, very careful ones.

With Christmas coming quickly, he didn't have all *that* much time to chew over things. Plus there was plenty of work. Lucy was fortunately taking up a lot of slack with the designs for various enchantments, so he could focus on actually honing his magic. He had the pseudo-ward for blocking portals, practice with making tubes instead of threads so he could make more robust and precise spell forms, and just generally trying to push his perceptions and magical stamina to greater heights.

He did take Lucy out on a few more dates, but it was more about spending time together than trying to move past cuddling. She was still dealing with her own issues, and until she had gotten her feet under her again there wasn't a possibility of their relationship progressing further. He wasn't going to build on shaky foundations.

Callum decided to join two ideas by sending the drone back to Alpha Chester's land while Lucy was busy with other things. Fortunately, that time the shifter was home, so it wasn't long before the portal focus got shuttled into Chester's basement. It was obvious by the set of Chester's shoulders that he was expecting something deeply dramatic, but what Callum had was fairly harmless. At least to Chester.

"I wanted to know about maybe bringing Lucy by at Christmas," he said through his phone-portal. "She said that she celebrated with you before." Apparently, Christmas was not really observed in the mage world. Though even if it were, Lucy's estrangement from her House would have made it a lonely holiday for her. Chester's face worked for a moment, shifting through expressions before settling on amusement.

"That's not a question for me," he said. "That's a question for my mate." Chester didn't do anything noticeable but a few moments later Lisa came down the stairs, taking a seat next to Chester. "Mister Wells wanted to know about attending Christmas with Lucy."

"Oh!" Lisa smiled, and Callum noticed she had slightly pointed teeth even in human form. "Lucy does have a standing invitation to come, and I see no reason she shouldn't bring her boyfriend."

"Ah," he said, unable to deny the charge. "I don't know to what extent we can stay, since it would be bad for it to get out that we were there."

"Let us take care of that," Lisa replied.

"Very well," Callum replied, with deep, deep misgivings. He considered springing it on Lucy as a surprise, but ultimately decided against it. It'd be unfair, especially since she'd probably want to get presents for her friends in the pack and with the current income constraints that would take some finesse. Actually, he would need to do so as well, since it would be fairly gauche to show up without something for the host.

Lucy, of course, couldn't help but tease him.

"You changed your mind pretty quickly, big man. I didn't even have to tell you about Lisa's cookies! She makes these gingersnaps for Christmas that are just, wow." She went dreamy-eyed, staring off into space as she lost herself in memory.

"I did say I'd give it some serious thought," he protested.

"Well, thank you." Lucy took a few steps nearer to give him a hug, humming Christmas music under her breath.

Ensharrehael was annoyed

Rather, the avatar known as Shahey was annoyed; Ensharrehael himself had rather different brain wiring than the hominids the avatar was modeled from and his emotions didn't translate so well. Still, annoyed was close enough.

The Fane feud was more than an irritant; it'd been why he'd asked for the Earth side of the dragonlands portal to be moved somewhere less accessible. Though the technological revolution on that part of the planet had been a big draw at the time anyway. He couldn't use other species' magic, but their discoveries in materials and devices were absolutely fascinating.

Fascinating enough that he didn't want to be distracted by the constant clashes between his avatars and the Fane clan. It would take far too many avatars charged with far too much power than was courteous to permanently deal with that sort of problem. Making that kind of move would also risk the humans closing the portal, which would defeat the entire point, so he had to exercise circumspection.

The Shahey avatar that had disincorporated with the previous Fane attack had been at the lower end of invested energy, in an attempt to keep from influencing the surroundings overmuch. An interesting experiment, but he had decided that having an avatar capable of proper defense against other supernaturals was more important. There was no point to anything if he lost the town.

A decision that had shown its wisdom as Fane's minions descended upon Tanner in force. For once, though, they hadn't shown up for *him*. The lackeys were all over Tanner, being generally obnoxious and making it very clear they wanted to get in touch with Callum Wells. Or else. Shahey could probably take care of it himself but it would not solve the root issue.

Shahey didn't sigh, because he was busy spotting for one of his regular customers. Ensharrehael did instead, lungs the size of a small city drawing in air and expelling it.

Then the dragon started spinning new avatars into existence. Wells was a difficult man to get ahold of, but it was at least known who his associates were.

Wells was an unexpected result of Shahey's little town, but he was an interesting one. Considering what he'd already done, he might even be able to solve Ensharrehael's problem with the Fane clan. It wasn't interference if all he did was pass along a message someone was trying to send anyway.

