



CORRUPT
SHADOWS

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DEDICATION

For those who wear red flags
like necklaces, this is for you.

PROLOGUE



Evie... Nine years ago

I barely squeeze my eyes shut in time as my brother explodes into a thousand pieces. Pieces of flesh cascade around me, body parts thudding when they hit the ground. The pungent smell of iron fills my nostrils as the blood splatters across the bare skin on my face, legs, and arms.

My heart pounds, and the blood rushes to my ears, so I don't hear my mom enter the bedroom until her piercing scream reverberates through the room.

I force my eyes to open, then stare at the space where my brother sat mere moments ago. The only evidence of him is a gruesome tangle of muscle,

flesh, and blood. The white cushions around the circle we used to practice the magic that killed him are now crimson soaked. Pillars of smoke spiral atop candles, blown out from the sudden rush of air after my powers had erupted from me.

My mom drops to her knees, her fingers curling against the remains of her son, as if it might bring him back. “Caden!” Her voice sends a deep ache through my chest. “No, God. Please, no,” she blurts as she runs her fingers through parts of his intestines.

I just stare at the blood. *There’s. So. Much. Blood.*

Reality distorts, and every second feels like an eternity. The world around me blurs, and I don’t realize I’m moving until I open my eyes and I’m standing by my brother’s bedroom door. A shard of bone crunches underfoot when I shift my weight, and I wince. I pinch my arm to make sure I’m not dreaming, but the pain doesn’t reach me through the haze of shock.

What the fuck just happened?

My mom’s accusing stare pins me from across the room. I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. Instead, my gaze travels to the ceiling, where chunks of flesh are clinging to the white paint.

The tattooed roses covering my legs burn, inked by shadows with a magical pigment that’s impossible to remove. I normally cover the markings branding me as a Fallenmoore witch, as they only aggravated my parents. But with Caden, I’d felt safe.

Until now.

I suck in my first proper breath since he exploded. The darkness inside me purrs in my core, desiring to be let out to play again. It was Caden’s idea to let it out. He was convinced that if I let it out a little, instead of suppressing it like our dad forced me to do, then I could temper it.

But it had been building for years, threatening to combust at any moment. Reality hits me. Tears fall down my expressionless face as my mom screams. I stumble into the hallway, my hands trembling.

“You killed him!” Her accusation follows me as I run down the stairs. They knew what I was when they took me in, but they thought they could contain it. Every experiment failed.

I failed.

My dad meets me halfway, and his hands grab my shoulders and shake me. “What happened?” he bellows.

Something primal inside my brain urges me to move, my instincts pulling me toward the front door. I disassociate from reality. Unable to answer my dad, I force my way past him. Grief and guilt hit me like a wave, threatening to drag me deeper into my subconscious.

My grip tightens on the banister when I reach the bottom of the stairs. The roar of my dad’s scream booms in my ears when he reaches Caden’s room. Adrenaline kicks in. I killed their son—their only biological child. He was only two years younger than me. His life had barely begun at sixteen.

I shouldn’t have tried to use my magic. My dad warned me. It’s an ancient, deadly magic that the church believed they’d wiped out. I’m sure my parents wish they’d left me to die in that house, instead of adopting me as their own.

Perhaps they should have.

“Evie!” my dad yells from the top of the stairs. I glance up and my heart skips a beat. His face twists into an expression of rage and malice, no longer calm or kind.

I am no longer the six-year-old little girl they saved. I am their son’s murderer and nothing less than the evil they had tried so hard to squash out of me.

My long, dark-brown hair tangles around my face, limiting my view as I race to get outside. My dad's footsteps are faster now. His rage is palpable, the air around us seeming denser as the death magic deep inside me picks up on the emotional shift in the air. It, like other demonic forces, feeds on anger and hate. Dark emotions fuel it, and keeping it from bursting out of me again is harder than ever.

He's going to kill me.

I deserve it. Yet something inside me refuses to stop and accept my fate, pushing me to run faster. My fingers shake as I fumble at the lock, then throw the door open.

The cold air hits my face, sending a shiver down my spine. Fingers grip my shoulders and pull me back inside, knocking me off my feet. I land on the carpet, and the air whooshes from my lungs.

My dad climbs on top of me in seconds, and I struggle to draw in a breath under his weight. His thin lips curl as he bares his teeth. Maniacal sadism contorts his narrow face. I've only seen that expression on a few occasions, when my magic came out, despite his best efforts to quell it.

"You killed him!" he shouts. His fingers are around my throat, squeezing tighter until each breath is a labor. I kick against him, my nails biting into his skin when I feel the shadow magic pulse through my body. The room blurs, and stars fill my vision.

He's right. I am evil.

It moves inside me, this untamed, untapped power, ready to destroy. I don't know a lot about my family's history, but I know they possessed both death and shadow magic. The death magic killed Caden, but this time, it's my shadows that show themselves.

Vibration builds in my core and darkness seeps around us, enveloping us

both in blackness. My body goes rigid under his heavy torso. My heart palpitates, and I kick my legs. My skin tightens into goose bumps, and I can barely think.

Not again.

No.

The shadows move unlike anything I've felt before. After spending years keeping it locked inside, careful with every heightened emotion so as not to feed it, having it seep out of me fills me with a thirst for more power.

A blanket of glittering darkness curls around my dad's body, shadow hands gripping his throat and squeezing. After the years of him inflicting pain to keep my powers away, my magic is thirsty for revenge.

But he was only trying to protect me from myself.

The death magic surfaces, bleeding through my veins like liquid fire. I glance at my dad, who is unconscious with red marks around his throat. The shadows dissipate, and I quickly get to my feet and run out the door before I kill him too.

The sun sets over the horizon as I race down the stone pathway toward the gate, the sky blotting with pink and purple. I spot Mrs. Endrich across the street. Her fingers uncurl when she sees me, and her grocery bags drop to the ground.

I must look like a monster. I *am* a monster.

The air prickles my skin as I try to contain my powers. I hurry down a hill, turn on a side street, and cut through an empty park. The chains squeak against the gusts of wind swaying the swings, and the roundabout slowly turns. I run my hands along the blood on my clothes and push forward again, despite the burning in both legs.

I don't stop until I'm under a bridge.

I place a hand over my stomach and lean against a graffiti-covered wall, my lungs aching as I try to catch my breath. My fingers tremble as I quake out a sob. Dry blood cracks atop my knuckles when I curl my fingers. My brother's blood.

He's dead. I killed him.

I recall Caden's eyes when he realized what was happening. My powers thrummed, building to a crescendo as the room vibrated around us.

The reflection of my eyes in his haunts me—black and demonic.

"It wasn't me. It was the death magic," I whisper aloud, then repeat it over and over until darkness falls and police sirens wail in the distance.

It's likely not for me. I may have decimated him with the build-up of magic, but they can't prove it. Humans don't believe in magic. But that won't stop my parents from hunting me to the ends of the earth. Their worst fears came true. This part of me can't be extinguished. I can't be fixed. I'm a witch born into the most evil family known to walk this world, the Fallenmoore Coven.

My father, who has been a pastor since I met him, always thought I was a test from God and he could save me from my sins. Now he probably thinks the devil himself placed me in his path.

Maybe I was a test.

If he's still alive, my dad will never stop looking for me. A sick, sadistic part of me hopes he isn't. If he is, then he'll tell the Order I'm a witch on the run. I don't know how involved he is with them, if he goes so far as to hunt witches with them, but it's a crazy church club. My parents may be killed for concealing me, but what do they have left now? I've murdered their only son.

The freezing air seeps through my every pore, chilling my bones. Nausea creeps up my throat, and each breath fogs in front of me as the temperature

drops a few degrees.

I take off again, staying in back alleys and quiet streets until I reach the outskirts of town. As I pass an abandoned shop, I glance at the window.

Blood covers my pajama shorts. Pieces of my brother dangle from my tank top, and my dark eyes are no longer black but now their usual deep brown. I breathe deeply, but the stench clinging to my pajamas makes me gag. My lips tremble, and tears flood my eyes. My legs ache from running, but I can't rest. Not yet.

If I know one thing, it's that a Fallenmoore witch will always have enemies. The church killed the rest of my biological family, and I am the last. If the Order finds me, I'm already dead.

ONE



Evie... Present day

The walls seem to groan as the rain hammers down outside the asylum. Jay slides his knee between my thighs and spreads them wider. My back presses against the wall, as he holds my wrists over my head.

I smile as he slides his hand over the tattooed roses entwined with skulls up the side of my leg. His breaths are heavy against my lips, and the magic buried deep inside me purrs, begging for release. Rain slashes against the barred windows, and lightning flashes throughout what used to be a patient's

bedroom, illuminating the graffiti and old blood covering the peeling, cracked wallpaper.

I can sense the ghosts here, watching us from the shadowy entryway to the corridor. The light fixture above creaks as gusts of wind slip through the cracks in the windowpanes.

“You’re breathtaking,” Jay whispers, then buries his face in my neck. His lips travel kisses along my collarbone, and a sliver of desire quickly pulses in my chest but fades just as fast.

I long to feel something. It’s why I come to the abandoned asylum on the edge of town. The violent energy left behind by the lost souls of cannibals and murderers writhes with my shadow magic, enhancing every touch.

My gaze travels behind Jay. There’s a sense of us being watched, as if someone is lurking in the shadowy corners of the room. The thought sends a jolt of electricity through my body, but there’s no one there. Another flash of lightning momentarily turns the room a bright shade of blue, and I stare at the incoherent words of former patients scratched behind a broken bed frame.

Four famous serial killers have passed through this building, along with thousands of the darkest minds. From the late eighteen hundreds until thirty years ago, this was the one-stop shop for evil. When I close my eyes, I can hear their screams, as if they’re still locked in their cells. My heart pounds, and the slight jolt of fear is enough to awaken something deep inside me.

“Evie,” Jay whispers against my skin, as if it’s a declaration of love.

I wish he wouldn’t ruin this by opening that mouth of his, no matter how gorgeous it is. His eyes widen, and I repress the urge to roll mine. If it weren’t for the lightning, I wouldn’t be able to see him at all.

I’d prefer that. Blindness gives way to the imagination, my favorite place to play.

Jay stands a foot taller than me, although that isn't a hard feat with my five-foot-one height. Most do. He's tanned, despite the constant cloud cover, and looks as if he belongs on a beach, not in a small town where it rains for half the year.

I look down at the six-pack he obsessively trains and tracks macros to maintain, and then at his tempting V lines. I run my fingers through his sandy-blond hair, breathing in the smell of sandalwood with notes of citrus on his white tee, masking the musky, mildew scent permeating the asylum.

A bang echoes in the distance. Has someone else wandered into our spot? Liquid fire sizzles between my legs at the thought.

I'm thankful he didn't hear, or else he'd stop. Exhibitionism isn't a kink he entertains. He doesn't like any of this, but he tries, for me. I stopped trying to get him to roleplay my fantasies and instead I act them out in my head.

He pauses after his next kiss on my neck, then brings his lips slowly up to meet mine. His baby blues lock onto me, and his pupils dilate, the lust brewing in them evident. "I'm so happy to have you back, Evie."

My stomach knots, and my pussy dries up. I smile because I don't want to hurt him, although we're not together. It's supposed to be just sex. That's what we agreed. I go to kiss him, but he pulls back an inch.

My brows pull together. "What's wrong?"

"I'm not playing around this time. This isn't just sex for me."

I close my eyes, holding my breath so I don't sigh. "Jay... You know I'm not ready for anything like that."

Gods, why is it so hard to have a quickie in an abandoned asylum?

He glances to the side, and my heart skips a beat. "I see."

"At least not right now. But I'm not seeing anyone else," I promise because I can't see him in pain. It's hardly a declaration, but it's enough.

His lips are on mine, and I dart my tongue to meet his.

Finally.

His erection presses against me through his denim pants. I unbutton mine and glance down. My nipples are hard peaks under my T-shirt from the iciness creeping in, and the black cotton under the lace grazes them with every movement.

Thoughts slide into my head, dark desires intruding on my being. I want to feel more of the darkness, to give into the energy left behind by the tortured, lost souls and let it consume me. The insanity purrs with my shadow magic. It's buried deep within me, and sometimes I let it come to the surface just enough to feel something. Like now.

It teeters on dangerous. I know what can happen if I let it out. The death magic will come with it. Yet I can't stop myself.

“Jay,” I say breathily and point at the gurney. “Let's do it on that.”

He whips his head around, grimacing as we both stare at the ripped brown leather, faded from the years of neglect. He brings his head up, then looks down at me. “Are you kidding?” he asks, exasperated.

“No.”

He sighs, a sound I've become accustomed to since I started dragging him here to fuck two years ago, before our small hiatus. “Why do we always have to do weird shit?” He rolls his eyes but grips my ass cheeks anyway, then hoists me into his arms.

I curl my legs around his torso.

“You're lucky you're beautiful. You know I can't say no to you.”

That's the fucking problem.

He places me on the leather and yanks his pants down to his ankles. I quickly undress, sliding off my top and pants. His eyes bulge as they trace

my curves. My bare ass presses deep into the worn-out cushioning, and I can't help but wonder how many people were tortured on the gurney.

When I close my eyes, I can sense the split, fractured darkness from their fucked-up minds still lingering. My magic likes it. It sizzles under my skin, waiting to be used, but I keep it locked away. It took me years to suppress it fully, through overusing anxiety meds and drinking most nights, only allowing myself moments of feeling the unkempt power inside me.

I live for those moments. While I hate what my magic might do, especially after keeping it so suppressed all this time, I can't help but long to use it again. It's a part of me, one I've become terrified of. It's too late for me to learn any control, if it's possible to command the darkest magic known to this world. But these moments—when my powers heighten every touch and emotion—are everything.

I pull his mouth to mine and press my lips firmly against his. My tongue darts between his lips when he opens in a gasp. The dance of our tongues causes my core to throb with need. His fingers travel up my torso, reaching for my breasts. He flicks a finger over my nipple, and a jolt of heat runs through me.

A second bang sounds from a far-off room. He pauses. "What was that?"

I can't help but smile. "You should be used to fucking in haunted places by now."

He rolls his eyes. "Ghosts aren't real."

I lick my lips. "Yes they are."

He whips his head around when something in the darkness creaks.

"Scared?" I tease.

His muscles tense, and I pull his lips back to mine before he can talk and ruin it. It's the closest I've come to feeling alive in months.

Hooking my legs around him, I tug him closer, his hard dick throbbing at the entrance of my wet pussy. I bite Jay's lip, coaxing a moan from him.

He slides inside me, my ass clenching as he slowly pumps his hips. I close my eyes, venturing deep into my subconscious. My favorite place to be is in my head. There, I can escape into my fantasies.

In this one, a stranger catches us. I squeeze my eyelids tighter, imagining the stranger in my fantasy unzipping his pants. He's watching us from the darkness of the room, pulling his hard cock out. His thumb rubs the glistening pre-cum around the tip, then gripping his length with his long fingers, he watches us fuck, covered in sweat.

Jay's fingers grip my hips lightly. I wish he'd press harder and dig his nails into my sensitive skin. A little blood never hurt anybody. Or if he'd wrap those long fingers around my throat until I'm gasping for air...

The energy in the building enhances my magic, sending shockwaves to my toes. That mixed with the fantasy in my head and his dick inside me makes me feel like I'm going to combust under the building pressure at the apex of my thighs.

I continue thinking about the stranger in my mind. He tugs harder on his dick as he masturbates to the couple fucking on the gurney. He draws closer, and I can practically feel his heavy breaths upon my skin. He groans like he's desperate to touch us. My pussy tightens, and a flood of arousal coats Jay's cock and drips down his balls. The stranger throws his head back, releasing a strangled moan, and spurts jets of his cum all over us.

My orgasm builds, my toes curling and going slightly numb as I bite gently on Jay's shoulder. He thrusts harder, the minutes running into each other. I moan against his shoulder as the gurney squeaks beneath us, threatening to

collapse. My orgasm builds to a crescendo, and I let out short bursts of groans, each one clipped as I lose my voice to my orgasm.

He shudders, his cum erupting inside me. His moans heighten mine, my magic growing stronger. I blow out a long breath, not letting my control go for even a second.

Hot sparks shred through me as I suck in a deep breath.

Jay pulls back, his breaths uneven, and he leaves a trail of semen on the leather between my legs.

Release. Finally. I missed feeling a dick inside me—and a warm body gliding against mine, even if it is short-lived.

If I'm honest with myself, it's the only reason I texted him after breaking things off with him a few months ago. He thought I was his girlfriend, whereas I knew I was using him for sex. At least now he knows where I stand.

I wish I could love Jay. He's perfect, and with the way he's staring at me, I imagine any woman in town would jump into his arms. But I won't let myself get close, not to him or anyone. The moment I lose control again, bits of Jay will cover these asylum walls, and he'll join the ghosts here.

I climb off the gurney and stand.

He smiles. "That was amazing," he says and tugs up his pants before buttoning them. Amazing is too strong of a word. But I *did* orgasm, even if it was just once. I need more, but instead of divulging that truth, I smile and nod in response. The truth would only hurt him.

I might be a murderer, but I'm not a sadist.

While he's pulling his tight white top over his muscles, I grab my clothes in a bundle. I should have brought some wipes, but as always, I never think

when I'm in the mood for fucking. I definitely should pee. I'm not getting a urinary infection for anyone, but I'm not doing that here.

I grab my phone from the mess of clothes. It's almost ten. "Let's go," I say. "We'll be late to work."

I lift my high-waisted black jeans up and fasten the three silver buttons. Then, I pull on my lace T-shirt, which cinches in at the waist, causing it to hug my wide hips. The sleeves are see-through, but the lace obscures the rose tattoos enough. I can't have anyone see them, but it's becoming hard to cover them, considering how much they've spread over the years. Purple roses, skulls, and leaves travel up both of my arms and my thighs, and there's one growing at the base of my spine.

I grab my purse, and Jay drapes his arm around my shoulders. The halls echo as we navigate the dark corridors, winding around discarded, rusty medical equipment. The walls are stained in splatters of browns, blacks, and crimson. Spiders dangle from webs that glisten when Jay shines his phone's flashlight toward the ceiling, and we are greeted by the creaking of the wrought-iron gates in the wind as we reach the front doors and step outside.

I pull out my pack of cigarettes and pull one between my middle and index finger.

Jay makes a face, unhooking his arm from around me. "You had one before we got inside. It's not attractive."

I shrug, then light it and breathe in the first, satisfying inhale of smoke. I hold it in my lungs for a few seconds, then blow out the smooth, long exhale of smoke away from Jay. "It's a good thing I don't give a fuck. Anyway, smoking after sex is the best thing ever." I know it's bad for me, but I don't really care. I'll stop eventually, but for now, it's too damn enjoyable.

Jay and I barely manage to clock in on time at the diner when Rosa walks in. Her thick, painted lips curve into a smirk when she sees me. I attempt to flatten my stray dark-brown strands but ultimately give up and tie my hair back into a ponytail. It reaches down to the bottom of my back. I really need a haircut. It's been what... two—no, *three* years.

Rosa places a hand on her hip, her bright-pink nails matching the ombre of her hair. “Don’t tell me. You were at the asylum?”

I tie my apron around my waist and step out behind the counter separating the kitchen and the tables. My apron is black, like everything else in my closet, except for the logo. I rub my fingers atop the material. “The Ugly Pancake” reads at the top, with a cartoon stack of pancakes that has a face on it. I can’t believe I’ve been working here for four years. What started as a temporary job has somehow become my livelihood. “I didn’t know you were coming by tonight.”

“I wasn’t.” She arches a dark-brown brow, matching her expressive eyes. “I stopped by your apartment and saw you weren’t home. There are only two places you go. Here and that asylum, but I didn’t expect you to be working *again*.”

I head for the coffee machine behind the register, and Rosa plops herself on a stool behind the counter. She doesn’t get why I like the graveyard shift. Granted, a few of the people we get in at this time of night I’d give a wide berth to in the daytime, but at least it’s slow and quiet.

Jay clears a booth at the back, and our manager, Brittany, is standing next to him, her hand on her hip.

“Someone called in sick,” I say, explaining why I’m working a seventh night shift in a row. “That asylum is just a quiet place to relax at.”

She scoffs. “If you ignore the devil worshippers breaking in to do rituals, sure.”

I smirk. “Or the ghosts screaming in the hallways.”

She shudders. “Be careful out there, unless you weren’t alone.” She tilts her head, and her pink-and-brown hair slides down one shoulder. She shoves someone’s leftovers to the side. “I can smell the sex from here.”

I shrug. “All I smell is bacon and pancakes.”

She drums her nails against the counter. “It’s super creepy, but whatever. To each their own. Although, what’s wrong with your apartment?”

What am I supposed to say? The violent energy makes me feel alive? That I’m secretly hoping someone will catch us? I’m weird enough in this town without adding any of my actual thoughts into the mix. “Gomez,” I reply, pouring myself a coffee and adding a double shot of espresso to get me through the night. “He interrupts.”

“Put him in his cage.”

I scoff a laugh. “Seriously? Gomez in a cage? He hasn’t been in that thing since I bought it. Not to mention the door doesn’t even lock, after Gomez destroyed it in a hissy fit the first time I tried to put him in it.”

“I do love that fruit bat.” She laughs. “I never thought I’d say those words.”

A ghost of a smile crosses my lips. Rosa points at the coffee in my hands. The heat warms my icy fingers, and I breathe in the rich smell.

“Um, where’s mine?”

“Cappuccino, extra sugar,” I say before she can moan. “Coming up.”

She swivels her body on the stool and looks at Jay, who is carrying back a stack of plates. “Poor guy,” she says in a coo. “Does he realize the

relationship isn't real yet?"

"We're not in one," I whisper-shout. "Please keep it down. He knows I'm not his girlfriend. I made it clear."

He shoots me an all-American smile, his pearly whites glistening under the fluorescent lights. I force a smile back, but guilt tugs in my chest. I went too far tonight, letting my magic come so close to the surface. I may not have lost control, but it was enough that it was heightening my emotions. Every. Single. One. I'm still horny as hell. "We're just..."

"Screwing. Yep, except it's not for him. He's looking at you with those marry-me eyes."

I playfully nudge her arm, then hush her as he heads behind the counter, then toward us. "Rosa, you look great as always."

She beams, and he leans over. Half the time, I'm sure he doesn't even realize he's flirting. Still, his tips are always double mine.

"You look good too," she says back, tilting her head. "I can hardly tell you've just had sex in an asylum."

He looks from her to me, creasing his light brows. "Suppose you girls talk about everything." He playfully pokes my waist, then kisses my forehead. I wince, but he doesn't notice and follows Brittany, who doesn't so much as glance at me, to the back.

Rosa slowly sips her cappuccino, the froth accumulating on her lip. I ignore the incredulous look, but she tsk-tsks.

"What?"

"I saw you cringe when he kissed you."

I roll my eyes. "Look..."

"We should talk sometime about why you won't let people close to you."

I tap my finger against my mug. "Don't psychoanalyze me. I am not one of

your patients.”

“Exactly,” she says with a bright smile. “That’s why I’ll tell you exactly what I think. No sugarcoating needed.”

I down the rest of my coffee, then look around the diner. Despite having the interior of being stuck in the sixties—with red-leather booths, an excessive amount of chrome, and large mirrors—the windows and light fixtures have been modernized. The register is new too, with hundreds of options on the screen. I’m just waiting for an upgraded coffee machine.

At least there are no customers right now to contend with. I should start clearing the tables from the day shift before Brittany leaves in thirty minutes. “Anyway,” I say, moving on from the Jay discussion. “How is work?”

“A client canceled last minute, so I had a long lunch. Nothing new.”

“I still can’t believe you have your own practice,” I say again, my chest swelling with pride.

She grins. “There are no other sex therapists in this town, and you know they need it.”

I nod, smirking, and place my cup down. Time to work.

“You might want to cover that up,” she says before I can walk out from behind the counter. “You know Brittany will say something.” She points at my neck.

I slap my hand over the skin. “Oh, God.” I grab my purse from under the register and rush to the employee restroom. I slide myself between the sink and wall to look in the mirror. I’m a mess. The dark circles under my eyes are, well, darker. I peer closer and notice a small bruise on my neck.

He’s given me a fucking hickey. Great.

I pull the concealer from my bag and cover the bruise. By the time I finish, only a small, discolored patch is visible.

I flick the light switch, and just before the room goes dark, I glimpse my reflection. Blackness leaks into my irises. I fumble for the handle. Light spills in when I finally open the door, and I look back. My eyes are back to normal, the hazel-brown of my irises devoid of darkness.

My chest heaves. "I'm fine," I say again. My magic is suppressed. It's not coming out. *Pull yourself together*, I command myself. My mind is playing tricks. The last time my eyes were black like that, I'd just killed my last victim.

I blink twice, then push the obvious hallucination from my brain. As I close my eyes, I take in a deep breath and feel for my powers. A low hum emanates from my core; my death and shadow magic are completely numbed.

I open my eyes and breathe a sigh of relief. The worst thing that could happen in my is my magic shooting out of me again. Witches aren't supposed to exist. Only the church knows about us, and they have eyes everywhere. I can't risk being discovered.

Even Rosa doesn't know she's one. There are many folk witches, unaware of the magic in their veins. I don't tell them. What's the point? Folk magic only grows with practice, and they're safer without it.

If only it was as easy to bury mine.

Jay appears in the doorway, pulling me out of my thoughts. "Brittany's looking for you." He makes a face, and I groan. "She wants to talk about the schedule before she leaves for the night. We have a customer. I can take care of them."

I shake my head, as if to scatter the thoughts of the shadow in the restroom.

"Thanks."

He lifts my chin with his finger. "Smile, Evie." He tilts his head. "You have such a beautiful smile, stop hiding it."

I groan, then head out to the diner. Ugh. Fuck off. Smile *more*? As if I have anything to smile about. Next to Rosa, I notice the customer Jay referred to, but there's something different about him.

I recognize the cross on a necklace hanging from his neck. It's black with gilded edges, and it's upside down. In the center, the letter O is embossed. The man, who can't be any older than me, stares right through me, as if he can see the evil lurking beneath.

My chest tightens and I quickly turn away, heading to the back to find Brittany. He doesn't say anything or come after me, but I'd recognize that symbol anywhere.

He's with the Order. They've found me.

TWO



Lorcan

Ominous thunder clouds roll over the mountains in the distance. This small town feels even tinier with the absence of life. A powerful gust of wind lifts the leaves scattered in the street, sending them to dance along its drafts. The wind carries a chill with it, and I lift the collar of my charcoal peacoat, the warm woolen fibers shielding my face from the bite of the dropping temperature.

Leaves crunch under my boots, and I stroll down the sidewalk in the Shadow Realm. I exhale sharply through my nose, my nostrils flaring. Being

the king of demons means nothing if I can't leave this damned place.

Forming a demonic attachment with a human by oppressing them means most demons can venture into the human realm for a short time. But unlike me, they were not bound here by blood and magic. The demons here followed me from Hell to this purgatory after my family had banished me to the human realm. Then the witches locked me in the Shadow Realm, ensuring I'd forever be alone. Only demons and witches with shadow magic can enter this realm without dying.

No matter what I've tried, I still can't leave and go into the human world. Rage pulses through me as I pick up my pace. The straw-colored sun barely emits any light as it hides within the puffy gray clouds. And yet, when another breeze gusts by, making the branches of the maple trees sway, I squint my eyes from the sudden brightness.

I grab a lighter and a cigarette from the pack in my pocket, then light it. The cherry glows as I pull in a long inhale of smoke, holding it until my mind buzzes. As I let it out, relief washes through my bones.

I wander aimlessly, hoping to distract myself. My past is never far from my mind. No matter how many times I bury it, it crawls out of the soil and into my thoughts. My insides seem to burn as bitterness overflows within me. The Shadow Realm is an exact replica of the human world but is much more twisted. It's a brutal place, but there is serenity to be found among the pieces of ash drifting like snow.

I pause at the park when the eerie song of a child singing fills my ears. My eyes drift toward the ghost seated on the middle swing, seeming content in her afterlife, the playground all for her. Before I leave, she fades, probably appearing in the human realm, as most spirits do. They can appear in both realms, although they are stuck in between, never finding peace.

I push my hair out of my face, but my raven locks quickly fall back against my forehead. I run my fingers through the strands, tousling it back. With a final puff of the cigarette, I throw it to the ground, showering embers over the sidewalk.

The more time I spend in solitude, the more my rage grows. If I ever want to escape, I must find her... the *witch*. I finally have the Fallenmoore mirror, after tracking it to an old antique store, and a human who sold me his soul acts as my proxy for the time being. The witch is all that is missing. Demons whisper of how the last of the Fallenmoore Coven was slaughtered twenty years ago, but they don't know what I do. I was bound here in their blood. I can sense when one of them still lives. We both manipulate shadows, while also having other, unique powers. I was not drawn to the small town of Darkwood, at the edge of Washington state, for no reason.

I tracked her magic here, but it's not exact. I've searched the town, but I've yet to find her. The last of the Fallenmoore family. She's my only hope.

I shove my hands in my pockets and walk toward my human's apartment. Thoughts of regret, hatred, and revenge are a constant loop. A flash of the Fallenmoore Coven pierces my thoughts, and I recall the day they shoved me through their mirror. They were the first people to trick me. I know my brothers worked with them to lock me in here too.

A hot flush blooms on my chest, a black spiked ball of rage in my soul growing infinitely the more I think of the coven. They believe their brand of evil is better than mine, but they do not know the type of monster they caged. I am bound by their blood, and despite enjoying the thoughts of each of them being slaughtered by the church, I am glad one survived. If they'd all died, I could never leave this place.

I must find her and keep her safe, then hope she's far more naive than the

rest of her family were.

A tingling sensation at the back of my mind alerts me to the proximity of the human I call my valet, my only foothold in the human world. He has no choice but to serve me after he bartered his soul.

I walk through shadows, shifting into them. I step from one shadow to another, going from underneath the large maple tree overhanging the street to stepping into my valet's apartment.

A leather sofa sits in front of the fireplace, a mug set upon the wooden coffee table. I make my way to the mirror hanging over the mantle and then stoop to light a flame on the logs in the hearth. The fire dances hypnotically as it licks up the wood, ever greedy to consume more.

I run both of my hands through my hair before clasping the strands at the back of my head. While I can only ever leave through the Fallenmoore family mirror, I can see through any, choosing to reveal myself when I want. I touch the mirror, and a shimmer ripples across it. I watch my human valet, Aiden, silently as he meanders through his home. His keys clink together when he drops them on the table by the door. Next, he removes his baseball hat and hangs it on the hook. He exhales audibly, as if the stress of his human life is too much for him to bear.

I summon him to me without speaking, reaching into his mind through the demonic attachment and bargain. *“Valet, it's about time you came home. We have much to discuss.”*

Aiden jumps, his eyes widening in fear. He places a hand against his chest and exclaims, “For fuck's sake! You could've given me a heart attack.”

“I wouldn't be so lucky.”

I pull my mask over my face, then make myself appear in the mirror from the Shadow Realm version of his apartment, and he rushes over to me in his

human realm apartment.

Aiden crosses his arms over his chest and raises his eyebrows questioningly as he waits. I listen to his internal monologue. *Every fucking day is the same shit from this dude. Valet, do this. Valet, do that. Am I some kind of fucking servant?*

My molars grind together as my irritation grows. “*You are a servant,*” I say into his mind, my voice somehow still sounding gravelly and deep.

He sighs. His blue eyes narrow, and he runs his hand through his short, mousy-brown hair, speaking aloud this time. “You promised you would set me free if I found her. Is that still true?”

“*That’s not all we agreed to. If you don’t want to burn in Hell, then you know what you must do.*”

Fear slices through his expression. I can do little to him from here, but a deal with any demon is a one-way ticket to Hell. Despite being trapped here, I can still barter soul contracts. I am the leader of the seven circles of Hell, after all—even if I’m not physically there.

“I know what we agreed to,” he replies, then scratches the side of his neck. “I just... feel bad for what we’re going to do to her.”

“*My patience grows thin, human. If you don’t want to burn for an eternity, torn apart over and over again, with the skin peeled from your bones—*”

“Fuck, okay. I get it. You paint a beautiful picture.” He puffs out his cheeks and leans forward. “Fine,” Aiden says, resigned. “But I better not get sent to Hell anyway because of what I do to the witch.”

“*You won’t,*” I respond, bored and ignoring the rest of his blathering. It is just my goddamn luck that I have to put up with a man who doesn’t have the bandwidth between his ears to comprehend the intricacies and nuances of

Hell, demon contracts, or how any of it works. If he did, he wouldn't be so easy to manipulate.

My lips pull back in a silent snarl when he doesn't stop talking, and he takes a step away from the mirror.

"I've grown tired of your insolence. Have you found the witch yet?"

"Have you?"

"Listen closely and shut your mouth. Remember who you are speaking to and why you are my valet."

He sighs, regret threading in his stare. I know that look. *Guilt.*

"You found her." My lips unfurl into the first genuine smile in a century. My valet shudders when he sees it, and I grin wider.

"Dude, don't take this the wrong way, but that is a creepy smile." He pauses. "Yes, I found her."

My eye twitches. This is everything I've been waiting for. *"So she is here."* I breathe deeply, then close my eyes for a few seconds. She mustn't be using her magic, else I'd have found her already. I only feel sparks of it occasionally, enough to get close to her location but not enough to track her entirely.

"Just like you said she would be. In Darkwood. Her name's Evie, and I glimpsed that rose tattoo with skulls and stuff you said she'd have. She was trying to cover them, which you said she'd do, but I could see them through the lace on her shirt in the light. Anyway, yeah, I wore the weird cross you gave me when I saw her at the diner."

"Was she afraid?"

He sighs. "Petrified. She hid away after she saw me, so I left."

My lip curves at the corner. *Wonderful.*

"Her friend told me a lot. She likes to talk."

“Find out where she lives,” I order. *“Now. I’ll have the mirror delivered to her, as we discussed before.”* I need to ensure he remembers our months of plans exactly.

He nods, and I flex my fingers.

It’s finally time for the Fallenmoore mirror to come out of storage. The store owner never sold it, but he wouldn’t—not after I appeared in it and ensured his loyalty. I’ll be paying him a visit shortly.

Aiden nods, expecting a “well done” when all he’s managed is to surpass the bare minimum expectation of his job. Besides, the hard part hasn’t been done yet. He turns around and stumbles, his palm connecting with the wall and shifting the picture frames as he rights himself. He glances over his shoulder and speed walks into a room beyond my current vantage point. No matter. I can watch him, no matter where he goes.

Humans are so fond of admiring themselves, and I can only be grateful for their naivety.

THREE



Evie

This bat has a fucking death wish. Every time I open the doors to the balcony, he flies out, decides he hates the sunlight, then falls onto the railings. I huddle him into my arms before he can fly in a panic down into moving traffic.

“For a creature who hates the sun, you sure do like to test your luck.” I groan, forcing Gomez back inside, and slide the glass door behind him. His wings flutter as his big, round black eyes widen behind the glass. “I invented that look.” With a flick of my lighter, the end of my cigarette glows, and Gomez’s gaze remains locked on me. “Don’t look at me like that.”

Water drips from the balcony above, and I glance over, spotting my neighbor, Margaret, watering her plants. She tsk-tsks when she sees the cloud of smoke, then walks back into her apartment. I hear her door shut and roll my eyes. I wouldn't be surprised if she tries reporting me again for smoking, even though it's allowed as long as I'm outside. It wouldn't be the first time she's done it. No matter, I can put up with her as long as it means I remain here, safe and far away from my adopted parents and the Order.

Living under an alias isn't the worst thing, and as for my magic, I have benzos and liquor for that. It works better than any of the experiments Edward did.

I shudder as the memories of being locked in their basement—after his wife had rescued me from the first of many murder scenes I have witnessed—come floating back. Everyone presumed me dead with my family, and Edward and Antoinette took me in, telling everyone they'd adopted me from a poor family. No one had seen me in town.

I've lived under three names, but Fallenmoore haunts me the most. I've found the name scrawled in ledgers from witch hunters, journals, and more. Despite doing my best to get a hold of anything that may help me understand my magic, coven, or family, there's little to find. Moreover, I have to be extra careful so as not to draw attention to myself.

I learned one important fact though: the Fallenmoore witches were the last to possess death and shadow magic.

That night comes back to me. I was only six, but the memory doesn't fade like the rest from my childhood. When I close my eyes to the sun beaming over the street below, I can see the blood splattering up the wall as I watched through gaps in the vent, from my secret hiding spot. I had just managed to

escape after they'd set the fire. When Edward and Antionette found me, I was barely conscious.

I open my eyes and inhale deeply. The cigarette stings my fingers as it burns down to the butt, so I drop it into the ashtray. I think about that night often. If it weren't for Antionette's pleading or Edward's beliefs that I had been delivered as a test to him—to remove the evil and save me—then I wouldn't be here now.

And five more people would still be alive.

I light another cigarette, ignoring Gomez flapping at the glass behind me. With a long exhale, I breathe out a long puff of smoke and lean on the black iron railing, looking down at the small shops with slate roofing and marquees. Shoving away the memories of the past, I think back to last night instead—and my current threat. I'd recognize that upside-down cross anywhere. I texted Rosa earlier, curious about the stranger she'd spent thirty minutes talking to while I'd hid away. While she told me he's just passing through, I can't shake the feeling he knows who and *what* I am. Why else would one of them be in Darkwood?

But he didn't say anything to me. My tattoos were covered, and he really could just be passing through, like Rosa said. Of course, she doesn't know why I didn't reappear after seeing him last night.

I try not to overthink, which is an impossible task. I blow out a puff of smoke and look through my bloodshot eyes at the road below. It's quiet, and with a population of a little over four thousand, there's less chance of me being found. I only hope the man from the Order doesn't return, that I'm just being paranoid.

I need to keep a low profile until I'm sure he's gone.

I examine the tattoo snaking up my arm. More purple roses with thorns and

vines have appeared, intertwining with skulls. Despite my best efforts to have them covered up or lasered off, they always come back. Unlike regular tattoos, they're formed from shadow magic.

They appeared when I was fourteen and have been growing ever since. First, the ones on my thighs appeared, followed by a sleeve down my arm, with parts growing onto my fingers. Now, one is partially growing at the base of my spine. My grandmother and mother had the same ones, but once they mastered their magic, the tattoos stopped growing.

They deserved what they got. My family was a bunch of murderers, and despite trying to be nothing like them, I ended up going down the same path.

You killed him.

Edward's words—the man I formally called dad—haunt me. An ache cuts through my chest, and I check my phone to distract myself. The cigarette's cherry kisses heat against my face as I inhale deeply, then hold the drag for a few seconds in my lungs.

I open the messages from Jay.

Want to come over tonight? My parents are making dinner.

I read his second message.

No pressure or anything. I can come to yours instead if you want. Night in?

My stomach's in knots. I hate leading him on. It's why I broke things off last time. But he's willing to go along with my sexcapades, and as much as I hate to admit it, a part of it stems from loneliness. Despite being a recluse, I still crave to be held.

Going to dinner with his parents is my version of Hell. I don't fancy being stuck in a room with his rich parents, who force him to work at the diner they own while they made a woman, who has only been in town for six months, manager. Brittany might be the biggest bitch I've ever met.

Jay deserves to be in charge of the place. God knows his parents have enough businesses. They want him to prove himself first.

Fuck Brittany and fuck his parents too.

I type back, blowing out a long exhale of smoke and relishing in the nicotine buzz prickling my brain.

Spending tonight with Rosa. Tomorrow?

I hit send, then quickly send a second message, so he knows family dinner is absolutely off the table.

Takeout at my place. Chinese?

The little dots appear within seconds, followed by a text.

I'd love that.

I turn to look at my sweet, all-black furbaby through the glass. I smile, watching my little fruit bat snacking on berries on the sofa, his favorite spot. He's probably sulking because I've been working so much. I never thought when I found him injured that bats could have separation anxiety or need constant attention. I've considered taking him to work with me, but I don't trust Brittany not to hit him with a spatula.

I stub my cigarette out on the railing and head inside. Rosa calls as I step onto the thick, cream carpet.

Her voice sings through the phone. "Morning! You're up early."

"It's one p.m.," I say deadpan.

Her laugh tinkers into my ear. "Right, early, for you. I was going to leave you a voicemail. Look, I need to cancel tonight."

Thank God. Alone time with takeout and a movie on my day off is exactly what I need. "Oh, damn."

"Don't pretend to be sad. We both know you hate going out."

"You're not wrong." I think about the party she planned on dragging me to

tonight, and my chest tightens. “Are you not going anymore?”

I can feel her smiling through the phone. “I have a date.”

“Oh.” I smile. “Who’s the lucky guy? Will you be taking him back to show him your huge penis collection?”

“He’s not ready for that yet,” she says, followed by a laugh. “It’s with the guy from last night and I think he’s, like, religious.”

I freeze midstep, a lump forming in my throat.

“Evie? Hello?”

“Sorry.” I nearly choke. “I, uh... thought you said he was just passing through.”

“I must have made an impression.”

My lips part. I want to scream at her to be careful, to not go, but then I would have to divulge my darkest secrets, and I’m not ready yet. “I can come, if you want.”

“Girl, what? When have you *ever*,” she says, emphasizing, “wanted to come along and be a third wheel?”

The doorbell rings. Gomez gives me the stink eye from the sofa and curls his wings around himself. I scratch my head and blow out a heavy exhale. “I have to go. Someone’s at the door.”

I hang up before she can say anything else. Why the fuck is he staying? I’ve only ever seen that cross on Order members. Really, it’s just a stupid club within the church, filled with obnoxious, pious men from rich families. They only have one goal: to hunt and kill witches. They’ve mostly succeeded.

A memory of the night they came to my childhood home flashes into my mind a second time; my birth mother’s maniacal laughter rings through my head, a perfect echo of the fateful evening. Insanity had already claimed most of her mind, so when the Order arrived with holy water and crosses, she

laughed. She took out four with her shadows, until she stopped. It was the first real time I'd seen her afraid. One of the cloaked men unsheathed a dagger. It seemed to absorb all light, reflecting nothing from the ebony blade. Around the handle, shadows danced, reminiscent of our magic, as if it had been forged by one of us. But that was impossible.

The doorbell sounds a second time, and I snap out of the memory, letting it fade like an old photograph.

My heart hammers, and I'm unsteady on my feet. I eye my pill bottle on the counter. Is it too soon for another? It's been an hour, maybe two. That's long enough to take another. It has to be, though the doctor won't refill another prescription early. I'll be forced to buy them from some college kid instead. Ten, sometimes fifteen a day is excessive, but the doctor can't know why I have to take so many.

If I don't, people could die. I can't risk letting my magic out ever again.

I head for the door and peer through the hole. My brows knit together when I see a package instead of a person.

I don't remember ordering anything, but I do have an obsession with online shopping, so it could be mine. I open the door and check the label. It's addressed to my alias, Evie Haywood. I look left to right and don't see anyone outside.

It's massive. I tear open the box outside because there's no fucking way I'm bringing it in not knowing what it is.

My stomach drops, and fear skitters down my spine. I examine the silver frame of the mirror first. The unmistakable markings of our family, roses and skulls, are engraved on the frame. I step back, my fingers trembling. "Nope."

I cover the mirror back up and hurry back inside, hoping to the gods that someone steals the fucking thing.

My nightmare pulls me deeper, even though I am aware it's only happening in my head. However, it's unlike my other lucid dreams. I can't control anything happening, only my own actions.

My apartment looks the same. The depths of night protrude through the undraped windows of my office, and I stare at the Fallenmoore family mirror. I haven't seen it since I was young, yet it looks the same. Even the frame hasn't weathered over time.

Yet, the reflection has changed.

My dark-brown eyes are the same color as my biological dad's. They're so dark, they could be black. At times, they have been. My hair rolls in waves over my shoulders and down to my navel. My cropped pajama top shows off my narrow waist and wide hips, something I inherited from my mom. I run my fingers along the skin, knowing one day it will all be covered in roses and skulls.

When did I bring this inside my apartment?

I shake my head. I didn't. This is a dream, I remind myself, but no matter how much I concentrate on making the mirror disappear, it doesn't.

This either is really happening, or someone else is controlling it.

The mirror surface ripples, and eyes clash with mine in the reflection. I bring my fingers to my mouth, scream, and stumble backward. A masked man appears, and shadowy figures move around him. My heart throbs in my throat as nausea builds in the pit of my stomach. Holding my breath, I hesitate to speak.

His gaze pins me. *"Little witch."*

The hairs on my arms pluck into goose bumps. I freeze at the sight of him. Amusement swims in his striking, pastel-green eyes. His hair is dark, as if it's crafted from the night sky. I can make out a shadow of a beard running the length of his chiseled jawline from under his mask. When he moves, his muscles bulge under his shirt.

The mask is terrifyingly beautiful. Black shimmery paint colors most of it, with gold dripping from the eye sockets. The cheekbones are raised to create contours like bone structure.

Edward warned me of demons, the ones that come when we play with mirrors. I was ten when I first played on the darker side. He fretted over such things, which made me want to find out more. *There are dangerous things in this world. If you let them in, they'll never let you go.*

His words float back to me. I wish I heeded the warning. I found the mirror several years after my biological family died, when I ventured back to the site of my abandoned family home—or what was left of the building, anyway. It belonged to my family and had somehow survived the fire. When I stared into it, the reflection danced with shadowy figures, so I left it behind.

I escaped my family's fate. I escaped persecution. Yet my past haunts me.

I glare at the mirror, swallowing thickly. Everything in me screams to run. The man in the mirror takes a step closer, the floorboards creaking under his boots from just behind the mirror. My eyes widen.

He tilts his head, his dark stare intensifying as he gazes into my soul. I look at his tattooed arms, the black lines peeking out from under his rolled-up sleeves, and I notice his markings, like mine, are formed by shadows.

I find my voice, curled up in the back of my throat. "Why are you in my dream?" I ask, sensing the demonic power behind his eyes.

His face splits into a grin, a sadistic smirk curling those lips. He smells of

ash and all things burned. “You catch on quickly, *little witch.*”

“What do you want?”

He tilts his head, and his smile drops. Every hair on the back of my neck stands erect. I should run. Everything in me is screaming at me to, but instead, I take two steps closer so I can touch the mirror. My fingers dance through the mirror, reaching behind it.

I pull my hand back, seeing the twitch in the corner of his snarl. The room vibrates, and everything shakes as I wake, startled, from the dream.

Gomez jumps up from where he was snuggled against my side as I gasp for air, sucking in deep breaths. Sweat beads my forehead. Pale light from the moon seeps through the gap in my drapes, illuminating my bed.

Slowly, I climb off the mattress. “It’s okay, Gomez,” I whisper as he flies off the bed. “Stay here.”

I let out a long, shaky exhale. I walk to the front door and open it. The mirror has gone. My stomach knots as I glance over my shoulder and in the direction of my office, and a chill trickles down my spine.

The demon.

Squeaking and fluttering penetrate the silence. I can feel Gomez’s fear through our familiar bond. He should be awake now, being nocturnal, yet he seems to sleep both through the day and night, with small periods of being awake. I follow the sound of his panicked flutters to my office. My stomach dips when I reach the door. Slowly, I flick on the light, and my startled reflection greets me. The mirror is standing, unpackaged, by my desk. On it, a note is taped.

I placed the mirror inside so it won’t get stolen.

It is a family heirloom after all.

FOUR



Lorcan

It's been two days since she saw me in the mirror. She didn't sleep much that first night. Instead she covered it with a blanket and went back to her room, but she didn't know I could still watch her.

I expected her to run, to panic and scream. Instead, she stepped closer and latched those big brown eyes onto mine. If it isn't enough that she wasn't afraid, she touched the mirror, curiosity wrinkling her forehead when her fingers moved through it.

The witch may have covered the only mirror I can use as a portal to enter her world, but it's no matter. I can't use it as a portal until I create an attachment with her anyway. She's the last of the Fallenmoore witches, and the only way I can have a foothold in the Human Realm is to wear her down, then force her to use her magic.

Tonight, I watched her again through her bedroom mirror. While she didn't fear me, everyone is afraid of something. I just have to find the key to hers. Although, Aiden has been somewhat useful. I know she's terrified of the Order. That much is apparent by how she hid from him for her shift.

The night lightens a shade outside of her drapes, and I grip the mirror's frame in her Shadow Realm bedroom, staring as she sleeps. She slides her fingers along her neck, as if she can somehow sense my presence.

I spot several empty bottles of pills on her nightstand. I'm certain she's using them to keep her magic suppressed. She's scared of her own power, but she shouldn't be. I can sense her shadows from here. They call out to me. I must set them free if my plan is to work.

I send my consciousness into hers as she dreams. This time, instead of controlling her dream, I watch from the shadows. The sensation of slipping into another's mind is euphoric, and my body shudders with pleasure every time.

Chuckling darkly, I realize Evie is dreaming of the mirror.

Curiosity mixed with fear emanates from her as she stands in front of her family's antique, wearing pajama shorts raked so high, I can see the curve of her ass cheeks.

A throb pulses through my shaft and I shift my stance. As I tilt my head, preparing to manipulate her dream, my likeness appears, standing menacingly on the other side of the reflective surface.

I smirk, pleased with her detailed remembrance of me. My tattoo sleeves seem to ripple as my double grips the mirror frame, leaning only his upper body into the Human Realm.

She gasps, a hand flying to cover her mouth. Instead of running on instinct, she freezes in place. Evie's dream version of me drops his arms and takes one large step out of the mirror.

I don't need to fuck with her nightmares. She's already thinking about me, remembering our encounter.

My dream twin is now a hair's breadth away from her, instead of several feet. I watch, steely eyed, waiting to see what she does next. I examine her every movement, looking for any sign of fear, but she doesn't seem afraid, just like last time. Instead, she's curious, as if the darkness is beckoning her instead of repulsing her.

Fascinating.

I sit on the couch and sprawl my legs wide, seeing where her dreams take her. I don't mind being a visitor if this is what her mind comes up with.

I only wish I had popcorn.

My dream twin and the witch stand directly in front of me, the tension between them so thick, I can almost taste it. If I weren't so intent on seeing what is in her subconscious, I would take my likeness's place. After all, the subconscious is where humans find their darkest fears and desires are materialized.

I allow the dream to play out naturally. The wrinkle between my brow deepens as he lifts a hand, circles her throat, and squeezes lightly. I wait for her to run, but instead, lust roars to life in her eyes. Her entire body trembles as if the possibility of death is the most exquisite foreplay. His masked face

gives off an air of menace and displays the sinister smile on his lips as if it were mine.

She wants this, craves it even.

My eyes bulge when they attack each other greedily, giving into the pull of their arousal. She was supposed to be afraid of me, not want to fuck me. The muscles in my forearms tighten, the tendons jumping under my skin as I clench my hands into fists. Part of me is jealous of their intimate encounter.

My brows raise as I watch her tear off her tiny shorts, revealing her round, perfect ass. Then she makes quick work of her tank top. Her full tits bounce free, her nipples hard as she watches my twin finish undressing. I take in every inch of her beautiful body and think about gripping those hips and bending her over.

My double wastes no time as he lifts her by the ass cheeks and impales her on his cock. I groan with them as her needy cunt swallows his length. Their bodies slap together as he increases his pace. Evie's so wet, it runs down her thighs and onto his balls.

I reach down and adjust my cock through my slacks, the pressure from my epic hard-on painful as it's trapped behind my fly. I watch with rapt attention as he bounces her on his length. My claws extend and stab into the fabric of the couch, pure lust overwhelming my senses. The sounds of their joining are so fucking hot, I nearly come without touching myself.

I still can't believe she's dreaming of me after only seeing me once.

I'm embedded in her subconscious, a physical form so she can play out what she truly craves: danger.

Humans never fail to surprise me, especially *this* one. God likes to think humans are beautiful, but really, they're just as fucked up as us demons. It's a good thing they are, or else I'd have no entertainment.

The other demons in my realm swarm closer but stay outside the apartment. I sense them like a vibration thrumming through the room.

Evie moans and bites my double's shoulder. Her eyes shut as she deepens the bite. A rivulet of his blood skates down his bicep and drips onto her chest. His longing permeates the air—the combination of pleasure and pain too euphoric for him to hold back his appreciative sounds for her.

My lips curve into a smirk as a shadow forms and presses her backward, causing her back to arch. My double bends forward to lick the blood trail from her soft skin, grazing her with his razor-sharp teeth.

I bite my lip as her half scream, half whimper pierces my ears. “Oh, oh my God. Fuuuuck.”

He digs his claws farther into the skin on her hips, and crimson covers her skin, dressing her like a sublimely macabre painting. He lifts by her ass, just high enough to look at where his fat dick is stretching her tight pussy.

I stand from the couch, stalking around the couple. I grip my painfully hard cock at the base to stave off my impending orgasm. My double widens his stance, his thickly muscled thighs flexing with each bounce as he slams her onto him, using her like his personal sex doll.

I stop perpendicular to them. Evie's head hangs back, her hair pooling on the floor behind her as the dream version of me doubles his pace, wrecking her with inhuman speed.

I kneel inches away from them and inhale deeply. “Godsdamn.” The witch's subconscious is so strong, I can smell the sex oozing from them. I lick my upper lip and groan. Slickness coats her thighs, the scent a mix of honey and something primal. My fingers flex as I watch the torturous scene play out before me, and it takes all my restraint not to engage. It would be so easy to lean in and lick the place where they're joined.

“Fuck, little one, you’re going to be so much fun to play with before I break you.”

Her scream reverberates in my skull, and my erection throbs painfully.

My double and I watch as he rams half of his veiny length into her cunt. A shadow forms, grinding down onto her clit. My cock twitches, and pre-cum seeps into my pants as she comes all over herself and my double’s dick. I pant and bare my teeth. My claws dig deeply into my bent knees. Blood soaks the material, and a puddle forms on the floor beneath me.

The dream version of me lowers to his knees, using the momentum to impale her as deeply as he can, then he slices long, razor-like teeth into the junction of her shoulder and neck. He stills, then fills her with his spend. After, he recalls his claws, releasing the witch. She slips off of his dick and falls to the carpet, her legs landing on either side of his body, leaving herself spread wide before him.

Without another word, he turns on his heel and strides completely nude back through the mirror.

The look of hatred on her face sends glee through my bones.

I leave her dream, my dick still rock hard against my pants. She turns over in her bed in the real world, a small, satisfied moan escaping in her sleep. I catch myself wishing I could go through, to touch her in real life, but dismiss the intense desire. Lust was always my weakness.

I walk to the window in the Shadow Realm version of her apartment, then spark up a cigarette. After holding the first inhale in my mouth, I create an oval with my lips, letting smoke climb over my lips and into my nostrils.

Darkness shrouds the mountains and forests against the horizon, so the silhouettes are barely visible. I glance down at the street and flickering lamppost. An eerie blue hue emits around demons as they glide down the

streets. Some, in their human form, wear clothes all from different eras. Others remain in their demonic forms, with tails, talons, and razor-sharp teeth.

I was born to rule them. Being a son of Satan means possessing more power—and bloodlust—than the rest. My six brothers and I embody the deadly sins, each of us leading different areas. However, to my dismay, I am the only one who can't step foot into the Human Realm, even with a demonic attachment. The Fallenmoore witches made sure of that, tying my fate here with their bloodline.

One demon watches the humans in the apartment across the road from Evie's. His tail twitches as he stares greedily into the vanity mirror, casting shadows in the low lighting of a lamp. Few mortals are aware that mirrors are portals, allowing us to look through them and into their world. If they did, I'm certain humans would cover them up.

Demons' favorite activity is spying on the Human Realm, each of the demons feeding on humans' sins through mirrors. I stare as the demon across the street looks through their bedroom mirror at a couple arguing. He strokes his cock, going between his demonic appearance and his shadowy form, feeding off their anger.

I finish the cigarette, open the window, and flick it outside.

Rage resonates through me as loneliness hits me again. I hate it, and until I was trapped in here, I didn't know I could feel it at all. Despite the millions of demonic forces also in the Shadow Realm, I am isolated. In Hell, I not only ruled the demons but I could feed off human souls trapped there. With a court of souls who lived to serve me, I didn't know what it meant to be alone.

Until I was caged.

I shake my head at the painful memory and instead focus on when I was

banished to the Human Realm. There were far worse punishments, and being around the mortals and their wicked sins filled me with deranged content. Corrupting them was easy, and I enjoyed every second of it, until I befriended a few of them. I should have known better than to have lowered myself to trusting one.

But I did, and all it got me was eternal damnation in the Shadow Realm.

I turn my back toward the demon and look around the witch's apartment. She's my only salvation from this place. As much as her dream startled me, I am reminded by the tarot cards and Ouija board tucked away on her black bookshelf that while she doesn't seem to practice her incredible power, she is still a witch.

The last time I trusted a Fallenmoore witch, it ruined me. Never again.

My nostrils flare, my lip twitching as I curl my fingers into my palms and glare at the photo encased in a black frame, of her with her pink-haired friend.

This manipulative little one will crave me so much that she aches, her core throbbing every time the thought of me crosses her mind. The more I drive her pleasure and fear, the more she'll have no choice but to allow her magic out, destabilizing everything she's trying to hide from.

She's afraid of her power, and she doesn't trust herself with it. Once she breaks, she'll be forced to embrace the parts of herself she hides from. She'll hate me, and that thought is tempting as fuck.

FIVE



Evie

I pop my ninth pill for the evening. I've been spacing them out, but the high isn't as good as usual. Half a milligram is nothing anymore, but it keeps my magic contained, and that's what matters. Still, tiredness comes over me, and the book I'm reading is far less enjoyable. The small lamp behind the sofa casts a soft, orange glow onto the cream pages.

My muscles tense when Gomez nestles against my neck. His wings curl around him. My hair falls around his body as he sits on my shoulder, looking at the book open on my lap as if he can read. I glance toward my office,

which is more like a library these days. Instead of going in there to grab a new book from my to-be-read pile, I stick to the ones I've already read on my two shelves in the living room.

There's no way I'm going back in there with that mirror. Not even Gomez will fly near that door. Despite covering the antique with a blanket, I know the demon is waiting for me to get a closer look. I've read enough about them to know they use mirrors as portals. Fortunately, this one seems tied to my family's mirror, which begs the question *why?*

My phone buzzes as I try to focus on the words, jolting me. I grab it from the side table and see a message from Jay.

Do you want to ride to work together?

Since learning about the guy from the Order, who Rosa said is called Aiden, I've felt anxious about going out alone. I hesitate my thumbs over the screen, then spot the little dots in a bubble. A second message pops up.

No strings attached.

I roll my eyes. There are always strings with Jay, but he's a good guy, and I can't drive my car in my state.

Thanks... I pause, then delete what I wrote and start a new message. *You're so amazing, Jay. But you're driving my car.* I would go in his, but he gets so pissed about me smoking in there. Maybe we can go to the asylum after my shift, I wonder, but no spark of excitement shoots through me at the thought.

I can't think of him or anyone but the demon in the mirror. Rosa doesn't think I'm fucked up, even though she's a therapist, but she's wrong. Because instead of focusing on real men, I'm obsessed with a man in a mirror.

Jay messages back.

Fine, but you're not smoking next to me. See you at 9.30.

Like fuck am I listening to him. It's my car.

I shake my head and speak my thoughts aloud. “How the fuck is it nine already?”

