

Allie awoke with a start, disoriented by her unexpected slumber and awakening in an unfamiliar place. A quick glance at her surroundings told her she'd fallen asleep in a library, evidently while looking at the book of abstract artwork and curious designs. Her husband, or someone who looked enough like him to be his double, slumbered nearby on the thick carpeting, and only the gentle burble of a miniature waterfall interrupted the hush.

What had happened to the children whom had given her the book? Allie glanced again around the library, but the children were nowhere to be seen. And, she smiled ruefully, nowhere to be heard, either. Whether they had finally stopped wailing, or simply fled far enough away that she could no longer hear them, she didn't know. Nor did she object to the quiet.

Allie slid the book into her newly acquired backpack. She shouldered the backpack, slipped her hand through the carrying loop on her double, and began moving back through the library. A familiar scent, that of fresh-roasted beans and strong coffee, tickled the edges of her awareness as she walked down an aisle of books.

First she saw the curl of steam rising from behind a high wing-back chair, not exactly a common sight in most libraries. As she quietly approached, a familiar-looking steel travel mug, from which arose a wavering plume of steam, came into view. A large brass and leather bound book lay on the table beside the chair with a blue ribbon laid between the pages: a bookmark?

She approached the chair, glancing at the mug. Had she really found the mug that seemed to accompany Mikkelus everywhere? How long could the mug keep a drink steaming hot, and how long ago had it been filled? If only her Mikkelus had his mug, who was she carrying? And... coffee... so tempting! Surely he wouldn't mind if she had a sip... he'd insist.

Allie took the mug and approached the book, opening it to the place marked by the ribbon. On one page, she found sketched a ring, similar to the one around her neck. She guessed the indecipherable writing that surrounded the sketch and covered the facing page to be a description or notes concerning the ring and felt a mild flash of annoyance that her subconscious had not thought to write in any of the languages in which she possessed a degree of literacy.

Then, between the next pages, she found a note. Perhaps her subconscious had picked up on her annoyance, because this note had been written in English. Furthermore, the note seemed to be addressed to her, or to someone who shared her name.

*My dearest Allie,
It feels like I've been wandering through your maze for ages. I'm certain our paths have been crossing and recrossing, but the nuance of synchronizing my presence to yours seems to have eluded me thus far. Consequently, I've been unable to locate you in this maze. I can feel your presence but I don't seem to be able to maintain a clear fix on you; I'm hoping and trusting that if I can't locate you, unfriendly eyes won't be able to find you either. I am hoping that I'll catch up with you, you'll catch up with me, or we'll somehow run into each other before I run out of time. I need your help, love, and you'll need help as well.
With all my love, Mikkelus*