So far as other possibilities – well. Not all the avatars were the small, jocular Shahey. Some were designed for combat; large, hulking, sharp of tooth and fang; scales made of layers of polymer, ceramic, and steel. Projectile weaponry was not beyond the dragon's capabilities, but mages were far weaker to mass and grappling. Besides which, he wanted to keep any combat quiet, not destroy buildings.

Tanner was its town. Best to keep it safe.

Callum almost talked himself out of attending three or four times before Christmas actually arrived, but he'd given his word. It helped that they were actually attending Christmas lunch, which was just Chester's immediate family rather than the entire pack. The shifters might be confident in their ability to keep things a secret, but there was no way dozens of people could be relied on to keep his and Lucy's presence under wraps.

Lucy was wearing one of her presents, an actual fur coat he'd found at a secondhand store, and once again looked like she belonged more to the 1940s than the modern era. Her preferred fashion sense had actually surprised him a little bit, considering her otherwise modern sensibilities, but he was hardly going to complain. Besides, the contrast of that style with her professional use of CAD and other cutting-edge software was fun.

Once again they flew the drone in to Chester's compound, and Callum verified there weren't any hidden observers as someone brought the anchor into Chester's house. There *were*, in fact, a few mage bubbles in some outlying buildings, but he'd been warned about those. GAR had extra liaisons and observers and whatever about, since Chester was being investigated, but they weren't allowed into the core buildings.

That was one of the things that had made him almost call off the meeting. He didn't, but he was going to be on a hair trigger to evacuate. The mages were close to a half-mile away, though, and Callum would be in a building and behind wards. He'd been closer to mages in many of the cities he'd driven through, so he had to clamp down on his worries and hope that nothing happened while preparing for the alternative. At least

once the anchor was in Chester's actual house the mages were far enough out that they wouldn't be looming on the periphery of his senses.

"You don't need to be so jittery," Lucy said, patting his arm. "If Chester said it's all safe and secure, it is."

"I can't help it," Callum replied, ready to open a portal linking the interior of the armored van to Chester's basement. "I know they're entire buildings away but I could sense the other mages so it was like they were *right* there. I know you can't, but it's hard to be casual about this outing." Lucy opened her mouth to reply, then closed it, frowning for a moment.

"Tell you what, big man. If you *really* think there's a danger of GAR coming down on our heads, we don't have to."

"That's unfair," he told her, half-amused despite his protests. He knew the chances were low, or close to nonexistent, and he knew that it was better to meet with Alpha Chester sooner rather than later, but if it were up to him he still wouldn't take the chance. Whether letting Lucy convince him was a good idea or not remained to be seen.

"Let's go, I guess," he said, and opened the portal. Alpha Chester and Lisa were on the other side, along with the Langleys; Arthur and his wife, Jessica and her husband Jerry, and Clara's family. The bodybuilder type guards were, for once, not around.

While Callum had gotten the measure of Alpha Chester with his spatial sense, it wasn't the same as seeing him in person. While he wasn't as hugely looming as the linebackers he kept around, Chester was still a big man, north of six feet with the kind of muscle that came from heavy labor. He looked like a Viking or, considering the season, a young, fit Santa Claus: all blonde beard and white-toothed smiles. Chester extended his hand as soon as they stepped through the portal.

"Welcome, Mister Wells," he said. Callum took the hand and was glad to find Chester was not a crusher. With shifter strength, that could have been a problem. "It's good to finally see you in the flesh. And to see you again as well, Lucy."

"It's only thanks to the big man," Lucy said. "Otherwise I'd still be stuck in that BSE black hole."

"Yes, indeed," Chester replied, letting go of Callum's hand. "Many of us here have at least something to thank Mister Wells for," he continued, and Callum knew it was only in his head that such a phrase sounded sinister.

“Hello again,” Clara said, smiling. “We’ve been hearing all about you.” Her eyes flicked to the cane he was leaning on, with a trace of confusion, but she didn’t say anything about it as she offered her hand in turn.

“Only good things, I hope,” Callum said, somewhat bemused. It was the first time in years that he’d been in a crowd of people he knew instead of passing strangers. His long-disused social skills were fairly rusty, but they slowly kicked in again as the group headed upstairs for lunch.

It helped that there were no mages and only a scant handful of shifters within his perception sphere aside from the people in the room. Considering who he was, actually getting that level of privacy was probably quite the concession. One that Callum appreciated.