A wing flaps against my face, and pain shoots down my arm. I reach for Gomez, squeezing my eyes shut as he goes into a flurry of panic, tangling his body in my hair. “Ouch, stop. Fuck, Gomez.” I grab him and slowly detangle him from my strands. “What the hell?”

I cup him in both of my hands. “Why are you trembling?” I ask, softening my tone. Blood seeps from scratches on my shoulder, but I ignore the sting of pain. My heart flutters but quickly slows again. The benzos keeps me grounded, even when he looks at the long, standing mirror next to the fireplace. My eyes glide over the makeup and straightener left on the carpet in front of it, from when I wanted to sit to get ready instead of standing in the restroom.

Tingling crawls along my skin as I stare at the reflection of the room behind us in the mirror. No one is there, but Gomez won’t stop squeaking. His wings flap, and I pop him on the cushions of the sofa, then close my book.

Slowly, I walk over and touch the mirror. There’s nothing there except my reflection. I wipe the smudged eyeliner accumulating in the crease of my lids, then sigh at my bloodshot gaze. I chew on the inside of my lip, then spin the mirror around to face the wall, just in case.

“It’s okay,” I say and turn toward him. “I’ll get you a bowl of milk.”

I freeze midstep when the doorbell rings. The candle on the side table blows out, leaving a pillar of smoke spiraling up and vanilla and burned jasmine permeating the air. My heart hammers when the doorbell rings again, the sound bouncing around the walls.

I breathe in the smoky scent, and Gomez flies from the sofa to the door.

“Shh.” I run to him, trying to grab him before he can make a sound to alert

whoever is at my door this late that we're actually home. I know it hasn't been long enough to be Jay.

I tiptoe to the peephole, then breathe a sigh of relief.

"It's me. Not a stalker!" she shouts from outside and presses her eye to the other side of the peephole. I unlock it and pull Gomez back before he can jump onto her head.

I smirk. "That's what a stalker would say."

She opens her arms, and I ready myself for her embrace, but she grabs Gomez instead, pulling him against her chest in a tight embrace. "How's my little night puppy?" she asks in a baby voice that makes me nauseated.

I walk back into the living room. My toes curl against the thick carpet, and I face the fireplace. Rosa eyes the mirror facing the wall, then arches a brow. "Everything okay?"

I nod quickly and force a smile. "It's great."

Her brown gaze darts to the pill bottle on the small table. "How many have you taken today?"

"The recommended dose," I snark back, although it's a lie. Technically, I'm only supposed to take three milligrams a day, but I've had four and a half already. Still, it's better than the days when my powers are haywire and I'm forced to take six or seven milligrams.

She shakes her head, then looks at me with disbelief. "You better not be drinking then."

"I'm not."

"I'm serious, Evie. Alcohol and benzodiazepines are both depressants. It can stop you from breathing."

I wave her down. "I know, I know." I curl my top lip between my teeth. There's a huge part of me that wants to tell her everything. Because then she

might understand why I have no choice. I'd rather die than kill her. My death magic has killed five before, and I can't have her as the next casualty or, God forbid, Gomez. "I won't drink, I promise. Anyway, Jay will be here soon. I have to get ready for work."

She tsk-tsks. "Seriously? Brittany is making you work *again*?"

I shrug, grab my black knitted sweater, and pull it on. It drapes down one shoulder and hangs baggy around my torso. "I need the money."

"Call in sick," she begs, pressing her hands together. Her normally straight hair hangs in ringlets down her back, the dark brown melding into the bright pink ombre. Her smile is contagious, and I almost caved when she presses her fingertips to her lip in a praying motion. I know what she's thinking, but I can't.

"I'll get fired."

She tilts her head. "Really? You know they can manage without you. Let's go out."

"Brittany will find out. You know she will. Look, I'm off tomorrow, and it's a Saturday..." I say, and she relents, throwing her hands down at her side.

"Fine." She strokes Gomez, who has perched himself on her shoulder. "But no excuses. We're going out."

"Where to?" I tease, as if there's more than one bar in Darkwood.

The doorbell rings again, and Rosa opens the door. Jay stands in the doorway and smiles at Rosa, then grins at me. He runs his fingers through his sandy-blond hair, and his blue eyes glisten when he looks at me. "Hey, beautiful."

"Hey." I smile back.

His brows pull downward. "You're not ready yet?"

I place my hand on my hip. "Seriously? What's wrong with what I'm

wearing?”

He grimaces. “No, no, nothing. Sorry.”

I blow out a heavy exhale. “Let me grab my purse. Then we’ll go.”

When I turn around, my heart almost leaps out of my chest. My brows draw together, and Rosa looks behind her at the small mirror on the wall.

“What is it?” she asks slowly as I stare at the mirror.

I could have sworn I saw something. I swallow thickly, then face her. “Nothing,” I lie. “Are you still going out?”

“Not without you.”

“What about Aiden?” I ask, and my chest tightens. I tie my hair back into a ponytail as Jay closes the front door. The cold, fall air creeps through and into the living room.

She places a hand on her hip and tugs her orange cardigan down, which complements her bronzed skin. “He hasn’t even kissed me.”

I make a face. “Come on. You can’t actually be interested in him.”

“He’s a pastor,” she says and smiles. “Well, in training, but still. It’s forbidden. I don’t know. I like him, except for his preaching.”

“Just be careful.”

“Oh.” She jumps a little, then reaches into her shimmery-gold purse. “Speaking of, he gave me this.”

Jay chimes in. “Aren’t crosses supposed to be, like, the other way around?”

I freeze and bile climbs my throat. He’s given her the fucking branding from the Order. “Rosa...” I stutter, as a lump forms in my throat. I take a step back from the cross hanging from the necklace. “I’ve seen that before.”

“You have?” She runs a finger along the gilded edge. “Because he says it’s a symbol for some important, secret mission, but he wouldn’t say what.”

My chest heaves. How the fuck do I tell her without implicating myself?

“It’s devil-worshipping,” I lie, hoping it’ll get her to break things off with him. “He’s probably just pretending to be a pastor.”

Jay nods. “Yeah, you always see an upside-down cross in horror movies and stuff.”

She drops it back into her purse. “Hmm. I’ll, uh... ask him about it.”

“Can you take Gomez with you?” I ask Rosa when Jay checks the time on his phone. “He’s been jumpy today, and I don’t feel comfortable leaving him alone.”

“Sure.” She heads to the fridge, grabs some berries, then hands him a few. “Here, baby.”

He pulls it from her fingers and swallows it quickly, squeaking for a second. “Thanks. I’ll come by and get him in the morning.”

Jay places his hand on the small of my back, and Rosa gives me a look. I follow her outside with Jay at my side, but I can’t shake the horrible feeling that someone is watching me as we head for the door.

SIX



Lorcan

I still cannot get my thoughts straight. Rage is my constant companion. I order Aiden to continue his ruse of being an order member. Him giving the pink-haired one the cross worked well. The witch's face drained of color when her friend pulled it from her bag.

I sit in the witch's office while she's at work, looking at myself in the Fallenmoore mirror and recalling the day when the coven forced me through it. Their powerful ritual and symbols trapped me in front of it. I believed I

could overpower them, but they knew my true name. My brothers had to have given it to them. There's no other way they would have known.

I trusted the elder, Evangeline. That was my first mistake and one I wouldn't make again. Fate has a sense of humor at least. Because of course the one who can set me free was named after the one who sealed my fate. If Evie knew why they locked me in here, she would be smart to run. But the witch is curious, to my benefit. Unlike the rest of her family, she wears the darkness so beautifully. I'll ruin her with it.

It's a fair punishment. Evangeline manipulated me. Now I will do the same to her last living descendant.

I step away from the mirror and through the Shadow Realm version of the witch's office, which is more like a library. I kneel by her bookshelves, then slide my fingers along the spines, breathing in the scent of parchment from the older books. She's even categorized them.

Leather-covered tomes fill the bottom shelves, reminding me of my library back home. It's been some time since I've been there, but soon I will return, and the witch will walk these hollow hallways alone, as I have done for a century.

I look over each title: ***A History of the Salem Witch Trials, Demonic Oppression, Demonology in the Modern World, An Origin of Necromancy.***

Above the nonfiction titles are shelves of fantasy books, some thrillers, and four entire shelves of horror. I slide my finger down a Stephen King novel and smirk. No wonder she's harder to scare than anticipated. I do enjoy a challenge.

She needs to believe her life is in danger if I have any hope of driving her toward me and away from her world. If she ends up using her magic, our

attachment will grow. Then it won't be long until she's a fractured, broken thing in the palm of my hands.

In the meantime, I'm learning everything I can about her—any fuel I can use to open her mind further. From the glimpses into her life, I've learned one important thing: she's lonely. It's unlikely she even realizes it, but she doesn't let anyone in. She has two people, the colorful witch and the boy with heart eyes. Once they're removed, she'll be completely isolated. It's easy to remove a person from existence when there's no one to miss them.

I stride to her desk and look around at the printed papers and their highlighted sections about secret orders within the church. I also find a stack of papers and notes describing signs that a person is going insane.

My lips unfurl into a sadistic smile. She's terrified of losing her mind.

I decide to go to Aiden this evening. He needs to amp up her fear of the Order, enough to make her believe they are here but not enough to make her run again.

The witch is an escapist, and I won't let her slide through my fingers this time. If I could come through to the Human Realm for just a day, I could easily unravel the witch. Instead, I must use the boy.

I sigh deeply. My hands fist at my sides. Disgust washes over me at how far I have fallen, reduced to use a human to do my bidding.

If I could return from this blasted realm, I could also feel the thrum of her blood as my hands encircle her throat, watching the life drain from her eyes.

No, I must not kill her. If I do that... I let my thoughts trail off.

Not to mention the added irritation of the witch's bat. At first the little pest tracked me with his eyes as he snuggled against Evie earlier this evening. It seems as though he is always within a wing's length of her.

Most of the time he rides around on her shoulder, hiding in her hair. I

enjoyed his terror when I showed myself in the mirror earlier, but then guilt slammed into me. I shouldn't give a shit about hurting a pet's feelings. So why does it make me feel horrible that I increased the bat's anxiety? I couldn't care less if it is her familiar. What can he do to protect her?

The fucking bat is on my last nerve. It has far too much intelligence in its dark beady eyes. I wonder if she was drawn to him by their connection. How did she find him in the first place? Not every witch gets a familiar. I may be a demon, but I have a vast knowledge of all things witch, a side effect of my crusade for revenge.

I step out of her office, slamming the door shut behind me. The fact that I was brought so low as to spy on the mundane everyday activities of the witch is torture. I am the demon king, and she is so far below me. Yet I have become a man possessed. I've barely slept or eaten because I must know her whereabouts at every given moment. My hatred for needing her consumes me.

I don't even like the witch, but I am ravenous to see her curves on display beneath my gaze. She's weak, afraid to lean into her own power. The magic aura surrounding her is thick, and the power she emanates comes off her in waves. Her magic is going to explode, despite the leash she keeps on it, if she does not start easing the pressure. I cannot allow her to be foolish and get discovered because she refuses to let that delicious darkness out to play.

There is a deep ache in my chest. Even though we are in separate realms, I feel it down to the marrow of my bones. It's inescapable, and I want to throttle her for it. The desire to throw her down and slice her open with a serrated blade from neck to navel is almost too much to bear.

I walk into her living room in the Shadow Realm and comb through the shelves there.

I run my hand along the side of the black shelf, behind a book, and something catches under the nail of my index finger. I eye the business card with curiosity. The corners are torn, kissed by age.

Darkwood Asylum

Est. 1778

“Here, unstable minds see the world anew.”

Well, that’s fucked. She might be just as deranged as I am. I smile and flick the card. There’s little else of interest on the shelves besides some thrillers, so I move on to the kitchen.

The coffee mug she uses most, covered with skulls, pink roses, cobwebs, and moths, sits in front of the stand holding the rest of her mugs. She has an obscene amount of coffee paraphernalia. Anything imaginable that could be used to create caffeinated beverages has a place in the shrine to the coffee gods. Above the coffee bar hangs a sign that reads “Dangerous Brews” with a bubbling cauldron underneath the text.

I run my fingers through my hair and growl. I’ve had enough of only watching. It’s impossible to ignore her lure. I crave to punish her. I’ll start with spanking her and end with her blood spilled. I’ll bring her back from the brink of death again and again to revel in the sweet desperation of her will to live.

I don’t need blood as sustenance, but the taste of it coating my tongue is like a drug, leaving me instantly high like a snort of cocaine. When I eventually leave her bloodied, battered, and bruised...

I force my thoughts away from anything to do with her blood, but my cock doesn’t get the message.

I walk back into her office and brace my hands on the wall close to the antique mirror. My length hardens achingly. Pain travels through my forearms as I slam my fists against the wall. I hate the witch, but I can't stop thinking of her.

I pop open the button of my jeans and tear them down my legs, freeing my cock, and immediately grab it in my fist. I grip my shaft and jerk off with angry, violent strokes, chasing my release and wishing I could be thinking about any other woman but her. The loathing for the witch fuels me, my strokes fevered.

In my mind, a fantasy plays out before me—Evie sprawled out on her bed in *my* realm. My shadows grip her throat, binding her wrists and ankles to the frame. She can't speak because of the pressure on her windpipe. My balls ache, wishing to be fondled. Her struggles and whimpers pour gasoline over bonfires of lust within me. The flames shoot high, and my back arches. My head falls back onto my shoulders as I thrust into my hand.

In my mind, I tear into her, splitting her pussy in half with my cock as I fuck her so hard, her body's impression on the mattress will be permanent.

My orgasm barrels through me too soon. "Fuck, little witch," I groan. Cum jets in streams against the wall in front of me.

Why does every time I come now feel like self-imposed torture?

My hands shake as I tuck myself into my pants, then pull up the zipper and button them. The witch lives in every thought that flashes through my mind. Iron coats my tongue as I sink my teeth into my cheek, tearing through the delicate skin and muscle. Pain, my comfort emotion, does little to exorcise her from my mind.

I tread heavily into her bedroom. My gaze sweeps the room before landing on her gray-stained wooden dresser. Something crunches beneath my boot

when I step through the debris of clothes and books. The wood against my fingertips grates against my skin like it wasn't sanded properly it as I yank one of the two remaining drawers in her dresser toward me. I grunt as the old-fashioned iron knob stabs into my abdomen, but the slight pain is a welcome distraction.

My cock twitches as I scan the plethora of panties lined neatly in rows. I shake my head, smiling slightly. The impeccable organization of her undergarments makes it even more enjoyable to trash them.

I rip the drawer out the rest of the way, then tip it, the contents cascading all over her rumpled comforter. Silk, lace, satin, and cotton slip against my fingers as I rifle through the monochrome pile. I close my eyes, breathing heavily through my nose. My claws break free, and my pinky snags on a pair of simple cotton panties. There are miniature pumpkins printed all over the black fabric. I run my finger along the lace-trimmed waist, then I bring the panties to my nose.

I moan while pressing my little witch's panties harder against my face. Her scent clings to the laundered undergarment. My blood ignites, then sends shockwaves to my groin. For a moment, the temptation to wrap her panties around my cock and fuck them with my fist overwhelms me. My every thought obsesses with rubbing her vanilla scent into my skin.

Cackling outside of the window snaps me out of my lust-filled trance. I narrow my eyes at the pair of demons chatting on the sidewalk below. The back of my knuckles brush against my lighter and cigarettes as I tuck the panties inside my pants pocket.

Filling her panties with my cum will have to wait until later.

SEVEN



Lorcan

I stand in the mirrored doors of Aiden's bedroom closet. He's sprawled on top of the covers, wearing navy-blue boxer briefs. He's not asleep, but he's deep in his thoughts about the witch's best friend.

The clock on his wall ticks a few minutes past eight in the evening. The witch is on edge still, after seeing the cross last night. It's the perfect opportunity to scare her, but her shift won't finish at the diner until three.

I lean against the wardrobe in the Shadow Realm apartment and stare at Aiden. His forearm rests across his eyes, but I don't miss the twitch of his

lips. His thoughts come through clearly.

The woman has an actual collection of dicks. Fucking full-on obsession. I haven't even seen where she lives yet, but I can imagine what a mindfuck it is. She's crazy about dicks! It sounds like she even had pillows shaped like them. Fucking pillows! Mugs, slippers—

I let out a low growl, and Aiden jumps. He swivels his head so quickly in my direction that his neck lets out an audible *pop*, and his hand flies to the point of injury. “Oh, fuck. Dammit, Lorcan. Can you just, like, for once knock or some shit?” He runs his hands through his mess of mousy-brown strands, letting out a long sigh.

I raise an eyebrow at him, then speak into his mind. “*I will never knock to make you aware of my presence. In fact, I quite enjoy watching you nearly die of fright—every chance I get.*”

“That’s a real dick move,” he says, flopping back onto his cream-colored pillows but keeping his eyes trained on me.

“Report. What’s the progress with the best friend?”

“Well, Rosa has this collection of dicks—”

“As much as I’m sure that pleases you, I hear enough about dicks from your thoughts as it is.”

His cheeks redden, and I sense him attempting to push me from his mind, but I’m firmly there. The deal we made assures it. We’re already attached, and I didn’t even have to oppress him to do it. “Someone’s in a good mood today,” he jokes, and I slam my fist against the mirror. The rest of my existence relies on this human doing his job, and he acts as if his soul isn’t on the line.

“Do you want to go to Hell?”

“Is it better than sitting here and talking to you?” he asks with a smirk, and

I growl. He slowly turns his head, then lets out a puff of air through his lips, a stray lock of hair blowing off his forehead.

“*Look at me,*” I state coldly. Darkness seeps through my irises, the shadows inside me turning them black. Razor-sharp teeth pierce through my gums as I unleash a glance at my true form. My mask only heightens the distortion of my features. His blue eyes bulge, the color draining from his face. A cushion drops to the ground when he kicks back against the mattress, sinking deeper against the headboard as if it might save him.

His words catch in his throat, but they slice through my mind. *What the fuck?*

I grin as I watch his horrified expression grow, then slide a talon down the glass, the screeching grating into his ears. “Then why wait? I’ll drag you there now,” I say, my tone gravelly, followed by a growl resonating from my chest.

His skin pebbles, goose bumps covering every inch of his exposed skin. I close my inky-black stare, calling for the demons in my realm to come. Screams rattle through his apartment as my demons slide into every mirrored surface, their depraved eyes on him. Some appear in their shadowy forms, others in their demonic forms.

Urine seeps through his boxer shorts. One of my demons licks the mirror on the wardrobe, next to where I stand. It’s pointed long tongue can nearly taste Aiden’s fear. Another watches through the mirrored surface of a lamp on his nightstand, and he slides away from the creature.

“No. Please! I’m sorry! I’m so sorry. Okay? I’ll do anything,” he pleads, his nerves causing sweat to dot his forehead. “Please.”

I begrudgingly release the demons from his apartment, ordering them away. He scrambles off the bed. Stumbling on shaky legs, he slams into the wall

behind him. Aiden presses his back to the door, his terror clouding the room.

Regret spills through his mind as he recounts the memory of selling his soul. I close my eyes, allowing the memory to wash through my mind. I remember every last detail, the scene painting before me as if I've stepped back in time and into the memory.

The grass that makes up the courtyard sinks beneath my feet as I saunter out of the shadow adjacent to the college library. It's more crowded than I'd like. Demons cover the courtyard, playing frisbee or fornicating, just like the humans they stalk.

I growl. "Get the fuck out of the way."

The demons split apart as I walk through them to the nearest dorm.

I've lived—no, survived—in the Shadow Realm far too long. Now, my usual resources for entertainment have yielded to boredom. However, the college campus is usually mildly entertaining. Something pricks at my demonic senses as I enter the building. I straighten my spine following the clumsy vibrations radiating from the fifth floor.

My eyes trace around the small dorm room, noting the single-bed-and-desk combo. Nausea churns in my stomach as I survey the space, but I ignore it in favor of the energy prickling my skin. The magical trail leads me to the center of the room to the Ouija board resting on the floor. My scalp tingles as it calls to me. It's been a while since I've used the classic demonic tool to terrify a group of curious youths.

I swipe empty beer cans and chip bags off the nightstand, then perch my ass on the edge. I am so godsdamn glad I cannot smell the stench that most certainly soaks this room. My gaze focuses on the Ouija board, but I leave it in place.

I stare into the mirror hanging on the back of the closet door. A despicable

smile moves across my face. This could not be more fucking perfect. A group of college students huddle around the Ouija board. Three males cram their hands onto the planchette, shoving it in each other's direction.

“Dude, this is so fucked up.”

“What do we do if a demon shows up?”

A guy with a backward ballcap covering his hair shoulder-checks one of the three surrounding the board, then folds himself between the bed and another student. “Offer to blow him for your soul,” he slurs.

The male he's seated next to shoves him in the chest. “Fucking idiot, you would offer your soul for it to blow you,” he says. My left eye twitches as his inebriated voice stabs into my brain.

Cheap beer sloshes out of the can the ballcap-wearing one grips in his fist. He flings around his damp hand, sending drops of beer onto his friends and the Ouija board.

And that's my cue. I focus on the planchette, then use my demonic magic to steer it to different random letters on the board.

“Fuck this,” a student with a brown man bun says, shaking his head. “Bye, Aiden! Hope you don't die!” He sprints out the door.

Several of the men shriek, tripping on each other as they flee.

“Boooooo!” Aiden calls, cupping his hands around his mouth. “We were just fuckin' around. There's nooooooo demon,” he slurs. His legs shake as he stands, then stumbles toward the bed, but his feet cross and he crashes into the desk instead. His hands slap the wooden surface, barely saving his nose from connecting with it. “Shit, that was close.”

He peeks over his shoulder, then turns rapidly before his hands slip off the desk, and his hip cracks against the floor. His hat rolls under the desk, leaving his sweaty blond hair on display. Whatever pain he might've felt must be

numbed by the alcohol in his system. I grin and slide the planchette to yes. His eyes widen as he scrambles to his knees by the board.

“Th-the fuck?”

I use the opportunity to spell “LOOK UP.” Aiden jumps back and covers his hands over his eyes.

“Nope. Nuh-uh. You drunk, Aiden; this isn’t real.”

“*Oh, but I assure you it is,*” I say into his unprotected mind.

Aiden screams and curls into the fetal position. This human needs to be taught a lesson in self-preservation. I glower at him, my lip curling as he cowers and his body trembles. I need a human I can train to be my physical presence in the Human Realm.

Inevitably his curiosity gets the better of him, and he rolls, his body now facing the mirror. He peeks between his fingers. I don’t want to risk spooking him, so I remain silent. Slowly he lowers his hands and sits up.

“You’re a demon?”

I roll my eyes, then sigh. “*Is it that obvious?*”

“Kinda,” he says, tipping his head to the side. “You’re not as scary as those indigenous. No, religenous. Religious,” he giggles, then smacks himself in the forehead. “Yea, religious people say you are. Wait! Are you in my head? Why are you here?”

“*To make a bargain. I heard you wanted to sell your soul and give me head. Am I remembering that correctly?*”

Aiden’s jaw slackens, and his eyebrows reach toward his hairline. “Wha—? No. I, uh…” His eyes dart around the room, then zero in on me. His straight white teeth nearly blind me when he grins like a fool. Oh, this should be good.

He climbs to his feet and sways, then leans on the oak dresser. “I do want to

sell my soul,” Aiden whisper-shouts, “but not for a blowie.” He shrugs and blows out a breath sharply from between his lips, causing them to vibrate obnoxiously.

“*Do tell,*” I growl.

“Yea, I could really use...” He taps his finger on his chin, pursing his lips. “A Mustang. The car, not the animal. I know a lot of bros confuse the two, but they are very fuckin’ different.” Aiden nods to himself, then his gaze finds me again.

Honestly, he’s rather unimpressive, but he should be fairly easy to manipulate. “*Then it’s a deal,*” I declare patiently. “*Your soul in exchange for a Mustang. Any particular color?*”

“Ummm, blue! No, red!” His eyes gleam, and his right leg bounces quickly. I sigh, digging my claws into my palms. Let’s get this over and done with. “*We have a bargain. Congratulations. Now, recite these words clearly.*”

“Recite these words clearly,” he says, parroting me like a fucking imbecile.

A bolt of pain shoots through my jaw as I grind my molars. “*No. I will tell you what words to say and when to say them.*”

He nods but loses focus as a fly buzzes near his ear.

“*Aiden.*”

“Hm? Shit. Sorry, bro. Demon bro? Bro demon.”

For fuck’s sake. I run both my hands through my hair, then cross my arms in front of my chest.

“*You will repeat the following phrases—and truly mean them,*” I order. “*I wish to enter into an eternal binding contract. My soul in exchange for a red Mustang.*” I gesture my hand toward him.

Aiden swallows and squares his shoulders as his body tilts slightly to his left. “I...” His face crumples, but he clears his throat and tries again. “I wish

to enter into an eternal binding contract. M-my soul in exchange for a red”—he lifts his chin—“Mustang.”

I bring my palms together once, and Aiden flinches. *“Very good. Now, the real fun begins.”* I close my eyes and shed any trace of humanity cloaking my person. I dig deeper into his mind, concentrating on manipulating the necessary wavelength of his brain to create the desired pattern.

He screams, claspng a hand to the side of his neck. Beads of sweat gather on his forehead, then a brilliant flush covers his throat. I chuckle as my mark slowly brands his skin from the inside out.

“Please, make it stop,” he begs.

I ignore him and finish the brand, the thread of our new bond solidifying between us. *“Now you will have my mark forever. It will remind you of the consequences of failing me.”*

He removes his shaking hand, the angry red welt on the side of his neck darkening to an onyx tattoo.

He goes to touch it again and hisses when the pain throbs once more. “What did you do to me?”

“I solidified our bond. It shows that you are mine, and it will enable me to be able to communicate with you on a deeper level. Welcome to day one of your eternal servitude. When you die, your soul belongs to me.”

“What? My soul? No! I-I didn’t mean it. Keep the fucking Mustang!”

Aiden is a means to an end and is desperate to survive this encounter. Desperate people are foolish and make incredibly poor decisions. For instance, selling your soul to the king of demons.

“It’s far too late for that. What you want no longer matters. Aiden, you are now my valet. You will follow my orders, never disobeying me and always keeping my secrets. I know you regret giving your soul to me. And yes, it was

a terrible mistake—on your part. But I'll make you a deal, one that has never been issued from my lips before."

Aiden leans forward.

I narrow my eyes, my lips flattening into a straight line. *"One soul for one soul. How deep are you willing to sink the blade to save yourself?"*

He blanches, then his horrified eyes dart away from mine. *"What does that mean? What kind of things do I have to do?"*

"That depends on just how willing you are to keep from burning in Hell forever. You can choose to do nothing... live out your days and then, when you inevitably die, I come for your soul. I remove it and bring it to Hell to torture and torment at my leisure. I bite my lower lip. It will be so much fun watching you squirm. Perhaps I'll cut off your eyelids so you can never close your eyes to the atrocities happening to you. You'll always see the pain coming, and perhaps that is even worse."

"Okay. Shit, dude. I get it. Fucking hell." Aiden is panting. He runs his hands down his face. *"What have I done?"*

I chuckle. *"Don't forget what's at stake. You can have your soul back one day. I will release it to you when you have completed everything I have asked."* I raise both my palms. *"On one side, you have your soul back, and on the other,"* I say, turning the other palm face down, *"you burn."*

Aiden steps back from the mirror. *"You're a fucking psychopath."*

I smirk, widening my eyes, and let the madness seep through the black. *Guilty.*

I open my eyes and stare at Aiden as he holds a pillow against his body, sobbing. I roll my eyes and press my hands against the mirror. He should have known better than to play with spirit boards. They let in far more than ghosts. I'd pity him if I had the ability to care.

“I have more orders for you,” I say into his mind. *“There’s something you need to do tonight.”*

He balls his fists, then slams them against the headboard, gritting his teeth as he pulls back. “What do you want me to do?”

EIGHT



Lorcan

I sit in the driver's seat of a shitty sedan, parked in the diner's lot, as Aiden breaks into Evie's apartment at my request. The Shadow Realm is silent, with ash and leaves floating around the car. In the Human Realm, I am sure the lot is filled with rats scurrying, and maybe a cat or two. I can't see them here, except through mirrors, giving me glimpses into the Human Realm. Thunders rolls in the distance, and rain lashes down.

My talons emerge as I remember how turned on I was by her yesterday. Fabric tears under my fingers, and the inner foam spills to the floor.

I never expected a witch to be the focus of my desire; it surprises the fuck out of me.

I recall her blanched face when she saw the symbol from the order, and I grin. I'm addicted to her fear. It soothes my soul in a way I didn't know was possible.

She's awakened a side of me I thought long past dead. I'm not sure if that is a positive or negative sign. No matter, my resolve to punish her for her coven's past transgressions only strengthens each time I lay my eyes on her. This is the only way I can get back at them, and I hope her ancestors' spirits are watching while I torture their descendant. It's too bad they got themselves murdered before I had the chance to get them to reverse their spell's magic.

I'm determined to find new and brutal ways to scare her. My options are only limited to the expanse of my imagination.

The girl is all doom and gloom, inside and out. She tries to hide the blackness in her soul, guilt slowly eating her alive. Regret and despair constantly simmer in the pools of her eyes. I've gathered enough from her thoughts that she murdered her brother.

Thankfully, the lights flicker inside the diner, grabbing my attention and dragging me from memories of my past. I watch her through the driver's-side mirror with rapt attention, making use of a car in the parking lot with its trunk facing the entrance of the diner.

She locks up for the night and stands under the awning, pulling a single cigarette and lighter out of her hoodie pocket. A moment later, a small flame illuminates her flawless face. I enjoy the quote on the hoodie. Just a Gothic Witch at Heart. She wears it like a badge as a joke to humans, who don't believe in magic and witches, but she teeters on the edge of dangerous for

those who know the truth. Despite thinking the Order is here, it's interesting that she wears such an obvious clothing item.

It's as if she likes being afraid.

She walks toward the car with her hood up, and I smirk. Finally, it's time. Thankfully, the blond boy isn't with her, despite him driving her car to work. I glance behind her, spotting him through the long windows, still clearing tables.

My heart thrums faster as she walks toward her vehicle, leisurely taking drags of nicotine deep into her lungs. Watching her evokes my craving for one too. I seamlessly travel through the shadows toward her, sliding into the back seat of Evie's car.

I grab a cigarette from my pocket and light it. The inside fills with smoke as I take a long inhale, the cherry glowing purple. All flames in the Shadow Realm is hellfire, which emits an eerie, purple glow.

The gravel of the parking lot crunches under her sneakers with every step. She throws open the door to her car, which is not even locked, and plops onto the driver's seat. She tosses her purse into the back seat and the Shadow Realm version of it lands in my lap. A bemused smile turns up the corners of my lips. If she only knew how close I was. The only thing separating us is a thin veil. She jams her key in the ignition and turns over the engine.

Her usual drive home from the diner doesn't take long, so I put my plan into action once she is on an empty, narrow street. The storm follows us, and black clouds form overhead. If she refuses to use her shadows, then I'll scare them from her.

I squeeze my chest between the two front seats and use the rearview mirror to whisper where her ear is in the Human Realm. "You really should lock your car."

A scream tears from her throat when my voice reaches her ears. Her shoulders tense as she glances up to the mirror, and I reveal my masked face.

The car swerves side to side across the yellow line before she slams on her brakes and pulls onto the wide shoulder. Rain patters down in thick, heavy drops against the windows. She grips the wheel tightly in both of her hands, her knuckles turning white from the pressure. Her breath is coming out in gasps, and her pulse beats deliciously against her neck.

A shadow dances from her body, but she quickly suppresses her magic. I grip the back of her headrest and growl.

She turns her head, looking over her shoulder with wide eyes shining with fear, but finds her back seat empty except for her purse and crumpled cigarette cartons. Her breaths come in shorts bursts, her chest heaving.

“Oh my God,” she whispers between desperate gasps for air.

She leans forward, gripping the wheel, and looks at the mirror. I remove her ability to see me as she looks around.

A cruel smile causes the bottom of my mask to push against my cheek bones. The lower half of my face transforms with the intensity of my evil glee, my white teeth bared and my barely longer canines on display.

She doesn't say another word on the drive home, but her thoughts are chaos, drowning every rationale in her mind.

Images of me in the mirror cross her mind. So does Aiden and the upside-down cross. Then there's her magic calling to me, desperate to be let loose. I can almost feel it buzzing under her skin. Every few seconds, her eyes dart toward the mirror, as if she might catch a glimpse of me again.

But she's not sure what she saw. The moment she parks, she darts from the car and runs to her apartment. She didn't even grab her purse. I chuckle darkly and head inside. Aiden should have left by now.

NINE



Evie

The hairs on the back of my neck stand erect when I enter my apartment. Someone's been in here.

I glare into the living room, and the dim glow from the lamp flickers. An ashy scent mixed with nutmeg and sage lingers in the air as I take small, slow steps toward the crackling fireplace. Flames lick the freshly cut logs, hissing embers through the metal guard.

I didn't light this. In fact, I hadn't lit it for several days.

Fear crawls through my veins, as if spiders are climbing all over my skin. Any sane person would call the police, but I know no one can save me from the Order—or the demon in the mirror.

This is witch business, and no human can save me.

Thunder cracks outside the window, rumbling through my top-floor apartment. Lightning strikes outside the large, bay windows, illuminating the room in a rich blue hue.

Gomez. Rosa brought him back already, instead of me picking him up.

Against my better judgment, I hurry to the bedroom, flicking on every damn light switch as I go. I spot Gomez asleep on the bed, snuggled against the pillows. I watch his little body rise and fall and relax a little. I glance at the large, silver-framed mirror hanging above my black dresser, and I immediately step out of its reflection. I *might* be losing my mind, but I still can't stand to be near mirrors. Not after what just happened.

Lightning strikes again, illuminating the drapes hanging over the windows. The crystals on my nightstand glisten in the light. I leave Gomez, knowing for sure that he wouldn't be so calm if someone had broken in. Although, this wouldn't be the first time. My thoughts drift to the mirror in the office. Thankfully, I don't work from home, or I'd be fucked. I may call it my office, but it's just a library with a laptop. I haven't set foot in that room since I found the antique sitting in there, despite my enormous collection of dusty books begging me to return.

I walk back to the living room and freeze. Wisps of smoke swirl in the air from the extinguished fireplace. My fingers tremble, and my heart pounds so hard, I fear it may leap from my chest.

The shadow magic deep in my veins burns and tingles its way to settling into every fiber of my being and reminding me of its presence. I can protect

myself with it, but I have no clue what that means for the apartment or Gomez. I haven't used it in years.

Flashbacks of my brother's body parts coating his bedroom pierce my mind, and I clamp my eyes shut. *This isn't happening.*

I blink rapidly, but nothing changes. My family succumbed to insanity. Every. Single. One. Maybe it's my turn, even if I don't use my magic.

Rain hammers against the windows, the thunderstorm soothing my soul as I creep through the room, every footstep calculated so I don't make a sound. Thank God I have carpet everywhere but the kitchen and bathroom.

I scan the cream sofa by the window. The black pillows and throw are in the same place I left them last night, next to my half-eaten croissant on a paper plate. Nothing on the glass coffee table has been disturbed, and my journal lies open on the same page I left it. I stare at the unintelligible scribbles on the page and mentally check off the rest of the items in the room. Nothing is missing, as far as I can tell, and if a normal human had broken in, they'd be the world's worst burglar. All my valuables are still here, the TV, tablet, and a stash of cash tucked away in a not-so-subtle glass trinket box.

If an Order member broke in, then I'd already be dead.

"Hello?" I say, my voice cracking.

A car backfires outside, and I jump. It's not even four in the morning. What the hell?

"Is anyone here?" I shout, my magic almost buzzing as my anticipation grows. Silence greets me. I hurry to the kitchen, open my bottle of pills, and pop two. The demon's trying to fuck with me again; I just know it.

As I wait for the numbness to kick in, I grab my phone and text Rosa.

You awake?

I blow out a shaky exhale and place my hand over my racing heart. Gomez

flies in, the fluttering of his wings filling the uncomfortable silence. He lands next to my purse on the counter and tilts his head, those big black eyes somehow softening his worried expression as he folds his wings around himself. “I’m okay, Gomez,” I lie but wrap my arms around myself in a hug.

My phone vibrates, and I quickly glance at the message.

No. I’m asleep, or I was. What’s up?

I run my fingers down my face, closing my eyes to the dimly lit kitchen.

Nothing urgent, I type. Just come see me in the morning. Please. I hit send and reach for my pack of cigarettes. Gomez shoots me a glare.

“I’ll give them up soon,” I promise for the billionth time, but neither of us believe it anymore. I don’t even try to sound convincing.

My phone rings, and I fumble with my cigarettes, dropping the packet before I can even reach the door to the balcony. Rosa’s name flashes on the screen. I shouldn’t have said anything.

“Hey,” I answer, trying to keep my voice from trembling.

Her anxiety is palpable through the phone. “What’s going on?”

“It’s okay, really. Go back to sleep,” I say, feeling like shit that I texted her in a panic. She has a job that actually requires her to wake up at a normal time.

“Don’t do that,” she replies, berating me. “You wouldn’t text me at this time of morning unless it’s important. Please, honey, what’s wrong?”

Her soothing tone reaches deep into my chest, soothing the building ache from fear. I try not to cry, but I teeter on the edge. “It’s…” I don’t even know how to explain what’s happening. “I’m scared.”

“What happened? Where’s Jay?”

I shrug, although she can’t see me. “He had to pull a double, so he stayed behind.” I glance at the fireplace, thinking back to the car and the man in the

mirror. It was for the best. If I'm going mad, then I don't want to keep Jay around, especially since he will probably end up getting hurt.

"I'm coming over." She hangs up before I can protest, and I sigh. I can't fault Rosa. She's there when I need her, which is always. She'd be better off without me. So would Jay. Yet I keep them around and close to me because I can't let go. That's always been my problem.

How many more will I end up killing before I learn? No one is safe around me, not my dead brother nor the others over the years who succumbed to so-called horrible accidents at the hands of my magic.

I remind myself that I'm basically a serial killer. I never wanted to hurt anyone, yet a sadistic, twisted side of me surfaces whenever I let my magic out, even a little. So I won't. I can't.

Gomez watches me from across the apartment, while I have my inner meltdown and stare at my cigarettes like I'm having a stroke.

I grab the packet, then go to the balcony and slide the door shut before Gomez follows me.

Not that he'd fly off, the scaredy bat. I suppose we both are right now.

I shake the feeling of being watched, but the whisper from the demon in the mirror lingers, his breath against my ear haunting. I can still feel him, as if he's right behind me.

I shudder and spark up a cigarette, inhaling deeply, and hold it for a few seconds. The benzo is kicking in, and slowly my nerves are calming. Soon, I won't care about being haunted. I know better than to try to escape demonic entities.

I down a few shots of whiskey, which heighten the effects of the pills. I welcome oblivion. There, my magic is buried so deep, I couldn't access it if I wanted to.

Rosa pulls the blankets over her legs and sits back against my headboard. The smell of smoke clings to my braid, and I pull it apart, letting the curls fall around my shoulders. I feel gross after working all night. I need a shower, and the sweat mixed with pancake syrup, eggs, and bacon holds onto the fibers of my clothes. I hate Jay's parents for thinking serving breakfast at one in the morning is a good idea.

Rosa arches a dark brow, the dim light of the lamp highlighting the sheen to her bronzed skin. She smells of bubblegum and strawberry, and I can't help but lean closer. "You look good, for it being six in the morning."

"Stop evading," she says, her thick lips pressing into a hard line. "Are you drunk?"

I pull my lip between my teeth and bite down until I feel a jab of pain, reminding me I am still alive and capable of feeling through this drug-infused haze. "A little."

She sighs with exasperation, and I shift back a few inches. Gomez nestles in next to her, as if he too senses that I'm not safe to be around. Calling her was selfish. She's at risk too, especially with the fractures in my mind. I want to be vulnerable, but the drink and pills have removed my ability to care—unfortunately, my inhibitions too.

"I saw... something in the mirror," I say and lie back to stare at the ceiling, no longer giving a fuck as the pills numb me to everything. "The guy you're seeing, I'm pretty sure he's here for me."

She scoffs a laugh. "Girl, you cannot be that conceited."

"Not like that," I say, closing my eyes, each word falling lazily from my lips. "He's here to kill me, or at least find out information, so he can go back

to his overlords.”

“Overlords?” Her voice reaches my ears as waves of sleep come over me. “You better start making sense, or I’m throwing a glass of cold water over you to wake you up.”

I shift my position on the bed, the blankets huddling around me like clouds. “The demon in the mirror is in my dreams too. He’s here because of the mirror in my office, and he’s fucking with me. I think he lit the fire in my living room, then put it out.” I shake my head. “See... I’m a witch too,” I explain casually, as if we’re just discussing the weather. I don’t bring up that Rosa is one too. I sensed her magic the moment we met in the street. It’s probably the reason she was drawn to me too, not that she knows it.

She doesn’t even know she’s one herself, but her magic is far safer than mine. Whatever coven her family is from, the magic is light—or folk magic, as we call it. “I’ve killed people with my magic. The Order is going to come and get me, and for once, I can’t blame them. I’m a danger to society. You should take Gomez and leave before I hurt you too.”

Her hands are suddenly on my shoulders, shaking me. “Open your eyes, now!”

I half-open them, and her wide, brown gaze meets mine.

“I know you’re a witch, Evie,” she says. “You’ve told me several times when you were drunk. You’re not as mysterious as you like to think.”

Yep, that sounds right. “You should go,” I say slowly, then close my eyes again. The tiredness is overwhelming. I wish she would leave. I called her in a pre-benzo panic attack. I’m fine now.

“You’re not pushing me away.”

I hear Gomez coming closer. They need to stay away.

“I’m deadly,” I say again, because she doesn’t seem to understand just how

dangerous that is for all of us. “My magic will burst out of me, and you’ll explode. Just like the others.”

“Who’s the Order? Why are they after you?” she asks, ignoring my warning.

I roll onto my side, mumbling into my pillow. I drank too much, and now I can’t even think straight. “They hate witches,” I say. “We’re an ugly stain on humanity, and they want us dead. They’re right.”

“Don’t be so self-deprecating.” She groans rubbing her hand along my back in soothing, swirling motions. “Not everyone will want to hurt you just because you have magic. You still have your humanity, and I love you.”

I swallow thickly. I’ve destroyed everyone who’s loved me. I can’t ruin her too. “I might be human, but I’m a freak of nature.” I lower my voice to a whisper, aware of the mirror hanging behind us. The feeling of being watched crawls over me. “Think of how we treat butterflies compared to moths when they’re basically the same thing.”

I can’t hear anything else she says as slumber pulls me deeper. As the feeling of being watched intensifies, my intuition screams for me to turn around. But I don’t, and just as I fall off the edge of my consciousness into sleep, I find his masked face and steely green eyes waiting for me in my dreams.

TEN



Evie

I'm standing in a room that looks like my own in every way, but there's something off. Everything's too still, and the colors are as if someone has turned the saturation down, muting every pocket of vibrance in my Gothic room. Even the white ceiling looks gray.

My brows draw together. The bed is empty. I'm certain I'm dreaming, but normally when I know it's happening, I wake up.

I turn to look at the mirror over my dresser. As I draw closer, my reflection disappears. Instead, I'm looking out at a replica of my bedroom, with Rosa

and Gomez sleeping on my bed.

My next breath catches in my chest. My heart pounds as I bring my fists to the glass and bang on the inside. I can't get out. This isn't a dream. I'm trapped behind the mirror to my bedroom.

Shadows snake around my body, and fingers grip my throat from behind. My lips part to scream, but no sound comes out. Hot breath tickles the top of my ear as he whispers, "Come to me, little witch."

I push back against the demon's hard body, but he holds me firmer, rooting me to the spot. I can feel the hatred pouring through every twitch of his fingers, as if he longs to squeeze tighter.

The same smell from the earlier dream emanates from him—nutmeg and sage, with some muskier notes of iris and leather.

"You're a demon," I state, and his grasp loosens a little. I already assumed so, but saying it aloud cements the truth.

His voice penetrates my thoughts, tickling the edges of my subconscious. I try to push him out of my mind, but he's ingrained there. "*Very good, little witch.*" He taunts me with each gentle press, though I know he could snap my neck at any moment. Panic seizes me, the moment almost mirroring when my dad tried to strangle me.

Then Caden enters my thoughts, or what was left of him anyway.

The demon's laugh penetrates my mind. "*Are you afraid?*" He's still behind me, his body pressed against mine. I can feel him along every inch of my body from my head to my ankles. He towers over me, my body tiny against his. His dick hardens against my lower back. I sense he hates me for it. Despises me even. His nails bite into my skin, and I instinctively arch my back to his touch.

What the fuck am I doing?

I freeze as his words reach my mind. *“Your magic recognizes me... It calls to me.”*

My breath catches in my throat. I don't want any part of him or this. I would never. I hate my magic and all the dark parts of myself.

He places his hands around my head, fully entering my mind.

Memories of Edward rush in—and his depraved, fucked-up experiments. I can feel him pressing the scalpel into my skin, slicing me over and over, so he could watch as I healed quickly and to ensure my shadows never came out.

“So this is why you hide from your magic.”

“It's you who's been behind all this,” I state, finding my voice. He's fucking with my mind, pulling out my darkest memories as if I need any help to relive them. I turn against him, looking up at his masked face.

He's darkness personified, and his green eyes look right into my soul, as if he can see every vulnerability. “How long have you been watching me?” An icy blast slithers down my spine, seeping through my pores and chilling me to my core.

Shadows surround him, and my magic purrs, pulling me closer. Caden's face, along with the others I murdered and keep buried deep in my psyche, resurface. Tears threaten to break down the barrier I've spent years building.

“You're trembling, little witch. Or should I say, little killer?” he asks, his dark, sensual tone taunting me as the horrors of my past run through my head.

I need to get out. The air somehow feels heavier, as if this mirror version of my room may trap me forever.

How do I get out of here?

He tilts his head and runs his hand through his tousled, dark hair. *“Your*

family's mirror," he says, answering my unspoken question.

Can he read my mind? "What do you want with me?"

His eyes flash gray, as if smoke has consumed them completely. Rage bubbles between us, the tension building. Fear ignites in my chest, and the moment it does, his face splits into a sinister smile.

My eyes widen, as if I'm a deer caught in headlights. He doesn't answer, but he doesn't need to. He wants to hurt me, just like all demons do.

My gaze travels to his pants, where I find his dick bulging. He's fucking huge. He's getting off on scaring me. Heat sears between my legs, and his eyes dart toward my thighs. I clench them together, and my heart palpitates. I run past him, but he doesn't stop me.

I race through this horror-movie version of my apartment. Outside the windows, a thick cloud cover blankets this world in a dove gray. Hisses sound from nearby, and I don't even want to know what's outside. I glance back over my shoulder and see him.

He's at the edge of every room, watching from the shadows while I navigate the enveloping darkness toward my office. I pull down the handle, sweat beading my forehead, and fall out of the mirror and onto my office floor.

I wake up in my bed.

I can barely catch my breath, and I startle both Rosa and Gomez awake. The sun arrows through the clouds outside, illuminating the room in a dewy, noon glow. I wipe my sweaty bangs away from my forehead, and my eyes go straight toward the mirror.

I press my fingers against my temples as my brain feels like it's swelling inside my skull. The headache comes, and I sit up, trying to piece together

everything that happened. Rosa strokes Gomez, and he turns onto his belly, but my best friend isn't sporting her normal smile. Her mascara has streaked below her bloodshot eyes, and she's staring at me as if I'm a stranger.

She stops stroking Gomez and brings her fingers to her forehead, running them along the wrinkles caused by her frown. "You were right."

I blink twice. "Either I'm really hungover and not hearing right, or you're drunk."

She doesn't laugh. Her lips don't even curve a little. "There is a big-ass mirror in your office, and I saw the note on it." She gulps, and Gomez snuggles into the pillow. I can sense his worry from here, but he quickly distracts himself with a half-eaten fruit breakfast bar in Rosa's purse on the nightstand.

"I dreamed of him," I say, my mouth drier than a desert. I grab a water bottle with a dribble left in it from the dresser, catching my reflection in the mirror. A sweat patch covers the front of my pajama top, and my brown strands are flicking off in all directions. I quickly avoid eye contact with the mirror, my heart racing as I turn my back toward it. "He's a demon, and for whatever reason, he's stalking me."

I swallow thickly. He might be watching right now.

Her brows draw together. "Wait, what?"

"The demon stalking me. He's been watching me, and last night in my dream, I was behind... the mirror."

Rosa raises her gaze to the mirror, bites her lip, and looks back at me. "This isn't good, Evie. We need to figure out what's going on."

A shiver tingles down my spine, and I clamp my eyes shut. "Let's not talk here." I glare at the dresser. The fucker stalking me is either hunting me with

the Order, or he set them on my trail. It was unlikely the Order filled with top church members would ever listen to a demon, so that left option two.

He's responsible for this.

"We'll talk where we're alone," I state. "*Really* alone." I glance at the mirror. "Let's head to the park before I go to Darkwood Asylum later."

She shoots me an incredulous stare and sits up. "Fine, let's go."

ELEVEN



Evie

I pull my knees together on the bench, and Rosa leans back, gazing up at the bare branches of the tree hanging over my head. I press my foot to the side, crunching a leaf under the heel of my boot. Rosa took everything pretty well, considering. I didn't tell her about the killings, but she knows all about the demon, the Order, and my magic, although she doesn't know exactly how dangerous it is. I can't bear for her to hate me, which she will once she learns I'm a murderer.

“So how do you get rid of a demon?” she asks, twiddling her thumbs.

I tilt my head. "You're remarkably calm after hearing all of this."

She shrugs. "I have to have an open mind, Evie. I'm a therapist. Besides, I believe in ghosts, you know... So I guess demons can be real too." She lets out a long shaky exhale, then tenses her shoulders. "Should we get, like, salt?"

"There are a few ways," I explain. "But I want to find out his motivations first. Demons can't hurt us, unless we form an attachment with them." My thighs clench when the memory of being close to him swallows me whole. I wish I could get the thought of his long, hard dick from my mind. I shake my head quickly. What the fuck am I thinking? "I need to know if he's behind Aiden being here."

She tsk-tsks. "That asshole."

I bite my lip. "Yeah."

"He still hasn't tried to kiss me. I guess I know why now."

The sound of her nails drumming against the wood of the bench relaxes me. I lean closer, feeling her magic locked deep inside, unpracticed. It's warm and comforting, like a blanket. But I'm glad she doesn't know about it. I can't have her hunted too. "I know he's in the Order. But, he hasn't come after me. None of them have. Surely, if they know I'm here and who I am, they would have tried to kill me by now."

Her eyes gloss over. "You should leave."

I sigh. "They'll only follow me. No one has tried to attack me yet. Besides, it makes no sense they'd work with a demon. They hate them more than witches," I whisper as a gust of cold air circles around us, lifting the leaves from the ground. "I'm going to try to find out more about the demon. I can't keep running for the rest of my life," I say, although the itch to escape again builds anyway. "I have you and my job. Gomez too."

“Jay,” Rosa says, and I force a smile.

“Right.” I whistle out a breath. “Jay. Yeah. Thanks for coming over and taking time off work.”

“I do have to go, but are you going to be okay? Maybe you should stay at mine until we figure this out?”

I pull her hand between mine and gently squeeze it. “I can’t run from this. Being at your place will only put the both of us in danger. Just work on extracting what you can from Aiden—safely,” I reply, although I’d prefer if she stopped seeing him altogether. But she’s already made it adamantly clear that she won’t.

She nods. “What about the demon? How are you going to find out anything about him?”

A pinch of excitement erupts inside, and I hate it. This shouldn’t be thrilling. “I’m going to lure him closer.”

Warning swims in her dark irises. “Don’t do anything reckless.”

“I won’t,” I promise, then stand. “I will call you tonight.”

“Please be safe,” she says sternly as she stands. “I’m worried.”

“I know.” I lick my lips as the cold air steals the moisture from them. “Thanks for listening and not thinking I’m crazy.”

I turn and walk away after giving her a hug, then tuck Rosa’s rainbow notebook into my purse. It has the words *cuntcake* colorfully printed on the cover. Inside, we have pages of possible motives of the demon stalking me and what to do about her so-called “date,” Aiden.

I amble from the park alone, walking the frostbitten streets toward the asylum. I hope the demon was listening earlier, when I announced where I’d be.

Burying my hands in my pockets, I glaze my eyes over the skeletal leaves

wrapped in icy body bags. The ashen trees reach high above the long winding road in what looks like a rib cage. Their bare branches hang above like contorted bones knotted together. The leaves throughout the rest of town are alive with oranges and reds, but here, like the cemetery I'm close to, everything is dead.

I light a cigarette as I walk, making my way toward the asylum. I don't want to go back to the apartment yet. Gomez is safer alone. The demon is stalking me, not him. Besides, there are mirrors in the asylum. For a moment, I feel a sense of control. If I do end up having to use my magic against him, at least no one will be around for me to hurt.

But that's not how I plan on getting his attention.

The thought of the demon and the Order injects fear into my veins, heating me from my core, despite the freezing weather. At least it's not raining.

I stop outside the wrought-iron gates of the asylum, which creak when a gust of wind whistles up the path. I stare at the broken windows of the tall, gray-bricked building.

Having my memories shamelessly witnessed by the demon last night had done something to my brain. Every time I close my eyes, I see their faces—my victims. I never wanted any of them dead. They were people I cared about, and people who felt the same for me. But they got too close. Being in Darkwood was supposed to be my fresh start, a chance at making things right.

Even though that's something I can never do.

I shake my head, scattering the thoughts threatening to pull me back into the grip of depression and self-loathing. I need a distraction. The demon in the mirror haunts my mind as I walk. As much as he terrifies me, I can't stop thinking about him pressed up against me.

I push through the gates, the broken chain swinging from when it was once locked. Slowly, I make my way up the weathered path I normally take with Jay, but this time, I'm alone.

TWELVE



Lorcan

I track Evie in her realm through a mirror attached to the gate at the entrance of her favorite haunt, the asylum. I've never understood the purpose of these useless mirrors. You can hardly see anything in them, and what you can see is distorted by the rounded shape.

The gargantuan double doors open a crack as Evie tugs on the handles and slips under the chains that wrap around them and into the dark expanse of the building. I stride forward, excitement thrumming through my body. I don't bother sneaking under the chains as Evie did. Instead, I hold the chains

between my hands and jerk sharply outward. Tendrils of my shadows push the doors open, and a resounding crack ricochets when they smack against the walls.

Dust and mildew assault my nostrils the farther I get into the building. It doesn't take me long to locate Evie. I turn my head to the side and listen to her distant footsteps on the floor above me. Light streams in from the ragged frame where a window used to be. The dust motes highlighted by the beams of light become glittering particles as my movement through the room disturbs their rest.

The asylum is a place of beauty. It's so deliciously macabre.

I lengthen my strides to catch up to my little witch. I stop by the stairs and place my hand on the splintered handrail, causing flakes of paint drift to the floor. My gaze travels up the staircase to the rotting roof. Light seeps through the caved patches on the ceiling. Ominous creaks and groans emanate from the abused wood of the stairs as I move up to the second floor.

Darkwood Asylum takes on a sinister look in the Shadow Realm; where there are patches of light in the witch's view, there are deepening shadows in mine. Ash floats around me, and the silence is deafening. The ghosts within these walls exist on a plane that is not fully anchored to one realm. It blurs between the two, constantly shifting. The spirits appear to me the same as they do to humans.

The most fucked-up thing of it all is that the idea of mental institutions—if they can be called that—were once a beacon of hope for those suffering mental episodes. Sadly, they turned into breeding grounds for the sick and depraved. Of the doctors, nurses, and other employees who made their living in these establishments, the majority were serial killers, murderers, or rapists. What better place to make one's perversions a reality than on people

incapable of stopping or voicing their displeasure at the atrocities being done to them? My morbid fascination withers with the reminder.

I take in my surroundings further, unease settling in my gut. Icy claws of a memory long repressed threatens to take me under. This room reminds me of my childhood. My mild panic eclipses with rage so potent, the edge of my vision blackens and my fisted hands tremble.

These walls would tell stories of sorrow if they could speak.

Bile creeps up the back of my throat, finding kinship with the souls who were once incarcerated here, mistreated for no reason at all other than existing. Okay, maybe not for no reason. Many of their minds were dark, dangerous places, but don't we all play in the shadows sometimes?

Most mental institutions of the human world used to help their patients with lobotomies, the mass graves outside an example of how well that worked. What these fucking "healthcare workers" didn't realize is that true madness cannot be cured—only fed, to satisfy its deep hunger until oblivion shreds their awareness from the inside out.

I walk down the hallway at a leisurely pace, slipping my hands into my pockets and whistling a Halloween tune. Wooden wheelchairs stand sentinel on either side along the walls. Most of them are dilapidated and falling to pieces, but there are a couple that look fully functional, as if someone could sit at any moment and make use of them. My dick aches as I imagine throwing a naked Evie onto one and spreading her legs to drape over the armrests, then strapping her to it with my shadows.

The creepy little slut would love to be eaten and bound at my mercy to within an inch of her life.

I drag my hand across the discolored stain-like streaks that run down the walls beneath a gaping hole in the ceiling in the far corner of the room. Ash

settles on a half-rotted desk and under a hole.

A glimpse of dark-brown hair catches my eye in the cloudy, spotted mirror through the open doorway of the bathroom. I tilt my head, watching through the mirror as Evie clambers onto the desk, then pulls herself upward, her legs briefly dangling before she climbs into the room above. Pieces of plaster crash to the floor beneath where she disappeared.

A growl builds in my throat. My fucking witch is lucky she didn't break her godsdamn neck with a foolish stunt like that. They invented fucking stairs for a reason. I glare into the empty air through the hole as if it is responsible for my ire. If she dies, I'm trapped in this realm for good. I sigh deeply in resignation and follow the same path she took to the third floor.

Delight sparks through me as I take in a table that was used for electroshock therapy. The wall perpendicular to it is unfinished, more of a skeleton of the framework than a wall, likely to hold something heavier, such as a one-way mirror. My eyes roam over the space and land on a chipped and blackened mirrored surface. There is only a sliver of mirror left, but the small shard is enough. I can easily make out Evie's distinct form sitting on the exam table, swinging her legs and humming a song I can't name.

I stand directly in front of the shard, admiring her moment of peace. Warmth blooms in my chest as a tender emotion tries to swell within me. Goose bumps pebble my skin as horror awakens a brutal truth. I immediately shut it down and shove it back into the box where it belongs, then toss it into the trauma-wrecked corner of my mind, left to be forgotten among the dust bunnies I call pain.

I will not allow anyone to get close to me ever again. Trust got me locked up in this realm, though I shouldn't be surprised that my brothers worked with those fucking witches to pick the perfect punishment for my crime of

being born. They were always clever in the ways they enjoyed inflicting punishments.

The decades of yearning to be free blur in my memory. I blow out an exasperated breath, frustrated that I allowed myself a moment of weakness. Yet again, another self-imposed torture session in the books.

The soft rasp of cloth against skin draws my attention back to the witch. She pulls off each item in a strip tease she doesn't know she's giving. My breath catches in my throat as I fully take her in, her black lingerie clinging to her delicious curves.

Evie lies on the table, relaxing her body, and spreads her thighs wide. Her hands leisurely stroke her body, lightly tracing her curves. Her palms cup her heavy breasts over her black bra, the scalloped lace edging lightly pressing into her ivory skin as she squeezes. Her nipples pucker against the nearly translucent fabric when her hands slide away. The thin material hides her tits from me. Saliva pools in my mouth as I imagine biting those tempting buds, grasping them between my teeth and biting until I taste blood. For a moment, the need to do just that is almost unbearable.

What the actual fuck? What am I doing? I'm practically drooling over a witch I seek to ruin. I loathe every breath that whooshes through her lungs and wills her heart to keep beating.

As if she sensed my feeling of unease, she picks up the pace, foreplay over. Evie jerks her panties to the side. Her cunt glistens, beckoning me to come closer for a taste. I would destroy her pussy in the best way imaginable. She moans softly as her middle finger swirls against her clit, her hips rising sharply before her ass settles back on the table.

She continues her languid strokes as her other hand glides back up her belly up to her neck, then she grips her own throat. My little witch is a dirty girl.

My cock drips for her, pre-cum soaking into the fabric of my pants as she applies more pressure and her breathing comes out in little gasps. It's the hottest fucking thing I've ever seen, yet it fills with me with rage. The slutty thing craves to be handled roughly.

She continues to choke herself with one hand while playing with her soaked pussy. I practically smash my nose against the rippling barrier of the portal as I lean toward the sliver of mirror for a closer look.

Let the darkness out to play, little witch. It needs a release just like you do.

The muscles of her arm flex, her tattoo rippling as though alive as she thrusts her fingers between her lower lips and pumps them quickly. The hand she holds around her throat relaxes, then stretches above her head in search of something to anchor her body.

Her fingers lock onto a frayed strap fastened to the table beneath her, which was likely used to hold the patients immobile as their brains were fried. Evie's hips buck wildly as she nears her climax. A light sheen of sweat coats her body from her efforts. She bites her lip, then whimpers husky, pleasure-soaked pleas. "Harder! Please, fill me with your cum."

The witch grips the strap so tightly, her knuckles turn white.

"Split my pussy open with your thick, demon co—" Her words are cut off by her scream.

I watch the scene before me with rapt attention while refusing to give into my lust and touch myself. The tension building in my balls goes unnoticed as she squirms, causing one of her breasts to slip free from its lace confines. She surrenders to nirvana as the orgasm consumes her. She lets go of the strap and slips a finger into her greedy cunt alongside the others before sliding it back out and between her lips.

My eyes slam closed as a wave of euphoria spreads throughout my body.

The witch's thoughts of me go through her mind, spurring me into an intense orgasm as I witness one of the most erotic things of my life.

I lean my forehead against the wall, my body spent as cum erupts against the zipper of my pants. The jagged mirror shard bites into my flesh. Blood tickles my cheek where a rivulet of the crimson liquid trails from the fresh wound.

Reality comes back to me slowly. I push myself away from the wall and glare into the mirror.

"Fuck!" I yell, feeling disgusted with myself, my face morphing into an angry grimace.

I am not weak. She will not best me by putting her pretty cunt on display. Whether she realizes it yet, she is the definition of my desires. Her magic is made of the same blackened notes as mine. My lungs shudder and jerk within me, failing to regulate my breathing. I will never be free from her agonizing thrall.

I push my fingers into my hair and yank harshly on the shaggy strands, a fiery burn lancing my scalp as I continue to pull. The pain soothes the jagged edges of my unstable emotions. I loosen my hold and drop to my knees on the filthy, gouged floor.

Fuck this, and fuck her for making me feel this way. She will suffer for all the pain she has caused me, intentionally or not. Eventually, she'll try to run when she realizes my plans for her, but by then, it'll be too late. I hope she does run, so I can hunt her down and drag her back into the darkness with me.

THIRTEEN



Evie

The last of the sun's rays dissolve through the drapes, shrouding my bedroom in darkness. Rosa flicks on the lamp, and it emits a low, orange hue over the room. Gomez watches from the bed as I pull a blanket over the mirror on the dresser, the last one left to cover. "Now he won't be able to see us," I say, and my lip curls at the corner.

After hopefully arousing him yesterday at the asylum, the best way to get him to communicate with me is by cutting off his visibility. Granted, he can

still hear us, but that may just work to my benefit. I quickly look away when I catch Rosa staring, but it's too late.

“You're enjoying this.”

Gomez extends his wings, as if he agrees with her.

I shrug. “I don't know what you mean,” I reply and turn to face her fully. “Did you text you know who?”

“Yes.” She displays her phone, and her last message to Aiden is on the screen. “It's all set.”

She ties the necklace I gave her, matching mine, around her neck. “Are you sure this will protect us?”

I nod. “Enough that he won't be able to listen to our thoughts and therefore influence them.” I slide my fingers along the necklace of rosemary entwined with sage, then dipped in anointing oil. “There's not much we can do to keep him away indefinitely.”

I walk to my closet as she sits on my bed, tickling Gomez's stomach. His wings curl around him, and he throws his little head back. Despite being a bat, he acts more like a puppy. Ever since I found him injured, he's stayed close to me.

Rosa clears her throat. “Now that we're openly acknowledging your witchiness...”

I pull open the closet door to exhibit my dresses, skirts, pants, and tops in an array of shades of black and dark purple. “Yes?” I ask but desperately fumble through my clothes to avoid looking directly at her. I want to be honest with her, but I can't get into my childhood, coven, or the truth about the type of magic I possess. If I know Rosa, the questions have been spinning through her mind for a long time.

“Does that mean Gomez is your familiar?”

I blink twice and stop what I'm doing. I turn to look at them, and Gomez tilts his head. "Yes," I say with a smile. His black eyes bulge, as if he can be any more adorable. "It was an instant connection."

She shifts her braid to one side. Fuchsia threads interlace with blackish brown, complementing her ombre lip shade. "Can you hear his thoughts?"

"No, but I can sense what he's feeling, and I think he can sense me too. I mean, myths say that familiars are supposed to be evil witches who were turned into animals as some kind of punishment, but I don't think that's true."

She cuddles Gomez, tenderly holding him close to her chest. "Impossible! My sweet Gomez doesn't have a bad bone in his body." She looks at him, her pupils dilating. "Isn't that right?"

He nestles against her warmth, and I roll my eyes. "Don't baby him. He's already such a brat," I tease, but she doesn't listen, and instead pulls out a bag of nuts from her purse, holding him with her other arm. She places them in a small pile on the bed, and I tsk-tsk, knowing crumbs will await me later when I climb under the covers. "I'm going to need to start paying your grocery bills if you keep bringing food over for him."

I turn back to my task: finding an outfit for tonight. While I'm terrified, it's about time I meet this Aiden. I can't keep looking over my shoulder, and if he knows who I am, what more harm can be done?

Rosa pulls out the necklace Aiden gave her, and I stare at the upside-down cross. The memory of being tied to a hospital bed in Edward's basement swarms unwantedly into my mind. I clamp my eyes shut. I can still feel the searing heat and pain coursing through me from when he sliced my skin off while wearing that same pendant. He was finally inducted into the Order when I turned thirteen. If only they knew what he was hiding...

Every coven has a branding tattoo. The Fallenmoores are no exception.

They are marked with purple roses, skulls, and leaves. The elders believed placing a spell on each coven was a good idea, so they could easily recognize each other from the markings. But that was centuries ago, when the covens helped each other and had treaties, and there were more of us. Now, the tattoos are dangerous, and the roses are proof of who I am. I examine the one on my arm, trailing my finger along the purple and black but stopping at the skull. Under it is the word “Fallenmoore,” inked between a thorn and two smaller roses.

I opt for a black top with intricate lace sleeves. Mercifully, the lace is thick enough to conceal what lies beneath. I pull it on, and the fabric hugs my waist and wide hips. Only a little cleavage shows, but if Aiden is an Order member, showing a little skin won’t affect him. With that in mind, I pull my ponytail down, not bothering to straighten out the kinks formed.

Rosa laughs. “Black, why am I not surprised?”

“Not all of us can pull off... that,” I point out, eyeing her neon-orange top. “I suppose it’s a good thing.” She arches her brow, and I pause. “We won’t get hit crossing the road. You’re a beacon.”

“Thanks,” she replies, deadpan. “We better hurry. So I’ll go in first and then you follow. We’ll be in public, so he can’t do anything.”

A slight tremble vibrates in my lip.

“I won’t let them hurt you. You’ve done nothing wrong. I’ll take care of you.”

She pats Gomez on the head and grabs her purse. If she knew the truth, then maybe she might hand me over herself.

My victims’ screams haunt me as I walk to the door, leaving Gomez behind safely tucked away in our bed. “I’ll be back soon,” I promise, careful not to let on where we’re going. “Don’t go near the mirrors.”

He rolls over in reply, as if to say his only plans are to sleep.

Rosa heads for the front door and I pause. “I’ll meet you outside. One second.” I hurry to the kitchen, then kneel and reach under the sink. There, I grab the handgun taped to the inside of the cupboard. It’s small, but it’ll take down a man.

I’m convinced Aiden is the one who broke in and left the mirror in my apartment, implying that the man in the mirror is aiding the Order. Aiden could have hurt Gomez while he was in here, and then he goes after my best friend under the ruse of liking her. Hell no. One mystery we can’t quite understand, no matter how much Rosa and I brainstorm, is why a demon is involving himself with witch business?

No matter what, I have to figure out what Aiden is up to. If he and the Order can track me here, I’ll have no choice but to run. I can’t take them down without unleashing my shadows. I wince, thinking about how many innocents will become collateral damage if that happens. It wouldn’t be the first time.

I check to make sure the gun is still loaded, then shove it in my purse next to my pepper spray. I can’t use my shadows, but I still want to teach Aiden a lesson for using my friend. My power dances under my skin. It wants me to kill again, but I know if I do, I’ll be feeding the death magic. I glance at the covered mirror in the hallway as I pass by, a smile playing on my lips. I can sense him behind the sheet, frustrated because he can’t see through.

He’s not the only player in his game.

FOURTEEN



Lorcan

My temples throb with pain, an oncoming headache inevitable. Aiden still hasn't come, despite being summoned an hour ago.

I stare at the blanket covering my view into her room, then pound my fist against the frame.

She also tied that fucking necklace around her neck so I can't hear her thoughts. Now I have no idea where she's gone. She's playing games, but she has no fucking idea how dangerous that is.

If Aiden survives tonight, I'll have him break in again and uncover these fucking mirrors. I light a cigarette and sit on the sofa, one hand on my knee. I hunch forward, lowering my head when I hear a hiss slip under the door.

"You know not to come here," I warn, sending the message to the demon outside, then drop my cigarette onto a trinket dish. I sense a demon. *"Leave."*

Their attachment to me tugs a desire to open the door. Their loyalty is supposedly unyielding, at least for those here who followed me when I was banished from Hell.

The door creaks open, and the demon Eshabia stands in the doorway, his matte-black stare landing on me. He barely resembles his human form anymore, the skin on his face a chalky white, his thin lips devoid of color. *"Master."*

Eshabia was once human, although it's hard to tell now after centuries of moving through the ranks. I recall when he was nothing but a trapped soul in Hell. In the human Realm, he was an infamous murderer, but in death, he was nothing—until his penchant for torture raised him through the ranks, moving from spirit to poltergeist, then finally to a demon. Eventually, he raised through the hierarchy, ruling beneath me over the other demons.

I raise to my feet, my muscles rippling as I clench my fists. *"What the fuck do you want, Eshabia?"*

He steps closer, and I growl. Eshabia hesitates on his next step, then stands still a couple of paces from the door. I should have expected this. I've been far too absent since focusing on my witch.

A sinister smile curls his lips. *"One of us has possessed a human."*

"When?" I question. They know not to do anything without my permission. It's difficult enough actually possessing one of them, and it only reminds me

of how I am trapped in here while they can still move between here and the Human Realm through possession.

His ghostly white fingers intertwine as he takes in his surroundings. I distract him before he can take too much interest in Evie's apartment.

I close the distance between us, my muscles tightening under my clothes when I reach him. Shadows snake around my arms and over my hands, joining my grip as I grab him by the throat.

"You might rule the others, but you answer to me."

His lips twitch, and I sense his desire to fight back, but I slip my consciousness into his before he can get any ideas.

There's little left in his mind to twist and break, but I sense his desire for power. My grip on his throat tightens as I intrude on every crevice in his mind, finding imprints of me there.

"We may not be in Hell anymore, but make no mistake," I say, both tattooed hands squeezing into his windpipe. *"I can still obliterate your soul."*

Fear threads through his stare. Not existing is the only thing a demon can fear; therefore, it is the only real threat that carries any weight.

"Do not make me ask again. Who possessed a human?" My question echoes in his head, the shadows around the room drawing closer as I release my hold on him and his mind.

"It's Solomor."

My nostrils flare, and my chest tightens. I flex my fingers, clenching my jaw as I focus on Eshabia. The desire to tear him apart overcomes all sensibility.

"My brother's pet," I spit. If it wasn't insulting enough that they aided the witches to banish me here, they sent Solomor and a few others to watch me. Now, one of them was loose in the Human Realm.

Eshabia moves half an inch, and I pin him with my glare. I understand now why he was hesitant to tell me who. The messengers of bad news have been known to be destroyed before. But this time, I may be able to use the information to my advantage. Possessions are rare, and never without my approval. The attachment to the human must be powerful, and oppression must have worn down their soul. Even then, taking away a human's free will is difficult.

"Is he in the Human Realm?"

"Yes," he replies dryly. *"He's there at a nearby hospital, possessing a girl."*

A growl reverberates in my chest. My family must be behind this. We can't communicate beyond our realm except through mirrors, and manipulating them is a power only I possess. They can only watch and heighten human emotions through them.

"Leave," I bark.

His human form disappears into a cloud of black smoke, and I watch as the dark wisps leave through the open door.

Solomor out in the Human Realm means he can communicate with my brothers, if they're still walking this world and not in Hell, where I should be. They have to be behind it, which means they want information. Why else would Solomor possess a human without my permission unless he was following the orders of another son of Lucifer?

I've been careful not to let anyone know of my habits. As far as the demons here are aware, I am haunting a human in Darkwood and nothing more. But if I'd let my guard down for a second, they could have heard... listened to what I've been doing in here.

If they know about Evie and Solomor tells my brothers, they'll know my

plan. If that's true, they'll kill her.

The precious Order that my brothers manipulate—using the guise of being angels, of all things—isn't safe from me either. Being stuck in here has its disadvantages, but I have one major advantage; I can be in a room without being seen, as long as it has a mirror. I'll hunt down every member of that fucking Order until I find a way to destroy them.

My shadows follow me as I walk down the winding roads, then pause outside a hospital. I slip from one shadow to another until I'm inside.

Lights flicker in the dark hallways, illuminating the demons waiting in the ICU. I smile when I see a mirror at the nurses' station. It's easy for a soul to become lost after death. All they have to do is see themselves in a mirror, and they'll end up walking the Human Realm as a spirit forever. Unless they end up here instead.

Demons huddle around the mirror, their eyes bulging and alight with excitement. I can feel it emanating from them. They wait for humans to look into it so they can feed off their emotions. The more negative ones are best, and where better to find sorrow, rage, anger, and grief than a hospital? When a nurse stares into it, unaware of what is behind her reflection, their faces split into sadistic smiles.

I continue walking until I find a room with a mirror over a sink, then peer through it. I'll search every single one in this damned building until I find Solomor and the human he possesses.

After looking through every mirror on two levels, I make my way to a room on the next floor. A woman sits on the end of her chair, too still for a human. She glances at the mirror above the sink and grins, as if she's been waiting for this moment.

But she hasn't been waiting here at all. He has. *Solomor*.

FIFTEEN



Evie

Rosa's date shifts in his chair when he spots us entering the restaurant. My fingertips brush the sage-and-rosemary necklace. If he knows anything about demons, he'll know these herbs. Or, at least, he should.

The shadows from the dim, red-orange lights highlight the strawberry blond woven between the brown strands of his hair. Rosa said he was our age, but his round, clean-shaven face makes him appear as if he's twenty-one rather than twenty-eight.

We reach the table, and his glacial-blue gaze darts from Rosa to me. Her four-inch heels clack against the marble floor, and Aiden quickly stands, then pulls the chair out behind her. “Hey, beautiful lady.” His voice cracks, as if he’s cringing as much as I am.

Rosa clears her throat and places her purse down next to her. “Aiden, this is Evie.”

He extends his hand, and I take it, my nose wrinkling. I pull away as quickly as possible, grab a chair from an empty table, and drag it to theirs. I sit between them and place my elbows on the table.

It’s not too busy tonight, which I like. The low hum of music and chatter covers our conversation, and I lean forward. I pull my purse onto my lap, sliding my fingers inside until I brush against the barrel of the gun.

“I thought it would be just the two of us,” he tells Rosa, unaware of the weapon I’m holding under the table. “Not that it’s not nice to meet your friend.”

Rosa clicks her tongue. She tilts her head, her dark, crimson-painted smile pulling up at the corners. “We know who you are.” Her brown eyes narrow, and he tenses.

The dimples on his cheeks deepen with a forced laugh. “I’m Aiden.”

She rolls her eyes and lowers her voice to a whisper. “I know you’re with the Order.” Rosa pauses, drumming her nails against the polished wood surface. “You’ve been using me.”

“That’s ridiculous,” he says, his voice raising an octave.

Rosa shakes her head, her pink waves bouncing around her shoulder as she scoffs. “Give it up. Why are you here?”

I tense a little, but neither seem to notice. I haven’t told her everything about my past. As far as she knows, my family was a bad bunch, and the

Order hates me for it. I'm only too grateful when a waitress walks over with a huge smile, unaware of what she's interrupted.

"Can I get you all something to drink?"

Aiden's leg bounces, vibrating the table legs. If we're not careful, he'll bolt, and I can't pull the gun out in public—unless he tries to hurt me, which is the reason I brought it. She hesitates when no one answers, and I force a smile. "I'll take a water."

Rosa smiles. "I'll have a martini, and he will have a scotch."

She nods and leans over, placing three menus in the middle of the table. "I'll get those for you and be right back. Have you been here before?"

"No," I say and look at Rosa. I hate small talk.

Rosa softens my harsh tone with a laugh, then she nods. "I have. We'll let you know when we're ready to order." The waitress smiles back at her, but her hesitant gaze sweeps over me before she leaves. When she's gone, Rosa looks at Aiden. "You'll need that scotch."

"I really don't know what you're both talking about," he says again. "I don't know about any order."

I tuck a lock of hair behind my ear and lean forward. "I know you've been asking questions about me," I hiss. "We're not leaving until you tell us who you really are and what you want."

His gaze moves past my shoulder, to my right. I look beside me and notice four mirrors on the wall. He quickly looks away, and my chest tightens. "You know him," I say when realization dawns on me.

The muscle in his jaw ticks.

"The demon in the mirror."

Anxiety threads his gaze, and he forces a second laugh, but this one is even less convincing.

I sigh. “Don’t pretend you don’t know what I’m talking about.”

“Demons?” He gives Rosa an incredulous look, as if I’m the crazy one here and he’s not some insane stalker pastor in the world’s deadliest organization. “That’s insane.”

I shake my head. “You know it’s not. You’re working with him.” I glimpse the mirror in my peripheral vision. “What does a demon want with the Order?”

The waitress returns with our drinks, and I bite the inside of my cheek. Rosa tells her we’re not ready yet, and she ignores the me and Aiden. I can’t blame her. Aiden and I both stare stormily at each other, while Rosa is the only one with a hint of a smile.

When she’s gone, I sigh. Rosa wags her finger. “I like it here, so try not to do anything to get us banned,” she warns. “We’re going to have a civil but honest conversation. That way, no one will get hurt.” She takes a sip of her martini.

I breathe in the potent scent of mandarin from a nearby candle and catch a waft of garlic and parmesan lingering. Aiden doesn’t touch his scotch.

“Look,” he says, his blue eyes widening in the same way Gomez’s does when he wants something. “I really don’t have a clue what you’re talking about...” He glances again at the mirrors to my right, and I sigh.

“He’s really not watching us,” I say, answering his unspoken question. “He has no idea we’ve come here, and unless you told him, how can he track us here?”

Aiden grimaces. “You’d think.”

My breath catches in my throat as my heart gallops. He knows. I was right. “If you don’t tell me the truth, you’ll have far worse to fear than from a demon.” I pull the gun from the purse and nudge it against his legs.

“What the fuck!” He slides his chair back then jumps to his feet, his forehead beading with sweat. “He’s right. You’re fucking crazy.”

Rosa fumbles for cash to leave for the drinks, but I can’t let him get away, so I run out after him. I keep the gun hidden, keeping it in my grasp but inside my purse.

The brisk, night air hits me like a wall after being inside the warm restaurant. I spot Aiden at the crosswalk. He’s running far faster than I can. I step back into the shadowy entrance of a store when he looks back at the restaurant. I peer around the doorway and watch him disappear into an alley.

When I reach the front of the alleyway, I slide my back against the wall so he won’t see me, then I slip into the dark, narrow space. Rats run through the rain-soaked garbage as I make my way farther in. I can hear his footsteps. It comes to a dead end, and I’m certain he could climb the wall if he wanted, but I know this town like the back of my hand. He can’t get away from me that easily.

My heart pounds against my ribcage, the hairs on my neck standing on end as I move closer to him. He’s staring at the brick wall at the end of the alley, the moonlight pouring down, illuminating the graffiti covering the whole area.

“Run and I will shoot,” I call, then step out of the shadows. I cock the gun, ensuring the safety is off, nausea swirling in my stomach. “I have spent my life running from you people, and I’m done.” Tears threaten to break through, the swell of emotion taking me by surprise. “Start talking.”

He freezes, his eyes locked on me as if he’s a deer caught in headlights. There’s a tremor to his voice. “Please, don’t…”

“There are no mirrors here.” I don’t take my eyes off him for a second. “The demon can’t hear you, and neither can the Order. The only threat is me,

so you better talk. Don't make me ask again."

"I don't know—"

"Stop!" I shout before he can deny it. "You said *he's* right, that I'm crazy," I state. "Who is *he*?"

His eyes flutter closed, and he shoves his hands into the pockets of his tailored blazer. "I'm fucked anyway," he states after whistling out a breath. "He will kill me for this."

I lick my lips, my fingers freezing from the gusts of winds sweeping up the alley, rustling papers around us. "He doesn't have to know."

His gaze darkens. "He knows everything."

"That's such bullshit. I've read enough about demons to know they can't do anything to us unless we let them."

His jaw goes slack, and he steps closer, as if I'm not holding a deadly weapon. "You know about the Shadow Realm?"

My brows knit together. He knows I'm a witch—he has to—so I'm surprised he thinks I wouldn't have researched everything and anything related to the dark portals that most in this world are ignorant to. However, I haven't heard of that realm. Only Hell, the veil in between, and the heavens. I clear my throat. "They say 'know your enemies,'" I say, deadpan. "Why did the Order send you?"

He hesitates, then Rosa's voice echoes from the other side of the alleyway. "Evie?"

I whip my head around, and pain shoots through my fingers as Aiden twists my wrist to the side. The gun slips from my fingers and into his. My magic sizzles from my core, begging to be unleashed on this dick. I keep it locked up, barely, but the rage pulsing through me threatens to combust.

My gaze locks on his. "You might be holding my gun right now, but I

swear I'll kill you if you don't tell me something."

A shadow moves beside him, and he jumps, letting out a small scream. My magic grows closer to the surface, the vibration rising between us. Darkness threatens to take over, and a second shadowy wisp moves through the air.

No. This can't happen again.

I clamp my eyes shut, my nails digging into the palm of my hands until I draw blood. "Evie?" Rosa's voice reaches me through the panic, and I open my eyes. I can't let it out. I won't. Not with my best friend here.

Rosa turns to face him. "You better tell us something. I swear to God."

"I can't!" he yells and sighs. "Lorcan will kill me if I do."

My eyes widen. "Lorcan?"

I suck in an icy breath, and Aiden's face drains of color. Another shadow ripples from me, and he takes a step back. I try to hold them inside, but they're going to combust. "Get away from me!" I shout at Rosa.

Aiden takes one look at my eyes, and his bulge. He drops the gun into a pile of trash and runs. I buckle at the knees, holding onto my stomach as I double over. Containing the shadows back drains all my energy.

"Evie, what's happening?" She holds my shoulders. "Your eyes are... black."

"It's my magic. You need to run," I beg, but she stays rooted to the spot. "I need a pill." I point at my purse lying on the floor, while my magic bubbles under my skin, moving as if it has a mind of its own.

Rosa places two tablets against my lips, and I stick out my tongue, then swallow them dry. "Please," I say with a whimper. "Go."

"No." She squeezes my hands, and I want to get away from her, but it's taking all my energy to keep it from exploding out of me. I don't want to move from this spot.

“Here, babe.” Rosa places a cigarette between my lips and lights it.

I puff out a cloud of smoke and close my eyes.

Rosa waits patiently at my side. She knows me well enough to not ask questions. Having her by my side seems to cool the magic down instead of encouraging it. We’re safe as I feel it coiling back into the place I buried it so many years ago.

“I need to go home,” I explain.

“What about Aiden?”

“He seemed to be more concerned about the demon and didn’t say *anything* about the Order.” My thoughts drift to the demon stalking me. *Lorcan*. Right now, he’s the only lead I have. He’s been trying to scare me, but now it’s my turn. After all, a demon’s name is his biggest weakness.

I kiss Rosa on the cheek and she pulls me into a hug, then squeezes me tighter. “Call me first thing in the morning, and keep those mirrors covered!”

“I will,” I lie. She closes the door behind her, and I throw my bag onto the countertop. Gomez is asleep on the sofa, his little chest rising as he snores. He doesn’t stir in my presence, and now I understand why he was shit at alerting me when Aiden must have broken in.

I imagine his anger as the demon stands behind the blanketed mirror. A devious smile plays at my lips, and I grab a marker from my drawer. I can’t use the mirror to see since I want it to be a surprise.

I mark his name on my skin, just above my left breast. If that doesn’t get his attention, I don’t know what will.

I admire the lettering—***Lorcan***—in black marker.

If he wants to play games, then who am I to rob him of a challenge? Now that I know he's behind Aiden breaking in and inserting himself into Rosa's life, it's time to get some real answers.

Forming attachments with demons is dangerous, but it's all I have. Besides, he's already in my dreams. A bond has already formed. If he won't talk to me, I'll never know why the Order hasn't already tried to kill me, whether my former parents are wrapped up in this, or even if I need to leave this town for another.

Furthermore, I want to know why a demon is tied up in this.

The tattoo on my arm has grown an extra rose since my magic came close to killing Aiden tonight, but the benzos numb any fear that threatens to surface.

I peel off my clothes one by one until I'm in nothing but my lace black bra and panties. My heart races, warning me to stop, and I press my lips together as I stand in front of the mirror.

I tug the blanket down and turn around, purposely averting my eyes. I run a hand along my chest to draw his gaze to the name written on my skin.

Slowly, I unclasp my bra and let it fall to the floor. My gaze darts to my reflection, waiting, but he's not showing himself.

Coward.

With a scoff, I pull on my tank top while tiredness stretches through me, pulling me onto the bed. I crawl under the covers, hearing Gomez's wings as he flies into the room. He sinks onto the bed next to me, and I nuzzle back, sensing the demon's eyes on me.

He can't do anything to me anyway, I tell myself. He can only watch, and if this is the only way to get his attention, to get him to speak to me again, then so be it.

SIXTEEN



Lorcan

I stand in the mirror of Evie's bedroom, my erection growing as I stare at my name marked on her breast. Surprise widens my eyes when satisfaction peaks in my chest. She thinks she's won, that she has some kind of control. As if I'd be stupid enough to give anyone my true name, especially an idiot like Aiden. *So, you like to play games, witch.*

I walk to her office. Time is running out. With Solomor possessing a human in Evie's realm and my family clearly behind it, I must provoke Evie into using her magic.

Anticipation builds as I pace back and forth in her office, then glide my fingers down the ornate frame of the mirror that locked me in here. Today, I will taste my little witch. The air around me seems to buzz with my mania and deeply rooted anger for her.

Her magic begs for mine to free it from its unwilling host every time I'm close to her. The intrusive but comforting feeling of my loathing for the witch wraps around me like a warm blanket, reminding me of my true purpose. No matter how tempting she is, I must not lose focus. She's too cautious, keeping her powers inside, buried too deep.

I drag my fingers through my hair and inhale sharply. She keeps her death magic inside to keep everyone else safe, but she doesn't realize it's rotting her from the inside out. Eventually, she'll be the one to explode into a thousand pieces.

Her magic calls to me, and she's useless to me until she embraces it.

My shadows coil around me, like a viper ready to attack. Every mirror is covered with blankets except the one in her bedroom. She knew *exactly* what she was doing. She's playing games far more dangerous than she realizes.

I can't do anything without an attachment, whether it's through fear or lust. But little does my witch know that with an attachment, the portal between us thins and I gain a foothold in the Human Realm. Most demonic bonds start with oppression, by demons using humans' emotions against them, but with my witch, it goes deeper. The more she obsesses and thinks about me, the deeper it goes. With us both having shadow magic, it's more intense than normal.

I shake my head. The things I could do to her... She gets off on fear and danger, and today I will show her exactly how addicting it can be to indulge in her darkest fantasies.

I take a deep breath to center my thoughts. The risk of losing myself is real; I could easily take it too far and fuck her, but failure has never been an option. I squeeze my eyes shut, attempting to calm my conflicting emotions.

I focus on the portal and push my fingers through the mirror. They slip through, and I grin. I reach back, then pull my mask over the upper half of my face while I wait for the mirror to settle. The smooth surface ripples gently like a pond, then dissipates seamlessly. Goose bumps cover my arms when the knowledge hits me. My reality will change irrevocably the moment I breach the veil.

This is the first time I have been out of the Shadow Realm in over a century. That fucking whore great-aunt of hers made certain I would be trapped. But I have her descendant, the last of the bloodline that keeps me bound.

The Fallenmoore witches have always been too arrogant and impulsive for their own good. They were once legendary, but now Evie is the last one standing; therefore, she holds the power of all her ancestors. It's too much for one witch, where the death magic is supposed to be spread across an entire coven. She must let it out.

I take my first step through the portal, and time loses all meaning. My skin sizzles, prickling heat all over my body, a warning from the ether. My chains may be longer, but I still wear the shackle to the Shadow Realm.

I can't be gone for long.

The blanket drops to the floor as I push through, smirking at the thinly veiled attempt to keep me out.

If the electricity still burning through my veins is any indication, my distance from the portal is severely limited. I turn and seal it, ensuring that no other demon can escape into her home.

Her intoxicating scent almost brings me to my knees. It is so much more powerful without the veil between us. I breathe her in greedily, my thoughts turning muddled with each inhale. She thinks she has power over me; I refuse to let it continue.

I walk through to the living room and to her bedroom. Powdered white light falls through the open drapes, illuminating the shadowy edges.

A cruel smile lifts the corners of my lips. Evie lies sprawled over her bed, sleeping fitfully as usual. I am all too aware of the possibility of waking her prematurely, but the craving to touch her is too overpowering.

I quietly walk to her side of the bed. She's tangled in her sheets, wearing that little tank top that hugs the curve of her breasts with its thin fabric. My name is fading against her skin. Despite my better judgment, I crave to make it permanent.

Fuck, she looks so innocent while she sleeps. But I know better. If tonight showed me anything, it's that she is a predator disguised as prey. If I didn't loathe her so much, I might be proud.

I lean down and lightly brush my fingers down her silken cheek. Her whole body twitches in response to the seemingly innocent touch, but she still doesn't wake. The vanilla and rose in her perfume mixes beautifully with her own scent, and for a second, I wish I could bottle it. I close my eyes. The smell is intoxicating. My cock throbs painfully as I imagine what it would feel like to have our bare skin touch. I will torture her pretty pussy and her flesh, scoring myself so deeply on her soul, nothing will remove me. Her death magic craves violence, and I will free it by any means necessary.

Her long dark hair covers parts of her face and the pillow. Her thick lips pucker in her sleep, and I notice the slight shadow beneath the bottom. I imagine how it would feel pulling that puffy red lip between my teeth.

That's when I hear it, the unmistakable squeak I've become accustomed to. I roll my eyes and sigh. That. Fucking. Bat.

He's roused from his sleep and is staring at me through black eyes from next to Evie's face. My eyes widen, and I press a finger against my lips in warning. But he doesn't fucking listen. He chirps and I grab him quickly, but he wrestles with my fingers.

"Quiet," I whisper. "I won't be killing your witch... *tonight*," I promise, but he sinks his fangs into my finger, and a stream of blood drips onto the carpet.

I growl at the fluffy fucker and find his cage, dusty and unused. I shove him inside and close the door but notice the lock doesn't work properly. I grab blueberries from the kitchen and pour a hefty pile through the bars, hoping it'll be enough to keep him there. He tries to go for the fragile lock, but I remove my belt before he can get out, and I wrap it around the bars to the door and the cage.

His little beady eyes narrow in suspicion. He opens his mouth, baring his tiny fangs at me. My nostrils flare and rage heats my chest, causing a flush to spread up my throat.

"Listen, you little fucker, this can go one of two ways," I say, my demonic side making itself known in the timbre of my voice. "Option one, you keep quiet and snack on some berries and leave us the fuck alone..." I pause, waiting to see if the creature understands the severity of its situation. "Or option two, I dangle this cage from the balcony with a shadow." I put my hands on my knees and lean closer. "No matter what you choose, you will not interrupt me."

The bat tilts his head with as much of a confused expression as a bat can make. My gaze narrows, and my lips pinch into a straight line. "I know you understand me, fluff ball."

I take a step toward him, and he scrambles back until he is at the very edge of the cage. “I will have your decision, bat,” I command, pointing a tattooed finger at him. His eyes travel between the open door to Evie’s bedroom and me several times. But then his eyes go wide, and the most adorable, sad expression I have ever seen in my existence covers his face. Why should I give a shit if I made the bat sad? For fuck’s sake, I brought it berries.

Finally, the bat reaches out a clawed foot and snatches one berry from the pile, then pulls it against himself protectively.

“Wise decision.”

He looks at me accusingly and I sigh. “I won’t kill her,” I say again. No, I’ll do much worse, but he doesn’t need to know that.

I stride back to the witch’s room. When I cross the threshold, I look over my shoulder and whisper at the bat, “Behave.”

He freezes with a berry gripped in his claw, halfway to his open mouth.

I pull my lips back in a snarl before closing and locking the door behind me. The tension eases from my shoulders as I set my sights on Evie.

My little witch looks more haggard than she did a few minutes ago. Her head thrashes side to side, low, fearful whimpers issuing from her lips. I press a fist to my mouth and squeeze my eyes shut as intense arousal hardens my cock to the point of pain. She’s having a nightmare.

I take a moment to look around her room, the place where she can be her most vulnerable self, especially in sleep. A few bottles of benzos sit on her nightstand. I slide my finger over a nearly empty packet of cigarettes and breathe in, sampling the evocative combination of vanilla and smoke. I wonder if she tastes as mouthwatering as she smells.

She’s keeping her magic numb with all this shit. I wonder how angry she’ll be if she finds her pills are gone. The thought sends a wave of excitement

through my chest, and I smirk before rushing to the bathroom and throwing the pills in the toilet, then watching as they're flushed away.

Her shadows purr with approval as I walk back into the room and to the bottom of her bed before leaning on it. I cross my ankles in front of me.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath before sending my consciousness into hers. Evie's mind is a curious place, and yet it strangely feels... like how I imagine home would feel. Not that I would know anything about that.

Fuck, focus.

When I travel into another's mind regularly enough, it becomes as easy as breathing to blend my mind with theirs, and my little witch is no different. Yet, she is. I allow myself to explore exactly what I'm feeling in the connection between us.

I watch Evie's dream as she runs through the woods. Every few steps, her head whips back, and she glances over her shoulder for her attacker. The last time she goes to look, her bare foot catches on a stray tree root. She falls face first on the forest floor. The breath whooshes from her lungs, and the masked figure chasing her covers her body with his, pinning her to the packed dirt.

The man fists her hair and yanks her head off the ground. My witch is emitting a tantalizing cocktail of fear and lust, turned on by being caught and manhandled.

I can work with this.

I manipulate her dream seamlessly, taking the core components of the nightmare and blending it with desire. My double flips Evie onto her stomach. She scrambles backward on her hands and feet as he closes the distance and grabs her by the throat. She releases a strangled moan as he tightens his hold. "Filthy fucking slut. Do you often spread your legs for strange men in the woods?"

Her pupils dilate, and she arches her back when he leans down and trails his lips along her shoulders. He pulls off his pants. “Take this dick like a good little witch.”

Now I’ve set the scene enough that it will continue uninterrupted for quite some time. I weave the necessary threads of her brain waves, tightening some and loosening others. She’ll sleep deeper than she has in her entire life.

I retreat from her mind and climb onto the bed before crawling up her body. She doesn’t stir, except for an occasional twitch. I brace myself above her and lean down, mirroring the actions of the masked man in her dream. I kiss and nip her skin in torturously slow movements. Her body is mine to explore. I crawl back down her body, the bulge in my jeans rubbing against her as I do. I gently push her legs to her chest, then grab her ankles and spread her open.

With her thighs spread like this, the curves of her ass cheeks peek out under her panties. Her hips rise off the mattress, but her eyes stay closed.

I grip her panties at the crotch on both sides and yank. A loud rip sounds through the bedroom, but the noise doesn’t wake her. I leave whatever scraps are left of her underwear trapped beneath her.

Her cunt is soaked. *What a naughty whore you are!*

The cool air kisses her exposed clit, and she moans, reaching a hand toward her pussy to soothe the ache, but she never reaches her destination. I wrap a shadow around her wrist and pin it to the mattress. I ghost my lips against her tight bud, lightly flicking it with my tongue. Desire races through my body when I taste her for the first time. She is Ambrosia, nectar of the gods; there is no other way to describe it. The flavor of her arousal coats my tongue, and I moan against her skin, unable to stop myself from enjoying this moment.

She startles awake with a gasp, her skin tightening beneath my palms on

her thighs.

“Wh-what’s happening?” She stutters, the tendrils of sleep still holding her in their sway.

I allow her to lift her head just enough to look down at me between her thighs. “Your cunt smells delicious, little witch.”

Her eyes widen, and her hands tremble even as her arousal deepens.

“You are so fucking delectable. Your body knows who it belongs to, little killer, and soon your mind will too.”

Her voice reaches me through the sheets. “I can’t move. Why can’t I move?” she asks desperately.

I continue, ignoring her protests, and press my face further into her. I suck on her lips, puffy and swollen from her unchecked arousal, and slowly draw her folds between my teeth.

It was too easy messing with the ribbons of her mind, threading the strands together and changing the patterns so she’s susceptible to my compulsion.

Sleep paralysis is a real condition, and recreating the effects is simple enough. I loosen the invisible chains enough on her psyche so I can feel her writhe.

“You bastard!” Her voice cracks in the middle. “Let me go.”

“You don’t want me to do that.”

A whimper escapes her mouth, and her voice raises an octave. “Get off me!”

I ignore her, my fingers sinking deeper against her skin. She instinctively pushes up against me, forcing my tongue deeper. I curl it back to collect her honey before drinking it down.

“Please, stop,” she begs.

“Be careful what you beg for, little witch.”

I dip my head lower, making use of the mask and grinding it against her clit. She bucks against me, her back arching. She lets out the smallest moan, then manages to move her arms despite the paralysis, breaking out of it.

Shadows dance from me, wrapping around her wrists to restrain her against the bed. She's not leaving yet. Doesn't she know that her fight only makes me want her more?

I can't fuck her. The attachment can't go that far. She needs to crave me, to be on the edge of the cliff of desire until she's so close that I can bend her to my will.

She's getting close to her release. I need to keep her wanting more. She's unsatisfied with this life she's created for herself. She merely needs a taste of the darkness to come looking for more.

I breathe hot air onto her glistening, wet pussy. She pushes herself against my eager mouth, saturating my tongue in her invigorating nectar. As I caress my tongue against her, my eyes close in admiration of her moans.

Nuzzling deeper, I explore the folds of her pussy, thrusting my tongue inside. She rocks herself against my nose and mouth. Her thighs clench around the sides of my face, and I cup her ass, guiding her movements.

Her moans turned to whimpers, earning a low growl from me as the desire to take her continues to build. The sounds she makes fill the room, and she tightens around my tongue. I pull away just as she's about to come, leaving her on the edge, rocking her hips against the space in front of me.

"*Beg,*" I order and come up to face her. The moment our gazes clash, my erection grows. Fuck, her eyes pierce my soul. Who knew revenge could be so sweet?

"Never," she whispers, her breaths uneven.

I bask in the glow of her sweat-slicked body, letting out a low rumble of a

groan. I unzip my pants, then grasp my aching erection, and her legs fall apart.

I smirk. *“Your body says otherwise.”*

She’s not even fighting my shadows. A tug forces me back, my time in the Human Realm fracturing.

I bite my bottom lip. She shakes her head as if this is a dream. “Get out.”

I chuckle darkly. *“Make me,”* I taunt, feeling the vibration of the room rise as her magic bubbles just under the surface. *“Force me out.”*

She slides her hand between her legs. *No, no, little witch.* My shadows grab her hand, and another slides around her throat. *“You won’t come until I tell say.”* I direct the order, my compulsion slipping through the crevices of her mind. She’s easier to control like this, an unsatisfied puddle on her bed. I climb on top of her and grip her throat myself, taking the place of my shadows. The determination in her eyes and slight curve to her lips as I grip tighter make me want to fuck her here.

Invisible tethers pull me toward the mirror. I have only minutes until I’m ripped off her and back through the mirror. *“If you want to come again, you’ll need to do something for me.”*

She shakes her head, but I can tell she likes it. Conflict breaks her thoughts into pieces, and I smile sadistically.

“Show me your shadows, little witch, and I’ll make it so you only scream for me,” I promise. My breath hits her neck as I take in one last, deep inhale of her scent, committing it to memory, and climb off her, pissed that I can’t stay longer.

SEVENTEEN



Lorcan

My lip twitches in my reflection as I stare out the mirror into Aiden's foyer. He whistles to himself in the kitchen, preparing for his shitty human job. He pulls his cap on, then grabs his wallet and keys from the kitchen counter. I grip the mirror frame, my canines protruding through my gums as I glare into the foyer. His light, quick footsteps sound in my ears as he draws closer, iced coffee in hand.

His eyes lock onto mine, and I let out a low growl. My talons slice through my skin, and my eyes darken to black.

“Holy fuck!” Coffee splatters over the mirror and floor as the cup I dropped, along with his keys, wallet, and phone. The screen shatters. I can hear his heart thrumming like a hummingbird in my head, his hand on his chest as he attempts to catch his breath.

“If you can’t keep that tongue from wagging, I will tear it from your mouth.” My jaw tenses as I glare at him and his narrowing blue eyes.

His hands shoot into the air, as if I’m holding a gun to his head. “So, you’re mad. I get it.”

My shoulders tense, and I glide my talons down the glass, sound shrieking through both the human and shadow versions of his apartment. *“You have one minute to talk before I end our deal. You can rot in Hell.”*

“No, no, please.” He lets out a long exhale and takes a step closer, puffing out his cheeks.

“Fifty seconds.”

“Okay, look, hear me out.” Sweat beads on his forehead, dripping from his light-brown, tousled strands. “It’s not my fault that witch of yours is a psycho. She was going to shoot me. She had a gun, for fuck’s sake.”

If I didn’t loathe her, I would swell with pride. *“You told her my name.”*

He hisses a breath through his teeth and grimaces. “Yeah, but it was an accident.” He points at me, then lowers his finger when he spots my snarl. “I didn’t mean to say anything to her, but that’s all I said. I swear.”

“You fear her.” I shake my head. *“Pathetic.”*

He chews the inside of his lip and slowly leans to grab his phone. I growl, and he rises quickly. “She’s insane. In fact, you two are perfect for each other.”

Anger rips through my chest, and I slam my fist against the glass, needing an outlet. He jumps back a pace, but it’s not enough. If I could, I would reach

into his apartment, wrap my hands around his throat, and squeeze until his head is no longer attached to his body.

“Lorcan, look...”

“Enough!” I bark.

He freezes, hearing my voice so loud. “Master,” he says quickly, but his internal monologue betrays him. *You would like that, you egomaniac. Pfft. Master. Next he’ll want me on my knees and kissing his ringed fucking finger.*

I grip the mirror until parts of the wooden frame splinter and crack under the pressure. “*Don’t pretend you wouldn’t like it on your knees, human.*” I snarl, then look him up and down, enjoying the fear radiating from him. “*You forget, I am as much a witness to your dreams as you.*”

He swallows thickly, rubbing his arm. “That’s not...”

“*I don’t care!*” I yell into his mind, and he squeezes his eyes shut. “*Tell me how you are useful to me now. The witch knows who you are she does not fear you. You are useless.*”

“No, please!” His eyes bulge, and he presses his hands together, as if in prayer. “I can still be useful. I... I...” I sense him scrambling for ideas in that empty head of his. I’ve had enough. Once I can stay in the Human Realm for longer than an hour, I will find Aiden and tear him limb from limb, so he can make good on our deal sooner than later.

He can join the rest of the souls in Hell.

“Oh.” His eyes light up. “I can get her to use her magic.”

“*You have nothing!*” I shout and pull away from the mirror.

“Please,” he calls before I can remove myself from his shitty apartment for the last time. “Have some empathy.”

I laugh sardonically. Is this human serious?

He sighs. “Never mind, I forgot who I’m talking to. Look, there must be

something else I can do. What about the demon you said is possessing someone? Or the real Order? Don't dismiss me yet. I can do more."

I turn back to face him, tilt my head, and curl a finger, beckoning him closer.

Hesitantly, he takes short, slow steps until he's standing inches from the mirror.

"You have one chance. Fear me before guns and witches. An eternity of anguish is worse than anything anyone can do to you here, especially when I return to Hell." I morph into my demonic form. Scales cover my tattoos, darkening my entire body. I grow several feet taller, my eyes blacker than a starless night. A few seconds later, I return to my human form and lean closer. His round eyes dull as he watches me like a deer in headlights. *"I have plans for you."*

I cough the moment I walk into my realm's version of the witch's apartment, the light stench of sage filling my lungs. My fists clench at my side, my nails biting into my palms as I storm to each mirror until I finally catch a glimpse of her. At least she's finally uncovered the rest of the mirrors.

My eyes are drawn to the black shorts hugging her round ass, then up to her white tank top, her nipples visible through the thin fabric. I drink her in, admiring her long black hair hanging to the bottom of her back, perfectly straight. Then she turns, her brown eyes fixed on the mirror above her bed.

I lose all lust when I spot the stick of sage burning from a wooden, coffin-shaped shelf where she usually keeps crystals. Smoke spirals upward, curling into the corners of the room. I place my hand over my nose and mouth, rage pulsing through me.

She pulls Gomez into a tight hug, and he rests his head on her chest. His beady eyes track me in the mirror, and his fangs peek over his black mouth. He can sense me, but it's not a surprise. Like all animals, and especially familiars, they have a sixth sense. "No one puts my baby in a cage and gets away with it," she coos into his ear, then shoots a glare at the mirror, despite not being able to see me. "Fucking demon douchebag."

I spot the handgun she must have used on Aiden. It's lying on the nightstand. My lip twitches, but I can't bring myself to smile, not when she's burning fucking sage and... What's that? I glare down at the thick line of salt in front of the mirror.

I bring my hand to the glass, pressing my fingertips against the cool mirror, but I can sense her like usual. The rosemary-and-sage necklace dangles from her neck. She leaves the view of mirror but quickly returns without Gomez. Her cheeks redden, and she puts out the sage, seeming satisfied that it's done its job. I should fucking think so. It looks like the entire apartment is choking with it.

It'll take more than a smudging to keep me out, but it does something. The distance between us ignites a hatred that has me imagining all the ways I could kill the witch. She's keeping me away, trying to break our connection. If it weren't for her family, I wouldn't be locked in this fucking realm. Now I have to ruin her in order to free myself, if only she'd stop playing games.

I follow her back out of the room, gliding between mirrors toward the living area, where I spot Gomez climbing over the sofa, then to the restroom, where I find her again.

She closes the door and glides past the mirror. My jaw clenches as she slides her hand behind the dark-purple, fabric shower curtain and turns on the hot water. Steam clings to the mirror as the water runs, and Evie strips.

My eyes follow every delicious curve of her body, and I hate her for being so fuckable, but it's more than that. I watch as she steps inside, every movement sensual. She pulls the shower curtain across and removes the necklace.

Her thoughts come through clearly. *I'm so fucking horny. Fuck Lorcan and that compulsion. Well, and his tongue. Not that I wouldn't fuck his tongue. Ew, stop it,* she thinks to herself, and I listen in to her stream of consciousness. *He's disgusting. He didn't even let me come, and he locked Gomez in a cage. He can't just come in here and control my mind. Who the fuck does he think he is? I hope he is watching everything. I hope he chokes on the fucking sage. I'll light it every day if it means harming him, the sick fuck! To think, he took my pills too. I know it was him. Who does that?* She pauses, and I can practically smell her arousal from here.

My stomach knots, and her internal monologue seeps back into my mind. *I shouldn't want to fuck him. What's wrong with me? But fuck, I can't stop thinking about that demon dick inside me. I bet it's huge.*

I smirk, delighted to hear I'm still the main thing on her mind. Whatever emotion may guide her thoughts, it will bring us closer together, and I can sense her magic from here. Those shadows are almost ready, and her ruin is so close, I can taste it.

She lets out a sigh of frustration as touching herself does nothing to bring her closer. Instead, she climbs out of the shower, then stares into the mirror. Droplets of water cascade down her breasts and torso, and I watch as they shimmer against her glistening skin. A white towel blocks my view, her wet strands being wrung out. Finally, she runs a brush through her hair but pauses.

For a second, I think she's looking at me and I've accidentally shown

myself—until I realize her gaze is focused on the scarred skin of her breast in the reflection. It's barely visible, a stretch of white and pink under her nipple. Her wide brown eyes gloss with tears, and she averts her eyes back toward her face. I reach into her mind, my chest tightening when her lip trembles.

I'm safe. She tells herself such pretty lies, then blows out a tense breath. *Edward can't hurt me now. I'm not a teenager. I can protect myself.*

Anger slides through me when she thinks of the gun instead of the unending, untamed power just under the surface. Her mind carousels through images of this Edward man, who I quickly realize was the man who adopted her, the sick fuck she called dad.

Finally, she leaves and heads to the bedroom, and I follow through the mirrors. It's barely seven in the evening, yet she climbs under her blankets. Gomez flies in after and snuggles under her damp hair.

She's afraid, but not of me or even the Order. It all goes back to this man and what his experiments did to her. I heighten her emotions through our attachment, despite it weakening from the sage. I'm just grateful she forgot to put the necklace back on. Weaving my way into her subconscious, I find the key to unleashing the darkness in her. She just needs a nudge, and I'm curious to see what this dark little witch, who reads horrors and goes to abandoned asylums, hides from.

She falls deeper into slumber, then into a memory. Shock roots me to the spot as I enter her nightmare, watching from a rectangle mirror as she prepares to be tortured by someone she loves and trusts—the betrayal an echo of my own past.

EIGHTEEN



Evie

I wrestle against the restraints on my wrists, desperation clawing with my magic to set me free.

My bare skin slides against the leather of the gurney. The gag cuts against the corners of my mouth, muffling my scream, although I should know better by now than to try. I turn my head to the side and catch my writhing, naked reflection in a rectangle mirror.

Silence permeates the basement. Metal shelves cover one wall, filled with various medical equipment. A cart sits next to me, scalpels and surgical tools

set up.

Tears trickle into my hair as sobs quake through me. Shivers run through my body, adrenaline and fear mixing, causing parts of me to jolt involuntarily.

I deserve this. I'm an abomination. But my survival instincts kick in regardless.

Heavy boots pound down the steps, and the light flickers on. I clamp my eyes shut to the searing, white light penetrating my eyelids.

I don't need to look to know he's beside me. My father's uneven breaths crawl over my chest as he leans over me. "Evie," he says, disapproval threaded through his tone. "You lost control again."

A lump forms in my throat. His finger slides down my cheek, wiping away a tear. I flinch and he clicks his tongue.

"I'm not doing this to hurt you," he explains.

The last time this happened, he kept me down here for three days. But he seems different this time. There's an excited tone in his voice that sets me on edge.

My eyes flutter open. He looks as if he's just come in from mowing the lawn. Mixed with his heavy spice cologne, the scent leaks from him. I wonder if my mom knows I'm down here again. She doesn't stop him. It's for the best. I'm a danger to them and my brother.

The bright light moves color through his mousy hair, illuminating the paler blues in his irises. He presses his lips together, concentration wrinkling between his brows. His fingers loosen the gag as he slowly removes it.

"Please," I beg the second it's off, but my voice comes out cracked. I cough twice. My throat burns from dehydration. "I won't do it again."

His fingers land on my throat but he hesitates for a moment. I squirm and

he lets out a long, restrained breath. “If the Order finds out I’ve been keeping you here, they’ll kill us all,” he says too casually and removes his touch. “There can be no room for error.”

He rubs his hand against his forehead, smoothing the wrinkles forming. No matter how many times he’s tried, the magic keeps bursting out of me like flames. It’s getting worse with age, and I know he hates me for it. He pretends not to, but I see it in his eyes.

He tilts his head, disheveling his hair. He picks a scalpel up, examining the blade under the light. My heart pounds against my ribcage, slamming my next breath from my lungs. “No.” I gasp, my eyes widening. “Please, Dad.”

He winces. “Deep inside, you know you need this.”

I shake my head, tears trickling from the corners of my eyes. “I won’t do it again,” I plead, but we both know it’s a lie. I can’t stop my magic, no matter how much he wants me to. I’ve tried. I do everything he tells me to. When I feel it coming to the surface, I dig my nails into my skin. Sometimes I even make myself bleed. The pain helps, but it doesn’t get rid of it.

“You’re a witch.” He makes a face, as if the word tastes bad on his tongue. “But the demonic darkness in you can be exorcised.” The same determined look crosses his expression, the one he’s worn since he started these experiments when my powers first emerged. We’d both hoped they wouldn’t surface, but when puberty hit, there had been no denying my witch heritage.

Before I can protest, he gags me again. I yell into the fabric, but he doesn’t meet my eye.

He presses the scalpel against the skin on my breast, and pain sears through me. “When we are naked,” he mutters, as if he’s no longer talking directly to me, “we are more vulnerable. Nothing else has worked.”

He pushes the scalpel deeper. I choke on my screams, and he goes harder

than ever before.

Shadows coil from my core, no matter how much I try to keep them in. They wisps around like glittering, dark clouds. I look at the mirror beside us, and my eyes are black.

It's taking over again.

He pulls the scalpel back and finally brings his bloodshot eyes to meet mine. "Pull them back or I'll cut you again," he warns, unaware of the shadows taking the form of ghostly fingers grappling closer to his neck.

My magic wants to hurt him, to see how he feels with a scalpel slicing his skin.

"*Evie.*" His voice is tender again, as if I'm no longer a witch he hates, but his daughter. My brows furrow, confusion flitting in my mind. "Do you want to hurt us?" he asks. "We're the only family you have. You must try, or we'll all pay the price."

My stomach knots. I tug on the shadows, and they rebel against my desire to suppress them. The scalpel is moved to my thigh, the cool blade spreading goose bumps up my body. He lets out a disapproving sigh, then cuts deeper.

I squeeze my eyes shut. I'm used to the physical pain by now, but emotionally, it's hell. The thought of ruining the only family I have tears me apart from the inside.

He slides the scalpel downward, slicing my skin into fresh wounds. I barely keep my magic from destroying him, although it craves to.

The scene distorts, and a masked man appears behind my dad. The room darkens, and he grabs my father by the throat. Shadow fingers reach into his mouth and down his throat until he's begging for air.

His green stare pins me from where he stands, and I watch in horror as my dad suffocates, choking on shadows until his eyes bulge and blood runs from

the sockets. Then I remember... that face... this room. I'm dreaming.

I look away, closing my eyes to the mirror at my side. The smell of blood tinges the air, the sound of my dad choking in my ears when the room finally falls silent.

A whisper of a breath runs along the top of my ear. I flinch, and a voice pierces into my mind. "*So this is why you hide from your power, little witch?*"

I jolt awake, sitting up in bed. Gomez flaps his wings and catches himself before he rolls to the floor. I suck in a deep breath and look at the mirror at the end of my bed.

Gomez nuzzles against my side, feeling my unease. I stroke his belly, and his feet and claws curl around my fingers, grounding me. "It was just a nightmare," I tell him, but my skin crawls anyway. It was more than that; it was a memory. I was sixteen then and believed everything Edward told me.

Lorcan's last words haunt me as I reach for my cigarettes. He's stalking my fucking past now too. I shake my head, pissed that the memories I'd spent so long burying are resurfacing. It's all the demon's fault.

I stand and walk to the door. Gomez falls back to sleep, and I hurry to the balcony. The cold night air hits my face, drying tears I hadn't noticed until now. I light the end of my cigarette, then breathe in that first delicious inhale and hold it in my lungs for a few seconds before exhaling a cloud of smoke. I take a second drag, then another, until I'm finished. I grab a second from the packet and light it.

It's the only thing that helps. I haven't taken a benzo since last night. I'm certain the demon stole them when he came into my room. I shudder against the cold, and bursts of irritation climb through me. The doctor can't give me

a refill until tomorrow, and I couldn't find anyone willing to sell. Fucking typical.

My free hand clenches into a fist, and I smoke the cigarette in my other hand until it burns the tips of my fingers. First he stalks me in mirrors, then in my dreams, making me relive things I don't want to.

If the evidence of his saliva against my pussy wasn't enough when I woke up yesterday, then the fact that I haven't been able to come since is proof enough that he was physically here.

I hate him.

His command is embedded in my damn mind. I think about going inside and smashing every mirror, but I know he'd only enjoy it.

I put the cigarette out and head inside. I slide the doors shut after stepping back into the living room, then head toward the kitchen.

I told the demon to get out, and he taunted me to make him, clearly getting off on the chase. I shouldn't have teased him, writing his name against my skin. I always did like to tempt the darkness, but I was delusional to think the consequences wouldn't be worse than I anticipated every time. Yet I liked the idea of him using me, because a demon won't question or judge but instead fulfill my darkest fantasies.

I grab a bottle of wine and uncork the top. I pour a glass, watching the off-white liquid fill to the top, and take a long gulp. I close my eyes, hoping it will help numb the withdrawals running like shockwaves along my skin. The wine ripples as my fingers shake against the glass.

Nausea builds and I end up sitting on the tiled floor with my knees to my chest until I've emptied the bottle. I need something, anything to forget the nightmare. To forget the withdrawals. To forget *him*.

In a haze, I grab my phone from my purse and see the battery is almost

dead. I forgot to charge it. I've forgotten a lot of things today.

I text Jay.

Come see me.

I drop the phone next to me and lean my head back against the cabinet.

Almost immediately, I get a message back.

Seriously? It's four in the morning, and now you respond to me? It's been a week. I'm tired of being used.