To Callum’s surprise, there wasn’t any talk of business. It was quite relaxed, with people sharing little anecdotes from their lives and some arguments over sports teams and television shows. Clara asked about his knee, and Lucy talked him into retelling his escape from the GAR squad after he’d left the Nightlands, though it was still somewhat sanitized. The Langleys didn’t need to know all the details about his perception and his gravitykinesis.

He had to admit, extremely reluctantly, that it was nice. Lucy was clearly enjoying herself, treating Lisa like an adoptive mother and teasing Alpha Chester with terrible puns. Frankly Callum thought that Lucy had understated how well she fit in with the shifter pack, but there were probably lines Callum wasn’t seeing. A single lunch wasn’t nearly enough time to dig into those subtleties.

There wasn’t enough room in the kitchen for everyone to help with the washing up, and Callum found himself relegated to the living room with Chester and Arthur. To Callum’s surprise, Arthur offered him a cigar, which he turned down politely, and Chester poured whiskey for them.

“I do have some news for you,” Chester said, as they nursed their respective drinks.

“Oh?” Callum asked, suddenly wary again.

“A dragonblooded came by looking to pass a message to you. Said his name was Shahey.” Chester raised shaggy eyebrows at Callum.

“Well, I do know Shahey,” Callum admitted, somewhat thrown. He certainly hadn’t forgotten the conversation he’d had with the dragonblooded, but he hadn’t expected to hear from Shahey anytime soon. “What was the message?”

“That you should stop by Tanner soon. Some mages want to get your attention there and he thought you might take exception to that.”

“Yes, I do take exception to that.” Callum frowned. He figured that Shahey would take care of anyone encroaching on Tanner, so either it was more than Shahey could handle or there was some further aspect to it. After seeing what the *real* Shahey could do in the dragonlands he wasn’t convinced of the former. “Thank you for telling me.”

“I don’t need to tell *you* to be careful,” Chester said. “But for what it’s worth all my dealings with the dragonblooded have been straightforward. Unlike the fae, they actually mean what they say. If one of them is upset with you, they will let you know.”

“That does help,” Callum said, though that had been his appraisal of Shahey anyway. “Thank you for telling me.” He was particularly happy that Chester hadn’t sprung Shahey on him or anything likewise dramatic. It was stressful enough just dealing with a normal, happy, domestic family.

“I hate to run you off, but we’ve got people coming over to start preparing for dinner,” Chester said.

“That’s fine. I think I’m about tapped out on social interactions for the day anyway,” Callum said. “It was nice, though. It’s been a while since I’ve done anything for the holidays.”

It took a little longer to collect Lucy, who emerged with a container of gingersnaps, and he opened a portal back to the van. Having a second set of anchors made it much easier to keep things indirect, though he very much doubted anyone from Chester’s side would be able to follow the portals. It was just habit. They took the telepad back to the house and Lucy flopped right down on the couch.

“Oof. That was fun, but still took it out of me.” She narrowed her eyes at him. “What’d Chester tell you? I know that look.”

“So you’re interested in my looks, huh?” Callum asked, and Lucy replied by sticking out her tongue. “Mister Shahey wants to talk to me,” he continued, though he did wonder exactly what look Lucy meant. “Apparently something is happening in my old hometown.”

“Can’t we catch a break?” Lucy complained, sitting back up. “They can’t let things rest for even a month, can they?”

“No,” Callum said. “Like I said, they’ll never leave us alone. If anything I’m surprised it took this long to try and get at me that way.”

“Yeah but I don’t think GAR would mess with a dragonblooded’s stuff? Pretty sure the official policy is basically just don’t.”

“The problem is we’re way past ordinary times,” Callum said. “Normal policy doesn’t really apply, and if it’s *not* GAR that’s even worse.”

“So what are you gonna do about it?” Lucy asked, shedding her coat and folding it carefully. “I know I said you should probably meet people but I didn’t mean *that* kind of thing.”

“Yeah, we’ll need to fly the drone anchor there,” he said with a shrug. “As to what I *do* about it, I have to see what’s going on first. It didn’t seem an emergency, since Shahey just left a message.” He wasn’t quite as sanguine about it as he sounded, but it was Christmas. Certainly he deserved at least that much rest.

The next day he and Lucy flew the drone to Tanner. It’d been a long time since he’d seen the Appalachians with his eyes, and the sight made him homesick. They weren’t as gorgeous in the winter as any other time of year, but he still missed having a horizon that wasn’t flat.