I rub my temples. I'd feel bad if my mind wasn't so fucked, but he did wake up to text me back. I can always count on him for that. I message him back with the only thing I know will get him here.

I'm sorry. It's been a bad week and I need you... only you.

I shake my head at myself when I press send. I really am a manipulative fucking bitch. But the demon hasn't shown himself or tried to come through today. In fact, I haven't sensed him at all. Smudging the place must have worked. The effects will only be temporary against a demon, but it will do for now.

I'm on my way.

I rock onto my knees and stand, stumbling when I grab the kitchen countertop for balance.

I don't have much to mask the darkness building within. My magic sizzles in my fingertips, begging to be unleashed. Heat sears between my legs when I think of him. I can't even escape him in my sleep.

Demonic attachment is nothing to play with. It's the only way Lorcan could have touched me. I invited him in subconsciously. I'd been thinking about him, then I marked his name on me. A part of me knew what I was doing, and I hate how much I liked it. I despise him for making me feel this way.

I can't come by myself, but maybe I just need a hard dick to sit on to break

Lorcan's compulsion. I go outside for a third cigarette, then a text lights up my phone.

I'm outside.

I run my hand through my tangled hair. The demon has gone too far, fucking with my dreams. I can still see my father's face. I push the memory to the back of my head, then go back inside. The smell of sage still lingers in the air, and I glance at the salt around every mirror ensuring he can't come back in—at least temporarily, until I can find a way to undo the demonic attachment he's formed with me.

But I can't stop him from watching.

Good. I hope he does fucking watch. If he wants to compel me from orgasming, then the demon will have to watch as I ride Jay's dick.

If I'm going to suffer the consequences of my actions, the demon will too. I'm going to show him how it feels to be powerless.

NINETEEN



Lorcan

The witch has done it now. She is going to need far more than sage smudging and salt to keep me out.

Irritation makes my skin crawl. For fuck's sake, this guy again? She throws the boy a bone once in a while, so he won't stop humping her godsdamn leg.

He takes one look at her face, and his smile fades. The boy walks right up to her and wraps her in his arms. "What's wrong?"

She lifts her head from within his embrace and gives him a small smile. "Nothing. I'm fine."

“You’re not fine.”

“Yes, I am. Really,” she says with an unconvincing smile.

He cups the side of her cheek and pulls her tighter against him, ignoring her as she tries to push away.

“Jay, really, I’m fine. Let me go.”

The boy sighs and takes a single step back, but he is still far too close for my liking. “Are you drunk?”

She shrugs and he grimaces.

“Seriously, Evie? This isn’t like you.”

I clench my fists. He doesn’t know her at all. Evie grabs the boy’s hand and pulls him over the threshold, then closes and locks the door behind him. She faces him, her shiny, dark hair hanging in straight, thick strands over her shoulders. Her eyes are alight with mischief.

Every few minutes, she glances at the various mirrors in the room, probably hoping I am here watching her. It’s too obvious that she is up to something, and I will not give into the whims of a silly little witch.

He pulls back. “You’re acting really strange.”

Evie’s lips widen into a grin that is akin to something on a psychopath in a horror movie.

“I’m totally fine, Jay,” she says with extra enthusiasm, as if she needs to convince herself.

“What ar—” His speech is cut off when she jumps on him, wrapping her legs around his waist and crushing her lips to his.

Bile creeps up my throat as I watch her throw herself at him. Is she so desperate for distraction that any warm body will do? The boy holds her up with a hand on each of her ass cheeks and sits on the sofa with her on top of him.

I can't shake the infuriated feelings creeping into my mind. She removed the blankets from the mirrors to show me this? Does she expect me to be jealous?

They continue to kiss as she grinds against his obvious erection. He hasn't moved his hands from her ass, like he's afraid she'll realize it's him she's kissing. Evie ends the kiss and climbs off his lap.

He follows her, as do I, and she leads him into her office. A sense of foreboding washes over me. What kind of fucking game is she playing? I move farther into the Shadow Realm office, then stand in front of her family's mirror, watching the scene unfold. My heart rate climbs the longer I observe.

I can already feel my magic stirring as she wheels the desk chair in front of the mirror. I'm outraged that she would seek out this pathetic boy when she knows that nothing will ever compare to pleasure she felt with my face buried beneath her thighs.

My little witch does not realize how brats get punished when they disobey. She thinks she can taunt me and make it out unscathed. I bite my lip, hard enough to draw blood, thinking of the ways I can punish her.

Evie circles the chair and places her hands on the high back. "Take off your clothes and come sit down," she orders the boy.

"Yes, ma'am," he says, giving her a mock salute and a grin.

He does as she commands, shucking his clothes and kicking them under the desk. He smiles cockily and sits, palming his poor excuse for a dick and slowly stroking it. Evie walks around to the front of the chair and kneels before him. His jaw hangs open, and his pupils blow wide with lust as he realizes her intentions.

"Just sit back and relax. Let me take care of you," my witch purrs, then dips

her head and sucks his leaking dick into her mouth. I watch the back of her head bob up and down through slitted eyes as blind rage takes hold.

My shadows awaken. They breathe into life around me, the shimmering darkness whirling as it smashes to the walls of Evie's Shadow Realm office, unable to expand with my growing fury. The desk creaks, and the legs give way as it collapses. The dingy paint on the walls peels as the demonic energy of my power lashes at it with invisible flames.

The varnish on the desk bubbles and pops. That fucking asshole thinks he can sit back and use her mouth for his pleasure? I despise that I'm cracking. I shouldn't care who she fucks, yet my heart races, and my shadows curl around me.

Evie moans his name and I growl, low and deep in an unending rumble, hating my body's reaction to watching her dominate the pathetic male in front of me. She doesn't even want him. She wants *me*. I grind my molars, and I can practically hear each layer of enamel wearing down.

Evie pulls away, then wipes her lip. Slowly, she walks her fingers up his chest while keeping her eyes trained on him. "We should bring someone else to join us next time."

He grabs her fingers and leans forward. "Seriously?"

"Why not?" she asks, with big doe eyes and a mischievous grin. "We can both suck your dick."

"You want another woman with us?" His brows pinch together.

She shrugs. "Who said it has to be a woman?"

He pushes her away and stands. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

She gulps, then stands too, her eyes darting from the mirror to him. "I shouldn't have said anything." She stumbles, and he doesn't try to catch her. Instead, she balances herself. "That was dumb. Come back down," she

pleads, attempting to pull him onto the chair. She just wants to fuck, and I'm ready to lose my fucking mind.

"I'm done this time."

Her eyes widen. "Are you joking?"

"What, you think I'll just follow you forever when you won't even commit to anything with me, and yet I'm expected to continue fucking you in asylums or potentially with a third party? It's weird, and yet *you* still think you're too good to be my girlfriend."

She scoffs, staring at his flaccid dick. "I don't think that, and anyway, why would you want me to be your girlfriend if I'm so 'weird'?"

He yanks up his pants and buckles his belt. "I just figured you'd... I don't know, change when we got serious. I thought it was quirky and cute at first, but now... It can never just be normal." He throws his hands up. "Is that so fucking bad? Sometimes I just want normal sex in a warm bed when you're not drunk or high. Why does everything have to be so dramatic?"

Gomez squeaks from outside the door, and Jay sighs.

"Or without a bat flying around?"

She winces, just slightly, but I spot the expression when he clearly doesn't. "You should go."

"I will."

"Good."

He sighs slowly, then walks to her and tucks a lock of hair behind her ear. She moves away from his touch, but he doesn't pull his hand back. "I hate that you're so beautiful," he jokes, but frowns anyway. "That would make this so much easier."

She makes a face, and I mirror it. Who the fuck is this guy? "I only ever wanted your dick," she replied. "If you wanted me for my body, you didn't

need to like my personality. This was just sex.”

“Just my dick?” he asks, the corner of his lip twitching. I can feel his heart breaking from here. Pathetic asshole. “That’s all you want?”

“*Did* want,” she says and shrugs, her words slurring.

His Adam’s apple bobs when he gulps, then he leans forward, grabbing her wrist. “If that’s all you want…” His mouth crashes to hers, and his hand slides to her breast. A mix of anger, lust, and hurt crosses his expression.

The worst part is she kisses him back. He reaches down his pants and grabs his dick, and I fucking lose it. Before I even realize I’ve done it, I shatter the veil between us, sending a shockwave into both realms. I barely notice the slight sting from the sage and salt as I cross into her office and stomp toward Evie.

I grab a thick section of her hair, wrap it around my wrist, and use it to pull her away from him. He shakes in terror, stumbling backward onto the chair.

I wrap my tattooed hands around her throat and slam her against the wall. “*Mine*,” I hiss, projecting it into her brain. Her gaze flicks over my masked face, her eyes widening and filling with terror. My lips pull back over sharpened canines, and I growl, my demonic essence washing over her. My shadows take over, pinning her to the wall as I hunt my prey.

He hasn’t moved from his prone position on the chair—didn’t even make a misguided attempt to save her from me. I hoist him into the air with my shadows, dangling his nude body by the neck and shaking him violently. I may enjoy the sight of his half-flaccid cock flopping side to side, like a fish left on dry land.

I drag him toward me, the tips of his toes sliding along the carpet, until I’m right in his face. “*Do you want to sample what’s mine, asshole?*” I ask, forcing my question into his mind. I curl a tendril of shadow toward Evie and

slip it between her thighs. She gasps as my shadow curls deep in her cunt and gathers some of her slickness before bringing it back to me. I dip my finger into the puddle of her arousal held aloft by my shadow, then bring it to my lips and suck on the tip of my finger. I groan and lick my lips, reveling in her addicting flavor. *“So fucking good. Here, have a taste.”* I shove the shadow down his throat. He gags and tries to scream, but my magic slowly fills his airway.

I close my eyes, relishing the symphony of his gurgles. He flails, scraping my forearms as I replace the shadows around his throat with my hands. I squeeze, feeling the seven delicate bones in his neck give slightly under my fingers. I pull my shadow out of his throat, but only enough to allow him to gulp a lungful of air. His skin slowly changes to an ugly ashy color as the oxygen seeps from his body.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, it registers that Evie is begging and pleading for his life, but I don't hear her over the buzz of my magic and the power racing through me. This is a high I have never felt, and that's when I realize her magic is fusing with mine.

I glance over my shoulder, and I will never forget the sight. My little witch is screaming for me to stop, but I can't, and I won't. My shadows have her bound and pinned spread eagle, wrapped around her arms and legs, only using enough force to keep her immobile and not harm her.

Her magic, which takes a shadow form like mine, swirls from her chest and coats her skin. The glittering darkness weaves around her coven tattoos and fills them with magic. I watch, mesmerized, as they grow before my eyes. A delicate, dusky-purple flower bud blooms from a thorny green stem, curling up and reaching her shoulder. The dark ink etches into her skin and flows through all of the roses, adding more detail.

In the small space between us, her magic blends with mine, swirling together like smoke. Her shadow magic is just barely a shade lighter than mine, but it glows with an intensity that causes the glittering cloud to sparkle. My eyes follow her magic, spreading out and twining through mine, as it cuts through my shimmering shadows and strengthens it. I track one vein and follow it all the way back to my shadow going down to the fucker's throat.

I cackle in a completely unhinged mania. Her magic wants him gone just as much as I do, and despite my little witch's cries for it to stop, her eyes are alight with the thirst for blood.

I close my eyes and inhale; the scent of our bonded magic fills the room. My eyes flash open, and I stare at Evie. I open the newly formed link between our minds. *"Do you see now, little witch? No one but me will touch you ever again, and your magic agrees."* Her magic seems to purr in response, sending shivers all over my body, then my cock stiffens against my zipper.

Enough of this. I unleash my magic, unconcerned that it will harm Evie. Shadow magic can't harm shadow witches.

He drops to his knees. "Please," he begs, pressing his hands together. "If you want her take her. I won't touch her again. I promise. She's not worth it. *Please.*"

"You are not worth it," I growl. The boy still in my grasp shakes as his eyes bulge and then pop from the pressure of my magic. Blood and other fluids run down his face in rivulets. His skin catches fire as shadows dance across his skin.

He screams loud enough to wake the dead before I reach my hand into his mouth and tear out his tongue, then toss it to the floor. Blood wells and pours out of his mouth as he slowly drowns. The flames don't touch me as I hold

his flailing body. I yank the shadow from around his throat, pulling his spinal column along with it, one excruciatingly painful vertebrae at a time.

With one final push, I send a pulse of power deep into the very essence of him, tearing him apart from the inside. Blood splashes against me, soaking my face and clothing in crimson. His head rolls to a stop at Evie's feet, and I'm left holding the bones of his neck.

Her magic has not released its hold on mine as it continues to become one with my own. I can barely register which shadows belong to whom anymore. I drop what remnants of his bones remain, and they rattle melodically when they meet his ribcage on the carpet.

I heave in a deep breath, filling my lungs. I stalk closer to Evie, taking in her visage.

She pants with the combination of fear and arousal coursing through her system. I place my hands on the wall next to her head, lean in, and claim her lips. I kiss her hard, scraping my beard against her skin and dominating her mouth. She kisses me back, our teeth clacking together as our tongues battle. She bites my tongue, drawing blood, and I hiss into her mouth.

I pull away, smirking as her swollen lips turn into a frown. She leans as far away from the wall as her bindings allow, her shoulders pulling behind her slightly. I release my shadows, and she falls to her feet, pitching forward and shaking. Her body is in shock, but I'm only getting started.

My heartbeat speeds up as the other needs of my body make themselves known. The rich iron smell coating her hair and body enhances her vanilla scent, as if the true nature of her darkness revels in it. Her irresistible body is begging to be taken. She whimpers against me, trembling with anticipation.

I support her waist with my shadows and cup her face between my large, tattooed hands. I'll give her body something else to think about other than her

grief. I crash my lips to hers again, and it only takes a second before she responds. The edge of my mask cuts into my skin as it presses between us. Desire blooms within her. Her magic soothes and mutes her feelings of loss and guilt for the boy and turns it into something more carnal.

I run my tongue along hers, then suck on it, eliciting a deep moan from her that goes straight to my balls. My hands slide through the blood coating her skin as I pull down her bralette and bare her breasts to me. Her nipples pebble when the cool air greets them. I lift her higher, holding her in place with my hips, my hard length pressed between us. I take one of the stiff buds into my mouth and roll it on my tongue. She squirms beneath me, rubbing along my length and creating delicious friction. My need spikes violently. I must have some part of her. Now. I bite her nipple viciously and she cries out, then moans from the pain-filled pleasure.

I step back and she slides to the floor in a heap. I walk several paces backward, my eyes boring into her. Killing that bastard wasn't enough to satiate me.

"Come," I order within her mind.

Evie starts to stand, but I shove her back to the ground with a shadow on her shoulders.

"No. Crawl to me, little witch."

She glowers at me, her chest heaving as she decides whether or not to fight me.

I weave into her mind and pull on the threads holding her release at bay, giving her the smallest taste of her reward should she obey. Her resolve crumples instantly as the temptation of finally orgasming floods her core. She's on her hands and knees, her ass swaying in the air as she crawls to where I stand.

“That’s a good fucking girl.”

She lights up with my praise, and I run a palm along her jaw and push the hair away from her face. I release my cock from my jeans and pull them halfway down my ass.

She lowers her gaze and her shoulders slump. No, none of that shit. I shove my fingers into her hair and use it to yank her head back to look at me.

“Do not read into this, witch. There is nothing more between us than slaking our mutual needs. Your tempting body drives me insane, and I loathe you for it.”

Her whole body flushes with anger.

“Now, you’re going to be a good girl and use that pretty mouth on me, where it belongs. If you want to be used, fine. I have no problem using and then discarding you just like the whore you are.”

She opens her mouth as fury brings a red flush rushing to her cheeks. Her eyebrows draw in as she contemplates her response, but I don’t give her a moment to collect herself before I shove my cock into her mouth. The feeling of her lips wrapped around me is euphoric. She whimpers and drags her nails down my jean-clad thighs. I look down at her, smile wolfishly, and grip her hair tighter.

“You’re mine now, Evie. Mine to use and abuse as I see fit. Now shut the fuck up and take that dick like a good witch.”

My shadows wrap around her head to support it. I rest my tattooed hands on the back of her head. My hips snap with vicious thrusts as I fuck her face. She rubs her thighs together, trying to gain some friction between her legs. When it doesn’t work, her hand moves toward her center, but I stop her with a shadow, my hips pumping slower.

“Look at you. My savage beauty covered in the blood of your dead lover,

your lips stretched around my cock. You have never looked so fucking beautiful.” I kick her knees apart with my foot and waste no time before my shadows move to shatter her senses. One plays with her clit, while another sweeps it up and down. *“You will not touch yourself.”* My shadow pinches her bundle of nerves. *“This is mine.”*

She moans and arches her back, unintentionally taking me deeper into her throat. Fuck, it feels good. I would see her covered in blood and kneeling before me every single day.

I pump into her mouth again, hitting the back of her throat and making her gag. I don't give a fuck that she can't breathe. I need this. She scrapes her teeth against my shaft, and I moan. The pain she inflicted is welcome and only spurs on my desire.

My hips get into a rhythm, her gags and moans a beautiful soundtrack. I add to it by diving a shadow into her sopping-wet cunt. I watch my throbbing dick slip in and out of her mouth over and over before fixing my gaze on her swollen, greedy pussy. The bond between us grows as she feels me pleasuring her needy slit.

I fist her hair in both of my hands, yanking the strands and shoving her face onto me, breaching the tight ring of her throat. She pushes against my legs. Her body doesn't know what to do with all the pleasurable things happening to her. I use it, careless of her needs.

Her magic wraps around my hips, driving my need higher. I thrust a shadow into her wet heat in tandem with my hips. She moans around my dick, sending the vibrations all the way through the shaft to my balls. The base of my spine tingles, spurring me to chase my release.

When I'm about to come, I pull my cock out of her mouth and her dulled teeth dig along my flesh, attempting to keep me there. I squeeze her jaw with

a hand, increasing the pressure until I free myself. I fist my engorged cock, stroking myself hard a few more times, my release imminent. She gasps and glares at me, her anger taking me to new heights. “Fuuuuck,” I growl, shooting hot ropes of come all over her face, claiming her with my spend.

I shove her backward and kneel between her spread legs.

I lower my masked face to her pretty pussy and inhale.

Her body stiffens, and she tries to back away from me.

“I’m not finished with you yet, witch.” I grip her clit between my thumb and forefinger and pinch it viciously. Her back arches, and she screams.

“That’s right, scream for me.”

“Please, let me come. I can’t do it anymore. Please!”

“No one else will see this pretty pussy ever again. I don’t care if you fucking hate me. In fact, I don’t much care for you either, but this is mine. Every part of you is mine. Do you understand me?”

She doesn’t respond, only undulates her hips against my shadow. I grow my shadow within her.

“You’re a fucking psycho!” she finally shouts, and I chuckle sardonically, the curve of her lips betraying her truth.

I thrust my shadow harder and faster, her back sliding up the carpet with the force. The obscene sounds of her squelching cunt cause my cock to harden again.

I lean into her thigh, grinding my cock against her. I slide two fingers below the stretched skin of her pussy, gathering her wetness, and rub it on my cock as lubricant. Godsdamn this woman. I grip her warm thigh to me, pumping my hips as my length slides against her skin again and again.

Her voice breaks me out of my trance.

“Don’t stop. I’m so close.”

A shadow wraps around her mouth, and her eyes widen.

“I don’t want to hear you speak right now, little witch.” I slap her clit in quick succession, her entire channel pulsing around my magic. It’s enough to call another orgasm forward. When I know she’s at the precipice, I remove her shadow gag and release all over her pretty pink cunt. I remove the shadow from inside her, causing her to scream, and replace it with two fingers, then ram them against her G-spot. Her pussy tightens around my fingers, and I let out a low growl.

“Lorcan!”

Seeing my name written on her skin is one thing, but hearing it uttered from her lips is something else entirely. Emotions swirl within me. We are creatures of darkness, doomed to share nothing more than moments of tortured passion. I push the feelings away, despising her arousing them, but her orgasm sends shockwaves up my shaft.

Her arousal floods down my hand when she comes. Her body twitches and she moans, riding out what is surely one of the most intense orgasms of her life.

She’ll thank me eventually for the edging, and I’ll be sure to do it again, because there’s no way she’ll behave.

I stand, tucking my cock back into my jeans, and cross my arms. I drink in the cum covered vixen in front of me.

“Did you enjoy being used, little killer? Being fucked mercilessly right after your fuckboy was murdered? You’re lying in all that’s left of him right now. This is what it feels like to be used. Taunt me again, and I will make your punishment so much worse.”

She pushes herself off of the floor and flies at me. “You fucking asshole!” she yells, a sob catching in her throat. Her nails scratch into the skin of my

back as I walk away from her.

I step through the veil but leave her with one last parting jab.

“Go shower, you’re covered in cum and blood.”

TWENTY



Evie

Little killer, little killer.

Lorcan's words haunt me as I walk toward the church with Rosa. I'm responsible for Jay's death, and I've never felt darker. Even with the demon back in his realm, I can't help but crave being near him. Why do I want him? The savage, murdering stalker? I really am screwed up in the head. I suppose, birds of a feather...

I pick at my nails as Rosa unlocks the arched gate, then I curl my fingers around a wrought-iron bar and step through.

A gray-bricked wall runs around the weathered church, ivy sprawling through the cracks as if it has the grounds in a chokehold. Low-hanging branches cast shadows on the ground as they move with the wind, and feathery moss hangs from them like ghostly fingers.

An orange hue emits from the two lights outside the church door, illuminating the arched entrances and wooden door lined with black bolts. Within the depths of the graves beyond the church, a thick layer of fog dances in illusory spirals.

A marbled statue of a weeping angel stands sentry in a path carved from stone. A musty, perfumed scent hits the back of my throat when Rosa opens the door.

Our footsteps echo through the empty chamber. My heart races, and I flex my fingers, preparing to run. This is the last place I want to be.

Rosa nudges my ribs gently. "I'm surprised you haven't burst into flames yet."

I know she's trying to lighten the mood, but with what happened yesterday, I take her comment to heart. "It's a very real possibility."

"Come on, Evie babe. We're in the right place." She grabs my hand and squeezes my fingers. "It's going to be okay."

She pulls me into one of the pews, and I spot a pamphlet for this weekend's coffee morning on the wooden ledge in front of my knees.

My skin crawls as I raise my eyes toward the intricately carved wooden pillars. The church is a haven to many, but I can't be sure who is and isn't a part of the Order. I can't imagine they would invite a pastor from a tiny town on the edge of the map, but if they know I'm here, then they'd have eyes on me. "This is a mistake." I stand from the hard, polished pew, but she pulls me back down.

“Stop it.” Her brown stare bores into me. “You can’t run from this.”

I close my eyes. Running is all I know, and it’s worked for me before, but she’s right. A demonic attachment has formed, and that’s above the laws of what a human can do. He can follow me anywhere, and if I don’t get help, I don’t know how long my mind can survive him. Maybe it’s his influence urging me to get out of here.

I bury my head in my hands. The moon’s pale light shines through the stained-glass windows, fracturing reds and blues onto the stone floor at my feet. It’s somehow colder inside. I wait for the pastor to come, grateful Rosa set up the meeting but also terrified that I might be walking into a trap.

I’m not sure what else to do.

The refuge of God is my only hope, but I’m certain He abandoned me long ago. Not even a pastor can liberate me from my sins. I look up and spot an abandoned red rose on the ground between the lines of pews. Something tells me it’s from a funeral. I place my hand over my stomach.

I’ve never attended a funeral, which is ironic, considering how many I’ve caused. I wonder how long it’ll be until they report Jay missing.

“Stop overthinking,” Rosa says. “You’re way too hard on yourself.”

“You think that because you don’t know the truth.” I look down at my feet. I told her some of what happened—that the demon came and killed Jay, and that he’s been oppressing me. She’s worried about possession, although I’m pretty sure Lorcan would rather own me than take over my body. I may have omitted a few things. One being how he made me come harder than anyone else, and two, how desperate I am for him to do it again. I long for his touch.

I hate myself for thinking about it. But my body reacts nonetheless.

Rosa grabs me by the sides of my arms and pulls me to face her. The heat in my cheeks quickly dissipates.

Her lip quivers, something I've not seen before. I hate the pity in her eyes. She should save it for someone who's earned it. "No one deserves what you're going through," she states. "Believe it or not, when you came to town with no family and refused to speak of your past, I guessed you were hiding something." She lowers her voice to a whisper. "I'm a therapist. You seriously think I don't know there's a lot you're not telling me?" Her chest rises and falls sharply. "I know when you're ready, you'll tell me, but I promise you nothing will scare me away." She pauses. "Unless you're a serial killer." She's teasing, but little does she know... "But none of that matters. This demon stuff has gone on way too long. We're putting a stop to it... today." She pauses and lowers her voice to a whisper. "What happened to Jay isn't your fault." Her fists clench, and she stares ahead. "It's that vile, disgusting fucking demon."

She lets out a long shaky exhale. I swallow thickly, wanting more than anything to believe her, but maybe the dark magic inside me isn't dark for its own sake. What if it's like that because of me? Edward told me that magic like mine was shaped by the witch's personality. So if it's just an extension of me, then I'm the terrifying thing people should stay away from.

I avert my gaze from hers. "Rosa," I whisper as I attempt to hold back a fearful sob. "If something happens to me, promise me you'll take care of Gomez." I already know she will, but I need to hear audible confirmation. "Please."

"Nothing is going to happen to you," she says with a determination so fierce that I could believe her if I didn't already know the outcome of this.

Demons form attachments and oppression settles in, then the darker a person becomes, the more susceptible they are to possession. Fortunately for

Lorcan, I already walk the line so it's only too easy for him to pull me into my shadows.

Footsteps bounce off the tall, stone-bricked walls. I glance up and spot the man who's my only hope. With a quick scan, I check for any evidence he might be in the Order, but there's no upside-down cross.

I need to know if I can trust him. He can't be any older than fifty, and he has kind eyes. But then, so did Edward at first.

Magic sparks in my chest, like shots of liquid heat searing into my bones. My magic doesn't like that I'm in here.

"Good evening, Rosa. I assume this is the friend you were telling me about?" His smile is too gentle, and I worry if he won't be able to handle the power inside me—or Lorcan.

Their conversation fades as I stare ahead, dissociating in and out of reality. The lack of benzos pulls my anxiety to a new level, and I'm sweating despite the cold air. I fucking hate my doctor. Apparently he's not happy with 'filling the prescription early'. I grit my teeth, then flex my fingers.

The pastor sits against the back of a pew two lines up from us and crosses his legs. "I'm Father Thomas."

My magic grows agitated the more the pastor stares at me. Ever since my powers fused with Lorcan's, they've felt even more dangerous than usual. I'm finding it difficult to keep them suppressed like I used to.

I can never let them out. If I do, the world will see how evil I am. "I need your help," I blurt, desperation thick in my voice.

Rosa's eyes widen, and I quickly clear my throat.

"Sorry, this is unlike me but..." I squeeze my eyes shut as Lorcan's green eyes penetrate my mind. "I'm losing my mind."

"It's easy to feel that way," he says, clearly not grasping the severity of the

situation. Lorcan does not like me being here. My magic especially despises the pastor's presence, and I fear for him.

Rosa does most of the talking, explaining everything I told her about Lorcan from yesterday. She leaves out my being a witch and Jay being killed, but by the way he's looking at me, I can tell he senses something deeply troubling. His lips pull into a thin line, the wrinkles at the corners deepening.

He scratches his peppered hair and leans forward, placing his hands on his knees. "When did this start, Evie?"

I squirm but don't answer. Instead, I blow out a tense breath and try to meet his blue gaze, but I fail.

"It's okay," he says, reassuring. "I'm going to help you."

I want to believe him, but I've heard those words before.

We're going to help you. The people who adopted me said the same when they pulled me from the wreckage the Order left behind.

They only made it worse.

I scratch the scar on my neck, left behind from one of Edward's experiments.

Rosa chimes in, placing her hand on my shoulder, her fluorescent-green nails shimmering under the light. I relax a little. She always has had a calming effect on me. I don't think she even realizes she's doing it, but her magic leaks out of her like a loving, comforting hug. Envy slices through me, but I dismiss the feeling. It's not her fault she has a beautiful kind of magic when mine is all wrong. It's why the Order wanted to wipe us out. We're abominations, taking our powers from the darkness instead of the light. I might be human, but there's darkness in me, just like the stuff found in the deepest depths of Hell, and it wants to destroy.

I run my hand against my bare neck. Sometimes I wonder if I should kill

myself and end it all.

Pain shoots through my head when the thought crosses my mind. My vision fills with stars. I grip the sides of my temples, squeezing as the pressure builds. My brain throbs, as if it's swelling and my skull can't contain it.

Hands are on my shoulders, but I can't tell who they belong to.

Before I can grasp what's happening, I'm unconscious, slipping into a place where I have no control.

Lorcan's there. I can sense him, inside my head.

His deep voice slices through my mind. "*Stop pretending you're weak.*"

I wish he'd get out of my fucking head.

He's here, in a mirror, in the fucking church. I hate how he can follow me anywhere. Even here.

When I reopen my eyes, I'm staring at a blood-soaked room. I choke on my gasp, my body running cold. I cover my mouth but jolt when I taste blood, then look at my fingers. Pieces of vein cover my nails, crimson coating my hands and wrists.

I blink rapidly, and the blood fades. The pastor is standing, unharmed, and Rosa is still talking to him.

His eyes meet mine, narrowing in suspicion. "Evie, my child. Is the demon here now?"

The hairs on my arm stand on end. A lump forms in my throat, and everything inside me wants to run out of here.

Lorcan's voice in my head stops me in my tracks. It's as if his tone demands obedience. "*Tell the pastor and he's dead tonight.*"

"No, I-I'm actually feeling better just being here," I lie, blinking twice.

Rosa does not seem convinced but thankfully doesn't say anything.

"Excuse me, but I forgot that I have an appointment."

Rosa's eyebrows shoot halfway up her forehead. "This time of night?"

"I mean work."

She gives me an incredulous glare. "I thought you took the night off?"

Lorcan's hold on my mind tightens. "*Be convincing.*"

"I did," I say, steadying my breaths. "I forgot Brittany texted me telling me there's no one to cover my shift." I turn toward the pastor. "My apologies. With everything going on, I forgot. My mind has been scattered with all of this. Can I come back tomorrow?"

He nods and uncrosses his hands. "Of course. These doors are always open."

"Thanks."

Rosa grabs my hand before I can run off, then spins me around. "What's going on?"

"Nothing, I promise," I say and try to keep my expression devoid of the fear building inside. Lorcan is under my skin and on the fringe of every thought.

The pastor takes a step closer as I slide out of the pew. He closes the distance between us, and the smell of frankincense clings to his clothes. I stare at the white strip on his collar, which takes me back to memories of Edward.

I refocus on the pastor, trying to rid my mind of buried anxieties and memories. He pulls out a small bottle and holds it out for me to take. I eye it and have to stop myself from squirming. I can sense what it is before he tells me.

Holy water.

Both he and Rosa watch me like hawks. I inhale sharply and hold out my hand. He places the bottle in my palm, then uses his hand to close my fingers

over it. I look up and he locks his gaze on mine. The blues in his eyes remind me of a clear, pale sky. "Please come by tomorrow," he pleads, as if he knows I have no plans on coming back.

I shouldn't have come in the first place. I give him a watery smile and nod.

Rosa lets out a breathy sigh the moment I unlock the door to my apartment. "This is a bad idea. I told you we should go back to my place."

"What about Gomez?"

"We'll take him. I'll happily have him with us." She peeks her head around me to get a view into my living room from the hallway. "Pack a bag and let's go. I'll smash every mirror in my place if it means getting him away from you."

A shiver dances down my spine. He doesn't like that she's talking like this. "He's attached," I say slowly, taking a few steps inside. I hang my umbrella and purse on the hooks, then reach inside and grab my pack of cigarettes. "Outside." I tilt my head in the direction of the sliding doors to the balcony.

She shudders, hugging her arms around herself as we pass the mirrors. "Why haven't you broken these yet?"

My brows draw together. Why haven't I? "He can get to me anyway," I say with a shrug, although I'm unsure if that's true. But mirrors are portals to this world, at least for demons to look through. Very few are actually portal gateways, giving demons the ability to come into this realm.

I eye the door to my office on the way to the balcony. The mirror in there is one. That much, I'm certain. Logically, I know I should get rid of it, but I have a horrible feeling that no matter what I do, I won't be able to escape him.

Maybe I don't want to.

I hate the feeling as soon as it fills me up. I despise myself for thinking of it. I'm sick and twisted, and everyone including Jay deserved better.

The demonic attachment is growing stronger, pulling my magic to the surface. It's as if Lorcan lives within my skin. I slide open the door to the balcony and step out into the icy air. The wind hits my cheeks, cooling me. Rosa hurries out after me, as if the demon may come and grab her if she's left inside.

"What about Gomez?" she asks.

I gaze up at the inky-black canvas, taking in the pinpricked silver stars. "He's asleep," I reply, then breathe in heavily.

"How do you know?"

I point at the windows overlooking the sofa. He's snuggled against a fluffy pillow, his wings wrapped around his body.

"Oh."

I spark a cigarette, the flame thawing my fingertips. I hold the smoke for half a second in my mouth, then inhale deeply. Holding it in my lungs eases some of the benzo withdrawals, and for a moment, I wish I could push liquid nicotine through my veins. The buzz lasts mere seconds. I blow out in a long line of smoke, and Rosa coughs as some catches in the breeze.

She places her hand on her hip. "So since we both know you lied about work to get out of there, are you going to tell me what happened?"

I close my eyes, my heart racing as I finish half my cigarette. "I'm not sure," I admit croakily. "He's in my head, I think. It's like oppression but stronger."

She arches a dark brow.

"You know, it's before a demon possesses a person," I explain. "They

heighten any emotions that can be used, like anger, lust, or fear. It's why we rarely hear of possessions happening to anyone who's really strong-willed."

"You are strong-willed. I'm tired of this. I'm getting us some real help."

I finish my cigarette and grab another, hoping to distract myself from the guilt from Jay's death tearing me apart. I can't explain the truth to Rosa because I don't understand it myself. Demons can fuck with a person's psyche, and oppression takes months or years. But Lorcan is already so far embedded into my soul, it's uncomfortable... yet invigorating.

I turn on my heels as tingling pricks the back of my neck. Rosa taps her nails against her phone as she searches for an exorcist or something, which won't help.

There you are.

My eyes lock onto the floor-length mirror leaning against the living-room wall, washed in a light glow of a nearby lamp. I feel him watching, then his form fills the mirror as he shows himself to me. I jump, and the cigarette flies from my fingers, showering sparks of embers over the concrete ground.

"What happened?" Rosa asks, placing a hand on my shoulder. She moves around me and gasps, closing her fingers over her lips.

"Get rid of her, or I will." His intrusive stare bores into me.

"Hurt her and I'll find a way to kill you," I say in my head, hoping he can somehow hear me. First Jay, then Rosa. This has gone too fucking far.

He looks me up and down, as if undressing me with his eyes. *"Think about killing yourself again, and I'll tear her apart in front of you."*

My gaze narrows. So he can hear me. *"Don't hurt Rosa."*

"Obey me and I will not hurt her."

His veins bulge when he flexes his fingers, and I can't help but wonder how it would feel to have them around my throat, pressed against the wall with

little breath in my lungs.

He smirks, as if sensing the arousal heating between my legs.

“Thinking about me, little killer?”

I suck in a breath. *“What do you want?”*

His eyes darken, and his voice slices through my mind. *“I want every bloodthirsty, vengeful part of you. Embrace the real you, and I’ll take you into the darkness you crave. Show me those shadows, little witch.”*

TWENTY-ONE



Lorcan

The mirrors at The Ugly Pancake annoy the fuck out of me. Every single one of them is covered in a greasy residue. What little cleaning the employees do only streaks the substance around until there's a permanent haze.

I watch Evie from behind the restroom mirror as she applies a shade of red lipstick to her pouty lips, practically begging me to smear it with my cock. As she does, her chestnut eyes burn with challenge. The game is on, little witch.

I cross her mind as she looks at her reflection, uncertain if I'm watching or not. Her lingering thoughts about me only make our bond stronger. I can feel

it strengthening, linking us together permanently. Eventually, her apartment won't be the only place in the Human Realm I can physically step into.

Bruise-like smudges darken the delicate skin under her eyes. Her skin, which not long ago reflected the glow of her magic, is sallow and dull. Her hands tremble as she caps the tube of lipstick.

I bite my lip to stop the grin from taking over my face. Her body continues to weaken as the benzodiazepine withdraws from her system. Good. Now she can stop poisoning herself, and her magic will come out to play.

My cock jerks when I recall her pale skin splattered with blood—and the squelch of the carpet, saturated in gore beneath us, as I sank my shadows into her dripping cunt. My little witch deserves to suffer. I hope she relives our joining over and over, letting shame and guilt eat away at her for the pleasure her body received by her lover's corpse.

Evie rests her hands on the edge of the sink and hangs her head. She's not handling her shit, and it shows. If she would just use her magic, she would feel a million times better.

Soon Evie will not be able to contain her darkness. I'll make sure of it.

She straightens herself, adjusting her clothes and squaring her shoulders before glaring into the mirror as if she can see me. Color rises to her cheeks while frustration flashes in her eyes. It seems the anger ignites her needs. The air is thick with the scent of her arousal. Too bad I'm the only one who can satisfy her.

She washes her hands and exits the bathroom. I follow, watching through the mirrors in the diner, staring as she grabs a stack of menus from a dirty table and places them back in the hostess stand. She spins around to complete her next task, and her ponytail lashes across the other waitress's face. No fucking clue what her name is. Blondie scowls and places her hands on her

hips as she stares at Evie. It looks as though she's about to spout some nonsense when the bell above the entrance jingles, and they both look over.

The waitress's demeanor quickly shifts, a fake smile plastered on her face. Blondie places a hand gently on Evie's shoulder and says, "See to the customer, Evie."

A deep pit of unease opens in my belly as I stare at the female customer. Solomor. What the fuck is he doing here?

My hackles rise when the human skin suit he wears smiles a little too eagerly at my witch. Solomor may be a regular demon, but he's my brother's pet and therefore doesn't obey me. I should have had killed him when I had the chance.

"Table for one?" Evie asks.

"Yes, honey. Just little ole me today."

My lip curls in a silent snarl. Evie grabs a menu and walks the woman to a booth in the corner, which is one of the worst places she could've put a tricky monster like that. She places the menu on the table and tries her best to act cheerful. However, she is not fooling anyone. The cook eyes her from the kitchen, frowning as he watches her shifting from foot to foot with anxiety. Even her ponytail droops as the withdrawals ravage her body.

"Are you okay, dear?" Solomor asks in the woman's voice, each word carefully articulated. He chose well with the woman he possessed. She is small, meek, and soft-spoken. But appearances are often deceiving. She couldn't have been open to possession by Solomor unless she harbored darkness herself.

Evie is a prime example; lurking in the shadows of her soul lies a darkness that is thirsty for blood, and I cannot wait to see what it can do.

If looks could kill, this demon would be a scorch mark on that shitty

wooden booth. But at this point, anything I do to make myself known is foolish and not worth the risk of Evie's life.

Evie responds, "Oh yes, I'm fine. I just need a breath of air. I'll give you a minute to look at the menu."

Evie moves to stand behind the long countertop, and I do the same in my realm. She crouches out of sight of the tables and rubs her temples. She shivers as chills creep over her body, a cold sweat breaking out along her skin. My witch reaches into her purse stashed behind the takeout containers, fishing out a pack of cigarettes. Her hand dives in once more, absentmindedly looking for something. Soon she growls quietly in annoyance.

I chuckle. *You won't find your pills in there, little witch. Remember? I fucking took them.*

She needs to pull herself together if she has any chance of surviving. There are too many unknowns in this game to allow her to show any weakness.

She pockets the cigarettes and stands, as if my thoughts give her the determination to move forward. She goes through the kitchen, giving the dishwasher a watery smile, then continues through the back door, which is propped open with a canary-yellow wet-floor sign. I watch the distorted view of Evie from a small mirror. I can barely make out the side of her face, the curve of her breast, and her bent knee as she braces a foot against the brick exterior.

She reaches into her pocket and pulls out her bright-pink Zippo lighter, no doubt a gift from that rainbow she calls a friend, and lights her cigarette with a deep inhale. Despite her appearance of being unwell, the image of her wrapping her lips around my cock instead of that cigarette seems to burn into my brain.

For a moment, I forget about the demon being mere yards away from my

witch, or her fragile mental state, instead giving in to my own selfish desires.

I squeeze the base of my cock hard through my slacks, warding off the blue balls that will surely follow. I will not allow a weakness like lust to distract me. Fuck Evie and her tempting curves. The woman pisses me off without even trying. She will learn to enjoy her place, on her knees before me. Anger breathes fire into my veins, increasing my lust and need to dominate her.

Before I can fall deeper into my faults, my distracted stare flies back to Evie when I hear a muted sob. Her cigarette lies smoldering on the pavement by her black sneakers, the cherry glowing red and smoke curling up before dissipating. She covers her face with her hands and tries to stop her tears but fails.

The demon leans out of the door, gripping the frame, wearing the middle-aged woman's face. "Ma'am, I'm ready to order now."

Evie looks up, startled. The whites of her eyes are bloodshot, and blotches of red mar her complexion.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Evie pushes away from the wall. Her brow furrows. "Wait, how did you get in the kitchen anyway? You really shouldn't be back here."

The teenager working as the diner's dish washer shuffles to the doorway. He blushes and scuffs his shoe against the linoleum. "Oh, she was waiting to order, and I said I would come and get you, but I got distracted. That might've been a while ago."

Evie sighs deeply, her shoulders rising and falling with the action. "I'm sorry," Evie stammers. "I'll be right in."

The demon smiles at her and winks before walking away. My rage returns unexpectedly. How dare Solomor use his demon charms on Evie. She is mine. She will not be caught in the crossfire of some wayward demon scum

under my brother's thumb. I make my way through the Shadow Realm version of the diner to the mirrored wall decoration hanging above the booth Evie seated the demon at.

Evie re-ties her apron and smooths the wrinkles by running her palms down the fabric.

“What can I get you? Also, I'll throw in some extra bacon for the delay.”

Solomor looks up at her and laughs lightly. “Well, I would be crazy to turn down extra bacon.” He looks down at the menu before snapping it shut and handing it to Evie. “I'll take the Ugly breakfast platter with some orange juice.”

“Sounds good, I'll go put that in for you,” Evie says and turns to walk away, but the demon snatches her wrist, halting her steps. “Yes?”

“Don't disappear for too long.”

Evie's brow creases. The demon drops his hold, the woman's french-manicured nails lightly scraping the underside of my witch's wrist. Evie quickly walks behind the long counter and tries to keep herself busy by marrying ketchup bottles.

My shadows writhe along my skin, tracing each tattoo as my temper slips my hold. Godsdamn it, I cannot wait to tear the flesh from Solomor's bones. The slimy fucker was presumptuous enough to touch what is mine.

Too soon, Evie is hustling back to the demon's table with a tray, the plates atop it overflowing with food. She sets it on the edge of the table and unloads the dishes, then snatches up the empty tray to leave.

“Enjoy your meal. Let me know if you need anything,” Evie says with a practiced smile.

“Actually, would you sit with me for a few minutes?”

“No,” she blurts, then sighs. “I just mean I'm not supposed to.”

“Come now. I don’t want to eat alone, and the place is dead anyway. I’m your only customer,” Solomor states, raising a brow and gesturing with a hand toward the empty booths.

She scratches the back of her neck. “Uh.”

“I’ll leave you a bigger tip.”

Her shoulders slump. “Okay, but only for a minute or two.” Evie sits rigidly across from the demon and places her tray beside her.

“Evie, is it?”

“What gave it away?” She jokes, plucking at her name tag above her right breast. “What’s your name?”

“Stephanie May.”

Silence descends between them, awkward and thick with tension. Solomor clears the woman’s throat delicately. “Where are you from? You have an accent I just can’t place.”

The color drains from Evie’s face, and she struggles to respond. “Uh... It’s nowhere really, just a small town in Washington.”

“Interesting. What town?”

Evie twists a ring around her finger. “You wouldn’t know it.”

Solomor speaks before she can voice the excuse to leave that is forming in her thoughts. “So, do you have a boyfriend?”

She tries to suppress a laugh, but her lips curve at the corners. Her thoughts come through quickly. *Why, thinking of asking me out?* she thinks, but instead, she drums her fingers against the table. “No boyfriend.”

“That’s too bad. You’re so pretty. What about friends?”

Her brows draw together. “Just the one. Rosa. But that’s about it. I’m really not that interesting.” Evie places her hands flat on the table and scoots from the booth. “I’ll let you get back to your meal. I have to... clean.”

“Sure thing. I’m sure I’ll see you around, Evie.”

I growl, the rumble deep in my chest. I’m going to obliterate what’s left of his fucking soul.

TWENTY-TWO



Evie

Rosa clicks her tongue as we reach our destination, and darkness envelopes Darkwood Asylum. “You can’t live off iced coffee and books alone.” She points a bright-green nail at the book under my arm and the coffee in my other hand. “Have you eaten today?”

I scoff a laugh and meet her discerning stare. “I’m about to summon a demon, and you’re concerned if I’ve eaten.”

“Yes. Ever since Jay...” Her voice cracks and she trails off. “We need to look out for each other.”

Gravel crunches under my boots as we reach the creaking iron gates. “I did eat,” I say quickly, although I doubt half a protein bar counts. “I’m okay, really, or I will be.”

We both turn toward the asylum. My fingers curl around the cold, rough texture of the rusty iron bar as I gaze up at the towering, gray-bricked building. The ivy has completely taken over the front of the building, with its leaves smothering every inch of space and its vines snaking their way around the pillars and through the cracks in the windows. The sky above comes alive. Stars twinkle against the black canvass.

I can feel the wind’s icy breath as it howls around Rosa and me. My hair becomes a tangled web, wrapping itself around my neck and face.

Rosa presses her arms against her narrow waist, her pink nails leaving half-crescent marks on her skin. “I can’t believe you used to come here for fun.” Her brown eyes scan the top story, her gaze lingering on a single window, as if she’s watching for movement. “Doesn’t it creep you out, the amount of devil-worshipping and stuff that’s happened here?”

As I clear my throat, I sweep my hair over my shoulder. “If you’re scared, then you don’t have to come inside. Like I said earlier, I can do this alone. In fact, I’d prefer it.”

“I’m not leaving you alone with a demon psycho stalking your every move.”

I let out a long sigh. It has been three days since Lorcan’s appeared in the mirror. He probably assumed his little trick would scare Rosa away—except it’s had the opposite effect. She took a small vacation from work and hasn’t left my side since.

I love her for it. Her fierce loyalty would be comforting in any other situation, but we are both out of our depth here. She’s in danger. She’s

remained stubborn, despite my constant warnings and trying to get her to let me do this alone.

The only thing left is to confess everything. Lorcan heightens my magic, and I can't trust myself to be around her with him present. I've taken another benzo, now that Rosa prescribed some after my doctor refused. I'm glad she agreed. I can't just stop taking them cold turkey. But she made me promise to use them as intended and not to abuse them. She's limited me to three a day maximum, which isn't helping as much as I need. It takes at least ten pills or more daily to keep my magic from surfacing, but I'm glad it's at least taking the edge off my anxiety, its intended use.

His words replay in my head like a broken record. *Show me your shadows, little witch.*

The tote bag, filled with summoning items, slips from my fingers and lands by my feet. "Rosa, please go home. I'm fine here, really. Once we step foot inside there, we're in danger."

She shakes her head and I sigh. I guess I have no choice but to tell the truth, even if she hates me for it.

"You should know something—"

"Don't try scaring me away," she says, interrupting me. "I'm not leaving you. Pushing me away won't work, although God knows you've tried."

I let go of the gate and lean back against the iron fence. My fingers cling to the cool metal, and a shiver travels up my spine as the frosty wind slices through my jacket. When I tug on the drawstrings, I notice the frayed edges, then wrap one around the end of my finger. "This isn't some scare tactic. It's life or death."

She rolls her eyes. "I have a gun, the necklace in my bag, and the holy water you gave me." She pulls the little bottle from her purse. "I dipped the

bullets in the water first.”

“That’s... actually really smart, although I doubt one will hit him through a mirror.”

“You said he came through before,” she replied. “He killed Jay, then tried to hurt you. You’re right to be terrified, and I’m not taking any chances.”

I rub the side of my neck and nod in agreement, but it’s a lie. He didn’t hurt me. Instead, he used me and left me confused, covered in cum and blood. I hate him for making me want it again. I hate that it was so good that I can’t stop thinking about him.

Heat sears between my legs, and I clench my thighs. Rosa tilts her head, her gaze locked onto mine as if she can sense the lie hiding behind my eyes. The wind dies down, and silence permeates the asylum and the woods guarding it. “The demon isn’t the only threat,” I say, and my stomach knots.

She’s going to hate me after this. I place the plastic cup with the last drips of my iced coffee on the ground, then place the book that will hopefully summon Lorcan into the bag, freeing my hands. I grab a cigarette, needing one if I’m to have this conversation.

A deep crease forms on her forehead, and she lifts a perfectly groomed brow. “You mean ghosts?”

I shake my head. Rosa shudders as the temperature drops another degree. Frost clings to the skeletal leaves gliding in front of the gate under a gentle breeze.

She tsk-tsks. “What then?”

I shift my stance and avert my gaze. “It’s me. I’m dangerous.”

She laugh-snorts. “Shut up. No, you’re not.”

My breaths mists in front of me. “I’m a murderer,” I blurt, the weight of my words hanging in the air. “I’ve killed people, Rosa. Five, to be exact.”

She remains perfectly still, unblinking and fixated on me, as if she expects me to say *just kidding*. Her arms lower to her sides, as if she's forgotten the cold.

“Almost ten years ago, I killed my brother. He was the first.” I blow out a puff of smoke. “The man who adopted me, Edward,” I say, wrinkling my nose, “protected me after the Order killed my entire family. I’m the only one left in my bloodline.” I pause, but she doesn’t say anything, so I continue. “I’m a shadow witch. I have shadow magic and death magic inside of me. It’s a part of who I am. Anyway, Edward kept my being alive a secret from everyone. Only his wife and son knew. He was called Caden...” I squeeze my eyes shut, trying to block out the horrific memory of him being blown into a thousand pieces. “He met his end because he tried to help me.” Tears well in my eyes. “Edward did experiments on me to keep my magic suppressed, but it only made it worse. The more I tried to ignore and beat the magic inside of me away, the more unpredictable it became. Caden tried to help me let a bit of the magic out. I felt like I was going to combust.”

She wets her lips and releases a tense breath. “Why did you kill him? Caden?”

I clear my throat to mask the quiver in my voice, then shift my gaze toward my black boots. I throw the last of my cigarette to the ground and put it out under my heel. “My magic kind of burst out of me and he... blew up. The, um... others, the four,” I say, stumbling over my words. “They were after Caden. I fled from town to town, trying to stay a step ahead of Edward. He wouldn’t have told the Order who I really was because, well, then he’d be dead for saving me in the first place. But if he was desperate enough to find me, he may have told them I’m a witch, just not *the* witch. The Order hunts

all of us.” I pull my bottom lip between my teeth trying to slow my breathing. My heart pounds against my ribcage as I recount each of my victims.

Despite my confession, Rosa remains rooted to the spot, her gaze never leaving mine.

“The second I killed was a woman. A girl, actually. Imogen was nineteen, and we became fast friends. I can still see my shadows pulling her apart after I let my guard down. We’d stolen a car. It was reckless, and the thrill was too much. I wasn’t as in control then...” I trail off. “The others were the same—all people I got close to, who felt safe with me. My magic would come out, then kill them. Once it happened while I was sleeping.”

I jump when she touches me, her fingers squeezing mine. “Evie, honey, it’s okay.”

My lips curl into a frown. “Didn’t you hear what I said? You’ll end up dead.”

“Oh, I have no doubts you’re telling the truth.” She takes a step closer, and I breathe in the smell of mango and pineapple in her perfume. “That doesn’t make you a murderer. I think... suppressing it has made you lose all control. Being afraid of it isn’t helping either.”

Tears pool in the corners of my eyes, and I blink them away. “I don’t want you to become the sixth.”

The corner of her thick lips rises. “There has to be something we can do to stop it from coming out of you like that. Have you researched it?”

“Most of the books are in the archives of the Order. I don’t have any family to ask.”

She nods slowly. “We will find a way to control this. I bet a lot of it is psychological too. You said the man who adopted you did experiments?”

“Not everything is psychological.” I pull my hands from hers. “My magic

has torn people apart, Rosa. I've been so fucking selfish even being your friend for this long."

She rolls her eyes. "Everyone needs a friend, and especially you."

"Rosa..." I stop myself from telling her the other truth, that she's a witch. Folk witch magic is completely safe, but if she knows and she's questioned by the Order, then it might slip out. Knowing is dangerous. Folk magic needs to be practiced to really be apparent, and she's happy without it. I shake my head and force a small smile. "You shouldn't come inside with me. The energy in there is residual from the most violent deaths. It does something to my magic. I was stupid to even bring Jay here." Guilt tugs at me, but not as much as it should. I should feel horrible and overwhelmed. I wish I could say what happened keeps me up at night. I am upset, but it's not soul crushing.

Rosa sighs. "About Jay..."

My chest tightens. "Do they suspect he was with me?"

"No, no." She waves me down when my eyes widen. "They still think he's missing. They're asking questions, Evie."

"I expected so much. I wish I could tell them he's dead, so they can—" I close my eyes, and the memory of cleaning up Jay's blood protrudes into my mind.

"Me too. Don't worry, we're going to fix all of this, starting with the demon dickhead."

I place my hand on her shoulder, looking deep into my friend's eyes. "Please, Rosa. Don't come with me."

"He could get to you in there."

"He won't," I promise, but I'm not entirely convinced I'm right. "My magic is temperamental, and I don't feel safe with you in there with me. It's better if I do this alone. I have everything I need." I grab the handles of the tote bag at

my feet, filled with everything I need for a summoning circle. “I don’t know a lot about my magic, but I do know a hell of a lot about rituals and everything else witch. This will work. He can’t get to me once he’s in the circle, but I don’t know what he’ll do to my magic.” I think back to how our shadows fused the night he killed Jay. “Please, for the hundredth time, let me do this alone. Go back and get Gomez and go to your place.”

“Evie…”

I raise my voice, and it breaks. “Please, Rosa. You and Gomez are the only ones left that I care about.”

She purses her lips, then lets out a heavy sigh. “I’ll wait out here.” She taps her purse again, a reminder of the weapon inside. “In case Aiden comes back.”

“I doubt he will,” I say, recalling how he ran. “But if it makes you feel better, then I can’t stop you, but don’t come inside.” I don’t like her being out here alone, but I know the more I push her, the more stubborn she’ll get.

A twig snaps behind Rosa, and we both freeze. The wind whistles around us, and I peer behind Rosa into the dark tree line across from the gate to the asylum. A tingle dances down my neck and spine, and the familiar feeling of being watched creeps over me.

It could be Lorcan. But there are no mirrors in the woods—unless he came back through my family mirror and followed us here. In which case, we really are fucked.

I peer around and into the darkness, but there’s no movement. “I should hurry.”

She nods and places her hand around her throat, as if protecting herself from a threat. “I’ll be here.”

I look around at the trees again. “If something happens, yell for me, really

loudly.”

She arches a dark brow. “I was going to whisper for help if something happened, so thanks for the tip.”

I roll my eyes, then grab my bag and head up the path, steadying myself as I tread over uneven stone. I reach the door, still open from whoever broke the original locks many years ago. The chains and padlock rust, hanging from the handles. Slowly, I walk inside, my fingers grazing the chain as I push open the door.

I must have come here a hundred times, but something feels different this time. The dark hallways beckon me, but I feel the hairs on the back of my neck stand erect. I can't see a thing, so I pull out my phone to use the flashlight, nervous as I hold it up to light the hallway of what might show itself.

Nothing but graffiti, old medical equipment, and dried blood clinging to the walls comes into view. Being around Lorcan has me on edge, the fucking psycho maniac. Although, he is a demon. What should I expect?

I cling to the bag with everything needed for a summoning ritual, and the unmistakable shuffling of boots against floorboards sounds as I reach the end of the hallway. I grab the banister to the rotting, wooden stairs and pause. With a sharp inhale, I hold my breath, listening for sounds of intruders. I don't want to run into a bunch of teens doing Ouija boards, or demons stalking me on behalf of the asshole in my mirror.

I white-knuckle the handle of the bag as it cuts into my fingers, and I let out my breath. Slowly, I climb the rickety stairs, the wood creaking beneath each step. I glide my fingers along the handrail, my nail catching against a newly formed cobweb, sending it drifting to the ground.

I enter a narrow hallway and turn into a patient room, number 203—an ex-

serial killer's residence, or so I read. There should be enough fucked-up energy in here to help feed the summoning ritual.

A boot scuffs against the ground in the corridor, and I turn to face the door, shining my phone light at the entrance. My heart stammers its next beat as a man steps into view, his hands clasped behind his back.

Father Thomas, the pastor from the church, walks inside, old ritual candles and bits of animal skulls crunching under his shiny shoes. "Good evening, Evangeline."

I lower my phone light, the powdery white light illuminating his soft features and collared shirt. I quickly drop the tote bag from my other hand. "What are you doing here? Did you follow me?"

"Yes," he says, his eyes averting to meet mine. Between his index finger and thumb, a rosary hangs, and he rubs the beads. "I heard what you said to Rosa. I prayed she would run as soon as you left to come in here, but she didn't. Sadly, she's drawn to your evil as much as poor Jason was." He lets out a heavy sigh, and I realize he's talking about Jay. I rarely heard him being called by anything but his nickname. "How can I look at his parents knowing the truth, that he was murdered. They still think he's missing and might return home."

My voice is lost, my throat tight as I try to find the words. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

He takes another step, this time cracking a shard of glass under his foot.

My shadows build inside, vibrating through me along with my death magic, sensing the danger. "Don't come closer," I warn, finally finding my voice. "If you heard us outside, then you know I'm dangerous. I don't want to kill you."

He shakes his head, his eyes narrowing. "You act as if you have morals," he spits, clenching the beads tighter. "I do not fear the face of evil." His gaze

glides down to the tote bag, and he spots the candles and grimoire sticking out. “What is your plan once you summon the demon?”

My magic pulses. *Fuck, keep it in. Keep. It. In.*

A shadow dances behind him, and I clench my fists. “Get back!” I yell, holding my arm out as my magic dances ever closer to tearing him apart. I can’t have even more blood on my hands.

He halts, and my heartrate quickens. “I’ll leave,” I say and let out a long, shaky breath. “Okay? I’ll skip town. I’m not evil, and well, the demon, he is attached to me. If I’m gone, then there’s no evil in this town.”

“Evie?” Rosa’s voice travels from where she’s entered downstairs. “Oh my God, please answer me. It’s so fucking creepy in here.”

His blue eyes narrow, and he steps back. A second shadow shifts closer, and this time he sees it. It moves around me in wisps, and sweat collects on my forehead. “Go!” I yell, pointing at the door as the heavy, hot hum of death magic creeps closer to the surface. I have absolutely no control over that one, unlike my shadow magic.

“Don’t come up here,” I shout, praying Rosa hears me. “Get out now.”

Father Thomas looks me up and down, his face blanched. His eyes lock onto my tattoos, and uneasiness settles into my gut. “You... You’re a Fallenmoore.”

No. No. How the fuck does he know? “What?” I scoff in an attempt to laugh it off, but his jaw slacks.

“Those markings,” he says, pointing at the ones visible from under my rolled-up sleeves. “You’re a death witch.”

I press my lips tightly. The Order must have told him, to keep him on lookout. I bet every town and village in Washington state has been alerted, to know who to watch for ever since I ran.

He runs off, and panic squeezes my chest. He's going to tell them I'm here. I run out after him, my magic humming under my skin, ready to be used.

"Evie!" Rosa's voice echoes closer. I spot the pastor at the end of the corridor as he disappears around a corner. Behind me, Rosa appears, running to meet me. Her breaths come out in short bursts when she reaches me, her eyes wild in the dark. "I saw Father Thomas..."

"He was here." I grind my teeth, looking at the empty space where he ran to. I can't use my powers on him, not with Rosa here, and he could come back at any moment. "We should leave," I say, dismissing the summoning bag.

TWENTY-THREE



Lorcan

I try to kick myself out of the nightmare, but nothing works.

Emptiness reigns. Loneliness claws the inside of my skull as I realize I'm back *here*. A place I thought I escaped long ago. My eyes are open, but I can barely see. Time has no meaning; it exists only in the expanse of the gaping chasm within my chest.

A chill creeps over my skin, leaving goose bumps in its wake. A breeze drifts through the stale air from a seemingly nonexistent source. Everything aches, down to the follicles of my hair. I roll over for a change of scenery, the

inky darkness swirling before my eyes. The new position is no more comfortable than before, only a fresh section of body to punish with the unforgiving stone floor. The dampness on the stone beneath me leaches into my body, settling into my bones and coating them with frost.

The silence is overwhelming. My own breath is too loud in my ears. I swear at times I can hear my stomach gnawing on itself as it hungers. The meager scraps from the small ration of food are long gone. I bend my legs tightly against my body, the beating of my heart anything but soothing as my brain throbs from its ceaseless pulsing.

Panic blossoms in my gut as I try to remember the last time I saw another living creature. My brothers inflicted the simplest and brutal form of torture imaginable. Isolation.

I lose time, floating in a state of blurred consciousness. Oily blackness slithers through my veins, slowing my heart and thickening my blood. My head throbs as my veins swell almost to the point of bursting, but I break through into consciousness before it can happen.

My vision clears again, but nothing has changed. I stare unseeing at what I imagine is the ceiling. Manic thoughts creep through my mind, and my soul withers just a bit more. I struggle to sit upright, causing my head to swim and nausea to churn in my belly. When it settles, I crawl to my threadbare blanket in the corner farthest from the entrance to my cage.

I settle my ass on the ground, my tailbone making itself aware in my gaunt, starving body. I pull my legs up to my chin and lean back against the bars. My skin burns at the contact, the sizzle of my searing flesh audible. What little magic I've stored up since the last time I indulged my craving for self-inflicted torture dribbles from me and freshens the wards of my cage. This pain is the only thing that makes me feel and reminds me that I'm still alive.

Pain is the one thing I can count on to always be there for me. It will never leave me wanting or begging for its cruel company. I pull my holey blanket around my shoulders, groaning when the slight movement allows the bars to mark a fresh part of my skin.

I don't fucking care anymore. No one loathes me more than I loathe myself. I allowed this to happen, so I deserve every hunger pang, shiver, and decade of isolation charged unto me.

Drip.

Drip.

I grind my teeth, doing my best to ignore the sound, but now that I've acknowledged it again, it's all I can focus on. I've no idea where the noise is coming from, but it has been here for as long as I have. Its constant presence makes me want to claw off my own ears. Madness clouds my every thought as I picture the ways I will rid my brothers of their lives when I eventually free myself from this cage.

Laughter bubbles up from my chest, escaping my lips. It starts off slow and quickly builds to an uncontrollable cackle. I throw the back of my head against the bars, feeling delirious from more than my ever-present malnourishment and dehydration.

I dig my fingers against the sides of my head, trying to ignore the drip stabbing into my brain. It seems to get louder, booming in my ears.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

“Shut the fuck up!” I roar, as if that will do any good.

I press my hands tighter against my ears, rocking my body forward and backward, hitting the bars with each sway back. Blissfully euphoric

awareness awakens my nerves. My blanket sticks to my freshly injured back, causing me to hiss. I seek comfort from its scratchy fibers, but every time I do, I lose more of it. Threads pull loose and rip it from my wounds. Soon, my only source of warmth will be reduced to threads. What will I do when it's gone?

Pain ravages my body, and I fall to the floor on my back. My muscles and tendons ache as I squirm closer to the bars. The front of my thighs, my chest, and the backs of my hands burn as I burrow into my enclosure. The pain is like a comforting embrace, soothing my anxious thoughts with its familiarity.

Still, hopelessness stretches inside me, demanding more space and consuming everything in its wake. Nothing I do eases the gaping chasm inside me. I'm all alone with my thoughts; they are my tortures. My mind is becoming a cage more than the bars I live within. I am trapped behind dark thoughts that feed the madness within. Someday the madness will become too much and—

My airway constricts, and the breath freezes within my lungs. Something within my brain seems to disconnect.

My body twitches with exhaustion and misery when a familiar voice echoes in my mind, sounding clearer than the others had. "*We're coming for her,*" my brother, Ezra, promises in a cold, detached voice that leaves no room for denial.

"Get out!" I bellow until my voice goes hoarse.

I topple out of bed and land on the stone floor of my bedroom, causing pain to ricochet down the right side of my body. Panic grips my heart in a vise as I fail to realize I've awakened. I gasp and my vision tunnels. My shadows explode from my chest and wrap around the posts of my bed to steady me as delirium fights for control.

“Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” I roar, balling my hands into fists and losing control of my shadows. They lash out, ripping the drapes from the window and punching a hole in the stone wall. I dive my fingers into my hair and yell again. My wrath knows no bounds as I fight for control of my mind. The inferno building deep within me forces me to double over, and a scream tears from my throat.

I stand abruptly and wreck my room with my shadows, backhanding my stained-glass lamp off the nightstand. The glass explodes out of its iron frame when it shatters from the impact against the wall. The nightmares were getting better, but ever since Solomor showed his cards, they’ve come back with a vengeance. I cannot handle these fucking dreams, paranoia and madness slinking along the edges of my mind, waiting for a weakness to show so they can crawl in and take hold once more.

When I sleep in Evie’s apartment in the Shadow Realm, the nightmares are not as shattering, and they occur less frequently. Something told me that tonight was going to be rough, especially after stalking Solomor and watching him make no moves other than to question those who might have information about me.

I’m glad I chose not to sleep in her apartment tonight and instead shadow-walked back home. It’s not modest by any means. Ghost Rose Manor sits on a sprawling eleven acres of woods far on the outskirts of town.

The floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace roars to life across from my canopy bed. The uneven stones lining the hearth glow with warmth. I stare, entranced by the violet flames. Fire is much more enjoyable to watch in the Shadow Realm than its glaring-orange counterpart in the Human Realm. Behind the iron fireguard, the hellfire hums with energy as it consumes all oxygen within its reach. The split logs catch, and a plum hue flares across them, the flames

lightening as they grow. Lavender sparks dance away as it crackles and draws upward with the air.

I surround myself in luxury, softness, and comfort in an attempt to make up for the years of my childhood taken from me. Even demons are supposed to be carefree with little responsibility as children, although they might still be educated in the basics of oppression and possession. Many of our courses were also about the history of demon lore and what being a royal means; our responsibility is for an infinite amount of creatures—particularly human souls, both alive and dead.

I pad back to my bed, running my fingers along an intricately carved chestnut post at the bottom, then yank the onyx cotton sheets and comforter up to the pillows. The silver-damask, quilted pattern of the comforter shimmers in the firelight. I pick up a pillow and toss it at the obsidian upholstered headboard. I sigh deeply and lie diagonally across the mattress, my feet dangling over the edge.

I cover my eyes with my forearm, forcing my mind to relax. Part of me is still trapped in my nightmare, tendrils of it pulling at my psyche and threatening to drag me under if I dare sleep anymore tonight.

No fucking chance of that happening.

My mind conjures my little witch the second my eyes are closed, as it always does. However, in this moment, her visage does nothing to calm me. I chose to sleep here for *her fucking protection*. The possibilities of harming her if she was too close after a vicious dream is a reality I don't relish experiencing. It would be too easy to step through the veil in a rage, sink deep into her dripping cunt, and wrap my tattooed hands around her delicate neck. I groan, shaking my head.

It was a waste of time, trying to protect her. I move my hands to cradle the

back of my head, the lavender fire creating a warm, soothing caress of heat across my bare tattooed chest. But then a fragment of the dream comes back to me, and my heart bashes against its bone cage.

We're coming for her.

Fuck! Was that real? Or did my brain conjure my brother? No one harms my little witch but me. I have to make sure she's still among the living, although something tells me I would know if she was ever in serious peril.

I clear my thoughts, then focus on our bond deep within me. When I find it, I grab onto it and send my mind down the connection that has become akin to a steel wire, though it initially was as thin as thread.

Unsurprisingly she's not asleep. Her insomnia is growing worse, right along with my nightmares. I also notice that she's sleeping less the farther I am from her, as if by a devious fucking plot twist from the fates, our bond gives us both comfort.

I breathe out a sigh of relief. Evie is alive and well. But then I really take in the scene through her eyes. The connection clears, and I waltz into her mind. The pastor is standing in the doorway of the asylum, as she recounts a memory of earlier in the evening. He mentions the Order and calls her a Fallenmoore witch. Her magic is so close to erupting, I can sense it humming ever so close to the surface.

A knock on the door shakes us both. I pull away from her mind, then watch with her as Solomor enters her apartment in his host, Stephanie May.

"What are you doing here?" Evie asks, *after* inviting a fucking demon inside.

He looks around her apartment.

"Get rid of him now!" I yell into her mind.

Evie flinches. Solomor starts to stride down the hall, but she pushes her arm

out, stopping him from going any farther.

He tilts his head, looking through the woman's eyes at Evie. "I'm friends with Father Thomas, and he seemed worried about you. Said you were having some issues." He glances into her kitchen, where her variety of mugs are on display. "Interesting kitchenware."

She steps in front of him. "Thanks for checking on me, although I've only met you the once," she says, her tone unenthusiastic. "But it's late, and I'm tired."

"Of course." He places a hand on her arm and slides her sleeve up. "Beautiful tattoos," he says, just spotting part of a skull and purple rose before she pulls the fabric back over them.

"Get out," she huffs and pulls a pack of cigarettes from her pocket. "Before I call the police."

Solomor holds Stephanie's hands in the air but smiles toward the mirror. "It's okay. I need to check something anyway."

The woman walks back to the front door and leaves. Evie quickly closes it behind her and lights a cigarette.

"Are you an imbecile?" I yell.

The cigarette wedged between her fingers slides and burns the side of her index finger when she catches it before it falls.

"Is that a serious question?" she asks, then huffs.

"Yes, witch. Now fucking answer me."

Evie sighs and rubs her forehead, the end of her cigarette trailing smoke with the movement. "No, I am not an imbecile. Happy?"

"You're positive that's true?"

"Yes, asshole," she hisses.

"Then why the fuck was Solomor just here? You invited a godsdamn demon"

into your home!” I yell into her mind. She flinches from my outburst, walking toward her coffee bar, and grabs the carafe. She meanders to the sink and fills the container with water.

I glance at the clock on the stove through her eyes. *“It’s three a.m., witch. You’re just proving my point further that coffee does not help insomnia.”*

“Fuck off, Lorcan.” Evie continues preparing the coffee, grabbing a gourmet bag of whole coffee beans. She opens the bag and measures out four scoops of beans into her grinder. The obnoxious hum of the machine sounds, but it does nothing to drown out her voice. “Who cares about some demon? I’m already fucked.”

“I told you that Solomor is within that woman. She might look innocent, but I promise you that he is not.”

“It’s fine. I’m still alive,” she says, rolling her eyes. Evie removes the container with the freshly ground coffee, dumps it into the basket inside the coffee machine, and presses Brew. A little green light glows, and the heating element clicks when it turns on. “Besides, I made her—him, whatever—leave.”

“After letting him in. You put yourself at risk, and for what?”

Coffee drips into the pot. She ignores my admonishments as she gets out the sugar and creamer, then snags her favorite mug off the rack. The pale-pink roses and skulls look more grim than usual in the low light of the stove hood. Evie leans her body against the sink as she waits for the coffee to brew.

Then I realize she’s drunk. The run-in with the pastor has shaken her more than I thought. Her familiar coasts into the room and lands on the kitchen island with a squeak. I mentally roll my eyes. Fluffy Fucker can’t help but get in the way every chance he gets.

Evie sets down her empty mug and goes to the bat. I tune out her warm and

fuzzy emotions and bathe in my rage instead.

“Enough, witch. It’s time you take my words seriously, or you won’t like the consequences.”

“Make me,” she mumbles, continuing to pet the bat.

Unhinged laughter escapes my hold and travels along the bond to my little witch. She freezes, like a mouse caught in the claws of a cat. I sever our connection without warning.

Back in my own mind, I stand from my bed and meld into the nearest shadow, not giving a fuck I’m only wearing gray sweatpants, pass through various shadows and make my across towns until I finally reach Evie’s living room in the Shadow Realm. I barely pause before moving with purpose toward the rose-framed mirror in her office, traveling through the veil, and stepping into the witch’s apartment.

She’s still talking to Fluffy Fucker, but I don’t miss the unease in her tone. I enter another shadow and exit one directly behind Evie in her kitchen. I silently creep up behind her, then simultaneously remove the cigarette from between her fingers and grasp her throat in a bruising grip.

The bat backs away as fast as his little legs will carry him, then growls at me in a frequency so low, no human would have a chance of hearing it. I raise an eyebrow at him, then dart my stare toward his cage in the other room. He narrows his eyes and shakes his head. This little fucker. We stare at each other, waiting for the other to back down.

Eventually the bat huffs and takes flight. He flaps his wings a few times and coasts to land on the curtain rod in the living room. I roll my eyes, resolved to ignore the little heathen.

I press the side of my bearded face into Evie’s cheek, then realize I never donned my mask. No matter, I’ll just make sure the little killer can’t face me.

I take a deep pull on her cigarette, hold the smoke in my mouth for a moment, and fully inhale. My movements are almost ritualistic, soothing my nerves with its familiarity. Fucking blissful.

I cover her small hand resting on the counter with mine, the cigarette pinched between my fingers. Smoke trails from my lips as I whisper next to her ear. “You have been a bad girl.” I squeeze her throat tighter. “You don’t take your safety seriously, so now I must do it for you.”

I drag her body back toward mine by the hold I have on her neck. The warmth of her skin seeps through her thin tank top into my bare tattooed chest. My cock takes notice and hardens against her lower back, my sweatpants doing nothing to hold it at bay.

She gasps as I lightly rock my hips, rubbing my erection against her and proving to her just how fucked she is.

“Use your shadows,” I growl.

“No.”

“Uncage them, now. I can feel them pressing against your skin, witch.” I run the fingertips of my hand holding the cigarette down her arm. “Feel their agony? They’re starving from being trapped so long. The more they suffer, the more you shall as well.” I put the cigarette to my lips and take another drag. Smoke slowly slips from my mouth as I press featherlight kisses along her neck. When I reach her pulse point, I nip and suckle at the spot, speaking into her mind as I drive her body mad.

“Would you rather your shadows lash out at someone against your will? What about if they attack that peculiar pink-haired friend of yours? Could you live with yourself if all you had left of her was her teeth that you salvaged after you murdered her?”

Evie’s heart rate gallops in her chest, and I know I’ve found my mark.

“If you don’t use them, they will use you.”

I inhale once more and stab out the cigarette on her countertop between her ring and middle finger. As far as she’s concerned, it was a narrow miss.

“You can kill the pastor if you decide to be smart. Let your magic out before you get yourself killed. It’s not too late to go after the pastor, and as for Solomor...” I release her and fade back into the shadows, whispering huskily into her mind. *“If I ever catching you talking to a demon other than myself again, I’ll introduce you to a side of myself that only the damned see.”*

TWENTY-FOUR



Lorcan

I follow the demonic presence closest to me through the shadows. Solomor is not powerful enough to realize I am stalking him through the Shadow Realm, and even if he was, it wouldn't make a difference. He can run back and tell whoever holds his leash whatever they want. It won't change the fact that I will protect my little witch from everyone, excluding myself. Solomor comes to a halt, and I step out of the shadows of my realm and see the blinding midday light in the Human Realm. I take in my surroundings, noticing nothing unusual.

The street is lined with small, ranch-style homes. Pumpkins adorn the stairs toward the front doors, while plastic skeletons and fake cobwebs decorate the trees by most of the houses on the street.

The breeze swirls toward me, blowing bits of ash into my face, sparking my irritation. I wander into the yard, keeping a close track of the demon's movements through a mirror attached to a garden ornament. Solomor wastes no time and trudges up the steps to a pastel-pink home with black trim and shutters.

He knocks delicately with his feminine human hand, and a poorly dressed boy opens the door. Solomor, in his female human meat suit, follows the boy inside.

I stride to the front door, taking in the plaque screwed to the exterior.

Embracing your emotional and mental sexual needs through therapy.

Dr. Rosa Gonzales

Son of a bitch, I know exactly who this therapist is. Today of all days, I have to deal with the fucking best friend? Of course the walking rainbow is a fucking sex shrink.

I enter the home within the Shadow Realm. The entryway is what must be the waiting room, with only a single chair and a tiny desk next to a closed door. A small fish tank sits on a built-in shelf to the left of the door. There are no fish in the tank on this side of the veil, only murky water and moldy aquarium rocks. However, I spot a surprisingly tasteful silver-framed mirror above the wall where the patients sit until their appointment time. I face the mirror and put my hands in my pockets to wait along with Solomor. Boredom sets in immediately, and I hate the demon more with every passing second.

I roll my head on my shoulders and push my chin to either side, cracking it. After what feels like an eternity, the view in the mirror changes as an

assistant or secretary stands and enters the office, then comes out a moment later and holds the door open.

“Stephanie May, the doctor will see you now.”

Solomor uses the woman’s face to give his best people-pleasing smile and sashays into the office. I walk along his imprint in my realm, the buzz from the proximity to him making my skin itch. My eyes widen as I take in the most detailed and colorful painting of a cock I have ever seen. I lean over a mosaic-framed mirror and stare through.

Solomor smiles nervously and stands in the middle of the room, fingering the hem of his dress.

“Welcome,” Evie’s friend says in a professional but peppy voice. The doctor turns to her desk, grabs a tissue, and noisily blows her nose before shoving it in the pocket of her fuchsia blazer. Lovely.

“I’m Dr. Gonzalez, but you can call me Rosa,” she says, gesturing toward the plush black-leather sofa opposite the desk, as she takes a seat in a purple wingback chair.

Solomor’s brows pinch together, his gaze skating quickly around the room. Normally I would not tolerate this level of immersion into a human’s life, but Solomor is not acting like a normal demon. No, someone is pulling his strings, making him dance like a puppet while they slither behind the scenes.

I blow out a breath sharply from my nostrils. Rosa and Solomor go through the bullshit introductions, and he has an answer for every one of her dull questions, all of them pure fabrication.

I glance at the small silver clock on the desk, squinting to see the time. The hands have only moved fifteen minutes past the hour. That leaves forty-five minutes of torture left in this session. I let out a long sigh when I realize

something; the hands on the clock are shaped like mini dicks. This woman has a fucking problem.

“So, Stephanie, what brings you here today?” She pulls out a leather portfolio and flips it open to a rainbow notepad.

Something shifts in the air, like the baby witch imbued the space with magic unintentionally. I raise my brow. I wonder if she has been practicing unaware her entire life. The magic glows beneath her skin, just as Evie’s darkness does, but it is not even close to as powerful or inviting. My shadows coil within me, ready to strike at a moment’s notice, as if her essence is too pure and bright and therefore not to be trusted.

Solomor talks, his voice coming out as a soft-spoken woman’s. “I... This is going to sound crazy, but I’ve been having these dreams.”

“Okay, what kind of dreams?”

“Um, s-sexual ones?”

Dr. Rainbow smiles. “What happens in these dreams?”

“Well, I dream about a masked demon stalking me through mirrors.” Solomor holds up both of Stephanie’s hands in a stop gesture. “I know. I told you I sound like a crazy person, but it’s true!” he pleads, the delicate wrinkles around his skin suit’s eyes deepening. “He comes to me every night.”

The pen falls out of the doctor’s hand and bounces soundlessly on the plush carpet, and her eyes widen. “Oh, right.” She clears her throat, quickly shaking her head. “I apologize, yes. It’s perfectly normal to have these kinds of dreams,” she says, but her lip twitches. She reaches down to pick up her pen, and her fingers dance around on the carpet a few times before she finds it and sits up. She poises the tip of her pen on the colorful paper and leans forward. “And what does the demon do in these dreams?”

“You believe me?” Solomor asks, the woman’s mouth falling open.

“Yes. I can see this is very troubling for you, and I can understand how this would be upsetting.”

I had no idea Solomor was such a good actor. I press my fingers against the wall, digging my nails to the wallpaper. He leans forward. If only Rosa could see what lurks beneath the facade of the “sweet,” middle-aged woman. “I think I am going insane. I’m certain of it.” He tugs on Stephanie’s hair. “I’m convinced it’s real, and I think he’s stalking me in real life. Have you ever heard anything so crazy?”

Rosa places her hand on Solomor’s grip of Stephanie’s hair, then sighs. The corners of her eyes crinkle, and I watch as she crumbles, falling for the act. “You’re not crazy. Y-you’re not the only one I’ve heard of this happening to.”

His eyes instantly lock onto Rosa’s. “You have? Who?”

“I think it’s important to focus on you. Tell me more about these dreams.”

Solomor nods. “Of course. Well, at first he just watched me, but then things got worse. Like I could feel his hands on me even if I couldn’t see him.”

“Did anything else happen? Has he come out of the mirror in these dreams?”

“Just the other night he was—” Solomor stops abruptly and lowers the woman’s face into her hands, her hair acting as a curtain to shield his true feelings.

Oh, he is good. I’m going to enjoy pulling him apart for this little act.

“Go on.” Rosa pulls me back to the session.

“I can’t. It’s so embarrassing.”

“This is a safe space, Stephanie.”

Solomor snuffles and lowers the meat suit’s hands, the jeweled ring on the woman’s index finger glinting from the light on the desk. “He was rubbing

his... member above me. Groaning and saying such naughty things. When I woke up, I was so hot and bothered.” The woman blushes, and I scoff. “I came for an appointment today because I don’t know what else to do. I’m terrified he’ll follow through with his threats and put his penis inside me.” She gasps and covers her mouth. “I can’t believe I just said that.”

I growl, baring my teeth at the mirror. Despite everything he’s saying being untrue—he fucking wishes—but he’s acting as if he hasn’t fucked his way through the Shadow Realm—as if the utter idea of sex is a foreign concept.

Rosa presses her lips together, her deep-crimson lipstick creasing. “Take some deep, soothing breaths. In through your mouth out through your nose.”

Solomor does as instructed, pretending to evade his panic attack. I can’t watch much more of this. Mother fucking sleezy demon asshole.

The doctor sets her pen in the crease of her notebook and closes the cover, then holds it against her chest.

“Sometimes giving something a name can be a powerful therapy tool. Do you know the demon’s name?”

“He said his name was Lorcan.”

Her eyes widen. “I... Do you know anything else?”

“He doesn’t talk much. Usually all he cares about is convincing me to play with his...” Solomor says, pointing to his host’s groin. “Sometimes I even... like it.”

I cross my tattooed arms across my chest. As if I would ever let that mother fucker anywhere near my cock.

Rosa sighs. “Don’t feel guilty about becoming aroused by these dreams thrust upon you. Your body is just reacting to the stimuli, and it is perfectly normal.”

“But how do I stop him?”

Her mask of professionalism slips, and she swallows thickly. “Cover up all of the mirrors in your house. You can also try smudging your house with sage. It’s been known to keep lesser demons from sticking around.”

“That’s it? Cover my mirrors and grab some sage?”

The alarm chimes, concluding their little therapy session. “I’m so sorry. I wish I could help more...” Her brows pinch together as she grabs a tissue box instead of the timer, then shakes her head. “Um.” She rubs her forehead and forces a smile, but there’s no wrinkle to the corners of her lips or twinkle in her eyes.

“I’m desperate. I’ve thought about just ending things. Please, help me.”

Rosa gasps and closes her eyes. “I... It’s patient confidentiality. I have the number to a hotline that can help.” She stumbles over each word, her fingers trembling.

Solomor grabs her hands, then looks into her eyes, the woman’s gentle features tight in desperation. “Please. Can you just... tell me the name of who else is seeing the demon?”

Her chest heaves. “I can’t. See, she’s my friend too, but I promise you are not going crazy. I can ask her if she will meet with you.”

“Please,” he says. “Is your friend from here? I’m wondering if the demon in our dreams is linked to this town.”

Her brows knit together and she sighs. “Uh, no she’s from Ashmore. Sorry.”

She squeezes Rosa’s fingers, and I scowl. “Never mind. It was just a theory.”

Fuck. He just wanted confirmation that I was stalking Evie. He must know Rosa and her are friends. He’s been stalking my witch too.

I watch him book a second appointment and leave. I follow him outside,

watching him through different mirrors. My brother is behind this. I just fucking know it.

TWENTY-FIVE



Lorcan

I follow Solomor into Ashmore, Evie's hometown, my stomach knotting as he grows closer to the truth and, by default, my brother. I look around at the scattered Halloween decorations and small houses with hanging baskets of flowers outside each gate.

Everything here is picture perfect, with one obvious exception. The remnants of Evie's childhood home are a glaring contrast to the cookie-cutter houses throughout the neighborhood. Even in the Shadow Realm, it is easy to see that it never belonged on this street.

Evie was the only one to survive the attack. The demons don't know she survived, and I would like to keep it that way. Solomor continues sniffing around, but he should realize that his actions have consequences. I am not above severing his spinal column and bludgeoning him to death with it. It would go a long way to relieve the stress I have acquired from his godsdamn interference.

The house groans with the breeze sweeping down the lane, as if it is one storm away from collapsing. A few flecks of gray paint chip off and float to places unknown on the wind. Humans must be able to sense the strange energy wafting from the ground of the property. I've observed countless people skirt the edge of the sidewalk or cross the street. They don't know what is wrong with the property, but I sense the magic coating this place. The noxious aura created by an event so hideous marks the grounds forever.

I watch Solomor casually walk down the street through a combination of the different mirrors of the parked cars lining the road. I stop next to a pickup truck.

Solomor's meat suit—Stephanie—flounces down the cobblestone path to the front door of the abandoned coven house. Stephanie's lilac dress sways side to side under her sunny-yellow windbreaker. The balls on this demon, breaking and entering in broad daylight.

Solomor carefully glances around to make sure his movements will go unnoticed, then cracks open the door and slips inside. The remnants of cracked and brittle police tape dangle next to the entrance, the original fluorescent yellow faded to a dull mustard. The front windows are covered with plywood and crossed with several two by fours. I straighten my hunched shoulders, standing to my full height, and follow him into the shell of a house.

Her coven was executed here, then the place was lit on fire to cover the evidence. The charred hardwood planks crunch beneath my black combat boots. Scorch marks creep up the parts of the wall still standing. The skeleton of the framework stands sentinel, its shadows ghosting sections of the original floor plan.

The farther I wander into the house, the more disgusted I become. In the center of the now-open floor plan, the stench of dampened flames, like an old bonfire smothered by brackish water, is heaviest. This must have been the origin of the fire. An icy awareness skitters down my spine as a familiar signature haunts my memories. I grumble obscenities through clenched teeth and shove the nuisance away from my mind.

I glance around, noting the crumbled remains of a fireplace. The hearthstone holds firm between the rotting wooden planks of the floor. In many cultures, it was common to place a bit of metal beneath the hearthstone, to imbue the house with protection. I guess in this case, the coven didn't bother, or their charms and enchantments simply weren't enough to battle the evil that craved their deaths.

This room appears to be the largest and was likely used for coven gatherings.

The Order is responsible for their murders. The slaughter occurred right where I stand. I don't take pleasure in their tortured souls brushing against mine for invading the site of the massacre. The magical influence concentrated here pulses around me. Evil so vile it contaminates everything it touches coats my skin. The unnatural urge to tear myself apart to remove its mark consumes me until I briskly stride beyond its small reach.

The house creaks, wind whistling through the exposed cracks in the plaster-coated walls.

Shingles from the burned-out roof lie in a heap below the largest gash in the ceiling, the washed-out blue of the sky visible in places.

To the far right, on the first level, the top three steps of a staircase hang from the floor above. I walk over and peer at its underside. I easily poke a finger through a weak spot in the stair, and the charred remains dust my finger with charcoal.

My stomach lurches, and vomit rises in the back of my throat when Solomor brushes past me. His demonic imprint disgusts me. I spot another mirror similar to the one now at Evie's apartment, except smaller and permanently attached to the wall. A substantial crack with large indent in the top-left corner mars its surface. Splinters spread like a spiderweb toward the frame of the mirror.

I walk to it and take in my fractured reflection. Several versions of myself peer back unnervingly as I survey my image. My pistachio-colored eyes glare back at me, unimpressed. I don't enjoy mirrors the way humans do. I get no satisfaction from watching myself. I take one step closer and thrust my hands in my pockets.

My gaze tracks Solomor with indifference as he investigates the devastated home. His footsteps disturb follicles of dust. They float through the weak light, brave enough to enter the ruined space. But it's the walls that snag my attention and keep it.

A thick layer of soot obscures faint shapes lightly drawn onto the walls. I growl and stab my fingers through my hair. Someone has drawn hundreds of replicas of the Fallenmoore Coven's tattoos. The tattoo's likeness covers every wall left standing, like ravings of an unstable mind. These sketches weren't here the last time I was.

Solomor has his back toward me, but his meat suit's shoulders tense

through the highlighter-yellow windbreaker hugging the woman's shoulders. He leans closer, placing both of her hands on the drywall, and fixates on one rose in particular. Solomor brushes at the flower hidden beneath soot with his sleeved forearm, then steps back.

My hackles rise as the demon turns on their heel and strides out through the back door, no longer visible in the mirror. I pursue him, sensing his presence speed-walk around the perimeter of the house and back to the sidewalk. I jog to the same truck as earlier, then bend at the waist and grip my knees to peer in the mirror.

In the Shadow Realm, a demon shrieks, and a deeper-voiced one cackles. I ignore them as I continue watching Solomor. The demons are restless with Samhain approaching, as well as a full moon. I've had to send Eshabia to no less than ten orgies in the past month when things turned more bloodthirsty than pleasurable. I don't really give a fuck if they kill themselves off. But as the king of demons, I have the responsibility to delegate the cleanup of the foolhearted demons. I do not have the patience for more petty annoyances.

Movement in the Human Realm draws my attention back to the small driver-side mirror. This late into the afternoon, humans are arriving home from work. Cars pass by on the street with regularity, and the odd mother with a stroller hurries down the sidewalk. From my point of view, the edge of the abandoned Fallenmoore property and Solomor's profile are visible. I get so close to the mirror that my eyes nearly cross. Stocking him would be a lot fucking easier if he wouldn't meander so far away the truck.

Annoyance flares inside my chest. I have a great deal of more important things to be doing than watching this asshole, like playing with my little killer. I sigh deeply, furrowing my brows. My obsession with her far surpasses anything I've ever felt.

A man approaches Solomor and smiles with thin lips, seeming friendly enough. Solomor turns on the charm, playing the bashful woman just out for a stroll. The man radiates self-importance. He's dressed in all black, except for the brilliant white collar tucked neatly beneath his black dress shirt, solidifying his entitled air. The finer details of his person taint the image. Grease clings to the roots of his dirty-blond hair, reflecting the dying rays of sunlight. I wrinkle my nose. Why is it the norm for the majority of humans to neglect their hygiene? The man sticks out his hand, and Solomor's meat suit clasps her delicate fingers around it. They break apart, and Solomor immediately wipes off his meat suit's hand discreetly on her dress.

"Hello there," the man says. "I've never seen you around before."

Solomor pushes Stephanie's hair behind an ear and bats her mascara-laden lashes. "No, you wouldn't have. I'm just in the process of house hunting with my husband, but he had to stay at work today, and I was just too excited to check out the potential neighborhood." She giggles unabashedly.

"Oh." The stranger's lips turn down in a frown. "There's not a whole lot of availability on this street." He pauses, scratching his dirty hair. "However, if you go over to Gardenia Street, they are building two new houses. Although, if you ask me—"

"Thank you so much. But I am actually interested in this house," she says, gesturing toward the fire-damaged home.

He throws his shoulders back, narrows his eyes, and lifts his chin.

The man practically snarls. "Unfortunately, it's not for sale. Why would you want to live there anyway?"

"It has so much potential for a remodel." The woman smiles brightly, ignoring his partner-in-conversation's souring mood.

"Well, as I said, it's not for sale, so why don't you just head over to

Gardenia Street and try your luck there.” The man tries masking his emotions, but it’s useless. Anger simmers behind his eyes. Solomor finally takes the hint.

“Okay,” Solomor says in the woman’s voice, waving her hand.

The man stomps away and into a beige version of every other house on the street. The front door slams, and Solomor smiles. He turns away from the house, oozing smug satisfaction.

An elderly woman meanders down the sidewalk. Solomor’s meat suit walks several steps in her direction, consequently closer to my location in the Shadow Realm, and pretends to be looking for something in her oversized black purse. As the other woman nears, a tube of lipstick slips from his grasp and clatters on the cracked sidewalk by a pair of tan loafers. The old woman nearly runs right into the demon. Solomor’s meat suit retrieves the silver tube, her long champagne-colored nails scraping against the cement before she quickly stands and tosses it into her bag. The old lady eyes her skeptically, but the corner of her lips twitch upward.

The older woman is wearing an absurd ensemble that has no right to be seen in public. Mauve dress pants cover her legs, stopping at a heavy elastic waistband that sits past where her navel should be. Her white blouse is practically exploding with frills, the hem of the top disappearing behind the waist of her pants. That shirt belongs on a pirate ship. She wears a bright-purple jacket on top of the blouse, open at the waist. A cherry-red, wide-brim hat rests on her head, completing the outfit. The front brim is pinned to the crown of the hat with a costume-jewelry-quality brooch, shaped like a dove. I snort, then wipe off the ash collecting on the mirror in front of me. Assorted rainbow flowers cover the brim of the hat in a nauseating display.

I bet my ass, that woman goes to church regularly and volunteers for every

committee.

The old woman places her hands on her hips, and Solomor meets her unwavering gaze warily, like she might bite.

“You all right there? Awful clumsy with that lip balm,” the frail female states.

Solomor clears his meat suit’s throat. “Yes, I’m fine. My lipstick,” he says, “just slipped from my fingers. I wanted to freshen up before my husband meets me here. We’re looking for a house to buy. I was on my way to Gardenia Street when I spotted this gorgeous home.” Stephanie gestures toward the abandoned house.

“Oh, sweet pea, you don’t want that house!” the old woman exclaims. She clasps her hands, her wrinkled fingers weaving together. “Everyone knows it’s haunted. How could it not be after everything that went down there?”

Solomor raises both brows, his confidence returning. “What happened?”

“You don’t know?” She lowers her voice conspiratorially. “Rumor has it, horrible things happened in that house. Unspeakable things,” the older human says excitedly as she prepares herself to spill every drop of small-town gossip. “One night, about nine years ago, a fire broke out, killing everyone.”

“People died?” Solomor asks with mock surprise.

“Oh yes, people say you could hear their screams from several blocks away as they burned alive!”

Solomor gasps and covers his meat suit’s mouth with both of her hands. The woman continues.

“The police are always having to bust down the door and roost out hooligans, breaking in to do drugs and God knows what else. I’ve gone to several town meetings and demand they demolish the place, but they say the property is owned by someone, and they cannot just simply demolish it

unless it is ‘officially,’” the woman says with air quotes, “causing harm to members of the community.” She rolls her eyes.

“Wait, did anyone survive?” Solomor asks, his meat suit’s eyes darting toward the Fallenmoore house again.

The elderly woman leans closer to Solomor. “There was one survivor, a little girl. She was a bit strange. Never one to have friends or seen much out of the house.” She gestures with her chin toward the beige home behind Solomor. Her hat teeters to the side from the sharp movement. “That fellow you were speaking to earlier adopted the young girl after the incident, bless his heart, and they lived happily for a long time.

“Sounds like there’s more to the story here.”

The female tsk-tsks. “I haven’t got to the worst part yet. One day, the most terrible thing happened. Their son died in a freak accident! No one knows what happened, only that they found him in pieces.”

Stephanie clutches the fabric of her jacket at the chest, worry lines deepening in her brow. “That’s horrible.”

“It is, but I’m not finished yet. The adopted daughter disappeared on the same day. No one has seen her since.”

Stephanie cups the slender hand against her cheek. “How unfortunate. That family has had such bad luck befall them.” Solomor chokes on his words before the overly friendly stranger can go on another tangent. But then, everything goes to shit. An unnaturally wide smile spreads across Solomor’s meat suit’s face, her eyes crazed; something clicked into place within the human body housing him.

Fuck! He’s figured it out.

I grip the sides of the mirror. The plastic shrieks as my claws gouge the plastic deeply. Solomor sprints away from the geriatric female toward the

house of the original townspeople he spoke to. He pounds on the door relentlessly until it swings open. His meat suit's fist hovers inches from the man's stern face. Solomor lowers her arm and stares at the man.

“What do you want?” he spits.

“I know where your daughter is.”

TWENTY-SIX



Evie

I down my third coffee of the day, sensing no demonic presence or flashes of Lorcan in the mirror. It's a good thing, I suppose. Hopefully he's gone off, after our last encounter, and won't see me packing. I push the second suitcase against my closet and take a step back.

This is for the best. My tattoos tingle as I contemplate running again, but this time I'll need to cross state lines. Perhaps to Florida? They probably won't look for me there. Although, the idea of constant sunshine, mosquitos and gators makes me want to vomit. Vermont is nice, but expensive, and I

barely have enough to live as it is. I can't use any ID that'll be put into an electronic system. I'll have to stay off the grid as much as possible. Maybe I'll be able to find work where I'm paid under the table.

My mind numbs as the burden of what I have to do aches through my shoulders. I shake my head, panic coming over me in waves.

I pass through the living room, glancing at Gomez snuggling against a fluffy black pillow on the sofa. My chest tightens, and I walk to the balcony and slide open the door. A gust of icy breath enters as I step out into the night, and a hanging ghoulish decoration from the apartments across the street swings in the wind.

Lorcan's warning hangs in my mind. I light a cigarette and lean over the railing, and my hair falls around my face.

It's been three days since a demon possessing the woman came into my home, the pastor threatened me, and the actual demon stalking me also threatened me... which sounds like the beginning of a bad joke.

My phone buzzes in my pocket, and I quickly pull it out. Rosa's name flashes, along with a preview of her message. I open it and bite the inside of my lip.

How are you feeling? Has dickfuck shown his face again?

I haven't told her that Lorcan showed up after the other demon visited my apartment. She's already freaked out enough, especially after Father Thomas figured out what I am.

Nope. Nothing.

I text back, but my stomach knots. It's been too quiet, and that's the problem. The pastor hasn't returned, and Lorcan's gone dead silent. I glance through the sliding door at the mirror reflecting Gomez on the sofa, then pull in a long drag. I cough when the icy night air mixes with the smoke. Gomez

can't be here, not now that the church is aware of what I am. I'm a sitting duck in this apartment.

I can't take him with me. It will arouse too much suspicion, and he's safer here, with Rosa. He'll have a better life. A tear trickles from the corner of my eye, but I wipe it away with the back of my sleeve before sentiment gets the best of me. Rosa replies.

Do you want to come over here, tonight?

I purse my lips and put out the cigarette on the railing. My fingertips numb as wind howls around my ears, blowing my hair back in all different directions.

No, but can you take Gomez for a few days? Just until things blow over?

I squeeze my eyes shut. I know she'll take care of him, but I feel bad not telling her I'm leaving. She's been the best friend I've had—and the only one I've trusted. Despite finding out I am a killer, she still cares for me.

I hurry back indoors and to my office. My reflection glares back as I stand in front of my family's heirloom mirror. With any luck, when the landlord realizes I haven't paid my rent and evicts me, he'll find this thing and throw it out.

Rosa responds, and I check the message.

Always. Gomez is my baby, he's always welcome to stay with Auntie Rosa. Want me to come get him tomorrow?

I roll my eyes, a smile playing on my lips.

Thanks and yes, please.

I'm going to miss them both so much. I walk to the kitchen, pop a pill, and climb onto a stool. I look up at my coffee mug collection on display and sigh. There's no way I can take all of them. I'll have to leave a note for Rosa to

save them before the landlord throws them into a dumpster. I shudder as I imagine them all smashed to pieces.

At least I have twelve-ish hours left to spend with Gomez before I plan on leaving.

Three louds knocks echo through my apartment. I hold my breath, as if it might somehow make me less visible. Slowly, I turn my body so I can see the front door. Three more bangs, this time louder, resonate from the door. It shakes, the doorknob wobbling, and my death magic heats inside me.

My heart palpitates as I watch the knob turn, then the door push open. I slide back, my back hitting the countertop. The chain prevents it from being opened all the way, but a hand slides through the gap, and I remove myself from the visibility of whoever is out there.

I grab my phone from my pocket, ready to call the police. It has to be the pastor or Aiden, because Jay is dead and Rosa is at home.

Or worse.

A low, gravelly voice sounds through the gap. “Open the door, *Fallenmoore* witch, or we’ll kill your friend.”

A shadow shoots out of my chest in a wisp of glittering blackness, as if summoned by whoever is at the door. Then it fizzles away and I’m left hugging myself, my fingernails gripping my arms.

A lump forms in my throat when I think of Rosa in danger. Whoever spoke through the door is not the pastor or Aiden. It’s someone else entirely. *Fallenmoore* witch. Only the Order or a demon would call me that.

I reach for my purse, grab my handgun, and run into the living room. Gomez springs awake and flies to me. I grab him, his wings pressed against the side of the gun, then rush him to the balcony.

His feet and hands cling to my fingers, his black eyes widening as I slide

open the door. “You have to go,” I say tearfully. “You must go, Gomez. Those are bad men. They’ll hurt you.”

The sound of the chain breaking jolts me, my nausea rising as I force Gomez off me, hurting his leg in the process. He falls to the balcony floor, and I shut the door before he can back inside. Better injured than dead.

I turn on my heel and point the gun, in turn at each of the seven men and a woman standing in my living room. All of them except one wears the symbol of the Order around their necks. The one free of the pendant steps closer to me. I tighten my grip on the handle of my gun, listening as Gomez flies against the glass door, trying to get back inside.

To protect me.

The man’s eyes are the most striking, pastel green I’ve seen, and his smirk reminds me of Lorcan’s, but he’s different. A groomed, dark beard runs around his chiseled jawline, into his brown locks. His muscles bulge under his black shirt and white collar, and he presses his thumb to the poutiest, thickest lips, then smiles. A dimple curves the corner of his mouth, and he looks me up and down, as if I’m dinner. “I thought you were dead.” He takes another step closer and places his fingers to my temple, and I flinch. He pauses, then slides his hand down my cheek anyway, tilting his head. “My brother has the prettiest secrets.”

He pulls me closer, until my head reaches his chest, and leans down. I breathe in the smell of ash, mostly masked by his bergamot cologne. He’s a demon. Only they have that smell linger, unless they’re a blacksmith or something. It’s as if the hellfire has tinged their bodies, the smell of it burned into their DNA forever.

With bent knees, he reaches my level, looking into my eyes.

“Demon,” I spit, my nostrils flaring. If I’m going to die, then I won’t be

going without a fight. I only wish Gomez would fly away. Unleashing my magic means destruction to this room, including him.

I keep my shadows in... for now.

The demon laughs and cups my cheek, lifting my chin. "I'm no demon," he replies, but his sadistic grin gives him away. "But my brother is."

My eyes dart toward the Order, then back at him. Are they really buying this shit? "How is that possible?"

He releases his grip roughly, and I stumble, still holding onto my gun. It might not do anything to him, but it will kill the humans in the room. The Order members are mortal, despite acting otherwise.

The demon paces in front of me, and the Order members hang back, waiting for him. Is he their leader?

"I am Ezra," he states. "I'm an angel, but my brother is fallen."

My forehead crinkles. "Really? Because I can smell you from here, demon."

His eyes darken as he halts and stares right through me, the look chilling me to the bone. "You speak of demons when their blood runs in your veins, Fallenmoore witch." He grabs my arm and twists it behind my back.

My trigger finger twitches as he turns, setting the gun off. I let out a scream, clamping my eyes shut as the bang shatters in my ears, and a bullet ricochets off the floor. Even the Order members flinch, but Ezra doesn't. His muscular arms hold me in place, then he pulls back my fingers until the gun falls to the floor. I look down, checking I hadn't accidentally shot myself, but I feel no pain.

Ezra's hiss slithers over the top of my ear when he whispers, "Be a good girl, or I'll kill your familiar." He glances at the door. "The one who was too stupid not to fly away."

I wrestle against him, but he's too strong. My shadows are restless in his presence, desiring to be let free. If it wasn't for Gomez, I'd let them.

"Gomez, go!" I shout at the door, but he scratches at the door instead.

Ezra snaps his fingers at the female Order member and jerks his head toward the balcony door.

"No, Gomez!" I yell. "Fly now! Go, fucking go!"

She grabs him, then yelps when he sinks his fangs into her finger. "Fucking thing." She groans and holds him by his torso, her grip too tight for my liking. He tries to bite her again, but she keeps her fingers away from his mouth.

My nostrils flare as I glare in her direction, venom dripping from my expression. Ezra pulls me tighter, holding me against his body. "Bring the pastor," he snaps to the others.

One man, with shoulder-length, dirty-blond waves and glacier-blue eyes, heads to the front door. His fingers fist my hair, and he pulls up the sleeve of my sweater. Gasps sound around the room as my tattoos confirm everything. Gomez squeaks from the hands of the bitch across the room adorning the Order symbol, and finally the other man reenters with Father Thomas.

His blue stare softens as he treads inside, both of his hands clasped in front of him.

"Is this the one?" Ezra asks, and the pastor nods.

I bare my teeth. "You told them about Rosa!" I shout, and Ezra tightens his grip on my hair. "They threatened her, and she's innocent. These people are fucking monsters."

Ezra tsk-tsks. "Coming from the monster." He whips his head around to look at the pastor, whose eyebrows are pulled down toward his crooked nose.

Father Thomas runs his fingers through his disheveled, salt-and-pepper

hair, swallowing thickly.

“Now,” Ezra says after clearing his throat. “Did she talk about my brother? About the demon?” he snaps, impatience threading each word.

Father Thomas nods quickly, his eyes darting from me to Ezra. He adjusts the white card in his collar, sweat beading his temples. “Yes, she wanted help. Said he was stalking her.”

“Yeah!” I shout, wrestling harder. “Thanks for the fucking help, *Father*.”

“You are a *witch*,” he states, as if it is a filthy, disgusting word. “Whatever demonic forces have called, you have answered.” He must genuinely think it’s my fault Lorcan has been haunting me in the mirrors.

Although, now, I wouldn’t mind him turning up, so I desperately scan the mirrors. Ezra notices so spins me around to face him, yanking my hair in the process.

I shoot a hiss between my teeth and glare at him. “Let Gomez go, and I’ll tell you what you want,” I say because I’m tired of this game, and hearing his squeaks is killing me inside. “You don’t need to play hard to get.”

He scoffs, amusement widening his stare, but he releases my hair. “Where is my brother?”

“I wish I could tell you,” I say, stumbling back. Closing my eyes briefly, I run my hand up to my scalp, rubbing the sore skin. “He’s not visited for a few days, but he came through the mirror in my office.” I point at the door in the shadowy area of my apartment, then glance at Gomez.

My shadows tug underneath my skin, and the pastor is watching me as I take a step toward them. I scan the faces of every Order member, not recognizing any of them, not that I would at their ages. At least Edward isn’t with them, but I’m certain he would have heard about my whereabouts by now. It’s unlikely I’m getting out of this alive, unless I use my powers.

However, I'd risk Gomez being caught in the crossfire, and it won't affect the demon anyway, masquerading as something good under the Order members' noses. How can they believe he's not dangerous? That his brother is a demon but somehow he isn't?

Biblical stories cover his arms and neck, in tattoos spiraling with shadow magic. Like Lorcan, the markings on his body tell a story, but his are lies. He's faking being an angel. This is fucking ludicrous.

Ezra grabs my arm, his nails biting my skin as he leads me toward my office. The Order members follow, each of them holding the pendants around their necks as if it might save them. When one gets close, I notice my magic faltering.

My lips part as realization washes over me. Those pendants work *against* my magic. That's why it's the symbol of an upside-down cross.

I walk into the office, the smell of parchment, books, and dust hitting my nose. I glance at the nonfiction shelf and rub the side of my neck. Every coven of witches has a marking, to identify themselves and their magic. The upside-down cross must have been one of a distant coven, but why would the Order adopt it? Only a coven mark could affect my magic like this.

The woman holding Gomez brushes past me, and my magic wanes further. Gomez's beady eyes lock onto mine, and tears well, blurring my vision.

I'll get you out of this, I promise in my mind, hoping he can somehow understand me. Ezra runs his hand along the frame and smiles. It's creepy as hell. "We thought this was lost."

The corner of my mouth twitches. I wonder what will happen if I push him into it. Does it even work that way?

He locks eyes with me, as if he got the same thought, then grabs my hand and tugs me against his chest. His groin presses against my back, his arms

holding mine still. His fingers grip my throat as he stares at the reflection of us and my inability to move against him. My heart pounds, then I see him—
Lorcan.

TWENTY-SEVEN



Evie

An unnatural silence descends, as if the room itself is holding its breath. Lorcan's masked face is carefully blank as he steps through the mirror into my office, his hands in his pockets.

Ezra snorts, ruffling the hair by my temple. "Nice mask, brother. Too much of a pussy to show your face?"

Lorcan's lips pull back, his shifted razor-like teeth bared at his brother. Lorcan's eyes are wild as they dart toward each of the threats in the room.

“Ezra, release her or I will remove your arms from their sockets,” Lorcan hisses through his teeth.

“Now why would I do that? She’s a snack,” Ezra says, running a knuckle down my throat. “Plus, these kind people are waiting so patiently to reunite her with God.”

He snarls. “God? She’s a witch. He wouldn’t touch her.”

My shadows weakly alert me to the presence of Lorcan’s. Gomez must notice it too because he chirps and squeaks wildly. Distracted, the Order members swing their worried gazes to Gomez, while the brothers glare at each other. Lorcan speaks and simultaneously slides a shadow under the carpet. It slithers undetected beneath the woven fibers before coming out behind Ezra.

I hold my breath, not sure how this will play out.

With inhuman speed, Ezra reaches over his shoulder and grabs Lorcan’s shadow. “Really, Lorcan? Did you think—” His voice cuts off when a different shadow winds around Ezra’s throat. I stomp on his instep, using his surprise to my advantage.

Lorcan and I work together in a dance of violence. He uses his shadows to bend Ezra at the waist just as I drive my elbow into his groin.

“Mother fucker!” Ezra shouts, cupping his crotch and loosening his hold enough for me to free myself.

His outburst startles the woman holding Gomez. She literally jumps several inches off the ground and her hands fly dramatically to her chest. My little bat falls to the carpet with a soft thud but quickly stands on one leg, holding the injured one off the ground. He pauses for a moment, shaking his fluffy head before his eyes narrow in determination. Gomez stretches his wings wide to his sides before taking flight.

“Yes! Go, Gomez. Fly away!”

I lose track of my fluffy baby when a thought pops into my mind. A hysterical laugh bubbles from my throat. Ezra cannot use his shadows and risk exposing his demon nature to the Order.

“You’re so fucked,” I choke out between bouts of giggles.

Lorcan raises an eyebrow, the corner of his mouth twitching into a smirk.

Then Lorcan sprints toward his brother in a blur, using the momentum of his forward motion to send a right hook to Ezra’s mouth. Ezra knees Lorcan in the guts, then punches him repeatedly in the kidney. Lorcan grunts but wraps his brother into a bear hug around his waist and smashes him into my bookshelf. I’m watching with rapt attention, oblivious to my surroundings, when one of the cloaked Order members grabs my hair and backhands me across the face.

“What is with the fucking hair pulling?” I shout.

The other people in the room back against the walls, clutching their fucking upside-down crosses fearfully.

They might temper my magic, but adrenaline pushes me into fight mode. I spin out of my assailant’s hold, my hair twisting painfully against my scalp, and punch him in the throat. He drops my hair and stumbles away, clutching his neck, his mouth opening and closing like a beached fish. The scent of iron fills my nostrils from the blood spilled, half of it staining my shirt, arms, and face.

“Seriously, you brought the family?” Lorcan snarls.

“An angel needs his entourage. They’re almost here,” Ezra replied, grinning like a lunatic. How the Order ever thought he was holy is beyond me. He gives Lorcan his back, then stalks toward me.

Lorcan’s shadows wrap around his brother in a full-body bind, pinning his

arms to his sides. His legs snap together next, and Ezra crumples to the ground. Another shadow gags him, muting the threats and obscenities passing his lips.

“My shadows cannot hold him for long. Come with me now!” Lorcan shouts into my mind while his arms band across my chest and he curls his body around mine protectively. He walks backward toward the mirror, pulling me with him.

Panic surges in my veins, and I squirm in his hold. His bearded jaw scrapes my cheek as he squeezes me so tight, it’s painful. I snag the desk chair with a hand but only maintain my grip for a moment before my bloody fingers slip off. He snarls at the slight obstruction.

“Lorcan don’t,” I beg.

He ignores me, his threatening growl constantly rumbling against my back.

A scream lodges in my throat, trapped by oncoming panic. Ezra barrels through the sea of cloaked bodies squeezed into my tiny office. The Order descends on Lorcan and me, like they just remembered their purpose for being here. More men pour into the room, each resembling Lorcan, and I realize they must be his family.

He places one foot through the veil and then the sensation of being ripped in half seers through my middle. The woman who came with the Order clutches my ankle in both of her hands.

“You will not survive to live another day, witch,” she hisses.

I kick her in the nose, the bones snapping grotesquely. Nausea churns in my belly as she screams, blood running down her face and onto my pants.

My breath saws in and out of my lungs as my death magic fights to be free.
No, my baby!

Gomez lands on my assailant’s head and attacks her eyes. Blood gushes

down her cheeks as he screeches and flaps. The muscles in his fluffy body strain, but the tenacious bitch won't release her grip. He pushes his wings down in powerful strokes while digging his little clawed feet further into her eyes. The woman screams, spittle flying from her mouth. Finally, she lets go of my ankle, taking my shoe with her. The last thing I see is one of my assailant's eyeballs rip free of its socket. A spurt of crimson splashes Ezra's chest as he shoves my brave little bat, and the female he is still decimating, to the side.

"Gomez!" I scream.

Adrenaline courses through my system without an outlet. Lorcan yanks me through the veil, and his other brothers turn their heads to face the mirror. An ominous buzzing sensation hovers along my skin. I've felt nothing like it, and my brain is far too frazzled to make sense of the paltry sensations.

I clap my hands to the sides of my head and groan through gritted teeth. Eerie whooshing fills my ears, building an intense pressure inside my skull. It took less than a second to cross between realms, but it felt like multiple lifetimes.

Lorcan still holds me in his clutches, my back to his front. The asshole won't let go. So I use the only weapon available in my arsenal. I twist my head toward his neck and bite deeply into the soft tattooed flesh of his neck. The skin breaks beneath my canines, and blood seeps into my mouth before spilling from my lips. He grunts, and I swear his dick twitches against my ass.

My death magic brews dangerously in the cavity it resides in as Lorcan takes a few more steps into the Shadow Realm. My anxiety turns into a full-blown panic attack. I thrash in his arms, elbowing him in the ribs. He grunts but doesn't free me.

My spine arches as my magic coalesces, and he holds me tighter to his chest. For a moment, it is as if we do not exist as two separate bodies. His shadow magic bands around us tightly like a safety net. I catch a glimpse of Ezra's grin as he slips through the mirror milliseconds before my death magic makes impact.

The death magic breaks through my carefully constructed walls, and surges from my body. The powerful blast ripples outward in a circle, the near-translucent magic shimmering like a heat wave.

The glass of the mirror disintegrates except for a few larger shards. A glitter-like substance floats among the ash in the air, then melts away before my eyes. I scratch at the demon's forearms like a caged monster.

The magic imbuing the mirror frame with life slowly drains away, leaving a tarnished disaster in its wake. The frame, somehow protected from the blast, stands empty and desolate. Lorcan shoves me to the floor. My teeth clack together so hard, pain radiates through my jaw, yet it is only a momentary distraction from the horror unfolding before me.

Lorcan paces in front of me. Then without warning, he stops directly in front of me, shaking from head to foot. His murderous gaze settles on me, but his eyes quickly dart away. He tips his chin toward the ceiling, every visible muscle tensed. His hands clench and unclench at his sides. "Fuuuuuck!" he roars, the tendons in his neck protruding. Lorcan stabs his tattooed fingers into his hair and yanks the strands violently. His face contorts into pure madness.

I've never seen this side of him before.

"Witch," Lorcan growls, low and deadly next to my ear. "You just destroyed our only path out of this fucking realm."

"At least only Ezra got through. I acted on instinct. Your other brothers

would have followed us too if I didn't destroy the mirror."

"You better use every ounce of magic in your body to repair the damage. If you fail, I promise the remainder of your life will not be pleasant."

Sweat beads on my forehead and trickles down my temple. *Fuck. What have I done?* I scramble forward, slicing open my knees on the shards lying there. I can't be stuck here. I'll never get back to Gomez. "I'm sorry," I whisper. I kneel, paralyzed with grief, my blood trickling onto the debris. The jagged shards glow with muted ethereal beauty from the desk light in my office. Then, as if my blood triggered a failsafe, the remaining mirror pieces transform into a liquid and meld into the carpet of apartment.

"No. No. No. No. No," I chant, unable to stop it even if I wanted to. My bloodied fingers stick to my face as I cover my eyes.

Lorcan storms out of the room, and I hear things slam against the wall of the living room. The unmistakable sound of shattering glass fills the quiet apartment as Lorcan releases his rage. He stalks back toward me, his all-black eyes finding mine. He chuckles mirthlessly, shaking his head. "Evie," Lorcan says sternly. "Since you are incapable of successfully wielding any useful magic, we need to move. I haven't a clue where Ezra is now, but he will not be far."

The importance of his words and furious tone don't register in my mind. Guilt, fear, and utter despair crash over me like gusts in a violent storm. I shift onto my ass, then rock back and forth. The word *no* continues to issue from my throat. I can't stop. The world around me is muffled, like I'm submerged in the dark depths of the lake near my childhood home. My brain works to comprehend the words the demon utters, but I am unable to translate them into understandable language.