With his magical perception he could tell that Tanner wasn’t just any town. There was more background mana, though instead of a portal source like GAR used it seemed to be more like an eddy in the slow background flow. A natural confluence, perhaps, or maybe dragon techniques were subtle. Like with other areas of supernatural activity, that mana was churned up, which in addition to the higher background would explain why those who could sense mana would feel more at home there.

He had the drone go straight to Shahey’s gym, but even on the way there he noticed a few mage bubbles around. While Callum could believe that there were one or two mages in town, he was pretty sure the mages he sensed were part of the trouble Shahey had mentioned. However, nothing was on fire and there wasn’t anything notable in the local news, so he let it pass for the moment.

Lucy dropped the drone down on the roof the gym, where Callum could easily sense Shahey inside. The reverse didn’t seem to be true, since Shahey didn’t react in any way, even when he moseyed back to the counter. Once there was some modicum of privacy, Callum opened a speaking-portal.

“You wanted to talk to me?”

Shahey might not have noticed the drone, but he also didn’t flinch at Callum’s voice sounding out from behind him. The dragonblooded glanced directly at the portal and nodded. Some vis stretched out around him, nothing that looked like either fae or mage spells, but he already knew that dragonblooded magic was different.

“Yes,” Shahey said. “I see you’ve picked up a few tricks since we last spoke.”

“I have,” Callum admitted. “It makes stuff like this easier.”

“I can imagine,” Shahey replied. “I shall get right the point, then. Archmage Fane wants to talk to you. Unfortunately, he decided to get this point across by coming in with men and money. We’ve got thugs wandering the town, the businesses are being pressured, nobody feels safe.” He sounded annoyed, but not actually angry.

“I’m assuming there’s a reason you didn’t take care of it?” Callum tried to keep the accusation out of his tone. He didn’t like being jerked around by people who figured out what buttons they needed to press.

“I could take care of the men, but the money and political pressures are more difficult.” Shahey sighed. “I have been at odds with Fane for over a hundred years, so there is some degree of personal animus here. But I think it would be for the best if you addressed the root cause.”

“You want me to kill Fane.” Callum wasn’t much impressed by Shahey’s suggestion. Admittedly, the idea had already sprung to mind but he wanted to be more measured in his actions. Violence was an easy first resort, and while it did solve some problems it was a slippery road. If he always jumped to it right off it would just cause more problems, and as he’d told Lucy, it was important to locate the principal actors. The ones with whom responsibility *truly* lay.

“I wouldn’t object to it,” Shahey said. “Though I’m not sure I would advise it, either. If Fane’s vis even *touches* yours, he can kill you. That’s what it means to be a healing Archmage. I know that from experience.”

“That *is* terrifying,” Callum said with a shudder. With that kind of ability, he couldn’t even use his portals from a distance.

“More, Archmage Fane is one of the most powerful Archmages. It is certainly not appropriate for *me* to try and remove him. So I merely give you advice. It is only by dealing with him that you can truly *resolve* this situation.”

Callum nodded at Shahey’s words, even though the only person who could see him was Lucy. It wasn’t bad advice, and probably would have been more potent a few months or even weeks ago. Even as it was, confirmation of his own thoughts was a good thing.

“Do they have someone they want me to talk to?” Not that Callum was inclined to listen to anything those people had to say, but he needed more information.

“They do, actually,” Shahey said. “One of Fane’s nephews, I think, name of Sen.”

“You’re kidding. The guy who was supposed to be my minder?”

“The very one.”

Callum didn’t ask how Shahey knew who Sen was, because at this point he wasn’t surprised by what Shahey knew. Sen popping up again was probably less ridiculous than it sounded: he was one of the few people from GAR who’d met Callum and could vouch for Callum’s identity. That Archmage Fane could acquire him for what was apparently an off-the-books operation just demonstrated what Shahey had already said. Fane was a big player.

“Where is he staying?” Callum had to wait for an answer to that because someone came up to the counter, and Shahey’s magical field shifted slightly to allow him to talk to the customer. As he’d expected, Shahey had some sort of glamour or privacy field. Likely he was just preventing sound from propagating where it shouldn’t.

“They muscled through a purchase on the old Murcheson place,” Shahey told him once the customer was gone.

“Thanks. Since it’s your town, you want to go with? Or anything I should keep in mind?” Shahey’s face crinkled into a smile at the question.

“It’s your town too,” he said. “You lived here for how many years? I’m sure you’ll use your best judgement on what to do.”

“Right,” he said.

“And come by to visit when you’re done! People here still worry about you.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Callum said, but didn’t promise anything. “I’ll let you know how it goes.”

“Good luck,” Shahey said, and Callum closed the portal.