Vertigo washes over me, so I put my head between my knees. Lorcan

speaks into my mind. *“Let’s go, witch. I am all out of patience.”*

But I don’t answer him.

He lifts my foot off the ground, but I pay him no mind. Nothing matters in this space of delirium. Time crawls as if I’m moving in slow motion but everything else is speeding around me. It’s like I’m driving a car down a steep hill and the brakes fail. The outside world would blur past the windows as I slam my foot on the brake pedal over and over. There’s nothing I can do to stop from crashing. Eventually, I’d resign myself to make my body go limp, to lessen the damage on impact.

The demon crosses his arms, glaring at me. I curl into myself, wrapping my arms around my knees. I’m unable to make my mind catch up with reality. I am no longer in the Human Realm but somewhere... other. My chest aches from the strain the panic attacks have put on my mortal body. This place feels wrong but at the same time feels like coming home. My heart palpitates as I recognize that the dark side of me, the side I have been trying to repress for so long, feels content. My death magic stretches inside me, uncoiling itself and spreading out as far as it can under my skin. I’ve never felt it so weak yet alive.

Lorcan lets out a deep breath. He scratches his beard, the soft scraping sound too loud in this place absent of noise. That’s when I notice the ash again. I look toward the ceiling, wishing to locate the source of the strange phenomenon. I catch some of the substance on my tattooed fingers and smear it between the pads of my fingers.

Lorcan touches his index and pointer finger to the bite mark I inflicted when we first crossed the portal, as if he’s just remembering it. He draws his fingers away and stares at the blood staining them with undeniable hunger in his gaze. The calm he exuded a moment ago vanishes. His eyes raise to meet

mine, narrowing. The V between his eyebrows deepens. Onyx bleeds into his green irises, taking over their pastel hue. A madness peers at me from behind his darkened depths. Lorcan sucks his blood-coated fingers into his inviting mouth, then closes his eyes and moans as if the taste of his own blood gets him off.

“That was a poor decision, witch.” His tongue slips between his lips before slowly skating across his full upper lip.

He steps toward me, but something scrapes against the window in the living room, breaking into his spiraling madness. My skin crawls, and I hug myself, gripping my shoulders to stop the tremors under my skin.

Shock is a lot like being trapped between a fever breaking and returning to consciousness, my body and brain attempting to fight the foreign germ that has invaded my body. My body reaches the precipice of increasing heat before it wins the battle against the inferno it created. I hover in a place of nothing. I cannot decipher where my body begins or ends. My mind is everything and nothing all at once, shamelessly flaunting its practiced ability to disassociate. In this strange place, time holds no meaning, but either way, it is a reprieve of the awareness life demands.

Lorcan breaks through the realm of nothing, shouting directly into my brain. *We need to move now. My brother could return at any moment, and you are not in any state to be more than a godsdamn blubbering target.*

I don't respond, just stare at the floor with unseeing eyes.

“This is not the place to fall to pieces. Wake the fuck up and start walking.”

I sway, suddenly standing, as Lorcan pulls me to my feet.

“Fuck this,” he states aloud.

For a moment, my body is weightless, and the defined muscles of Lorcan's shoulder digs into my belly. Reality, the wretched asshole, attacks my mind

with awareness when Lorcan clamps an arm across the back of my thighs.

“Put me down, demon,” I order, kicking my legs.

He smacks my ass cheek hard, the crack of his strike reaching my ears before the sharp sting registers. Lorcan offers no other response as he barrels toward the front door.

“It would feel so good to wring your tiny neck,” he grumbles quietly, seemingly to himself. My head throbs as the blood rushes to my brain in this awkward upside-down position. I grab onto his belt loops as he rushes with inhuman speed out the front door, through the hallway, and out of the building.

“Wait! Stop!” I shout.

Lorcan continues striding forward.

“Where are we going? We can’t just leave. I have to fix it. I need get home.” I choke on a sob. “Gomez. He-he could be hurt.”

“Cease your blathering and listen.”

I huff and wipe my blood- and who-knows-what-else-covered hand onto the back of his shirt.

“It won’t be long before demons fall on this place. They are all too eager to hunt you.”

My heart lodges in my throat, and I whimper. “That doesn’t make any sense. How would they even know I’m here?”

“They knew you were here the moment you breeched the veil. The only reason they stayed away this long is because of my presence. Although, by now, I’m positive my brother is twisting their minds, turning as many as possible against me and, as a consequence, you.”

“Put me down!” I attack his lower back with my fists, but he doesn’t flinch. “Lorcan! You don’t understand; Gomez needs me!” I shriek.

He continues forward but finally breaks the silence. “No, I will not. You don’t know how to listen and therefore cannot be trusted to stay out of danger.” The anger seeping off him is palpable.

Rain pelts my back, and a deep rumble of thunder booms not too far away from us. A demon steps out from behind a parked car. The horrible creature has short, sharp horns all over its head. It lifts its nose in the air, inhaling audibly. Drool leaks from both sides of its gash-like mouth. A tongue slips out of the hideous opening and licks its barely existent lips. An abnormal half-hiss, half-purr sound issues from its gaping maw.

I stare at the horrific creature. Lorcan’s long, determined strides quickly put distance between us and the apartment. It appears he is impervious to the rain and our dangerous predicament. Doesn’t he sense the demon behind him?

“Um, Lorcan? There’s something following us,” I whisper-shout.

“I’m aware,” he says. “If they don’t keep their distance, they will answer to me.”

“But—”

Lorcan stops, rolling me from his shoulders abruptly. I stumble and slip on the rain-soaked street.

“I’ve had enough of your nonstop whining, witch. You have two options,” he states without emotion into my mind while walking away from me.

My heart hammers against my ribs as the demon tracking me gets closer. My gaze darts from Lorcan’s back to its hungry eyes zeroing in on the blood splattered on me from the fight in my apartment. There’s now at least a hundred yards between me and safety.

“Either you come with me…” He pauses, chuckling sinisterly. *“Or you can fend for yourself among the demons.”*

I know he’s the safer option, but my pride doesn’t want to go down without

a fight.

My hair lifts, floating slightly off my shoulders as the electricity in the air builds to a fevered pitch. Lightning strikes too close for comfort, the brilliant purple-blue bolt connecting with the hood of an SUV. The windows blow out all at once, glass flying like shrapnel and cutting into my face and neck. Several more demons of varying shapes and sizes crowd around me now that their king isn't nearby.

The demon closest to me grabs a fistful of my hair. A scream tears from my throat as it yanks my locks viciously. My magic surfaces, but before I unleash it, one of Lorcan's shadows grabs the creature by the throat. It shakes the demon once, snapping its neck—the bones protruding next to its jaw—before tossing it at the others.

“That’s the last one I will save you from. Remember, this batch of demons was sent by my brother. They will not back down.” Lorcan turns to face me from a block away, his arms crossed over his chest. *“Will you unleash your magic to save yourself? Or is it too much for your fucking pride to admit that you need help?”*

I shove my soaking hair out of my eyes. More demons are gathering around me to take the place of the demons now occupied with the corpse. A fearful sob passes my lips. My chest feels as though it's cracking open from the force of my terror.

“Wait!” I scream, sprinting after Lorcan.

The demons in the crowd speak over each other, muttering about how they will be rewarded for spilling my blood. The demons give chase, but it matters not when Lorcan sends a blast of shadow magic toward them, obliterating every demon within a mile. Their shrieks of pain and bodies thudding to the

earth echo in the resulting silence. Lorcan presses his fingertips under my chin, his extended claws pricking my skin.

“Close your mouth, baby. You don’t want to give me any ideas on using it here in this gore-covered street.”

I turn my widened gaze on him, but he’s already moving. I follow, his long legs eating up the ground too quickly for me to keep pace with him without jogging every couple of steps.

“Where are we going?”

His shoulders stiffen beneath his black shirt. “Somewhere safe,” he answers cryptically.

“How do you know it’s safe?”

“Because it is a place where the demons dare not tread,” he bites out.

“Why don’t they go there?”

Lorcan faces me and throws up his hands. “Are you capable of holding your tongue? You’re such a fucking nuisance. Why do you continue to question every single one of my motives after I just rescued you from no less than twenty demons?” He growls, baring his teeth below his mask.

The demon turns away sharply.

Fair enough. *For now.*

I have plenty of thoughts to keep me occupied that don’t require questioning him. I roll my eyes, pushing my heavy, wet hair over my shoulder.

The sidewalk ends, and Lorcan angles his steps until we are walking down the center of the road. I squint at the chipped, double yellow lines and follow their path with my gaze until the road curves out of sight in the distance.

The rain falls harder. The wind slaps the drops against my face, causing it to sting from each tiny assailant. We walk in silence for several miles.

Although he saved me from certain death in the Human Realm, I am now wholly at his mercy. The hope of getting back to repair the mirror diminishes the farther we travel away from it. I squint through the rain, unable to recognize my surroundings. Panic flares inside me again. My heart sinks as I pat my wet pockets. *I don't have any benzos. What the fuck am I going to do?*

The storm clears slightly, and I'm finally able to take in my surroundings. The lush forest of home has been replaced with a much darker forest. It seems deeper somehow, even though most of the trees have shed themselves for the season. Deep plum-colored leaves encircle their bases.

Goose bumps cover my skin, and dread skates down my spine. I trudge along with Lorcan, but the adrenaline has fled my system. Exhaustion weighs down on me, and the effort to pry my eyelids open with every blink keeps me on edge.

Maybe if I time it right, I can sneak off into the forest and find my way back to town.

A tree crashes to the ground somewhere in the distance, and I whip my head in its direction. Lorcan stares into a shadow just off the road, which quickly dissolves from sight under the weight of his gaze.

“These demons are even more dangerous than the ones you've seen in town. Their thirst for violence and destruction is unmatched. They hunger for it. In fact, they often feed on their own kind, if they get close enough to the edge of the forest. The forest demons use their own suffering as fuel, pitting themselves against each other regardless of the demon's hierarchy,” Lorcan explains and brushes a piece of hair behind my ear with a wisp of shadow.

I try to remain calm and casually step closer to him. My eyes dart from the trees to Lorcan, unease settling deep into my bones. I cover my obvious show of fright by distracting him with his favorite thing, more questions.

I groan, my shoulders slumping. “How much farther? I don’t understand why we need to hike the whole way. I’ve seen you travel through shadows.”

Lorcan stops suddenly and turns on his heels. I barely stop from colliding into him by instinctively shoving my hands into his chest. The fabric of his shirt clings to his broad, defined muscles, and one of his hard nipples presses against my palm. I attempt to pull my hands away, but he covers both of them with one of his. He stares at me, fury radiating from him.

He growls ferociously, then pins me to a nearby tree by the throat.

“The reason we can’t simply fucking appear at our destination is your fault. If you would quit being such a disobedient brat and use your shadows, as I have been suggesting for weeks, we could shadow-walk there.”

“How am I supposed to know how to shadow-walk with no practice?”

“You could have been practicing this entire time. Now, you are in a rather precarious situation and have no other choice than to cling to me.”

His body presses against the length of mine. I am intimately aware of his anatomy, the wet clothes clinging to his muscular body like a second skin. His breath ghosts my lips as we stare at each other, neither of us breaking the prolonged eye contact. Something shifts in his gaze, and his mouth parts slightly before he licks his lower lip. An involuntarily moan leaves me, and his eyes dilate in response.

A shadow replaces his hand, keeping me pinned to the tree by my neck. The unusual gray bark of the Shadow Realm tree is somehow soft and sharp at the same time as it scrapes against my cloth-covered back. Lorcan shoves his knee between my thighs and presses it firmly against my clit. My eyes practically roll back into my head, desire flooding my core. I sink my teeth into my lip as he grinds his knee against my pussy. A sharp sting registers

when he tugs my lip from between my teeth with his sharper ones. My eyes snap open, meeting his far-too-close stare through the holes in his mask.

“*Mine,*” he says into my mind, still holding me hostage between his partially shifted teeth. He continues to speak in my mind and drives my need higher as he rubs his knee on my clit at a maddingly slow pace. “*Do you know what you do to me, little witch?*” He retracts his razor-like teeth. “*There is not a moment that I am not absolutely consumed by lust for you.*”

He groans, and the evidence of said lust throbs against my hip as he practically fucks me with his knee, but it’s not enough. I need more. I’m so wet, my hot, slick arousal soaks through my rain-dampened panties.

“Every time I catch you biting this fucking lip...” He moans and nips the front of my throat. “I will bloody it for you and then smear your blood all over my cock as I fuck your face.”

I gasp when he rolls his erection against my hip. Lorcan’s eyes dart to my lips once more. Then, as if the temptation is too great to ignore, his lips press against mine. My pulse quickens as Lorcan braces my head between his palms, then rests his forearms against the tree, caging me in. He kisses me with a surprising gentleness I would never expect, and yet he’s dominating my mouth. His tongue skates across the seam of my lips, coaxing my mouth to open for him. I’m consumed by this man, and an unwelcome warmth blossoms in my chest.

I greet his tongue, sliding mine against his, then flick it against the roof of his mouth rhythmically. Lorcan growls into my mouth, and it is easily one of my new favorite sensations. My thoughts fade to nothing but the sensations he wrings from my body. I don’t need fantasies when I am with him. Lorcan is every fantasy I’ve ever dreamed, in real flesh and bone.

Lorcan is too seductive for his own good. How can I deny him when he’s

showing a rare glimpse of his true self? I want to hate him. No, I *do* hate him, but I crave any intimacy he will give me. I live for the moments of vulnerability he loathes to share.

He rests his mask-covered forehead against mine. Our breaths mingle as we breathe in the precious oxygen our kisses stole from us. Lorcan covers my mouth with his palm. My nostrils flare as I narrow my eyes on his lips, covered in my blood from the lacerations he inflicted. My clit pulses sharply. Turns out I like the sight of my blood on him too. But then he holds a finger to his lips.

“Shh, little witch. We are not alone.”

He whips his head to the right, a shadow diving into the thicket far too close to us, then dragging out a huge demon whose head appears to be decomposing. Lorcan keeps his body pressed against mine, his tattooed hands sliding down my sides to settle on my hips. Meanwhile, his shadow dangles the rotting creature far above the ground a few yards away.

“Did my brother send you?”

The demon squeals like a pig in response.

“Answer me, demon, or my shadows ripping you to shreds will be the least of your problems.” Lorcan’s eyes close, and he breathes in and out deeply before opening them again. “Did my brother order you to come after us?” Lorcan raises a shadow fashioned like a spear and hovers it between the demon’s wide, terrified eyes.

“Y-yes! Yes, my king! He crashed a party on the rooftop of the building I live in. Then he started making demands and ripped Amy to shreds right in front of me.” The demon hiccups, and a trail of snot drips from his nose.

“Interesting. Ezra was never one to waste time,” Lorcan says to himself. Then he turns his face toward mine before nuzzling my nose gently with his.

I blink my eyes rapidly. Did that just happen?

His attention returns to the captive demon. “You will send a message to my brother.”

“Okay. I m-mean, yes, sire.”

The shadow spear dissolves, and the demon sighs deeply. The calm only lasts a moment before the demon shrieks in agony. My eyes widen as the carnage ensues. A second shadow grips the creature’s arm and yanks, severing it from his body before dropping it to the ground carelessly.

“The only reason you are still breathing is to convey my message. Tell my brother he’s a pathetic asshole and that if he insists on using my demons against me, he will learn what a century of solitude truly feels like.” Lorcan grins, but it is anything but friendly. “Maybe if you’re lucky, Ezra will kill you before ripping you apart for failing him,” Lorcan states plainly. Then he tosses the demon so far into the forest with his shadow that I don’t hear him land.

“You just ripped an arm off that demon and then threw him into the woods.”

“Yes. Is there a problem you’d like to address, little killer?”

“Well, I... I guess not. I’m just trying to process how this is my life now.”

Lorcan chuckles and leans forward, his nose grazing the sensitive skin below my ear. He inhales deeply. His cock throbs against me. How is he still hard?

“Mmm, I wish I could soothe that ache for you, little one, but we cannot linger. As you just witnessed, you are still being hunted.”

Lorcan steps back from the tree and slides me down his body before releasing me. He adjusts his obscenely large dick, tucking it into the waistband of his slacks. His rain-soaked clothes mold his cut body.

My nipples pebble beneath my shirt, the hardened peaks poking the fabric. Lorcan's eyes sweep down my body leisurely before returning to my face. He smirks, turning to walk ahead of me. I swallow audibly, trying to keep my eyes off his ass. He's terrifying, yet I want him. I shouldn't, but I do.

TWENTY-EIGHT



Lorcan

The black train idles next to the platform. I push back my sleeve to check the time. The train is due to depart soon. Thank fuck. It's about time this day ended already.

I lean my chest against her back, the contact sending a wave of arousal through me. "*Watch,*" I whisper into her mind, then point a tattooed finger over her shoulder at the mirrored wall of the awning to her left. I travel through our bond and meld my mind with hers for a front-row seat. It's fascinating to watch her brain try to make sense of what she's seeing.

Evie watches the Human Realm version of the station through the mirror, the black train idling at the station. It looks mostly the same, except for the fresh coat of paint and the humans milling around it. Two people walk under the awning and sit on the wooden bench. I watch as their fingers link together, both leaning in closer to chat quietly.

Evie's brows pull together. She glances over her shoulder, her eyes widening as she stares at the station in the Shadow Realm, her gaze gliding over the empty bench. She whips her head to look back through the mirror, then slowly, she reaches her fingers toward it and presses her palm to the solid glass.

This is so fucking creepy, she thinks to herself.

I retreat to my own mind, letting her explore her new reality without interference. It can be chilling to see the world moving on without you, but for so long, all I've been able to do is watch.

Evie curls into a ball on the farthest end of the blue-leather sofa in the opulent train car. Her form lures my eyes to trace the outline of her curves as the soaked clothes draping her body leave nothing to the imagination. My little witch's skin is usually a gorgeous alabaster, perfect and ready for me to mark, but now the ashen color is stretching too tightly on her bones. I grind my molars together; she is not caring for herself, letting those fucking pills destroy her body, abusing them to cage her magic.

I tip my head back and stare at the ceiling with a deep sigh. Evie is finally in my domain, but instead of the relief I expected to feel, a heavy ball of anxiety forms in my gut. I turn my head to the side, still resting on the couch, to look at her.

She's already fast asleep, her breathing steady. Good, she needs the rest. I

lose myself in watching the rise and fall of her chest. Its hypnotic movements draw me into a place of calm I've only found with her. Who knew watching her sleep could be so cathartic but also maddeningly torturous?

I pillow my head with my hands, my elbows splaying out to the sides, and my thoughts drift to my brother Ezra. It's just like him to come in and turn a perfectly good stalking into a clusterfuck. There is no one in this life that I hate more than him. I curl my arms around my head and squeeze my eyes shut. A bead of sweat trickles down my spine, and my skin crawls. Godsdamn him. I finally have the key to my freedom, and Ezra wants to rip her from my fingers.

I bolt upright. No. He will not take her from me. No one will. I will bleed the life from her veins, then mine, before I allow that to happen. I will *always* follow her into the dark.

I groan, scrubbing my hand across my forehead. Why does it have to be her? She is everything I fucking despise. She's a witch, *and* her traitorous coven branded her my eternal enemy. Yet the temptation to spread her thighs wide and nail her to the couch with my cock seers through my veins. My head throbs, hovering on the cusp between a headache and migraine. I rub my temples and shake my head. Evie wouldn't last for more than a few seconds if I unleashed my true demonic nature on her. She's far too soft and delicate. Breakable.

I scooch closer to her and trail a claw down the back of her thigh. Her tiny body shudders and she moans lightly. The sound draws me to her blue-tinged lips. Damn, that shade is so attractive on Evie, but not when it isn't from my hand cutting off her airway.

I stand, then snag a soft, fluffy paisley blanket from the cabinet secured to the wall above the windows. The edges of the fabric snap quietly as I shake it

out, then float it atop her trembling body. The soft fibers brush against my fingers as I tuck the blanket in around her limbs and under her chin, ensuring no heat escapes. I grab another blanket for a pillow. My little witch nuzzles her cheek against my palm when I slide my hand under the side of her face to lift her head and place the pillow beneath it.

My heart seizes within its bone confines. I hold my breath and squeeze my eyes shut. Everything within me urges me to sever these feelings—to snap her fucking neck now and be done with it. Instead, I brush my knuckle along her cheekbone and bend to place a featherlight kiss on the tip of her nose. Her face scrunches adorably.

“Godsdamn,” I groan softly, then blow out a breath past my lips. My obsession with her has gone too fucking far, but my plans have not changed. They can’t. I will *not* remain stuck in this place for a moment longer than I have to. Through her, I’ve had another taste of the Human Realm, and I crave to reap destruction and chaos once more.

The image of Evie drenched in blood and moaning beneath me in her office flashes across my mind. My teeth sink into my lower lip to stop the grin from spreading across my face. There isn’t much left to do before she is fully corrupted. I look forward to it... to viewing the depraved masterpiece I’ve created.

What would it be like to drag her to Hell with me someday? She would look so lovely in its violet flames. I sigh deeply and stare out at the rain-soaked landscape. I’m not afraid to admit I’m homesick. There is a special place in my heart for Hell and the celebrations steeped in unimaginable sins, depravity, and violence. But when I return, blood will rain upon Hell’s inhabitants as I hunt every single creature who lifted a finger against me and aided my brothers and their vendetta.

My inner madness squeezes my mind in a vice. My skull explodes with pain as the pressure increases. I don't think my little witch would mind if I spilled a small bit of her blood. Maybe a pint? Just enough to ease the desperate ache clenching in my center.

No. I force the maddening thoughts into the back of my mind and set them aflame. Instead, euphoria cascades over me as I stab a claw into my wrist and drag it toward my elbow. "Fuuuck." I hiss at the pain but moan when the pleasure of my overflowing well of emotions releases. The coppery tinge of my blood seems to stick to the back of my throat as my cock swells.

I've seen her covered in blood more than once, but I wonder how fucking incredible would she look covered in *mine*.

I stand and pace in front of the sofa, the deep cut dripping gore to the carpeted floor. Evie snores once before settling back into a deep slumber. Why the hell is that so cute? Shit. These fucking *feelings* are taking over every atom in my body, and I loathe her for it.

I will claim her in every way possible, if only so no one else can have her. She can hate me at all she wants. In fact, I hope she does. It will only make me crave her more. I lift my arm, then tilt my head and watch the wound stitch itself together. I run my tongue along the gash, licking the remnants of my blood. The iron flavor coats my tongue, and my balls throb with need. I grip my length through my pants while fighting the temptation to jerk off and come all over my little witch while she sleeps.

Patience, Lorcan, I scold myself. I stretch my arms over my head, flattening my palms against the ceiling and loosening the residual soreness. Damn, every muscle aches. Rescuing my little witch, and the exhausting effort it took to make her keep walking to this goddamn train, has ruined me. I can easily fit the top of her skull in my large, tattooed hand.

It's been an exceedingly long time since I've had to walk any such distance. My lip curls, and a growl vibrates in my chest. Fucking disgusting, the king of demons being forced to lower to her level. Sure, I could've thrown her over my shoulder and shadow-walked us right to the doors of the manor, but what would Evie learn from that experience? My bodily discomforts aside, I endeavor to make her life as miserable as I possibly can. If trudging through puddles with demons shrieking all around her does so, then so be it.

Evie whimpers in her sleep, and her legs twitch, throwing off the blanket. I stoop to pick it up and wander back to her. My gaze roams her face. Her brows are drawn in, and her cheek twitches seemly at random. Mmm, a nightmare? I fight with myself on my best course of action. Do I soak in her beautifully distraught emotions playing across her face and body? Or do I walk into her nightmare and fuck her so hard, she comes in real life...

I exhale sharply through my nose. Fucking temptress.

I gently scoop her off the sofa and cradle her in my lap. I secure the blanket around her. The breath strangles in my lungs as her forehead smooths and she sighs, a small smile pulling at the corner of her lips. My jaw slackens. Did my touch soothe the terrors attacking her dreams?

I don't know how long I hold her sleeping form against my chest, but my fingers twitch, itching to do more. I slide the gray hair tie from her dark-chocolate locks and smooth my fingers along the damp tresses. I massage her scalp, then smooth a hand from the crown of her head down the length, spreading it out on the couch next to me.

The bubble of calm surrounding us pops as my shadows surface, begging for my attention. I sit forward, my hand curling around Evie's shoulder. Her lips graze my bicep as she hums contently.

One of my brows raises as I survey my surroundings. Nothing's changed.

There's not even a tingle of awareness. What made my magic react?

And then I feel it. Something prods me in the chest, and for a moment, I worry I'm smothering my little witch with my pecs. I sit back slowly and dart my gaze toward my lap. A laugh escapes me, then I reach a finger for the glittering shadow trailing from Evie's chest. It curls up my hand to my arm not wrapped around Evie and twines into my hair.

I smile. "*Hello to you too,*" I say, greeting her shadow in my mind.

Another tendril joins the first, this one twirling and playing in the air above her chest. My shadows converge on it, and my heart palpitates. Have I lost control of my magic? My shoulders sag and I blow out a deep breath, ruffling the hair that dropped into my eyes. I eye the pair of shadows as mine cocoons hers in an embrace, as if they are familiar with each other. My gaze narrows before darting at the witch and back at the shadows. They seem to pulse with magic, as if agreeing with my assessment.

My lips purse, then I sigh, breathing out heavily through my nose. I resume untangling the knots in Evie's mane as the shadows... cuddle?

Could it be that our magic is trying to send me a message? Just then, the shadows grow to twice their size and pulse rapidly. I cover Evie protectively with my chest and growl, but the shadows shrink back to their previous size as a shimmer much like a heat wave threads through Evie's tattoos. Something within me tugs outward from my navel. The shadow "couple"—I roll my eyes internally—makes room but stays close, twirling through her hair gently. The translucent magic coating my little witch's skin vibrates softly.

It takes me a moment to understand what it is trying to communicate with me. Evie's death magic. My eyes widen, and a grin covers my bearded face. "*Hello, little death,*" I purr in my mind. The vibrations come on faster, and

Evie twitches but doesn't awaken. It has been too long since I've felt the presence of death magic outside of its host.

I hold an open palm faceup over her abdomen and unsheathe my claws. Most of the death magic surges to my palm, condensing into a shimmering globe not unlike the type seers use to gaze into time itself. The heavy weight of the small globe settles onto my hand, and I curl my fingers around it, my claws slightly digging into the magic. Her death magic vibrates intensely for a few seconds before settling, as if my claws tickled it.

I raise the magic to eye level and caress the spectacular magic with my thumb, making sure to scrape my claw against it. *"Hmm, you and I need to have a chat. You too."* I narrow my eyes at Evie's shadow, now buried within mine. For fuck's sake, I am talking to her magic as if it were a baby animal. This witch is making me soft.

I straighten my spine and level a glare on all the magic present, mine included. *"This witch is not to be fucked with,"* I say, nodding at Evie. I soften my gaze. *"I understand that you're hurt. She has kept you in chains. It is easy to resent someone who holds the keys to your cage. I know all too well how you feel."*

Her magic vibrates slowly, and her shadow separates from mine to curl around my hand and the death magic. My shadows fade to trace the tattoos on my skin, but they don't recede entirely.

I run my fingers down Evie's shoulder and onto her arm, caressing her softly. I sigh and shrug my shoulders. *"Yes, I'm a fucking hypocrite, but I'm ordering you both to behave. The more you work with our witch, the more you will be released."* I wince when her shadow squeezes my fingers and my hand vibrates so violently, I almost drop the globe of magic. *"Be easy, little*

monsters,” I coo. *“Let’s face it. You need to learn how to harness your strength, and so does Evie. I need you to be good.”*

One of my shadows floats to my hand and covers it entirely, obscuring the extremity from my tattooed wrist down, before returning to my skin. I’ll take that as a sign of support.

“I dig the claw of my thumb into the globe, then lift my fingers and bring each down from my index to pinky finger rhythmically.” My little witch’s shadow pulses happily, and the death magic emits a steady hum of vibration. *“If everything goes according to plan, with my help, you will be free to roam within her.”* I bring the magic closer to my face. *“But don’t think for a moment that if you lash out and maim or kill someone against her will, she will ever unlock your cage again.”*

The death magic ceases vibrating and takes on a gray hue for a moment before it clears into a fog and seeps back into Evie’s skin. Her shadow darts to my tattoos, blending into the shadow ink for a moment before wrapping around my neck loosely. It tugs on my ear, and a loud laugh escapes me as it vanishes into Evie’s body. Playful little shit.

Evie stirs with a moan, and I continue petting her hair. Slowly, her hazel eyes blink open. She peeks at me before her eyes widen, and she scrambles off of my lap to the other end of the couch. My little witch pants as she catches her breath, then pulls her knees to her chest. She curls into herself like a frightened baby bunny.

Evie looks out the window until the train halts at the station. The rain has finally stopped, and few clouds remain in the sky. The sun shines on the gray tree trunks of the forest, igniting them with light.

Tears well in my little witch’s eyes. I scoff, then grab the pack of cigarettes and lighter from the counter over the mini bar. *“You should be thanking me,”*

I state and light the tip of my cigarette, the violet flame eating away at the paper immediately. I inhale the smoke slowly, enjoying the fuck out of the naked hunger on Evie's face. The feeling is mutual, but for different reasons. A smirk tips the corner of my lips, then I tilt my head back and release the smoke from my lungs toward the ceiling.

My gaze finds her again, and she licks her gorgeous lips. I know the effect I have on her all too well, and I see no reason not to use that to my advantage. The smoke dances seductively as I exhale it from my nostrils.

“Can I have one?”

I snort, then struggle to keep my expression blank. “No,” I reply flatly.

“Why not?”

“You haven't earned it, witch. Although...” I stretch my arms along the back of the opposing sofa. “I'd love to watch you wrap your pretty lips around something else.”

Every emotion plays across her face.

I raise my brow and lean forward, resting my elbows on my spread thighs. “But if you're a good girl, I may grant you a smoke as a reward.”

Evie groans and flops flat on her back, her arm dangling off the sofa. I stand and saunter to my little witch. I purse my lips around my cigarette, the tip flaring bright purple. I lean over her and blow smoke directly into her face. Her nose scrunches, and I swear I feel her glare in my balls. I point the cigarette at her. “You're welcome.”

“Ugh! You're such an asshole.”

“So I've been told,” I call as I snag the blanket and exit the train.

Evie stomps across the platform, her upper lip slightly poking out in a cute pout. I slip the blanket over her shoulders and grind the stub of my cigarette beneath my boot.

“I’d like to get there before nightfall. Keep moving,” I order.

We walk another two or three miles, and I find myself drastically slowing my steps so I don’t leave Evie behind. The gravel drive cuts through the woods a few yards ahead. Fucking finally. I sigh, the tension melting from my shoulders. I place a hand on the small of Evie’s back and lead her down the winding driveway. Dense trees outline the path until we emerge in a small clearing.

“Welcome to the manor.”

“Lorcan, you said no other demons will come here, right? It’s safe?”

“Demons know better than to come here, but it doesn’t mean you’re safe.”

TWENTY-NINE



Evie

Clouds like blots of ink shroud the sky into a thick fog of gray and black, pelts of rain splashing around us. Lorcan pulls in a drag of his cigarette, and it takes me everything not to wrestle it from his fingers.

I slide my gaze from him to the mansion, my jaw slacking as I peer beyond its tall walls to the grounds beyond, surrounded by fir trees. The weathered, gray-bricked building stands nestled against the forest, as if nature has embraced it as her own. Ivy is woven through the bricks, sprawling its leaves over the buttresses of the large building.

Long, pointed arches reach toward the stormy sky, their spires disappearing into the thick fog hanging over the manor. Rainwater trickles from the open mouths of gargoyle statues built into the stone.

Thick raindrops hammer against the stone-mullioned windows, and I follow Lorcan through the wrought-iron gates. Gravel, twigs, and dirt crunch underfoot until we reach the doors, passing a crumbling fountain filled with green water and floating moss. What was once beautiful has slowly succumbed to decay.

Straight lines dominate the manor, enhancing the Gothic architecture. My heart skips a beat as we walk underneath the entryway. Iron bars point down over the double, arched wooden doors in warning. A heavy knocker, chiseled to appear as a serpent, stares at me as if it was once alive, now turned to stone.

I swallow thickly, and the doors open. Lorcan steps inside, leaving wet boot prints against the dark-wood boards. With a deep inhale, I step inside, breathing in the freshly polished wood and smoky incense.

My eyes are drawn to the ribbed-vault ceiling and exposed beams. I cough, spluttering, when dust hits the back of my throat, and the sound bounces and echoes off the walls.

Filtering the gray light, heavy silver-and-black drapes hang over the glass with stone frames inlaid into the window. I glide my fingers along an aged half-moon table with ornate designs covering the glossy top. On it, a gold candelabra holds three white candles, the wicks blackened. I take a moment to look around the foyer and eye a velvet-covered window seat and black cushions. On the ledge in front of it, dried floral arrangements sit in a glass vase. It's the perfect reading spot.

Rain slashes against the building, beating the walls and glass. Thunder

rumbles above, but the building is a fortress, giving the illusion of impenetrability.

Lorcan strides toward the grand staircase, and I follow, my footsteps muffled by the ornate, patterned rug finished in a dusky blue. I watch after him, and light flickers from the dark-metal chandelier hanging from a beam. The ornate wallpaper of the walls behind him, with vaulted and spiraled designs, is washed with yellow-and-orange hues from candlelit wall sconces.

I pause when I spot a tapestry woven in grays, deep purples, and silver, the threads depicting ancient scenes, where humans hold onto tall, demonic figures, their faces warped.

Lorcan spots me looking and tilts his head, admiring the art. “I miss home.”

My nose scrunches. Purple flames lick the humans, and I realize it’s illustrating Hell. “Yeah.” I transfix on the designs, but the closer I look, the more disturbing it gets. I climb the steps behind him, my shoes hitting the marble, flecked with silver and purple. “It’s beautiful,” I mumble aloud, not to anyone in particular.

Lorcan pauses, then keeps striding upward, until we reach a long walkway above the entirety of the entrance. I grab the banister and peer over the edge, hyperaware that if he pushed me from here, I’d definitely die. Can I even die in the Shadow Realm?

“Enough, witch,” he says, pulling my attention to his back as he makes his way to a door. “Stop thinking about your death.”

“Stop listening to my thoughts then,” I snap, my skin crawling as nicotine and benzo withdrawals begin. I flex my fingers, curling them inward to my palms and digging the tips into my skin. Worries for Gomez overwhelm my thoughts, but I have to believe he’s okay.

He’s my familiar, so I’d have felt if he died, but no pain or heartache has

penetrated my body yet. Then there's Rosa. She would be arriving to the apartment in the morning to collect Gomez. What will she find?

"They're fine," Lorcan snaps, and I scowl at the back of his head. "Gomez got free."

"How the fuck would you know that?"

He doesn't answer, and I shake my head.

"We have to find a way back."

He turns on his heel, the mask blocking his expression, but the blackness swirling with the pastel green in his eyes is enough to tell me I'm pushing him too far. I may like walking on the darker side, but I'm not suicidal. "Listen, witch," he spits, the veins bulging from his fists. "The only way out is to fix that mirror. Unfortunately..." He closes the distance between us. "That means I need you to actually use your powers to do something about it. It's your family's mirror, and it was made from your blood." He grabs my wrist, his thumb pressing against my artery.

My stomach dips and everything inside tells me to run.

Before I can answer, Lorcan sweeps me into his arms as if I weigh nothing, knocking the air from my lungs.

"What the... Put me down." I punch his shoulder, but he doesn't flinch. My fingers throb, but I refuse to show that hitting his body caused *me* pain.

He shushes me, and I grind my teeth.

"What?" I whisper as his eyes darken, and a muscle feathers in his jaw.

His grip on me tightens. "Ezra," he says with a hiss, baring his teeth.

"He's here?" I ask, whipping my head around.

A second hiss sounds. This time, the sound ends with a rattle. I look down at Lorcan's feet, and my heart palpitates. A long, winding black snake curls

around one of his heavy boots, then a second, smaller snake with a coral pattern on its back slithers along the dark-stained, wood floor.

I'm assuming the whole "demons won't come here" doesn't apply to Lorcan's brother, who by his account is an angel, although I saw through the facade. The fact that he said Lorcan is a fallen angel almost makes me laugh, if I weren't so damned depressed. An image forms in my mind of Lorcan with long, feathery wings, and he scoffs.

"Don't mistake me with angels," he warns, then mutters something in Latin.

I attempt to block him from reading my thoughts. I need to find the materials to make another necklace, to keep him out of my head.

The snakes hiss, and I watch as smoke pillars from their now-sizzling scales, and the snakes crumple into embers and ash. Lorcan shakes the soot from his boot and mutters something unintelligible under his breath.

Slowly, he places me down, and I find my footing. "He sent snakes?" I ask, since he's given me zero information on what happened.

"They're from Hell," he says casually, as if that isn't insane. "If one bit you, you'd be dead."

I press my lips together and nod slowly. Great. There's just threats at all angles. "So, Ezra wants me dead."

He flinches when I say his brother's name, as if he hates the sound of it on my tongue, he but quickly composes himself. "Yes."

"Why?"

"I'm done answering questions. All that matters now is that we are trapped here with him. I'm bound to this realm by blood, and you by your family's heirloom mirror. Neither of us can leave." He regains his composure, but I stare at the untamed power behind his eyes. He towers over me, and I cross my arms over my chest. I need a cigarette. I need something... Being trapped

here without Gomez and being worried about Rosa is hell enough without him keeping me from my addiction. My magic has never felt more dangerous. It's bursting at the seams, and I fear if I don't have something to keep it trapped inside, then I'll explode, just like my victims.

Without thinking too much into it, to keep him from my thoughts of what will happen next, I lean in. His lust is his only weakness, and I can't help but place my hand against his rock-hard chest. His heartrate races under my touch, and for the first time since being here, I feel powerful.

Surprise glistens in his eyes, and my lips curve slightly at the corners. The blackness in his irises dissipates, and I lean closer, breathing in his evocative smoky scent, mixed with nutmeg and something citrusy. His muscles tense and I tiptoe up, then slide my fingers into his pocket. His lips part, and I'm closer to his mask, wanting desperately to know what he hides underneath.

Then I feel them, the tips of his cigarettes. I grab the packet, placing my other hand to the bulge in his pants at the same time. A low growl reverberates in his throat, his cock twitching under the caress of my fingers.

I quickly pull back, cigarettes and lighter in my hand, feeling victorious. When I look back at him, his stormy glare bores into mine, and my breath catches in my throat.

THIRTY



Evie

“Run.”

His warning surges adrenaline through my veins like liquid fire. I waste no time and turn on my heel. Excitement mixed with terror pushes me to run faster. I chase shadows from flickering candles on the walls, down the cold, empty corridors of the manor.

Painted eyes from portraits follow me as I turn a corner, almost catching my foot against a wooden bench decorated with velvet cushions. My breaths come out in short bursts as I grip the stone wall.

I tighten my grip on the cigarettes. His anger is palpable as echoes of his footsteps bounce off the walls. My heart pounds against my ribcage, and blood rushes to my ears.

Shit.

He can only be one corridor behind me. I shouldn't have seduced him to get them, but I can't let him keep winning.

Shadows ripple around me, and I take off again. My bare feet hit the ancient stone, and I fling open a door.

His voice slices into my mind, and my brain numbs. *"When I find you, I'll show you true pain."*

I pull my bottom lip between my teeth, biting down hard. *"You have to catch me first."* What the fuck am I doing? I bite my lip, surprised at the wide grin curving my lips. My hair clings to my cheek as I whip my head around and spot his shadows creeping closer, like a dense fog threatening to consume me entirely.

Panic jolts me and I keep going, the high better than any drug. The hairs on the back of my neck stand erect as a whisper caresses the top of my ear. I stop running and look behind me. Fingers made of smoke and darkness materialize from the shadows and slide along the curve of my breast.

My stomach flips as I close my eyes to the touch of his shadows. My eyelids flutter open, and Lorcan appears at the end of the corridor, the sides of his unbuttoned shirt blowing outward from him when he walks. A playful, dangerous grin curls his lips. I can't help but stare at the belt hanging at his side. His fist squeezes around the leather. His predatory eyes find mine, and low growl resonates as he marches the distance between us. My heart races, and I rush through a door.

His footsteps are closer. He's running now.

I fall inside the room just as his fingers slide through my hair, then pull me backward and into the doorway. He lets go and pulls his hand back over the threshold.

I look around, my lips parting. It's a chapel. A fucking chapel, even in the Shadow Realm. A smirk plays on my lips as I watch him in the doorway. I take slow strides backward, toward the confessional. I pull a cigarette from the packet and grab the lighter.

His green eyes pin me from across the room, and purple light from a dimly lit candle flickers over his angular features and chiseled jawline. I press my back against the box. The smooth mahogany cools my skin. He can't come in, I realize.

I reach with my spare hand and graze my fingers atop the handle, disturbing a cobweb that snaps and floats to the ground.

Eventually I'll have to leave and he'll punish me, but the twitch in his eye and anger settled into his features brings me far too much pleasure. I inhale the first drag of smoke and hold it in my lungs. The panic in my bones eases, and I close my eyes for a second. Until now, he's been in control. But he can't come in here, and the idea of taunting from behind enemy lines titillates my every thought.

His uneven breaths set me on edge, and my eyes light up. He tilts his head, his fingers a chokehold on that belt. "Get out of there, now," he commands, his darkening stare fixated on me.

I bite my lip, enjoying that his gaze is drawn to my mouth. "What's the matter?" I ask, catching my breath. "Can't the big, bad demon come in here?" I take in a second inhale of the cigarette and blow a cloud of smoke in his direction.

His jaw tenses, and I have to stop myself from grinning. My heart balloons

with victory. I. Fucking. Won.

“Don’t fuck with me, Evie,” he warns, and I savor the way my name sounds on his lips. “Get the fuck out of there now, or I will make you.”

“Maybe I want to pray.”

His eyelids flicker.

“Even in here,” I say to get a rise out of him, “I can still reach God.”

His shadows fill the areas around him, as if they’re rippling out from him in a thick smoke, and my smile drops. “Do you truly think me so weak,” he spits, his tone thick with rage, and his shadows slide into the chapel.

My eyes widen and I jolt back, opening the door to the confessional box.

I barely slam it shut when his shadows reach the door. I pull against the handle, white-knuckling the doorknob. My fingers slide around the brass, but the door swings open anyway. The cigarette tumbles from my fingers, showering embers over the ground. I clamber to put it out with my foot while fighting to hold the door.

Fingers grasp my ankles and wrists, then splay me against the bench inside. My magic comes out, but his shadows smother it before I can react.

A shadow slides between my legs, licking up against my lace panties beneath my skirt. Pressure builds in the bottom of my stomach, and my fingers uncurl.

His voice pierces through me. “*This is what you get for playing games, witch.*” His shadow binds dissipate, and I look out of the confessional doorway at Lorcan. He steps inside and rolls his shoulders.

I shrink back against the wood paneling, as if it can somehow save me. He closes the distance between us, towering in the doorway of the confessional.

Before I can take in my next breath, his hand is around my throat, pressing against the arteries on the sides of my neck.

Lightheadedness takes over, and my mouth falls open. His breath hisses against my earlobe.

“I spent centuries in Hell.” His grip tightens. “I welcome the pain of being on holy ground,” he growls. “Do you still want your God, witch?”

I close my eyes in response, and he eases the pressure on my throat, allowing me a few gulps of precious oxygen. My brain fuzzes, and I try to squirm free. “I’ll take Him over you.”

My head slams against the back panel, and his large hand squeezes tighter. He’s above me, his greedy stare sliding over my figure. “Stop pretending you are good,” he growls, his lips forming a hard line. “You *are* darkness, little killer. Now let your shadows out to play before I fuck them out of you.”

My magic purrs with his, tingling as if it wants to be let out to play. I keep it inside. He already smothered my shadows once. Or maybe he didn’t, and my magic just didn’t want to stop him before.

He releases his grip and takes a step back. The black candles in the chapel flicker and a couple blow out, smoke spiraling above them. He forces me onto my stomach against the bench and slides the belt around my throat.

The cold buckle digs into my skin, but he buckles it, collaring me like a pet and holding onto the strap so he can choke me at any moment. When I try to push away from him, the leather tightens enough to where it’s uncomfortable. He forces me onto my knees and stands over me. I look at his tattooed abs, then up at him. He smirks, in control again, and I *almost* despise him for it.

“If you’re going to force me in here,” he says, his eyes a darker color than I’ve ever seen. “Then I will make you feel the same pain.”

My stomach lurches. “Fuck you.”

His dimple deepens. “Strip,” he commands, holding the strap of the belt as if I’m a fucking dog. “Now.”

“No.”

My knees scrape against the stone, and the skirt of my black dress billows out around me. His shadows slide down me, caressing the fabric. “You only worship me, Evie. You belong to me. If you want to smoke, if you want anything, then you will fucking earn it.” His shadows slice through my dress, tearing the lace to shreds. Pieces slip down my skin, forming piles around my knees and legs. “You. Are. Mine.”

My lips part. His words reach somewhere deep, nestling in my chest. But with him, I’m a monster.

He kneels, his nose mere inches from mine. He averts his gaze to my hair, sliding his fingers through the silky strands. “Even your hair is the color of my shadows.”

My breath catches, and he lets my hair fall back over my chest.

“I am not yours,” I reply, hating that his comment evoked butterflies. Fucking butterflies. He’s the thing nightmares are made from. He stalked me, lied, and manipulated. He killed Jay and kidnapped me. I hate him to the depth of my bones, yet I can’t help but draw closer to his lips. Even his smell intoxicates me. I breathe in the musky, woody notes lingering on his hair and can’t help but imagine running my hands through his tousled waves.

He smirks as if sensing my every thought, making me despise him more. “We’ll fucking see.” Shadows bind my wrists, and he leans over, his eyes alight with menace. Everything in them reminds me of a psychopath, so why do I want them to soften when he looks at me?

He tugs the belt until each breath is a struggle.

His shadows pierce into my breast, pricking through my skin. I scream, and he chuckles darkly. I manage to look down. Ink trickles over my chest in

thick, hot drips. I clench my teeth, the burning sensation the same as when my tattoos grow.

Panic widens my eyes. The letter M appears on the top of my right breast.

“Stop,” I beg, but he presses his palm to my lips, muffling any protest. I realize he’s tattooing me with his shadows, and his bedroom eyes are locked onto mine the entire time.

Less than a minute later, the burning on my chest dissolves, and the ink disappears with his shadows.

He leans down to admire the work of his shadows. His mouth unfurls into a sadistic smirk, and I look down at the tattoo. *Mine*. It’s the second marking, branding me forever. Just like the roses showing I’m a witch.

My body is a tapestry of both of my masters, death magic and now *him*.

I wet my lips and stare at him. Untapped power swirls behind those green eyes spilling with evil. He presses his thumb against the fleshy inside of my lip and drags it down. “You’re bleeding,” he says breathily, then presses his fingers against my nipple, using the blood to moisten my hard peak. He twists the flesh, coaxing a moan from me.

“Good girl.” He pinches harder, eliciting a second, louder moan. He shrugs his pants down, pulling out his length in his free hand. He squeezes the tattoo he just permanently marked from shadows, and I yelp, coating his palm and fingers in blood.

My eyes roll back as the residual pain from the tattoo mixes with pleasure. When I find him in my haze, he’s spreading my blood over the throbbing head of his cock.

“Oh, God.”

Anger flashes in his expression, and the room seems to heat a few degrees. “The next time you scream for God,” he warns, “I’ll fuck you until you forget

all names but mine.”

Challenge threads in his stare and I smirk, just a little.

He tilts my chin with his thumb and brings his enormous dick to my lips. “Now, give me that pretty pout.”

I’m not even sure how I’d fit all that in my mouth.

The fear in my eyes only excites him. My shadows dance, and my wetness soaks through my panties. The pain over my breast tips me closer to the edge of an orgasm. He drags the tip along my lips and fists my hair. I glide my tongue over the glistening pre-cum and blood, and my clit throbs.

I close my lips around him, tasting my blood against my tongue. He’s definitely too big for my mouth.

Slowly I trace my tongue down his shaft, alternating between gentle licks and soft sucks. He fists my hair, then injects himself to the back of my throat. I gag against the head, and he groans. His shaft throbs in my mouth.

“That’s my girl,” he says, and I suck harder, as an innate desire to please him fills me up.

His body writhes under my touch, and a long, low moan escapes his lips. He guides each movement, pushing himself deeper into my mouth, as he fucks my face.

He thrusts his hips with reckless abandon, and I moan against his length as wetness drips between my legs. The vibration shooting up his shaft pulls a second moan from him, and my body pulses with energy.

“Fuck, Evie. I can smell your arousal.”

My shadows curl out from my chest and stomach and wrap around him, pulling him deeper. Shock widens my eyes.

“You can’t hurt me, Evie. Let it all out,” he orders huskily, sensing my knee-jerk reaction to suppress them.

I let them out, and they explode around us. The candles blow out, submitting us to darkness. The wood panels of the confessional shatters, but he keeps me upright. Splinters dig into my skin, but the pain only excites me further.

“What a good filthy slut you are.”

The room seems to quake, the stone beneath us shuddering as our magic fuses. Anticipation rises inside me, lifting me to new heights. He inhales sharply, pressing deeper. Saliva covers every inch of his shaft, and he holds the tip at the back of my throat for a few seconds, moaning and quivering.

Oh God.

He growls, pulling on my hair. “*God can’t reach you here, killer.*”

My shadows drape over him, their purring filling the silence. He closes his eyes as sparks ignite in the wake of his touch. I can feel the strength in his deep grunts as he pushes his hips toward me with each movement.

I gag again.

“I know you can take it, witch. Your tongue feels incredible.”

I close my eyes and focus on the feeling of him inside me, his movements becoming more forceful. My throat muscles pulsate around him, and I sink deeper with each thrust of his dick.

“You have no idea what you’re doing to me.”

A surge of sparks shoot down my spine and out to my toes. I want him to tell me that again. I want to hear how much my mouth is affecting him.

His moans reverberate through the room and into my ears. His eyes shut, and his breath hitches as I take him to the edge. As he fucks my face faster, his lips muffle his moan, and my thighs clamp together.

He lets out a long groan, and his hips buck up against me. His hands tighten around my head, holding me without air. My lightheadedness adds to the

intensity as I increase the speed of my motions, taking him deeper and faster, unable to breathe.

“Good. Fucking. Girl,” he says breathlessly, grunts in between his words.

As he thrusts, his body tenses until he quakes with release. He releases a deep roar and loses all control.

I drink his cum, gulping as it pours down my throat. I keep swallowing, teasing out every shudder, but there is so much cum. The remainder of his release spills over my lips, then drips from my chin onto my breasts.

The last pulses throb in my mouth as I softly suck, his pleasure feeding mine. He looks down at me, his pupils dilating as he drinks me in with his bedroom eyes. He cups my cheeks, staring straight into my soul as if nothing around us exists. My reflection in his stare startles me. My eyes are pure black.

“Look at you,” he says as the shadows devour every pulse of desire leaking from my body, and smeared blood begins to dry atop my chest. “You’re beautiful.” He grazes a finger along the tattoo on my breast and groans appreciatively. “Now everyone will know you belong to me. Now turn onto your stomach. I’m not done with you yet.”

He pulls a cigarette from the packet, somehow still intact, and lights it, the cherry glowing purple in the dim room. I watch as the smoke curls into his mouth, then he leans down, and I close my eyes. He kisses me, and smoke dances from his mouth to mine. I inhale, and he grips my arm before pulling away.

I squeeze my eyes shut, feeling the darkness leaking from me. Everything is carnage around us. The chapel is blown to pieces, a symbol of how far I have fallen. Perhaps it’s better that I never return from this realm. Here, Rosa, Gomez, and any innocents are safe from me.

I'm a monster.

Lorcan tilts my chin, his fingers squeezing the skin between them. He looks into my eyes as if he can sense every dark thought. But unlike the others, he doesn't see a monster. He sees something beautiful, and that's somehow more terrifying.

THIRTY-ONE



Lorcan

My hair ruffles as a gust of winds rips through the open windows of my bedroom. The plum curtains billow out into the room before settling into place again. I gaze out the window to the thick pine forest below, resting my bare foot against the stone sill.

Angry footsteps sound from the hallway, then my door bursts open, and a sexy but highly infuriated witch graces my presence. Perhaps leaving her in the chapel alone wasn't the best idea, but she needed time with her shadows.

Embracing one's inner evil is a solo activity, and now that her magic has been set free, she's fully planted on the darker side.

She raises her chin and stomps in my direction. Evie stops by my side and levels her searing gaze on me. Fuck, she has such pretty eyes. They're even more beautiful with their tint of blackness.

"Where is my room?" she snaps, placing her hands on her hips. Her lengthy dark chocolate locks blow into her face, ruining the mean-girl vibe she was putting out. "Ugh. This mansion—"

"Manor."

She ignores the correction. "Is ridiculous. I keep getting lost. I just want to sleep, and you left me there." She balls her fists, and I sigh.

I grab the pack of cigarettes from my pocket and hand her one. Her shoulders slump, but she pulls it to her lips.

Her hair flies into her face again, just before she can light it. "Goddamn it."

I slip the gray hair tie from her wrist and motion for her turn around. Her brows pinch together, but she turns anyway. Since letting out her powers, our bond has cemented. Her magic fused with mine, and soon she'll be ready. Once the mirror is fixed, or another made, then I can execute my plan. I tilt my head. It's ironic how the only person I have come close to liking is the one I need to sacrifice for my freedom.

No matter. I've waited too long to let anything get in my way. Even her.

Still, I can enjoy the time until then.

With gentle fingers, I pull her hair back. Evie slowly turns to face me. The corners of her mouth tip down, and her lower lip pokes out. She lifts her gaze to me and her expression clears, her former annoyance returning. "About my room?"

I slip my hands into my pockets, careful to keep my expression cloaked

with boredom behind my mask instead of the emotion I can't place burning in my chest. "You don't have one."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You share my room."

Evie throws her arms into the air. "What? No. First you tattoo me." She yanks at her shirt, pulling the neckline down and displaying the swell of her mouthwatering breast. "And now you deny me some personal space? Where's the human decency?"

I groan, and I can't help but palm the erection tenting my pants as I stare at the tattoo. "My mark looks delectable on you. Next time I fuck your face, remind me to spear cum all over your gorgeous tits too. As far as human decency? You seem to have forgotten something, little one." I wrap my shadows around her waist and pull her flush against my chest. "I'm not human," I say, reminding her in a singsong voice.

"Demon."

"Witch."

Her shadows slip from her chest and join my shadows, and they curl around us. Evie's eyes narrow at her magic's display. "Fuck you."

I smirk. "Gladly."

She lights the cigarette and pulls in a deep inhale, all the while fixating her glare on me. "There are so many rooms here. I can have one."

"You do not make the demands here," I snap back. The idea of her going off on her own, where my brother can get to her, sends sweat beading on my forehead. "You will stay in my bedroom. There is no other option." My upper lip scrunches up, and my gaze tracks to the vaulted ceiling.

"Have you found out anything about Gomez yet?" she asks and grinds her teeth. The cigarette calms her, but I can sense the withdrawals from those

pills raising her anxiety to new levels.

“He is safe” is all I say, but I don’t know if he is. Saying it calms her, and I can’t have her panicking. She must think I have some ability to see into her apartment from here.

Our shadows cinch tighter around us, as if they enjoy the friction too. I shake my head. She does not deserve my godsdamn comfort, yet I pull her closer to me as she shivers against the cold.

Evie presses her palms against my pecs and shoves. I will my shadows to cooperate and allow us to separate. She closes her eyes for a moment, her tiny fists tightly squeezed by her sides. Evie opens her eyes, and if I were a weaker being, I would be frightened by the depths of darkness within them.

“The bed is yours,” I say, my voice so gravelly, it sounds like I swallowed a stone. “Stay here. Do not wander the manor without me.”

I pull away from the embrace. My molars grind together. I fucking hate how good it feels to hold her. Quickly, I give her my back, then step into the hall and lock the door behind me.

I flinch as a stab of guilt lacerates me. Maybe I’ve been too harsh on her. Evie has only been in the Shadow Realm for a day. She’s left behind everything she knows for an entirely new reality. She didn’t ask to come here, but I would have stolen her away eventually either way.

Being honest with myself is not a game I often play. Most days it feels as though I’m drowning in a swamp. The thick muck surrounds me as air bleeds from my lungs, but no matter how hard I try, I cannot reach the surface.

I desire her. *All* of her. Yet loathing surrounds my every thought of her. It’s difficult to think rationally about her when I know I have to sacrifice her to this realm and take away her freedom so I can have mine.

If I continue bashing my head into the wall to rid myself of her addictive

touch, I will only end up with a cracked skull. And even that won't kill me. I roll my eyes at myself, but my mad thoughts are too close to the surface for comfort.

She is my sacrifice for my freedom, and I've never understood the word more.

Unless my brother gets to her first.

This is the closest Ezra and I have physically been to each other in a decade. And before that, well, it's not like we were ever mentally close either. He is responsible for much of my misery. It may not have been his idea to cage me, drain my magic, and allow my bones to wither in my husk like skin... but he didn't stop it either.

Ezra thinks he can slither into my realm and threaten us? Never. I do not know what his or my other brothers' end game is, but the next time my eyes land on any of them, I will break each and every one of their necks.

I remind myself that Ezra houses the same magic I do, and even though he isn't as strong, he's still a huge threat.

Searing hatred blackens the edge of my vision. I close my eyes, breathing in and out deeply while attempting to rein in the madness of my blood-soaked demands. My demonic nature feeds forcefully into my mind. It squeezes on my brain rhythmically, and I fear if I give in, by even an inch, I will defile my little witch with my claws and hang her above the mantle like a trophy.

I refuse to ride shotgun in the back of my mind, unable to control the weakness my madness has always been. I cannot protect her if I allow myself to give in to the lunacy. Plus, if she ends up as a corpse, I'll be trapped in the Shadow Realm for eternity.

I bite my lower lip, my razor-sharp teeth piercing through the tender flesh as my out-of-control emotions drive part of my mind and body. I need time to

plan how to tackle Ezra, the conniving bastard.

Irrational panic surges through my blood. Fuck, I let her walk off unprotected, even after the godsdamn snakes. I scramble to find the bond between us, then grab it and race into her mind. I sigh, the bubble of anxiety in my chest deflating. She's sleeping, for once almost peaceful, and in my bed as she was told. So she does know how to do what she's told.

Her mind is quiet with a thankfully dreamless slumber. I won't enter her head tonight. I can't get sucked into a delicious nightmare or sexual fantasy right now. I must prepare for my brother.

THIRTY-TWO



Lorcan

I lie back on the gray pillows of the guest bed and stretch my legs, groaning. There's no sign of Ezra anywhere in the perimeter. I can't even sense his magic. Wherever he is in the Shadow Realm, he's staying out of sight.

He should have more sense than to come here. I just need to wait for Evie to find the hidden pages of instructions so she can fix the mirror, and to practice using her magic for the spell.

Her great-aunt trapped the spell in one of her grimoires, ensuring it's only revealed to a Fallenmoore witch. I'm surprised they didn't smash the mirror

once trapping me inside, but if my brothers were involved, which I highly suspect they were, then they wouldn't want to break that connection forever. No, they loved control too much for that—especially Ezra.

I shake my head. I only hope the spell is in the grimoire in the library and not the one hidden in a drawer in the spare bedroom. In there, the detailing of my relationship with her great-aunt fills several pages. If Evie finds out, she'll never let me touch her. She won't believe that I crave her more than any witch I've encountered, and that my attraction to her has nothing to do with the likeness of her great-aunt.

I sigh, my body relaxing deeper against the mattress. I need to tread lightly if I wish to succeed in ridding myself of this realm forever. Fuck, I cannot wait to strike the match and watch it implode.

Evie is not to be underestimated. If I push too hard too fast, she'll shut down everything that is brewing between us. We both need space to sort shit out within ourselves. "Hence why I am in the guest room and not balls deep inside my little witch right now," I grumble.

But before I can feed my constant need for her again, I must see about the whereabouts of her bat. If I don't, it'll be sure to bite me in the ass later. She'll never relax enough to explore her magic if she's too busy worrying over Fluffy Fucker.

I reach for my connection to Aiden. I traverse the bond into his mind and scan the surroundings through his eyes.

Lights flash to the beat of the deep bass as he sips from his drink. Aiden's eyes travel the length of the body next to him, focusing on his slender hips and toned muscles visible through his white T-shirt. Aiden's thoughts steadily stray into the gutter, so I interrupt him before things progress any further.

“Where the fuck are you?”

He jumps, knocking his tumbler into the person next to him. The sticky concoction spills over the rim and onto their phone and lap.

“Jesus Christ. Why do you always have to do that?” Aiden asks aloud.

The bar patrons around him slowly move away. I chuckle darkly. *“Calm down and get to somewhere you can focus and speak to me properly.”*

Aiden stands, the legs of the bar stool scraping the floor. He weaves through the crowd of drunken humans toward the men’s room. He opens the door, and what looks disturbingly like human feces litters the floor. The pungent stench of urine clogs Aiden’s nose.

“Stop,” I order loudly as someone slams into his back.

Aiden catches himself on the doorframe, then steps to the side and holds the door open for the rude bastard behind him.

“Get the fuck out of there.”

Aiden mumbles to himself about unbearable overlords as he exits the building. His mind clears a bit as he breathes in the fresh, cold air.

The parking lot is overflowing with cars. Several vehicles are double-parked. Gravel crunches under his sneakers as he stumbles slightly to his car, drops his keys, and cracks the back of his head on the driver’s side mirror. Once he climbs inside, I waste no time before I set siege on his mind.

“Lock the doors. Don’t you know the type of psychopaths out there who could be waiting to hide it in your back seat and slit your throat?”

His hand slaps onto the lock, then he grips the steering wheel and lets his head fall forward. When it connects with the center of the steering wheel, the horn emits a short, shrill beep.

“Focus.”

“I am. Just say what you need to say.”

“Sit back and recline your seat. If you pass out, I will terrorize your dreams.”

He does as he’s been ordered.

“You will go to the witch’s apartment and then report to me if anyone is still there and what kind of state her home is in. Also, find her bat. Once you’re finished, go to the manor so we can communicate face-to-face.”

“But I have class, and it’s gonna take me a while to get there.”

“Need I remind you of the many ways that I can rid your body of its flesh? Oh, how about how I’ll remove your eyeballs with my claws. Perhaps dip your toes into boiling acid and watch the flesh and bone slowly deteriorate?”

“Damnit. No, I get it. I’ll figure it out.”

“Good. Oh, and bring some granola or some shit for the bat. He’s probably been scavenging to survive. Fluffy Fucker is more likely to trust if you provide him with treats. When you arrive at the manor, send the staff home, then contact me through our mind connection.” I ease out of his mind, but he stops me.

“Wait, what about Evie? Did you harm her?”

The fury within me seeps out of me, down our bond. *“The witch is with me and is none of your concern.”*

THIRTY-THREE



Evie

My breath fogs in front of me as I sit in front of the fire. Embers fade to ash between the logs, and a dark-purple hue emanates from the burning coal on the grate. I press my fingers to the fireguard, finding relief in the heat defrosting my icy fingers.

It's been three days since I arrived at Lorcan's manor—and since he permanently marked my chest. Gomez and Rosa linger in my thoughts as I gaze at the violet fire. Everything in the Shadow Realm is muted, the rest of

the colors in a sepia tone, as if the entire place is captured in an old photograph.

I cross my legs on the thick rug and lean forward, rubbing my hands together. No matter how much time I spend in front of the fireplace in Lorcan's bedroom, I'm never fully warm. Icy wind beats the windows as afternoon slides closer to nighttime, and ash lingers in the air.

The death magic pulses under my fingers, ready to be used at a moment's notice. Ever since I let it out, its thirst for violence stronger than ever.

Lorcan clears his throat from the doorway, and I slowly turn my head to face him. His muscles tense under his tight, black shirt. The belt he used around my neck on our first day here holds up his black pants. The mask stops at the tip of his nose, gold paint dripping from under his eyes. A shadow of a beard covers his chiseled jawline, and his lips pull into a grimace when he looks at me. "It's hellfire," he explains, pointing at the fireplace. "The Shadow Realm was built from Hell."

I arch a brow, pulling a throw from the chair next to me over my shoulders. "When was this realm created?"

He takes one step inside, his boots creaking against the floorboard, and stops. "I would guess around the same time your family locked me in here."

My heart rate quickens. It's the first time we've actually discussed what happened in any detail. "You think my family created the Shadow Realm?"

He walks to the sofa behind me, then sits, his legs wide and his hands on his knees. "No." He runs his hands through his tousled, dark strands, and the desire to pull off his mask, to see what he's hiding beneath, is stronger than ever. His predatory gaze snaps to mine. "Careful," he warns, and I mentally kick myself for not looking for the herbs to lock him out of my mind yet.

“My brothers created this realm. There is no way witches could do this, only the sons of...” He trails off and leans back. “It doesn’t matter.”

I sit upright and twirl myself around to fully face him. “Tell me everything. It might help me find a way out of here for us.”

“There’s a library,” he states, flexing his fingers. “Everything you need is in there.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before?”

He doesn’t answer, but I can’t believe it was to give me a break after everything that happened.

I shudder uncontrollably, shivers pulsing through my body. I hug myself and squeeze my eyes shut. My heart pounds against my ribcage, blood rushing in my ears as I try to slow my breathing, but it’s too fast. My chest tightens and my heart sinks, and I’m aware of how little oxygen I’m taking in.

Everything spins, so I grab the fibers of the rug, desperate to feel grounded. I don’t need to see to know the world is spinning on its axis.

“*Breathe.*” Lorcan’s voice penetrates my mind, and his hands are on my shoulders, his touch gentler than I’m used to. “*What’s happening?*”

My eyes flutter open to his masked face.

Bile creeps up my esophagus, acid biting the back of my throat. I fist my hands, desperate to hide the tremble in my fingers. Nausea sweeps my mind and the feeling of falling consumes me. I grab Lorcan’s hand, as if the ground is disappearing underneath me, but nothing has changed. “The benzos,” I say and remind myself it’s just withdrawal and that I’m not actually dying, but my body doesn’t get the message.

“*You can’t die in here,*” he says into my mind, while reading my racing but fractured thoughts. “*Not from a human ailment, anyway.*” He’s reminding me

that I am vulnerable to him and his brother.

“G-great,” I stammer. “I’ll just suffer endlessly then.”

He snickers, and he’s lucky I’m too weak to punch him in the face.

“Don’t mock me!” I shout, pulling away from his aura. The panic subsides as frustration and rage build. Everything he’s done to me sweeps into my mind. Hearing his chuckle flipped a switch, as if I’ve been asleep. Without the benzo haze to keep my magic muted, I feel more dangerous than ever. Everything comes back with crystal clarity. “You are a monster!” I shout, each breath a labor. Adrenaline courses through my veins, and I push back closer to the fireplace. “You took my pills.”

“You didn’t need them,” he says nonchalantly. “You’d have killed yourself eventually, by keeping your magic inside. It’s not supposed to be suppressed.”

Tears burn my eyes, but I hold them back, refusing to let him see me cry. “You killed Jay.”

He shrugs. “You taunted me.”

I grit my teeth. “That doesn’t mean you can kill people.”

A growl resonates in his chest, but I’m not afraid. My eyes darken. I can almost feel the blackness leaking from my sockets as my magic vibrates in my core. His gravelly voice intrudes on my thoughts.

“I can do whatever I want. I am not human, and you shouldn’t mistake me for one.”

“No!” I force myself to my feet, stumbling as I stand barefoot on the rug, the throw hugged around me. “I should know better than to try to reason with evil.”

He presses his hands against his legs and rises, towering over me. My shadows dance around me, and his eyes light up. “You’re angry.”

I laugh maniacally and clap my hands, and the throw falls to the floor. “How perceptive, genius. Of course I am fucking angry. You made me suck your dick!” I shout, then clench my thighs as the memory comes back to me, shrouding my judgment. I shake my head, scattering thoughts of his dick in my mouth. “Then you didn’t even fuck me after.”

He grabs my chin, but I push him away.

“Don’t touch me.”

He chuckles darkly. “Then punish me.”

My lips part, then close again. “What?”

Challenge threads his stare. “Punish me,” he says again, tilting his head. “You can’t. You’re too weak. You can’t stop me. You couldn’t protect your bat or friend, and now you can’t even teach me a lesson.”

I ball my fists, and a wave of rage consumes every part of my being. Death magic sizzles against my skin as I look at this fucker taunting me with a smirk, thinking he can get away with anything. Everything is his fault, and I want him to pay. I want to make him hurt for keeping me from Gomez, for taking my pills, stalking me, killing Jay, and making me want him.

Tears run down my cheeks, but they are not from sadness. “You want to make me evil!” I shout and take a step closer, feeling braver than ever. “So I can be more like you, is that it? So you’re not so fucking lonely in this stupid fucking realm!” My entire body is shaking now. “Because I would rather my magic eat me from the inside out than be anything like you.”

He laughs and I push him, my hands flying against his chest. I can hardly catch my breath as my fists hammer against him. He doesn’t move, doesn’t even flinch, and I lose it.

A hum of magic erupts from my core, vibrating the room around us. Memories of the people in my life I’ve loved, blown apart in front of me,

make me flinch. Trauma pulls me back, but he grabs my fist in his hand. “Don’t hold back,” he growls, squeezing tighter.

I push past my fear, my head rolling back as the magic pulses away from me unlike ever before. It spreads in a circle around us, obliterating everything in its path. The fire blows to smoke, papers fly, and glass shatters all over the carpet. Splinters of wood from the bedframe fly toward us, but my magic shields me like a dome. Lorcan is forced back into his seat, his legs kicking up as he slams back against the pillows. His mask shifts, but he quickly corrects it.

My shadows rip from me, stealing my next breath with them. The light from the window dims as my shadows form a blanket of glittering darkness, enveloping us in a makeshift night. The world steadies, and my nausea subsides.

For the first time, my magic doesn’t feel like a separate part of me. I am my powers, and they are me. My skin sears with heat as my lips curve into a smile. Shadows reach from the heavy blanket of darkness, forming hands that reach toward Lorcan. I just spot his grin when they reach him, shadowy fingers gripping his throat.

His sadistic laugh chills me as they push harder on his windpipe, then finally, they fizzle away, and for the first time ever, I feel in control and not like I’m ready to combust at any moment.

Red marks cover his neck but quickly heal. He stands back up, admiring the destruction around us. “Feel better now, little witch?”

My brain dizzies as power floods me, filling me up. A small, satisfied smile curves my lips.

He reaches down and tips my chin so my eyes meet his. “You were perfect.”

“I still hate you,” I say, less convincing than before.

“I should hope so.” He runs his thumb down my neck and to my chest. His gaze lingers on the tattoo, and I can’t help but bite my lip. “Don’t do that,” he warns. “If you don’t want me touching you.”

I bring my hand to his chest and press my fingers against his muscles, enjoying the way they tense under my touch.

He grabs my wrist and growls. “Not this time.”

But this time it is different. Every time, he’s had the upper hand, even when I taunted him. His magic pulses under his skin, the same brand of darkness as mine. The shadows want to play together, recognizing each other. His scent intoxicates me, with notes of burnt citrus and nutmeg. I reach to my tiptoes, and his eyes widen, his pupils dilating. I feel powerful, and he’s not afraid of me. I can’t hurt him, not like the others, and as I embrace my magic, I feel invincible.

“Evi—”

My lips meet his, and I steal whatever he is about to say with a kiss. I fist his hair as our tongues meet, a carnal need sharpening his features.

His fingers tangle in my hair, and my eyes close as I lose myself to his taste, his touch, and his scent.

He forces me down to the sofa, keeping his mouth on mine. His groan reverberates in my mouth, and I pull his hair harder, his hips rolling against me. My eyes roll back as he releases the kiss and travels his tongue down my neck to my tight peaks. A moan erupts when his erection presses on my hip through his pants.

I let out a breathy gasp as he swirls his tongue around my nipple, sending shockwaves to my toes. This is what I needed, him—his dick—inside me. His fingers slide between my legs, slickness coating his fingers as he grazes

my clit. My body quivers under his touch, the desire for him to fill me up maddening. Pricking sensations spark along my skin as he slips two fingers inside me, and I clench around him.

His teeth clamp onto my breast, and I rock against his fingers. Sweat beads along my skin, and I rock harder, but this isn't enough. "*I want you inside of me.*" My declaration whispers into his mind, and he thrusts his fingers deeper, then moans audibly.

He nips my breasts again, torturing and teasing my nipples with his tongue. An orgasm builds again, spreading heat along my body as if flames are licking every part of me. His magic purrs with mine, shadows seeping from both of us. I can barely see him, but I can sense every sensation as thoughts slip from his mind.

"My killer."

His fingers explore my curves, finding every sensitive spot and leaving desire cascading with each touch. I teeter on the edge of release, my wild eyes snapping shut. He releases his erection and presses his hot, throbbing length against me.

I gasp as he lowers me onto his cock, every inch of him filling me up—and more. It's slightly painful at first, but he eases into it, and soon, pleasure supersedes any aches in my cervix.

I grip his biceps, screaming his name. He pushes deeper, harder... his breaths coming out in short bursts. I lose myself to the first orgasm, screaming maddeningly.

Slowing down, he grips my hips, his nails biting into my skin.

"Scream for me."

I scream louder. "Lorcan!"

An animalistic growl tears from his throat, his eyes shining in surprise as I

can just make out that pastel-green stare of his locked onto me. Every part of him holds me tight, consuming me and pulling me closer, as if our bodies could somehow meld together. My toes curl against a pillow, a fever sweeping my mind.

The sofa rocks under his weight, the wooden legs splintering and fabric tearing as his claws unleash. The restraint in his features snaps when his gaze finds mine in the darkness. “*My little witch. My killer,*” he says again.

I tighten my hold on his shoulders and speak back into his mind. “*My demon.*”

“Fuck,” he roars as he quickens his pace. He slams so deeply into my pussy that my vision blurs. His thick cock swells, and hot cum rushes inside me. He loses his voice to the sudden orgasm, holding me in place as cum pours from me. I love the effect I’m having on him, seeing him a mess of sweat and lust. I wish he didn’t feel so good, that everything about him didn’t draw me in, but it’s too late.

After a few seconds, he climbs off, and I let out a breathy gasp. He tucks himself back into his pants as our shadows dance with each other, matte black and glittering darkness filling the room.

Then he looks at me, panic swallowing all lust in his eyes. His jaw clenches, and he grabs the pack of cigarettes and throws me one. His stare glides along my body before he storms out of the room, as if I’d just undressed him in more ways than one.

The fire’s crackling fills the silence. Rain drizzles from the night sky, pattering against the stone-inlaid windows. I crouch in front of the black

shelves in the manor library, dragging my finger along the leather spines of the books categorized under “Fallenmoore.”

A hiss sounds from the fire, and I look over, the logs shifting as purple flames greedily consume the wood. The library fills with an ashy, woody scent, reminding me of home. I miss my apartment, Gomez, and Rosa. Lorcan insists Gomez is safe, and I assume he has a demon way of finding that out, but worry still lingers on the fringe of my every thought. Gomez has never been left this long without me, and while I hope Rosa took him, the idea that he may be home searching for me or, worse, trapped with the Order, twists and knots my stomach, removing my appetite.

The smell of coffee lingers in the ash-tinted air. I forgot about the cup I’d made myself over an hour ago. Not that it matters; everything tastes weird here. Even coffee has an ashy aftertaste.

I miss home, Gomez, and Rosa. I shake my head, refusing to let everything overwhelm me, and instead happily dissociate while staring at the lines of grimoires from my ancestors.

After a few seconds, I snap out of my trance and grab the grimoire lined with purple roses on the spine, embedded in black leather. The book calls to me, and the moment I touch it, my shadows come to life.

There has to be something in here about creating portal mirrors. After all, it was my family who had created the one I smashed. Now that my magic is under control, or at least not threatening to burst out of me at any given moment, I can’t help but wonder how different things can be for me, back in the Human Realm.

I just need to find a way to get rid of the Order. I’m tired of running. If Edward hadn’t tortured me when my magic was just coming to the surface, none of the deaths would have happened. He forced me to suppress every

ounce of my power, letting it consume my soul instead and destroy everything I love.

I hate him. When I get out of here, he's the first I will destroy.

Slowly, I loosen the strip of black leather holding the grimoire together and unfold the cover to reveal the first pages of parchment.

Evangeline Fallenmoore.

I wonder if she's who I'm named after. I glide my fingers along the page.

I continue reading, then realize it's as much a journal of her ramblings as a magic guide.

The demon goes by Lorcan, but his true name is hidden. He has admitted he is one of the sons of Lucifer. The devil has seven sons, each embodying the sins that plague humanity. Lorcan is one of the seven. While he will not divulge his true name, allowing us to summon him, I have gained the monster's trust. Since the one of lust has arrived, the magic of our coven has fractured. We walk on the edge of sanity. If we do not lock him away soon, he will bring plagues onto all witches. The destroyer of all that is good must be contained. Eloisa has been working on a mirror realm, but it is useless without a portal.

My eyes widen as I slide my finger along the scrawled handwriting. I scramble through the pages, but her musings only get more unintelligible. Lorcan is lust. The statement hits me, realization washing through me as things click into place. His weakness makes all the more sense.

I read the one line again. *He has admitted he is one of the sons of Lucifer.*

A chill runs down my spine, and my whole body shudders.

Then another line... *I have gained the monster's trust.*

On the next page, I find a list of herbs used to ward away the demon of lust, alongside a drawing of a summoning circle.

Sage

Lavender

Rosemary

Black salt

Rue

Footsteps sound nearby and I quickly close the book, pushing it back onto the shelf. My fingers tremble as I grab my cold coffee and breathe in the rich scent. The insanity-laced ramblings from her later pages run through my mind. Every member of my family lost their mind. When I examine my growing tattoos, I can't help but wonder when I will topple into insanity.

My eyes dart around the room, at the floating ash, and the tall black bookshelves with rolling ladders and books about demons, Hell, and all the mysteries of our realms, and I wonder if it's already happened.

THIRTY-FOUR



Lorcan

The morning sun rises outside the window. I've left Evie asleep and listen to her light snores as I head down to the cigar room. I close the door behind me and walk to an ornate, small oval mirror that hangs on the wall between two plush armchairs. The frame is gilded in silver, and the likeness of a gargoyle is sculpted around the top curve of the frame. The gargoyle's clawed hand stretches down as if holding the mirror aloft. The face of the creature doesn't resemble any animal I have ever seen, more like a depiction of the devil that

humans dreamed up. I am well aware of what Satan looks like, and it is not whatever the fuck that creature is.

The back of my mind tingles, signaling Aiden's nearby. Right on time.

"Aiden," I call through the bond.

A few minutes later, he strolls into the room. He takes a big bite of the burrito wrapped in foil he's holding, then chews obnoxiously. "*Report.*"

"The ap—"

I hold up a hand and scowl at him. "*Do not speak to me with half-masticated food in your mouth.*"

He chews quickly and swallows audibly, then coughs a few times as he tries to get the large lump of food down his throat. Aiden wraps the excess foil over the top of the burrito and tucks it away in the back pocket of his jeans. I raise an eyebrow.

"Shit. Sorry. I didn't get to see much, but Evie's apartment is definitely destroyed."

"*And the mirror?*"

"Oh, that thing is completely fucked. What happened to it?"

I ignore him. "*Were there any dead bodies?*"

"Not that I saw. But these dudes showed up, and I did not want to fuck with them, so I hid in Evie's bedroom, then snuck out the window. Actually, they looked really similar to you."

Fucking spectacular. "*Anything else?*"

"Rosa filed a missing person report with the police. Evie's face is plastered all over every news and social media outlet. Oh! And I found her familiar. He was actually at the manor already."

I knew familiars could follow the bond to their other half, but not that it would work through great distances. The property is cloaked so it cannot be

seen by anyone who is not invited by me. Yet somehow, Fluffy Fucker was able to find her. I employ a select few to keep up the general maintenance of the manor in the Human Realm. Aiden is in charge of making sure they all do their jobs and keep my secret. If they fail, so does he.

I believe guilt over the bat is part of the reason she is feeling reluctant to let me help her with her magic. The last time she saw him, he was clawing the eyes out of one of her attackers. I will allow her to have whatever contact she needs with him, despite the fact that he is a nuisance and is interrupting my plans. He can't even stay out of my business when we are in an entirely different realm. Maybe I shall fashion him a new cage. Once I am free of this place, he will need a master after all. I'll provide a ration of berries and whatever the fuck else he eats. I swear that's all he's munching on when I watch Evie.

I clench my teeth as my demonic hearing picks up the all-too-familiar flapping of wings. "Speak of the devil," I growl.

Aiden looks over his shoulder. I hear the bat's chirping well before I see him. Gomez glides into the Human Realm version of the cigar room. For a few moments, no one makes a move. Aiden's eyes dart from me to the bat, and his eyebrows rise, then he smiles toothily.

"Hey, Gomez," he says in an irritating, slightly falsetto voice.

Gomez chirps in his direction and lifts his chin as if begging for scratches. For fuck's sake, another one falls to the charms of the bat? Aiden holds his hand out to Gomez, but he flies to his shoulder instead.

I growl and run my hands through my hair. "*Leave.*"

Aiden opens his mouth to speak but thinks better of it. "Sorry, bro, looks like you're on your own."

Gomez flies from Aiden's shoulder and circles the room. Once Aiden

closes the heavy door, the bat flies to the mirror and latches his clawed toes onto the gargoyle's head. He hangs upside down in front of me, wraps his wings around himself, and glares at me with his beady eyes.

“You would do well to remember I will forever be involved in your witch’s life. She is mine much more than she is yours.”

He screeches, the pitch changing and warbling, making my ears wish to reject the sound.

“I did not come here to argue, and frankly, I don’t give a fuck about your feelings, only hers. She misses you and worries for you constantly.”

Gomez finally stops hissing and gives me his familiar stink eye instead. I’ll give it to him; he’s a plucky little bastard.

I tuck both of my hands into the back pockets of my slacks. *“I have a proposition for you. You and I are long past having a chat about what is and is not acceptable to do when I am spending time with Evie. Mainly, you will not interrupt. Ever. In exchange, I will make sure that you never run out of those blueberries you love so much. And perhaps I will procure something to keep you company.”*

He tilts his head to the side, causing him to swing slightly, and the fur around his neck fluffs up.

“I know you cannot speak, but you can communicate. I’ve seen you do so with Evie and her human friend.”

He stares at me like he doesn’t know what I could possibly be talking about.

“Cut the shit. If you understand me, blink your beady eyes at me two times.”

For several moments, he does nothing, but then with exaggerated slowness, he blinks his eyes twice. He then glares at me and bares his teeth.

“Oh good, you can follow instructions. You must not be completely useless after all.” I step closer and place both of my hands on the opposite sides of the mirror.

The veil seems to shimmer between us as his eyes widen with anxiety. Suddenly he lets go of the mirror and flaps to the back of the black, stuffed armchair. He pierces his claws into the material, looking smug that he was able to do this small amount of damage to something that belongs to me.

I continue, ignoring the twitch in my eyelid. *“One of the reasons I choose to allow you to see my witch is because you tried to save her. Although, we both know there was no way you would ever be able to.”*

The bat hisses at my implication, but I push on.

“But I like your thirst for violence to protect our girl.” I raise an eyebrow at him, waiting for some kind of snarky expression, but none come. *“As I was saying, you went to battle for Evie and you survived; therefore, it disgusts me to say that you can be trusted within reason.”*

His little toes dig deeper, and he stretches out his wings before wrapping them over his little body, leaving only his fluffy head poking out.

I roll my eyes and let out an exasperated breath. Why is it so fucking taxing to have a conversation with a bat? If I do not form some kind of truce with this tenacious creature, he will continue to be the bane of my existence, his cute little flaps and squeaks the soundtrack driving me back to insanity. *“You know those people who tried to harm her. They won’t stop coming, and she needs my help in order to realize that she is capable of protecting herself. Does all of that make sense to you?”*

He tilts his head to the other side and brings up a claw to scratch the underside of his jaw. His eyes focus on me and he blinks twice.

I’ve had enough of his presence. *“It’s the only way either of us is going to*

survive each other and keep her happy. Help me sweep the grounds for my brother first, and I will show you where in the manor she is.”

THIRTY-FIVE



Evie

Lorcan strides into the living room, his rain-tousled hair woven in shades of dark brown as he walks in from outside.

“Find anything?” I light a cigarette, gazing out at the afternoon, dove-gray sky.

Since finding his stash, I’ve ensured to load up on packets in case he tries to withhold them from me again. Ever since we fucked, he’s barely said two words to me.

I avert my eyes to the window and blow out a puff of smoke. His wet shirt clings to his tattooed muscles, and I have to stop myself from turning and looking at him. I can't believe I couldn't tell before that he's lust. Everything about him is inviting—his appearance, stance, expressions, and scent.

“If my brother has been here, he hasn't left any sign since those snakes,” he replies casually, hesitating in the doorway. Since we've arrived, nightly perimeter checks have become routine for him. I've yet to leave the manor, mostly because I'm not stupid enough to think I can fight a demon. I mean, I'd try, but like he said, I'm only safe in the manor so why risk being out there?

Especially when his brother is on the loose, another son of Lucifer.

My chest tightens. Son. Of. Lucifer. I turn slowly, reminded of the terror in front of me. He's ruled in Hell, and his father is the fallen angel the world cowers from. I should be more afraid. Perhaps if I were smarter, I'd have never taunted him in the first place. But I was tired of running from things that scare me, and Lorcan reminds me of a part of myself that I've kept hidden. With him, I can be my truest self, but I'm not sure if that makes me just as bad as he is.

Lorcan sighs, pressing his hands to his temples, and his mask shifts slightly. “Stop thinking so much.”

My brows pinch downward, and I grab the bracelet I'd created last night using herbs listed in the Fallenmoore grimoire. He shouldn't be able to hear a damn thing. “You can hear me?”

“No.” He scowls as his gaze drifts to my wrist. “I can sense the wheels turning in your head.”

I bite the inside of my lip. We stand in silence, listening to the pattering of the rain against the window. I wonder if he finds solace in the sound as I do.

When I catch him staring, he's not admiring the rain, but me.

He points at the mirror. "You should take a look in there."

"Why?" I turn my head to face the heavy mirror hanging over the fireplace, its ornate, silver frame carved in a wavy pattern.

"I'll leave you alone," he says as a non-answer and walks away.

I drop the butt of my cigarette into an ashtray and hurry to the mirror. I grip the stone mantel and stare into the Human Realm version of the manor. Everything's more vibrant, and the flowers in the vases are fresh instead of dead, like the ones here. I blink twice as the unmistakable flapping of wings reaches my ears. My heart balloons when I see him.

Gomez flies to the mirror with his mouth open, his fangs showing as his mouth pulls into something of a smile. Rosa thinks I'm crazy for it, but I swear Gomez can smile, despite being a bat.

"Gomey!" My hands shoot toward the glass. I press my palms to the mirror as Gomez flaps against the other side, his body squishing against where my fingers are. Tears blur my vision, and for the first time since being in this realm, I feel a semblance of peace. "Are you okay? How did you find me? Where's Rosa? Is she okay?" Questions tumble one after the other, and Gomez squeaks in response, then flies back a foot. I move my hands, staring at him, examining his small body for damage, but he seems healthy.

I blow out a tense breath. "Rosa," I say quickly, giving him one question at a time. "Is she okay?"

He flaps his wings twice and tilts his head.

I smile. "Good. What about the Order? Are they hunting me?"

His wings flap maniacally, and he bears his fangs.

"I expected as much," I reply, sighing. They're still trying to find a way in. "Did they hurt you?" I ask, grimacing.

He doesn't respond, and I know what that means. I'll fucking kill them when I get out of here.

"I'm going to find a way out of here, Gomey."

His beady eyes widen, and a gush of love pushes through our familiar bond.

"I love you too."

He sighs, and I grip the edge of the fireplace. "I need you to do something for me," I say, lowering my voice to a whisper. I look around the room, listening for footsteps, but there's only silence. "I need Rosa's help." I glance around the Human Realm of the manor. "Does the Order know I'm here?"

He sits still and I nod. At least they have no clue where Lorcan's manor is.

"They're in Darkwood."

He flaps twice.

"Bring Rosa here, only when it's safe. Don't let Lorcan see her, so keep her out on the grounds and away from mirrors, then come and find me in the one," I whisper. "Okay?" I press my hand to the glass one more time. "When I get out of here, I'm getting you all the fruit you can eat."

He squeaks and my chest aches. Only a thin piece of glass separates us, yet it feels like miles. I realize that's how Lorcan must have felt for the entire time he's been trapped here.

Trapped by my family.

I gulp as I watch Gomez fly away, back to Darkwood to get Rosa. It could be days or even weeks until she comes, depending on when it's safe to bring her here. The Order knew who she was, so they'll likely have eyes on her.

"Feeling better?"

Lorcan's deep voice jolts me. I place my hand to my chest, feeling the racing thumps from my heart. "Gomez," I say with a smile. "Yes. Thank you."

The library is a labyrinth of demonic darkness and witchcraft. Ancient tomes spill from tall shelves reaching up to the arched ceiling painted in blacks and swirling purples, depicting scenes from the dark underbelly of the Human Realm. I climb two steps on a sliding ladder, white-knuckling the mahogany as I drift along the shelves until I spot the word *Fallenmoore* engraved on the black wood shelves housing various grimoires, spell books, and journals.

I find the grimoire in the same place I left it and slowly slide it from the shelf. The grandfather clock at the back of the library dongs twelve times, for midnight. I place the book on my lap after sitting on the long plum velvet sofa in front of the fireplace, then breathe in the parchment scent permeating the grand library.

Lorcan's hatred toward me is understandable, in a fucked-up way. While I may not have done a thing to him, my ancestors did. I peruse the pages, flipping the old parchment carefully. Diagrams, spells, and handwritten journal entries cover the book. It's almost impossible to find anything, as Evangeline's writings become more erratic with each page, her insanity growing as words become sketches of horrifying, demonic creatures with claws and tails. Sigils cover the next four pages, with Lorcan and a question mark after each one.

His true name. His true name. His true name.

Her obsession with him drives every spell, dark magic leaking all over the grimoire in ink. I stop when I see another name I recognize.

Ezra is helping me. He's beautiful, an angel amongst his demon brothers. He is forbidden to speak any of his brothers' true names, a blood oath

preventing each of them from betraying the others in such a way. Instead, he will mark Lorcan with his name. Tomorrow, I will know the truth.

I gasp, almost dropping the book. It slides down my legs, but I catch it. His true name is inked or branded on him.

The next ten pages have been torn out. I graze my fingertip down the remnants of the parchment in the center of the book. Lorcan didn't want me seeing whatever was next. That, or my family ripped the pages out.

But why would Lorcan have them here?

"Find anything?" Lorcan's voice sounds behind me, and I jump. I quickly close the book and shove it back onto the table.

"Nothing but the ramblings of an insane woman," I say with a forced, small smile. "What about you? I'm sure you've looked through these a hundred times."

He shoves his hands in his pocket. "Some things can only be found by a descendant of the coven." He glances at the clock. "Continue tomorrow. You should rest. You look terrible."

I roll my eyes. "Thanks a bunch."

"If you continue to use your magic, you'd feel better," he says.

I exhale shakily, refusing to meet his stare. Using magic only pushed my family deeper into insanity. While I may have let it all out the other day, I must be careful not to let it push me over the edge. "I could sleep."

He waits until I finish my coffee, which I know does nothing to help my insomnia, but it does take the edge off the withdrawal slowly climbing its way back into my body after I stopped using magic again.

I walk to his second bedroom, as I blew apart most of the furniture in his last one, and clench my teeth. His footsteps sound behind me and he leans against the door, his eyes boring into me as I slowly strip. I pull a silk

nightgown from the dresser. I don't know how he got clothes here, possibly by a housekeeper. Or he has had a female guest in the Shadow Realm before.

The thought heats my cheeks, but I quickly pull on the pajamas, the silvery silk fabric clinging to my hips and breasts, sagging where my stomach is. My stomach growls when I touch it, but the thought of eating only heightens my nausea. Every limb in my body aches, my eyelids heavy as I climb into the bed.

The sheets shift when Lorcan gets in next to me. I don't protest to him getting in beside me, as long as he leaves me to sleep. My head hits the pillow, and slumber pulls me deeper before I can fully shut my mind off.

My eyes flutter open, but everything in the room is distorted, as if I'm trapped between the Human and Shadow Realm. I whip my head around, but the bed is empty, and everything is faded, the furniture and lamps in black and white.

A shadowy figure appears in the doorway, the man like a wall of muscle. Ezra's ashen face comes into view, and his eyes lock onto mine. "I should kill you."

I kick my legs against the bed, pressing my back to the headboard. Where the fuck is Lorcan? I glance at my wrist, but my bracelet isn't there. "I'm dreaming," I realize aloud, but my magic is here too, swirling under the surface. "You're in my head. How?"

He closes the distance between us and climbs onto the bed. My scream is muffled by his palm, and his other hand snakes up to my throat. His voice comes out deeper than I remember, his dark hair pulled back into a bun. I wrestle against him, but he's too strong. Shadows move from my chest, but his own rise from his body, like vipers ready to attack. My magic retreats,

and Ezra laughs maniacally. “My brother has been too soft with you.” His fingers grip tighter, pressing against my carotid artery.

My head spins, and I grasp his wrists, trying to pull him from me, but he doesn’t move. I will my shadows from me again, letting them dance from my body like black glittering hands. My bloodshot eyes bulge as Ezra’s thicker, darker magic smothers mine, choking it as he is me. “Lorcan has given you a false sense of security, Fallenmoore witch, if you think your shadows are any match for ours.” He leans down, his hot breath hitting my neck. He inhales deeply, then closes his eyes as he rises over me once more. “I can see why you’ve become an obsession of his. You smell wonderful. All that magic, evil, and arousal together is intoxicating.”

I scream against his hand, despising my body for arching at the hand around my throat.

He tilts his head, those predatory eyes gleaming under candlelight. “Fear not, witch. I’m not going to hurt you.”

Why am I not waking up? I clamp my eyes shut, but nothing happens.

“Your family would be disappointed,” he continues. “My brother wants you to make a new portal mirror, but you can’t let him out.”

I open my mouth when his fingers slip, dragging his skin between my teeth. I clamp down, but he only laughs as I sink my teeth in harder. Finally he pulls away, blood dripping through the creases of his hand. I spit blood onto the sheets. “Fuck you,” I croak, gasping for air. I rub my throat, the ache heavy on my clavicle.

His weight is crushing, but slickness still grows between my legs as his erection bulges behind his pants. What the fuck is happening?

I slam my fists to his chest, but he quickly restrains my wrists over my head with one hand. “I am not your enemy,” Ezra hisses. “My brother is far worse

than me. He's gaining your trust, just like your ancestors did to him."

My blood runs cold. "Why should I believe you?"

His nose wrinkles. "I was there when it happened. The spell that binds him here was done with your blood," he says, and I stop fighting. I've heard that already. "He can't be set free unless you take his place."

Goose bumps spread along my skin. "That's not true."

He brings his mouth to my ear and whispers against my lobe. "He doesn't care about you. Don't let a hunter lure you in, little bunny. You'll be trapped forever. If you want to keep him here, you only need his name."

"I don't know it."

"Just look under his mask."

Before I can reply or process what he said, I'm pushed out of the dream. My head spins as I fall through an ocean of layers, then wake up.

THIRTY-SIX



Evie

Ezra's warning from last night plays over in my mind as I watch steam spiral from the clawfoot tub while it fills. What if Lorcan is using me to escape?

Dark-gray damask paper covers the walls, and a silver-framed mirror hangs over the standing vanity, reflecting my naked figure. I peer over my shoulder, holding my hair to one side. The tattoo at the base of my spine has flourished, the roses and skulls now woven intricately up my back, reaching the bottom of my neck.

My legs, arms, and back are covered. I look much like the rest of my family. Since embracing my death and shadow magics, everything feels different. I'm more powerful than ever, yet I've never felt more afraid. Losing the grip of my sanity has always been a deep-seated fear, and after reading Evangeline's slow descent into madness, it's never felt more real.

I keep my magic suppressed, but without my pills, it's more difficult. The cigarettes help, but there's little to keep me numb here.

After removing the lid from a glass jar, I use the small spoon to dish jasmine-scented bath salts into the tub. After, I grab the jar next to it, filled with rose petals, and sprinkle two handfuls over the water. That mixed with the vanilla bubble bath I'd poured earlier creates an enchanting aroma, soothing my soul.

I light two candles, placing them on the cabinet next to a pile of clean towels, and step into the steaming water. I grip the edges of the bath, smiling as the heat soothes my aching muscles. I thumb my shoulder, working my way toward the back of my neck. I gaze at the Victorian-style light fixtures on each side of the mirror, holding four long ivory candles. Shadows flicker around the room as the flames dance, rippling a violet hue around me.

I sink deeper into the water. My thoughts quiet, and I feel myself slipping away into memories I'd rather leave forgotten.

My eyes close to the room as I drift, letting my arms float up and the water carry the weight. Despite hating being away from Gomez and Rosa, I surprisingly enjoy being in this realm. I don't want to be trapped here forever, but I enjoy the quiet. I also have to remind myself that it is filled with demons, and that if it weren't for Lorcan, they'd likely be here, turning my quiet time into a horror movie.

Not that I'd hate that.

Edward's words come back into my mind, a memory reaching me from when I was ten. *Why can't you just be normal?* I shake my head, refusing to let memories of him ruin my bath time. But not overthinking every moment of my existence has never been one of my strong suits.

It was probably the spiders that tipped him over the edge. My obsession only grew as I got older, and I'd bring spiders into the house. I liked them, they were just misunderstood, and they never bit me. Edward and Antionette hated them, but Caden didn't mind them. Out of the three of them, my brother was the only one who truly embraced the darker side of me.

He never thought I was weird. In fact, he always looked up to me. His face swims into my mind, bringing with it a deep ache settling in my chest.

He succumbed to the darkness he accepted, and for that, I hate myself. Although, the blame doesn't rest entirely on me. I was a teenager, and I'd been told for most of my life that I was damaged, broken, and dangerous. Everything that went wrong was my fault, and I mistook control for love.

Being a Fallenmoore witch has followed me in everything I've done. If Edward hadn't forced me to suppress my magic, then I may have gone insane, but at least I wouldn't have killed five people.

Five people.

I let out a shaky breath, then toe the tap, enjoying the searing burn to my skin. Despite Lorcan's actions, I never really punished him. I can pretend I hate him for everything he's done, but if I'm completely honest with myself and accept the fucked-up parts of my mind that I've pushed away, I don't hate him for Jay. I should. I'm a terrible person for not caring as much as is expected. Jay didn't really do anything wrong, but after seeing so much death in my life, the lines have become blurred.

Because despite every dark thing Lorcan has done, I want him, and that just

shows how damaged I really am. With him, I don't have to pretend to be anything else. He accepts—no, he *likes* the screwed-up parts of me. He forces them out, challenging my morals and blurring the lines of what I thought was right or wrong.

He's got evil in him too, and he doesn't hide it. He's a demon, and the offspring of an infamous fallen angel at that. I doubt there's a good bone in his body, yet I allowed myself to believe there was, if only for a few moments.

He understands me. He helps me, in between cruelty and humiliation. There's a bond between us, formed by demonic attachment or something else, that beckons me closer to him.

That's why I must leave. Even if it means going back to a life where I hide who I really am from everyone. Self-preservation is stronger than my desire to be close to him, to feel his arms wrapped around me and breathe in his smell, or run my fingers through his choppy, tousled strands.

I roll my eyes at myself and dip under the water, holding my breath. After several seconds, I reemerge and run my fingers down my face.

Lorcan comes into view, leaning in the doorway. "What were you dreaming about last night?"

I tilt my head, not bothering to hide my nakedness, which is mostly covered with bubbles. "Can't remember," I say with a shrug, and he paces a step closer. "Why?"

Fuck. My heart stammers, but I keep my expression devoid of emotion. Did he get inside my head? My bracelet was on, made to repel him from my thoughts. I glance at my wrist and wrap the string around my finger. It's infused with herbs, intertwined with strands of his hair I'd pull from a comb.

He glances at the bubbles, his lips pulling into a tight line. "I could smell

your wet pussy when I woke up.”

“Okay?”

His jaw clenches, and I know better than to taunt him, but secretly I like it.

“Honestly, I’m just shocked you didn’t do anything about it.”

The corner of his lip lifts, dimpling his cheek. I gaze at his mouth, wanting to feel it on mine again. He strides to the tub and grips both sides, towering over me. “Did you want me to?”

I’ve always liked the idea of it, but I didn’t dare admit it to anyone. Except now. “Maybe,” I say, then inhale sharply.

His gaze narrows, and I wish I could grab that mask and pull it from his face. If Ezra was right, then Lorcan is hiding his true name under it.

The veins on his hands bulge as he grips the sides of the tub harder, and I can’t help but imagine them around my throat. My magic sparks through my body, reaching the tips of my toes. Every part of me reacts to his presence, and my gaze drifts to his chiseled chest.

What am I thinking? He’s planning on trapping me in here. But if I let on that I know anything, then I’ll lose any element of surprise. He can’t know, and I can enjoy myself until I get out of here.

He leans closer. “I didn’t want to wake you,” he says in a low voice, but his eyes focus on mine, anticipation threading through them.

My muscles tense as I stare back at him, afraid of speaking the truth out loud. The last time I hinted at one of my fantasies was to Jay, and he called me sick. Perhaps I am.

Lorcan leans even closer, until his nose is almost touching mine. My lips part, my thighs clenching as I tilt my head up, the curve of my chin brushing his. “I don’t want you to wake me,” I whisper against his lips, and a primal growl sounds from his throat.

His mouth widens into a sadistic grin. “Is that what you were dreaming about?”

He eyes my bracelet, and I quickly drag my wrist under the water. I can't have him force me to take it off, although I'm surprised he hasn't so far. His thumb grazes my cheek, and I lean into his touch. Maybe Ezra was lying, but I must know for sure. I reach up and touch the side of his mask, desperate to pull it off. It's only covering from the bridge of his nose and up. If there is a branding, it would be right there. I'd know his true name, just like my family wanted. They must have found out. How else could he have ended up here?

Pain jolts through my fingers and into my wrist when he grabs my hand and pulls back. He shouts, “Never do that again!”

I press my back against the porcelain. His reaction tells me everything. It isn't to scare me, like I initially thought. He's hiding something. “Ezra was right,” I say through gritted teeth.

“Ezra?” His eyes darken to black, and shadows rip away from his body like ribbons. “The dream,” he says, emitting a heavy growl. “What did he do to you?” Madness swirls in his irises, and the untapped insanity behind them has never been so prominent, his stare chilling me to the bone.

“You care about what he did to me?” I ask when he doesn't question what Ezra told me.

Claws tear through his fingers. “Did he touch you?”

“We didn't fuck, if that's what you're asking.”

His shadows douse the flames of the candles, delving us into darkness. Before I can stand, both of his hands are around my throat. “But you were aroused.”

I wait for the pain, for him to punish me, but instead, he releases his grip. He storms out of the bathroom before I can say another thing to him, then

he's gone.

My jaw slacks as I stare around the empty, dark room. He didn't care what Ezra said, only that he turned me on, which was involuntary. It was nothing like when I'm with Lorcan. I should have said that.

Would he have wanted to hear it?

THIRTY-SEVEN



Lorcan

I will erase every whisper of arousal Ezra created in my witch and replace it with my brand of lust. I walk into the bedroom and find her asleep, still in her towel from the bath. The smell of lavender and chamomile reaches me from her empty mug on the nightstand. I climb into bed and will her into a deeper slumber. The bracelet might keep me from reading her thoughts, but it doesn't stop my powers from forcing her mind to stay asleep.

The need to savagely mark her again boils in my blood. I will not allow her wet cunt to stain the sheets with arousal for my brother. Tattooing my little

witch was not enough. It will never be enough. I stab my fingers into my hair and pull on the back of my head. My muscles tense, and I force the maddening thoughts away.

My gaze flickers to her slumbering form. She sighs deeply and rolls from her side onto her back. I wrap each of her limbs in a length of shadow and cinch them tight. Her legs part, and she spreads open beautifully for me. The warmth from the purple hellfire caresses my backside as I take in her bound form.

I rub my neck and sigh. How she ended up my counterpart in this life is beyond me. We shouldn't work, but we do. Both of our edges are jagged, sharp, and stained with blood-drenched pain. But that might be why we fit better than expected. We will just put them together by force, breaking off sections from both of our pieces until they lie flush.

Love in storybooks is falsified. It is painted to resemble the ideal relationship. But where is the passion? The bone-deep, need-to-carve-my-name-into-your-skin obsession? Who wants perfection when blood stains and screams are common ground for us? I don't want perfectly paired pieces of a puzzle. I want the puzzle piece that falls out of the box, then lies forgotten under the sofa. Because the forgotten ones caged in their own destruction are beautifully broken.

My Evie is beautifully broken. And in the wreckage of her trauma that she constantly pushes to the back of her mind, there's inexplicable beauty. What we have is something unique, but she has to be stronger to survive this so that we have a chance to explore how to break each other apart.

I breathe in through my nose, then out through my mouth several times, willing calmness to soothe some of my rage. I strip out of my clothes and leave them in a pile at the foot of the bed. Her helpless display of

vulnerability is breathtaking. I can do anything I want to her, and she won't be able to stop me. It's a heady feeling. My vision darkens as intense need surges directly to my already-erect cock.

I scale her body and rub my maskless face against her core. I groan loudly when her arousal coats my nose and mouth. But is this slick for me or him? A snarl tears from my throat, then I pierce her tender inner thigh with my shifted teeth. *Mine.*

Evie twitches as her body reacts to the pain, but her mind sleeps on. I suck on the wound and lap up the blood pooling along the bite mark.

My need is an unstoppable force, but I know she needs to be prepped before I rail her sleeping body into the mattress.

I lean forward and nibble on her labia, then moan into her folds. Her vanilla-honey flavor bursts across my tongue. I could feast on her for days, spread her out like my own personal buffet, and drink directly from her core. I pop two fingers in my mouth, swirling my tongue around the digits and making sure they're coated in my saliva. I pull them out from between my lips and thrust them into her dripping center. Her frame jostles with each of my strokes, her breasts wobbling enticingly. I add a third but don't stop to let her body adjust to the additional intrusion. Her cunt grips my fingers, nearly sucking them off and begging to be filled deeper and fuller.

"Fuck, little witch. You make me want to decimate this delicate body." I sit back on my heels and pinch her hardened nipples until her body jerks. "You allow my madness an outlet, and as a reward, I will use and pleasure your body in every way imaginable," I say, knowing she can't hear me but wanting to speak it aloud anyway. "I want every single part of you. You are mine. Only mine. You always were."

I need to feel the heat of her wrapped around my dick immediately. My

brain throbs as lust overtakes my every thought. I kneel between her spread thighs, fisting my cock and lining it up with her needy cunt. I grab her hips and lift her as far off the bed as her shadow bindings allow.

The breath is stolen from my lungs when I thrust into her opening. She feels like every wet dream and fantasy I've ever had all rolled into one. She is mine. No one will tempt her again. I roll my hips, thrusting into her without a thought other than intense need. The canopy above the bed sways each time I dip into her.

I blow out a sharp breath, slowing my pace before I forget my purpose for tonight. I pull out until just my tip is wedged inside her. My teeth grind together as I attempt to contain my out-of-control lust. I'm not sure if I like this hold she has on me. Yet it's oddly soothing to know my obsession ensures my pleasure will only come from one source now.

I lightly rock my hips, rubbing the head of my cock within the entrance of her pussy. I lean to the side, then trail my fingers across the nightstand to grab the alcohol prep pad. The coated packaging tears between my fingers and I pluck out the small square of soaked cloth. I wipe her clit with the alcohol and skin all around it, then push back the hood that keeps it sheltered. She moans softly as I cleanse her, then arousal slips around my dick and drips on my balls. "Your body knows whose cock will satiate that hunger."

I thrust half the length of my dick into her center, then stop, digging my claw-tipped fingers into her hips. I squeeze my eyes shut, fighting my instincts to drive into her as my cock throbs painfully. Her pussy pulses around me, begging for more even while asleep.

I call more shadows and pin her on my lap. Her ass rests on the top of my thighs, her legs spread over my hips. My control slips further from my grasp, my demonic side and madness fighting for control. I fashion another shadow

into a needle and spread her pussy wider with two fingers. I suck in a breath at the mouthwatering sight of her glistening pink pussy stretched around me.

My body trembles from the restraint needed not to move. I position the shadow needle above her clit. My nostrils flare as I use another shadow to pinch the skin of her clitoral hood, then I pierce the shadow needle through it.

I keep the shadow needle in place, grip her ass, and thrust upward. Pleasure rolls through my nerves, relieving some of the ache. I pant as I force myself to slow down. My gaze sweeps over her body. Evie's head and shoulders rest on the comforter, but the rest of her body is supported by my hands and shadows.

My shadow remains in her flesh, with its needlelike form magically imbuing the area for the barbell and ensuring that the body modification remains permanent. It will never reject or close up.

I grab the jewelry off the nightstand with a shadow and drop it in my palm before removing one of the custom ball fasteners. I work the jewelry through the shadow piercing her skin. The shadow dissipates as I carefully screw on the other ball. My cock pulses within her. I admire the letter resting over her swollen clit.

Finally, a bit of sanity eases into my mind as I stare at the sigil engraved into the obsidian ball fasteners. "Mine," I growl, and for once, my demonic side and madness agree.

The rational part of me knows it's a mistake. The sigil represents my true name, and through it she could figure it out. But I can't have her near my brother, and this will stop him, or any other demon, from going near her pussy again.

It is mine.

I want to suck her piercing into my mouth and bite on the sensitive flesh.

But I refrain, reminding myself that although she is a witch, she does not heal as quickly as a demon.

With that thought in mind, I keep my thrusts shallow as I work toward my release. My heavy-lidded gaze traces over the piercing, then darts up to my tattoo on her chest. I caress the marked skin with a fingertip, and her nipples harden. Evie is mine, and no one will take her from me.

I grab her breast and pull out before straddling her torso. I reach behind me to swipe my fingers through her messy folds, then slather her arousal on my shaft. I squeeze her breasts together hard, ensuring my fingerprints bruise into her skin, and slide my dick between them. “Fuck. You feel incredible.” I moan, closing my eyes. I told her I wanted to cover her tits in my cum, and I don’t make idle threats.

My cock head taps the hollow at the base of her neck with every thrust, smearing pre-cum on her skin. She opens her mouth, moaning in her sleep, her hips rocking. I squeeze her breasts together harder, forming them tightly around my cock as the tingle at the base of my spine grows into a full-body ache.

My imminent climax drives me higher and higher. I moan as my heavy balls tighten. These gorgeous tits are going to be the end of me. She moans louder this time, calling out for me in her sleep. I pinch her nipples, her sounds pushing me over the edge, as I thrust harder. Her head bangs against the headboard.

Euphoria washes over me in waves. My back arches and I roar, milking my cock with her breasts, then release ropes of hot cum all over her neck, creating the most beautiful pearl necklace. My moans come out in short bursts, my voice lost to my orgasm. I rest my semi-hard dick between her breasts as the last jets of cum spill onto her.

I climb off my witch and grab a cloth to clean her up, but then decide against it, wanting her to feel me all over her skin. I pick up my shirt off the floor and clean myself up. I release my shadows from her extremities and lie on the bed next to her. I kiss her lips gently.

THIRTY-EIGHT



Evie

I know what happened last night. The evidence is sticky on my chest. I look at the empty space on the bed, figuring he's already left for the morning to search the grounds again for any sign of Ezra.

I know his brother is long gone by now. He came and did what he needed to—warn me so I'd turn against Lorcan. Besides, he obviously can't get close to the house; otherwise, he would have killed me. If he removes me, then he gets rid of any chance of his brother escaping this realm.

My clit throbs as I shift my position in front of the mirror in the bathroom, angling for a better look at the piercing. On the silver jewelry is an engraved circle with some kind of symbol in the middle and letters I can't quite make out. My eyes widen and I let go of the piercing. He fucking branded me, again.

I rub an ointment of herbs over the area, to speed up the healing process. Despite not being able to use my powers, I've learned enough about natural remedies from various grimoires over the years to know how to heal cuts, grazes, wounds, and now... piercings.

I shouldn't have told him about the dream, but the thought of him maddeningly piercing me in the middle of the night, claiming me as his own, creates a wave of slickness between my folds. I bite my lip as I think about how I woke up satisfied, without an aching need between my legs. I must have orgasmed, although I don't recall it.

What did I expect, telling a demon about my more depraved fantasies? I run my hand along my chest, grazing my nipple, as I think about him ejaculating all over me in my sleep, getting off to my tits. I slip my fingers between my legs, but the sound of flapping cuts me short.

Gomez.

I gaze into the mirror, seeing out into the Human Realm of the bathroom, but there's no sign of him. I hurry back into the adjoining bedroom and race to the fireplace. Gomez flaps, his head tilting when he sees me. "You're back!" I squeal and grip the mantel. "Where's Rosa?"

He flaps, giving me a long look, and glances behind himself.

I nod. "It's not safe yet," I say. "Is the Order still there?"

His beady eyes track me as I lean closer.

"What about his brothers?"

He drops to the ground, then crawls to the bed in the Human Realm.

“Gomey?”

He squeaks twice, scratching desperately at Lorcan’s side of the bed, at the wood frame.

“What is it?”

I turn slowly, then hurry to the bed. Gliding my fingers along the grooves, I finally feel a split, as if this part of the frame doesn’t belong.

When I push gently, it clicks out of place, then opens into a drawer. *Gomez, you’re a fucking genius.* On my knees, I pull the drawer all the way out, dust hitting the back of my nose. It looks exactly like the grimoire from the library, except this one is dated later.

October 1921. Evangeline Fallenmoore.

I pull open the pages and tear through them, but most are blank. There are a few drawings of summoning circles and sigils, but none that match the one now hanging above my clit. The parchment is fragile between my fingers, and I sigh. My shadows burn under my fingertips, alerting me to something I’m not aware of.

Words appear on the page, as if Evangeline is writing while I’m holding it. Bold, looped calligraphy covers the page, and I remember what Lorcan said, about some things only appearing to a Fallenmoore witch.

A complex spell covers two parchment pages, the ink spreading through the fibers. A symbol appears with a sketch of a mirror... and the blood of a Fallenmoore witch.

Everything is here to create a portal mirror. But I have to practice my magic to perform the spell, and I’m already close to the edge of insanity. I can’t fall victim to the same curse as my family.

I tear the pages from the book and pocket them. I place the book back in the

secret drawer and slide it back into the bed frame until it clicks, melding with the rest of the wood. Lorcan's footsteps creak against the floorboards, and I stand just in time. I peer at the mirror, noticing Gomez has gone or hidden himself.

Lorcan stands in the doorway, his eyes traveling from me to the bed, then back again. "Dining room, now."

THIRTY-NINE



Lorcan

She needs to be stronger than this to face the threats looming from every angle. I don't want to see her foolish tears when she lets her magic slip and it kills someone she cares for. She would never forgive herself if she hurt Fluffy Fucker or her human rainbow friend. I finger the demonic dagger sheathed and strapped to my waist. I can't be too careful after his visit in Evie's dreams.

I will always harbor a deep, festering anger. The infection lives in my blood. But now I don't instinctually want to release it toward Evie. My

thoughts darken as I rub my chest. The foreign burning emotion is back. Anxiety slithers unwelcome into my mind.

We sit at what Evie deemed the obnoxious dining room table. The mahogany surface gleams beneath her elbows as she sits at the far end opposite me, staring at her favorite mug, which is steaming with coffee. Her addiction to coffee is almost as intense as my obsession with her.

Pale early morning light streams through the gap between the thick purple, black, and gray drapes onto the stone floor beneath the window. Shadows from the straight, crisscrossing lead between the panes stretch toward Evie's bare feet beneath the table. Her shoulders tense, and her lips purse as she falls deeper in thought. My witch has been too quiet lately, and I can't help but assume she's up to something.

I place my elbows on the table and clasp my hands together. My eyes narrow on my witch as I trace my lips with my index finger. An iron candelabra sits in the center of the long table between us, wax drippings frozen on the white tapered candles. She raises a mug to her lips, then shoots daggers at me over the rim. Her eyes close, and she moans as her throat moves, swallowing her first hit of caffeine.

I groan internally as thoughts of fucking Evie's forbidden hole cloud my vision. Glass shatters as I sweep the place settings onto the floor with my shadows. My lips crash against hers as I grab her hips possessively, then thrust my tongue into her mouth. I run my palms to her ass cheeks and dig my fingers in as I lift her onto the table before me. My shadows flip her over and position her in the center of the table, then I crawl up after her. My head falls back as I pull the side of her skimpy sleep shorts to the side and run the head of my cock along her crack. Pre-cum smears all over her creamy skin.

Evie slams her mug on the table, jolting me out of my fantasy. I blow out a

breath, the raven strands on my forehead lifting for a moment. I will imprint myself in every one of her orifices before I leave her, but all in due time.

What Evie doesn't realize is grand tables like these serve a purpose. In societies with hierarchies and positions of power, tables such as this silently alert people where their place is. By placing her at the opposite end, I have shown her without words that she is my counterpart. Little incidents like this are happening more often as our bond solidifies. It's almost time, but it's difficult to keep my hands and mouth, not to mention my shadows, to myself, especially when she makes those mouthwatering sounds.

I exhale the air in my lungs through my nose, my gaze scorching as she looks up, her brow raised in question. I need a reason to force her to face her magic head on. Evie responds best when her emotions run high and wrath burns through her veins, so I will give her something to be pissed about.

I slam my fist on the table, ignoring the biscuits and jam on my gray plate, inlaid with silver roses on the scalloped edge. My witch startles, sloshing coffee over the rim of her mug.

“You,” I say, aiming my index finger at her, “are so fucking weak.”

“Excuse me?” Swirls of inky darkness cascade through her hazel irises as she carefully sets down her mug and wipes her fingers on the royal-purple cloth napkin. Her eyes dart toward mine. “How dare you?”

I cut her off. “You already embraced your magic, and now you're suppressing it again out of fear. You can't hurt me or anyone here. How are the withdrawals? The circles under your eyes and the pinched expression often on your face are just two of the dead giveaways highlighting your struggle.” I cup the back of my neck. “Continue using your magic like you were before. It will help get rid of the withdrawals for good. Stop acting like a fucking sacrifice for your magic and do something about it.”

Evie stands, her chair grating against the stone, then clattering onto its side. Her eyes blacken completely.

Good, little witch, fucking fight me.

“That is exactly what I’m talking about!” I shout as I storm around the table and get in her face. I sneer as I squeeze the arteries in her throat with my shadows.

Her shadows burst from her chest and the breath freezes in my lungs as it constricts my airway. My eyes widen, and I can’t stop a maddened grin from forming.

We stand in some sort of twisted version of an embrace, refusing to give the other any advantage. The sensation feels like it did in the bedroom the other day, but this time it’s more powerful.

“What changed? Why are you suppressing them again?”

My balls ache as desire builds within them. A gorgeous shade of blue takes over the natural pink of her lips. I bring my cold lips lightly to them, unable to hold myself back.

“Get off of me!” Evie shouts through the bond.

“No.”

She grabs my dick through my gray sweatpants. My lungs burn from the lack of oxygen, and I could not be more proud of her. Her shadows flex, and I roll my hips into her hand.

“So, that’s it? We strangle each other. Would I even be here if your stalking ass wasn’t obsessed with my pussy?” She responds in her mind.

“You even had to pierce it because you were jealous.”

Her venom-laced words are having the opposite effect on me than she probably intends. Evie sways as my shadows continue to trap the carbon dioxide within her.

I back her against the wall, papered with rose gold between the wooden panels, and the candle vibrates in its iron setting. She shoves at my chest with more shadows, but I don't budge.

“Obsession means nothing if you are not willing to command something that is inherently yours. Look at you. You can't even force me away with your shadows because you are not trained. No one can control your magic but you. And right now, your magic is controlling you instead. The nature of darker magic like ours is that it takes on a life of its own. Your magic is feral. Frankly, I'm surprised it hasn't turned on its host yet.”

Her eyes widen and her body trembles, her shadow around my throat with it. Evie blinks rapidly, baring her teeth at me. Her chest pushes against mine as her back arches, and her death magic bursts from her. My witch's head cracks against the wall behind her, and she crumples to the ornate carpet covering the stone.

The blast of her magic sends me stumbling backward. Yes. This is exactly the motivation she needs. She picks herself off the ground and crosses her arms in front of her chest.

“It's not feral. It feels. I don't know how to describe it. But the few times I let it out, it's like a fire burning along just under my skin, painful but also leaving ecstasy in its wake. It thrives off my intense emotions. And I know it's a part of me. But I don't want to lose my mind.” Evie walks back to the table, her shoulders sagging, and braces her arms on the dark wood.

My eyes soften. “You're right.”

“What?”

I bridge the gap between us and press my chest to her back as I embrace her. She stiffens but doesn't move away. “You're right, little witch. Your magic is intrinsically part of you. No one, including myself, can tell you how

it feels and works within you. However, you should know that the Fallenmoore insanity is no curse, but a refusal to embrace dark magic.”

She turns her head over her shoulder, her lips pulled into a frown. We stare into each other’s eyes.

“What I said earlier is true. Using your magic regularly will keep you strong and stop you from falling into the brink of insanity. Your magic is the cure, not a curse.”

“You seem to know a lot about this,” she says, her breath ghosting my lips. “Can you show me how to use it properly?”

“Do you trust me?”

She smirks. “No.”

“Good.”

FORTY



Evie

I bend at the waist and grip my knees. My chest aches as the breath whooshes in and out of my lungs. We have been at this for hours, but it's no use. My magic has been exploding from me in sharp bursts or hiding from me altogether.

“Do you recall our bargain?” Lorcan asks sternly.

“What bargain?”

“I'm not speaking to you,” he says, meeting my gaze, and glares at me. He seems to look through me now that I think about it.

I realize he's talking to my magic.

"Yes, I remember. Didn't it feel good to play with my shadows at the manor?"

My body seems to hum in response, like something deep within me is responding to him. Millions of tiny vibrations cascade throughout my body, then a totally unique sensation floods through me. It's neither painful nor pleasant, but somewhere in between.

"Good. So you *do* remember." He seemingly answers himself. "Then stop being fucking bratty like your witch and do as you're told. You need training just as much as she does."

"What the fuck, Lorcan?" Confusion muddles my brain. Did I trip on a tree root and bash my head on a rock? I touch my fingers to my temple, then bring them in front of me. Nope, no blood. None of this makes sense.

"You're as sane as you ever were," Lorcan says, tipping his head to the side.

"Then who the hell are you talking to?"

"Your magic." He pinches my chin between his fingers painfully. His claws extend and threaten to pierce through my skin.

"You spoke to my magic."

"Yes." Lorcan lowers his hand, then widens the space between us. "Start over."

"Why should I? It won't be any different this time."

"Just fucking do it." He sighs, rubbing his temples. "Now."

"We're not done talking about this. You will explain how you are communicating with my magic."

"Fine," he says and nods his bearded chin toward my target. He leans against a nearby tree and crosses his thick tattooed arms over his chest, the

definition of his toned muscles bulging in the right places under his fitted T-shirt. He flexes his biceps, tapping his forefinger on the opposite arm, when he catches me staring. “I’m waiting, witch.”

My cheeks heat. *Get it together, girl*, I chastise my pussy mentally. He chuckles as he lights a cigarette.

Like Lorcan instructed, I position myself in front of the massive pine before me. My quads flex beneath my jeans as I brace my legs, one foot farther forward than the other. Char marks cover the trunk, and pieces of rough bark lie on the forest floor around its base. I release the air from my lungs, then use a shadow to toss a stick in front of the tree. The branch flies seamlessly through the air until another shadow catches it precisely over the ‘X’ Lorcan carved into the tree with his shadows.

I close my eyes, then open them, determination brewing in my core. Chills sweep along my skin. I’ve never felt this way before, almost in harmony with both my shadow and death magics. But the bond is unfamiliar, like they chose to never let me close enough to truly feel their unique vibrations. Does my magic resent me? Goddamn him. How did he know that would work? A surge of jealousy throbs in my belly. How is it possible that the demon understands my magic better than I do? He even seems to have a relationship with it, for fuck’s sake.

“Good girl,” Lorcan purrs, dragging me out of the dark web of my thoughts. My core warms with the praise, and he steps up behind me. “You’re still hesitant to unleash your death magic. I’ve seen you unleash it several times, but it’s always in stressful or emotional circumstances.”

I raise my eyebrows and pop out one hip.

“With practice, summoning the magic within you will be as effortless as breathing.” Lorcan grabs my shoulders and places me in front of him. “Close

your eyes,” he whispers against the back of my ear.

I do as he asks, anxiety churning in my belly.

“Do you want to go insane? You have to fully let it in to prevent that outcome.”

I hold my breath, squeezing my fists. Lorcan’s hands cover mine, and he pries my hands open. “Be easy, little witch. I’m here to aid you if anything gets out of hand. But you need to trust in yourself and your magic. You can’t keep fearing it.”

I suck in a breath, my chest inflating.

“Do it, and maybe I’ll hunt you again. Force your needy pussy open and fill it with my cock.” He inhales deeply, his chest brushing against my shoulder blades. “Your cunt smells delicious, especially when it’s soaking for me.” His stubble tickles my neck as he rests his chin on my shoulder. “My filthy fucking slut,” he growls.

Lorcan drapes his arms over my shoulders as I straighten my spine and glare at the tree. I focus on the death magic within me and inhale deeply. In my mind’s eye, I conjure the image of a sphere dense with death magic hovering in my chest. I expel the ball of magical energy from my chest, and it blasts into the tree, pieces of gray bark dispersing into the air. My jaw drops as a hole is burned completely through the trunk.

“Oh my God.” My head whips around, then my eyes flash to Lorcan.

He doesn’t say anything, only smirks. “Are you ready to try shadow-walking?”

I squirm in Lorcan’s arms as he steps out of a shadow in the kitchen. He slides me down his body, a sheath strung through his belt jabbing into my

thigh, and sets me to my feet.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

His brows narrow, as if he couldn't possibly understand why I am upset.

“You could have shadow-walked with me this whole time?”

Lorcan licks his lip, then bites it. “You needed to be taught a lesson,” he says with a shrug. Why the would he need a dagger? Isn't his magic enough?

“I can't fucking believe you.”

He sighs and runs his hands through his thick, dark hair. The strands shimmer from blue to black like a raven's feather as the silver chandelier hanging above the kitchen island shines down.

The kitchen is breathtaking, but I am so overwhelmed with frustration that I barely absorb its attractions.

Anger clouds Lorcan's features. “After everything we've shared,” he says, prowling toward me. “You're pissed that you had to walk a few miles?”

“That's not the fucking point, demon.”

“Then what is?” he spits.

“You lied to me.”

He scoffs and folds his arms over his chest. “I simply omitted the fact that I could shadow-walk with you in tow. *That* is not a lie.”

“Same difference!” I shriek, throwing up my hands.

Chills cover my skin, and the fine hairs on the back of my neck stand on end as an eerie, dark laughter echoes around us. “A lover's quarrel already, brother?” Ezra asks, rubbing his hands together.

“Get out.” Lorcan seems to grow in size, taking up more space in front of me. My heart palpitates, and a cold sweat breaks out on my arms and neck.

“*Evie, run.*” Lorcan growls into my mind.

“*No. I'm not leaving you with him.*”

Ezra's eyes dart back and forth between Lorcan and me. "Are we having a conversation without including the rest of the class?" he asks, the timbre of his voice like the bass track to a heavy-metal song.

Lorcan hisses as his claws shoot from his clenched fists, then pierce through the back of his hands.

Ezra laughs, shaking his head. "You never were very good with control."

"That's ironic coming from you, *Wrath*," Lorcan spits. My tank top scrunches below my breasts as Lorcan's shadow picks me up and tosses me onto the kitchen island behind him. My elbow connects with the wood knife block as I stop myself from sliding off the other end of the granite counter.

My eyes widen when my demon launches at his brother. They tumble to the stone floor. Lorcan slashes across Ezra's chest with his claws, and blood oozes through the torn material of his heather-gray hoodie. He wraps his legs around Lorcan's neck and squeezes his head between his massive quads. He grunts, then flexes the muscles in his legs, every dip and swell of his muscles showing through his slacks. Lorcan sinks his claws into his brother's knees all the way to his knuckles. Ezra howls but doesn't release him.

My hands fly to my mouth as Lorcan grips Ezra's man bun with a shadow and yanks at the black strands. Ezra's clawed fingers fly to his head, and his thighs loosen just enough for Lorcan to roll out of his hold. Ezra whips a shadow around his brother's ankle and pulls his foot out from underneath him. Fuck!

"Don't use your shadows against me, Lorcan. Some of us have had centuries of training, while others rotted in a cage."

I take a step farther away from the demons as Lorcan's frame trembles violently, prone on the floor before Ezra. He balls his hands into fists and releases them several times. The hairs on my arms rise as a quiet, devastating

whimper slips past my demon's lips before he covers it with a snarl so piercing, my ear drums ring.

Lorcan throws his body forward, the momentum propelling him to his feet. I've never seen someone move like that. I grab a cast-iron pan from the sink but hiss as the weight of it twists my wrist the wrong way. I feel better with the potential weapon in my hand. It's a decent backup, in case my magic isn't enough on its own.

The brothers circle each other, but Lorcan counters his brother's moves, keeping him away from me at all costs. Ezra's eyes dart toward me, then at the pan in my grasp, and the corners of his lips turn upward in a sinister smile. He shakes his head as if disappointed.

"Fucking asshole!" I scream, launching the heavy iron skillet at his head. My wrist twinges when my fingers release the cast iron, and I miss the mark, clipping him on the shoulder.

Lorcan uses the distraction to crash into him, but Ezra's shoes just slide across the stone. Ezra lashes a shadow toward me like a whip, then wraps it around my waist and drags me off the island.

Pain radiates deep into my bones when I smash against the plum-velvet-upholstered stool. Ezra drags me toward him, and I scream. My shadows unravel and grab onto the stool, but it clatters to the ground and slides along with me.

Lorcan roars as his shadows yank back his brother's head, and he stabs him in the neck with the dagger that was sheathed at his side. Blood drips from the blade as Lorcan clenches it tightly in his fist. The muscles in his back ripple through his fitted T-shirt, and a continuous stream of growls issue from his throat.

His brother falls to one knee, trying to stanch the flow of blood with his

hand, but it seeps through his fingers, staining his hoodie crimson.

I push to my feet and wince. My hip throbs. My heart races as Ezra stares at me for a moment.

Ezra smiles, blood coating his teeth, and laughs. “You think that stabbing me will be the end of this?”

I peer around Lorcan and move to step in front of him, but he blocks my path.

“You should know better than to think a dagger would end me, *King of Demons*,” Ezra hisses.

“Oh, I know it won’t,” my demon states as he cleans his fingernails with the tip of the dagger. “I’m surprised you don’t recognize the blade, *brother*.”

Ezra’s eyes narrow as he squints at the dagger. “Motherfucking cocksucker!” Ezra shouts. “Where the fuck did you get a demonic blade?”

Lorcan shrugs. “Parting gift from Hell.” Lorcan stalks closer to his brother.

Ezra gets to his feet and stumbles back, trailing blood in his wake.

“This needs to end, Ezra. There’s only one way out of this realm, and I will protect her at all costs.” My demon slashes at his brother with the dagger, but Ezra floods the room with inky shadows at the same moment. I can’t see anything for a few moments.

“I will take her and everything from you,” Ezra promises. “Just like I did the last time.”

“*Lorcan?*”

The shadows slowly dissipate just as I hear the door to the courtyard click shut.

“He’s getting away!” I yell to Lorcan.

I eye the blade still coated in his brother’s blood, then dart my eyes toward my demon. Lorcan looms over me before wiping the dagger on his jeans and

stabbing it into the sheath.

He grips the sides of his head and growls a demonic sound. Panic freezes the air in my lungs, and I gape at him. He spins on his heels, his upper lip pulled back over his teeth. His eyes change. Anything resembling humanity in them before is gone.

Anger over his brother has shifted him into a version of him I don't recognize. He shoves me to the floor and comes down on top of me. Lorcan digs his claws into the waistband of my jeans and tears them apart at the seams.

I choke. "Lorcan, stop."

He straddles me, pinning me with his weight. He stabs his unsheathed claws the ground.

"Lorcan," I say again, louder, but the man staring back at me from only an hour ago is no longer present. His black eyes shimmer, and the same desperate, chilling feeling I get when I visit the asylum washes over me.

He rocks on his knees, his groin pressing into me, as my demon comes apart at the seams. He laughs, and goose bumps pebble on my flesh. My eyes look anywhere but at his face. It's never smart to lock eyes with an alpha predator. He leans over me, slamming his palms down on either side of my head. I flinch but realize that the dagger forgotten on his waist now dangles within my reach. I need a distraction. I lean up and bite his lip, tearing through the soft, plump skin, and grab the dagger. His hands launch to my throat, but he's not quick enough.

I stab the blade into his abdomen.

He hisses, releasing my throat to cover the wound, and glares at me. The madness swirling in his eyes deepens. He falls back on his ass, then lies on the floor, laughing uncontrollably.

I stand on trembling legs and sprint away from the demon.

FORTY-ONE



Lorcan

My madness breaks free, and I welcome it.

My laughter eventually subsides, but I remain lying on the cold stone, thoughts of my brother killing Evie, then her stabbing me and him keeping me trapped here forever wash through me. I dissociate from reality, the evil inside taking over every pore.

My abdomen flexes around the black tourmaline blade buried within my flesh. I grip the handle and slide the intrusion out of my stomach, then toss it onto the counter in front of me.

Stupid fucking bitch. Does she really believe that stabbing me would help my psychotic behavior? The darker, primal side of her demands my madness meet hers, and I will gladly fucking oblige.

I close my eyes and center on our bond. I travel down it and emerge in Evie's mind. Her thoughts practically shout at me in the chaos of adrenaline, arousal, and fear.

“Run, run, witch. When I catch you, I will spank that needy pussy and make a feast of your filthy fucking body.”

I watch through Evie's panicked gaze. She's hiding in a small, cramped space. The witch huddles with her knees to her chest. Her heartbeat thrashes against her ears.

“Do you think you can hide from me? You've never known pain like I am able to inflict.”

Evie bursts from the wardrobe and paces back and forth in front of the enormous canopy bed, frantically wringing her hands. She bolts toward the entrance of the room and presses her ear to the door. The witch twists the knob slowly but cringes when the hinges creak loudly. Evie pokes her head into the hall, then rushes away.

Back in my own mind, I push to my knees and stand. My stab wound shoots bolts of pain through my middle, and I grin widely. I poke my fingers into the gash and hiss from the pleasurable pain. I remove my crimson-stained fingers and slide them down my tattooed neck, the skulls on my throat now decorated with war paint.

I saunter out of the kitchen to the bar built into the wall of the library, then press a button. Something whirls within the wall as the wooden panel slides down, exposing the stereo system. I select a mix perfect for hunting and crank up the volume far too loud. The base thumps through my body,

practically vibrating my neurons. I remove another mask from a drawer beneath the bar and secure it to my face. I stare threateningly at my reflection. The black-and-gold mask hides nearly all of my inner turmoil, but it cannot wash away the madness blazing within my obsidian eyes.

A wave of utter disgust simmers in my gut. No one loathes me more than I loathe myself.

Maddening pain radiates through my skull, and I smile widely behind my mask. I roll my shoulders back, then reach behind me to pull my bloody T-shirt over my head, exposing the throbbing gash in my tattooed abdomen. The wound isn't healing as quickly as it normally would, because the demonic blade is imbued with magic to interrupt my magic from repairing the damage.

I ride shotgun within my mind as my madness takes the driver's seat. It calls my demon form forward, shifting my body partially into the terrifying, lethal predator I am. Evie has only skated the surface of my true nature, but she has yet to dance with the devil himself. My muscles visibly swell, and my veins strain against my skin, now a blue so dark, they appear black. My razor-sharp teeth form and everything in my body extends and lengthens. I admire the unwavering demon in the mirror, enjoying the freedom from the attractive shell I always don.

All of my senses stretch out of me, fighting for dominance at the forefront of my mind. I smell the witch all the way on the third floor, the stench of her fear a potent aphrodisiac.

“Paint It Black” by Anrankai vibrates in my chest, then it slowly transitions to a new song.

I breathe in her potent rosy-vanilla scent, her fear enhancing each of the notes, and stride through the kitchen to the buttery entrance. I jog down the

stairs and flick open the electric panel behind the wooden rack of wine bottles. My claws scrape against the metal housing as I switch off all the breakers minus one, the stereo system.

The witch screams, her terror echoing through the manor, but it cuts short, as if she covered her hands over her mouth.

Adrenaline floods my veins and my brain throbs intensely, the edges of my vision blackening. My psychosis and demonic form happily blended is more than a little dangerous. The blood rushing through her veins calls to me, and I ache to drive my cock into her warm, wet holes while I brutalize her body with the blade she lovingly lodged into my abdomen.

I jog back up the steps and enter a shadow to travel to the third floor. I remain cloaked within the darkness beneath a painting. It feels as though it's been years since I stalked her properly. I yearn for her horror-laced sweat beneath my tongue. The thought sends an unbearable ache to my swollen length.

The witch sprints by the shadows in which I loiter.

"I cannot wait to cover you in my blood," I whisper, barely loud enough for even my ears to hear.

She skids to a stop, her heart beating so hard, it thumps against my tattoo on her breast. I stroke myself a few times and groan before adjusting myself so that my hard-on does not become a hindrance. Its mushroom head sticks well above my waistband, and the several rows of ridges lining the top and bottom of my demonic cock rub against my abdomen in a way that is distractingly pleasurable.

The witch backs up slowly, her eyes darting around the hallway, and she bolts toward the grand staircase. I wait until she gets halfway there before I escape the shadows.

With my free hand, I place the tips of my claws onto the wooden paneling. Keeping my pace measured, I walk forward, dragging my claws along the wall. The wood snicks as grooves carve along the grain. In my other hand, the dagger slices into my palm as I grip it by the blade. A trail of my blood follows me in an unbroken line.

The witch glances over her shoulder and stumbles before landing on all fours. I tilt my head to the side, lazily moving toward her. I slice into my lip with my razor-sharp teeth when she presents her ass cheeks beneath the gray satin cheeky panties. Pre-cum leaks from my demonic dick, then drips down my shaft as I thoroughly enjoy the view. Her biteable ass jiggles as she scrambles to her feet.

My mind fogs as her honeyed arousal permeates the air. My brain squeezes, begging me to dig my teeth into her throat and coat my tongue with her life's essence.

Evie turns the corner and slides on her bare feet when she reaches the first marble stair. "Fuck!" She shrieks, her voice cracking. The witch crashes into the ornate railing, knocking the air from her lungs. She swivels her head, then gasps when I reach for her with a hand-shaped shadow. The wood groans eerily from my claws as I draw closer. Evie white-knuckles the banister but trips down the long staircase.

I linger on the balcony between the stairs, leaning casually against the banister. The intricate carvings on the wood dig into my forearms as I purposely let her get farther away. It would be a shame to end the hunt before true terror freezes her palpitating heart.

Thick drops of blood leak between my fingers squeezing the dagger's blade. They splash soundlessly against the stone floor below. The opening

bars of “.SALT.” by the Dead Poet Society blare through the hidden speakers in the manor, and I laugh throatily.

I press my bloodied palm against the damask wallpaper, smearing gore on the wall. I rest my fingers on the banister as I walk down the stairs, the pads smoothly gliding along every intricately carved rose.

Evie trips again and falls the last three steps onto the first floor, then heads straight for the entrance. Her sweaty palms slip on the handles as she pulls them down aggressively, her own madness finally waking up to meet mine.

I eye her back as I lazily descend.

I laugh darkly, the hairs on my arms standing from the psychotic melody. “Try the lock,” I say, my gravelly voice cracking with restraint.

She turns, placing her back flat against the door, her glittery black nails scraping at the wood. Evie flings herself back around and tilts her gaze up. The lock is slid into place high above her head. She whimpers at the sight and jumps, reaching upward. She misses the first time, her fingers just grazing the iron handle. The witch tries again, the muscles bunching in her shapely legs as she jumps, then slaps at the lock. The metal grates as it disengages, another note in our haunting melody. She pulls on the handles, throws the doors wide, and flees into the night.

My madness stabs my mind, raging as I force it to stall instead of giving chase.

I lift my face toward the sky and take in the waxing moon. My blood-coated fingers slide against the edge of my mask as I push it until it rests near the top of my head.

I place the dagger into its sheath, then extract a pack of cigarettes and a lighter.

My brain throbs as I hold myself back. My demonic side thrashes in fury,

hating the partial shift of my form. It wants to shift my body fully and unleash its deranged needs. I wrap my bloody and lacerated lips around the cigarette and press my thumb on the wheel of my lighter. A lavender spark ignites the propellant, and a violet flame rises. I cup my hands around the end, then drag in a lungful of the drug-infused smoke and hold it in my chest.

I smoke for several minutes, fighting the psychotic impulses firing in my brain. The longer Evie runs through the woods, the more delicious her fear-drenched arousal will taste.

The music blares in the house behind me, and I wonder if she is still close enough to hear the soundtrack of her flight. I tap the tip of my cigarette, the ash breaking apart to float onto the wooden slats of the porch. I pinch the purple ember, smothering it before pocketing the rest.

I blow out the remaining smoke through my nose and slide my mask into place. I stride through the meadow, the wet foliage dampening the hem of my gore-splattered jeans.

The chill of the October air pricks the bare flesh of my torso. I clear the tree line and step into the woods just as the theme song from *Halloween* pumps from the manor. I cackle loudly along with my madness as it embraces the vibe of Michael's murderous tendencies.

The thick trunks of the fir trees blur as I unleash the temporary hold I placed on my madness. Excitement stiffens my shifted cock further. A stripe of moonlight peeks through the skeletal branches of the other trees, then slashes across my torso from shoulder to hip bone. My demonic eyesight widens in pleasure as I take in the swollen head of my dick rising slightly higher and the ridges catching on my jeans as it grows.

It takes no effort for my madness to pinpoint the witch's exact location as she crashes through the woods. I breathe in deeply, bouncing on the balls of

my booted feet and palming the length of my dick straining against my lower abs.

I soothe the madness steering my body. *Hunt her. Devour our witch.*

FORTY-TWO



Evie

I am being hunted by a fucking psychopath. I'm certain the look on his face promises to introduce me to levels of pain I have yet to experience in my tortured life.

My image of Lorcan prowling toward me with that dagger dangling by his side comes unbidden to my mind as I race through the unfamiliar woods. The dark, depraved side of myself craves Lorcan's psychopathic madness. His eyes take on a wild look at times, and I never know what he'll do next. Part of me craves for him to force me again and again, my body simply the

receptacle for his pleasure. The thought of how he thrust into me as my limp body jostled on the bed beneath him sends a primal need straight to my swollen clit. He's right; my cunt is needy for him.

He turned the music up so loud that I can still hear it filtering through the trees a mile or two from the manor. The haunting playlist is perfectly fitting for the psychopath to hunt me down and obliterate my senses. I never knew being scaroused—is that even a word?—would satisfy my craving to be dominated far beyond my level of consensual sanity.

I hiss when my shoulder collides with a tree. My skin tears as I stumble, but I keep running.

“Fuck!” I yell when the side of my cheek meets the leaf-covered forest floor. The air forcefully leaves my lungs as Lorcan's weight lands on top of me, and I panic. I try to pull air into my lungs, but none travels into my oxygen-starved body.

I dig into the dirt, and something sharp in the soil stabs beneath a nail as I finally gasp precious air into my lungs.

The demon grinds his erection to my ass, wedging my panties between my cheeks. His cock presses against me, seeming heavier than usual. “Caught you,” he growls, the timbre of his deep, gravelly voice pitched an octave lower.

I shiver, realizing he still has not returned to me from his maddened state in the kitchen. My soaking pussy clenches on air as his new baritone tenor washes over me.

The demon forces his hand under my hips and slides it into my panties, cutting me with his sharp-as-fuck claws in the process. I moan and grind my ass back into his hardened length.

His shadows flip me over abruptly, and I suck in a breath. A scream tears

from my lungs when I take in his new mask. The black surface seems to absorb the moonlight, and the dripping gold from the eyeholes is exactly like his usual mask. However, this one covers his entire face. My eyes dart over the contours of the molded lips set into an unreadable line, rendering him expressionless.

My nipples pebble against the thin cotton fabric of my tank top. I moan as the hardened peaks brush against Lorcan's chest. Embracing my dark side means allowing myself to enjoy the darker pleasures that life offers.

His shadows cinch around my ankles and spread me wide. The monster leans down, then lifts the mask slightly before his razor-like teeth grab the gray satin of my panties and shred them. I tremble as he exposes me further to the elements, the cold autumn air chilling the barbell pierced through my flesh, now thankfully healed from the magic-infused ointment.

Lorcan's maddened gaze smolders as he stares at my opening. The demon hinges at the waist and grinds the unyielding mask against my bundle of nerves. My heart balloons with bliss as he uses the mask to edge me closer to euphoria. He runs his masked nose between my lips and inhales.

"Oh my God," I whimper. Seeing him like this, half shifted into a demonic form, should terrify me. But it only makes me want him more.

I moan as he swipes a flat tongue from the base of my slick pussy to my clit. He grips the piercing between his teeth, then yanks on it, flicking the tip of his tongue over the taut flesh. My body convulses from the painful action.

The demon sits back on his heels and slowly runs his tongue along his plump top lip. Fuck. He pushes the mask down to cover his lips, arousal coating his mask indecently. I bite my lip and moan, my mind and body on sensory overload.

"Time for your punishment, witch."

“Punishment?” I ask, my voice cracking and lust fogging my thoughts.

He cackles, and my hands tremble in response to the haunting display of insanity. “You fucking stabbed me,” he growls, but I know with certainty that a wide smile lingers below his mask. “I enjoyed the pain immensely, but there will always be repercussions for your disobedience.” His deep, sexy voice washes over me, and my hips thrust into the air.

He slices through my tank top. The fabric parts, and it falls away to the sides of my body, then he traps my hands against my chest. The demon rains slap after slap directly onto my clit, my piercing pressing into the swollen bud. I throw my head back, mumbling incoherently as the sting registers. Madness grasps onto my mind, digging its talons into the gray matter.

“More,” I groan.

His eyes flash to a familiar green as my demon peeks through the haze of his madness. Obsidian replaces it almost as soon as it appears. This feels too fucking good to be a punishment. If this is how his madness reacts to my disobedience, I will stab him more often.

He pauses, then speaks into my mind. “*Count, filthy witch.*”

His slaps come harder and more brutal. My madness embraces the punishment as less pleasure and more pain coalesces in my core. My pussy gushes as my body races toward release.

“One.” I sob, tears rimming my lower lashes. I am so turned on that it’s difficult to keep my place in the count. “Two.”

Slap.

“Three.”

Then, twice more in quick succession

“Four. Five,” I cry out.

My back bows as he holds nothing back and spanks my pussy one last time.

“That was for fucking thinking you could stab me and get away with it.”

He grazes the tip of his claw along my overly sensitized clit, and my hips buck against the air in response. One of his shadows snaps my legs together as he stands. From this angle I cannot see his eyes, just the deep portals of darkness behind the gold-dripping eyeholes. He tips his head to the side.

Lorcan straddles me, the movement jerky. My mouth drops open as my gaze meets his literal monster cock protruding above his jeans.

Fuck yes, my madness echoes within my skull. He’s several inches larger, and the girth surpasses the width of my pussy. I desperately want to tongue the ridges scaling the top and bottom of his veiny shaft. My mouth waters, and I nearly come from the sight alone. My body trembles beneath him, terror and lust fighting for dominance. He’s going to tear me in two.

His shadows move around me, grabbing a thick branch and snapping it in half. The shadow stabs it into the soil well above my head, then grabs the second half of the broken branch. The ground shakes beneath me as his shadows penetrate the ground with the broken point of the second piece below my bloodied and dirt-covered feet.

His shadows bind my limbs securely to each of the stakes in the ground, my core tightening as I’m stretched between them. I wiggle, testing my bonds. The demon moans loudly while watching my struggle and unease.

He grips my pussy, his thumb sliding into my center. *“I’m tired of waiting.”* He unsheathes the dagger and drags it across the front of his throat, cutting through the eye sockets of his mirrored skull tattoo. Blood gushes onto his chest, and he leans over. My skin pebbles as the thick, hot, crimson liquid soaks into my top and pools in the hollow of my throat. I wince when drops splash against my face.

The demon pants and his hands shake. *“You look incredible covered in my*

blood.”

My eyes dart to his as his wound knits together. Behind the mask, his gaze holds no semblance of humanity. I flinch away from him as he rams the dagger into the sheath.

Black tinges my vision as I fight to remain in control of my madness. The temptation to beg him overtakes my thoughts. For what, I'm not sure. Do I want to beg him for my life? Or beg him to fuck me with his fat cock?

My nostrils flare as his scent deepens the more aroused he becomes. He slowly climbs off my bound and immobile body, then unties the laces of his boots before toeing them off. He unbuttons his pants and lowers the zipper one metal tooth at a time, before shoving them down over his incredible ass and dropping them on the leaf-covered ground. His eyes bore into me, never taking his terrifying gaze off me as he steps out of the puddle his jeans created.

The demon straddles me and notches his dripping dick between my lower lips. He grasps the base of his shaft, rubbing it hard against my swollen nub. My body trembles uncontrollably as the unforgiving ridges catch on my clit. He presses against me more firmly, gliding the head along my labia.

He leans forward, grinding his hard dick between my folds and onto my clit but not entering where I need him most.

I clench my fists, aching to tear that goddamn mask off his face. The demon braces his hands on his thighs, staring intensely at his massive cock covered in the combination of our arousal.

I raise my head as high as I can between my bound arms and witness one of the hottest fucking things I have ever seen in my life. He grips his monstrous cock within his fist and rubs himself. The tattoos on his hand and fingers appear starker from the force of his grip. Lorcan's body shakes as his

madness gives into the lust we're both suffering. Oh, my god. He jerks off while seated on top of me, moaning and stroking himself from tip to base. His fingers jump as they connect with every ridge. I lick my lips, desire an inferno licking my veins as his cock swells and a thick drop of pre-cum bubbles on the tip.

I can't take any more. My madness breaks free to meet his.

"Fuck me," I beg, my brain pulsing with searing pain.

"Patience." He throws his head back, his corded neck straining. Rope after rope of hot cum cover my belly and chest. My pussy throbs painfully, needing to be filled. For a moment, I fear now that he's come, he'll leave me here, bound in agonizing need.

The demon pants above me, coming down from his orgasm. I narrow my eyes on his still-engorged dick.

"H-how?" I stutter.

"I'm a demon. I can keep myself hard for as long as I choose."

"Holy shit."

He squeezes his knees, pushing my legs together tightly, then thrusts three fingers into my tight, wet channel. I grit my teeth as he prepares my body for his enormous size. I'm surprised he's taking the time to prep my body, rather than surrendering to his primal urges, but even monsters are capable of compassion. He adds a fourth thick finger and rolls my clit beneath his thumb. I scream as pain lacerates through my stretched skin while pleasure radiates from my swollen bundle of nerves.

"*Fuck yes,*" he groans. "*Scream for me, witch.*"

His fingers slide within me, the pain receding at the rate of spilled molasses as my body works to accommodate the intrusion. He continues with his ministrations for an immeasurable amount of time, then curls his fingers

toward himself. Sweat coats my skin as intense pleasure centers on that spot deep in my pussy.

The madness within Lorcan's onyx eyes swells as his gaze darts from my panting mouth to my pussy.

"No! I'm not ready," I plead.

"You were made to fit this cock in all its forms. Look how your cunt swallows my hand exquisitely."

I lift my head, while a shadow cradles the back of my skull to help support the weight, and peer at the junction of my thighs. His knuckles press against my opening, his fingers deep within me. Holy shit.

The shadow rests my head against the cushion of plum leaves, then he fists his shaft and squeezes the tip into my sopping cunt. Pain tears through my core as my body struggles to widen for his demonic cock. My arousal squelches obscenely as he rocks his hips, pushing his way deeper into my body.

His masked face tips skyward, the tendons in his tattooed neck and torso roped with tension. Instinctually, I know he's lost the battle of control completely.

Madness reigns, and Lorcan's ridged dick is splitting me open. I black out for a moment as agony consumes me before tendrils of pleasure work their way to my aching center. I jerk my wrists against his shadow binds, itching to touch him.

His abdominal muscles tighten and loosen against mine as he rolls his hips. I lick my lower lip, then bite it hard enough to draw blood. I moan, the taste of copper flooding my tastebuds. The pain hovers on the edges of my consciousness as his ridges rubbing within me overtake my pleasure center.

Pain and pleasure don't exist on their own as he devastates my pussy. The

ridges of his cock grind against my swollen G-spot. My pussy aches, stretched well beyond anything I've ever experienced, and he's giving me no mercy.

The demon picks up the pace, slamming into me over and over. I panic as the pressure rises to blinding levels, and I fear I'm losing control over my bladder.

"Don't fight it, witch," he growls. *"You're about to squirt all over us. It's natural and so fucking sexy."* Confusion swirls in my mind. I thought that was a fucking myth. The demon presses up on his hands and tilts his hips upward to grind the ridges of his demonic cock against my walls, purposely increasing the pressure within my G-spot. I stop fighting it, and the bubble of pressure pops.

Hot liquid surges from me as I squirt. Euphoria attacks my senses as an all-consuming orgasm soars through my body and rips my reality to shreds. He moans as jet after jet of the purest form of female satisfaction splashes against his lower abdomen. I've never experienced bliss as all-consuming as this. He growls thunderously as my pussy spasms around him.

"Good fucking girl," he says, his madness praising me.

Our torsos glide against each other as the liquid released from grinding against my G-spot combines with the cum from his earlier release.

"Now, shut the fuck up and take that dick like a good witch."

He fucks into me relentlessly, my breasts swaying against his hard chest.

"Mine," he growls, the word vibrating within my skull. *"If another man ever touches you intimately again, I will rip their weak spines from their mouths and suck the marrow from their bones. Say it."*

"Say what?" I slur, unable to focus on the specific filthy words greeting my ears.

“Say that you are mine. That you will never allow another to touch this flesh,” He captures my throat, cutting off my air supply.

He loosens his hold just enough for me to speak and I wheeze the words through my lips. “I’m yours.”

“Not good enough.” He flexes his fingers on my windpipe. When I don’t answer quickly, he snatches the dagger from the ground and slices shallowly beneath my nipple.

“Oh, fuck,” I groan. I use all of my residual energy to focus on what the madness wants so I can come. Riding the cusp of release is unbearable. “I-I’m yours. My body is yours to do whatever you want. Use me, break me, fucking destroy me...” I moan.

“That’s a good fucking witch.” He rolls the tight bud at the center of my thighs between his fingers as he moves within me faster than humanly possible. For a moment, I fear he’ll pierce one of my organs with his cock. My spine arches as pleasure burns deep in my lower belly.

He uses my shoulder to nudge the bottom of his mask up, exposing his lips, the stubble around his mouth so fucking inviting. His transformed teeth flash in the moonlight before he attacks the space between my shoulder and neck, his teeth so sharp that they slice into my skin easily. My muscles tense, my body expecting pain, but it never fully comes. It hurts, but there is too much happening below my waist. He moans and thrusts into me wildly, as if the taste of my blood triggered something in his demonic nature. If I weren’t held in place with his shadows, I would be scraping against the leaf-and-stick-strewn ground with every thrust.

He bites down harder and sucks some of my blood into his mouth. My eyes cross and I moan uncontrollably into the night. His teeth in my flesh trigger the part of myself begging to submit.

His bite retracts, and his body freezes above me. My chest brushes against his unmoving one as I struggle to catch my breath.

“What’s wrong?” I croak.

His cock pulses as he stays deeply seated within me, his demonic cock remaining as his features shift. My jaw slackens as his razor-like teeth transform to their straight, white counterparts, and his claws recede.

“Lorcan?”

His eyes slowly open, then his pastel-green pools sear into my fucking soul.

“E-Evie,” he stutters, dropping his forehead heavily to the ground next to my head. His shadows retract from my limbs all at once. My fingers and toes prickle as feeling slowly returns to them.

I wrap my arms around his neck. Relief floods through me that Lorcan is in control of his mind and body once more, but I don’t want him to stop fucking me.

“Please don’t stop,” I beg. My aching pussy throbs against his shaft.

He lifts his head. “Do you want this?” he asks, his deep voice cracking.

“I meant what I said to your madness. I’m yours. Use me. Don’t ever ask for permission.”

“Hold on to me, little witch.”

Lorcan pulls out of me to the tip, his ridges vibrating along my walls, then pounds into me wildly, unleashing himself on my soaking pussy. I balance on a knife’s edge over the cavern of orgasmic bliss.

His breath warms my ear. “Come on your demon’s cock,” he orders.

My body surges toward the peak of ecstasy. I dig my nails into Lorcan’s back, rapidly climbing the rock face of the mountain rising above the cavern of bliss. Pleasure so intense it’s almost painful heats my body. I squeeze my eyes shut as I detonate, his filthy words like gasoline on a fire. I can’t breathe

as I climb higher and higher. My vision blackens and I plunge into ecstasy. Moans and gasps spill from my lips as I come.

I exist somewhere between Heaven and Hell. A limbo created just for me.

Lorcan moans, and it tips me further into my never-ending orgasm. He slides two fingers alongside his engorged dick lodged in my pussy, then rubs them along his dick and my walls as he continues to rock his hips. Shadows surge out of my body and coat us in glittering darkness. One of my shadows swirls around my clit and tugs on it rapidly. So this is what nirvana feels like.

“Yes, baby girl, let it all out. Fuck, your magic feels so good against mine.”

I crack my eyes open. Death magic hovers over both of our skins, shimmering like a heat wave and absorbing our pleasure. Lorcan’s shadows join mine, and our magic sings harmoniously together.

I truly am his. This is the point of no return.

His lips press to my neck, and he moans my name. “I’m going to paint this pretty pussy with my cum.” His mask digs into the side of my cheek, then he roars another release. Cum too hot to be natural jets against my cervix. Lorcan rocks his hips lazily as he rides out the waves of his orgasm. His cum spills over my lips and forms a large puddle beneath me.

He pulls out and sits up abruptly. Lorcan dips his fingers into the mess and uses it to massage my swollen labia. “This should help soothe the ache from being stretched around my demon dick,” he says, his voice quiet, then his shoulders tense. “I didn’t want the first time I fucked you in my demon form, even partially shifted, to be so aggressive,” he says while continuing to massage my pussy lips. He blows out a breath and falls forward but catches himself on his forearms before his body crushes me.

“Well, it did hurt at first, and I know my body will probably be one big bruise by morning...” I trail off. I cup my hands on his masked cheeks. “But I

didn't hate it. In fact, that might've been the best sex of my life."

"Good, because I plan on doing it often. Just not as violently."

He rolls off me, then pulls me against him. I lay my cheek against his chest and trace the lines of his tattoos etched into his skin with my finger. Nothing exists outside of this moment. We lie on the forest floor for several minutes, cuddling beneath the light of the moon.

Awareness lazily trickles into our content bubble. Reality is a fickle bitch. It reminds you of existence at the most inconvenient times, tearing you from blissful dissociation.

I run my finger along the line of dried blood crusted over his mirrored skull tattoo.

"My demon."

"My witch."

FORTY-THREE



Lorcan

My steps thud softly against the hardwood floors in the library as I pace and think about last night. I released my madness fully for the first time in decades, and it was more than ready to play. My control slipped as Ezra mocked me. I can still hear his voice echoing in my mind.

Don't use your shadows against me, Lorcan. Some of us have had centuries of training while others rotted in a cage.

It was always this way between Ezra and me. Whenever we were near each other as adolescents, the tension between us was like a volcano ready to

erupt. He triggered my madness to take control of my body. If my witch did not submit to my madness as she did, the outcome would've been catastrophically different.

I am in awe of this woman. Evie has finally accepted that she is mine. Thoughts swirl in my mind of all the ways I can make her darkest, dirtiest fantasies a reality.

My thoughts are interrupted as dread runs an icy finger down my spine. Ezra won't be gone for long. Demonic blades do affect us, but it's not the instant death non-royals receive from their cuts. There is no fucking chance that he will not retaliate for the suffering I caused him.

Guilt covers me as flashes of memories creep into my thoughts. I don't regret taking her with my demon cock, though the madness was not even remotely gentle. Evie craves to be used violently; however, as I watched from within my mind, there were times when she was petrified of my madness.

I sigh, scrubbing a hand down my face. She and I have bonded through our trauma, *and* she is the only one who understands me. I can't be apart from my witch. I need to explain to her that she'll stay here with me. I'm just too selfish to let her go.

I wonder if she's gotten my note yet.

Replacing the Fallenmoore mirror is still my priority, and I know my little witch is more than capable. Perhaps she would be more willing if I allowed her to visit her bat and best friend.

I groan, gripping the mantle over the fireplace. I need to show her who I really am... unmask myself literally and metaphorically.

My fingers tremble as I touch the edge of the mask, then I ball my hands into fists at my sides. Something as simple as revealing my face should not make me feel like this. Anxiety grips my heart violently. Evie will have

complete power over me if she desires it when she sees what's beneath the mask. I sigh deeply, lowering my head between my outstretched arms.

My thoughts are too fucking loud. Flashes of memories from my time in that cage have me on edge. I massage my temples as I stare at the warm purple flames dancing along the pine logs. I send a shadow toward the stereo and play dark, haunting songs on a loop. I run my fingers along the varying book spines, willing the music to distract me.

Music is my refuge from the trauma my mind insists on replaying, dulling the edges of the jagged pieces slicing into my brain. The edges are quick to sharpen, but ever since she came into my life, the cycle is much slower. I know that those memories, the sharp reminders of the pain I've endured, will always be there. Yet some sick part of me is relieved. I've been trapped within myself for so long that life without misery is terrifying.

I twist my head toward the engraved door as quick footsteps sound down the hall. A few moments later, Evie cracks open the door and slips inside. She walks into the room cautiously, as if she hasn't spent hours upon hours exploring its shelves.

The thrill of watching her without her knowledge will always be something I enjoy. I will never stop stalking her from within the shadows. When my witch reads, a small smile curves her lips, and there's a gleam in her eyes that only surfaces when she has her nose in a book.

She walks toward me but stops several yards away. Her eyes dart around the room, and her fingers tremble before she crosses her arms over her chest. Shit. Did I hurt her last night? Or is my witch nervous about facing me in the light of day?

"Evie."

She looks up, her eyes darting to mine. "Lorcan," she says as pink tinges

her cheeks.

“I want to show you something.”

It’s time to prove to her and myself that I am not afraid to be vulnerable around her. To offer her my broken pieces and hope that she’s willing to cut herself on their edges.

I squeeze my eyes shut and rip the mask away from my face.

Evie gasps, and my eyes flick open. Her hands fly to her mouth, then she slowly reaches a hand toward my cheek. I know what she sees, the disfigurement my brother granted me with. Her warm palm caresses my stubbled jaw, and she brushes her thumb over the branding Ezra etched into my skin. Her hazel eyes shimmer with unshed tears, thin wisps of black swirling within them. Her lower lip trembles from the force of her emotions.

“Lorcan,” she says softly, still tracing the word on my cheekbone.

I turn my head, looking toward the fire. My throat bobs as I swallow, anger simmering in my veins. I don’t want to witness her tears for me. Evie snuffles and cups the other side of my cheek, bringing my gaze back toward her. My lips form into a thin line as she gives me a sad smile.

“Do not pity me, witch.”

“It’s okay to *feel*, Lorcan.” She blinks, and a tear splashes onto her cheek, but she brushes it away quickly. She’s still staring at me.

My mind and body are at war. My body tells me to shove her against the bookshelves and fuck that look off her face—use her body to drive my torment away—while my mind begs me to absorb every second of this moment.

My witch grips the back of my hair and pulls me down to kiss me lightly on the lips. Fuck. I take a step back, widening the distance between us.

“Are you okay?”

I breathe deeply through my nose, but I don’t answer her. How do I explain

that I am so far beyond the simple word *okay*.

Evie moves toward me with determined strides, then trails her nail down my chest. “When do I get to play with your demonic body again?” she asks sweetly, batting her eyelashes at me.

My jaw slackens and my eyes dart toward her grinning face.

Evie presses her fingers under my chin, and my jaw snaps shut. “Close your mouth, baby. You don’t want to give me any ideas on using it here in this library.”

That fucking witch, using my own line against me. I growl but can’t stop my lips from pulling up at the corners. The bars of the last song fade out, and another begins its melody, haunting and romantic. I don’t know if she’ll make the connection to the lyrics, but it’s time I share more of myself with her.

She squeaks when I pull her body flush against mine. My fingers walk up the valley between her breasts barely contained within the sexy-as-fuck, plunging neckline of her top. I squeeze her throat, but not enough to cut off her airway.

“What song is this? It’s glorious.”

“‘Blossom in the Dark’ by Dianna Goldberg,” I reply.

She nods, her eyes still tracing my bare face.

I sing the opening lines of the song, my voice rumbling between us as I lead her in a sensual dance around the library. She hasn’t taken her eyes off of me since I removed my mask, and I’m not sure if I like it or not.

As the song reaches the chorus, her shadows circle my throat and squeeze it once playfully. Fuck. My cock hardens against her belly. It’s difficult to remember each of the lyrics with her hands and shadows tracing my skin. I

spin her away from me while keeping her hand clasped in mine. Evie giggles, and my heart pounds in my chest. Fuck. I love this sound.

Evie coils back into me, and I skate my palms down her sides. My hands slip into her back pockets, then she stiffens. My fingers touch parchment, and I pull the pages. She backs away several steps, and I let her.

My fists clench as I take in the complex but familiar spell on them. The writing must have revealed itself to her. She has the spell. She wasn't supposed to discover it until she'd practiced her magic more. But now I have everything I need to free myself.

Evie gazes up at me, panic widening her gaze. She was going to escape without me.

I want to tell her that I wouldn't have done it. Something in me changed since knowing her. I wouldn't have locked her in here. In fact, the idea of keeping her in here with me has never been more alluring.

I never thought the witch would make entrapment feel so free, but as I look at her and hold the spell pages, I know which one I choose.

I hold my breath and step toward my witch. My brother's voice booms into the room. "Romancing another Fallenmoore witch, brother?"

Rage floods my veins. Pain lacerates my mind as memories shake the bars I locked them behind. Evie turns to face my brother fully.

"What *the fuck* is that supposed to mean?" she hisses.

Ezra's booming laughs echo around us, and my madness prepares to finish him.

"Your demon," he says cheerfully, "had a relationship with your great auntie, Evangeline."

He prowls toward her, but I step in between them. Ezra continues speaking to her while his eyes bore holes into my skull.

“I can see that the information isn’t soaking into your lust-addled brain.” Ezra tucks his hands into the back pockets of his jeans. “Lorcan,” he says with exaggerated slowness, “was in love with her.”

Evie’s eyes shoot toward mine, shock and disgust evident behind their blackened depths.

FORTY-FOUR



Evie

My lungs ache as I run through the manor, my shadows tearing from my body, blocking the corridor behind me. Lorcan's and Ezra's footsteps sound in the distance, the pounding racing alongside the hammering of my heart.

The door to the chapel creaks as I race past it, pausing for half a second to peer inside. Gray, powdery light filters through the stained glass, fracturing into colors on the ground. The confessional lies in splintered pieces, and the memory of him collaring me and my choking on his dick pierces into my mind.

I let him, when all this time he'd had a relationship with one of my ancestors. It's disgusting, and I wonder if that's why he pursued a physical relationship with me, despite only needing my magic to set himself free.

I can't believe I ever let him get close to me. The thought of love has always repulsed me. Letting anyone have that much control over my heart always seemed like a mistake. But Lorcan came dangerously close, and leaving him behind here is going to break me a little.

I run faster, my quads aching as I fall out onto the first floor, terracing the foyer. Twenty or so doors greet me, and I grab the banister, looking over and down onto the marbled floor below. I decide not to jump, knowing that while I may not be able to die a human death here, a broken leg wouldn't help my escape.

I race down the grand staircase, my panicked breaths muffled by the blood rushing to my ears.

I hear Ezra's yell, their footsteps closer now. I glance up and spot them both overlooking the foyer. I grab the handle to the front door when Lorcan's voice hits me. "Evie."

My death magic hums, hot and searing in my bones, waiting to be unleashed. I haven't practiced much, but this is my only chance to escape. If I fail, he'll force me to do the spell anyway but keep me here instead of him.

He'll be free, and I'll be trapped for good.

"Let me protect you." Lorcan's voice slams into my mind as I look at him. *"Ezra will kill you now that you know the spell. Come back to me, Evie. Please."*

A sharp pain shoots through my chest, dipping into my stomach. The plea in his voice was too broken, but this is what demons do. He's been manipulating me this entire time. He's a fucking demon, and everything—the

sweet words, removing his mask, all of it—was just to gain my trust. It's his revenge for what Evangeline did to him a century ago, and he is punishing me for her crimes.

Ezra's human form shifts. Obsidian scales grow where his skin was, and his eyes blacken. A long, pointed tail erupts from behind him, and claws protrude from his fingers.

Lorcan's gaze pins me, and I swear I see something change in them. His plea comes through clearly, and I run cold.

“Run.”

Lorcan's fangs protrude, his demonic side taking over his human form. His mouth clamps around Ezra's throat, while his brother's claws slice through the side of his torso.

“Go. Now.”

I don't wait to be told a third time and run outside. I emerge into the courtyard. Snow drifts down, covering the Shadow Realm in a blanket of white. Ice crunches under my feet as I dart toward what was once the servants' quarters. Hissing sounds from deep within the forest, and my magic coils tightly around my core, ready for attack.

Demons.

I glance over my shoulder. They haven't followed me, and the idea of Lorcan fighting Ezra swells an unexpected emotion in my chest.

No. He had to save me. Lorcan can't be freed unless I'm alive. That's all it was. There's no way I can let him through the portal. The Human Realm will suffer once he unleashes the demons permanently. My family locked him in here for a reason, even if I don't fully understand why yet.

The small, red-bricked building comes into sight as I pass the weathered stone fountain. Wind howls, flurrying the snow into an oblivion of white. Icy

gusts whip through my hair, freezing my tears.

I reach the door and throw it open, wasting no time racing to the nearest mirror. I've memorized the spell. But this won't work if my magic is too weak. I only hope I've embraced it enough.

I stand in front of a long, black-framed mirror fixed to the wall, large enough for me to go through if I turn sideways. I stare at my reflection, willing my shadows to come to the surface. My eyes darken, and dark magic spills from them like ink. Black smoke wisps through the pores of my skin, moving over me like a halo as I focus my energy on keeping the shadows contained.

The death magic sears like liquid heat through my veins, every hum of magic vibrating as if it could erupt from me at any moment. I don't recognize myself as it takes over, control slipping from my mind.

I recall my lesson with Lorcan, then every moment where embracing it felt as easy as breathing. The powers are a part of me, not some separate evil I was led to believe for most of my life.

The room darkens, and the walls somehow feel closer as I lean forward, gripping the mirror. Death magic releases from my body, but instead of bursting out of me, it moves in sync with my movements.

A tug pulls me backward, from within. My powers swirl, still linked to Lorcan's as I sense him getting closer. My magic doesn't want to leave him behind, or maybe I don't, but I have no choice. "No," I say aloud, then recite the incantation of the spell in Latin, careful with pronunciations so I don't end up shattering the mirror instead.

Every word uttered drains my power, and I sink to my knees. It's too much on my own, but shakily, I hold on to the frame, keeping my attention on the glass.

I can't fail.

My words become slower and more drawn-out as I struggle to keep my eyes open. With each slow blink, darkness lingers a little longer before my vision clears. As I slip closer toward slumber, I keep repeating the spell until the mirror's surface shimmers. I press my fingers to the glass, and it ripples. Leaning to my left, I grab a vase from a side table and smash it.

Glass showers the stone ground, fractured pieces glimmering light as my shadows move around me in wisps of glittering black. I grab a piece, then hiss through my teeth when I stab the glass into my leg. Stinging pain pulses into my thigh. The instinct to cover the cut has never been stronger, but I force myself to not touch it, allowing the blood to drip onto the ground.

I pull the shard of glass out and slice it into my other leg. I can barely sit up by the time enough blood pools, and I smother my hands and fingers in it until they're coated.

My fingers glide along the smooth black frame, and I whisper the final words of the incantation under my breath. The mirror shudders as the pools of blood flow together and form a dark vortex that swallows my shadows. I close my eyes, and vibrations of the trembling wall and ground reverberate through my body.

Resisting the exhaustion proves more arduous than ever, yet when I open my eyes again, the blood has permeated the mirror and is staining the opposite side. I reach forward. My fingers pass through the mirror, and a chill from the Human Realm hits me.

Lorcan's warning screeches into my thoughts as I go to walk through the mirror. "*Run.*"

The door flings open, and Ezra's black glare fixates on me. Blood coats his clothes as he grimaces, stepping inside the room in his human form. A wound

runs from his neck down to his shoulder, and I notice another longer cut on his leg. Lorcan runs in behind him, three large gashes slashed across his torso.

Fuck.

I fall through the mirror, just as Ezra reaches out to grab my ankle. His fingers graze my skin, and I land on the carpet. My powers hum as I catch my breath, then quickly stand, staring at them both through the glass. Shadows erupt from my body, shaped like vipers as they attack through the mirror. Ezra's hand is part of the way through, and my death magic rises through my body. I squeeze my eyes shut as it explodes out of me. Windows shatter, the magic circling my body in a protective dome. The mirror cracks, then fractures into a thousand pieces. Lorcan's and Ezra's faces distort as the glass disintegrates, and a few larger shards fall onto the ground.

I clamp my hand over my mouth and hold my breath. It's far too quiet now, and my eyes adjust to the brightness of the Human Realm, unmuted in its coloring. I grab the sides of my head, the room spinning around me as I fall to my knees.

Eventually, I climb to my feet and look outside. I amble out of the building, dissociating with each step. A hundred thoughts run through my mind, but I can't focus on a single one.

It's snowing here too, I realize, the frosty air nipping at my bare arms. I slowly make my way back to the manor, the emptiness aching my chest.

A fluttering sounds from the living room, and relief floods through my body. Gomez. Every limb feels like lead as I drag myself through the cold foyer toward the living room. My magic fizzles, sparking gently under my skin. I wonder how the fuck I'm going to make it home. I can't shadow-walk properly, and even if I could, my magic is depleted.

“Gomez!” I shout, my voice raspier than I was expecting, but he doesn’t come to me. “Seriously? I’m dying over here,” I joke, then push open the door.

Gomez clings to Rosa, her arms wrapped around him tightly, and tears fall thick and fast from her big brown eyes. “Don’t come closer,” she begs, and I spot a figure in my peripheral vision.

Slowly I turn my head, then freeze.

I haven’t seen those eyes since I was eighteen, when I still called the man *dad*. Edward stares at me, and my gaze travels his arms to the gun he’s pointing at Rosa and Gomez.

He tilts his head, his wrinkles more pronounced now and his glare colder than ever. “We’ve been looking for you,” he spits, then tightens his grip on the gun. “*Daughter.*” He somehow makes the word sound more disgusting than it is. Footsteps shuffle behind me, and I glance over my shoulder. The remainder of Lorcan’s brothers stand behind me, with a pastor from the Order and Aiden, who looks terrified.

Edward snarls. “Where’s the demon?”

I open my lips to answer, but the brothers step into the room, pushing past me. One answers in my place. “Trapped. She broke the portal after using it.”

Another brother speaks, this one with shoulder-length hair and eyes that match Lorcan’s. “He won’t be able to get out.”

“Good.” Edward turns the gun on me. “It seems you’ve trapped the only one who could have helped you.”

The end... for now.

Book two releases early 2024.

CONTENT WARNINGS

This is a work of fiction and any BDSM references are not meant as a guide, nor are they accurately portrayed. Please see a full list of content warnings below. Corrupt Shadows is a dark paranormal romance, with scenes of non-consent and other topics that can be triggering.

BDSM

Breath Play

Blood Play

Body Modification

Death of a Character

Degradation (with praise)

Demons

Domestic Violence

Drug Use/Abuse

Dub-Con

Expressionism

Gore
Knife Play
Masks
Mental Illness
Murder
Non-Con
Orgasm Denial
Parental Abuse
Religious Occult
Religious Trauma
Sex Without a Condom
Sexual Violence
Sleep Paralysis
Smoking
Somnophilia
Stalking
Strangulation
Suicidal ideation

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CM writes spicy, dark, gothic, paranormal, fantasy, and monster romance, often with queer-gender characters. She enjoys turning the darkness from past trauma into the written word. CM lives on smutty books, coffee, and tattoos. Writing, much like reading, offers CM a much-needed escape. When she writes, she steps out of her own mind and into the world of her books.

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A book collector at heart, Rebecca loves creating something beautiful for her readers' shelves. You can find her special edition boxsets and book boxes

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